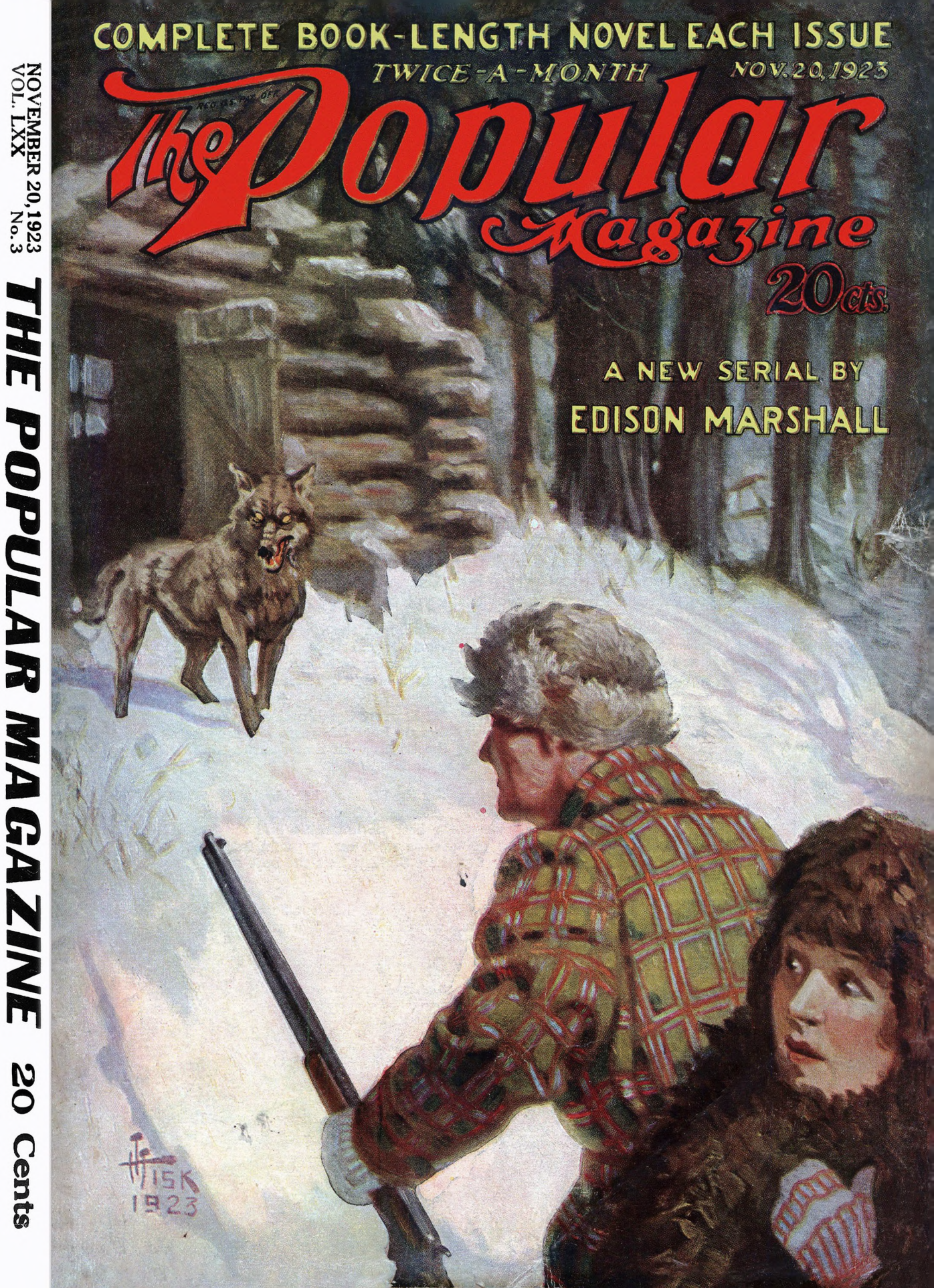
COMPLETE BOOK-LENGTH NOVEL EACH ISSUE

TWICE-A-MONTH NOV. 20, 1923

The Popular Magazine

20 cts.

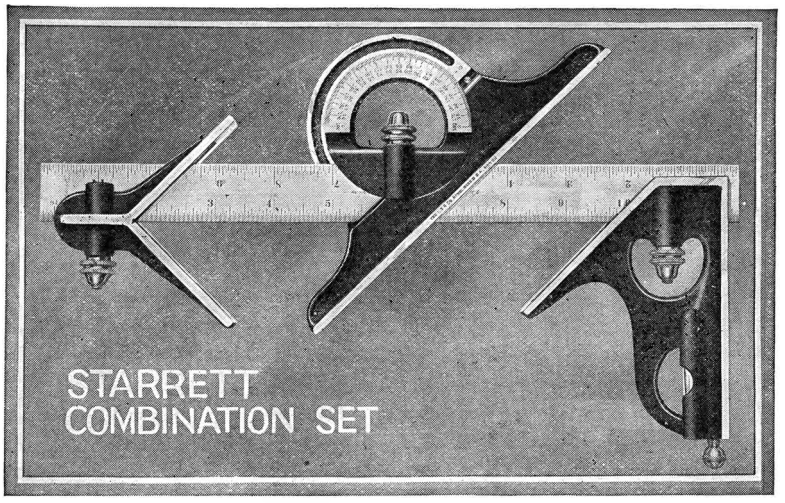
A NEW SERIAL BY
EDISON MARSHALL



NOVEMBER 20, 1923
VOL. LXX No. 3

THE POPULAR MAGAZINE

20 Cents



"The most useful tool ever built"

YOU ought to own one of these famous Starrett Combination Sets. With its Drop-Forged Steel Combination Square, Reversible Protractor Head and the Center Head, here's a practical, handy tool that for general all-round work has yet to be equalled.

The Combination Square (with Spirit Level and Scriber in the Head) alone gives you seven tools in one—Rule, Square, Miter, Depth Gage, Height Gage, Marking Gage, Level and Plumb. Add the Protractor and Center Head, and you've got a set of accurate tools that you'll use constantly in a hundred and one different operations.

And useful as it is, the Starrett Combination Set (No. 434 is illustrated) takes up but little room in your kit and saves littering the bench with the separate tools needed to do the same work.

Heads slide easily along the Blade and can be instantly removed or clamped at any desired position. All parts nicely finished, of the best workmanship and reliably accurate. For doing close work easier, you'll find the purchase of one of these Starrett Sets the best investment you ever made.

For complete description of the different Starrett Sets and Attachments, write for the Starrett Catalog No. 22 "RA"

THE L. S. STARRETT CO.

The World's Greatest Toolmakers
Manufacturers of Hacksaws Unexcelled
ATHOL, MASS.

a few uses—

Machinists

Laying out
Bench work
Leveling shafting, etc.
Setting up machine tools

Auto-Mechanics

Lining up shafts, bearings, connecting rods, crank shafts, etc.
Truing cylinders
Checking up valve seats
Timing valves

Carpenters

Laying out mortises, tenons, dentils, stringers, etc.
Cutting rafters and jacks
Scaling blue prints
Leveling and plumbing jambs, casings, etc.
Marking gage, rabbet gage, butt gage, etc.

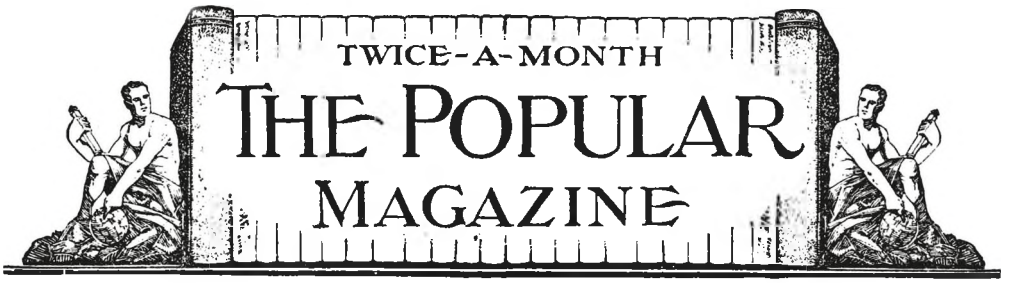
5757

Starrett Tools

STARRETT TOOLS
STARRETT HACK SAWS
CUT QUICKEST LAST LONGEST

"MONEY TO BURN," the complete book-length novel by Reginald Wright Kauffman in the next issue of the POPULAR is a high-spirited, gripping tale of the adventures of an American in San Domingo. If you haven't done so already, make sure of getting this literary treat, one of the best we have ever offered, by telling your news dealer to reserve you a copy. The issue will be on the stands December 7th.

Vol. LXX NOVEMBER 20, 1923 No. 3



Twice-a-month publication issued by Street & Smith Corporation, 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York. ORMOND G. SMITH, President, GEORGE C. SMITH, Treasurer; GEORGE C. SMITH, JR., Secretary; Copyright, 1923, by Street & Smith Corporation, New York. Copyright, 1923, by Street & Smith Corporation, Great Britain. *All Rights Reserved.* Publishers everywhere are cautioned against using any of the contents of this Magazine either wholly or in part. Entered as Second-class Matter, September 20, 1909, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under Act of Congress of March 3, 1879. Canadian Subscription, $4.72. Foreign $5.44.

WARNING—Do not subscribe through agents unknown to you. Complaints are daily made by persons who have been thus victimized.

IMPORTANT—Authors, agents, and publishers are requested to note that this firm does not hold itself responsible for loss of unsolicited manuscripts while at this office or in transit; and that it cannot undertake to hold uncalled-for manuscripts for a longer period than six months. If the return of manuscript is expected, postage should be inclosed.

Address all communications to the Street & Smith Corporation

YEARLY SUBSCRIPTION $4.00 SINGLE COPIES 20 CENTS

THE POPULAR MAGAZINE

VOL. LXX. NOVEMBER 20, 1923. No. 3

Lord of the Barren Lands

By Edison Marshall

Author of "The Call of the Blood," "The Isle of Retribution," Etc.

Another amazing epic of the North country from the pen of a writer who needs no introduction to readers of this magazine. We know of no writer living better able to handle the theme Mr. Marshall has chosen as the core of this latest and best of his stories. And we believe that when you have reached the end of the literary trail that Marshall has blazed for you in "Lord of the Barren Lands," you will agree with us without a struggle.—THE EDITOR.

(A Four-Part Story—Part I.)

CHAPTER I.

JOHN CARLSON did not dream for a moment that he was alone. He knew his native forests too well for that. True, he knew of no other human beings throughout all this universe of ranges that his keen long-range eyes could span; but human beings are not the only people that count in the far Northern forests. Indeed, they are a negligible part of the population.

As the man bent over his supper fire he heard, at long, breathless intervals, little feet that scratched the fallen leaves and little bodies that rustled the small spruce boughs into motion. Once two tiny beadlike eyes glowed suddenly in a thicket not twenty paces from the fire; and a deep note of laughter bubbled up from the man's lean throat as those miniature twin-light bulbs went quickly out. One of his neighbors, a small furry neighbor who was eternally eaten up by curiosity, had come up to investigate the dancing mystery of the fire; but he had scurried away, squeaking with terror, as John had returned his curious gaze.

It was just a wood rat, one of the Little People. And he had better look where he ran, because a weasel, already putting on his stylish winter garb of white, had called on John a few minutes before and now was

waiting quietly and hungrily in the farther thickets. The weasel and the wood rat were old acquaintances, but not altogether friends. The former would like nothing better than a chance meeting in the darkness with his squeaking neighbor. What they would say to each other there in the gloom, and what would happen, would make a tale more terrible and cruel than any ever told of a great city's underworld; but this is mostly hidden from the eyes of men. Even John, a native of the forests, could only guess at its details. Yet much of the drama of the forests is likewise terrible and cruel; and nothing in it could surprise this lean woodsman to any large degree.

When John was cutting off a great red steak from the young moose that hung beside his tent a third neighbor—one who had had many hungry speculations in regard to that same moose—slipped quietly away into the gloom. John caught just a glimpse of him; and it was an odd thing how his lean face so suddenly changed expression. There was a swift, hard light in his gray eyes, a tightening of the lines—so deeply graven for the man's brief years—in the homely face, the swift flash of a brown hand, like a serpent's leap, to his hip. But it was just a coyote after all, the archcoward, the accursed one that sobs and wails in the dusk, not the real forest power that John had at first supposed. The man had for an instant been deceived by a similarity of outline. And the creature slipped stealthily away until the wall of spruce was thick between them—into the deepest shadows that were his refuge.

John let the fire burn down so that he might have red coals to broil his steak. As the shadows encroached upon his camp the woods people crept ever nearer; he could hear their twitching movements whenever he strained to listen. But he paid little attention; this was all part of his life and he knew that those stealing, furtive little folk meant him no harm. On the lake shore a mink glided like a long, black shadow. A lynx, not daring to come close, saw the red glow of the fire from far-off; just once John heard her mew, softly and plaintively—a sound that gave no hint of the cruel cutthroat nature that lived under her glossy pelt.

There were other sounds; the myriad voices of the wilderness night. Some were the voices of animals, some of the raw elements—such as a newly risen wind, not yet strong in voice, that crept and whispered through the dense thickets, rustling the boughs like an animal itself, whimpering enticingly in the dusk and disturbing the placid surface of the lake so that it lapped disconsolately on the shore—and some sounds there was no identifying in heaven and earth. It might have been that the glaciers themselves on the far peaks spoke, very softly and dimly, but the sounds were lost in the dim, whispered chorus—scarcely to be heard at all except by those who hold their breath to listen; that is the voice of the whole land. A tree fell, far away, but only a little point of sound was left of its thunderous crash. The molding vegetation, the eroding powers of frost and water, the very wilderness of trees were themselves articulate, although some of the sounds not even John Carlson could hear. Once a black bear encircled the inlet of the lake not far from his camp, but John could not tell exactly how he knew that fact. If it was by sound, it was such sound as the ear could not readily fasten upon. Once a moose, a great bull that was nobler than are many men, came grunting down the far shore of the lake. He was a great way off, yet his call rolled in almost like distant thunder to John's ears—a voice of surging and triumphant power, even mellowed by distance as it was, a deep, strange sound, perhaps like the bellow of some great beast of the long ago—and though it was dim even at first it echoed and reëchoed until it was the merest tremor in the air.

There were smells too, more hard to identify than the sounds. Some were of the balsam; some of the flowers that had blossomed and died in the months just gone, faint sweetness in the air that the wood smoke could not wholly obscure; and some seemed to be merely of decaying vegetation, but John could not be sure. The forest has a thousand moods and a thousand mysteries and it is hard to be sure about any of them. The lake itself had a dank, strange smell, not unpleasant to the woodsman; and now and then there were pungent wisps of fragrance that blew over him from the dense forest, but he could not trace them. In these moments he resented man's intrinsic limitations; he knew that the smallest weasel in the shadows about his fire could distinguish a thousand interesting smells that his blunt human senses could not catch. To

him the forest was an eternal mystery—as it is to all real woodsmen—yet he knew its wonder would increase a hundredfold if he could but perceive its smells.

All this was old to John, yet it was ever new. Seemingly he was entirely absorbed in his work of cooking supper; yet it was part of his woods training never wholly to forget the whispering depths about him. It would have been surprising, bent over the coals as he was, how quickly he would have heard any variation in the familiar tone of the night; how quickly he would have discerned any unfamiliar shadow. Some way, these forests were too big and too old, too poignant with ancient passion ever to let him wholly forget about them. But only at intervals he looked up from his work, over the firelight into the mystery of shadow. He felt only the faintest quiver of excitement.

He cooked his thick steak, made reflector biscuits and coffee, then squatted beside the fire for his solitary meal. He ate abundantly, slowly and deliberately, and the food he consumed would have sufficed a whole family in a gentler land. But he was a big man physically—close to six feet, lean and powerful—and he could not eat like a bird. The arduous work of caring for his trap lines—now being laid out for the winter—was destructive to tissue, and besides, his outdoor life in such a climate necessitated a great quantity of inner fuel. He slowly finished his great meal and presently the deepening cold of the Northern night reminded him to build up the fire. His great shoulders lurched in his heavy shirt as he cut fuel; and in a moment the firelight was creeping and probing into the dense growths where before the curious Little People had found their shelter.

He had no desire to drive these away. He had rather enjoyed their company and because he knew with a certain knowledge that at this season no forest creature would attack him without provocation they were not in the least to be feared. Only in the winter months, when forest law is sometimes forgotten in the terror of famine, did he ever give a thought to these visitors in the dark; and then only in a single instance. He rather missed the sound of their furtive feet in the dead leaves. But he could not trifle with the cold. He could see the white stars, strangely sharp and clear-cut in the velvet darkness, and there was little warmth in them to-night. Real winter was still some weeks off but already frost glistened on the dew-wet leaves and the little wind was keen and sharp from the new snow on the high plateaus.

He stood a moment drinking in the warmth; and then he looked searchingly into the star-studded welkin above him. The mellowness of fall that men know in gentler climates did not bless him here; and the cold lights of heaven reminded him of the bitter nights to come. Weeks distant though it was, the whole forest world already trembled and entreated in fear of the impending winter. A merciless winter, to be conquered only by conflict endless and untiring, and there was such a little space of summer as a reward of victory. "You're coming closer, you're creeping up on me," he murmured, for the instant moved to articulate speech. But he was soon smiling at his own fervor, and warm in his parka he took a big chew of tobacco and sat down to enjoy it.

There would be mild days yet, and besides—it was part of the game. The tobacco soothed him. His face in repose was kindly. He sat half smiling into the fire. The small curious people in the shadows could see him plainly now; a gaunt youth, brown and weather-beaten, with a shock of coarse black hair. No one had ever called John Carlson handsome; even his own mother, had she lived to see him grow up, would have had to call upon her mother love to say so. Yet his large mouth was kindly and his gray eyes were surprisingly earnest and clear. He gave no impression of great physical strength, because of his exceeding leanness; yet those long, stringy muscles were not without some reputation in the far Northwest. In years he was little more than a boy—he and the Spanish-American War had been ushered in together—but the forests had made a man of him before his time. He had the long head of the Nordic and the wide, clear brow behind which there was plenty of room for thought.

As the warmth of the fire crept into him his sense of comfort and well-being increased and the ruddy light chased away his darker moods. It was enough for the moment that he was full-fed, warm; and that man's first love, the fire, leaped so cheerily before him. He sat with long legs stretched, his great shoulders drooping, his brown cheek swollen from his big chew. At first he was not con-

sciously lonely; the forest was quite a bit of company in itself. However, he wished he had a dog—such a companion as old Shep had been before that disastrous day on the log jam.

"I suppose I'll be settin' just this way, all by my lonesome, thirty years from now," he told himself with a mellow melancholy. "An old sour dough! Always figuring on another spring—settin' here digesting my supper and talking to myself. I've just got to get a dog or I'll bust."

It did not occur to him that these far-Northern forests would greatly change in his lifetime. The fondest dream of the old sour dough—that of immediate development of the North and consequent riches—did not particularly appeal to him; and he seriously believed that these black woods had a long time yet to grow. Trapping would be more systematic and thorough, lumbering would increase on the banks of the navigable rivers, but this was no climate for the shooting green of young wheat. Because he was a woodsman he felt glad that he might find a silent haven here for years to come.

Now that the fire crackled less fiercely he began to hear again, more distinct than ever, the night voices that he loved. Still he sat dreaming, yet awake to any messages that the wild might have for him. The radiance from the fire probed here and there among the young trees, accentuating the queer, frosty glint that is the particular trade-mark of the spruce, showing dusky coverts, changing the mossy covering of a rotted log into an Oriental tapestry. And suddenly a strange voice, a weird, far-carrying call, came floating down to him on the wings of the wind.

It was not a loud sound, yet it seemed to fill the entire forest. Perhaps this was simply because all the lesser woods voices were stilled at its first note. It seemed to rise and fall, and as if it were a great signal from the mightiest forest god, every living creature in range of it halted in his night business to listen. It *was* a great signal, John knew, but what it signified was not wholly within this tried woodsman's power to tell.

The sound crept between the little trees, rose higher—a clear, strange, wailing note—and then ended in something that was very much like a sob. And it was curious that it could be all these things and at the same time be like great music. There was no melody in it, its whole range was but two or three minor notes, yet it expressed more than many an involved composition by a master. All great music must express the soul; and this song that John Carlson heard over his lonely camp fire was the voice of the very soul of this dark wilderness in which he had his home.

CHAPTER II.

John listened until the last note died away. It was a significant thing that in these long seconds that the song endured the man made no outward motion; indeed he hardly seemed to breathe. When it was done and the lesser forest folk had gone back to their varied occupations the man arose quietly and gravely and heaped fresh fuel upon the fire. It was not that he feared any sort of attack. The act was largely instinctive, an inevitable reaction to the mood that the call had wakened.

John knew that voice. It had trembled into the far-off Alaskan gold camp where he was born and likely it would be his dirge when he died. But it had never been and never would be greatly changed; even his own death, that of a hated foe, likely would never give it a note of triumph. It would be the same rising and falling chant that he heard now; passionless for all its sadness, a song of the pain of living even while it was a song of death.

It was merely the forlorn cry of a lone wolf, the age-old lamentation that all woodsmen know. He had stood on a distant snowy ridge, savage muzzle lifted; and oblivious to all the forest world that stretched below him, he had sung the song of his wild heart to the cold, glittering stars. But it meant more than this to John. In his years in the open places the man had begun to have strange thoughts and fancies in regard to the wolves and such sounds as this had for him a special significance. Perhaps it was mere superstition—men who live in solitude are especially subject to superstitious fancies—that to John there was something prophetic, symbolical, almost supernatural about the lives of these skulking, savage rangers of the woods.

They had been his study and his cult since boyhood. He felt that he knew them as far as human knowledge of beasts can hope to go—and simply because the pack is its soul and its symbol he felt he also

knew the wilderness from rim to rim, from its ragged edge to the south where the farms began, clear to the barren lands farther north. He knew the wolves' savage ways, he had studied the cycle of their mysterious lives, he respected their cunning, revered their marvelous physical development, and feared their never-ending, dread ferocity. There had been a time when he had hated them, yet the feeling he had for them now was far removed from hatred. He had begun to regard them as a strong, wise man regards some natural force—the snow that pelts him or the winter cold that grips his lungs. He made bitter, relentless war against them; but the impulse was not real hatred. Rather it was merely part of his struggle for survival, the same great war that men have fought since the gray dawn of the race. In the wolves were typified to some degree all the cruel natural forces that have opposed man's survival, his progress and his dominance. John's campaign against them was as passionless as the song the gray wolf on the ridge had just sung to him; and it was no less terrible.

But the thing went deeper than this. John had had many long nights to think about it and his active imagination had innumerable fancies concerning it. It seemed to him now, in these last years in which the wild had begun to unroll some of its most secret scrolls, that the wolves represented all of man's natural enemies in general, but his worst enemy—an eternal, insatiable spirit that preys upon him—in particular. To him the wolves were the symbol, almost the living agents, of that most terrible of all realities, the most merciless of all foes, the most exacting of all judges—the great oppressor that is famine.

The wolf in folklore always has been the symbol of famine. All of man's battle upward through the ages has been wholly to obtain enough to eat for himself and for his fellows; and has not famine ever preyed upon him in the person of the wolves? Has not the gray beast ever haunted his door until the experience of the ages has embodied him in an adage? He killed and devoured the wild game that was man's first meat, and in these latter years he still destroys the flocks and herds without which man cannot live. But John's thought did not stop here; his quickened fancy carried him into the realm of the bizarre and supernatural and to him the wolves were not only the symbols but the very spirits of famine. Only rarely he caught sight of them during these gentler seasons—spring and summer and fall—and yet there was no forgetting their unseen presence. Famine was like that—lurking ever, hidden in the coverts, yet eternally watching for its moment of grim opportunity. Sometimes they called to him—a passionless, wailing, sobbing song of remembrance and prophecy—and sometimes they cracked twigs and rustled the fallen leaves at the edge of his firelight; but it was rare that he saw more than a swift gray shadow in the dusk of the thickets. Famine was this way too—ever waiting just beyond the fire that man has built to keep him warm; revealing its gaunt form only at rare intervals; silent except for an occasional forlorn cry in the darkness, yet deathless, unconquerable, eternally menacing—the ghost that has haunted the ages. No wonder the woodsman piles on fresh fuel and gazes away, ill at ease, into the gloom!

But the wolves grow bolder in the bitter days of winter. These are the days when famine comes into its own, and the east wind blows and its gray spirits hunt in packs over the snowy ridges. They can be seen often enough now; but yet they remain dim, unreal, like the spawn of some fabled underworld, more like the shadows of hunger and death than living things. They are gaunt and gray and their eyes swim in blue fire.

The wolves, to John, represented the antithesis of all that he stood for; death instead of life, the triumph of the powers of the wild over mankind, remorselessness instead of mercy, and, when all was said and done, cold wickedness instead of the virtue that mankind has ever been reaching for. Would the gray pack ever be conquered? Would they howl, forlornly as ever, but yet in passionless triumph, over his own grave? Would man prevail or would famine conquer him yet? It was the basic struggle of life.

There had been a time when his war against the wolves had been a personal war, but that time was past. John's own father had been pulled down by a starving pack on the barren lands far to the west, and at first John's motive had been simply that of vengeance. But this was largely past now. The wolves were more than mere personal foes. He thought upon them now as the foes of all mankind, not only in themselves but in the raw forces that they rep-

resented; he feared them still with a creepy kind of secret fear apart from the mere physical terror of their fangs. The thing went down to his basic instincts; a wonder and a dread that when the sun was cooler and the land drained dry by the teeming billions that had sought life upon it the pack and the spirit of famine that walked behind would conquer everything at last.

Brush crackled on the slope back of his camp and John's soaring thoughts were wrenched back to the commonplaces of the moment. He stood listening, peering into the gloom. It was difficult to believe that he was hearing the wolf that had just called; in the first place the creature hardly would have been bold enough to come so near camp, and in the second, it would not have been the lupine way to announce his coming by crackling thickets. The wolf moves through even dense thickets like so much smoke, and although John looked about half instinctively to locate his rifle he immediately began to seek some other explanation for the sounds.

His visitor could very easily be a moose. That huge monarch of the deer family can steal quite softly when he wishes, but ordinarily he crashes through the thickets with little concern for who hears him. It might be a caribou, come down from his high parks in search of salt, and more likely still a black or a grizzly bear. But even in case of the latter there was no call for John to be alarmed. The bear would not come near the fire; and besides, even the grizzly will turn tail a thousand times where once he launches into his smashing breakneck charge.

John felt his amazement and interest growing when the sound reached his ear again. Even the majestic grizzly, careless where and how he goes, rarely moves so awkwardly through the coverts. The sound was almost continuous now—rustling brush, limbs that swayed and scratched together, and finally a sharp sound that John found extremely difficult to explain. It was almost like something falling—brush crashing and then silence.

Of course none of these sounds were loud, and perhaps they would have gone unnoticed except where silence is the eternal mood of the land; but John's keen ears were keyed to even the smallest variations in the tone of the night. He was considerably curious about the sounds and more curious concerning the silence that followed it. In serious speculation it seemed likely that some one of the larger woods creatures had blundered close to the camp, had caught a glimpse of the fire through the trees, and in wild-beast fashion had frozen into immobility until it could decide its course. Soon, John thought, it would steal away—as silently as possible—and the profound silence of the forest would drop between.

His interest dimmed slowly and his thought began to take other trends. He was no longer vividly conscious of the exact location of his rifle or just what motions he must make to seize it. It was therefore with a pronounced start that he heard another inexplicable sound in the dusk.

It was very weak and soft, yet it sounded like a human voice. It sounded like some one calling faintly, in great distress. For a moment John listened with all his ears but the night gave him no further hint of what was transpiring in those far deep shadows.

John no longer thought of wolves and famine. His clear eyes began to brighten as his blood whirled faster through the gates of his veins and he began to make certain preparations. He picked up his rifle and forcing back the lever made sure that he could see the brass of its shell in the barrel. Then he laid the hammer at quarter cock—a perfectly safe way to carry it and the most convenient way in case a man is obliged to get swiftly into action. He had no reason for believing the weapon would be needed in this night's business but he nevertheless wished to be prepared for emergencies. It was his first trust, a great continuation of his own strength; and he did not care to investigate any human or near-human sound in the darkness without it. The wild beasts of the far Northwest are almost never to be feared; but such is not always the case with its so-called human inhabitants. These solitudes have often been a refuge for desperate men.

John filled his skillet with blazing spruce knots—a very effective light in a land where the oil can has not yet come to reign—and, his rifle under his arm, ventured out into the darkness to investigate. He went very slowly, peering into the coverts. And when he had gone a hundred yards and was almost ready to turn back he heard, but a few yards distant, that same dim, despairing cry.

He no longer moved slowly. His long legs stretched out and the wind caught the flame

of the spruce knots and made them roar dimly, like an acetylene torch. It was not a wild beast nor yet a desperate fugitive from law that had called for help in the gloom. It was a girl and she lay huddled in the entangling branches of the underbrush.

With the last of her strength she had cried out to the dancing light in the gloom. Now she was quite unconscious and her body hung limp as John gathered her easily and swiftly into his long, lean, untiring arms.

CHAPTER III.

John's life was the forest; and he had supposed that he had long since passed the point where any forest adventure could actually astonish him. He thought he knew every trick that the wild could play, every deadfall, and that he had probed some distance at least into every wilderness secret; and most of all he thought he had tasted every delight that it might offer. Hence the amazement that infolded him now seemed wholly without limitation.

This midnight visitor was not a young squaw lost from her village on far-distant Otter Lake. The flickering light from his grotesque lantern had showed unmistakably that the girl was white. John did not take time to notice anything else; this fact alone was almost beyond credence. He did not know of the existence of a single white woman—much less a girl—in the ten thousand square miles that were his immediate neighborhood, and that such a one should appear as if by magic at the very gates of his far and lonely camp was the sort of thing that reawakens a childlike belief in latter-day miracles.

His bewilderment prevented any rational train of thought. He turned automatically back to his camp and fire, leaving his skillet of red coals glowing in the thickets, and at first he was unaware of her dead-weight in his arms. When the increasing strain made him credit her reality he became simply childlike in his acceptance of this miracle of the night. He had wished humbly for a dog for company, and his native forests, the far-flung darkness that he knew so well, had answered him with this!

He felt sure that there was work to do to save the girl's life. This should be done, coolly and energetically, the instant that he reached camp, but until he did so he could only carry her in his arms. Until then he could give himself up to the wonder of it. She was warm, soft-skinned; her disarranged hair lay against his face.

Presently he laid her down on his own bunk and made a first hasty examination of her condition. He guessed at once that she was unconscious, perhaps near death, from fatigue and exposure; but not for one moment did he dream that he could not save her. She had not come to his camp in his hour of loneliness to depart by that dark trail. He began to administer first aid.

He set water to heat and while he waited he rubbed her chilled hands between his own. Neither her hands nor her bleeding feet were frozen, although the latter were wet, and her heart was beating faintly but regularly.

He made a warming drink of hot water and whisky and put it between her lips. Very slowly he administered it to her, rubbing her throat to assist her to swallow, and very soon the vital forces of her life quickened within her. She moaned and sighed as if in deep sleep and stirred in his arms. He gave her more of the liquor and in a moment she wakened to vivid consciousness.

He was watching her intently and he saw the first opening of her rather dark though luminous eyes, vivid and expressive for all her present weakness, in the stark white of her face. At the first glimpse of him her eyes opened to full width and she cried as one cries in a terror dream.

"I ain't going to hurt you," John told her quickly as she flung back in his arms. "Lay still and take it easy."

Some quality in his voice reassured the frightened girl—for the moment at least—and drinking deeply of his cup she almost instantly drifted into slumber. He knew what was best for her now. He wrapped her warm and dry in his own robes, laid her at ease on his spruce-bough bed and turned to build up his fire.

As yet no explanation for her presence had occurred to him. He scarcely felt the need of one; it was enough that she was here sleeping quietly beside his fire. Slyly and in constant fear that she would waken and catch him at it he now began to study her face.

He could just see it above the caribou robe, a girlish, rather full face, framed by the wealth of dark disheveled hair. She was a lovely thing, he thought; he might

have expected nothing else in the magic of the night. He liked her childish mouth, the lips parted slightly as she drew her troubled breath; the clear brow, drawn somewhat now with troubled lines; the white curve of her eyelids. He remembered with pleasurable warmth that the eyes beneath those lids were dark gray and peculiarly clear—even in that one glimpse denoting a rather earnest, sincere nature, lofty ideals, and likely strong moral convictions. She was not, John considered, any one's clinging vine. He could discern the strong but pleasing curve of a well-developed chin; and though he knew more of wolves than of women, he rated her a high spirit and a determined, purposeful nature. He thought that her physical make-up contributed to this impression; rather slender but with substantial womanly strength. Her hands—and he had rubbed them between his own enough to know—were capable and strong, hands that could do woman's work swiftly and well.

John got the idea as he sat dreaming that this guest at his camp was the most beautiful living creature he had ever laid eyes upon. He came to this conclusion soberly and painstakingly; and he told himself that such was his deliberate judgment, not merely part of the magic of the night. Of course she would be beautiful, the gift of the forest as she was; but he was sure he had studied her with cool, appraising eyes. In this John was mistaken; those dancing eyes of his had been neither cool nor appraising. They had been simply brimming over with the ineffable delight of youth. Nevertheless, they had not told him many lies about this face above the caribou robe. It was pretty enough to please more discriminating men than this forester in his wilderness camp.

At this point in his thoughts he noticed that the girl had no pillow. He himself had slept out so many nights that he had almost forgotten the existence of pillows; but surely this was a frightful breach of hospitality. With deliberate care he made quite a plausible pillow out of his coat, then creeping to the girl's side he gently raised her head and slipped the coat beneath it.

He found himself trembling absurdly when this small duty was completed. He thought it might be mere anxiety that she would waken and be terrified again; but such hardly explained the warm glow of pleasure that had crept all over him. And now he found himself in need of additional warmth. The girl had his bed and even his parka was beneath her head. He put the last of his fuel on the flame.

At this moment he decided to make no attempt to slumber to-night. For the sake of warmth alone he must sit by his fire; yet he was amazed at how easily he was reconciled to a long, wakeful vigil at the girl's side. He seemed to think it considerable of an honor to keep guard over her, to tend to her wants when she wakened and watch her draw her breath in sleep.

Fuel, however, was a difficult problem. He could not chop up one of the spruce logs that lay near camp without waking his guest; and this his innate hospitality would not let him do. He didn't feel that he desired to leave her while he sought fuel farther in the forest because—so he told himself—she would be unprotected from night prowlers. But he knew in his own heart that this was a most outrageous lie. In this season there was no wild thing in all the forest to molest her. The secret reason why he did not wish to leave her, even for a moment, was the fear that she might vanish as mysteriously as she had come. John Carlson was not overly rational this night of nights and his fancies were getting the better of him.

However, cold soon made up his mind for him. He went out after fuel and on the same trip he procured his gun and frying pan, two camp essentials that he had left where he had found the girl.

When he returned to camp he resumed his watch—his eyes dancing, his cheek still pleasantly swollen from his chew, his brown face lit with a half grin that would not go away. He considered this the most momentous evening of his life.

His life had been singularly untouched by the influence of women. Always he had been exiled to the little-known places of the earth, and except in certain boyish, foolish dreams, beauty and loveliness had always seemed apart from him. He had never been tempted to take to wife one of the younger squaws from the Indian tribes he sometimes encountered in his trapping; an inborn pride of race sustained him surely and unwaveringly in this. And now as realities once more took hold of him he began seriously to wonder who this girl was and how she had come to wander into his camp.

There was no obvious answer. This was the primeval forest, the haunt of wild beasts and a few lonely trappers and squaw men; and there were no mining camps close by that might explain the presence of white women.

While he wondered at her coming, he didn't seem to enjoy thinking of her going. He resolutely shut from his mind the reasonable supposition that on the morrow her friends would come to look for her and carry her away. But at least he could make a lop-stick to commemorate the most momentous night of his life!

The girl tossed on her pallet, mumbling half in delirium, half in slumber. John listened with all his ears but what he heard only increased his bewilderment:

"They won't bathe. They're only half human and their old souls are not worth saving. They can't look to to-morrow, and no one can make them bathe. They pray and sing, but they worship Manitou just the same." Then, in a gentler tone: "Edward, Edward, dear—I'm discouraged. What's the use of trying any more, dear boy—they won't even wash their faces."

John gazed at her in open-mouthed astonishment. Now he was face to face with a new problem—who in blazes was Edward? John felt instinctively that he could never like a man with a name like that. It might have been that this matter of bathing bothered him slightly also. He glanced surreptitiously at his brown hands, then got up laboriously, procured some water and put it on to heat. When it was warm he washed himself more carefully and painstakingly than at any time in months.

The long chill night came to an end at last and dawn found the girl sleeping soundly and peacefully. John prepared breakfast, and to-day he put an extra slice of meat into the pan. When the primitive meal was prepared he filled a plate and once more knelt at his guest's side.

"Wake up, miss," he began. He secretly knew that he was blushing fervently, the red showing plainly through his brown skin. "It's time for breakfast, miss."

The girl woke up with a cry of fear and the man tried to quiet her. "I ain't meaning to hurt you," he told her with some little annoyance. "I've just brought you your breakfast."

It was impossible for any normal girl to be terrified for long at that brown, good-natured, flushed face. She glanced about her; at her bed of skins, the cheerful camp fire, the ring of tall spruce, and then to the plate of rich meat he was trying to urge upon her. "Where am I?"

"In my camp," he told her. "You're as safe as you ever was in your life. We'll talk things over after you've eaten your breakfast."

"Where's Black Maria? Is she here?"

"You mean that old squaw from up Beaver Marsh way? Course she ain't here. Anyhow, she's dead—about a month ago. She isn't no relation—I mean no connection of yours?"

"I was going to meet her—at the head of the creek. She didn't come. And now what—what shall I do?"

The real distress in the girl's voice, the secret knowledge that she was at the verge of tears, made John more ill at ease than ever. "I'll see that you don't come to no harm," he promised rashly. "Better eat your breakfast now. It'll make you feel a lot better."

She looked into his earnest face, then to his lean hand that held the steaming plate of meat. She was famished from her bitter experience of the night before; and after all, his was good advice. She took the plate and he plied her with reflector biscuits and coffee. A look of real pleasure overspread his homely face when he saw how enthusiastically she devoured her food.

She pushed away her plate at last, sat up in bed, replaced her shoes and stockings that had become miraculously dry during the night, and even made some attempt to braid her tangled dark tresses. John meanwhile pretended to be busy at camp work; he had not had great experience with ladies, but at least he knew it was not a gentleman's part to look on while they made their toilet. She did not attempt to get up simply because she did not desire to faint. The effects of last night's experience had not yet worn off.

"Now I'm ready to ask a few questions," she told him. "I don't seem to remember very much of last night. I don't even remember coming here."

"That don't surprise me an awful lot. When I picked you up you was almost all in. You was lost, I guess."

The girl seemed to smile wanly. "I guess so too. I think I owe you an obligation, Mr.—Mr.——"

"My name's John Carlson."

"Mr. Carlson. Except for your kindness I wouldn't be alive now."

"It was a pleasure." He told her this frankly, because he meant it. "And that's so—I don't suppose you'd ever woke up again. When I found you you was unconscious from exhaustion and exposure. It was a chance in ten thousand that you hit my camp."

"Yes, I suppose it was, though I was following that creek that flows right by here. But I'm very much indebted to you for your kindness. I won't impose on you very long—I think maybe this afternoon I'll be able to start on."

Her voice broke curiously and John took a chew of tobacco to steady himself. "Start on?" he demanded. "You won't be able to start nowhere for two or three days—until you rest up. And then, if it's a fair question, where are you meaning to go? You've got no supplies? One person don't let another start out in these woods unless there's at least some little chance of getting there. It's part of the laws of the country, as you ought to know, that people has to sort of look out for each other."

The girl looked down. "I've got some robes. They fell in the creek last evening and got wet and I couldn't carry them any more. I'm afraid I'll have to ask you to go after them."

"Right up this creek? It's shallow. I'll get 'em easy enough."

"I'll pay you for your trouble. It's all true, what you say, and I'm afraid I'll have to have even further help in getting—where I want to go. The squaw was to have plenty of supplies. But I'll pay you—liberally—for all you do for me."

John swallowed painfully and his Adam's apple worked up and down.

"Maybe you haven't been in the country long enough to know that money don't much enter in two people helping each other. If we don't work together we'd all die—the game's too tough. Maybe you'd better begin at the beginning and tell me all about it. Then we'll figure what's to be done. You was going to meet Black Maria, and she was to have supplies for you both?"

"Yes. She was going to get them somewhere."

"Doubtless," John remarked with a peculiar emphasis. "She had a few old things in her cabin that 'Buck' Nevin took away when he went south. She could have dried some moose meat, I suppose. She probably didn't stop to tell you that the last trading boat up the Nenamanah River has gone and another won't be back till spring, and there ain't any other supplies that could possibly be got here within two months' journey. Luckily I've got enough supplies to split up with you, and there's always plenty of meat. But you was going to begin at the beginning, and tell me the whole story about yourself."

"Yes. I haven't even told you my name yet. It's Ruth Acton. I'm a missionary."

John's eyes slowly opened. "What's—what's that?" he asked rather humbly. "Did you say—a missionary?"

"Yes. I have been stationed with the Otter River Indians."

"But you—you don't *look* like no missionary!" John protested. "Why, you're just a girl. Missionaries are always preachers, aren't they?"

"You've got the popular idea, but not the true one," she told him earnestly. "Foreign missions should—and often do—appeal to others than ministers of the gospel. I'm a missionary—come to try to do what I can for these poor people—and at present I'm on my way to meet Edward Fisherson, my fiancé."

CHAPTER IV.

For all that Siwash was the only foreign language John Carlson knew, he knew what "fiancé" meant. He turned and built up the fire, partly to steady himself, partly because he felt uncomfortably chilly.

"Is Mr. Fisherson a missionary too?" he inquired.

"Not in the popular sense. He did settlement work until now, particularly along cultural lines. He was so successful among the poor of the slums that he decided, as an experiment, to try to civilize the natives up here. He selected this country for his first efforts so to be near me. Oh, he is a great teacher!" John saw that her clear, fine, wide-apart eyes were welling with light. "He is a man of real standards—real worth—and he knows what really matters. He is a gentleman besides."

John did not miss the splendid idealism that the words expressed. Yet for himself he only felt great discomfort. "I heard there was a man with the Caribou River Indians. Is he the one?"

"Yes. I have no doubt he has done won-

ders with them. I only wish you could have met him."

John looked very soberly into her eyes, and his mood was earnest. "Do you think he could do wonders with—white Indians?"

"I don't know what you mean—white Indians."

"I'm one, I guess. White, but that's all to say for me."

"I don't doubt his influence would have benefited you greatly, just as it has me. His policies are different from ordinary missionaries. He usually leaves spiritual upbuilding to me: his special interest is in civilizing crude and uncultured people—teaching them to be gentlemen, if you know what I mean. He doesn't take every one into the church as soon as they ask to come in. He believes in waiting until they are ready—and prepared; till they have the right standards."

"Sort of an exclusive missionary, then," John suggested. He was not jesting, nor was she.

"Yes. He has used the word himself—exclusive. He was once a deacon of a very exclusive church, and as such he molded my standards. He was a man of leisure, so he agreed to forsake his settlement work and spend a year up here—at my request of course—after which I was to meet him at the native village of Caribou, where we are to be married. In the spring when the river was open, we'd follow down the Caribou to the Nenamanah and catch the first trading boat out. I was to meet the squaw at the headwaters of this creek and she was to conduct me through the chain of lakes to Edward's mission."

"How about the Otter River Indians? You left them to look after themselves?"

"They have all gone south for the winter in their canoes. They haven't had a very successful season and they are going to try to get down so they will be near the Hudson's Bay post. I had a few things in my mission house, but if I'd been able to find my way back last night I couldn't have got through the winter."

"You'd have probably died—it's the easiest thing there is to do up here. And your converts will have to hurry some—but they may make it before the freeze-up."

"They seemed to think they would." The girl sighed and moved her lithe arms in an appealing gesture. "I don't know whether I ought to call them converts or not. Some of them I didn't let join the church—simply because they weren't prepared."

He left her shortly and followed the girl's trail up the creek in search of her lost supplies. He found them easily enough—water-soaked robes of caribou and a few personal things—and returning to camp he dried them out before a roaring fire.

As he did this work John was aware of a new buoyancy in his step, a pronounced enthusiasm in his voice and tireless energy in his muscles. The all-night vigil evidently had been a tonic to him; for surely the mere anticipation of a certain little plan he had in mind—a small service that he figured he might do for Ruth Acton—would have no such pronounced effect upon him. Was he not merely obeying the code of the North that teaches all followers of the forest trails to help one another in distress? Surely he had no personal interest in the matter. Indeed, the plan he had in mind incurred considerable sacrifice on his part; it would unquestionably destroy all hope of a profitable trapping season. He had hoped to get ahead this year, to take enough furs to buy him some sorely needed education and business training in the cities of men; but this would have to be postponed for another year. But even if it meant exile for years in his gloomy woods John felt he could not hesitate. The girl was in real need of him and he felt a real and strangely happy need of serving her.

"I've got this matter all figured out," he told her as he brought her her lunch. "There's only one possible course—and there ain't any question about it. You can't stay here all winter."

"No." The girl's eyes were wide and bright. "That's impossible, of course."

"And there ain't many places for you to go. You couldn't have picked a more deserted, uninhabited, and generally God-forsaken place."

"Please don't swear," she interrupted soberly.

"Beg 'ee pardon. I didn't mean to. But sometimes I think it is, Miss Acton—just that."

"No. No place is."

"I hope you can teach me so. I was going to say you've picked one of the emptiest places in the world for your missionary work, although there's thousands of miles just like it, all around. As you know, when the river freezes up the last gate to the out-

side world is closed. There's no trading post in reach after the winter closes down—it's weary months away even in summer. All supplies come up the Nenamanah and from there are poled up its tributaries, and the last boat is out of the river and almost down the coast to Point Fortune by now. There's no white family I can take you to, and even your tribe of natives have hit south, out of reach. You've got to keep to your original plan and go and meet your sweetheart on the Caribou River."

"Yes. That's what I want to do."

"And there's no one to take you but me. So when you're well enough we'll take my canoe and we'll race the winter."

The girl caught her breath. "You know the way? It's a long, long journey."

"Yes—I'd be hard to lose up here. If old Black Maria was alive I'd tell her, though, that she was taking a chance to wait this long before she started. If there was a good early freeze you might have to hole up till spring. You needn't worry with me, though, Miss Acton. She was old and fat and couldn't make time like I can. Shall we call that settled?"

"As you say, I haven't any choice but to let you do it for me. It's a tremendous thing to ask——"

"You ain't asked it. I offered it."

"And I'll recompense you all I can. I'll pay you what I intended to pay the squaw and my uncle will put in something more when he hears about it."

John felt hot about the collar of his flannel shirt. "I'd just as leave you wouldn't say no more about money," he suggested mildly. "That's a habit white folks have got up here—trying to help each other out; and some men start cussin' when people talk about paying them. You don't like cussin'."

"You're so kind. I don't know how to thank you."

John's eyes puckered at the corners and she glimpsed the man's never-failing humor. "There's going to be plenty of reward in it for me, so don't worry about that," he observed. "I ain't ever been thrown with a missionary before and I expect to get some good out of it before those weeks are over. Maybe I'll even qualify for your church."

She did not know how much of this was humor and how much extreme earnestness; but she was quick to resent even a small amount of fun poked at her lifework. "You don't think you'd qualify now?" she asked. "You've been very kind to one who had fallen by the wayside—and that is greatly in your favor. I think even Edward would consider that such a thing goes a long way."

All the humor was gone from John's voice when he spoke again. This was no ill-considered or trivial subject; and many the long night he had pondered over it, sitting beside his lonely fire in the breathless darkness. As is true with many men of the open places he was close to the heart of nature; and the stream of his faith—whether it was true or not he did not know—ran deep and full.

"Do you suppose *he* would baptize *me?*" he asked quietly.

There was a curious significance in the way he emphasized the pronouns. The girl thought she caught his meaning; and perhaps there was a light of pity in her clear luminous eyes. She would not make light of this man's earnestness by giving him a flippant or an insincere answer.

She looked into his rugged, weather-beaten face—deeply lined considering his youth—and his clear eyes. She looked at his hands, skin-cracked and calloused, and then her gaze wandered to this vast, dark, wondrous wilderness in which he lived. The days were shortening appreciably lately; already it was late afternoon. The spruce looked almost coal black in the diffused light. She saw, without ever meaning to look at them, the few material things that comprised his camp; his tent, a few blackened pans and skillets, a gun that leaned close beside his fire; and above them she saw the lowering autumn sky.

"Would *he* baptize *you?*" she said. "I couldn't promise, Mr. Carlson. Are you a Christian?"

"I don't know. I never been in a church; there aren't many up here, and when I was in town I never thought to go into one. I suppose it's almighty hard to be—a real Christian."

"My natives found it so—our idea of a Christian. They could hardly make it. You say you have never been in a church and have been a woodsman all your life—away from the gentler things; away from culture and refinement; I suppose even away from books."

"Yes. Haven't had many books."

"I'm afraid you'd have almost as hard a time as my natives—surrounded ever by roughness and brutality and crudity and

having a hard time to lift above it. I know you want me to speak frankly."

John looked very solemn. "Yes, ma'am. I suppose I'd have a harder time than many of 'em. Has a man got to be a gentleman to be a Christian?"

"Mr. Carlson, I think he has—in one way of speaking. But we are going to be weeks together and we'll have lots of time to talk this over and you'll have lots of time to think about yourself. Perhaps I'll make a Christian man out of you before that journey is over." An exultant light welled in her clear eyes. "Perhaps I'll make a real convert."

"Yes'm. Maybe you will. You find out about a person on the trail if you're ever going to." His weather-beaten face was solemn as he started to turn back to his camp work. He felt somewhat shaky after so much serious talk and to steady himself he drew his tobacco plug from his pocket and bit off a generous chew.

It was almost a minute before he realized that the girl's face had abruptly changed expression. He looked up to find her staring at him in incredulous dismay. At first he was wholly at a loss to know the cause; and although he flushed guiltily—on general principles—he had not the least idea as to the nature of his guilt. From the girl's look he knew that for the present moment at least he could not begin to qualify as a member of her church.

"What's the matter, Miss Acton?" he asked humbly.

"What is that you just took a bite of? Tobacco?"

"Yes, ma'am. Sailor's twist. Lots of fellows up here use snuff——"

"Don't you know that's the very thing ——" she began. She spread out her capable hands. "But what is the use?"

John was not so stupid but that her idea got home to him at length. She just saw the fiery back of his neck as he turned into the nearest thicket. He instantly emerged and the suspicious bulge was gone from his cheek.

He began to cut wood with lusty strokes; and she might have thought that he had immediately forgotten the incident had it not been for his curious behavior later this same afternoon. He had taken out a strong pipe of ancient vintage and in a decidedly ostentatious manner began to fill it with slivers of tobacco cut from his plug. She did not for a minute mistake his purpose. He was not doing it to show his independence; he was simply and sincerely trying to find out if the pipe was a forbidden luxury too.

But she paid no attention and his only recourse was a direct question. "Do Christians ever smoke?" he asked her bluntly.

"It is a matter of opinion," she replied. "Personally, I think it is an unpleasant, silly habit—but I'm not going to tell you not to. Perhaps you'll learn not to care about it."

He lighted the fragrant tobacco and exhaled drifting veils of smoke. "I'll try, but it'll come pretty hard," he replied. "This old pipe has helped me out in many a tough night and it'll be hard to throw it over. But I'll be glad to try."

She got the disquieting idea that it was not altogether through the desire to become a Christian gentleman that John would so try to reform. It seemed to her that a personal issue had crept into their relations in spite of herself, and except for his wish to please her personally he would have kept his rough, uncouth and godless ways.

CHAPTER V.

When the evening meal was done and the fire built high John found that he scarcely knew his familiar Northern night. Its old charm was immeasurably enhanced; the little noises of the night prowlers in the thickets, the fragrances, the caress of the wind on his cheek, the starlight on the sleeping lake, even the fire's crackle had a cheery note he had never distinctly noticed before.

He had always lived close to realities, this forest man; and that meant he had always loved the leaping flame. Many the night it had brought back dear life to him when he had come in chilled and almost dead with the cold; it had thawed his frozen food when famine stalked him close, and at least once—one bitter night at the edge of the barren lands—it had been his only protection when a ring of yellow eyes watched him from the darkness. To-night it possessed an added happiness for him and his young blood seemed to leap like the flame itself in his veins. The girl was very beautiful, he thought, with the firelight upon her. It brought out the threads of gold in her hair, it shone in her eyes; the soft light seemed to bring out, even better than the

white radiance of day, the delicacy of her girlish features.

But Ruth had a different reaction to this primitive camp in the primeval forest. She was close to the savage heart of nature as she had never been before in her life—even during her stay with the natives on Otter River she had slept within stout cabin walls —and the weird light, the whispering sounds and the pressing darkness seemed to magnify and accentuate the various disquieting aspects of her own predicament. The forest was the home of all that was cruel and savage and lawless—and she remembered with growing dismay that for weeks to come she was largely in the power of this brown, gaunt, unlettered pagan that sat beyond the fire.

The night before her very helplessness would have moved him to pity; and she had been too near dead from fatigue and cold to be afraid. The surprise of finding her, fallen in the thickets, and the unusual situation itself had been in her favor. John had been busy caring for her in the first place; and in the second her unlooked-for appearance, suddenly, in the wild heart of the night, had robbed the incident of its reality so that the old relationships between men and women had been swallowed up in wonder. But to-night they were simply man and woman in a most unconventional situation. He had become adjusted to her presence; and how did she know but that the fine chivalry he had showed the preceding night was but the mood of the moment, forgotten now that she was herself again? At first she was only uneasy, but this feeling gave way to something like real terror as the hours of night drew on.

She was not at all afraid of the deep forest that surrounded her. Somehow she felt that this man on the opposite side of the fire knew all about the forest, that he had conquered it in a long war and that he could save her from its perils. Indeed, his lean, strong body was a fort not to be despised. The fear she knew was of the man himself and even the warmth of the bright fire could not dispel its chill from her veins.

He suddenly looked straight into her face, with a troubled look on his own that fastened her interest at once. "I want to be sure of something, Miss Acton," he said at last, evidently with difficulty. "We're going to be together some weeks. I want to be sure that you're not afraid of me."

She blessed him in her heart for this effort to reassure her. "I'm not—now."

"Good!" He made a pretense of lighting his pipe, meanwhile groping for words. "I just wanted to make sure," he told her. "I know your picture of a gentleman is something quite a lot different from a raw-boned trapper in the woods, but a man doesn't have to be a gentleman—the way you use the word—and maybe not a sure-enough Christian either—to show a little decency to a lady who's his guest. I hope you understand that. I've been a skunk a few times in my life but I hope I ain't that much of a skunk, if you know what I mean. Maybe 'skunk' isn't a gentleman's word either—I don't know—but I'll learn 'em all in time."

"I'm not frightened at all, Mr. Carlson."

"To make it a little plainer—I'm taking you on this trip in the capacity of guide, and you can treat me like a guide, and I'll act like one. I won't even eat with you if you'd rather I wouldn't. It ain't that I haven't got plenty of independence—I just want you to feel at ease. I'll obey pretty near every command you give me.

"I could give you my pistol, but it would be a foolish thing to do, considering how long we'll be together. You needn't worry, I'll never forget my place. You don't have to call me *Mr.* Carlson—just call me Carlson, or John, and I'll answer like a dog. And I'll turn you over to Mr. Edward safe and sound."

She smiled at him with real gratitude. She could not doubt this man. And when she went to her bed of skins it was with the certain conviction that she could sleep peacefully and soundly, fearing neither the powers of the wild nor this lean forester who would protect her from them.

John decided she must rest one more day, then they would start their long trip down through the chain of lakes. This day, the second of their companionship, passed with painful slowness to Ruth. She was anxious to join her lover on the far-away Caribou River and John's pathetic efforts to serve her could not alleviate her loneliness or quiet her impatience. Mostly John wore fairly well that day, yet it was to be that early evening brought a decided reawakening of her doubts as to his character. An adventure at the close of day showed him in a new light.

It had been a clear, pleasant afternoon;

and the dark was delayed in coming past its usual time. Even during the supper hour, a period in which ordinarily the forest world dimmed in the gray enchantment of the twilight, when the distinct trees blended into a mysterious wall of black and the little shining streams ran darkly over the darkened moss, the daylight still lingered over the wide blue surface of the lake. As John cooked the meal Ruth stood on the lake shore; and what were her dreams as she looked out over the placid waters to the dim-wooded shore beyond even she did not fully know.

Long though this water vista was, it made no appreciable break in the continuity of the forest. The trees crowded close to the water line and sprang up tall and erect on the opposite shore; they crept into every little isthmus and encircled the large water body as if they coveted its place. As she stood there she went into the majestic moods of this far-stretching wilderness; she sensed its menace and at the same time its eternal hospitality; its power to build and strengthen and, at a whim, to shatter and destroy; its tenderness and its cruelty. It had not been conquered yet by man. Man was the great builder, the dominant one who swung the ax and struck the flame, but as yet these countless leagues of forest had mostly resisted his strongest advances.

A great salmon sprang in a flash of silver. A band of Canadian geese passed in stately flight down the long channel of the lake, and they called a strange, weird password down to her that she could not yet understand. A loon, invisible somewhere on the dimming surface, laughed at her in maniacal frenzy.

Suddenly she saw, far up the lake and in the shadow of the shore, a small, black, moving dot. She watched it with quickening interest, thinking at first it might be swimming moose. It drew slowly toward her, taking shape; and even before it suddenly emerged into a twilit stretch of water she had guessed its real identity. It was a canoe manned by a single voyageur.

He was approaching from the direction of the Caribou River country; and for one moment she was exalted at the thought that this might be Edward Fisherson, her fiancé, on the way to investigate her delay. Such a thing seemed wholly possible at first; there were not many human inhabitants in this great North to come venturing down the waterways at the close of day. But as the voyageur drew nearer she found she could no longer entertain this hope. She knew Fisherson's build and outline even at a great distance, and this man was not he. His build was more heavy than that of the missionary and his head showed blond in the paling light.

He was not, therefore, an Indian. This fact made his appearance all the more important, for while natives are not abundant —thinned out by white man's maladies and habits as they have been—a forester sometimes lives from autumn to spring without even a glimpse of a white face. She immediately turned up to the camp and notified John of the stranger's approach.

"This country will soon get too populated for me," John observed. "I never seen so much traffic. I suspect he'll want to stay for dinner—and three's a regular dinner party for this country."

"You'll invite him to stay?" she asked.

"He'll invite himself. But you won't mind, will you, if he proves to be all right? A white man doesn't turn away another that's decent."

She saw he was pleased at the prospect of a guest and assented at once. They went down to the shore and John let his deep voice roll out in greeting over the water. The wayfarer heard, hesitated a moment, then turned his canoe and came directly toward them.

"He is just going through and out, I guess," John observed. "You see he didn't know I was camped here."

But now that John could distinguish the man's identity there was a marked ebb in his enthusiasm. The pleased expression departed speedily from his homely face, and Ruth thought she saw a hardness—a grim look that she found oddly disquieting—about his large, humorous mouth. She had not known that her woods companion could look this way, and because her particular religious convictions made her in some degree a pacifist she found herself resenting it. There was no hatred in John's face, but there was certainly contempt and disdain, and in addition a rather deadly humor that was wholly new to her. The result was that she found herself championing the stranger in some slight degree against John.

The canoeist rested on his paddle about forty yards from shore. "What ye want?" he called.

"Nothin'," John replied easily. "I was just yelling hello as you passed through."

The stranger began to paddle again, swiftly and easily, and in a moment his boat touched the shore. Ruth was face to face with the man now and she tried to tell herself that there was nothing about him that should so waken John's displeasure and disdain. He was a type that is not uncommon in the North—burly, coarse-featured and ugly, with furtive eyes under a low forehead—yet it was not always a particularly vicious or criminal type. Indeed, she tried to convince herself that John had no right to assume such a contemptuous attitude. He looked to be greatly John's superior, physically—at least he was heavier and he looked equally muscular—he could scarcely be more unlettered, and unless he had been born in the wilderness like John himself he probably had more refinement and had enjoyed certain cultured advantages, things that mattered greatly in Ruth's eyes. Yet she got the queer impression that John's right foot was trembling as if under tremendous temptation to kick this burly visitor back into the lake.

She noticed that John said nothing more about inviting the visitor for supper. Yet it was apparent that the men had some past acquaintance; and even strangers are usually mutually hospitable in the North. "I didn't mean to stop you, Serge," John remarked with some finesse. "I 'spect your anxious to get as far as possible before dark. I was just yelling hello."

Serge pulled his canoe farther up on shore, and a little, deep, straight line came between John's brows. "Oh, I ain't in such a hurry, Carlson," he remarked. "You seem to have a pleasant camp here." He looked straight at Ruth.

She didn't like the look, and yet, such was her state of mind, that she didn't like John's look either—grave, grim, certainly and surely deadly.

"There are some just as pleasant sites farther down the lake," he observed.

No fool could mistake his meaning; yet Serge chose to do so. His eyes dropped once over John's lean form, and evidently secure in his burly strength he bent to lift some of his blankets from the canoe. "I guess I might as well put up here with you," he observed. "I ain't in no great hurry and I kind of like the place."

"I *did* kind of like the place but I don't like it so well now," John replied. "Leave your things in your boat, Serge. The salmon poachin' is better farther down the lake."

Serge's furtive eyes flashed fire, and he straightened. This shot evidently had gone home. "I'm to understand that I ain't wanted, huh?" he asked. Ruth perceived the repressed anger in his voice and started to speak in his behalf, but John was too quick for her.

"That's the idea I've been trying to get at," he observed calmly. "It's taken quite a little time for it to sink through but you've got it straight at last. We'll see you later."

Serge glanced from one to the other. "I get you, now," he said viciously. "You and your *klooch* are havin' such a fine time——"

This was one remark that Serge never finished. The storm that broke in the middle of it gave no opportunity for further elaboration of the idea. And to Ruth it was wholly like a storm—a wilderness tempest that breaks with wolfish fury, sudden and violent, without warning. She scarcely had time to cry out before those two savage men were in murderous combat on the lake shore.

John had let drive with one of his long, lean arms, a blow that was considerably too fast for the eye to follow and with all that wide, slouching shoulder behind it. If it had gone home where it was aimed—the point of his enemy's jaw—that combat on the shore would have come to an abrupt and certain end before it had hardly begun. But Serge had been on guard; and with a jerk of his burly neck he was able to avoid the smashing power of it. It caught him along the cheek and his skin stripped off before that raking knuckle. For all the pain that rocked through him and the tremendous jar to his nervous system he lowered his huge head and struck out like an enraged bear with a left and right.

John avoided them and replied with his own left—a lashing, upcurving blow that caught the man on the cheek bone under the left eye. It would be some days before that eye would do full duty again; in somewhat short of a minute it began to look like the black patch that men used to wear over eyeless sockets. With that blow Serge arrived at the sensible conclusion that a stand-up fight would not prove his best tactics; and he made a flying dive for John's knees.

They rolled together in the sand—in Ruth's eyes two fighting beasts without hu-

man attributes. But even in the heavy twilight that in these last few minutes had lowered over the lake she did not miss the point that when the two rolling bodies came to rest John mysteriously had appeared on top. Before she could scream her companion had pinned his enemy down, one hand clutched at his throat, his strong knees gripping, and with a gnarled brown fist was lashing in blows that popped like pistol fire in the silence.

Serge reached for his side arm and he did actually succeed in drawing the heavy pistol from his belt. But that same deadly right hand caught his wrist, with the same flashing speed with which a falcon might overtake a teal in the air. She heard the smack of the flesh. Then Serge's arm made a curious backward motion with the result that the pistol was hurled into the air and lit with a splash in the lake beyond.

With one stinging blow for luck John started to get to his feet; but evidently his arguments had not been sufficiently convincing. This outlaw fisherman could take considerable punishment and as he sprang up his hand sought the long hunting knife at his thigh. This second attempt at murder was an even more lamentable failure than his first. John's arm seemed to reach a full six feet. At every succeeding attempt to rise Serge encountered the same brown, hard-knuckled obstacle. The former was enjoying himself thoroughly now, first with one arm and then another, and Serge's getting up and falling down seemed so perfectly regular and automatic that it some way resembled the operation of some grotesque machine.

Finally one of John's hard-knuckled levers happened to land just right—near a certain point on the lower jaw that has some unfortunate connection with the motor centers—and the machine abruptly stopped running. Serge lay still, a very ugly figure in the sands; and it would be some moments before he would rise again.

"We've got him under the anæsthetic now," John observed pleasantly. "We can begin the operation."

He addressed this remark in general to Ruth; but it was wholly lost on her. She was making certain remarks herself; and only when he turned squarely to her and looked into her pale face and flashing eyes did he fully get their import. When understanding at last sunk home to him he was the most astounded champion that ever entered the lists for a lady's honor.

"Oh, you brute!" she was crying. "You wicked beast!"

John opened his mouth, then closed it firmly. "You mean me?" he asked at last, wholly sincere in his amazement.

She most certainly meant him and she said so. "You—you!" she repeated. "And I thought you were better than most of these wicked men."

"Well, I ain't." He looked at her with sober dignity. "I guess it's the climate. The only way I know how to *mission* anybody is with my fists."

He glanced toward Serge, saw that he was still sleeping soundly, and mostly to relieve his own injured feelings began packing for his enemy's departure. He replaced the blankets that Serge had removed from the canoe, and then—still without loss of dignity—lifted the unconscious man in his strong arms and deposited him limply on top of his duffel. As a precaution against armed attack he next temporarily spiked his enemy's gun by stopping its breech with mud. This done he turned to Ruth.

"If you've got anything to say to your little friend," he observed, grimly and wholly without humor, "better say it quick. He's going on a journey."

The girl's eyes opened wide. "You're not going to drown him!"

"No, but I'd just as leave. I've drowned poor beavers and such that I've liked better. He won't drown; he'll come to pretty quick, floating on the big lake, and his paddle's laying there in plain sight."

"So you're not going to let him stay!" It was not a felicitous remark or a very sensible one, but it was all she could think of for the moment.

"No. I kind of thought I had made that plain. I'm willing to be treated just like a guide and I've acted like a good guide ought to act, but I'm going to say for a little while yet who sleeps before my fire." A sudden need of justification came over him. "Miss Acton, do you know who this man is?"

"No. But no matter who he is, you didn't have to treat him like a brute!"

"He's Serge Vashti, an outlaw—a crook—an illegal salmon catcher—everything I hope I ain't. And if he was a missionary I wouldn't let him say what he did about you and walk away with it."

"What did he say about me? I didn't hear him say anything."

John turned in amazement. "You didn't! Well, damn his ugly mouth—you'll just have to excuse that, Miss Acton—I ought to have filled it full of mud instead of his decent gun barrel!"

"I didn't hear him swear once, as you did then," she answered, secure in her convictions. "Perhaps he said something I didn't understand, but I can't believe it was very bad. A *klooch*—was that what he said? What does *klooch* mean?"

"He meant what he said as an insult. *Klooch* is the Northern word for a young squaw."

"I don't see anything so terrible in that—to justify your half killing him." Her voice dropped lower. "I shouldn't mind being called a squaw—squaws have human souls, the same as I have. They are my sisters. I came clear up here to help them and save them. Edward would tell you the same. I shouldn't object to being called a squaw when Edward has devoted a year of his splendid life to the assistance of these same poor squaws. You can feel lucky that he isn't here to tell you what he thinks of that disgraceful scene just now."

"I do feel lucky he ain't," John commented. "I might turn loose and bust things."

"I suppose you would—brutally and savagely. I don't think I can forget this disgrace very soon. Squaws are my sisters and there was no excuse whatever for your brutality. Besides, I don't know that any one asked you to stand guard over my good name."

"Nobody asked me to, that's right." John stood straight and tall, a grave and dignified figure in the dusk. "But I'm goin' to—just the same—clear till I turn you over to your sweetheart. As long as you're with me you're in my charge and I'm going to look after you and keep foul tongues off of your name if I have to cut 'em off with my jackknife. That's my religion and I'm as firm in it as you are in yours."

To give emphasis to these remarks he strode down to the edge of the impassive lake and with his great shoulders shoved against the loaded canoe. The continuation of that powerful movement shot it out onto the placid surface; and as the wind caught it, it started to drift.

CHAPTER VI.

After the simple evening meal John rejoiced to hear Serge's paddle splashing ever fainter as he progressed down the lake and temporarily out of the lives of these two exiles in the forest. That dimming sound was welcome because it assured John a good night's sleep; he would not be obliged to stand guard against a possible attack from ambush. He knew Serge of old, and it would be quite in character for the outlaw to creep into the shadows about the firelight—like a wolf, John's ancient enemy—take remorseless aim and coolly and deliberately destroy him while he slept. But Serge had had certain reasons of his own for haste; so he postponed the payment of his debt to a more favorable hour.

Such a crime would have been incredible to Ruth. She did not believe in such things. It had been her pet theory that all crimes have extenuating circumstances and that deliberate cold-blooded murder lived only in the cheap film and the penny-dreadful; and this was her basis for her opposition to capital punishment. She had spent some months in the North—months of cruel disillusionment—and she had learned some bitter lessons of human nature; yet she was not prepared to believe many things that John's bold life had taught him to be facts; and thus she had had no fear of Serge stealing upon them with cocked rifle in the darkness. She was the child of a well-ordered civilization, and its illusions, its false self-satisfaction, most of all its false sentimentality were with her yet. She had seen Serge reach for his knife during the fight on the shore; but she had excused it on the grounds of self-defense. But she was glad that he had gone on. It removed the danger of another clash with John and further destruction of what little good opinion of him she still retained.

John seemed to bear no resentment toward her for her verbal attack and he cooked and served her dinner with entire good nature. Afterward he remade her tree-bough pallet, building it up with consummate care and amusing her meanwhile with his droll talk; and he wished her a cheery good night when she went to her tent.

Almost at once, it seemed, he was calling that breakfast was ready and they must be on their way.

John had not only prepared breakfast,

but to permit her all the rest possible he had already packed most of the duffel for the journey. Nothing remained but to break camp, load the light silk tent and her own robes into the canoe and launch out on to the still surface of the lake.

Morning was just breaking when the last of this work was completed. Of the fire that had warmed her and cooked her food, only ashes were left; her bed was but a mat of dead limbs that would soon be overswept with snow. She had a queer feeling as she took her seat in the bow of the canoe that these three days at John's camp had been some way good for her; that she understood certain things better than before. If this were foolish, at least they had been fairly happy, and comfortable days. This at least she owed to John; uncomplaining care of her and shelter from the powers of nature.

The mystery of the dawn was never more moving than now—on the lake, at the edge of the forest. The shore line drew away, black, breathless, charged full of ancient passion that she did not wholly understand; the regular beat of John's paddle was the only sound. The slowly brightening dawn was strangely moving to her; it went far to those deeply religious instincts that were such a dominant part of her nature. The sky line strengthened; she could make out the individual trees pluming the ridges on either side; the far-off snow peaks, dead white before, woke with the rest of the landscape and stood flashing against the gray morning sky. And with John to point it out for her she now began to see the waking forest life.

Every few yards, it seemed to her, the forest offered some delectable glimpse of its hidden people. Often she saw a mink hunting or playing along the shore, occasionally a swimming otter—an animal rare to see even in the North because of its propensity to travel at night—sometimes a fox, puzzled no doubt as to what this long swiftly moving amphibian might be. All three of these were hunters not to be despised, John told her—and their ferocity seemed to be in inverse ratio to their size. He said that the fox was a fairly respectable beast of prey. He caught hares, grouse, in fact all manner of the Little People, but it was wholly a matter of business with him; he wanted them to eat. The otter did a large part of his hunting in the lake itself, and his very shadow in the water was terror itself to the folk of the blue depths. The mighty lake trout was never known to be modest about his swimming—he knew he could dart through his dim haunts like a ray of light—but down in his cold fishy heart he was well aware that the otter was his master. Woe upon him when that long, brown shadow came diving into those glassy depths! But both the fox and the otter knew of a ferocity beside which they were as sheep; a speed that made them seem like old Urson, the tedious porcupine, in comparison; a hunting passion beside which they were cold and lifeless as the gray crags of the lake bottom. This was the mink, the Little Death that naturalists wonder at, the terror of the lesser folk.

Ruth need not have feared that the journey would be uninteresting. There was always something to watch for. She saw most of the other hunters from time to time—the wolverine, whose dogged courage and never-abating fury made him hated and feared through half a million square miles of unbroken wilderness; the marten—the beautiful, orange-throated terror of the treetops; the fisher, only a larger marten that catches and kills almost everything he can conquer except fish; and often the gray coyote, peering at them a moment from a covert and then stealing, in never-forgotten cowardice, into his coverts. Sometimes the hair seal showed a sleek head above the water—a wanderer up the rivers from the sea—and once a lynx wakened from his nap on top of a great rock and licked his whiskers as he watched them paddle swiftly by—for all the world like a great cat warm and secure on the hearth. Never throughout the journey did they see his majesty the grizzly bear, principally because he was back in the hills at this time of year, keeping his eye open for a suitable den of hibernation, but once they saw his great tracks at a portage; and for days they looked in vain for a glimpse of a wolf. It was not yet the season that the wolves show themselves. They were the spirits of famine—and the deep snows that are famine's kingdom were not yet laid upon the ground.

In addition to these the travelers saw the various creatures that gave the hunters their sport, all of them old friends of John. Often they saw the fool hens perched in a row on a rotted log beside the water's edge as if waiting foolishly for some of their foes to come and kill them—but John explained

there was some method in this seeming madness. The whole hope of the fool hen—Franklin's fowl, a naturalist would have called them—was in their protective coloring; they seemed to become merely inanimate parts of the logs they perched on; and keen the hunter's eye that made them out. The voyageurs saw large snowshoe hares scurrying to cover as the canoe glided past and leaving their big imprint in the sand; they saw muskrats working tirelessly at their huts at the mouths of the streams, and sometimes a beaver made a great and ridiculous splash at the paddle's sound. Often a curious something that looked like an overgrown bur moved slowly and stupidly along the shore, but only such hunters as the wolverine, with more ferocity than sense and in whom the killing passion is developed to such an extent that it becomes a serious backlash to their own survival, cared to molest him. This was his stupidity, the porcupine—yet he had sense enough in the presence of an enemy to hunch up into an untidy ball extremely painful to the touch. Once they caught a glimpse of a caribou down from his high parks, and Ruth thought she would never forget the long, majestic sweep of his horns, the snow-whiteness of his mane, the vigor and spirit and beauty of him. And then there was the evening, standing out even in that long succession of illustrious evenings, when an old bull moose had stood like black marble as the canoe glided by him.

Not only the living things, but the inanimate aspects of nature filled her with surprise and delight. This was a chosen land to the nature lover; mostly open forest filling the broad valleys between the high ranges, wide green parks, and chain after chain of glimmering lakes; and now, in the last days of fall, its strange and moving beauty seemed at its fullness. The quivering aspen, often standing alone in a long sweep of spruce, had suffered the Midas touch of the frost, and Ruth's heart leaped up to see it—as if it were golden daffodils. The lake itself was ineffably beautiful; long blue inlets; strange, moving cloud shadows, the dark image of the spruce along its shores. She looked up secret streams that vanished at once as the canoe glided past their half-concealed mouths; she caught glimpses of far-distant waterfalls, light as gossamer; she saw the rosy peaks at sunset and the glint of frost in the dawns.

Yet the delight she felt was often vaguely mingled with sadness; and John often looked from his course to find her oddly grave, her full lips still, her eyes luminous and brimming. She could not satisfactorily explain this mood; it seemed to be something that reached her from the forest. And indeed, as the days passed, the mood of the forest itself was darkened, as if an ancient sadness forgotten for a while had been recalled again.

The wilderness beauty began to have a vaguely unhappy quality that she could not quite name or trace. She got the idea that all the little trees were shuddering with terror of some unconquerable foe who was even now bearing down upon them; she thought they whispered unhappily, bending one to another, and wept in the long watches of the night. Shadows seemed to lie deeper among the trees and the sun came timidly if at all. Sometimes the night's small, sorrowful, half-whispered intermittent sounds became a veritable chorus of distress and fear: the trees soughing and moaning in answer to some grim tidings that the wind brought; the dead leaves rustling; the branches shaking fitfully against one another.

But if John could not always beguile her out of these darkened moods, at least he could see to her comfort—and this he did, quietly and without fail. Because he was not in the least officious but always unobtrusive she was half the time unaware of his ministering to her, she only knew that discomfort touched her hardly at all. Yet she was not blind to the fact that this unlettered woodsman was showing her as fine a courtesy as she had ever encountered in her native city.

The more she thought upon this thing the more surprised she was. He was a savage, scarcely more civilized than the Indians themselves—winning his livelihood by brutal contact with the wilds—and yet he had a faculty for making her feel at ease. Possibly it was merely the complacency born of a sense of instinctive superiority, yet this hardly explained the comradeship she felt for him, the comfort and security she knew in his presence. She believed it impossible that this man could be a gentleman; the word meant something far different from him, in her way of thinking. Edward would laugh at the thought. Yet even Edward could scarcely have been more considerate

of her. She felt that possibly her own influence had had a marked effect upon the man; but she wished that she could do more for him—that she could make him a Christian! It seemed a tragic thing that she must leave him—considering the amount of good she thought she saw in him—amid these savage surroundings, fighting his brutal fights, living a life hardly better than that of the beasts themselves. If only he could fall under Edward Fisherson's influence! In such case he might yet find redemption!

Every hour spent with John was, in some vague, half-glimpsed way, a revelation to her. As she learned about him she felt that she was also learning about life. She thought it strange that this uncultured pagan could in any manner influence her usual habits of thought—that his philosophy could ever threaten the firm foundations of her own. Most of all, she was amazed at the comfort she got from his presence, the ease with which she got on with him.

Of course he took wonderful care of her. When they started out in the morning he would wrap her in a great caribou robe and seat her comfortably in the canoe's bow; and the brisk wind that sometimes whistled down the lake was wholly unable to get to her. Even when the clouds lowered and the rain flurries lashed the lake about her she remained warm and dry. He was never too tired to point out things of interest on the bank.

When they made their noon landing he was quick to build a roaring fire—before ever she climbed out of her warm seat—and he learned to prepare her steaks and flapjacks just as she liked them. He did all camp work happily and ungrudgingly and acted as if it did him honor. Even after a full day at the paddle—when she saw the tired lines about his youthful gray eyes—his courtesy and consideration never flagged and every wish of hers was literally a command. He always took the greatest pains with her pallet of spruce bough. On the other hand he himself rolled up on the ground wherever his fancy dictated; and because of a physical toughness she could not but admire—sometimes she found herself faintly wishing that Edward Fisherson's steel was of the same forge—neither damp nor rain, wind nor cold seemed to harm him.

There were certain small adventures that helped to speed the days. Sometimes they were hungry for grouse, and until his stock of cartridges got low John had a neat way of walking within a few feet of these birds and decapitating them with a bullet from his revolver. Ruth was ordinarily a dainty eater, but at the evening meal after a chill day on the lakes she found she could just comfortably envelope one whole grouse. John, not so dainty, could usually be counted on for two, and one day when he had missed his lunch he devoured a flock of four. They were about the size of spring fryers that are a well-loved tradition in the South; and the plump breast was as fine-flavored flesh as ever graced a frying pan. When only six shells were left—one full magazine of his revolver from which he did not care to draw except in an emergency—he killed the birds with clubs. This seemed wholly impossible to Ruth until she saw him do it; a careful stalk within ten feet of a fat fool cock—the cocks were even more foolish than the hens—and then a wooden missile hurled with deadly accuracy. He was able to pick up enough birds in this way to give them an occasional grouse dinner.

Of course he had his rifle and shells in abundance; and in this section of the North very little else was needed. The fresh meat they had brought with them lasted a good part of the way—without touching their store of jerked flesh—and a young moose yearling, encountered in the shallows, served them when this was gone. The other essentials that John had laid by for the winter seemed hardly scratched as the journey neared its close.

There was something adventurous and thrilling in the very character of the journey; the passing from lake to lake over wooded portages, the soft dip into some great, mysterious water body—pale blue in its frame of black spruce—that seemingly had lain unglimpsed by mortal eyes since creation's dawn; the long hours of paddling through sun and shadow to another portage and on to another lake beyond. Sometimes the boat crept through narrow channels where the beaver had built his house, and the swimming muskrat made long riffles through the still sloughs; and sometimes the lakes were connected by swift rivers up which John's strongest paddling could hardly force the craft. There were still, strange dawns; drowsy hours of midday; and nights whose mystery and magic sur-

passed her understanding. Perhaps she loved the nights—the early hours of darkness, before she sought her pallet—better than any other time.

Through his own knowledge John showed her the forest in a new light. He taught her how to sit perfectly motionless so that the Little People that crept and rustled in the shrubbery might come near enough to glimpse; he taught her how to interpret sounds and, indeed, to hear sounds to which before she had been deaf. His very sympathy and understanding brought the Red Gods close: as if in reward of worship they showed him their hidden secrets and revealed their most wonderful treasures. In these still, breathless hours they beheld scenes of magic that a tenderfoot, not knowing where to look, would have wholly missed.

Her senses quickened under his teaching. Until this time she had never greatly regarded her sense of smell—thinking it an unimportant sense, at best—but he taught her how to make good use of it in these fragrant woods. Even the blind—she came to know at last—might have received some blessing from these dark, brooding forests.

She learned that the fire itself was a thing to love; the circle of light that kept out the breathless darkness. She liked to sit warm and safe before it and give way to dreams. Toward the end of the journey, as the days shortened and the first scouting parties of the enemy came riding out of the north, it began to seem the flame of life itself.

Their luck had broken favorably so far in regard to weather, but now, in the last days of their journey, they could no longer forget that fall was almost done. Often and more often they wakened to find the lake fretted with brisk winds out of the north—winds that cried triumphantly as they swept by, as if their time of glory was nearing, and armed with blades of stabbing cold. The sun's strength waned; and often heavy, sullen clouds retarded its meager rays so that the day never seemed to emerge from twilight and John could hardly distinguish his familiar landmarks. Thin ice formed on the sheltered pools and on the sloughs out of reach of the wind—a significant sign to John. He knew he must not linger along the way for surely the general freeze-up was not far off.

Sometimes the lakes were gray with rain, eddying storms that swept at intervals over the gray water; and once, as the day drew toward its dreary close the water drops softened and whitened, an eternal miracle that was always deeply moving to this dark man in the canoe stern. Of course the high passes had been banked with snow for weeks; but here on the lakes it was a sign not to mistake. Surely there were not many days left in which to be abroad. He watched the white flakes hiss into the water.

"Just a flurry, like enough," he observed. "But just the same I'm glad we're going to have a comfortable camp to-night."

The girl's eyes looked big and clear in the dimness of the storm. "You've got a place already picked out?" she asked.

"Yes. It's a cabin—one of the few in this end of the woods. An old trapper built it—Trotter by name—and he ain't using it any more."

"He—has he gone away?" She felt sure that this was not the full answer; and something in John's tone made her interested enough to seek further. He had not spoken in sorrow, although Ruth had got the idea that Trotter's failure to make further use of the cabin had more than ordinary significance to him, as if, indeed, it were prophetic of his own future.

"Yes, and he won't come back. Leastwise, if he comes back it will just be to stand a minute at his cabin door, with the wind whistlin' through him and not even know he was there—and cuss the winter. He passed out, couple or so years ago. He was old and it got him."

"From exposure—cold——"

"Yes, and the general cussedness of the country. He was always talking about going home—making a stake and going Outside and settling down among his old friends in Nebraska—but he never done it. He was a nice old man, but nothing to me in particular; and yet I've always sort of felt for him and wished he'd cleaned up on 'em."

The girl leaned forward—quite as if this little forest drama had touched her too. "John—cleaned up on whom?"

Only once or twice before, in rare moments when the camp fire was warm and soft, had she called him John. In spite of the depth of his mood he didn't fail to hear; and a little flicker of a smile, slow and grave, touched his lips. "On who?" he echoed. "How do I know who? On the winter—and the woods—and the wind—and the wolves; whatever it is we're bucking

up here because we don't know no better. I suppose they're all giving a song and dance now because they put the old boy down. It's their victory and they'll all yell their triumph over his grave."

John had worked his paddle as they talked; and now they were almost to Trotter's landing. Facing into the wind John steered toward the beach and the forest. Slowly—rather laboriously, Ruth thought—he pushed the canoe to the shore, got out and pulled it to safety on the sand. Ruth looked about in vain for the cabin: she could only see the little evergreens already turning white, and the deep darkness of the spruce behind.

"It's a little way back from the shore," John explained, answering her thought. "Out of the worst of the wind. Do you want to stay wrapped up in the boat till I get the place warmed up—and maybe swept out a little? But if you want to get in out of the weather——"

She decided to come at once; the snow and the twilight appalled her a little and wakened a lonely mood. The lake was quite gray, what she could see of it; and the snow flurries soon dropped between. She was meeting the wilderness in a new mood.

This was not winter yet but it foretold what would come. There was grim prophecy in the wind that shrilled over the forest and on to the lake; and the sullen clouds over her were the White King's advancing banners. She had looked forward bravely to this first winter in the North; but now she felt secretly appalled, vaguely uneasy. The waterfowl were circling over the gray waters as if they were uneasy too.

She was never more grateful for John's consideration. The sight of him—lean and strong, big shoulders drooping—strengthened her and she felt glad that he was beside her. She believed that his courage was largely physical, his strength purely that of his muscles, but yet she could have hardly felt more secure even with Edward, the man whose moral convictions had become the basic tenets of her life, whose standards had come to be the scales by which she weighed all things. For the moment she almost forgot her companion's faults—such omissions as Edward had taught her were of such paramount importance—and indeed, she thought she glimpsed certain virtues that almost compensated for them. Edward would scorn him, yet in this sudden need of him his crudities and even his underlying savagery scarcely seemed to matter.

They walked up on the bench together and suddenly John halted and looked down. There were fresh tracks in the snow like those of a large dog. She was only half interested in them until she glanced at John's face; and then they began to matter very much indeed.

The man beside her was not afraid—unless it was with a dim, distant fear in the secret places of his being, bequeathed him by a thousand far-removed generations of dark and savage men that had fought with a raw nature. She did not get any idea of physical apprehension; whatever dismay he had was something instinctive, subconscious, racial. Rather he looked grim, as a man looks when some bitter truth long suspected has been made manifest. Indeed there was a hint of a grim smile at his lips, but at the same time an ironlike hardness that baffled her, a remorseless look that offended deeply the pacifistic tenets of her religion.

"What is it?" she asked him, almost afraid to speak.

"A wolf track. Not two minutes old. They always know when to show up. They know their inning. They'll come out and show themselves now the winter's coming." He followed the track with his eyes and she saw his hands change their position on his rifle. "He seems to be lurking around—not just passing through," he whispered tensely. "Don't make any more sound than you can help; maybe I can get a shot at him."

"But why? We can't use him, can we? There's no way of taking care of his pelt."

His eyes looked narrow and grim as he gave her a questioning glance. "I'll take care of him, all right, if I see him," he answered almost roughly. "Please don't make a sound."

He started to steal up an old, almost obliterated trail through the thickets; and the cold judgment with which she knew he had spoken filled her with misgivings. His eyes strained ahead. There was a fair chance, at least, that he might get sight of the wolf; the wind was such that it would blow the human smell away. She crept softly behind him through the gathering dusk.

A sudden turn in the trail brought them squarely in front of the cabin, hardly twenty feet distant. It looked bleak and forsaken in the snowfall, the little trees pressing close

upon it; but it was not this that held Ruth's startled gaze. The door hung open on its leather hinges; and standing fairly on the threshold, an incredible symbol of a wilderness triumph, stood a gray form—a living animal that even her inexperienced eyes could not mistake. It was the wolf, of course.

For an instant they both saw him with curious vividness, considering the murk of the storm and the diffused light. No wonder Ruth knew. The race had inherited hatred and fear of this savage breed. No wonder the wolf has haunted our folklore like an evil spirit! She saw the hideous, sloping back, the shaggy shoulders, the lowered head with its blazing yellow eyes and white fangs. She could even understand why John's wish was to destroy him without mercy, if only in self-protection. Yet while she saw him plain, there was a fiendish quality about the scene that was beyond her wit to analyze. It was vivid and yet it hardly seemed real. It was hard to think of the wolf as a creature merely of flesh and blood; in the dimness and the snow flurries, at the door of the abandoned cabin, he might have been one of the devil's pack, a demon of mythology.

It was only a grim coincidence that the wolf should be encountered at the cabin's threshold, yet it was lost on neither of them and to John it was significant beyond his poor power to tell. It strengthened his secret superstition—a conviction that has always been rife among primitive races—that these gray loiterers were the very spirits of the conquering wild. But if the beast had come to gloat over that empty cabin John resolved that his triumph should be short-lived. The rifle leaped in his arms.

At the same instant the wolf made a frantic attempt to flee; and for once in his life his instincts played him false. Bewildered by the hunter's sudden appearance, or else to follow a fatal instinct to conceal himself in darkness, he leaped through the doorway full into the cabin. John sprang forward hardly less fast; and the girl heard a smashing crash as the wolf leaped against the small cabin window only to fall back half stunned. And before the animal could recover and escape back through the doorway John had reached the threshold.

The subsequent scene, in the dimming twilight, was not soon to fade from the girl's memory. She saw John blocking the doorway with his body and little flashes of lightning were scattered in the dusk as he slowly drew a bright knife from the sheath at his belt. He turned, speaking gravely.

"I've got him trapped," he said with quiet exultation. And before the girl could cry out he leaned his rifle against the wall, and slipping into the cabin, closed the door behind him.

To be continued in the next issue, December 7th.

The complete novel in this issue, "THE GLADIATOR," by Wilbur Hall, starts on page 59.

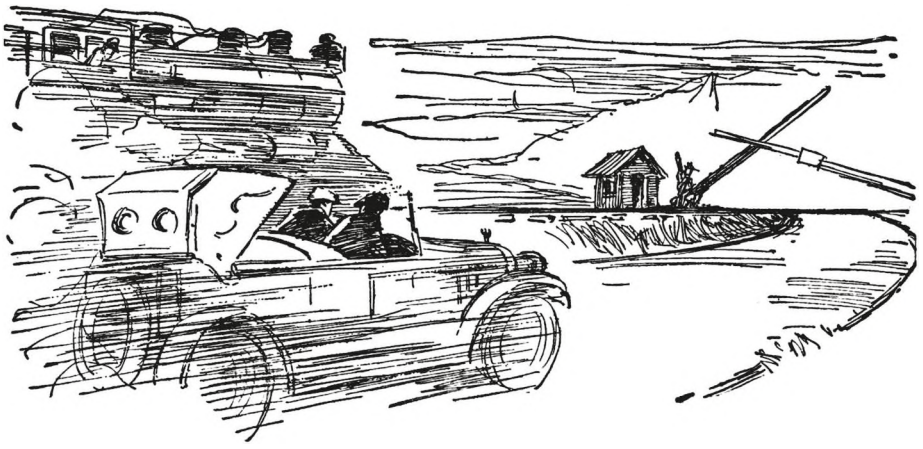
THE POPULAR PEA SEED

ONE of the Southern members of Congress represents a district in which there are several unusually poor communities. The people in them have nothing but the vote and an appetite, a situation which long ago got the congressman into the habit of sending them as much as he could of everything the government gave away. He was particularly generous with them in forwarding free seeds.

The year after the war, when the cost of living was a buzz saw gone mad, he sent a constituent in a specially needy settlement a large bundle of pea seed, and, as the voter kept on asking for more, he repeated the shipment seven times. It was not until the eighth request that the congressional patience frayed out and the donor dictated the following brief note to the constituent:

"I send you another package of seed as you request, but kindly tell me what you are doing with all this pea seed. Are you sowing fifty counties in peas?"

"Ans'erin' yours," came the reply two weeks later, "will say no we aire not sowing them nowheres. We aire using them fer soup."



Fear and the Flying Mercury

By John Lawrence Ward

Author of "The Ghoster," "Foolish Finance," Etc.

All Willie Greene needed to make a man of him was a dash of speed, and that was what he managed to acquire.

TO every man his day of days," quoth the Prophet, and even one so meek and lowly as Willie Greene was not denied.

True enough, he had little to do with the trend of events. Numerous other people had a finger in the pie, which is usually the case and further strengthens the Oriental dogma of Kismet.

Old Mr. Harker started this day off with a bang. To those neighbors and passers-by who happened to be about, and to his servants who made it a point to be about, the spectacle of old "Deviled Crab" Harker, armed with a wet mop, chasing a man out of the private garage in the rear of his pretentious town house was a divertisement. Not so to "he who got chased," otherwise, Willie Greene. Aside from the ignominy of the thing, Willie felt certain that before a tardy trolley car could deposit him at his place of employment a fulsome and unjust complaint would be registered against him.

His misgivings were justified. About the time he was swinging on board a downtown trolley the evil-tempered Mr. Harker succeeded in gaining the ear of George R. Trumbull, owner and active manager of the Trumbull Motor Agency, which position gave him the power of the high justice, the middle and the low, over Willie Greene. He also held, by public acclamation, the title of runner-up to old Deviled Crab in the town's Hot Tempered Handicap; but as one professional to another, or perhaps because of vulgar financial reasons, George R. listened with profound courtesy to the vitriolic discourse poured over the wire by the champion.

Taking advantage of a choking fit on the part of old D. C., Mr. Trumbull assured him that the moment Greene put in an appearance at the office that young man would be hanged, drawn and quartered, skinned and the remains boiled in oil.

Whereupon he hung up the receiver and swung around angrily on the good-looking, well-dressed man who lolled comfortably in a big leather office chair.

"Coombs," he bellowed, feeling the need of some slight safety vent, "between inefficient help and your accursed Mercurys, my life is becoming a hell on earth. And I'm going to stop it—stop it, I say. Dash me if I don't. I'm going to fire every short-circuited chuzzlewit around this place and quit handling Mercurys. I'm going to put some new, live blood in this establishment

and a new line of cars. Then, by the heavens, maybe I'll have peace—and make some money, devil take it!"

Barry Coombs gazed pensively out through the crystal-clear plate-glass windows at the kaleidoscopic activity of Automobile Row and slowly exhaled a long, slender, fluttering shaft of smoke. Being an extremely wise person he said nothing. Mr. Trumbull glowered savagely at his imperturbable caller and with a raucous "Wah!" of disgust snatched up the telephone and pressed a pudgy finger on a button marked "Service Manager."

"Hello! Kenny? Say, Wat, has that flat tire Greene showed up yet? No? Well, when he does, send him right in to me. Understand?"

He banged up the receiver and once more recognized the presence of the urbane Mr. Coombs. He was considerably mollified by the knowledge that shortly a suitable lamb, or rather a goat, would be brought forward to the verbal slaughter, and besides, nobody ever quarreled outright with Barry Coombs.

In his suavest business tones George R. resumed the conversation at that point where Mr. Harker had interjected his complaint.

"No, Barry, m' boy, I've quite made up my mind. I have been considering throwing the Mercury out of my line for a long time, and when I wrote you that letter, stating that I could not see my way clear to renew our contract, I meant every word of it. The Mercury is a passing machine. It's losing out—and for several reasons. It's too high-priced compared with other cars of its class. You have cut your advertising down to practically nothing, making it hard to sell. It requires expert mechanics to repair it, and your service on parts is absolutely rotten. And furthermore"—here Mr. Trumbull's tindery temper blazed forth again for a moment—"furthermore, Barry, I don't like that c'nfounded, snappy, letter-writing, smart-Aleck sales manager of yours, Ross. I don't like him."

For about the twentieth time that morning Coombs started to speak but once more the impatient whirring of the telephone forestalled him. He concealed his annoyance gamely. It had been a disheartening morning for the Mercury man. With an uphill battle to fight, opposed to the most opinionated dealer in the land, he had been constantly thwarted by interruptions most inimical to a successful, concentrated interview. He was possessed of a most equable temperament and a patience and diplomatic persistency that almost amounted to genius but he was beginning to think that to-day he bucked a combination of conditions that would prove too much for him. So far Trumbull had done ninety per cent of the talking. Every time he—Coombs—had attempted to launch a carefully prepared attack somebody or something had twirled the traffic sign to stop. This wouldn't do. It was getting on to noon and he had heard Trumbull promise his daughter, over the telephone, that he would lunch and spend the afternoon with her out at the Country Club.

Barry decided to go into action immediately, so when George R. finally hung up Barry straightened up in his chair, pinched out his cigarette and fixed the old chap with his magnetic eyes.

"Now see here, Mr. Trumbull," he said, and his quiet, unhurried speech matched his high-grade air, "you know I'm not here to sell you something. I mean sell in the sharper sense of the word. You know that I believe in Mercurys or I would not stay with the company. The Mercury is not a going car. It is a coming car, and you will find out that this is so, after this period of depression has passed and the real business begins. At the present moment the automobile industry is just emerging from the first slump in its history. Nobody has been selling cars. But the worst is behind us. This is no time for anybody in the business to get cold feet." Here Mr. Coombs slyly let his gaze stray outdoors again. "Some companies and some dealers have rather—er—wilted under the pressure but the wise men have mended their fences and are getting in position to go after the big business that is coming. I would be sorry to see you let the Mercury agency for this territory slip away from you after the way you have identified yourself with the car in the past years. I would be doubly sorry, personally, to see the pleasant and mutually profitable relations between the Mercury Corporation and one of its oldest and most valued customers severed."

George R. snorted and threw up a restraining hand.

"Huh, Barry! I bet you would." He squinted shrewdly at Coombs. "I hear that the Neilson-Grant outfit in Guilford have

thrown the Mercury overboard. That right?"

Mr. Coombs nodded somewhat reluctantly.

"And Greb at Hartsburgh?" probed George R. "Tell me they have left you and taken on that new Eagle. Eh?"

Barry shrugged his shoulders and said, "Those are two of the concerns I had in mind when I mentioned cold feet a moment ago. They got panicky and turned to strange gods."

"Why then, Barry, with our account gone you haven't got an agency in the whole State! And you got the gall to sit there and deny that the Mercury has hit the slide?"

Barry could have enlightened Mr. Trumbull on one other point had he cared to. Mr. Ross, the general sales manager of the Mercury Corporation, closely approximated George R.'s estimate. He had no particular affection for the popular Coombs and had intimated that the loss of the remaining account in that State would be followed by a request for Barry's resignation. But it was not in Barry's code to work the sympathy game, so he merely smiled and cast his best fly.

"Mr. Trumbull, has it ever occurred to you that the Mercury agency for the entire State is a most attractive proposition?"

Mr. Trumbull blinked over this thinly disguised bit of bait and then laughed loudly and a bit rudely.

"What? Don't you think I'm bad off enough as it is with a third of the State, without unloading the whole works on me? Say—whose bright little idea was that? Some more of that slicker Ross' work?"

"The thought was mine," answered Barry slowly. "I'm sorry you can't see it. It's a good idea and——"

A door back of Barry was flung open boisterously and he heard a high, crisp, girlish voice: "All right, Ches, a dollar a hole and a box on the game. You're faded."

The door closed with a slam that rattled the mahogany partitions and abruptly obliterated the rather stilted laughter of the "Ches" person.

"Good morning, gentlemen," greeted the disturber with mock gravity.

Barry recognized the voice, arose to his feet, and shook hands with this latest interruption. He had known the heiress to the house of Trumbull for many years and they were quite good friends. He had watched her grow from a thin, lanky tomboy into a raving beauty, with still a good bit of the hoyden in her small but athletic body. She was dark and imperious, with extraordinary large brown eyes and a delicately feminine replica of her father's high-bridged dominating nose. Perhaps her mouth was a trifle petulant and her manner somewhat arrogant—well, she was the spoiled, petted daughter of George R. Trumbull. To-day she was garbed in an expensive, colorful sports creation that set off her dark beauty admirably.

She appeared to be genuinely glad to see Barry Coombs. Most women were—and they chatted away at a great rate until the impatient George R. broke into the conversation.

"See here, Sally, c'nfound it, Barry and I are talking business."

Miss Trumbull surveyed her father, wide-eyed and unimpressed.

"Dad, you know you ordered me to pick you and Chester Bullen up at twelve o'clock sharp. Well, it's twelve o'clock. Here I am and out front is my faithful chariot. Cæsar, we salute you. You and Mr. Coombs can just talk your heads off. I'm sure what you say means nothing to little Sally." She settled herself in one of the big chairs, opened her bag of magic and proceeded to paint the lily.

Barry laughed, seated himself and returned to the attack. That is to say, he got so far as, "Now see here, Mr. Trumbull," when there came a knock on the door. A very timid knock to be sure, but a knock nevertheless. Barry threw up his hands helplessly.

"Come in," shouted George R. cordially, and then as he caught sight of the newcomer his countenance assumed the ferocity of a medieval headsman.

Willie Greene, cap in hand and blushing furiously, stepped into the office.

"How do you do, Mr. Greene?" inquired Miss Trumbull in her high, clear voice. Barry looked at her sharply. Her tone was too sugary, her smile too artificial, her eyes too mocking to deceive an expert psychologist like Barry Coombs. Why, wondered the Mercury man, did the patrician Sally Trumbull show unmistakable signs of pique when passing the time of day with one of her father's hired men? Barry's brown hand concealed a whimsical grin.

Willie bowed confusedly, mumbled a re-

sponse to Barry's, "Hello Greene," and then reluctantly met the stabbing eyes of The Boss. George R.'s uncertain temper hurried him into a grave mistake; that of disciplining an employee publicly.

"Well, Greene, what about it?" he demanded.

"What about it? What about——" stammered Willie. "Oh, you mean—about Mr. Harker? Why—why, nothing, Mr. Trumbull. I took his Mercury out to him this morning. He seemed to be in a bad humor. He said the car was in worse shape than when he put it in the shop. Swore we never laid a wrench on it. He raised an awful row. I tried to explain to him just what work we had done on the car but he wouldn't listen. He snatched a mop from the colored boy and ran at me. Well, sir, I didn't want to have any trouble with an old man like him, so I—so——" Willie gulped and glanced sidewise at the scornful face of Sally Trumbull. "So I—er—left."

"That is not what Mr. Harker told me," roared George R. "He said——"

"Father! You certainly wouldn't believe anything that old grouser said, would you?" Sally was indignant, and again Barry grinned under his hand.

"Sally," thundered her parent, "you keep out of this, c'nfound it!"

"Oh, rubbish, dad. I'm sure Greene is telling the truth. Run along to your grease cups, Willie. Come on, dad, we'll be frightfully late. Call Ches Bullen and let's go." She jumped to her feet and walked between her father and the unhappy mechanic.

To save a part of his face George R. shouted over her shoulder at Willie, "You may go, Greene, but remember—one more complaint against you and you are through around here."

Willie turned to go but Barry Coombs said, very casually, "By the way, Greene, just between ourselves, what was wrong with Mr. Harker's Mercury?"

"Nothing, Mr. Coombs," asserted Willie stoutly. "She was as quiet as a new victrola. Mr. Harker is sort of hard to please sometimes."

Barry thanked him courteously. He had scored a minor point, and to-day he was overlooking no bets, no matter how trivial.

As Willie laid his hand on the knob, the door was pushed open and Chester Bullen, accoutered with hat, stick and gloves sauntered in.

Mr. Bullen, manager of sales for the Trumbull agency, was without a doubt a fine figure of a man. He admitted it himself. He was completely satisfied with Chester Bullen, kept himself in good physical condition to neutralize his dissipations and supplemented a superior pose with what he fondly imagined was a sparkling, cynical wit. In truth he was merely a disagreeable fellow with a penchant for grievously bruising finer natures than his own.

He felt that he should dramatize his entrance with a little dash of impromptu comedy.

"What ho! The swaggering hero comes," he declaimed. "Say, Willie, there's a wagon load of cops out in the alley. Want you for attempted murder. They say you ran old Deviled Crab around the block seventeen times and he nearly died of exertion."

Somehow or other the story of Willie's hasty retreat from Mr. Harker's garage had worked its way downtown, as such things do.

Willie's wide blue eyes clouded and his ever-ready blush darkened his face. He glowered curiously at Bullen and his thick muscular fingers curled suggestively. An unbidden thought had arisen and gripped Willie Greene, but for a moment only. Then it was gone, leaving him trembling all over. He slunk out of the office and shut the door quietly behind him.

"Barry," said George R., "we are all going out to the club for lunch, and then play some golf. Come along, m' boy. No use discussing the contract matter any more. I've made up my mind. Sorry, but let's forget it. It won't affect our friendship in the least. Come on, go with us."

"Yes, yes, Coombs, come along," seconded Bullen amiably. He knew that Barry had a perfectly ripping wife of his own and two fine babies in Detroit and therefore could do him no damage with Sally Trumbull. Chester confidently expected to annex himself to the Trumbull family and funds by way of the altar.

Coombs hesitated. He had lost out with Trumbull. He had better be hustling about, digging up another connection, instead of golfing away an afternoon.

"Please, Barry," begged Sally as though she meant it. "Don't spoil a good foursome."

"I'll be glad to," said Barry. And then with a malicious wink at Sally, "Providing

you and I pair." Bullen was one of the few people Coombs really disliked.

Sally agreed laughingly and they all piled into her sport-model Mercury.

Willie Greene watched the gay party drive off. His eyes were miserable and his heart heavy within him. He wouldn't have minded so much—but in front of Mr. Coombs and Sally Trumbull! He thought Barry one of the finest men in the world and as for Sally—well, no ancient goddess was ever adored by her most abject devotee as Sally Trumbull was adored by Willie Greene.

When George R. gave Sally her first car he told Wat Kenny to put her under the tutelage of the most reliable driver in the establishment. Wat selected Willie Greene, and during this rather intimate association Sally had conceived a frank liking for the quiet, gentlemanly chap. As for Willie—for an all-too-brief period he dwelt on Olympus, but like all mortals who have dared to love a goddess he was condemned to eternal torment—or so he thought. After the driving lessons were over, Sally, with the inherent guile of her sex, had attempted to maintain a pose of disinterested friendliness toward Willie, but Sir Faint-heart had made it impossible for her. Willie firmly believed that the poor-boy-rich-girl legend existed only in books. He wasn't aware that it occurs in real life at least as often as it does in fiction. So he tried to forget Sally Trumbull, without much success. To be humiliated before her was to reach the depths of degradation. As for Ches Bullen —some day he would pull Ches Bullen's long, inquisitive nose!

"I know what I'll do," muttered Willie. "I'll quit. Quit right now. I won't stay around here, or her, any longer."

He stalked determinedly toward the main office but just then from the outer reaches of the building came a loud, imperative call.

"Willie! Oh, Willie!"

Willie hurried out to the service garage. Wat Kenny, the service manager, source of the voice and Willie's immediate superior was standing in the sunny rectangle of the alley doors inspecting a big, handsome Mercury touring car that had just been rolled off the elevator. A paint bespattered workman from the shop upstairs was giving the satiny body a few perfunctory parting swipes with a soft cloth.

Willie admired Kenny immensely and Kenny liked Willie and saw to it that the other men around the place did not ride the boy beyond a certain point, for Greene was, Mr. Trumbull to the contrary notwithstanding, an expert hand; loyal, dependable and safe.

"Cheer up, Willie," advised Kenny, grinning at the young man's woebegone countenance. "The old boy's waffles ain't settin' right this morning. He's got to bawl somebody out and he knows you'll stand for it. I'll just drift in on him to-morrow and tell him a few things."

Willie knew this was not braggadocio for the invaluable Wat's chief amusement was baiting George R., so he smiled wanly at his fat, fearless friend.

Kenny looked at his watch.

"Willie," he said, "tune this scow up and chase her around the block till she's right. Have her at No. 220 St. James Place at one o'clock. This is Senator South's car, so be sure she's right or maybe the senator will interduce a bill makin' it illegal to sell spark plugs or somethin'. One o'clock on the tick, Willie. The old windjammer's drivin' up to the capital 'safternoon to throw off one of them tom-tom speeches Eddie Pratt writes for him. And for the love of Mike don't get any scratches on this new paint job. Take 'er away, Willie."

Willie squeezed in behind the rakish steering wheel and deftly piloted the softly coughing beauty out of the alley. Once on Broad Street he turned south toward Municipal Park and the Speedway.

It seems odd that a person of Willie Greene's timorous temperament could be a crack driver, but it is often the case that men who could never—by any stretch of imagination—be called heroes accomplish a daily routine which impresses the layman as being extremely hazardous. So it was with Willie. During his years of service with the Trumbull Agency he had learned perforce to handle big, powerful cars. Besides which he was a natural-born wizard with an automobile. But for one shortcoming he would have become, no doubt, an important adjunct to American motordromes. As it was his chance of ever having his picture in the papers over the enviable slug, "Winner of the Indianapolis Sweepstakes," was even farther away than remote, for nobody to date had ever succeeded in getting Willie to jump the indicator past thirty-five miles an hour.

But even conservative drivers get into trouble. At a busy, particularly difficult corner in the heart of the financial district, Willie ran afoul of the law.

Traffic policemen are not inhuman, infallible automatons. They are an alert, efficient, hard-working body of men and like all other human agents subject to an occasional mistake. The officer on this corner undoubtedly made a mistake in Willie's case. Willie had three fourths of his long machine past the semaphore when the janissary of the police threw the signals against him.

Duff was, ordinarily, an easy-going man with a record for a clear corner and few arrests; but this morning all the boob drivers in the city and environs had apparently selected his bailiwick in which to perform their most absurd antics. So the spring of his Hibernian temper had let go and in the midst of an amused crowd he proceeded to have a few words with Willie.

"Well, and just where did *you* learn to drive?" he demanded. "Correspondence school? Did you have your eyes on the sign or on the flappers? Did you hear me whistle, or don't I blow loud enough for you?"

Now one stout retort from Willie would have cleared the atmosphere, but Willie merely looked scared—and guilty.

"Lemme see yer card," growled Duff, as he was duty bound to do.

Willie made a great pretense of exploring his pockets, but naturally he had forgotten to remove his wallet from the hip pocket of his overalls, so there was no driver's permit forthcoming. This is a heinous crime, for some reason or other.

Sorry now that he had stopped the boy but committed to certain procedure in regard to the traffic regulations, Duff said: "First chance you get stop at Number Three Precinct and leave ten dollars collateral, or meet me in court at ten o'clock to-morrow morning. Be more careful next time."

Willie proceeded toward the park in a very low frame of mind. As he entered one end of the Speedway—so called because fifteen miles an hour was the limit—he got a real scare. A huge black limousine came bowling out of the drive and without regard for speed laws or right of way attempted to cross Willie's bow into a diverging street. Only swift footwork and nicely adjusted brakes averted a first-class smash-up. With all the license of an innocent injured party the hard-boiled chauffeur of the limousine cursed the blameless Willie thoroughly and comprehensively. Willie said not a word, but backed up, circled around the stalled limousine and went on, devoutly thanking God that the glossy fenders of Senator South's car were still unsullied.

It was ever thus with Willie. He was a luckless pot. To the casual observer he differed not a whit from his brother pots, for he was big, proportioned nicely, and his countenance was frank, wholesome and altogether attractive. But to carry the old Tent Maker's simile a bit further, he was flawed. When tested he did not respond to the challenging stroke with a loud ringing note, but invariably betrayed his defect by a dull, hollow thud.

Willie was a coward.

The worst of it was, he knew he was a coward and the knowledge of his weakness had eaten into his vitals until he had been reduced to a mental state more deplorable than that of a drunkard or a drug addict. Cursed with the shyness of a woods creature and the imagination of a poet he was forced to endure the most fiendish torture that could be meted out to a human—that of having to live day after day with his soul, knowing that soul to be a craven, despicable thing. It required a sort of negative heroism to do it; to dream brave dreams and act the poltroon. But Willie had been striving with his Mr. Hyde for many years and had slipped into a frame of mind similar to that of the habitual sinner who after each debauch dilutes his remorse with fine vows, knowing full well that when temptation calls again he will not be able to resist the summons.

Willie must have been born a coward. His earliest impression was that of fear. His parents died while he was an infant and until the age of eighteen he had lived a life of hardship and misery on a farm with a brute of an uncle and a no less attractive aunt. These two effectually murdered whatever chance Willie had of conquering his inherent timidity. As rotten as this association was, there was a fine streak of decency and ambition in his make-up that resisted corrosion. This was in a large measure due to certain books which Willie managed in one way or another to get his hands on and surreptitiously devour. The flickering light of his inner lamp was fed by the wholesome oil of Howard Pyle, Stanley Weyman,

Washington Irving, Kipling, the earlier works of Doyle, Dumas, Stevenson.

One day the terror of his jailers overbalanced his fear of the outside world and he ran away to the metropolis of his State. Being a pleasant-looking boy and husky, he got a job at the first place he applied, the Trumbull Motor Agency.

By and large everybody treated him pretty decently, but—they—everybody, the world—and his wife and his daughter—knew Willie to be a spineless affair.

Came the war. Like a man hypnotized, walking to his fate, Willie enlisted. The months of anticipatory horror put a patch of white over each ear. And Fate, like a toying cat, saw to it that a training camp on this side was as far as Willie got, still leaving him untested, and still afraid.

Honorably discharged he went back to the Trumbull Motor Agency and his picaresque dreams.

Thousands of times he vowed to knock down the next person who bullied him. But he never did. Millions of visions he conjured up wherein a bold hero was needed. Night after night he lay wide awake on his white-enameled bed at Mrs. Falvey's and his recreant heart quickened as he watched himself dive gracefully off the towering bridge of a transatlantic liner and with powerful strokes swim toward a golden head bobbing in the yeasty combers—galloping furiously through the park with steely eyes fixed on the slender, girlish form clinging to the maddened runaway horse ahead—nonchalantly descending a shaky ladder hooked to the side of the topmost window in a blazing apartment house, a still, golden-haired figure slung over his muscular shoulder—balanced gracefully on the slender toes of high-heeled cowboy boots, full panoplied in sombrero, silken shirt, neckerchief, leather belt and hairy chaps, a smoking, old-fashioned Colt in each hand, a golden-haired daughter of the Southwest crouched behind his powerful form, and bad men, Mexicans, half-breeds and what not dying like swatted flies before him——

An angry, high-pitched screeching shocked Willie out of his chivalrous dreams. He jammed on his brakes just in time to let a heavy three-car interurban electric train clear his front bumper by a matter of inches and to catch from the rushing wind a faint but unmistakable epithet flung at him by an apoplectic motorman.

Willie grinned his guilty grin and decided to give his undivided attention to the possible ailments of Senator South's car. By the time he had circumnavigated the public golf links he had discovered and annihilated three body squeaks, increased the register of the horn two full tones and eliminated the last faint wisp of smoke from the double exhaust.

The clock on the dash showed twelve-thirty. Willie swung into a broad curving road that led out of the park and connected with a crosstown avenue leading directly into the heart of the city. He had plenty of time in which to get to Senator South's, so he decided to pay his compulsory call at Number Three Precinct.

Willie sighed. Not because of the ten dollars he would have to forfeit as collateral, for he was thrifty and his account at the Security Trust Company was no mean one for a young workman. He just didn't like police stations or the grim blue ogres to be found therein. He took a hand off the wheel and dug into his money pocket. Three one-dollar bills and a few coins were the best he could produce. He would have to stop at the bank and get a check cashed.

He nosed the big Mercury through the dense traffic on Great Canal Street, keeping a sharp lookout for a parking space.

The curb in front of the fortresslike facade of the Security Trust Company was lined with motor cars of all descriptions, and —incongruous note—serenely at rest between two "No Parking" signs stood an old-fashioned, high-wheeled buggy hitched to a big, bony, iron-gray horse which looked almost as ancient as the wizened graybeard who sat within, reins slack in his gnarled old hands.

Willie, like everybody else in town, knew that outfit.

In thirty years the little dingy wheelwright shop of Archibald MacLeod had grown to a concrete-and-glass factory hiving five hundred workers. Automobile wheels did it. In every way it was a modern, up-to-date plant—save one.

Old Archy MacLeod hated the source of his fortune like the "verra deevil!" He did not own an automobile and all the factory trucks were motivated by huge Clydesdales.

And so every Friday around noon, little bespectacled Mr. Tappen, paymaster of the MacLeod Wheel Works, climbed into the antiquated buggy, piloted by old Tim

O'Day, MacLeod's coachman, and was driven in town to the Security Trust Company to get the weekly pay roll. And to Tim O'Day, who believed in the old order of things, parking signs did not exist.

As Willie slowly crept abreast of the MacLeod equipage a lady came out of the bank and stepped into a big, handsome town car located ahead of the prohibitory signs. The uniformed chauffeur started his motor and Willie throttled down so that he could easily slip into the vacant spot, once the town car had worked its way into the moving stream of motors going west on Great Canal Street.

Willie's eyes were intent on that coveted twenty feet of curbing, so he did not see what was occurring in the cool, dark vestibule of the bank. But he heard a sharp report—something like that of a back-firing motor—then a second one—hoarse shouts—a woman's scream. He jerked his head around just in time to see a slim figure in dark clothes and rowdy cap dart out of the bank and run across the wide pavement to the curb.

The running man carried in his left hand a sizable black satchel with double grips and broad reënforcing straps, and in his right a big blued-steel automatic.

Willie's car was still rolling—barely creeping along but moving nevertheless. The old iron-gray horse reared and rattled his big hoofs on the asphalt as the sinister figure ducked under his nose. The next few seconds were a hideous nightmare to Willie Greene. He saw the gunman heave the black satchel into the Mercury's tonneau; heard it thump on the carpeted floor. Then the man was on the running board, over the door and into the seat beside him. Willie uttered an involuntary cry of pain as the big automatic was jammed viciously into his ribs. From under the visor of the grotesque cap a pair of pin-pupiled, muddy eyes entirely devoid of all human attributes stared blankly at him and from out the crooked bluish lips set into a white, peaked face a string of obscene oaths slithered like snakes from a hole in the rocks. Willie clutched his wheel desperately—hypnotized, horribly afraid, nauseated.

"Step on her, Jack!" ordered the gunman. "Step on her! Get out of town. I just croaked a coupla saps in the bank. You let me get caught and I'll swing for three of you. Step on her, damn your heart! Get out in the car tracks."

Mechanically Willie speeded his motor, shifted gears and twisted the big Mercury on to the westbound car tracks.

"Blow! Blow! Make 'em open up," snarled the devil at his elbow. "Give 'em the horn, I say!"

Willie rested his thumb on the button and the Mercury roared out a peremptory warning. The officer on fixed post at the next corner, hearing the prolonged blast not unlike that of a police car or ambulance, and noting the big machine racing down the car tracks, obligingly and abruptly halted Fourth Street traffic and waved the Mercury through. So potent is the voice of authority coupled with daring tactics that the speeding, screaming Mercury was cleared by every policeman from Fourth Street to Washington Circle, a matter of eight blocks. There the congested district ended. Willie rounded the Circle at forty-five miles an hour and bore into Northampton Avenue, a wide, concrete thoroughfare beautifully parked in the center and the main artery of travel to the city's best residential district.

There were but few traffic officers on this street. These men guarded the intersections where surface cars crossed the aristocratic avenue. None of them disputed the progress of the flying Mercury, as Mercy Hospital lay out in that direction and they were used to emergency cases flitting by their posts.

It seems needless to state here that at the sound of that wild, insistent klaxon those respectable citizens who were tooling their automobiles along Northampton Avenue within the legal limit drew in toward the curb with numerous and diversified remarks and conceded the right of way to Willie Greene.

Nor must it be presumed that the fugitive car was getting away unharassed. The duped and outraged law had galvanized into action. The hue and cry had been raised. Fully a half dozen khaki-clad, begoggled figures hunched on red motor cycles were putputting out Northampton Avenue as fast as they dared, while in the rear, but gaining fast, came a big, ugly touring car with a strange device fastened to its radiator. Within sat five hard-faced, silent men in citizen's clothes. This was the headquarters car and the famous homicide squad. Unfortunately they were much too late. There was too great a gap between the van

of the pursuers and the Mercury and the gap was speedily widening.

Northampton Avenue terminated at Olney, a pretty little suburb on the city line. That is to say, it lost its identity as Northampton Avenue, a city street, and became Northwestern Boulevard, a magnificent forty-foot brick highway which eventually merged with the National Old Trail.

Past Olney the going was much easier. At this time of day there were few cars rolling on the boulevard and most of the few were traveling in the same direction in which Willie was splitting the wind. Willie held the hurtling Mercury well to the wrong side of the road and car after car fell behind.

At Potter's Crossroads traffic had thinned out to an occasional car or farm wagon. It was at this point that Willie overtook the bottle-green sport-model Mercury bearing the Trumbull party. He whizzed past at such a fearful pace that Chester Bullen, who was driving, almost took the ditch. In deference to the presence of Sally the remarks of her male companions regarding the wild driver were toned down considerably.

"Who said a Mercury couldn't travel?" chuckled Coombs.

"Was that a Mercury?" asked George R. Sally answered him. Her big eyes were wide with excitement. "It *was* a Mercury, dad. Senator South's Mercury. And Willie Greene was driving it."

"Willie Greene! Ha! Ha!" Chester Bullen enjoyed the best laugh of the week.

"Senator South's car? Willie Greene?" sputtered Mr. Trumbull. "My heavens! If he breaks that car up—Ches, get going, follow him. The Lord save us, what's all this?"

The deafening roar of many motors drowned out his words as a big, ugly touring car loaded with men and convoyed by a scattered flock of motor cycles swept by. Ches swung in behind this delegation and tried his best to keep up with the procession.

A good five miles ahead, Willie had attracted to himself a much more dangerous pursuer. A State trooper was chatting amiably with the keeper of a small filling station across the road from Bethel Church when Willie rocketed by. The trooper uttered an amazed, "Well, I'll be darned," scowled, pulled his hat down over his eyes and threw a leg over his motor cycle.

Outwardly, affairs in the Mercury were pretty much as they were when Willie had turned Washington Circle. The gunman still sat silent and alert, half facing Willie, and held his gun to Willie's ribs, but the expression on his evil face had changed from murderous determination to something very much like uneasiness. Criminals are just as averse to dying as other humans, if not more so. It is because they love life so intensely that they will rob and kill ruthlessly to maintain it. This young villain was no exception to the rule. Quite the reverse. The thought of death was abhorrent to him, especially a violent and messy death. In all his submerged, misspent life he had never before ridden in a speeding automobile. Just as many otherwise normal people find that great heights affect their sense of equilibrium, so did "Smoky Joe" Gheen discover that excessive speed was distinctly not one of the things he liked best. This wild ride with Death as a pacemaker was playing hob with his drug-wrecked nerves. He had used his last deck of cocaine a few minutes before entering the bank and the effect on his saturated system was not lasting. He was beginning to tremble all over and his dull eyes flitted from Willie's face, with its fixed, meaningless grin, to the speedometer, to the next obstacle that loomed ahead, then to the rear and back to the speedometer again.

As for Willie Greene—well, something had happened to Willie! From the moment the bandit had jumped into the car until Olney had been passed Willie had suffered an ecstasy of fear, the while his physical being and his driver's sixth sense piloted the Mercury on its dizzy way. The great moment that he had been eternally awaiting and dreading had arrived and he was doing exactly as he had always foreseen he would do. His brain seemed to be divided in two parts, one half a phantasmagoria of horror and fear—fear of the man beside him, fear of a terrible death under the machine, fear of Senator South, George R., the police, Sally Trumbull's contempt—while the other half looked on in a detached way and said, "I knew it. You're a coward. Yellow. And you can't help it!"

No future hell can hold in store for Willie Greene any torment such as he endured in those few minutes. That side of his brain which seemed to be standing aloof, acting the part of a disinterested spectator, wondered how he managed to endure it. Why didn't he scream, collapse, go mad? Willie

did not know, could not know that he was merely reacting to a psychological law, the discovery of which thousands of years ago made it possible for the first general to train and win with the first army.

Routine—habit—the constant doing of a thing—the hour after hour—the day after day—week after week—months, years—doing the same thing! Automatically—instinctively—like breathing consciously or unconsciously.

As long as Willie's two hands gripped a steering wheel and his right foot rested on an exhilarator he could not completely succumb to any emotion. The habit of years and that peculiar automatic instinct which all good drivers acquire would not permit of this.

Some hint of this began to percolate through the chaos of his mind when it suddenly dawned on him that he, Willie Greene —to whom forty-five miles an hour was an undreamed-of gait—was pushing a big Mercury along at sixty-five. This amazing discovery really shocked him. A thrill crept over him similar to that wondering, wonderful sensation a dreamer experiences when during the agonies of a nightmare chase he discovers that by merely flapping his arms he can fly! There was no room in Willie's head for this tremendous elation and the fear demons also, and slowly but surely the fear demons crept away, for a new soul was being born.

Following an age-old precedent, the first thing the new soul did was to get mad. All the indignities of his twenty-seven years and especially those of the day arose on their hind legs and clamored for vengeance. Unfortunately Willie was in no position to work off his wrath on any one, so he took it out in speed. He glanced sidewise at his speedometer. He was hitting seventy, and still plenty of throttle left. He wondered just how much a Mercury would do. He knew they were lightning fast and he knew that the manufacturers claimed they would outrun more expensive makes built especially for speed. Delicately, slowly he applied the pressure of his foot.

The hot wind which had been whipping past in great billows now seemed to settle itself into a steady, continuous roaring stream that could almost be seen, and in this greater volume of sound the throbbing of the engine diminished to a barely perceptible hum. There was an odd illusion as of white-painted poles, entire woods and farms being wafted past, borne by this mighty incredibly swift current of air.

Smoky Joe Gheen stared dazedly at the speedometer. Slowly, steadily the numbers increased. Seventy-five—six—seven—eight! The bandit licked his lips. He decided that he had had enough. They had evidently shaken off the pursuit. It was time to cut loose from this madman who was surely headed for death and destruction and take to the woods.

He leaned over and shouted in Willie's ear. "Cut 'er down. Cut 'er down, you damn' fool!" He had to shield his mouth with his hand to keep the words from being plucked out of his throat.

Willie's unwinking eyes stared straight ahead and the speedometer showed seventy-nine.

Smoky Joe's nerve broke completely.

"Cut 'er down," he screamed hysterically. "I want to get out. Stop 'er or I'll blow your brains out."

Willie grinned wickedly. So! The weak spot had shown up. The cause of all his misfortune didn't like speed. That was a vain, silly threat. He knew that this terror-stricken creature still possessed wits enough to realize that the moment he blew Willie's brains out, the following moment would see his own dashed out against the nearest telephone pole. The whip hand had passed to Willie. Very well. He would swap scare for scare. This fellow had demanded a ride. He would get it!

Finding Willie deaf both to threats or pleading Smoky Joe shrunk back into his seat and fell into a sort of lethargy.

And now appeared on the scene an actor whose name was destined to be linked forever with that of Willie Greene and the flying Mercury. This new factor's shrill, raucous voice came faintly through the forest to Willie's ears, as he was approaching the Dover Creek bridge. Perhaps a half mile past the bridge the shining rails of the G. L. and S. main line flashed out of the thickly wooded hills and for five miles paralleled —almost as straight as a crow flies—the Northwestern Boulevard. In the old days when automobiles were few and traffic rules practically unknown young bloods with their high-priced cars and professionals with their racing specials were wont to forgather on this five-mile stretch with the expressed intention of taking a fall out of the Chicago

Flyer, the Great Lakes and Southern's crack train. It is believed that a few unofficial scores were hung up but time has obliterated the record, and since the boulevard has become so well policed and the speed limit fixed at thirty miles no one has ever attempted to step along with the Flyer, whose schedule on that section of the division is eighty-five miles per hour. It was the Flyer's screeching voice Willie had heard, and, in his new madness, it affected him as a side of fresh-killed beef would affect a starved tiger. He was convinced that the end of this crazy day would find him either in the hospital or in jail, so he decided to go out in one grand, spectacular finish. He no longer had anything to fear.

Without slackening speed he took the long, easy curve that brought the boulevard to within one hundred yards of the G. L. and S. right of way. Straight ahead stretched the dark-red ribbon of level brick highway, separated by a dazzling white fence from the green sod of the railway property. Through the thinning triangle of trees he saw that the Flyer had much the best of the coming contest. It had already thundered around the deeply banked curve which led out of the hills and had straightened out in the stretch.

Willie edged forward a bit in his seat and crouched lower over the wheel. Smoothly, deftly his sensitive hands felt out and shifted to better positions of leverage on the big steering wheel. Unwinking, he stared ahead at the red stretch of straight road, revealed to his eye for almost its entire five miles because of its construction. Between his present position and the little hump known as Macgruder's, not a car or wagon was to be seen. Willie lined himself well in the middle of the road and went after the Chicago Flyer.

The ten-car Flyer rolled along like a train in a film. Willie could see, from the tail of his eye, the flattened plume of black smoke, the wisp of steam, the almost unbelievable stabs of the engine rods, the wildly eddying clouds of dust filling the vacuum caused by the rushing mass of steel, but not a sound reached his ear. He could see the white faces pressed against the windowpanes and the bareheaded mob swarming on the observation platform.

Willie drew up alongside the club car and began to inch up on the sleepers. A flickering glance at his instrument board caught eighty-five on the speedometer. Another lightninglike glance toward the train showed him the fireman leaning out of his cab, beckoning derisively. Willie set his teeth—his jaws ached for two days afterward—and plunged on in a soundless world. He kept his eyes fixed on the road but he knew that he was slowly, surely gaining. He dared not glance aside even for a split second now. This was the hardest thing he had to do. A queer, exultant sound passed his lips when he laid the flying Mercury alongside the big ugly tender. His eyes, focused straight ahead for Macgruder's Hump, still possessed a lateral range which reflected to him that the whistle on the big Pacific was wide open and that the fireman was still waving his arm. But, it seemed to Willie, the arm was no longer challenging. Rather a frantic warning semaphore, that fireman's arm!

Just as a fast steam trawler glides up a mountainous comber, just as an airplane wafts itself over an air current, so did the flying Mercury negotiate the fifty-foot rise of Macgruder's Hump.

And then Willie suddenly remembered.

Beyond the Hump, the boulevard veered to the right in a long, graceful arc. There was no danger in the curve itself, but—five hundred yards ahead was a concrete demonstration of the old rule that two converging lines on the same plane are bound to meet at some point, sooner or later.

The point where the boulevard met and crossed the G. L. and S. tracks was known as the Aberdeen Crossbones. It got the first half of its name from the little town of Aberdeen which lay a mile farther on and the second half from its yearly death rate. The architectural scheme of the Crossbones was simple enough. Two sets of old-fashioned, slender, wooden gates of the weighted cantilever type, motivated by hand; the gate tender's kiosk and the gate tender's private palace—a dismounted freight car. Total population, one; Signor Rocco, a peg-legged ex-section hand. A dangerous place, a disgrace to the State, the boulevard, the G. L. and S. and to civilization in general. Unfortunately Willie Greene in his excitement had forgotten it.

It is very doubtful that when Willie bounded over Macgruder's Hump he did any correlated thinking. Thinking requires time. Ahead he saw the wabbling gates of the Crossbones and the peg-legged figure

of Rocco dancing crazily in front of his puny barrier, a big circular black-and-white stop signal in each hand. To the right he saw the ten-car steel Flyer bearing closer to him every instant. He realized that it was as impossible to stop his Mercury as it was for the engineer of the Flyer to stop his thousand-ton projectile. Willie was ahead of the Flyer and constantly gaining but the Flyer was on the short side of the angle and he was on the long. If he attempted to slow up, at the speed he was going, he would assuredly plow into the Flyer at some point between the engine and the observation club car.

For a moment his throat filled and his stomach grew hideously vacant. The ancient fear demons were trooping back to their home. But only to be met by the faithful, methodical habit. The eyes of Willie's driving mind told him that there was nothing between him and the gates, and what was more important, no cars or vehicles halted on the other side of the railroad. They also told him that the engineer of the Flyer was doing all he could to avert the impending catastrophe. Even in the dazzling sunlight, dull-red sparks metamorphosed the big drivers on the Pacific to Catherine wheels. There seemed to be only one thing to do and Willie did it.

He tightened his grip on the wheel, braced himself, and stamped the throttle button down to the floor boards. Numerous queer sounds penetrated to his ear through the waring wind. The sirenlike wail of the Pacific's whistle; the harsh, brittle squeal of the Flyer's brakes; the bleating of the horrified Smoky; a single dim, musical note as he flashed past the five-hundred-foot warning gong. Crack! The first pair of gates. A tinkle of ruptured glass. A huge, black mass about to topple over on him. A hot breath of hell that made him gasp. His hat sucked off his head. His face wet—sticky. Crack! The far-side gates. His whole left arm seemed saturated with moisture. To the rear a roaring clattering something—he must have gotten over safely! He gee-hawed at the wheel and, mumbling absurd hysterical oaths, held the Mercury to the center of the road.

He took his foot off the gas and applied his brakes as forcibly as he dared. Gradually he reduced the gait of the flying Mercury and by the time he entered the little village of Aberdeen he was proceeding at the snaillike pace of thirty miles. He was considerably dazed and every nerve and muscle in his body was throbbing curiously. Strange thing, his mind was serene and untroubled.

Fast-flowing blood was obscuring his vision to a dangerous point, so he pulled up to the curb and stopped, quite by chance, in front of the town's pharmacy.

Mechanically he crawled out from under the wheel and walked stiffly around to the front of the car. He wiped the blood from his eyes and treated Senator South's abused automobile to a rapid survey. "Not so bad," he grunted professionally.

The Mercury had evidently caught the two sets of spindly gates fair on the nose of its long hood, for outside of a ragged, rusty gap where the ornamental radiator cap and motometer had been torn away the front of the car was apparently unpunctured. The wind shield, with its natty glass side wings, the adjustable spotlight and the bull's-eye riding lights were nonexistent. As for the brand-new lustrous paint job—well, the time and weather-seasoned ash splinters had certainly made a hundred-per-cent mess of that! The Mercury presented all the appearance of a bad loser in a free for all with a covey of bobcats, staged in a bramble patch.

"I'd give a dollar if the old windjammer could see his pretty pet now!" sneered Willie, which callous remark will show to just what depths of indifference Willie was falling.

He cleared his eyes once more and noticing the drug store decided to step in and have his wounds looked to. Then he happened to recollect his friend the gunman. He approached the front seat gingerly for he also recalled the .45 which had so grievously bruised his ribs.

There was no cause for alarm. Smoky Joe Gheen was huddled in his seat—very quiet. His gun had slipped from his nerveless fingers and was lying on the floor.

The bad man had fainted.

Willie picked up the gun with his gory left hand and stood looking down at his unconscious little playmate. He was a bit hazy about what he was going to do with this fellow who had played havoc with his peaceful existence.

Several villagers, sensing something out of the ordinary, had drawn near in a casual manner, but a closer view of this big blood-drenched stranger and his wicked gun

seemed to remind them all that they had pressing business indoors. So for quite an interval Willie stood unmolested, wondering what to do next. Oh, yes; he had better carry the tough egg into the drug store and have him attended to. He might be badly hurt. Perhaps he was dead. Willie swayed a little. The loss of blood was beginning to make him dizzy. Yes, he had better be getting into the drug store.

Just then the first of the pursuit arrived. It was the State trooper. He pulled up alongside the Mercury, one putteed leg extended to balance himself, dismounted, kicked back the standard, snatched off his goggles and walked around to the curb in a businesslike manner. At sight of his sinister-looking quarry he halted abruptly. He had not reckoned on that gun! Then this fresh-faced, country-bred young trooper did a rare, courageous thing. He walked up to Willie and extended a hand.

"Give me that gun," he said without a tremor.

Willie laid the automatic in the other's palm.

"Take it. I don't want it." Willie's tone was indifferent. He wiped his bloody eyes again and surveyed the trooper with no particular interest.

The trooper returned Willie's gaze, but with considerable interest. Here was no ordinary speeding case.

"What's the big idea?" was all he could think of in the way of questioning.

"Search me," answered Willie mildly.

"That's just what I'm going to do," snapped the trooper. He was annoyed. He thought Willie was trying to be funny. A surprisingly quick movement brought him around in back of Willie and his expert fingers flitted through Willie's clothes. Satisfied, he stepped back, pocketed the automatic and produced his own long-barreled, police positive.

"What's the matter with the fellow in the car?" he demanded. "Stewed—or dead?"

"I don't know," said Willie. He was beginning to feel sick but there was no fear in him.

"Walk ahead. Into the drug store," commanded the trooper. "Don't try anything."

Willie marched unsteadily through the store and into the well-equipped blue-and-white workroom of the proprietor, who was doctor as well as pharmacist. He lowered himself onto a slender enameled chair and promptly lost interest in worldly matters.

Presently he became aware of a strong aroma, combination of iodoform and ammonia, and heard the hum of many voices. The first object that registered when he opened his eyes was Smoky Joe Gheen, twitching in a chair in a corner of the room. Willie noticed that Joe's wrists were manacled. Otherwise he appeared undamaged.

Willie blinked his eyes and looked all about him. This act made him aware of the fact that his head was confined in a veritable bale of linen gauze and that his left arm was swathed in bandages from knuckles to shoulder. The little dispensary was crowded to suffocation. Besides Smoky Joe, the trooper, the doctor and his white-coated assistant there were several hard-faced men in plain clothes and the door leading into the store was jammed with khaki-clad motor police from the city.

"He's coming out of it. He's all right now," he heard the doctor say. Willie nodded his head agreeably.

"Well, let's be getting downtown," said one of the plain-clothes men briskly. "Jim, you and Casey take the little fellow. Matt, give me a hand with this one. Think you can stand up?" This to Willie. Willie managed to get to his feet. The two detectives closed in on him.

Loud voices sounded in the store and the policemen who blocked the door squeezed aside to admit a new group.

First to enter the room was the portly, masterful George W. Trumbull.

"What's all this?" he demanded truculently. "What's going on here? Willie, what the devil has happened? Are you hurt badly, boy? Speak out!"

Willie grinned his old sheepish grin and shook his cumbersome turban weakly. He heard a high, sharp cry as a second figure entered and two soft hands infolded his undamaged fist. Two big, misty eyes looked up into his one uncovered optic and Willie quite forgot what he was going to say to George R., and just stared fatuously at the pallid, lovely face of Sally Trumbull. He was dimly aware that Barry Coombs and Ches Bullen had framed themselves in the doorway.

"Oh, you know this fellow, Mr. Trumbull?" asked Warner, chief of the squad.

"Should say I do. That's Willie Greene. He works for me."

"Huh! Didn't know you had a regular wolf on your pay roll, did you? Know his little pal here?"

George R. surveyed Smoky Joe blankly.

"His pal?" he echoed. "No, I don't know this man at all."

"Well, boys, let's go." Warner regarded Sally Trumbull doubtfully. "Beg pardon, miss," he said respectfully, which meant, "step aside!"

"But—but——" stammered Sally. "Are you arresting him?"

"I'm afraid we are, miss."

"But why? What has he done to be arrested?"

Warner rasped his massive jaw. He was not given to discussing police business outside of headquarters office or the courtroom but he found it hard to deny this anxious beauty. Besides, she was George R. Trumbull's daughter and plainly interested in his prisoner, so he adopted a mildly jocular tone.

"Well, let's see, miss. This State trooper here has him charged with excessive speeding, dangerous and reckless driving, violating the 'stop, look and listen' law at grade crossings, trespassing on and damaging railroad property, carrying a dangerous weapon, breaking the twenty-mile limit in small towns, passing other vehicles at a speed greater than the legal limit, and no permit. These motor cops from the city want him for excessive speeding, for busting a dozen or so fixed-point regulations, and no permit. Maybe for joy riding and auto theft. We fellows from headquarters want him for—well"—here the detective had to choose his words carefully—"we want him because we have reason to believe that him and this little fellow here stuck up the Security Trust a few minutes back, shot Pattison, the bank guard, and Mr. Tappen, paymaster for MacLeod, and got away with the weekly pay roll—some sixteen thousand dollars. We found the bag in the back of their car."

"Oh!" Sally gasped. "Oh! He never did! Willie! Dad!"

Sally never appealed to her father in vain. A thought flashed through George R.'s mind that Sally, c'nfound it, was displaying entirely too much anxiety publicly over the infernal Greene boy, but he dearly loved to wield the big stick. Also he was a good judge of men and down in his heart he felt that Willie was not a crook. So he went to Willie's rescue.

"Robbed a bank?" he blustered. "Shot two men? Rot—nonsense. See here, Willie, how did you get mixed up in this mess?"

Willie withstood the impact of dozens of eyes, most of them hard, inquisitional, police eyes, without even blushing. Decidedly Willie was coming on.

"Well, Mr. Trumbull," he started, very calmly and every one was silent, listening intently, "I don't seem to——" That was as far as he got, for there was a sudden chorus of voices from the crowd of unfortunates who were jammed in the drug store proper, unable to see what was happening in the dispensary, and forced to get their news secondhand. The uproar produced was strikingly similar to the off-stage shouts of the merry villagers in an operetta, announcing the approach of the king. And a king it was of a sort who had entered the little Aberdeen pharmacy, for even those in the back rooms could not fail to recognize the lionlike tones of the Honorable Stanley R. L. South. The good senator bestowed a pontifical greeting on his devoted subjects as he strode through the store, but any one who knew the senator's little characteristics would have noticed a mean glitter in his bold, piercing black eyes. The Honorable S. R. L. S. was peeved and peeved clear through. The nonappearance of his resplendent Mercury at one o'clock had not only made him late and let him in for a devilish-expensive taxicab, but had seriously lowered the tone of what should have been a triumphal entry into the State capital. Naturally when he saw the recreant Mercury parked in front of the Aberdeen pharmacy, all tattered and torn, and surrounded by a crowd of natives, he called a halt and got out to investigate.

He entered the dispensary, an imposing bulk poured into correct afternoon garb, from shiny topper to patent leathers; boutonnièred, gloved, spatted and caned.

Right back of him were two men, newcomers but not strangers to any one in the room. The little, skinny, sharp-eyed chap was the redoubtable Collins of the *Daily Times-Star*, and the fat, sleepy-looking bird, lugging the big, businesslike camera, was Richter, his running mate. Their taxi had rattled up to the store just behind the senator's.

The curious scene scattered the senator's wrath and his eyes twinkled with interest.

"Well, well, gentlemen, *and* Miss Sally,"

he boomed in his very best voice. There was a murmur of respectful greetings and then everybody started to tell him about it simultaneously.

The senator held up a patiently restraining hand and achieved some measure of silence. Naturally, Sally Trumbull had the last word to say.

"Of course, senator, it's all absurd," she said frigidly. "Mr. Greene had nothing whatever to do with it."

The senator's close-clipped mustache twitched slightly as he surveyed the bandaged Willie. "No, I can see that, Miss Sally," he said dryly and hoped that the big-eared Collins caught the little witticism. His rapier eyes played over Willie like flickering beams from a battery of searchlights. He noted the firm mouth, nicely modeled jaw; and the one visible eye was well-opened and frank.

With all his pomposity and petty vanity Senator South was a wise and brainy man. His long grip on the political destinies of his native State demonstrated that. Also his knowledge of human nature was almost uncanny. He had looked at Willie and found him good. A vast difference between that clean-looking boy and the poor, shivering wretch whose partner he was alleged to be. Something wrong somewhere.

"What does Greene have to say about it?" he asked, his bright eyes encompassing the group.

George R. answered. "He was just about to tell us his version of it when you came in, senator. Go ahead, Willie, tell us about it." George R.'s voice was encouraging, almost friendly.

Once again all attention was centered on Willie, and right here the old Willie Greene perished from the earth forever and the new soul which had taken possession of the once unworthy carcass seized the golden trumpet of Destiny and blew a loud, resounding blast—in honor of Willie Greene.

"Well, folks, it was like this. I was pulling up in front of the Security Trust—wanted to get a small check cashed. This man here," pointing to Smoky Joe, "came running out of the bank, threw a bag into the car, jumped in, shoved a gun in my ribs and told me to get out of town as fast as I could or he would blow me wide open. I surmised what had happened, but what could I do? Well, I drove him out of town as fast as I could——"

"I'll say you did," somebody growled.

"And pretty soon I noticed that this fellow didn't crave speed as much as he thought he did. And that gave me an idea. I knew that nobody could catch that Mercury with her speed and the start we had, so I thought I'd give him a good scare and maybe get the upper hand of him. Well, it worked out pretty good, I think. Of course, I'm awfully sorry about your car, senator, but I have enough money to have her fixed up for you. And"—this to the assembly of policemen—"and I'm sorry I broke all those laws but you see how it is, and—you've got your man and the money and you never would have if I hadn't scared the daylights out of him."

"Sounds good!" sneered a voice in the background. It was Chester Bullen and he never knew for some little while that his sarcastic, poorly timed jibe separated him thoroughly from the Trumbull family.

"Was crashing the G. L. and S. gates a part of your little scheme?" asked Warner, still suspicious. "If it was, you can certainly figure to a gnat's whiskers."

"No, sir!" answered Willie, emphatically and truthfully. "I never even thought of those gates until I was coming over the Hump and saw them. It was too late then. I couldn't stop a heavy car going ninety in that short space so I stepped on her to the limit and kept on going."

"Some nerve!" exploded one of the officers whole-heartedly.

Willie finished his story: "When I saw this man had fainted I pulled up to the curb, took his gun away from him and then this trooper came up—and—and I guess that's about all."

"Hah!" snorted George R. "What did I tell you?" Warner whirled on Smoky Joe.

"Is that right?" he snapped. "Is this man telling the truth?"

"Listen!" snarled the twitching Joe. "I ain't sayin' nuttin', see?" He glared at Willie balefully. "He's in it same as me. See? The big stiff!" He was determined to make as much trouble for that big, bandaged speed devil as possible. A happy thought germinated in his drug-eaten brain. "Ask him," he croaked. "Ask him how it come he was right dere wid de big hack, all rollin' slow and nice right on de hickey o' time! Huh? How 'bout dat? Right dere, Johnny on de job, wit' de big bus he stole f'm the dump where he worked at. Jis like

me and him framed it! You said it, chief," this in a sneer to Warner, "one swell little figgerer, dat boid. On'y he don't figger on 'at damn' gate, jis like he said. Dat's de on'y time he tells de troot. See? Ast him!"

A poser! The rising tide in favor of Greene dissipated itself against the stone breakwater of apparent logic.

"Um," Martin grunted. "That's one little item that's been sticking in my craw all through this act. Coincidences like that don't happen. What about it, Greene?"

"I can answer that question."

It was a new voice, a crisp, cultured voice and every neck was craned as the owner of it, one Collins of the *Daily Times-Star,* wiggled out of the crowd and confronted Warner.

"What do you know about it?" demanded Warner, trying not to show his surprise.

"Enough to straighten this boy out," answered Collins, jerking a thumb at Greene. "Richter and I happened to be passing headquarters. Coming from the Albany fire we were—just as you fellows drove off. Naturally we went in to get the news. When we found out what was up Richter ran out to get a taxi, and just then Cleary and Stone from Number Three dragged in a young lad who had been caught by Woodstock, one of your motor-cycle men, boldly lifting Mrs. Kane Berry's limousine from in front of her lakeside house in broad daylight. It happened to be Vogel, Mrs. Berry's ex-chauffeur, who was discharged last week. I understand he was bootlegging Kane Berry's famous stock. At that time no charge was pressed. He was merely fired. Woodstock knew all this, however, and when he noticed Vogel speeding along in the Berry car toward the Municipal Park he started after him. Woodstock's machine went bad on him and Vogel would have gotten away but for the fact that Vogel stalled his engine coming out of the Speedway at Coot's Creek Road and so Woodstock picked him up. Vogel showed fight and drew a gun, so when Woodstock finally docked him in Number Three they searched him. They found, besides the gun, a stilletto, several decks of coke, a pint of 'shoots' and some queer memos regarding the Security Trust Company in which the word 'Smoky' appears several times. Evidently a scenario of the stick-up. The boys at Number Three decided to take Vogel around to headquarters for further questioning. It appears to me that Greene is telling the truth, that his appearance on the scene was merely a question of luck—or bad luck, take it any way you please. Vogel was the man, eh, Gheen? The plan was for him to lift the Berry car and slide past the bank at the appointed minute. When you came out of the bank you saw nothing of Vogel and the big, black limousine, but you did see Greene and his moving car. You didn't have a second to lose so you did the best you could and tried to kidnap Greene. Come now, Smoky! Called the turn, didn't I? Oh, you might as well come clean." Here he used an old, old police trick. "You see, Smoky, Vogel blew the works, and besides if you don't come through, maybe Warner will tip the medico in the psycopathic to hold out your little pick-me-up until you decide to talk."

"Nix, nix," begged Joe piteously. "You got it right, chief. It was me and Vogel. I jis wanted to git square wit' dat cuckoo fer de airplane stuff. At dat," he added virtuously, "he ought to be caged up. He ain't right. He'll kill somebody some o' dese days. C'mon chief, let's git downtown and see de doc. I need a shot bad."

Warner favored Collins with a stare of unfeigned admiration.

"Collins," he said, "you're the goods. I don't know how much the *Times-Star* pays you, but it's not enough."

"Thanks, Warner," drawled Collins. "I was sorry I missed the big chase but now I'm glad I got the first chapter in the right place. That's what made us so late getting here. Rick! Grab all the shots you can."

"Well, young fella," said Warner to Willie, "I guess that lets you out, but I'll have to take you along and let you tell your story to the Old Man. He'll probably want to bond you as a material witness."

"I'll take care of that," snapped George R. "Any amount."

"Don't hesitate to call on me, George." The sonorous tones of Senator South filled the pharmacy. A great stage manager was the senator and one who could whistle the limelight in his direction in any emergency. He had listened with keen interest to every word that had been said, once he had entered Doctor Stokes' little dispensary, and the cockles of his heart had warmed as the publicity possibilities of the situation slowly unfolded. He stepped forward and grasped

Willie's hand firmly. He felt a short, punchy, "human-interest" speech coming on him.

"My boy, are you a native of this State?"

"Yes, sir," answered Willie and then he added, mischievously, "but I've always voted the Democratic ticket."

For a moment the senator's vivid face went blank and then he guffawed loudly and honestly.

"Good! Infernally good! I'll have to use that one in my speech to-night. Well, Greene, my boy, yours is usually the fate of the hero. They arrest you to-day and a hundred years hence they erect a hideous monument to your memory. You're a brave fellow and a credit to this great and sovereign State the type of man that has made this nation unconquerable—ahem—Greene, don't worry about my car. Do you know, I'm rather pleased that my old rebuilt Mercury had a part in this afternoon's affair. Ninety miles an hour! Hum! Beat the Chicago Flyer! Well! Well!"

"I'll repair that car, gladly," said George R., as peppy as ever.

"Nonsense, George," beamed the senator. "Fully insured. Patch her up and see what you can get for her. I'll see you in a few days about a new one. I must be going. Good-by, Greene. I expect to see you again."

The senator shook hands all around, congratulated the gentlemen of the police and Mr. Collins and led the exodus from the drug store. Collins dived into the telephone booth and the stolid-looking Richter hopped around with amazing nimbleness, shooting everything in sight. He snapped the senator, and the senator's now-famous Mercury. He snapped the Trumbull Motor Agency group—Miss Sally lending the interesting feminine and social touch—and the Trumbull Motor Agency's speed marvel and his heroic bandages. The homicide squad were particularly willing subjects, but the surly Joe Gheen, handcuffed to Bowden and Casey, refused to hold his head up. Rick snapped the State trooper, the motor-cycle fleet, Doctor Stokes and his drug store, the merry villagers and then took another picture of Senator South holding hands with Willie Greene. Later on he would snap the ruined gates of the G. L. and S. A red-hot editorial would be forthcoming about that dangerous grade crossing.

Senator South lit a long cigar, waved a comprehensive farewell, clambered into his hired taxi, and departed northward toward the State capital in a very contented frame of mind. He felt that the afternoon's digression had netted him a dozen or so votes —and a funny thing, it had!

The first of the cavalcade bound cityward to get going was the big, ugly police car containing the homicide squad and their prisoner.

"Tell 'at gorilla wats drivin' to take it easy," growled Smoky Joe to Martin. "I ain't goin' no place."

Next off was Sally Trumbull at the wheel of her bottle-green sport-model Mercury. Her father sat beside her, pretty well pleased with things in general. On the back seat, Chester Bullen lolled in solitary splendor—very solitary. The motor cops from the city got away by ones and twos, kicking up a racket like irregular gunfire. The State trooper, after a jocular warning to Willie, waived his list of charges, answered Barry Coomb's request to specify the brand of cigars he favored and retired to Doctor Stokes' private office to write up a report on the afternoon's doings.

Collins and Richter, nothing loath, allowed Barry to persuade them into the battered Mercury and they sent their taxi back light. Barry brushed the glass out of the car and took the wheel. Willie sat beside him, the two newspaper men in the rear. The crowd scattered. Barry turned and drove through the little town very cautiously. Evidently the stoutly built Mercury's vitals were undamaged. The feel of the steering mechanism was reassuring and all eight cylinders were hitting pretty. Barry opened her up and caught the van of the parade at the G. L. and S. crossing, where everybody had halted to let Rick get his last picture, and then—on to the city at the decorous, legal gait of thirty.

Barry's spirits were so high that he felt like throwing away his fifteen-dollar hat. The floodgates of his eloquent line of conversation were wide open! So entertaining was his talk that the hard-boiled Collins scarcely realized that he was getting pumped full of the cleverest bit of press-agent propaganda ever unloosed on a newspaper man. Barry was working hard to impress his personality and the merits of Mercury motor cars on Collins, and that he succeeded is attested by one remark made by President Sloane of the M. M. Corporation to the

executive board on that evening a month later when they unanimously decided to present Barry with the portfolio of general manager of sales.

"Why, gentlemen," said Mr. Sloane, using both hands to spread out a stack of important American newspapers, "Coombs has succeeded in putting over an advertising campaign that can only be equaled by Henry Ford. He has gotten us more space, and front-page space at that, than a million dollars could buy. The proof of it is our last month's sales record. It beats anything we ever knew!"

Coombs also had a lot of quiet conversation with Willie Greene before city hall was reached. Conversation that thrilled Willie through and through.

Inspector Mitchell, in charge of headquarters, was slightly amazed at sight of the delegation herded into his quarters by Detective Sergeant Martin. The inspector was rapidly acquainted with the high lights of the case and Vogel was brought out to confront Mr. Gheen.

As the hard-visaged ex-chauffeur entered the room secured to two guards, a loud laugh broke the tense silence. Everybody looked questioningly at the offender—one Willie Greene.

"Excuse me," said Willie. "I—I couldn't help it. That's the fellow I cut off on the Speedway about noon. I noticed he had stalled his motor as I drove around him. Excuse me."

"Huh!" grunted Martin. "Seems like you've jinxed this bank robbery from the start."

Inspector Mitchell threw another sop to Mr. Trumbull's vanity when he accepted him as guarantor for Willie's appearance in court and released the boy without bond. The motor-cycle squad decided that to hold Willie for any of his traffic infractions would be to introduce a jangling note into the harmony of the occasion, and there being left nothing to do, George R. suggested that they repair to his office, sit down and draw a few, long, refreshing breaths.

The morale of the Trumbull Motor Agency force was ruined for the day when they beheld the procession that filed into George R.'s private office. In spite of Willie's statement that he felt fine George R. insisted on supporting him with one chubby arm.

No sooner had Willie been deposited in one of the big leather chairs than he was up again.

There was an alarmed look on his face and he grabbed his cap and made for the door.

"I've got to get to the bank and get that check cashed. I'll be right back," he mumbled.

"Bother the check," said George R. "Sit down."

"I've got to go, Mr. Trumbull. You see"—Willie gulped—"I've got to leave ten dollars at Number Three Precinct, or I'll get into more trouble."

"Number Three Precinct?" bellowed George R. "Why, you're crazy. Nobody preferred any charges against you. Sit down."

"It hasn't anything to do with this bank-robbery business," said Willie. "I sort of got into a jam earlier in the day."

"A jam?" repeated his boss weakly.

"Yes, sir. I had a run-in with a cop and he pinched me."

Mr. Trumbull shook his head slowly, perplexed.

"Willie, you're a vast mystery to me. I don't believe I've sized you up altogether correctly. However, sit down. I'll fix it. It's a good thing for you, my boy, that I have some small influence in police circles." He picked up the receiver. "Miss Penny, get me Captain Tate, Number Three Precinct."

This detail attended to satisfactorily, Willie's big adventure was gone into thoroughly by all hands. Not, however, without several interruptions. Once George R. had his ear glued to the telephone for three minutes without saying a word; a record! When he broke his silence it was to ask the puzzled Willie, "Say, Willie, what's your official name?"

"Well, it don't happen to be Willie at all," he replied. "It's Glenn W. Greene."

George R. passed this information along to the person on the other end, and hung up.

"That was Byrd, over at the Security," he explained casually. "He wanted your correct name so that he could deposit the reward to your account. A juicy one it is, too. Byrd also tipped me off that when old Archie MacLeod learned of the holdup he had an attack of financial insanity and loudly proclaimed a large reward. To-morrow you and I will pay Mister MacLeod a

call. I guarantee to collect that reward for you, and incidentally sell him a Mercury."

A call to Mercy Hospital elicited the information that neither of Smoky Joe's targets would die. The bank guard had a hole through his shoulder and Mr. Tappen's bony superstructure had deflected a well-intentioned bullet.

"I'm glad of that," said Willie heartily. "I'm glad Smoky Joe don't have to swing." He let this enigmatical remark go unexplained. He felt that he owed a lot to Mr. Gheen.

A shining-eyed office boy brought in the first editions of the evening papers. Collins and Richter had certainly spread themselves all over pages one and two. The papers were scanned, commended and criticized. Everybody agreed that the pictures were particularly fine except Miss Sally, who flew into a temper. Some flaw in the reproduction had deposited an ineradicable drop of ink in the vicinity of Sally's gorgeous eyes giving the likeness an undeniable resemblance to Ben Turpin.

George R. hurriedly promised to sue the *Times-Star* for libel and switched to a more pleasant thought.

"If Mr. Coombs and Mr. Bullen have no previous engagements for this evening," he said with heavy humor, "we would be delighted to have them dine with us at seven o'clock. We are hoping the guest of honor will be the lion of the hour, Mr. Willie—beg pardon—Mr. Glenn W. Greene. What say?"

Ches Bullen knew when he was beaten. He pleaded a mythical club engagement and effaced himself as quickly and as gracefully as possible.

"Well—how about you two?" demanded George R. somewhat huffed over Bullen's polite refusal. A Trumbull invitation was more of a command—like royalty's.

"Thank you, sir," said Willie. "I'll be delighted and I promise you I won't eat with my knife." Willie was slowly developing a sprightly line.

"Charmed," murmured the debonair Coombs. "Greene and I can postpone our little business chat until to-morrow."

"Hey? What's that?" George R. was instantly alert. "Business chat? What's going on here?"

Willie looked uncomfortable and Coombs, for once in his life, appeared off side. Appeared is the correct word, for Barry was a bit of an actor and had hooked Mr. Trumbull very neatly.

Grudgingly he admitted that he had made some tentative proposals to Greene that afternoon, any one of which, if accepted, would put Willie on the top of the world in a decent number of years. He said that Greene had admitted that he had a tidy little roll saved up and with the rewards he had annexed to-day—well, certainly Mr. Trumbull would be pleased to see one of his employees make a name for himself in the automobile world, wouldn't he?

George R. was a cunning old business man himself and he clearly perceived the sharp edge concealed under Barry's apologetic words. He did not have to be a clairvoyant to make a good guess as to just what those proposals were. Being a good business man he did not feel the slightest anger toward the Mercury man. Business was business and he rather admired the clever fashion in which Barry was taking advantage of the psychological moment and pulling himself out of a hole. Foxy boy, that Coombs. Well, old George R. Trumbull wasn't so bad himself. He squinted one eye and puffed strongly on his cigar.

"Barry," he said as if deeply hurt, "if you think hiring one of my best men out from under my nose is good business ethics, I'll be dam—ah—I mean, I'll be dashed. Particularly when you consider the relations existing between the Mercury Corporation and the Trumbull Agency."

"You severed those relations this morning, Mr. Trumbull," interrupted Barry, significantly.

"To take care of the tremendous expansion of our business which I am planning," went on George R., unheeding, "I will need every good Mercury man I can get my hands on. You know, Barry," here he glared bleakly at Coombs, "the State agency for Mercury cars is a big thing to swing. In the reorganization Greene will be taken care of—exceedingly well taken care of and if he has any funds to invest he can buy into my company and add his stock to the little block I'm going to present him."

"I'm sure, Mr. Coombs," chirped Sally, "that Mr. Greene has an excellent future with our company." She smiled sweetly with her lips but in her eyes was sudden death.

With a great effort Barry refrained from smiling. He glanced at Greene,

"Well, how about it, Greene?" he asked dryly and Willie imagined the Mercury man's right eyelid twitched warningly.

"Before I make any changes," he answered thoughtfully, "I want to talk things over with a friend of mine."

George R. rubbed his hands together briskly. "Hah! Now that's settled," he announced optimistically. "After dinner to-night you youngsters will have to amuse each other the best way you can while Barry and I fix up the new contract."

Willie opined he had better be getting on home. Sally observed that he looked rather peaked and didn't he think he had better let her drive him home. George R. thought this was a bully idea. It would give him a chance to steer the suspiciously indifferent Mr. Coombs around to the club and thaw him out with a couple of illegal cocktails.

Willie hustled out to the locker room to retrieve his wallet and the reception he was accorded by the "whistle gang," who revered nothing in the world but gameness made his throat go a little tight. It was then he received the accolade and was given a new name. Wat Kenny laid a fat, affectionate hand on Willie's uninjured shoulder and said gruffly, "Atta boy, 'Speed!'" And from that moment on, "Speed" Greene it was.

"Great Pompey passing through the streets of Rome" no doubt was wallowing in pleasant thoughts, but that remarkable conqueror had nothing on Willie Greene as he sat beside Sally Trumbull and was driven to his modest boarding house. In fact, so dazed and fascinated by the afternoon's doings was he that he quite forgot to display a proper interest in his pretty—well, whatever the proper feminine for chauffeur happens to be.

Lovers love to scrap with each other, so when Willie stepped out onto the curb in front of Mrs. Falvey's, Sally said, with her bittersweet smile, "Don't forget, Mr. Greene, seven o'clock. And I do hope your *friend* will not object to our monopolizing you this evening!"

"What friend?" asked Willie, wondering.

"Why, the friend that you must consult about—about—you know—Barry Coombs—oh, don't pretend. Of course, I assumed it was a girl friend! She will probably advise you to accept Mr. Coombs' offer." Sally's smile grew more saccharine.

"You're right. It is a girl friend," said Willie bluntly. "It's you. I'll do whatever you say."

"Oh!" said Sally. "Oh!" She fumbled with the gear shift, and then raised a flushed face to Willie. "We—we will talk it over to-night, Wil—I mean, Mr. Greene."

"Make it Glenn," commanded the devil-may-care Speed.

"All right—Glenn," said Sally softly. "Good-by until seven." She speeded up the motor.

"By," said Speed. "Watch your step there, Sally. You've got 'er in reverse. That's better. By!"

Speed squared his shoulders and strutted into Mrs. Falvey's.

All of Mr. Ward's stories appear in THE POPULAR. *Look for them in future issues.*

THRIFT

HENRY D. PARSELL, one of the best-known lawyers of Auburn, New York, tells this one:

In a certain Western city there is a social club of prominent business men which has a picturesque funeral ceremony—suggested by an ancient Indian custom—of depositing valuables in the casket of a deceased member, to be buried with him. The club rule is to make these post-mortem contributions in the form of money. Each member places ten dollars in a bronze bowl, bearing a suitable inscription, which lies on the breast of the departed one, repeating a short formula as he does so. Not long ago one of the most popular members died, and a recent addition to the club, who came of thrifty stock, was a witness of the ceremony for the first time. He was deeply impressed as each of his fellow members dropped ten dollars into the bowl, and his sympathetic grief found vent in an audible sob. At last it came to his turn. With tear-filled eyes, he wrote a check for twenty-five dollars, placed it in the bowl and took out fifteen dollars in change.

Christopher of Columbus, Ohio

By C. S. Montanye

Author of "Huckleberry Flynn," "Hale and Farewell," Etc.

Ottie Scandrel goes in for baseball and lets opportunity knock a number of times too often.

VARIETY is the spice of life, the poets tell us, and without it the mutton broth of existence would be a flat and tasteless affair. It was the need of variety that turned Ottie Scandrel away from the leather-pushing trade and the flock of punch professors he had handled and managed for more time than it takes to contract the gout. The real reason for Ottie shunning the game, however, can be laid at the front-door step of the heavyweight who answered to the name of "Kid" Tusk. This Tusk looked as if he could tip Madison Square Garden with a left hook. Scandrel, infatuated with his white hope, began to dream of the championship crown but the very first scuffle the Kid participated in promptly wrecked the dreams. It took exactly six punches and a minute and a half to lay Kid Tusk as flat as the Atlantic Ocean.

A week later and Scandrel had turned from box fighting to baseball. For the mere sum of a few thousand fish he had picked up a ball club intact. This team was known as the Edgemont Tigers and if they weren't all of that then Nathan Hale never listened in on a British conversation.

The club was a unit in the Central New Jersey League. Its grounds and clubhouse were at Edgemont, a town that boasted of being twenty-six minutes from Times Square. The previous year the Tigers had finished fifth up in the league's standing. That they *hadn't* copped the bunting was principally due to bootleggers and rotten management on the part of "Cap" Higgins, the previous owner and manager.

From what I could gather, Higgins was a thirsty soul who gave more time to his bottle than the battle. He didn't see any reason why the Edgemont Tigers needed him at the helm and a lost game was simply a good excuse for Higgins to knock the head off another quart and submerge his sorrow.

When Scandrel dropped anchor at the park, looked the outfit over and showed the hue of his money, Cap Higgins was so anxious to sell out that he would have thrown in a couple of his Sunday suits and a case of the bourbon to close the deal hastily.

Higgins' excuse was that he needed money twice as much as badly. This was surely the truth. Distilled waters run steep nowadays, don't they?

So Manager Scandrel took over the organization and with his usual bumptious conceit proceeded to fill the Edgemont Tigers up with his own ideas. That baseball was something that made all roads lead to the Polo Grounds and took up a considerable amount of space in the sporting extras

of merry Manhattan's newspapers was where Ottie's knowledge of the great outdoor pastime began and ended.

But Scandrel was optimistic if nothing else. He took his merry men down to Florida for the usual training period and then carted them home and handed them over to the local fans. Honest, burlesque didn't have a thing on the Tigers. They encountered the Newark Robins on the opening day of the season and were smothered under a score that looked like the population of the Bronx.

If pocket picking was a felony, Scandrel's management was grand larceny in the first degree!

From then until the middle of July the team went from worse to much worse. Starting at the bottom of the league it made haste to work its way farther down. Playing together with the carefree abandon of a troupe of unrehearsed acrobats, Scandrel's club set an immediate record for lost games. No matter the conditions or the opposing nine, the Tigers were certain to go up in smoke.

The remarkable part of it was that taken individually, the players on the Edgemont pay roll weren't so terrible. The pitching brigade showed some stuff; Benton, the catcher, was old-time big-league timber and the bagsmen all held diplomas from the school of experience. It was when they were all assembled and in action that the Tigers went to pieces.

This was a jig-saw puzzle to Ottie Scandrel. He realized he had the talent but why they didn't register was as mysterious to him as etiquette is to a gangster. He figured that if his ideas had been as scarce as bartenders there would have been an excuse. He sobbed out loud whenever he remembered all the work he had put in to make the Tigers a total loss. And then, just to take another shot at the target of hope, he'd bawl the outfit down until three or four of its members passed in immediate resignations.

One night when it was so hot that Hades seemed like an ocean summer resort, I dropped in at Scandrel's West End Avenue apartment where he lived with his wardrobe, Jap valet, French chef and Italian secretary. The League of Nations were out but Scandrel was in. He answered the door, ushered me into the living room and gave me the sofa.

"Joe," he began in a voice that would have gotten tears from a stone, "I'm glad you dropped in. I'm glad because I'm leaving in twenty minutes for a place called Haymaker Center. My new 1924 Gutter Hound is downstairs at the door. You're going with me!"

"What gives you that notion?"

Scandrel threw away the cigar he was champing on and unwound a reel of explanation.

It seemed that some sorrowing friend had given Ottie the low-down on a ball team called the Blue Demons that held forth in this same Haymaker Center. It also seemed that the Demons were managed and handled by a party who dubbed himself Ebenezer McLoughlin. Eb, so Ottie stated, was a wizard who could do more with a baseball team than Steinmetz could with a thunderstorm.

"That's what!" Scandrel hollered. "I'm bound for McLoughlin. If he can take a bunch of apple knockers and make them famous, picture what he could do with the Tigers. I'll sign him for life if it costs me every centime I've got hidden in the bank!"

The result of this threat or promise was that a few days later we sighted Haymaker Center over the motor meter of Scandrel's can. One glance marked it as being a rural community surrounded by farms, orchards, dairies and the like. It was so far behind the times that its inhabitants weren't sure how the Allies were making out in the big war and whether or not the Germans were back over the Rhine. For a fact, the first couple of hours in Haymaker Center were better than a first-row orchestra seat at a Broadway laugh show.

We throbbed up Main Street looking at the stores—all four of them. In front of a barber shop a dozen straw chewers were parked. The minute they heard the motor they rushed to the edge of the road. Ottie turned off the gas and addressed a tall rustic with freckles enough for fifty.

"This here trap is tagged Haymaker Center, ain't it?"

The question provoked humor for some reason.

"Yeah, leastwise it were when I woke up this morning!" the big boy drawled.

This brilliant sally brought forth a guffaw from the loiterers. Ottie nudged me.

"So this is where Al Jolson is spending the week-end, Joe? What'll I do—slap this

silly slicker for a month on a cot? Or shall I take away his straw?"

"You came up for ball—not brawl!" I retorted. "Don't lose control of yourself over a little witticism."

Ottie stabbed the big hick with a cruel eye.

"Keep your comedy for a cold night next winter down at the general store," he growled. "We're looking for information."

"Waal, you'll find her over in the telephone exchange!" was the answer.

This put the crowd in stitches and burned Ottie up. Flinging open the door of the buggy he dropped down in the road. Most of the village cut-ups melted before his glare but the big guy stood his ground, munching the hay.

"Come on, push out your pan!" Scandrel bawled. "Being the king of comedians I'll have to crown you!"

"Wait till he hits yer fust, Jed!" a little tramp piped.

"He's only a gosh durn city feller!" some one else butted in. "Don't let him fule yer, Jed!"

"Reckon not!" Jed giggled. "I'll hit him so gosh dinged hard it'll just about rune him. Consarn it! I'll learn yer——"

With that he suddenly leaped forward, swinging clumsily. A professional box fighter could have walked under the twin punches and that's exactly what friend Scandrel did. Letting the big sapolio's right glide harmlessly by his head, Ottie blocked his left and uncorked a dazzling hook that rang the bell and spilled Jed.

The hysterical excitement of that party's pals went out like a box of matches under a pail of water.

"I'd like a little information," Scandrel growled, shooting his cuffs. "What's the best hotel in this idiotic slab?"

A grass tosser with a dollars' worth of tobacco in his cheek stepped nervously forward and pointed down Main Street.

"The Ho-tel St. Tonsilitis, mister. Two blocks to yer right. And be you a prize fighter?"

Ottie scowled the question off and got back into the ark. The crowd walked all over the fallen Jed in their eagerness to get a final look at him. If dumfounded amazement represented water an ocean would have been at the foot of the street.

Positively, the village beaus were gone from here to Guatemala.

"I reckon yer don't know who yer licked," one of the crowd called out suddenly. "That there's Jed Hawkins, mister, and he's a town constable!"

"I don't care if he's Mary Pickford's grandfather!" Ottie snapped. "Leave go them fenders and stand aside!"

When we moved away I looked back through the rear window. Jed was being conveyed into the barber shop—as cold as any Monday morning at the pole!

"Ha-ha!" Ottie chuckled. "I can see where we're going to have a good time while we're here!"

Two minutes after that we pulled in and docked at the Hotel St. Tonsilitis. The hostelry was one of those old-oaken-bucket, moss-grown resorts that had opened to the public about the same time Molly Pitcher was dusting off her favorite cannon. It had a regular lobby which was decorated with a pair of farmers pegged out in comic-opera overalls, straw sheds and knee boots. Really, I had to look toward the dining-room door to see if the chorus wasn't ready to dance on!

"What a place!" Scandrel muttered under his breath. "The Plaza for luxury, ain't it so, Joe?" He gave the desk clerk a nod. "Watch me fox Useless, who'll try to take us the minute he sees my scarfpin. Two fifty-cent rooms," he said, once we were lined up at the desk.

The custodian of the register eyed us wolfishly.

"There ain't no sich rooms here, gents. This is a dollar-a-day house."

With that the clerk went out and tore the hotel's staff of bell hops away from his billiard game. We were conducted up to a brace of rooms on the second floor and turned loose. Ottie tipped the hop a half a dollar—which almost caused that party to go into a convulsion.

After we got washed up we went down to find a garage for the car. For a fact, the boat had cobwebs on it. By the time we found standing room for it in a former livery stable that had given up the horse for the horseless carriage, it was trough time. Back in the hotel we piled into the dining room. It was one of those chow chambers whose motto is eat, drink and be wary.

From soup to the nuts who spent half of their time with their faces in their plates and the rest of it staring at us, the meal

would have taught a Sixth Avenue landlady a few tricks on the art of thrift.

Really, I wouldn't be surprised if they serve snow up there for dessert during December and January!

The instant the ordeal was over we went out to walk it off. Ottie insisted on hanging a walking stick on his left arm before faring forth. We stopped on the way out to purchase a couple of stogies from the cigar clerk who doubled up in the rôle of desk clerk.

"There's a cigar missing out of that there box!" Ottie yelped. "Who did you sell *that* to—Mark Antony?"

The clerk took it without a smile

"No, sir. Nobody by that name has registered here since I've been on the job!"

No fooling, it was as bad as that!

Five minutes away from the St. Tonsilitis and we were in fairyland and dairyland. A turn of the dusty road and Ottie and I spied a milkmaid, leaning against a yard of fence, absently removing the petals from a daisy. The girl, a cute little trick in gingham, wore a sunbonnet and white cotton stockings. She had a pail on her arm and a couple of eyes as blue as the Sundays the reformers are trying to hand us—to say nothing of a complexion Broadway would have gone mad about, hair as gold as the mint and lips that knocked the roses cold for color.

"One of them goofy rube maidens!" Ottie sneered. "Give me the city gals every time. Come on, let's trip up and do a piece of wise cracking just for fun."

"Why annoy her?" I said. "What did she ever do to you?"

His answer was a snicker. Lifting his tipper with a grace unequaled by Walter Raleigh he approached the Juno of the milking stool.

"Er—a thousand pardons. As you possibly can see we are strangers in town. Such being the case could you—now—give us a line on a baby whose letters come to him addressed Ebenezer McLoughlin?"

The girl blushed like tomato bouillon in a cup.

"Mr. McLoughlin is over at Farmingdale to-night—at the barn dance. The Blue Demons—they're our baseball team—beat the Farmingdale Pirates this afternoon. But you can find Eb at the ball grounds to-morrow morning—they're just down the road a piece."

While she was talking the dairy flapper looked Ottie over with round eyes. She glanced at the glittering headlight in his six-dollar cravat, no more interested if he had been King Arthur just up from a mutton chop at the Round Table.

"Live around here?" Scandrel asked casually.

The girl colored up again.

"Yes, I'm Sally Jones. My father lives back there yonder. We own fifty cows!"

"That sounds like bull!" Scandrel yelped. "Let it go. Why ain't you in New York working for Ziegfeld instead of out here with the Grade A? Ain't you got no ambition? A—now—swell chicken like you ought to get out of this barnyard."

"Don't mind him," I told the blushing damsel. "He can't help it."

Sally Jones smiled demurely.

"I'd love to go to the big city," she lisped. "But pa won't hear of it. Oh, I've got plenty of ambition, I really have. And then there's my boy friend to think of. I—I might be married this time next year! I suppose you've often been on Broadway, haven't you?" she said to Ottie.

Scandrel laughed like a seal at the sight of a frozen fish.

"I practically own it! I did give the Shubert boys the Winter Garden as a birthday present but the Metropolitan Opera House, Macy's and Columbus Circle are still mine. Well, I guess we'll have to push the dogs now. Glad to have met you. If you ever hit New York look me up without fail. I'm thinking of dispossessing all the tramps in the Woolworth Building and keeping the whole place for my private office. Olive oil, Cutey!"

"Overflowing with fun, aren't you?" I said when we were halfway back to the St. Tonsilitis.

"Get in order!" Scandrel snarled. "These dumb-bells need a little stirring up. They ain't had a bit of excitement since Benny Franklin flew that kite!"

Dark and late the next morning we hunted up the stamping ground of the Blue Demons. The team was hard at batting practice in a park that was the most modern thing in Haymaker Center. We watched the local lads clout out a few snappy ones and found Ebenezer McLoughlin on the porch of the clubhouse. The town's John McGraw was a hard-panned baby who was not as young as he had been once or as old

as he hoped to be. He took all that Ottie had to say in silence and then shook his head.

"There's not a chance of me leaving the team. I've got a five-year contract with old Colonel Jordon, the owner of the club, and if Connie Mack run up here with a truck full of jack he couldn't get a rise out of me. Kiss that off, pal!"

Scandrel argued for a quarter of an hour with no results.

"I'll stick around and watch you play this afternoon," he sighed at length. "Maybe you can flash a player or two that I can use. Or aren't you releasing any this season?"

Ebenezer McLoughlin tilted back his chair.

"There's only one boy I'm willing to let out. That's Chris Biggs, a southpaw twirler. Chris come here from Columbus, Ohio. But he can't stand small-town stuff. He ain't happy and when a feller ain't that he can't put his heart in the game nohow. I'll work him this afternoon so you can see him do his stuff. I'll make him cheap if you like his looks."

"Fair enough," Ottie murmured reluctantly. "We'll be back to slant him off."

By this time the midday meal was ready and we headed back to give indigestion a chance in the dining room of the Hotel St. Tonsilitis. But as Shakespeare frequently jotted down, it's a wise man who knows what Fate has got up her sleeve. We noticed a small congregation on the porch of the hostelry but thought nothing of it until we went up the steps—to confront no less than Constable Jed Hawkins and the town gendarmes, armed to the teeth.

"Somebody must have robbed a bank!" Scandrel murmured. "Ain't that the big mock orange I ditched yesterday, Joe?"

Before I could answer Hawkins came down the steps two at a time and grabbed Ottie by the shoulder.

"You're under arrest!" he hollered. "Here's my warrant!"

With that he shoved a paper halfway down Ottie's throat.

"Remove your hand from my shoulder or Scotland Yard won't be able to find your teeth?" Scandrel yelped. "What kind of nonsense is this?"

"Do your dooty!" Constable Hawkins bawled at his bodyguard.

Immediately afflicted with palsy a half dozen of the minions of the law pressed forward and shoved their guns in Ottie's face. While this was going on Hawkins swung around and nailed *me*.

"You, too! You are accomplice to the crime! Come along peacefully or by gosh the fust thing you know the two of you won't know nothin'!"

Ten minutes later by anybody's watch we were in the portals of Haymaker Center's courthouse and up before the judge. That was shock number one. Shock number two came the minute we flashed her honor. The lady's name was Amanda O'Tosh. Picture that! Later we found out that she had been elected on the reform ticket and that hip-pocket flasks, dancing shoes, jazz and the sex best sellers were fond memories in the community.

The only reason the Blue Demons were allowed to perform was because Colonel Jordon held the mortgages on two thirds of Haymaker Center property and would have knocked the town for a row of silos had any one tried to put his nine out of business.

As for Amanda, she was a panic in herself. She had a map that would have made granite look like feathers for softness, glittering eyes, a mouth from which mercy was absent and if she didn't wear a wig Mary Garden thought music was something shoes were shined with. Positively Judge O'Tosh would have stood vaudeville on its ear. One of the "we girls" that regarded matrimony as a certain sin, her looks would have made *any* clock go cuckoo on the spot.

"How extremely unusual!" Scandrel chortled. "I'll bet that dame thinks a permanent wave and a facial massage are things to eat!"

Her honor heard him whispering and looked up from a pile of papers. She gave Ottie a glance that turned him ashen and picked up her gavel.

Slam!

"First case!" she snapped.

A court attendant came to the front with the first prisoner of the morning and we were handed shock number three in a paper bag. The girl in the clutches of the law proved to be no other than the demure Sally Jones, still with the milk pail on her arm and as frightened as a family who couldn't swim at the height of a flood.

"Charge?"

The constable who held the arm of Blue Eyes shuffled his pups.

"It's this a way, Amanda, I caught her leavin' the pasture bars down again. Two or three of the cows were a-wanderin' all over the road. It was pufectly scandulous, it were!"

Her honor gave the fair Sally a look that would have set celluloid on fire.

"Ten dollars fine!" she snapped.

The cutey of the cream buckets promptly went all to pieces and cried in her handkerchief.

"Pa'll skin me alive for this!" she sobbed. "Can't you make it five dollars, Amanda?"

"No, I can't and don't call me Amanda! I'm Judge O'Tosh when I'm on the bench. What did you do with that twenty-dollar gold piece your Uncle Ezra gave you last Christmas? Buying gewgaws and fripperies, I reckon! Well, I'll make it eight dollars cash and not a penny less!"

The words were hardly out of her mouth before Ottie was at the bar.

"Here's the eight berries!" he barked. "Give her the street!"

When quiet was restored and the fine was accepted Sally was hustled out and our joint case called. Her honor listened to all Constable Hawkins had to relate, shook her head every so often and burned Ottie up with another look.

"Assaulting an officer of the law! That will cost you fifty dollars apiece. Disturbing the order of the courtroom! That will be twenty-five more. Add this up, Si," she said to the clerk before turning back to the outraged Scandrel. "Ten for meddling in other people's business and paying their fines and five for not taking off your hat when you came in!"

"How could I?" Ottie howled. "This big bolognie had a-hold of my hand!"

The gavel came down with a bang.

"And ten more for talking back to the judge!" her honor murmured coyly.

Woof!

We paid up and checked out to an accompaniment of snickers, Ottie blazing up like a can of kerosene. We gained Main Street. The instant we were out of the courtroom doors Miss Sally Jones, lingering near the portico, jumped at Scandrel, threw both arms about his neck and kissed him twice in the same place!

"Be yourself!" he snarled. "Don't be getting so familiar just because I sprung you. How do you know I ain't married or something?"

The other looked humiliated.

"Ex—excuse me," she faltered in a small voice. "I—I wanted to show you how grateful I am——"

With that she climbed hastily into a farm wagon, shook up the Man-o'-War between the shafts and clattered away.

"Love and learn!" I murmured.

"She's triple cuckoo and if you don't think so you're crazy!" Scandrel growled. "What a swell dive this place is. First they fine you and then they kiss you! Let's be getting down to the ball park. I'll have one look at that baby McLoughlin was chanting about. If he's sour we'll check out of this hole as soon as possible—if they ain't stolen my car off me!"

Three o'clock the same afternoon found us nodding into the beautiful Haymaker Center baseball park. Ottie pulled a Balboa and discovered Ebenezer McLoughlin on the porch of the clubhouse. After a few minutes of careless chatter he excused himself, ducked indoors and returned chaperoning a big gil who had tow-hued hair and a pair of ears that were only exceeded in size by what hung on his ankles and masqueraded as feet. In the snappy uniform of the Blue Demons this freak of nature looked thicker than dumb and dumber than stupid.

"Christopher Biggs," McLoughlin said, introducing him around. "Chris, this is Mr. Scandrel, the manager of one of the clubs in the Central New Jersey League. He's here this afternoon to see what you've got."

Biggs staged a piece of gri ning.

"Take it from me," he said to Ottie, "when you see me bending them over you'll see *something!* When I was working around the sticks in Columbus, Ohio, my stuff was the talk of the neighborhood. I do it pretty and I got a break on the pill that would puzzle Sherlock Holmes—positively."

Ottie looked at me blankly.

"We're playing the second game of a series with Farmingdale," McLoughlin cut in quickly. "We did a barber shop with them yesterday and trimmed them nice. We ought to repeat sure to-day."

"If they get a run off me," Biggs observed nonchalantly, "it'll be on account of me dropping an arm on my way out to deck. See you later, gents."

He tossed us a nod and joined his playmates out on the diamond. McLoughlin conducted us to the players' bench and some time later Farmingdale went to the bat.

"Now," Scandrel mumbled, "we'll see if Feet can do as much with a ball as he can with his mouth. If he can get the sphere across as well as his line he'll make Grimes, 'Dazzy' Vance, Haines, Robertson and some of them other expensive pitchers look like a one-armed laundress in a hurricane."

The minute Biggs planted his boats on the mound he began to show us that he was pep plus. Whatever his shortcomings, he pitched flashy ball. With the loosest kind of support back of him he uncorked a dazzling assortment of eye-opening curves, drops, hop balls and straight ones so fast that they made a bullet look like a letter to India when it came to a quick delivery. For three straight innings Biggs held the visiting team hitless and scoreless and merely to show that all of his talent did not begin and end on the twirling platform the southpaw lashed out a deep drive at the close of the sixth session that not only anchored him on bag number three but started a veritable batting rampage that put the Demons into a long lead.

When the smoke of battle cleared away a synopsis of the home team's victory showed that Biggs besides striking out ten of the enemy and showing hearty work with the stick, had played a flawless game.

"A bear for action!" Scandrel declared as we pushed our way through the enthusiastic fans and headed once more for the clubhouse. "This town is a terrible mistake and for twenty roubles I'd set it up in flames but Feet takes my eye, no fooling! I'll get him if I have to put the Tigers in hock and give the ticket away!"

"Yet," I murmured, "it seems strange that if Biggs is so wonderful this McLoughlin should mention him as the only man on the team he's willing to let out."

For all of his optimism Ottie was stopped by the question. He gave me a startled glance.

"Say, I never thought of that. This looks like there's a catch in it somewhere. Maybe McLoughlin thinks he's a gypsy trying to gyp me. I'll glom him for the dirt and knock him colder than cold if he don't come clean. That's a promise!"

Haymaker Center's baseball Edison was on the clubhouse porch. He took what Scandrel had to say to him with perfect coolness.

"What are you giving me a bell for? I'm not asking you to be interested in Biggs. Take him or leave him—it won't break my heart."

"Get calm!" Ottie snapped, pushing out his jaw. "I'm asking you why you're willing to get rid of something that's good. To me this looks as peculiar as an orchid in the buttonhole of an ashman. What's the answer?"

Somewhat to our mutual surprise McLoughlin smiled as he touched a match to a new cigar.

"It's this way, gentlemen. I saw Biggs in Ohio when I was out there on a vacation. He showed me the same line of goods he just now showed you. I grabbed him so quick it made him dizzy and—two weeks later repented at leisure. Biggs is a bit of a mystery. He's a flash in the pan. You saw the kind of game he put up to-day. He can play ball when he wants to but the trouble is those days come only once in a pink moon. From experience I've learned he shows his real stuff only when we have visitors—like you—dropping in on us. The rest of the time brimstone, buckshot and cold steel can't budge him. That's the truth. He's one of those players that come in the front door holding a contract in their hands and go out the back with a lily in the same place."

"I like this southpaw fine," Ottie rumbled after a minute or two of pensive thought. "I'm not bargaining for no false alarm but I'm willing to gamble a stack of nickels on him. I'll fool him and here's the way I'll do it. He'll work with my team for no salary but on a bonus for games *won*. If he cops he gets paid—if he don't he don't. Then when he makes good he'll get a contract for a regular salary and not before. Walk him out here and let me slap him in the eye with this proposition."

A brook trout at the point of starvation couldn't have snapped at a highly colored fly quicker than the way Christopher Biggs snapped at Ottie's offer!

At eight bells the following morning the Scandrel mudlark was in front of the Hotel St. Tonsilitis with its gas tank filled. Biggs was to meet us there at seven-thirty, at which time we were to check out of Haymaker Center. At five minutes after eight a member of the dare sex, driving a couple of cows down the road stopped beside the car and looked at Ottie, her blue eyes misty and her red lips trembling.

It was the Diana of the milk pails.

"I—I just wanted to say good-by and thank you again for saving me from that horrible old jail," she began in a voice that sounded full of tears.

Ottie made haste to seat himself on the other side of the bus.

"Listen, girlie, what's past is O. K. with me. If eight dollars cash kept you out of the cooler I'm satisfied. You're welcome! Er—nothing more is necessary!"

"I'm thinking of coming to the city soon. Pa is so old-fashioned. He heard about how I was arrested for leaving the pasture bars down and he hollered at me all last night. I can't stand it much longer. Oh, yes. And please take good care of Chris."

"Do you know *him?*" Ottie asked.

Sally nodded her sun-kissed head.

"Everybody knows Chris. He's rather nice even if his eyes are open when he's sound asleep. I—I don't want to say anything but I really think he's leaving the Center just because of something I've always been telling him about his lack of ambition."

"If he ain't here inside of ten minutes," Scandrel said with a peek at his ticker, "he'll be leaving the Center, all right—but not with us!"

The beauteous custodian of the cows divided another word of farewell between us and tripped away. She was hardly out of sight before Biggs rushed into view, stumbling over a valise that made the Rock of Gibralter look like a cinder.

"I guess I'm a little late," he exclaimed, hurling the luggage into the car. "Haw, haw! I must have overslept."

"Get in and make it quick or I'll oversleep you with a bust in the kisser!" Ottie snarled. "O. K., Joe? Let's ride!"

The return trip to Edgemont was made with Christopher Biggs entertaining us with tales of his youth and early childhood. According to the young man from Ohio, intelligence was something that had been served him twice, education covered him like paint and cleverness was second nature to him. For two hundred and fifty miles straight he dished the oil and let us get the impression that he knew more about finance than Shylock, love than Lothario, more about traveling than the Wandering Jew and more about dress than Beau Brummel. In his own opinion Biggs was as sharp as a safety razor, a spendthrift and a jolly good fellow.

He kept up the pace until we struck a bad piece of road at the gates of New Jersey and blew a shoe.

"Haw, haw!" Biggs laughed, lounging comfortably back on the upholstery while we piled out in the blazing sun to rip the flat off. "This certainly reminds me of one time when I was out riding with the governor of Minneapolis. It was just as hot. We come to a bridge and the rubber went blooie. The chauffeur said we had picked up a nail that had caught us in the tube and——"

"I'll pick up a punch that'll catch you in the tube!" Scandrel hissed. "What do you think you are—a chicken—laying back there? Step out of your coat and show us how the chauffeur jacked up the front axle!"

For the rest of the trip Biggs had less to say than a deaf mute at a meditation meeting.

Whatever the history or the mystery of the silly southpaw's connection with the first game Ottie sent him in to toss, Biggs braced up the Edgemont Tigers like a pair of fancy suspenders. Starting with the very first game Ottie sent him in to toss, Biggs showed the same flash stuff he had revealed when pitted against Farmingdale in the ball park at Haymaker Center.

Endeavoring to ascertain how long it would take him to blow up Ottie sent him in on the three successive afternoons—against two teams that were there thirty ways. Biggs not only copped the three bonuses but got better during each game. The effect of three wins was like opium to the Tigers. And when, a week later, they had only dropped two games out of seven—and those, games Biggs didn't pitch—Edgemont began to curl an eye at them.

Ottie was no more excited than a shop girl with an eighteen-thousand-dollar sable coat!

"This baby is more mysterious to me than Houdini," he stated one afternoon some two weeks later. "Biggs is still working on the bonus graft and he's costing me more than if I had him signed regular. He's got me guessing and no mistake."

"Why don't you give him the papers?" I suggested.

"I would this minute," was Ottie's reply, "only I know the second he puts a pen to them he'll crack and go all to pieces. Remember what McLoughlin told us? There's something more phony than the Bell System mixed up in it. I'm everybody's friend

but nobody's fool. I'll play safe and wait a while longer. I'm not going to have him scratch his moniker on the good news and then close up like a wet umbrella!"

But Christopher Biggs did no closing up —on his own behalf.

Pitching astonishing ball and registering solidly with the wagon tongue he kept the Edgemont Tigers pegging away until by the middle of August the team had climbed up from the cellar and had a throat hold on third position. Still as egotistical as a screen star who got his morning mail by the truck load the southpaw thrived on heat and hard work. No matter how tough or soft the game was he threw into it the same amount of wolfish energy, the same grim fighting spirit and was there dealing out the same quality of air-tight, practically hitless ball that made him a popular idol among the yeomanry of Edgemont.

Really, nifty wasn't at all the word for it!

By no means an object of infatuation among his teammates, principally because of his braggadocio and swaggering conceit, Biggs cared little or nothing for their social life after working hours. The minute it was the end of a perfect game he robed himself in a tasty, form-fitting, one-button-and-a-half suit, donned a heavy straw tipper, hung a cane on his arm and, fondly imagining he was the very essence of Piccadilly, sauntered forth to linger near the front door of Edgemont's cigar store, from which point he could give the local demoiselles killing looks.

The mere fact that the size of his feet and the shape of his ears was enough to nip romance in the bud worried Biggs about the same as the loss of a fifty-cent piece to any of the Morgans. Smirking and as highly pleased with himself as Romeo with a balcony date the dizzy southpaw lived a carefree existence on the bonus plums he dragged down daily.

"This mockie's running me ragged!" Ottie Scandrel moaned after a look at his books. "The team keeps climbing fine while my own kale keeps shrinking rotten. Honest, I'm in a fog without a horn!"

"Why don't you hand him over the contract now and be done with it? You'll have to come to it sooner or later," I said.

"If it isn't sooner it'll never be later—that's a cinch," was his answer. "He's gone so far now without cracking that *any* minute he'll bust sure. I'll stick it out though I'd give a couple of fingers to figure it!"

"Isn't it possible," I asked, "that this might be some sort of a frame between McLoughlin and Biggs? Isn't it just possible that they might have an agreement to split up on all they can take you for? How do you know Biggs was as rotten as McLoughlin claimed?"

Scandrel smiled easily.

"Give me credit for a few brains. Do you think I took McLoughlin's say-so for it? I'm laughing out loud! That night while you were kipping on the pad I had a chirp fest with at least twenty Haymaker Center taxpayers. They didn't know who I was or what I wanted so there wasn't no cause for them to bull me. I asked them how good Biggs was and they told me that if he was morphine he would be a drug on the market. No, he was the genuine liederkrantz up there—like we was told. This is making a daffydill out of me. I'll end up in a laughing academy, I will for a fact!"

With characteristic stubbornness Scandrel withheld the contract and the southpaw wonder moved blithely up the path of glory he was blazing.

By this time Christopher Biggs was beginning to get himself talked about. Like electricity, the first airplane, the second automobile, Henry Ford and the radio, the young man caused considerable gossip. The result was that Biggs drew as well as Whistler. Not only were the stands always crowded when he was on the slab but his fame crept across the Hudson and the New York ball experts were beginning to sit up and take notice of the victories he hung on the hook for the Tigers. The remarkable part of it was flattery had no effect on the exile from Ohio. His performances were always steady and even.

The Edgemont Tigers, as all the statistical hounds and dope students expected, marched to the top of the league. On Labor Day they had the bunting cinched and when the season closed they wound it up with a burst of red fire.

"Watch me in these last three games," Biggs advised me. "Honest, my work all season will look senseless beside the way I'll deal 'em out. Like a cornet, I'll be something to blow about!"

Which was true. The season ended with three melées staged against the Seabright Sentinels. Biggs worked the trio and

showed specimens of the twirling art that will long be remembered in the Jersey hamlet. He collected his last bonuses and showed up at the clubhouse wearing his usual vapid grin.

"Well, that's that!" he told Scandrel and me. "I hear them tell that the fans are kicking in with two bits apiece so that the sporting department of the Edgemont *Call* can buy me a diamond ring as a sample of their esteem. Haw, haw! If they hand me anything under one carat I'll mail it back by parcel post. Maybe I'd better run down to the office of the *Call* and have a pike at the jewelry. For all I know they might think that when it comes to diamonds I'm stone blind!"

He swaggered out and ten minutes later a representative of the town's chamber of commerce blew in.

"Edgemont is giving the team a banquet at the Hotel Hysteroid to-morrow night," this party explained. "After the dinner we'll all attend the performance of the new musical show at the Witless Roof, where we've taken all the boxes for the evening. Things were never like this when old Cap Higgins managed the Tigers. Edgemont feels that a celebration will be only a slight token of its appreciation!"

Ottie licked his lips hungrily.

"Ain't that nice!" he hollered. "What time do we eat?"

At twilight the next evening the league champs, looking more like society than the four hundred in a flock of rented dinner jackets, piled into the touring cars supplied for the occasion and set out for merry Manhattan with banners flying. As luck would have it, Ottie and I drew a chair in a big twelve-cylinder Phooie next to Chris Biggs, who was quite the glass of fashion in a hired spot garage that bore some slight resemblance to a dress suit. New Jersey's star player looked a trifle worried.

"That—now—ring," he began when I asked him what was the trouble. "I don't get it until next week and 'Babe' Benton says he understands it ain't going to be in a platinum setting. I—er—I'm thinking of handing the ice over to my future wife—as an engagement ring. If it isn't all to the Tiffany, I'll be out of luck for a certainty."

"So you're going to get married?" Ottie barked. "You have my sympathy. I suppose now you'll be all set to sign a sweet contract for next season. I've been thinking it over so look me up some morning this week and we'll talk terms."

Biggs rubbed one of his foolish ears and looked at his feet.

"I'm not signing—with the Tigers," he said. "Didn't I tell you I'd show some snappy work during them last three games? Well, there was a reason. Eddie Samuels, the dig-'em-up for the Cards was over to Edgemont for them three games. You didn't see him for the reason that he didn't want to be seen but he saw me playing and that was enough—for Samuels. I'm leaving next week to sign a five-year contract with this major outfit at a salary you couldn't and wouldn't offer me if you had the keys to the back door of the treasury!"

Zam!

This information practically ruined Ottie's appetite for the banquet at the Hotel Hysteroid. Really, he almost cried in his soup and during all the speeches he was as cheerful as if he had just been cleaned out by Wall Street. He had little to say to me and nothing to Biggs until we piled out of the hostelry and gasolined up Bunk Boulevard to the Witless Roof where we were planted in a stage box.

This temple of hilarity was given over to a mélange of mirth, music and maidens that had set somebody back a hundred grand before the curtain had ever ascended. The show contained the famous Shower of Jewels scene where the girls were pearls; the topsy-turvy restaurant bit, and a horde of dancing numbers that put opera glasses at a premium. The music was so catchy that it had been caught out of the classics, the comedians had more gags than burglars, the leading lady was immense in more ways than one and the chorus dolls were beautiful enough to give Tired Business Men insomnia.

Scandrel ceased muttering about the ingratitude of Christopher Biggs when the curtain went up and the chorus came on. He took one look at the maiden on the left end of the line, rubbed his eyes, looked again and gave me his elbow.

"Get that snapper!" he yelped. "A Venus for the life of you, hey? My idea of heaven would be calling her up on the telephone and asking her out for dinner!"

Without question the young lady that caught Ottie's eye was some Portia. She had more curves than a country road, hair that was blonder than blond, eyes that were

bluer than blue and a mouth so intensely red that an ordinary summer sunset would have quit cold beside it. She danced as if she had taken lessons from St. Vitus and swung a shapely slipper that had the first row paralyzed.

"Soft pedal the admiration," I advised, when Ottie continued to chant exclamations of pleasure, "unless you want the management to present you with the avenue! Where do you think you are—back at the grounds riding an umpire?"

"Outside with that guff!" he sneered. "This is one of them cases of love at first sight like Omar Cayenne, Bluebird and them other lady killers used to talk about. That little girl has got me dizzy. Pardon me for a minute or two."

"Where are you going?"

"To find out what her name is!" he shot back. "One side everybody!" he hissed at the other occupants of the box.

When he returned again, some ten minutes later, he looked as pleased as Paul with a telegram from Virginia. He pushed a way back to his seat, sat down and nudged me.

"It cost me five smackers but I got the dope from an usher, Joe. Her name is Dolores Fair and no doubt she's a sister of that Vanity Fair you hear them speak about. Er—I just now sent a line back to her dressing room saying that the two of us would be around later. Maybe her mother's with her. In that case you'll have some one to talk to."

"You're so nutty you ought to be put on a sundae!" I said. "Get rid of those ideas —you've been walking in the sun without any hat on!"

With the utmost impatience Ottie waited until the curtain dropped. Then he slipped the Edgemont Tigers, the members of the chamber of commerce and battled a way to the street—with me following to turn in a call for an ambulance.

Our destination lay at the end of a long alley where the stage door was hidden. Here we were met by a gentleman who wore a rusty derby and a pan that only his parents could ever have appreciated. Scandrel tried to brush by him and got tripped for his trouble.

"What's yours?" the doorkeeper bawled at Ottie. "You stage-door Johns gimme a pain! Beat it!"

Scandrel's reply was to turn around and cuff him twice.

"Get respect! Learn yourself some manners! Where is Miss Dolores Fair at? Put us in the know or I'll rock you to sleep with an old-fashioned lullaby!"

This brought immediate information. We went through a forest of scenery and a crowd of busy stage hands and idle actors to a narrow iron stairway that led to the regions above. On the third floor Ottie began knocking on the different doors. Twice somebody threw a shoe out at him and once some indignant dame was heard telephoning downstairs for the theater's bouncer. We reached the end of the corridor and were about to turn back when a door to the left of us opened and out marched Christopher Biggs as large as life with the charming Dolores hanging on his arm. Or at least the Dolores Fair of the program for though paint, powder and fine feathers make fine birds, a single glance at the young lady was enough for us, astounding though it was, to recognize in the showy show girl no one else but Mademoiselle Sally Jones, the former Haymaker Center blushing milkmaid!

"Well, well, well!" Scandrel hollered excitedly, rushing forward and pushing Biggs nonchalantly aside. "I knew there was something about you that seemed familiar. Listen, Wonderful! Get rid of Nonsense here and we'll do a little suppering together. I've got a lot of things I want to talk over with you about the old times up at the Center and what a lot of good times we're going to have in the future!"

The heavily mascaraed blue eyes of Miss Fair née Jones looked him over as if he was something ready to be swept up and put out.

"I beg your pardon," she said frigidly, "but I think you've made a slight mistake. I know you gave the Shubert boys the Winter Garden as a birthday present and I'm aware that you still own the Metropolitan Opera House. Macy's and Columbus Circle but that is of scant interest to me. Come, Chris, I dislike keeping my chauffeur waiting."

"Haw, haw!" the party who had put Edgemont on the baseball map guffawed. "So that's the kind of noise he handed you! How extremely amusing! Yes, let's go. As I was saying, this diamond engagement ring I have in mind for you——"

With the cry of a clam in distress Ottie stepped forward and caught Biggs by the shoulder.

"You'll come clean on what I want to know or you'll never pitch another ball! You know what I mean!"

The southpaw caught a glimpse of the danger in Ottie's eyes and drew a careful breath.

"Well, it was this way," he began. "When Eb McLoughlin picked me up in Ohio and took me to the Center he give me a five-year contract. Then I met Sally—excuse me, I mean Dolores—and tumbled for her like a truck full of stones. But she says no wedding bells will ring until I make big jack, a rep and a name for myself—she's that ambitious. What could I do when Colonel Jordon and McLoughlin had me sewed up with that contract? Honest, I was fit to be tied. When things looked the blackest, Sally—Dolores I should say—give me the tip-off that showed the way out."

The enticing show girl let a tinkle of silvery laughter escape her.

"Yes, I used to think about it every night when I milked the cows. I finally got wise to knowing that the only way Chris would ever get a release from the Demons was to show poor form instead of good. Simple, was it not? He did his best only when some one happened to be passing through the Center—with the hope, of course, it might be some big-league scout who'd like him and be willing to take a chance with him."

"Give her credit," Biggs continued, with a proud glance at the girl beside him. "It worked because McLoughlin really did think I was a false alarm and was crazy to get rid of me. Er—you must excuse us now. We've got a table reserved over at the Café de Paranoiac. So long, watch the box scores next season when I'm shooting them over for the Cards——"

They took the air. Ottie sniffed the perfume that lingered. After a minute he gave his lid a new slant and stole a glance at his watch.

"Come on, Joe," he muttered finally. "Let's I and you slip down to Indigestion Ike's for a cup of mud and a piece of pie!"

Another story by Mr. Montanye in the next issue.

THE SIDE-STEP BRIGADE

AMERICA has too many side-steppers. Nimbly and without waiting to be called to the colors, we have in the last few years flocked numerously to the ranks of the Side-Step Brigade. We prefer not to be annoyed with problems. Like the buck, responsibility is something to be passed on to somebody else.

Parents proclaim their inability to manage their own offspring and demand that the school-teacher take over the job. The teacher blames the youngsters' misconduct on their nearsightedness or poor teeth and declares that it is the doctor's business to transform them into models of deportment.

If the members of a craft or profession feel that they are not being paid enough for their work, they besiege Congress and State legislatures with importunate cries for the enactment of statutes to reverse the law of supply and demand and compel the public to hand over what they want. We are no longer expected to resist temptation. The police are empowered to do that for us. Policemen dash whisky from our lips, tell us how fast we may drive our automobiles and determine what assemblies we may safely patronize and what motion pictures, paintings and books will demoralize us.

Corporations are organized to save us from the exertion of being careful and the disagreeable results of being reckless. The insurance companies, for a comparatively few dollars a year, stand ready to pay property damages to the man with whose car our car has collided and to reimburse the people whom we have run down on the street and sent to the hospital. There is practically nothing that cannot be side-stepped by our eager, swift and persistent side-steppers.

This Side-Step Brigade is too multitudinous. What we need is less of the "safety-first" gospel and more of the "I venture" spirit. The side-step is a goose step.

The Gladiator

By Wilbur Hall

Author of "Not Unknown to Fame," "Don't Mention It," Etc.

This is the story of a ring champion who did not like fighting, and who cared nothing for purses, titles, and the favor of the multitude. His interest in fighting sprang solely from an ambition to do a certain thing before he died. The road to his ambition lay through the prize ring. He took that road because it seemed the only one. How he followed it, in dogged uprightness, and where it led him constitute the story of the remarkable character created by Mr. Hall in this searching and dramatic study of a widely condemned and little understood profession.—THE EDITOR.

(A Complete Novel)

CHAPTER I.

THE sensational retirement of Billy Dreem, middleweight champion of the world, on the day after he won that coveted title was the signal for the release of thousands of columns of speculation, biography, and human-interest stories about this extraordinary figure in the sporting world. A favorite theme was the reason for Dreem's entering the ring and dozens of men were named as the ones who "made Billy Dreem."

No one outside the champion's immediate circle of close and tried friends knows the truth. But it can be written now. Billy says so—and Mrs. Billy agrees.

The fact is that Billy Dreem's whole career, his fortune, his fame, his success as a fighter, were all primarily due to the only enemy Billy ever had. And that enemy is the pugilist Dreem battered into a sodden mass of bruised flesh in that Western ring the other day, while sixty thousand blood-mad maniacs stamped benches to splinters and wore themselves out following the swing of fortune as the historic battle went forward to its climax.

The man who "made" Billy Dreem, the champion, is Ralph—"Young"—Corbin, from whom, in the greatest comeback fight in the annals of pugilism, he tore the diamond-studded belt.

The story begins when Billy was thirteen and in the sixth grade of the Rincon School in San Francisco. "Cud" Clark, two years older, was the bully of the hill. He was one of those mean-natured boys who are continually picking at others, usually smaller than themselves. It must be said

for Clark that his nastiness sometimes embroiled him with his equals, when he would fight like a wild cat, but this was not often. And he never fought his betters. His favorite victims were younger lads, tall and strong enough to stand out among the littler chaps, but never in his class. With these he would play like a cat with a mouse, letting them hit him a few times until they had "put an eye on him" or bloodied his nose. Then, apparently taking a keen pleasure in cruelty, he would fall to and beat up his opponent so thoroughly that, on occasions, he narrowly avoided going too far and doing a boy a serious injury.

Why he picked on Billy Dreem was never quite clear, for Billy was considerably lighter and shorter than the bully, at the time, and generally thought of by the other children as sickly. Serious throat trouble in early childhood had sapped his strength and he had grown gawky and thin. His instincts and tastes were healthy enough, to be sure. He was the fastest runner and the best first baseman in his class; he was plucky, quiet, and willing to do more than his share of the work, and older girls had a fondness for him, although this was entirely one-sided. Billy was afraid of girls, did not understand them, did not know how to act when they teased him or tried to talk with him, and was extremely uncomfortable if he found himself alone with any of them. His teachers were always favorably impressed with him on first acquaintance, but sooner or later each of them ran into his streak of obstinacy, and they usually put him down as stubborn and stupid and let it go at that.

Billy himself could never recall what gave Cud Clark his first cause of offense, but such a cause cropped up. There was an argument, cut short by the school bell. According to the school rules every child was supposed to stand quietly at the first bell, then move toward the "lines" on the second. During the wait between the two bells Clark called Billy a name.

"After school, teacher's pet!" he muttered threateningly.

"All right," Billy replied under his breath.

The second bell tapped. As the little ring of boys started forward some one behind Billy gave him a shove that carried him into Cud Clark. The bully deliberately raised his knee and caught Dreem a cruel blow. Instinctively the boy doubled up, but a teacher across the grounds clapped her hands and called shrilly and he straightened and walked stiffly to his place, only his white, drawn face registering the agony he suffered. Cud Clark laughed.

The fight that occurred that afternoon, under the hill on the water-front side of the school, was of short duration. Billy was not the sort to stand off and let Clark play with him. He bored in and the bully had to move quickly to avoid being hurt. In a minute, though, Billy Dreem was battered, bloody, sick. In a minute more he was on the ground with Clark on top of him. Clark recognized no rules and he satisfied his lust for blood before he rose.

There was a dispute afterward as to whether or not he kicked his victim as he came up. Some impartial witnesses declared Cud "gave him a nasty one in the head." Clark's supporters denied this angrily. Clark himself offered to lick anybody who said he had done such a thing. But this was all later.

For Billy Dreem was out of school the rest of the term. The night of the fight his ear began to bleed; later a nasty swelling developed and his father took him to a doctor. The surgeon looked grave and ordered an immediate trip to a hospital. There the dreaded mastoid operation was performed and afterward complications set in and only Billy's pluck and obstinacy pulled him through. He came out at last weak and thin, his father signed an agreement to pay the bills at the rate of so much a week, and every cent Billy earned that summer went to doctors.

Billy brought two things away from that experience—a determination to fit himself somehow to lick Cud Clark until all the fight was taken out of him, and a natural sensitiveness about that left ear and the bone structure behind it. The doctor had told him to be careful of it—warned him that even a slight blow there might prove fatal. The caution was given carelessly but Billy took the surgeon very seriously. Besides he could not quickly forget the horrible pain he had suffered. He was to make some desperate fights in his life but never one so prolonged nor one that so greatly influenced his life as the struggle to conquer the fear that grew up in him of an injury to that left ear.

But meantime he had to lick Cud Clark. Even that same summer he was casting

around for methods that would condition him to do this. On a vaudeville stage he had once seen a weight lifter with tremendous muscles and the look of a perfect man. Weight lifting required no money and no teacher, so Billy Dreem began to go into a ships' junk yard below the Rincon Hill, hide himself in a corner and practice raising heavy pieces of iron.

It is surprising that he did not permanently injure himself, for he was a slight youth and he worked with loads far too heavy for him. But his bulldog tenacity, his stamina and his sound heart saved him and presently his body began to show the effects of this strenuous course. Certainly he was a much huskier boy when Cud Clark picked on him the second time, and that fight lasted twenty minutes.

The only thing worth recording in connection with the second battle was that Clark soon noticed that the smaller boy was covering his left ear. Quite deliberately the bully set to work on that member. When Billy was nearly senseless from the beating he received Cud Clark grabbed that sore left ear in his hand, almost tore it from the head, and then knocked him endwise, for the final count.

"Afraid of them elephant ears of yours, are you?" he cried. "Well, get yourself a sunbonnet and cover 'em up!"

The wrench at the ear hurt but did no serious damage. The taunt, however, made Billy more than ever conscious of his weak spot and this was in the nature of a permanent injury to the boy. But nothing could shake his determination to go on until he whipped Cud.

The latter left school at the end of that term; presently his name began to appear in the newspapers as a prelim fighter. He was a ninth-rater but he had an occasional match and an occasional draw or win to his credit. He became more offensive than ever and on the rare occasions that he visited his old neighborhood Billy kept away from him. He was not ready to meet Cud Clark yet.

The following year his mother died and Billy left school and went to work. He and his father fended for themselves as well as they could, but the death of his wife broke Sam Dreem badly and a year later he died, leaving Billy without a relative in the world as far as he knew and with no legacy but debts which the sale of the little home place barely covered. Billy lived anyhow he could, but now, he felt, he could devote himself more strictly to the single purpose that actuated him. He began to live only to make himself fit to humiliate Cud Clark.

A chance-read advertisement gave him his start. A well-known physical trainer wanted a man to clean up his gymnasium. Billy was in the first group that answered the inquiry.

"I got to get strong and learn to fight right, mister," he said to the keen-eyed little giant he faced in the office of the gymnasium. "If you'll let me clean up nights I'll take my pay in lessons."

"Why, my boy, you're too thin to make a prize fighter!" the instructor objected.

"I'm not planning to be a prize fighter."

"What's the idea, then?"

"I've got to lick a kid," Billy replied simply.

"Oh, that's it." Sparks laughed a little. "Well," he said, "I guess we can arrange it. I'll give you all the time I can spare. Come to-night at seven."

Unfortunately for Billy Dreem he tried to be his own manager. At the end of six months he felt that he was ready. Sparks, the instructor, could have told him that he was not. But Billy did not confide his plans to the friendly athlete. When he thought he was fit he went looking for Cud Clark.

The latter's father was a plumber and Billy had no difficulty in finding where he was working. Characteristically Billy lounged about the job—a new house—until Clark, Sr., had driven away in his wheezing little truck, and until the other workmen had gone for the evening. Then, as Cud Clark began to descend a ladder from the second story where he was joining pipe, Billy stationed himself at the foot.

"Hello, Cud," he said quietly. "I been looking for you."

The plumber's helper looked down with a sneer.

"Oh, you have, have you?" he retorted. "Well, if it isn't little Sore-Ear. Run home to mother, cutie, before I knock your face off."

"I came to find out if you still think you can."

"You—what?"

"I came to fight you."

Clark jumped from the ladder and whirled on Billy.

"I'm getting sick of licking you!" he snarled angrily. "You better take my ad-

vice and beat it, because if you don't you'll go home in a dead wagon."

Billy faced him without a movement.

"If we scrap here, somebody'll come along and butt in. Is there a basement we can go into?"

"There's a basement you'll come out of feet first if you go into it."

"I'm ready to be shown," Billy said. "Come on."

His toes felt cold and his heart was beating fast but he was absolutely unafraid. Clark, working himself into a rage, whirled just as Billy stepped to the basement floor and, with an unprintable epithet, lashed out. The blow caught his feudal enemy under the left ear and instinctively Billy stepped back and covered the spot with his left wrist. Then and there Cud Clark knocked him flat.

He was up again instantly—made a furious rush. For a moment Cud was taken off his feet and the first part of the struggle found him on the defensive against an enemy much more cunning and resourceful, and considerably stronger, than he had expected. If Billy had had a few more pounds behind his blows he might have ended the conflict then and there and this story would never have been written. But the younger boy lacked the punch. And the tide of battle turned.

Clark was a ninth-rate prize fighter but he had some of the tricks of the ring, he was absolutely unscrupulous, and more than all he knew Billy Dreem's weakness. He began to play for that left ear. Blow by blow he wore his antagonist down. At the end of forty minutes both were gasping for breath, bleeding, bruised, staggering and wasting many blows, but Clark was confident and sneering again. Billy covered his ear and retreated more and more. The end was inevitable. Dreem went down.

When he rolled over and got to his knees Clark leaped on him, caught his head in the vise of his arm and began systematically pounding that left ear to a pulp. When he was so tired from rage and his effort that he had only about one more good punch left in him he raised Billy a little and then sent him crashing down with a blow on the point of the chin that put him completely out.

When he came to again Clark stood over him, wiping his own bloody nose on his sleeve and spitting.

"Do you want some more?" he growled.

Billy answered in little more than a whisper.

"If I could stand up I'd fight you," he said.

"But you're licked, are you?"

"Yes."

"All right. Then I don't want to ever see your ugly mug again."

He crossed to a faucet, took a long drink, and went toward the stairs. Billy Dreem was almost choked with thirst but he would not ask his enemy for h[illegible]. The plumber's boy swaggered away.

"Get me right, now," [illegible]rned, lifting a weary foot to the stairs; "if I ever run into you again I'll just naturally kill you. Have you got sense enough to keep away?"

Billy Dreem looked at him steadily, though he was in a torture of pain, weariness and thirst.

"No," he gasped. "I'm not going to keep out of your way. I'm coming back to lick you yet. I am—if it takes—me—all my life!"

CHAPTER II.

The Billy Dreem who went into his nineteenth year as a plasterer's helper was not the Billy Dreem who had gone, at sixteen, to a gymnasium to develop his body and to learn to box. The two years had done marvels for him. With good bone and a large frame smoothly covered with well-coordinated muscles, with his wind sound and his nerves and eyes steady, Billy came into his young manhood a fine, upstanding, clean-cut figure. His body was not of classical beauty—it was more serviceable and healthy than statuesque. He was a trifle too narrow in the shoulders and too wide in the hips for perfection and certainly he did not own a handsome face. His nose was snub, his eyes set wide apart, his chin prominent and a little too long, and he wore an undeniable cauliflower ear as a memento from Cud Clark. But he had a nice frank smile, he was quiet and minded his own business and he was a good listener; and these are qualities that make friends for a man wherever he goes.

Because he wanted still to learn and prepare himself for his next attempt at defeating Cud Clark, Billy watched prize fighters, studied their methods, read all he could find about them, and occasionally attended fights. But he did not like them. The atmosphere wasn't clean—and it sickened

him to hear the fat and safe and easy-living men in their dress suits or tailored business clothes bawling like maniacs to two battered, bleeding, weary little figures in the ring in the center to do murder—to kill one another—to "come on and fight!" The boxing—the standing up to give and to take punishment with a smile and to face either defeat or victory unspoiled and in modest fashion—these were all clean and worthy, Billy thought. But it never occurred to him for a moment to enter the game himself.

This, however, was on the knees of the gods, and they arranged matters themselves.

Billy Dreem's interest in fighters and their ways led him to go occasionally to the one place in San Francisco where all of them, at one time or another, could be found—to "Waffle" Kelly's basement restaurant. And it was through Kelly himself, in the end, that the change in Billy's career came about.

Waffle Kelly was an odd little man, of mysterious origin, who for twenty years was the best friend to young fighters in the city. His own body had been twisted and dwarfed by paralysis when he was a child, and so he had never been a fighter. But he knew more about the game and its history than most sporting editors and he had as large an acquaintance among fighters and followers of the ring as any man in the West. They all made his place headquarters. Promoters, fans, trainers and dopesters were always in and out, and the atmosphere of the place was given a dash of color and paprika through the fact that theatrical people also frequented it.

Kelly's success in maintaining his business and keeping it popular was due first to the fact that he served good food, specializing on the dish that had given him his name, second to the fact that he was himself an interesting character, with a lot of personality, and third to his unalterable policy of keeping the restaurant free of toughs and rowdies. He ruled it with an iron hand, too.

"Have a good time and eat your head off," he would say, "but if you don't know how to be decent you're just as welcome here as a case of smallpox!"

Usually Waffle Kelly was competent to enforce his own edicts, but if he failed he had only to crook a finger and half the men in the room would be at his back. So that occasional calls from hoodlums and roughnecks were certain to be cut short and if there was any resistance the caller was carried away in an ambulance—and never came back.

It was in this place that Billy Dreem absorbed, unconsciously perhaps, the lore and traditions of the American prize ring. He was so quiet, so unobtrusive and so little known that it was a long time before even Kelly noticed him. But he had friendly qualities; gradually he became a favorite with the proprietor, which meant, of course, that he became thereafter a favorite with the regular patrons.

"But he don't never mix in," "K. O." Murphy complained, on one occasion. "What's the matter with the guy—can't he talk English?"

"Say, listen, K. O.," "Butte" Smith retorted, "he can talk English all right, all right. Just because the kid don't shoot off his face all the time some folks thinks he ain't got any brains. But don't fool yourself!"

"But what weight does he fight at? Who'd he ever lick?" Murphy of the one idea persisted.

"A guy don't have to be in the 'Annual' with his record, does he?" Butte snapped. "He ain't a press agent for himself like some of you lightweights with featherweight domes!"

"Aw, I ain't saying nothing against him, am I?"

"Not out loud where he can hear it, you ain't!" Butte observed witheringly.

The merest chance turned the stream of Billy Dreem's life. He was still training himself, studying to prepare for the inevitable battle with Cud Clark, who had left San Francisco meantime in a hurry one evening, and whose whereabouts were only known to his family. Dreem was working now as mechanic in a garage. A complex job detained him one night and he dropped into Kelly's for a late supper. The waffle king had gone to a musical comedy, of which amusement he was very fond, and only the cashier was in charge. Billy, who had not eaten since eleven o'clock, was hungry, and his main idea was to put himself outside a considerable amount of substantial food.

In one corner of the room five or six men, strangers to Dreem, were having a rather noisy party which the cashier watched with concern. But Dreem paid no

attention until he saw that they were beginning to bait some one at another table.

Billy turned a little in his chair. The victim of the frolickers was a pompous and rather offensive little press agent named Brewer Conville who was very fond of showing up twice a week or oftener, each time with a different girl. Dreem had noticed the publicity hound's supercilious manner, especially when he was pointing out celebrities to his fair friends, and he had a sort of contempt for him. But he had never paid him much heed.

He did not, as a matter of fact, pay much heed to Conville now. After the first glance he ceased to remember that there was such a person in the world, and to forget also the roistering party making jokes at Conville's expense, to forget Waffle Kelly's, and even to forget that he was hungry.

The only thing he saw clearly and remembered distinctly, at the moment, was Conville's guest.

She was a slender, blond girl, with small regular features, twinkling blue eyes, a tender little mouth, soft wisps of hair framing her face, and a look of innocence and sweetness that made it seem impossible that she could actually be the friend of such a puffy, mouthy, affected young fool as Brewer Conville. Billy Dreem had never seen such a lovely, fragile, gentle person in his life. He gaped. The girl happened to catch his eye. Billy turned to his table so quickly that he almost upset it. His ears burned and he felt that every one in the room must be laughing at him.

But they were not. The few diners scattered about were interested in their own affairs, Conville in himself, the girl in—well, no one knows that!—and the sextet at the round table in some hilarious joke at the expense of the publicity agent. One of the party, encouraged by the applause of his friends, outdid himself with a jest that set them roaring. Conville, abruptly conscious that some one was handling his great dignity with careless hands, glanced over at them.

There are some men who can be depended on, nine times out of ten, to do the wrong thing. Conville was of that type. Instead of ignoring the jokes and letting them wear themselves out, as they would have done, he frowned, looked important—rose and started across toward their table like a ruffled little poodle.

Billy Dreem knew what would happen and he did not want it to happen. He told himself that it wouldn't do in Kelly's, especially with the waffle king away. But the truth was that he could not bear the thought of having the girl witness a scene. He jumped up and cut across to stop Conville.

"Wait a minute," he said, confronting the little peacock. "You better sit down or you'll start a rough-house."

Conville glared, although his face was pale.

"I'll thank you to mind your own business," he snapped.

"I am. My business right now is to keep you from getting your ugly little face mussed up. Sit down or that's what will happen to it."

Conville pushed by him importantly.

"Get out of my way," he said.

Billy stepped back. Short of picking the little man up and seating him bodily there was nothing to be done. He glanced at the girl. She was pale, anxious, distressed. Billy stood back where he could be of some help to her should she need help.

The press agent faced the group of laughing men.

"You keep your remarks to yourself over here," he said pompously, "or I'll call an officer!"

The anticlimax was too much for them. They let out a roar of mirth, pounding the table and slapping one another on the back with delight. Conville turned to go, haughtily, and one of them shot out a toe and tripped him. He staggered—turned—kicked out violently. Unfortunately he caught one of the merrymakers on the shin.

Several things happened at once then. The man who was kicked, sobering instantly, jumped for Conville and hit him with open hand. Billy Dreem, standing back, heard a cry from the girl. He stepped across to her.

"They won't hurt him much," he said. "He ought to have kept away!"

The cashier was coming on the run. But he was too late. The revelers jerked Conville across the table. One of them threw one corner of the tablecloth over him. This suggested an idea—in a breath the cloth, with all its dishes, glasses and flat ware was wrapped about the struggling little writer's form. They tied him up as a Chinaman does the week's wash. They carried him,

screaming and begging, to the door. They heaved him out—hard. A moment later Conville was in full flight up the street.

Five of the hoodlums sat down again at their bare table, arguing laughingly with the cashier. The sixth, a big, ruddy-faced man who was drunk enough to make him think very well of himself, maneuvered from the door and suddenly dropped into the seat Conville had abandoned, across the table from the frightened little girl.

"Hello, kid," the big fellow said jocularly. "How'd you like to have a real man to take care of you?"

Billy Dreem took two steps, leaned down a little and said quietly:

"She has one, Jack."

The man looked up. He ran his eyes up and down Billy's frame. Then, without a word, he turned again to the girl.

"Listen, peaches——" he began.

He got no further. Billy Dreem caught him by one shoulder and pulled him so sharply over that, to keep from pitching to the floor, the man had to struggle to his feet. As he straightened Billy caught him with a right swing, that had a slight hook in it, and the big sport rocked backward.

He bellowed like a bull and came on again with a rush. Billy side-stepped and located his lips with a straight left. The gallant shook his head and swung both arms like flails. Billy ducked and gave ground in order to get clear of the table where the frightened girl stood staring and dazed. Billy smiled at her reassuringly.

But that was a mistake. His attention was needed elsewhere. In that breath of time his opponent took his opportunity in both fists. Right and left glanced from Dreem's head and he dodged—and he knew he was in for a fight. In the narrow space afforded them for such a struggle Billy had either to box his man, retreating as he went, or to close in. Billy Dreem was instinctively an infighter. He followed his instincts.

It was probably not a pretty spectacle but it certainly moved fast. The cashier already had blown his police whistle several times, and the five who had thrown Conville out, thinking that their husky friend could take plenty of care of himself, incontinently deserted him, running out and up an alley. The police were coming. So were Waffle Kelly and a friend—coming fast.

Billy Dreem did not know any of this. He was taking some heavy punishment and waiting for an opening. He saw it just as Waffle Kelly and McNear rushed into the cellar with two heavy-footed policemen. It was an opening to the point of the jaw and with his whole body behind the blow Dreem let go.

The playful Goliath swayed a moment, with his head sagging, and then collapsed as quietly as a sack of meal.

Billy Dreem pushed the hair out of his eyes. He saw Waffle Kelly coming, with a stranger. Then some one touched his arm timidly. He turned to face the girl—her wide eyes gentle and her lips trembling.

"Oh, thank you so much!" she cried.

Billy Dreem gasped, gaped, opened his mouth, wiped the blood off his chin, stammered—fled.

In a corner washroom he was doing his best to remove traces of the conflict—his heart pounding with something besides weariness and his face suffused with a blush that had not come from fighting, when Waffle Kelly entered with his friend.

"I heard all about it, kid," Kelly said explosively. "Yesterday morning when I opened up a black cat run out between my legs and I knew right then I was in for a spell of bad luck. Shake hands with my friend, Andy McNear, Billy Dreem."

Billy wiped his right hastily and shook hands. The newcomer's face was glowing with admiration.

"By golly, boy!" he exclaimed, "that last punch was a banjerino! This fellow you operated on has just come to. He claims a mule kicked him. Will you come by and see me to-morrow? You ought to be in the fight game right, and I'm ready to help you get there. Will you come to see me, son?"

Billy grinned—tried to frame a reply.

But Waffle Kelly beat him to it.

"He'll come all right, Andy!" he said positively. "But he's going home now and sleep off that black eye. I got a taxi for you, Billy."

Billy thanked them both. They all stepped into the restaurant again. Billy's eyes were roving. Waffle Kelly chucked him in the ribs with a blunt finger and laughed gleefully.

"Oh, don't worry about the little girl, kid," he said. "I sent her home in charge of Miss Carter. If you ain't the lady-fetchingest young rip in this territory I don't

know veal from chicken! Cut along now, Billy—she asked me your name and I told her. So you'll hear from her, all right, if that's what's on your mind!"

CHAPTER III.

The rough-house in Kelly's Waffle Cellar was the beginning of Billy Dreem's career as a prize fighter.

Big Andy McNear, to whom Kelly had introduced him, was the owner of a truck-and-transfer business established in the early days by his grandfather and now grown to be an institution in San Francisco. McNear was Scotch, and shrewd, but he was not by any means the proverbial close and penurious Scot. On the contrary he was inclined to be too generous to those he liked and within a few months his fondness for Dreem had become almost an embarrassment—because the favors, Billy thought, all came one way. McNear wanted to give him opportunities that Billy felt he ought to earn, but McNear wouldn't let him argue the point.

Andy McNear was a sportsman in the best sense of the word. He liked sports and he believed in them. He lost his temper only when confronted with a narrow or bigoted man's view of professional games and it was a treat to hear him when aroused on the subject of the prohibition of prize fighting, horse racing and even of gambling.

"Sure I bet on sports!" he would say frankly. "Here I am forty-nine years old and respectable and with a forty-five-inch waist line. I couldn't hit a baseball with a tennis racket. I couldn't go two rounds with a fast bantam rooster. I don't own any race horses and if I tried to ride one they'd have to prop the poor beast up like they do the prune trees in the Santa Clara Valley. So I sit in the stands and watch the other fellows play for me.

"But just watching isn't good enough for me. I've got a prize fighter's eye, and a baseball player's ginger, and a jockey's knees, but I've got the blood pressure of a Wall Street banker. So how'm I going to get into the game? Why, by letting my little dollar play for me and then working and rooting to help it win. The brethren that don't agree with me can have their checker games and their poetry-reading matches without me bothering them any, and so why shouldn't they give me the same privileges? That's the kind of person I am and if you want to you can announce it on the first page of the morning paper!"

It was this man who persuaded Billy Dreem that he could make his way up in the middleweight division of prize fighting. He used several arguments to convince Billy that the rewards would be generous and the career honorable. He might have saved his breath.

"I'm not thinking about that end of it, Mr. McNear," Billy said. "But I believe I'll take your advice."

"What end are you thinking of, then?" McNear asked, puzzled.

"Why, you see," Billy said simply, "I've got a fellow to lick and maybe this is a short cut."

"How's that?"

Billy told of the three encounters with Cud Clark. McNear whistled.

"Do you mean that you've made up your mind to lick that bully before you do anything else in life?" he asked.

"Yes. It's not exactly to get even with him, either. You see, I've figured that I won't be able to go far if I don't wipe out that old score. I can't explain it but that's the way I feel."

"Where is this Clark fellow now?"

"I can always find out through his folks."

McNear dropped a hand to Billy's shoulder.

"I'm for you stronger than ever, son," he said. "Come on with me; I want you to meet a man I know."

The man he knew was a bustling, round-faced, energetic pygmy known as "Little Jeff." His eyes were like a bird's, his shoulders broad and powerful, his hands like hams, and his short legs resembled those of a grand piano.

"This is the boy I was talking to you about, Jeff," McNear said, and he shoved Billy Dreem forward.

"Pleased to meet you!" Jeff said, offering a hand.

Billy replied with his own. Instantly Jeff caught Billy's fingers in an unbreakable grip and gave the wrist a sharp turn. Instinctively Billy stiffened his muscles. Jeff pivoted like a flash, pulled Billy's arm over his left shoulder, and bore down. The suddenness of the attack caught Dreem unprepared but he managed to hitch forward on the shoulder, roll, and break the hold. Jeff

ducked and released the hand. Then, like lightning, his fist shot out for Billy's cheek. Laughing Dreem twitched his head back and countered by putting his whole hand, palm open, over Jeff's face, and giving a quick push. The trainer went over a table and sat down on the floor on the far side with a jolt.

Without smiling or attempting to rise he looked up at Andy McNear.

"He'll do," he said. "I'll take him on, Andy."

McNear was roaring.

"You would tease the animals!" he exclaimed. "Why didn't you ask me whether it would be safe to try tricks with this boy? I could have told you what would happen."

Little Jeff rose as solemn as an owl.

"That's what I'm thinking now, Andy," he said. "But the trouble is I didn't think it early enough."

Billy Dreem put out a hand.

"I hope I wasn't too rough, Jeff," he said pleasantly.

Jeff stepped back and put his hands behind him.

"No more," he said positively. "Never again. The next time I want to say howdy-do to you I'm going to do it by mail!"

Little Jeff was a trainer and instructor. Billy had heard of him before but now he began to make inquiries and immediately he discovered that the ridiculous pygmy was famous throughout the West as a conditioner of men and as a coach of beginners. Too short himself to box he was nevertheless a thorough master of all the tricks and arts of physical training for pugilism, and he had an uncanny ability to discover a fighter's strongest points and to give him theoretical principles by which he could develop them.

He and Billy Dreem got on famously. Billy's understanding was that Little Jeff was undertaking his training for a percentage of the money Dreem would later earn, but he thought that a one-sided and unfair basis on which to operate. One day he said as much.

"Say, don't worry your head about me, kid!" Little Jeff snorted. "I been taking care of myself since I was knee-high to a fire hydrant and I haven't asked the Associated Charities for any help yet!"

It was a long time before Billy discovered that Andy McNear had made an arrangement with Jeff, and that that little gentleman was entirely justified in his boast concerning his ability to look out for himself in such matters.

They started in at once. Little Jeff discovered immediately that Billy was working as a garage mechanic.

"Tie a can to yourself off that job!" he ordered. "Enough gas in one of them joints to kill you in a year. And you wouldn't have no more wind than a side-show fat woman! Get outdoors!"

"All right, Jeff," Dreem said.

So he quit the garage job. But he had no idea where to go for another position and he had to have work. He answered newspaper advertisements the next morning but places were all filled before he got there, or else it was inside work. He walked the streets, he waited in outer offices, he picked up odd jobs here and there, but he couldn't get on regularly with any one. Meantime he went on working evenings and mornings with Little Jeff, but he was not eating regularly nor well and he began to lose weight and color.

Little Jeff couldn't understand it and he couldn't get a word out of Billy Dreem as to the truth. So he confided his troubles to Waffle Kelly.

"Get an eye on the kid and see what's the matter if you can, Kelly," he urged.

So Kelly watched. One day Billy Dreem came into the waffle parlor before noon.

"What you doing here at this time of day?" Kelly demanded sharply.

"I was up this way," Billy replied vaguely.

Kelly looked him over carefully.

"You aren't eating enough, and your pants look to me like they've got holes in the seat, and your hat is only about two jumps ahead of the ash can. Look me in the eye, you side-stepper. Have you got fired from your job?"

"No. I quit."

"What for? Slamming the boss over the head with a wrench?"

"Little Jeff told me garage work would hurt my wind."

"So it would. Well?"

"Well, I've been looking for another job."

"And not finding one?"

"Not yet."

Waffle Kelly gazed sadly at his young friend.

"By chicken gravy in a deep dish, Billy," he said in a mournful voice, "sometimes I

get pretty near discouraged with you. Why in the oven doors of Hades didn't you tell somebody about it? What did you think me and Andy McNear was for—ornaments?"

"I didn't want to come to either of you."

"You didn't? That's too bad, that is! Go on and eat yourself a square meal on the house while I do some business for you. You're as helpless as a roast of beef on a sawdust floor, you are! If a waffle didn't have any more brains than you've got I'd start selling hot dogs!"

Still growling he went away. Billy did not order but food in large smoking quantities began to arrive. There was a big sirloin steak swimming in gravy, a baked potato that smelled to Billy like attar of roses, corn on the cob, brown bread, a bottle of milk that was half cream and a rice pudding that was half raisins. While Billy was still discovering forgotten odors and flavors Waffle Kelly came in again with Andy McNear and two minutes later Billy was engaged at a good rate of pay to drive a truck for the McNear Van and Storage Company.

"Oh, by the way," McNear said, as he was turning to go, "can you drive a truck?"

"I think I can," Billy grinned.

McNear sighed.

"Well, that's good," he said. "Not that it matters, because you wouldn't have to. But my conscience is easier now."

That was the beginning of a wonderful year for Billy Dreem. He couldn't get work enough out of his immediate bosses to keep him busy, but he picked up color and flesh, hardened and grew elastic and springy under Little Jeff's ministrations, slept like a top, ate like a farm hand, and had the wind and the nerves of a race horse. Little Jeff complained that they'd either have to enter him in the fat men's races on Fourth of July or else make a heavyweight out of him, but he was only talking. Billy Dreem was in the perfect pink of condition that only a clean-living young man can attain, and all three of his queerly assorted friends and sponsers were so proud of him that they could scarcely contain themselves.

Meantime there was a fly in the ointment.

Billy had never heard a word from the little girl in whose defense he had engaged in the give-and-take battle that had brought him to the attention of Andy McNear.

She had dropped out of his life completely. Billy made fun of himself, scolded himself, tried to tell himself that he didn't care. But he did care. He cared a lot. He had no idea who she was, nor in what profession or line, if she had one. He had only one clew: her appearance in the waffle parlor with Conville had seemed to him to indicate that she might be an actress, for it was with actresses that Conville was usually seen. Against this was the cold fact that she didn't look sophisticated enough for a professional. Conville had gone to Los Angeles to work for a motion-picture outfit as press agent. There was no other way of finding her. Billy almost gave up hope.

Then he came upon her trail.

She was on the screen, in a minor part, dressed as a little country girl and sharing an apple with a red-faced boy. Billy caught his breath—thought he must be mistaken. The picture flashed on. Then suddenly she appeared again—close up to the camera. There could be no mistake. It was the girl of Kelly's.

Frantically Billy searched through the program. No name. He asked an usher and received a stare. He stopped at the office and, timidly, inquired there. They thought he was a mash-note writer and evaded him. He got no satisfaction except the slight amount accruing from attending six performances of the picture, which almost caused him to lose the respect of Little Jeff.

It was the first time Billy Dreem had been hit at all in his life and he took it hard. He began to think that he would have to abandon his lifelong pursuit of Cud Clark for the moment and take up another hunt. His first fight found him unprepared. He was badly beaten and finally, caught guarding his left ear, he was knocked out. Little Jeff wept openly.

This jolted Billy sharply and he put the girl aside for the time being and went at his training again with a new zeal.

Two weeks later he knocked a heavier opponent through the ropes and into the aisle of the arena. The papers mentioned him with a paragraph. A month later he fought in another preliminary and got a draw with a man of some reputation. He was given another short paragraph.

Life for Billy became a monotony of training, work, good meals, long nights of rest, preliminary matches, draws, defeats, an occasional victory. One sporting editor

gave him a few lines of comment between fights, wanting to know where this young boiler maker had come from and why some one didn't take him in hand and teach him a punch. But there was only a ripple of interest on the pond of the world of pugilism.

Out of a clear sky came Billy's first chance. Two well-known fighters in the lightweight division had a press-agents' wrangle that developed into an active quarrel. Two days before a heavily advertised program they refused to meet, advancing technical objections that saved them from breaking their contracts with the fight promoters. There was a desperate scramble to get a substitute attraction. Andy McNear became active—arranged a match for Billy.

His opponent in this, his first main event, was a hardy, wily, tough fighter called "The Livermore Kid." Billy had to give some weight and he had to take the short end of the purse, lose, win or draw. But it was an opportunity.

The night came. The arena was packed—most of the crowd having come to use tickets purchased early in expectation of a fast lightweight bout. The preliminaries were run off. They happened to be good scraps and the fans were delighted. Then Billy Dreem crawled through the ropes, followed presently by The Kid. The latter got a hand. Billy himself was perfunctorily greeted, but most of the crowd was yawning, idly asking who this Dreem was and making clumsy puns on his name. There was a little apathetic betting, with The Kid an overwhelming favorite.

When the bell rang and the two rose and trotted to the center of the ring for the handshake there were not ten men in the house who cared whether Billy Dreem was knocked cold in the first round or not. The rest hoped for the best—that the unknown would be able to stand up and take a good beating for a while and then that The Livermore Kid would send over that right cross of his and end the match with a sensational finish, and plenty of blood!

CHAPTER IV.

Three thousand fight fans leaned forward in their seats, breathing tensely and hoarsely—some of them emitting, half unconsciously, sharp, barking cries of encouragement, admonition or warning.

It was the fourteenth round, with half a minute to go.

Billy Dreem saw an opening, set himself—swung.

The blow crashed home.

For a moment the entire auditorium was covered by a pall of silence broken only by the thud of a body to the canvas of the ring. Then the referee's voice:

"One! Two! Three!——*Ten!*"

Cries came from every corner of the big building. There was some cheering, but mostly it was booing and catcalling. Questions were shouted. There were strident charges of fake! An almost unknown man, with a peculiar jealous care of the left side of his head which had slowed down the fight and made him seem awkward and hesitant, had suddenly knocked out a vicious, experienced and wily fighter who had up to that last moment or two appeared to be steadily wearing the newcomer down. Who was this Billy Dreem? Had that last blow been an accident? Had The Livermore Kid been doped, or paid, or had he quit cold?

Meantime Dreem had lowered his hands and turned toward his corner. The referee ran to him, seized his left wrist, raised his gloved fist high above his head. Men in the ringside seats yelled their approval. But as a whole the crowd was disappointed—chagrined.

Billy Dreem's seconds rushed at him, throwing around his shoulders his new blue bath robe, talking excitedly, with cries of exultation, patting his back, his arms, his cheeks, in an intoxication of vociferous triumph.

Across the canvas-floored square The Livermore Kid was being fairly dragged to his corner, sick and gray, and with his face bloody and his torso covered with bruises.

Billy Dreem looked away from him—took a sweeping view of the big arena.

Most of the crowd was already pressing toward the exits, lighting cigars and cigarettes, hailing acquaintances, asking and answering questions and communicating their disgust to one another. The sporting reporters were dashing over seats, making for a private exit in order to get into their offices with their stories, for it was late. A few men stood looking the winner over critically, as though he had been so much beef in a stall; a few cheered him with genuine enthusiasm. The majority were puzzled, fooled, disappointed in The Kid. The ad-

vent of the new man with the tender left ear had cost them money and they grouched.

Billy Dreem had seen more than one mob of fight fans from the vantage point of the ring but never with just the sensations he had to-night. This was his first appearance in a main event. Whether they liked it or not he was now a real contender for local middleweight honors—might even be on his way up toward championship matches. But he was making an inauspicious start. These thousands, for the most part, had hoped to see him knocked endwise. In the first few rounds he had won favor by standing up gamely and taking some severe punishment with a smile.

Then in the fifth round he had had a recurrence of his old trouble—a fear that he would be hit on the left side of his head just behind the ear. Once again he had felt the agony of those childhood days in the hospital—had recalled the surgeon's advice about taking good care to avoid blows on that injured part. This recollection had made him wince and he had begun covering the left ear. The Livermore Kid had taken advantage of this psychological condition, without knowing whence it came, and at the end of the eighth had sent Dreem to the floor with a terrific right cross to the jaw. The bell had saved Dreem that time—the crowd recognized this and during the remainder of the fight reminded both The Kid and Dreem of it ten thousand times, in ten thousand cries—hoarse and bloodthirsty.

Their apparent hostility had aroused Billy Dreem's old obstinacy—the bulldog tenacity that had molded his whole life. He had come back with a set look on his face and a grim light in his eyes and had fought thereafter without feeling blows and without remembering his left ear. So the end had come—and now the mob that filtered out through the exits made Billy a little angry. He thought again of what he had read once about Roman gladiators. He himself was a modern gladiator, whose profession it was to offer his body to an opponent to be beaten and bruised and bloodied to excite the passions of the crowd and then to satisfy their pain lusts with blows taken and given. They wanted blood and lots of it. They booed boxers; they cared nothing for science. They paid their money to see blood let and bodies beaten and hurt, and if they had any admiration for Billy Dreem himself, at this moment, it was because he could take punishment gamely. In that flash of vision Billy Dreem knew that he would some day be popular with these fight fans. He would be a successful gladiator, because he was not a boxer—never would be. He was a slugger.

But if they admired him, liked him, paid him big money to fight for them, and encouraged him by their acclaim to go on to the top, what would be their motives? Obviously to see him take blows and give them gamely and with all his strength and viciousness, until he had gone as far up as he could go in the squared circle; after that in the certain knowledge that he was big enough to fall very hard when he did fall! He saw the whole fight game explained. He could build by being a slugging, merciless, game, deadly fighter, and could sweep tens of thousands of partisans along with him to the day of his defeat—and hear their hoarse cries rise as he went down, and then they would acclaim his conqueror, licking their lips and gloating over his fall!

Billy Dreem shrugged. Well, he thought, they would never know why he was a pugilist. Some day he would be trained to the point where he could search out and lick Cud Clark, and after that one gladiator would disappear from the ring, leaving his retirement a mystery! The thought amused Billy. He would get even with them in the end!

Little Jeff thumped his back with a big fist.

"Come on, kid; let's beat it!"

Billy and his party climbed out through the ropes, moving through the loitering fans toward the dressing rooms. A few came forward to congratulate him—hail him as a comer. Billy was abstracted.

"Speak to 'em, you boob!" Little Jeff whispered indignantly. "You look like you was composin' poetry! Give 'em a wave!"

Dreem obeyed, grinning at the faces around him and waving his hand widely. The fragment of the crowd cheered him. He had made some friends, certainly! Little Jeff grabbed his arm.

"Wait a sec, kid! Come on over this way. Waffles is yelling to you!"

Dreem brightened—looked across to locate his friend. Waffle Kelly was standing on a bench yelling excitedly and waving a gigantic red-silk handkerchief. Billy, crossing toward him between the seats, saw him

like a ridiculous statue on a pedestal of benches. He was a short, thin little man, with one leg a trifle longer than the other and with the muscles of the left side of his neck pulling his head down and askew so that he looked for all the world like a sort of comical bird taking a slant at life from a perch. He was dressed, as always, in the height of fashion, which made his commonplace little face and his twisted little body the more grotesque. But he was a man of influence in fight circles. Quite a ring of men stood about him now and Billy recognized several well-known figures in the sporting world of San Francisco. They were curious to see what sort of greeting the new fighter would receive from the famous Waffle Kelly.

The little man did not leave them long in doubt.

"Well, Billy!" he said in his shrill voice, "I guess I'm a picker, eh? Gentlemen, this is my latest discovery and contribution to the noble game of bloodying the human nose! I said he could fight—and now he's on his way to prove it."

Little Jeff spoke out unexpectedly.

"I'll say he's a discovery, all right!" he said irritably. "He's the only fighter in the world that can go fourteen rounds with his right arm wrapped around his neck like a feather boa!"

Kelly caught this up.

"Jeff's right, kid," he said. "What was you trying to do in the sixth and seventh —keep off a sore throat? Or was your left ear cold?"

Billy Dreem colored.

"I got careless then, I'll admit," he said evasively.

"Careless!" Kelly cried. "Say, if that's carelessness I'm a French chop! You was trying to commit suicide, that's what! Don't let me see you doing that sort of thing again or I'll match you against a clerk at a glove counter and get him to slap you on the wrist. Come on now—hustle into your togs and we'll go down to the cellar and break training with a piece of lemon pie!"

Billy was not sorry to go. He knew better than any of them how great had been his risk in those three or four rounds and his ears burned as he remembered that gnawing, sickening fear for his mastoid bone. He shook himself. This old obsession must be conquered—should be conquered!

Kelly watched him go proudly. He spoke to the men around him and they agreed that he had found a fighter—perhaps a great middleweight if he could be loosened up a little. Then as Kelly turned to go with a group of friends he stopped short, with a frown on his face.

Down the aisle Billy Dreem had taken he saw two men moving. Their coat collars were turned up and their hats pulled low but they could not hide from the quick eyes of Waffle Kelly. He quickened his steps. The two ahead disappeared by the door to the dressing rooms that Dreem had passed through a moment before. Kelly turned to his friends.

"Meet you outside, boys," he said. "I got something to 'tend to first. Come along with me, Andy."

He and McNear hurried after that overcoated pair.

"What's up, Kelly?" the transfer man asked.

"That's what I want to find out," Kelly growled.

They threaded their way through narrow corridors—came to Dreem's dressing-room door. The door was open and in it stood the two Kelly had followed. Beyond, Billy Dreem could be seen lying back on a table for the ministrations of Wash Boone, his rubber. Of the two in the door the heavier spoke in a sharp, rough tone that had something of a sneer in it.

"You got visitors, kid," he said. "If you ain't too sick turn over and give us a look at your baby face!"

Billy Dreem turned slowly. Little Jeff, truculent and irascible, jumped forward.

"Say, you big cheese!" he cried angrily, "get out of here or I'll bust a bottle over your head!"

The man in the door did not give the trainer so much as a glance.

"Do you know me, Sissy Sore-ear?" he asked Dreem tauntingly.

Billy spoke coolly.

"Yes, I know you."

"All right. Now I'm going to tell you something."

"Your mouth's open," Billy said quietly. "Go on and work on me, Wash—this big bum doesn't count."

The rubber began slapping and kneading muscles. The visitor in the door glowered.

"You're figuring on getting good, aren't you?" he sneered. "All right, hurry up and

finish the job. Because when you get good enough for me to bother with I'm going to catch you outside your mamma's house some day and I'm going to just—naturally—beat you to death! There, now you know!"

He turned, shouldered Kelly and the sizable Andy McNear aside as though they were children in a school yard, and went away.

Waffle Kelly stepped inside the dressing room.

"Billy," he said in an excited tone, "do you know who that fellow was?"

"Yes, I know him," Dreem replied. "His name is Cud Clark and he used to lick me every few months in school until I made up my mind that I'd get so I could lick him. That's all."

"Great crab!" Kelly cried, with his jaw dropping, "is that the fellow? Andy told me you were after some man. But do you mean that you don't know who he is now?"

"I thought I reco'nized him, somehow," Little Jeff interrupted. "But I can't place him."

"You can't, eh? Well, I can. I've seen his pictures often enough and I met him last fall when I was in New York. This bird you call Clark is known now as Young Corbin—the greatest middleweight alive today, not barring the champion. That's who he is, Billy, and if you've started out to lick him you've got quite a ways to go, son—quite a ways yet, and don't you ever forget that for a single minute!"

CHAPTER V.

At eight o'clock on the morning after his defeat of The Livermore Kid, Billy Dreem reported for work to find a dapper, keen-eyed man of thirty or thereabouts standing by the nose of his truck waiting for him.

"Good morning, Mr. Dreem," the stranger said, holding out a small white hand. "Glad to meet you. My name is Dyce—Tom Dyce."

Dreem took the proffered hand doubtfully. He scented the professional "front" of a salesman.

"Pleased to meet you," he said. "But I've got to be on my way."

"That's all right with me," Dyce said. "I'll go with you. I want to make you a little fast talk."

He gave Billy no chance to refuse his company but climbed at once into the cab of the truck. Dreem smiled and cranked up.

"I don't want to buy anything," he said as he crowded in behind his big wheel.

"Oh, yes you do, only you don't know it yet."

"All right; we won't argue about it. What's your line?"

"Did you see the papers this morning?" Dyce countered.

"You mean the sporting pages? I saw one of them."

"Notice any banner headlines—big type clear across the top of the page—about a fighter named Billy Dreem?"

Billy laughed. He was guiding his truck through traffic and minding his step.

"Well," he confessed lightly, "they didn't exactly crowd everything else off to give me a write-up."

"I'll say they didn't! As far as you are concerned they might as well not have mentioned the man that licked The Livermore Kid. And that's why I came to see you."

"I don't get you."

"You will. I'm a fighter's manager. That's been my business for twelve years. I handled 'Kid' Riveira, and Johnny Despain, and 'One-round' Cassidy, among others. I've quit 'em all, one after the other, because they're all dead ones. I want to manage you because you're a live one. Some day you're going to be the middleweight champion of the world."

"I hope so," Billy grinned.

"I know it. I don't talk to hear myself, Dreem. I've got this fight game all learned by heart. I've picked winners ever since I was fifteen years old. The men I've managed have all started good but they've shown a yellow streak. I watched you last night and I saw right away that you've got the makings of a champ in you. I'll admit I'd never heard of you before, but I took a shine to you from the first minute you put up your gloves. I said: 'Here's a young fellow with the stuff and Tom Dyce is the lad to take him clear to the top!'"

"But I don't need a manager. And I couldn't pay one if I did."

"Say, listen, Dreem; if you can find anybody that'll prove to you that Tom Dyce doesn't watch out for Number One you can tell me that I'm ripe for the nut pickers, but not before! As far as paying me goes, leave that to me. As far as needing me,

you don't know what you need. And that's what I'm here this morning to tell you."

He spun an age-old tale. Baubles of fame and riches he dangled before Billy Dreem's eyes. He wove "Arabian Nights'" stories of undreamed splendors. He was the Aladdin to rub Billy Dreem's lamp and bring the wonders and the wealth of Bagdad to his hand! Billy Dreem sat quietly, without comment, but he was impressed and Dyce knew it. What he did not know was that Billy was thinking nothing of wealth, fame, power—the magic of success as a world-famous pugilist. He was thinking of advancing the day when Cud Clark, now known as Young Corbin, could be humiliated and beaten down and shunted to oblivion, and the old score paid!

"Well, that's what I'm going to do for you, Dreem," Dyce finished with magnificent assurance. "The morning papers treated you like a dog catcher. What you need is a press agent, to begin with. That's my middle name. Wait, now! Don't say anything till I'm through. You're going to say that you don't care about having your name in the papers. You've got to forget that! You've got to learn to like it—to eat it up—to live on it and for it—or else you've got to get out of the fight game."

"I don't see why."

"I'll tell you why. Now'days a fighter's success doesn't depend on his having a punch in both hands—it depends on the public knowing he has. If every fight fan in America recognized the name of Billy Dreem whenever they saw it you'd be on your way to the top right now. If nobody knows your name you could go on licking four middleweights every night of your life and it wouldn't buy you a square meal! Because, if people don't know about you, you're not going to get a chance to lick a postage stamp in a fight ring.

"I'm not going to argue with you. I'm going to show you. I don't want any money from you. For now I don't even want a contract. I only want you to promise me one thing."

"What is that?"

"That you'll tell me your whole life history—everything—and then that you won't deny anything the papers say about you. Give me two weeks. In that time I'll have every fight follower in the West talking about you and I'll bring you a challenge from one of the real welterweights or middleweights around here, with a fight promoter's promise of a purse that will make truck driving mean nothing in your life. Now, don't be foolish! What's the word?"

"But what are you going to say in the papers?" Billy demanded.

"I'm going to put you across, don't you hear me telling you? What difference what I say? I'd confess that I murdered my wife if it would get me publicity! I won't hurt you any—don't worry. I'll only draw on my imagination some, maybe."

"I'm afraid of it," Billy objected. "I don't like it."

"All right, then. I guess I sized you up wrong. I'll get off at the next corner and not bother you any more."

"Wait a minute. I didn't say I wouldn't do it. If you'd give me a day or two to think it over——"

"Fine! By that time your licking The Livermore Kid would be as dead around a newspaper office as a battle story hot from the fields of the Civil War! To-day I can have you discovered—to-morrow you'll be as uninteresting as Queen Victoria!"

"I wish you'd tell me what you're going to publish?"

"I don't publish anything. I never work that way. I give the newspaper guys hot tips and they think they've discovered you themselves. So I can't tell what they'll write, can I?"

Billy Dreem had had no experience with managers. He wanted to consult with Andy McNear and Little Jeff and Waffle Kelly. But also he wanted to get ready to lick Cud Clark and have it over with. He was not impatient but on the other hand he recognized the truth of what Dyce said about publicity and its value to any professional sport and the people engaged therein. It was perfectly apparent that he might spend useless months—perhaps years—marking time while more enterprising and better managed fighters passed him and went on toward the top.

"Well," he said slowly, "I guess I can afford to take a chance if you can, Mr. Dyce. Now, you want me to tell you about myself. There's mighty little to tell."

"Shoot the dope. I'll pick out something that'll land 'em!"

The one story that would have made Dyce hysterical with press-agent's madness was the story Billy Dreem did not unfold—the tale of his three fights with Cud Clark,

his vow to punish that rival, and the discovery he had made the night before that his enemy was Young Corbin, the famous eastern middleweight. That story only two or three people knew, and he did not propose to enlarge the circle. So he gave Tom Dyce what he had. It was little enough. But Dyce, like most publicity agents, was not to be hampered by a trifle like the lack of facts.

Before eleven o'clock he and Billy Dreem had sealed their oral bargain. Dyce left the truck driver with enthusiastic assurances that the next morning's papers would broadcast his fame to the world. Billy was a little anxious and very doubtful. He was also a little ashamed, after the magnetism of Dyce's presence was removed. He had committed himself to a bold move without consulting his three good friends. And every minute that passed made it harder for him to frame the explanation. The ultimate result was unfortunate. Very nearly it cost Billy Dreem his career and all his promise, his hopes, his ambition, and his steady purpose in life. But that came later.

It was after four o'clock before the first of the news hounds found him. Dyce, wise to the ways of the game, knew that the favor of the sporting editors of morning papers was of more value to him and his new protégé than was the favor of the gentlemen in the same capacities on the afternoon papers. He had, therefore, kept the story "under cover" until too late for any evening paper to grab it. The result was that he was furnishing the morning men with brand-new dope. They snapped it up—for he had offered it to them sugar-coated with sensation.

His first experience with the reporters was an unhappy one for Billy Dreem. He had run into them before—knew some of them by sight. But they had never descended on him in force, paper and pencil in hand and eyes gleaming with insatiable curiosity, and he came near to making a mess of the whole project. He had promised Tom Dyce not to deny anything, yet on the other hand his whole instinct was to be straightforward and direct. His resultant confusion was interpreted in various ways by the various men who came to interview him. All of them got a story. But a few of the wiser old heads among them looked down their noses as they questioned Billy and afterward as they wrote their articles. Was there something shady about this fellow Dreem? Was he holding something in reserve? Was he all he made himself out to be—or less—or more? And those questions remained in their minds for a long time—came up again, fresh and startling, when later developments made them menacing and deadly doubts that turned the scales against Billy and cost him grief and bitterness and misunderstanding and abject humiliation.

For the moment, however, the success of Tom Dyce's campaign exceeded even that worthy's fondest hopes The papers blazed with the story of Billy Dreem, the sensational find of Waffle Kelly and of big Andy McNear, the well-known clubman, business man and sportsman. Billy, the papers said, had been born of poor San Francisco parents. He had had a terrible struggle with poverty and ill health. He had made himself a fighter by the most amazing routine of training. He was almost wholly untaught. The training given him by Little Jeff was discounted—his own efforts magnified. He had licked The Livermore Kid without anything that the average fighter would call scientific training and almost at a moment's notice.

And so on and so on.

"Well, Billy," Andy McNear said, the following day, "it looks like you've busted into the limelight to stay! You were given almost as much space as the latest divorce scandal this morning. How did it happen?"

Billy side-stepped. He was still ashamed of his association with Dyce, not because of that little gentleman's personality or efforts but because he had taken him on without consulting his friends. So he evaded questions.

It was Little Jeff who wormed the secret from him a week later.

It came after Dyce had talked Billy into getting himself a real trainer—and after Dreem had signed iron-clad articles of agreement putting himself in the hands of Dyce as manager and financial guardian. The thing had been rushed through, with Billy talked off his feet. The new trainer had been Dyce's first demand. He literally ordered Billy Dreem to report in the morning to Johnson Slade, an ex-prize fighter, whose name Billy had heard and whose reputation, he believed, was none too savory. But again he had been talked into silence. So he had to go to Little Jeff and confess.

Jeff heard the story in silence. When it was finished he shrugged his wide shoulders.

"Tom Dyce, eh?" he said. "All right, that let's me out! Dyce? Do you know what's the matter with Dyce? Well, I'll tell you, Dreem, to save you finding out for yourself. Dyce is loaded!"

CHAPTER VI.

Johnson Slade, Billy Dreem's new trainer, was a hard, brutal, vicious character with only one thing to recommend him—he could teach fighting. Not boxing. Slade had no use for boxers. To him pugilism was a game of exchanging blows and he thought Tom Sharkey the greatest fighter he had ever seen because of his ability to give and take sledge-hammer punches and come back for more. He had no more heart than a stone. Sentiment was anathema. His pupils were either worn out or disgusted during his training, or else they became bloody fighters with no more compunctions about seriously injuring an adversary than they had about shaking hands with him. If anything, less. Usually they were not the sort of men who shook hands except under necessity.

Tom Dyce, also, to do him credit, did understand the fight game. He had been raised in it and to him the use of any means was justified if they brought results. His choice of Slade for Billy Dreem was in line with his knowledge. The moment he had seen Billy as a possible contender for high pugilistic honors he had sensed that the young man was clean, square and determined. He had not been taught to box and therefore he would not last long. But while he did last, Dyce reckoned, he would be a popular slugger who could draw blood —and shed it.

To him, then, Billy was only a marketable commodity. What he needed was brutalizing. He needed to have the gentleman mauled out of him. He had to be transformed, if possible, into a cold, mechanical, senseless fighting machine—and Johnson Slade was the man to perform the operation.

Within ten days Dyce had matched Billy against a rough-and-ready slugger called "Sailor" Bartlett. Dyce insisted that his fighter must really train for the bout; against Dreem's better judgment he left Andy McNear's employ, drew his money from a savings bank and spent every penny of it training with Johnson Slade. He had five weeks in which to get ready.

Andy McNear was inclined to be a little angry with Billy, as he had a right to be, and Billy felt his wrath keenly. Waffle Kelly talked McNear into a more amiable frame of mind.

"The kid probably got an arm talked off him by that jackanapes Dyce, Andy," he said. "If he don't get wise to his new friends pretty soon you can clean and stuff me and serve me as shoulder of veal!"

"But it's damned ingratitude!" McNear grumbled.

"Oh, no it ain't, Andy. It's just youth. Wait a bit and you'll see."

Billy Dreem was having his own particular punishment in the meantime. Slade was a heartless taskmaster, rough, brutal, merciless. His first discovery was Billy's obstinate bulldog determination and he played on that. When Billy objected to instructions given him or the ethics Slade outlined, the trainer would say carelessly:

"All right, you big bag of meal, you! You ain't fit to be a fighter. You ought to be pushing wheel chairs. Go on and get yourself a job in a old ladies' home!"

Billy would buckle down then to prove his tutor wrong. He didn't realize that the opinion of men like Slade was of no possible value. He had an objective and Dyce and Slade and their associates and cronies seemed to be helping him toward it. He had Young Corbin to lick!

The process of brutalizing Dreem went ahead slowly but the process of making a punishing fighter of him boomed. Day by day, with road work, bag punching, weight lifting and rope skipping Billy's wind and muscles improved rapidly. He became bigger in every way, with his weight kept down under one hundred and sixty by the most grueling sort of program. He fought for an hour every day and sometimes twice a day—fought the worst sluggers Johnson Slade could bribe, hire or taunt into facing his pupil. The new sort of work sickened Billy Dreem but he stuck to it manfully. It was mere bloody slaughter, with himself for a victim sometimes, his sparring partners usually. When he was most disgusted he would think of Cud Clark.

His hardest times came when he thought of the mysterious little girl he had seen

in Waffle Kelly's, because everything about his new life would, he felt, have been particularly revolting to her. He was still looking for her—still seeing her occasionally on the screen. But she seemed to be always in unimportant parts, and he could not understand it. To him at least she was the perfection of grace, beauty, charm and ability. In fact he knew that she had those qualities for he found other people around him often speaking of the girl—wondering, as he did, who she was.

His fight with Sailor Bartlett justified all that Dyce had said of him through the newspapers—all that the sporting editors had been led to promise for it. It lasted eleven rounds and was a toe-to-toe battle throughout. Once the big sailor found Billy Dreem's left ear. It was a glancing blow and not one calculated to do much damage but it sent Billy flying to cover—white and panicky. The ringside experts saw this and marveled. The referee noticed it. Some of the fans glimpsed it. Luckily the only man concerned who did not realize what had happened was Bartlett himself. He was a man of low intelligence—little more than a big, savage animal. He went on slugging—hitting where and when he could. Billy recovered. In the tenth round he battered down his opponent's guard and beat him to the floor. At the very beginning of the eleventh round he sent in rights and left in trip-hammer tempo—ended the fight with a smashing blow over the heart that would have felled an ox.

Billy had gone into the contest a new discovery, with his whole future before him and the betting odds against him.

He came out a sensational popular favorite, with tongues wagging even as the crowds rose to leave of the possibility that Tom Dyce had unearthed a new contender for championship honors.

Nothing succeeds like success, but even that is exceeded by success when it is heralded from the housetops, talked of, discussed, blazoned forth in the newspapers, and mentioned—the crowning honor of all—by the comedians in vaudeville shows! Tom Dyce may have been, as Little Jeff had declared, a "loaded" Dyce, but he was certainly a great publicity agent. In a week Billy Dreem was the talk of the town and half a dozen fighters were virtually camping on his doorstep to get a match with him.

Striking while the iron was hot Dyce put up his price sharply. Billy Dreem wouldn't go into a ring for less than a thousand dollars, win, lose or draw, and if anybody wanted him for a real fight it meant a division of the gate with the promoters and nothing less! Billy himself was aghast at his manager's effrontery. But Dyce knew his business. Inside of three days after the Sailor Bartlett event Billy was matched to fight to a finish with "Uncle Tom" Perkins, a negro, and one of the best middleweights on the Pacific coast.

Bill Dreem won, in the ninth round, with a knock-out, and his share of the spoils was eighteen hundred dollars. But Dyce came to him after the fight with a worried and somewhat angry look in his eyes.

"What were you trying to do in the sixth, Billy?" the little manager demanded. "Did you have an earache, or were you counting your own pulse?"

Billy colored.

"That was the time Perkins hit me under the ear," he said simply.

"You don't say? Well, what if he did hit you under the ear? He could have hit a mosquito there with that blow he sent over and not stopped him drawing steady at his meal! What do you mean—hit you under the ear?"

For the first time Billy told his manager of the mastoid injury, the succeeding operation and the surgeon's warning about it, though he did not explain the cause of the injury.

"I see," Dyce said thoughtfully, and there was a momentary gleam in his eye that was not explained by anything that followed. "All right. Your left ear has got your goat. We'll have somebody look at it and see if it's really dangerous to get poked there. You've got to get over that ear stuff or you'll be carried out of the ring some night soon in a long basket with a place for flowers left on top!"

A surgeon made an examination. He assured Billy that there was no reason for him to worry about the effects of a blow on that sensitive point unless the old injury became aggravated or the old wounds troubled him.

"I wouldn't tell anybody about the sore place, though, Dreem," the doctor said. "If it got around that you had a weak spot your goose would be cooked right then."

Billy told no one—went back to work with Johnson Slade. Slade was not sup-

posed to know of that mastoid sensitiveness himself, yet by an odd coincidence he began pounding the side of Billy's head and telling his training crew to do the same. This made Billy angry; presently he felt that he had mastered his old obsession, for the blows ceased to bother him.

After the Perkins fight Dyce branched out. Billy Dreem was recognized as a contender for Pacific-coast honors, and there was no trouble in getting him matches. He fought with almost clocklike regularity now, twice a month. Dyce was a clever manager. He chose only men he was confident Dreem would beat, and when he was fooled he was lucky enough to get a draw to save his face. Billy Dreem went forging ahead. And, as a winner and much sought after, Billy, through Dyce, was able to make the challengers come to him in San Francisco. Dyce, short-sighted, avaricious and tricky, made one serious mistake. He had appraised Billy Dreem as a flash in the pan —good for a short life as a fighter, and then suddenly blown up. Therefore he began figuring on making a killing for himself before it was too late.

About eight months passed, then one day came two offers almost together that set the manager to thinking fast. One offer was from a motion-picture concern that wanted Billy Dreem to appear in a feature film, at a tempting figure; the second a proposition that Billy meet in Los Angeles a seasoned veteran of the middleweight class known as "Knock-out" Kavinsky. The bout was to be programed as a challenge match for the championship of the West, which Kavinsky claimed and which he had held for some time by a sort of default, since there was no such scheduled championship known. The offer was to include a sixty-forty division of one half the gate receipts.

Dyce spent a night thinking these two offers over, without mentioning them to Billy Dreem. In the morning he sent four telegrams. One went to the motion-picture manager, and demanded twice the money offered, but stipulated that Dreem should be left to believe that he was getting only the smaller amount. The difference was to be Dyce's graft. The second wire went to the fight promoter. It urged that Dreem had an excellent chance to win and proposed that the half share of the gate receipts that was to be divided between the two fighters should be divided on a basis of seventy-five to the winner and twenty-five to the loser.

The two other telegrams were not signed Dyce. They were signed Jack Moore. They went to a pool-room proprietor and gambling commissioner named Forcythe, in San Diego, and to Knock-out Kavinsky himself, and Tom Dyce took particular care to see that no one knew of their filing with the telegraph operator.

Two days later answers came to all the four dispatches. The fight promoter agreed to the new proposition; the motion-picture man wired: "You're on—and so am I;" and the other two answers were simply: "Yes."

So Tom Dyce told Billy Dreem that he had reached the end of his first stage as a pugilist—that he was come into the big money and "the big time" at last—and on the following day Johnson Slade, a fox-faced rubber and physical trainer named Moody, Tom Dyce and Billy Dreem left for Los Angeles in Dyce's big automobile.

The first project to be attended to was the picture. Billy Dreem went to work two days after his arrival—and the studio life was a revelation to him. Several days were spent in test photographing, in teaching him to work under the glaring blue-white lights of the "sets," and in giving him the rudiments of knowledge concerning acting for the screen.

Then the actual scenes themselves were begun.

The story was simple. The hero of the piece was a young college man seeking money to pay a debt of honor for the father of his sweetheart. As he was an athlete he turned to prize fighting. In the end he wins a match with a famous pugilist and brings down the house and the money and the prize fighter all with one punch in the jaw. Billy Dreem was to take the punch, and in due time he did.

But meanwhile his work kept him several hours each day in and about the studio. He had come south hoping that he would find some trace of the girl he had seen once in Waffle Kelly's, but his first glimpse of Hollywood had disabused his mind of the original notion that every one in pictures worked in a small neighborhood and that any one in the business could be found merely by standing on a street corner and keeping an eye open. As a matter of fact the studios were scattered over many

miles—with thousands of people hurrying and rushing and swarming over all of them and in between—and Billy grew tired looking for one familiar face in all the swarms he found about him.

At the end of three weeks his work at the studio was done, for the moment. The director wanted to finish some other scenes and then come to the big fight episode, when any possible injury to his hero would not interrupt the taking of the rest of the picture. So Billy Dreem, with a good deal of relief, went out to the big barn Tom Dyce had engaged as training quarters. He fell into the grind of training with zest. Dyce and the others kept talking of the glory, the money and the future that would be assured when Knock-out Kavinsky was put away, five weeks later.

Billy Dreem only nodded. He was thinking how much nearer he would be to fighting Cud Clark, now Young Corbin, the middleweight star of the East.

He had been training for two weeks and was beginning to round into splendid shape when a message came from the studio asking him to report for the final picture that afternoon.

Tom Dyce took him out.

And the first person he saw on the lot was the girl he had defended in Kelly's Waffle Cellar.

CHAPTER VII.

Knock-out Kavinsky was the sort of prize fighter that makes champions possible but who never develops real first-water ability himself. Such men are second-raters by temperament as well as by talents; they lack the stuff of which, with very few exceptions, champions are made.

Such was Kavinsky—a beetle-browed, thick-necked, loud-mouthed youth of twenty-three, vain, swaggering, self-sufficient and unscrupulous. His assumption of the title of middleweight champion of the West was typical of him. There was no such title—no such classification—but it sounded good to Knock-out, he had the nerve to appropriate it, and he managed to hold it against all challengers for a considerable period of time. Probably he was the best middleweight, for the moment, in the West, but that wasn't the claim he made. "Champion" was his arrogated title.

His manager was a smooth-faced, well-dressed, plausible individual named Aronson.

Behold these two worthies, Knock-out and his slick manager, in the back room of an unsavory hotel, waiting somewhat impatiently and beginning to express grumbling doubts of the party with whom they had an appointment; then behold, slipping almost furtively into the room, Mr. Thomas Bailey Dyce, manager for Billy Dreem, and a large, florid gentleman of the name of Mitch Forcythe, from San Diego.

"Well, you certainly took your time, Dyce," Davvy Aronson growled disagreeably. "What d'you think we are—a coupla suckers that you can date up and then keep 'em waiting an hour already?"

Dyce smiled imperturbably.

"At the last minute I had to run my boy out to the studios to finish a picture he's making," he said. "This is my friend, Mitch Forcythe, gents. Mitch, this is Davvy Aronson, and the big kid over there is Knock-out Kavinsky."

There were the usual amenities—cut short.

"This ain't a pink tea, Dyce!" Aronson objected. "Shoot in your piece and don't waste a lot of time making only bows!"

"It won't take me long," Dyce said easily, although he lowered his voice unconsciously. "You boys have got a notion what I want, and I've brought Mr. Forcythe in to figure out his share of the business."

"Is Mr. Forcythe a fight manager or is he something else maybe?"

"He is a bookmaker and gambling commissioner."

"Oh, that's it."

"That's it. I'll make my proposition brief. To begin with this boy Dreem of mine, if he doesn't run under wraps, can put Knock-out to sleep in three rounds."

"How do you get that way?" Kavinsky growled belligerently.

"Let's not waste time arguing," Dyce snapped. "If you really want to fight him and take a twenty-five-per-cent cut of half the gate this conference is adjourned right now. Because that's what you'll get—and a sore neck and probably a broken jaw into the bargain."

"Shut up, Knock-out!" Aronson said. "Let Dyce talk, so he gets it off his chest anyhow!"

"Knock-out," Dyce resumed evenly, "hasn't got a chance against this bird—if

Dreem is right. Between Forcythe and the newspapers and me we can work up good odds, with Dreem a strong favorite. The San Francisco fans are sold to Billy and their money is going to come down here to talk for them. You know that fight odds on a match between two men who've never met and who haven't fought but one or two men in common are liable to be any old way. We can get five to three, and maybe better, that Dreem will win. And if you play the game right Forcythe can make it two to one."

"Go on!" Kavinsky growled, watching Dyce's face closely.

"I am. Billy Dreem has one weakness—as far as I've found out, it's his only one. He's afraid of his left ear."

Kavinsky laughed.

"I thought you said this bird was a scrapper!" he sneered.

Dyce didn't turn a hair.

"If you think he isn't, we'll let the bout go as she lies, on the level," he said, with a cold stare.

"Will you shut up your trap, Knock-out!" Aronson cried impatiently. "Already we've got nothing from Dyce but noise. He hasn't said yet anything that listens like money to me."

"I'll come to that next, Davvy," Dyce said. "My man has got that sore ear—but he's got something else on his mind, too. I didn't know till this afternoon what it was. It was just luck that I found out. It's a skirt."

"You mean he ain't training right?" Kavinsky demanded eagerly.

"I don't mean anything of the kind! You don't know this boy. He has never smoked nor drank in his life and his idea of late hours is a quarter past nine. He's clean! No, the trouble with Dreem is that he's fallen for a movie girl and she won't even look at him."

"How do you know she won't?" Forcythe cut in. "From what I know of the chickens in that business——"

"Because I've seen the girl," Dyce interrupted. "I don't know where they'd met before, but this afternoon, when I delivered Dreem at the canned-play factory he walked right into the sweetest little kid I've seen in many a year. I ain't pulling any sob stuff, gentlemen; I want to tell you that if I had a sister I'd want her to be like this Aline Hines."

"Is this a business fest, already, or is it a scene out of 'Turn to the Right?'" Aronson sneered.

"It'll be the place where you get your ugly face slapped in a minute, Aronson!" Dyce retorted angrily. "Do you think I'd waste my time coming up here to talk about sweet girls to a couple of bums like you and your pug?"

Kavinsky muttered an oath and Aronson paled and started to his feet. Forcythe, the big gambler, broke in soothingly.

"You aren't getting anywhere, folks!" he said, shoving Aronson into his seat good-humoredly. "Let Dyce tell his story and don't keep cutting in on him."

"Well, maybe some time he'll get to the money!" Aronson said, with a sigh. "Go on with your business, Tom."

"Dreem walked up to this girl looking as though he'd found a friend, but she didn't know him. He had to tell her who he was and then there was something about a meeting in San Francisco where he'd licked a roughneck for her. I didn't get it straight. But I could see in a minute that somebody had horned in between them and given the girl a bum steer. She was as cold as stone. She walked away. And I thought Billy Dreem was going to go down for the count right there on the sidewalk. He was hard hit."

"He'll forget it!" Kavinsky suggested.

"You don't know this boy of mine," Dyce said. "He's as serious as a preacher. I could tell you a lot of things about him to prove it, but you'll have to take my word for it that this girl business is going to bother him. If I pass the word to Slade, our trainer, he can work Dreem stale in three days. And I'll put in my touches with a doctor and an examination of that sore ear of his."

"I got it straight now what you dope out," Aronson said. "We work the odds up, Dreem takes a licking, and we clean up on the betting. But how about the rest of it? Framing fights is already a ticklish business, Mr. Dyce, and there has got to be in it more than a few measly dollars that I should run the risk I got to be found out by some of these here smart newspaper fellers!"

"You talk as though you were the only one in the room with a reputation," Dyce sneered. "I've made my proposition now; you can take it or leave it."

"Is that all you got it to offer?" Aronson exploded.

"That's all."

Aronson rose excitedly.

"Well, all I got to say is, you can take your frame-up out and give it to the newspapers, for all me!"

"Except," Dyce went on, as though he had been interrupted, "that I'll have to have my cut of the winner's purse."

"Yow!" Aronson screamed, covering his ears. "Already you offer us nothing, then you want half of that!"

"I do. If you don't like it you can send Knock-out into the ring on the thirtieth and when he comes out you can hire an ambulance and take him to the Home for the Aged—at your own expense. Because when Dreem gets through with him he'll be through."

"How about that tender ear of his?" Kavinsky sneered. "I don't need nothing more than a hint to get to working on that."

"If I hire a doctor to tell Dreem that his ear is all right—as it is—you can work at it till you break a hand and he'll laugh in your face!" Dyce retorted.

"What was it all this talk about his ear, then?" Aronson exclaimed.

"If you had brains instead of bone in that dome of yours you would see," Dyce replied coolly. "I tell you this boy of mine is serious-minded. He believes anything he's told. If a surgeon tells him, a day before the fight, that he's got a mastoid gathering coming on again, one tap on that ear will send him to cover and he could be licked by any ten-year-old kid!"

"Why shouldn't we send the doctor to tell him that?" Kavinsky suggested, struck with his own brilliant idea.

Dyce laughed.

"When you send a doctor to him, with me watching, Knock-out," he said, "you'd better send two other doctors to patch the first one up. Because Dreem would throw him through the training quarters walls!"

There was silence in the room. Dyce was a convincing talker—more than that, both Aronson and Kavinsky had known him for years and they knew that he always told the truth when he was engaged in framing anything. If they had met him on the street or in a club and he had been trying to win the fight for his man with propaganda they would not have believed a word of his, and they would have been right. Now that he proposed to double cross his own fighter they knew that every syllable he spoke was spotless truth.

"What cut do you want already we should give you from Knock-out's share of the gate?" Aronson demanded at last, weakly.

"Thirty per cent!" Dyce said instantly. "You can do what you like with the rest. That's between you and your fighter. Out of my share I take care of my friend Forcythe, here."

"I got to talk it over with Kavinsky," Aronson said, rising slowly. "You give us fifteen minutes——"

"You can talk it over with Kavinsky right here," Dyce interrupted. "We're all of us in this thing or none of us are. And if you think I'm going to let you take that boiler maker of yours out in the hall to frame a double cross on me you're even crazier than you look, which is saying a good deal, Aronson!"

Aronson sat down once more.

"Well, Knock-out," he said, "what do you say about it this scheme?"

The prize fighter looked at his big hands.

"I leave it to you, Davvy," he replied.

"Ain't you got maybe a idea or two in that cranium which you call it a head?"

"I ain't paid to have ideas. I'm paid to fight."

"That's lucky, or starving is the best you'd get it!" Aronson retorted. "Well, Dyce," he said, "I suppose already you've got papers drawed to sign, ain't you?"

"Naturally," Dyce responded genially. "I've played with you before, Davvy. Here they are."

Aronson read them carefully. Then he read them again. He balked, backed, filled, objected, brought up imaginary points and submitted hypothetical questions. Dyce only shrugged.

"Take it or leave it," he said to every argument.

Aronson signed. Knock-out signed—in an unintelligible scrawl.

Dyce signed.

Forcythe looked at them in amazement.

"You don't mean that you're going to have a written agreement on a thing as shady as this!" he exclaimed.

Dyce nodded complacently.

"But what good would it do you? Suppose any one of you wanted to break faith

—you couldn't take such a thing as that paper into court!"

"No," Dyce agreed, "that's right. We don't go into court—Aronson and I, do we, Davvy?"

Aronson scowled and shook his head. He would not meet the other manager's eye.

"You see," Dyce said eloquently, "this is just a little memorandum—for use in case Davvy here should find his memory falling down on him—again!"

CHAPTER VIII.

As the gong sounded for the beginning of the main event—a finish fight between Knock-out Kavinsky, of Los Angeles, and Billy Dreem, of San Francisco—ten thousand fans leaned forward in their seats, the southern California contingent to watch every movement of Dreem's, a stranger to them, and the visitors from central and northern California and other parts of the West to appraise the shifty and low-browed Kavinsky whom most of them were seeing for the first time. The papers had been full of the fight for three or four weeks. Manipulation by a past master in the art, Mitch Forcythe, the Tia Juana bookmaker, had brought the odds to two to one with Dreem the favorite. Ninety per cent of the men in the house had some money staked on the outcome of the fight; the bulk of this money had been handled by Forcythe and other gambling commissioners who had made secret books on the bout. The arena was jammed. Only four men present knew what the outcome would be. The rest were there because they didn't know.

As Billy Dreem rose to the tap of the bell his eyes, wandering a little from his antagonist, caught sight of three faces in a close-up row just behind the ringside seats. His heart, already beating slowly and feeling like lead in his breast, sank lower. For days he had felt certain that he was going to be beaten. Everything was against him. He had been warned by a surgeon that there was an inflammation threatening in the mastoid process behind his left ear—and he had believed it—had actually suffered some pain from it. He had gone stale, he knew, although Johnson Slade kept telling him he was fit. He had heard nothing but menacing reports from the camp of his opponent. He was sick, worn out, jaded, below par. On top of that was the dull pain at the treatment he had received from Aline Hines. He tried not to think of that—and he failed.

Now, at the very beginning of the contest with Kavinsky, he had sighted in that front row the faces of Waffle Kelly, Andy McNear and his old trainer, Little Jeff. They wore expectant, hopeful, cheering faces—and Billy Dreem was going to disappoint them! It was the last bitter stab! He shook his head and advanced.

From that moment he knew nothing: as though he had risen and walked into a fog of stupor all consciousness left him. His subconscious mind governed his body, directing nerves and muscles automatically. To the watching crowds he was a fighter, unexpectedly torpid, stupid, slow. Round after round he responded to the call of the bell, he fought stubbornly and at times viciously, he dropped his gloved hands when the round was ended and returned to his corner, to repeat the performance at the next bell tap. But Billy Dreem was not there. It was his shadow that faced Knock-out Kavinsky—his ghost that was laid prone in the tenth round, amid storms of protest, angry shouts, confusion—a babel of noise created by a milling multitude of puzzled, wrathful, cheated fight fans.

Late in the afternoon of the third day Billy Dreem awoke in a hospital. Bewildered, and hard ridden by an unaccountable feeling of depression, he turned his head on his pillow. A familiar voice greeted him.

"Well, old kid, how are they coming? Feeling better? That's the boy! But if you can't snore then I hope they make me up into roast-beef sandwiches! Easy, there!"

It was Waffle Kelly, his crooked little head cocked, his homely face working, his hands trembling.

Billy Dreem sat up.

"What am I doing here?" he demanded.

"Well, now, son," Kelly replied nervously, "if you ask me I'd say you were taking the rest cure. The doctors have some fancy names for it, but if rest is sleep and sleep is breathing hard and noisy I'd say that you had old Rip van Winkle left at the post!"

Billy looked at his hands, shook himself slightly, swung his feet out of the bed and laughed.

"What happened to the fight?" he asked. "Or hasn't it come off yet?"

Waffle Kelly looked away, confused and embarrassed.

"It has—come off."

"I don't remember anything about it. Not after the first bell tapped and I caught a glimpse of you and Andy McNear and Little Jeff. What happened?"

"You got it," Kelly said, slowly, and impressively, "in the neck!"

Billy sighed.

"I knew that I was going to but I didn't know I had," he said. "Kelly, something hit me before Kavinsky ever touched me with a glove."

"I know it, son."

"I was worried and a little yellow, I guess, but I couldn't understand why."

"I know that, too."

"I was doped before I went into the ring."

"I know that."

"Good Lord, how?"

"Found out. Andy and I. We've been on the trail ever since you stood up to be introduced the afternoon of the fight. Andy and Little Jeff and I all saw that something was wrong. We've been taking turns watching you ever since and when we weren't here we were out scouting. We've found out a few things—by six o'clock to-night we'll know the rest."

"It was a frame-up then?"

"It was."

"What are the fans saying—and the papers? Am I in on the mess at all?"

"I'm afraid, son," Kelly said, shaking his head dispiritedly, "that you're through with the fight game."

It was the one piece of news Billy Dreem had not expected. All this news had come to him in a rush, out of a clear sky. His mind had been a blank and on that blank surface had suddenly been written an amazing story. The climax shook him to his roots. He lay back on the bed with a groan.

"What'll I do, Kelly?" he cried. "I can't quit!" Suddenly he sat up again. "Where are my clothes? Help me get things together, Kelly. I've got to get out of here and get to work."

His eyes gleamed, his face flushed and his back straightened.

"Through with the fight game?" he cried. "I have only just begun with it. I'm going to stay in it if I have to lick every fight fan, every promoter and every pugilist in America, taking them one by one! Now give me my clothes. I'm going!"

Protests, prayers and objections were alike in vain with the thoroughly aroused fighter. He had come out of his long sleep refreshed and with his body cleaned of poison and his mind suddenly released from the torture of mental sickness. Now he had an impelling motive to immediate and violent action. His jaw set and his eyes took on a dangerous light. In five minutes he was dressed and ready. Three days' growth of beard on his face gave him a savage and unkempt look—his clothes were rumpled and made him appear bigger than he was. The expression on his face was that of a grim, determined, dangerous man.

With Waffle Kelly trailing, half admiring, half afraid—this was the man who, in the lower hallway of the hospital, ran squarely into Andy McNear, Little Jeff, and a stranger. Greetings were cut short. Kelly explained what had happened to Dreem. Billy himself fumed and fretted with impatience.

Andy McNear spoke up.

"Are you really all right now, Billy?" he asked sharply.

"I never was better in my life."

"You ought to be weak from sleeping so long—being so sick as you were day before yesterday."

"Maybe I ought to be. But I'm not. What Kelly told me cured all that."

"Fine. Then I'll tell you what we've found out."

He led them to a reception room—closed the door.

"Dreem, this is Mr. Raymond, a detective."

The two shook hands hurriedly.

"Tell Dreem, Raymond."

"The fight was framed against you, Dreem; you know that?"

"Yes. But not who did it."

"We don't know that yet, except that Kavinsky and his manager, Aronson, were in on it. But we suspect the fight promoter."

"Where is my manager—Dyce?"

"He was summoned out of town by a wire the evening after the fight. The sporting editors looked him up and found that out. But they think he was straight. They saw him buy his tickets and get on his train. He left a letter for you care of the *Bulletin*."

"Go ahead."

"The charge is that you and Aronson got together, with a gambler named Forcythe."

"I never saw Kavinsky before the fight

and I don't know any gamblers, Forcythe or others. But let that go."

"I am—for the present. Our operatives have been working with your friends here ever since an hour after the fight, and it looks as though there is to be some sort of a split of the loot to-night."

"Do you know when and where?"

"Not yet. But we expect to find out ahead of time and if we don't our men will shadow Kavinsky and Aronson and let us know where they go."

"What are you planning to do about it?"

McNear replied. "We are going to notify the district attorney and the chief of police——"

"No you're not!" Billy snapped. "Listen to me, folks. This is no time to be fooling with the law. Some one might slip up and spoil the whole game. If Raymond finds out for us where this meeting is to take place I want to go to it."

"You!" Kelly exploded. "Not on your life. You'd do nothing except to spill the beans and get into a fight with Kavinsky."

"Well?" Billy Dreem said quietly. "What if I did?"

"What if you did? He'd lick you and then——"

"Lick me? If he does I'll go into open court and confess that I took money for throwing the fight to him! Don't let's talk about that. One thing more. I want every sporting editor in Los Angeles tipped off to this meeting—I want them all there."

Rapidly, clearly, surely he outlined his plan—reinforced it with succinct, convincing arguments that were like blows. Raymond and McNear suggested slight amendments. No one thought of opposing Billy Dreem longer. He dominated them all. His usual reticence, modesty, quiet demeanor, were thrown off him as a cloak. His steady, burning rage turned him into a grown man—able, alert, incisive, sure. It was his enterprise they joined together to consummate and he was their leader in it.

At twenty minutes past ten that night, with Billy Dreem leading, eleven men burst in that little back room in the frowsy hotel where the conspirators had met three weeks before. The morning papers and two of the afternoon sheets were represented. Two detectives, the fight promoter himself, Little Jeff, McNear and Waffle Kelly were in the party that entered.

Four men staggered up from a small table in the center of the room. The table was overturned and the room was suddenly showered and littered with the bank notes they had been counting on it. The men were Kavinsky; Aronson, his little rat of a manager; Forcythe, the gambler—and Tom Dyce.

It was Dyce whom Dreem picked up, as though he had been a chicken, by the throat.

It was Dyce, choking, gray-faced, gasping—a thief and poltroon at heart—Dyce, the double crosser and crook—who confessed. Billy Dreem threw him aside.

"Now, the rest of you yeggs come through!" he cried sharply, eying them.

Knock-out Kavinsky laughed hoarsely.

"Come through?" he cried. "I'll come through, all right, and when I get through with your ear, you pasty-faced yellow dog you——"

He stopped there. Literally, Billy Dreem stopped him there.

Kavinsky had fooled himself into believing that he had actually thrashed this long-legged San Franciscan once; no man ever deceived himself more thoroughly. The fighter he had faced in the ring three days before had been a mere shell of a man—the semblance of Billy Dreem, with Billy Dreem away.

The room became a shambles. Kavinsky was smothered under blows so well placed, so perfectly timed, so accurately measured and so viciously delivered that he had scarcely time to get his hands up. Billy had no desire to make short work of the job. He did it neatly, carefully, almost as though every movement—every heartbreaking blow—had been planned out ahead. Bleeding, staggering, sick, mauled, and disfigured, the man had no chance. Forcythe, attempting to interfere, was sent spinning into a corner by a backhand blow dealt him, with a nasty laugh, by Dreem. Little Jeff sat down calmly on the big gambler's head and watched the end of the play from there, with callous indifference to the fat man's squawks.

Kavinsky crashed to the floor. He did not attempt to rise.

"You were in on this frame-up, were you?" Billy Dreem asked, leaning down, panting a little.

"Go to——"

"Were you in on this?" Billy Dreem asked, reaching down for the fallen fighter's throat and beginning to drag him up.

"Yes. Don't hit me again. Yes, I was. I'll come clean. Tom Dyce brought the scheme to us."

"To us? To you and Aronson?"

"Yes. I didn't want to go into it——"

There was a crash of broken glass. One of the sporting editors and Waffle Kelly made a leap. They caught the legs of Davvy Aronson just as he was going through the windowpane on to a fire escape beyond. They hauled him back.

"Dyce talked me already into it!" he screamed. "Honest I been all my life and now that I should get mixed up with such a black-heart crook like that Dyce——"

Billy Dreem turned to the men who had come with him.

"Do I get back into the fight game, gentlemen?" he asked quietly.

In one laughing and affectionate roar they told him he did!

CHAPTER IX.

If Billy Dreem had been nominated for president on the Prohibition ticket he could not have jumped more suddenly into the limelight than he did with his practically single-handed exposure of two of the crookedest and least-liked fighters' managers in America. The story of that encounter in the back room of a cheap Los Angeles hotel was snatched out of the sporting sections all over America and put instead on the first news pages. It was too good to be wasted in "The Green" or "The Pink" or whatever the sports supplement happened to be called—it was the sort of dramatic comeback that Americans love and it got first position accordingly.

Billy Dreem was the only man on earth who didn't fully realize how far he had come back. During those three terrible days when sporting editors all over the country were using up their whole stock of denunciatory adjectives on him and accusing him of a palpable fake and lay-down, Billy was as unconscious of mundane things as he had been during that dreadful fight. When it was proved, as it was, that he had been poisoned both by psychological methods known best to such thoroughgoing rascals as Tom Dyce and Davvy Aronson, and by the whole-cloth lies of a quack doctor who had pronounced his ear in bad shape, and finally by the administration of a subtle drug an hour before the bell, the sports-loving public reacted in his favor; but when, on top of that, he turned up the nest of scoundrels who had used him as a tool and beat Knock-out Kavinsky almost into insensibility with his naked hands the tide was turned in earnest. Overnight Billy Dreem became one of the idols of the American prize ring.

The sting of his disgrace and the humiliation of the whole unsavory interlude ate into him, however. It did not help any to find that after his own gracelessness and ingratitude to Waffle Kelly and Andy McNear they were the men who made it possible for him to come back. They forgave him everything because they liked and admired him; moreover they were wise enough to realize that Dyce had been clever and adroit and Billy himself a mere child as far as experience went. They could not have been more kind, thoughtful or generous if he had been their own prodigal son, in partnership! And Little Jeff, spluttering and growling, wanted to lick somebody on his own account, choosing Johnson Slade, Billy's second trainer, as his first preference. They had to bundle the little man on to a train to get him north before he overreached himself and was seriously hurt.

The fight promoter, to whom the ill-gotten gains recovered from that back hotel room were turned over, offered the whole sum, which was considerable, to Billy Dreem, but he would not touch a penny of it. It was finally given to charity. No effort was made to account for the sum as it was found. Part of it certainly was money won by the conspirators on wagers made, but when the gambler, Forcythe, threatened to make trouble for what he claimed was robbery he was politely referred to the police department. He filed no complaint. Probably he did not care to interview the authorities on any subject.

So the whole incident was closed, with Billy Dreem a winner, but a rather saddened and heavy-hearted one. For besides his regrets for his treatment of his San Francisco friends and his mistake in signing up with Tom Dyce he had one other cause for humiliation.

Addressed to his hotel there had come, late on the afternoon of the fight—so late that he had not received it—a note that he read for the first time three days later.

DEAR MR. DREEM: Our director, Mr. Mowray, has been saying very nice things about you since

you have been working on the lot, and I have asked some questions—which I hope you will forgive me for doing—because I had been given a far different idea of you by a party in San Francisco.

Now I feel that I ought to apologize for the way I treated you the other day on the lot and to say that I am sorry and hope you have good luck in your fight to-day. Your friend,

ALINE HINES.

Billy whooped aloud when he finished that missive, but his jubilation was short-lived. There was a second note, on different stationery, dated the day after the fight and the day before it had been explained to a naturally antagonistic world. This was short—conclusive.

MR. DREEM: I find that my friend in San Francisco was not mistaken about you after all, if what the papers are all saying this morning is true about your disgraceful fight yesterday. I shall be grateful if you will disregard my note of yesterday. ALINE HINES.

Billy's one hope was that he could get an audience with the confused and puzzled young woman; he went to sleep after that full evening with nothing else in his mind.

But the fates were unkind. At the studio, where he was warmly greeted, he was told that Aline Hines had been starred in a picture and had gone to New York for its taking. They gave him her address, offered him a contract to appear in another fight picture, which he refused, and wished him good luck. That was all of that, then!

In San Francisco once again Billy found himself facing two alternatives—one to abandon pugilism and with it all hope of carrying out his design against Cud Clark, alias Young Corbin; the other to begin virtually at the bottom again and work up. True, he had climbed several steps on the ladder—he was known favorably both as a fighter and a man and he had had some valuable experience. But he was without funds, he had no trainer, he had no manager, he had no fights, and he was compelled to fight vigorously against an overwhelming sense of the impotence of his own efforts. He told himself that Aline Hines' judgment of him was immaterial, but the fact was that her misunderstanding of his character rankled.

But if any one expected Billy to give up they were counting without his characteristic obstinacy and bulldog determination. With Andy McNear and Waffle Kelly as advisers, and Little Jeff as consulting engineer of his destiny, he mapped out a new program. McNear insisted on financing him and did it in such a way as to make it seem a cold business proposition. Through Little Jeff they obtained the services of "Two-round" Gallagher, a former boxer and an able and crafty instructor, to take up Dreem's education in the fistic art, and Waffle Kelly busied himself and presently introduced to Billy Dreem a young fellow named Wally Stein who consented to become his manager. Stein was everything that Davvy Aronson was not. He was clean, alert, sound and forceful. He had a host of friends in the fighting game, and while his experience was limited he was ready to learn and was a quick and clever pupil.

As for challenges, they took care of themselves. Half a dozen were at Waffle Kelly's the day the friends returned there from the south; presently two fight managers appeared with rival propositions for Billy's consideration. Waffle Kelly called together what he called the Board of Directors of Billy Dreem, Incorporated, and the fighter and his friends went over the ground.

One offer was for a sixty-forty division of a guaranteed purse of five thousand dollars for a match between Billy Dreem and a light-heavyweight named Alvarez who was forging to the front but was a little too heavy for most of the middleweights in the game. The other was a straight offer of two thousand dollars to Billy, win, lose or draw, if he would meet Jack Compton, a Middle Western middleweight who had established himself as a topnotcher.

"We don't need money, Billy," McNear said. "What we need is to show the world that your beating up Kavinsky was not an accident. My vote is for the Compton bout."

"Compton is a tough customer," Kelly objected. "And Billy couldn't afford a defeat right now."

"Billy ain't going to be defeated right now!" Little Jeff cried explosively. "Take on the Compton guy and lam the head off him!"

"I withdraw my objection!" Kelly laughed.

So it was decided. The match came six weeks later and Billy Dreem fought a young cyclone to a fast draw in a twelve-round go.

A month later he beat Frank Alvarez, the pride of Arizona, in four rounds; after that

he won four fights in succession, with mediocre men, by the knock-out route, in jig time, and then he met Compton again and in the ninth round put the Middle Westerner to sleep in one of the fastest bouts, the sporting writers declared, that had been seen in San Francisco since the days of Robert Fitzimmons.

The time had come for him to enlarge the scope of his operations. He had long since paid all his debts to Andy McNear, save the debt of friendship, and that he figured as a constant and heavy liability that could not be paid off. Waffle Kelly had taken care of his money and he had a respectable bank account. Wally Stein was more than pleased with his business relationship with the fighter and wanted to continue it indefinitely. The only dissatisfied man was Two-round Gallagher.

"The way I dope it," that worthy Irishman said, "is that I ain't good enough for the kid any longer. A middleweight has got to be able to stand punishment from the big wallopers and he's got to be fast enough to meet the lighter guys. I've give him some ideas about boring in and standing the gaff, maybe, but what he wants now is a boxer to finish him off. I ain't a boxer and never thought I was. I'll stay with Billy till the cows come home to get milked but I can't teach him nothing more."

This oration, which caused Gallagher to wipe perspiration from his brow and pant like a dog, was received with polite objections, but in their hearts the board of directors knew it was true.

"If Gallagher quits my stable I'm through," Billy Dreem said positively. "But I think maybe he is right about learning to box. I've got a long way to go there and the experts are all saying now that the man who whips Young Corbin has got to be able to move fast and fight with his brains as well as his mitts."

"Are you planning to take on Young Corbin soon?" Wally Stein asked, surprised. He was not in the secret as yet.

"Well, he stands between me and the championship," Billy Dreem replied, half laughing. "I was just using him as an example of what I've got to go against."

So it was decided to give Billy the best man who could be got hold of, and that is how the tie-up came with Sergeant himself, the grim old master of the science of self-defense, who has made more champion boxers than any living instructor. Billy Dreem went East.

As the car wheels clicked and clattered over rail joints they were singing of success for his young pupil to hardened, rough old Two-round Gallagher. They were singing money and power and the top of the heap of managers to ambitious Wally Stein. They were singing of old companions and old familiar spots in Eastern cities to Little Jeff, taken along because he had obstinately refused to be left behind.

But to Billy Dreem they were singing, hour after hour, day after day: "Aline Hines! Aline Hines! Now you'll face her —Aline Hines!"

So the whole quartet had visions and songs according to their natures and needs, and unfamiliar lands slipped by Billy Dreem, on his first journey out of California, toward the wonderland of New York—and the day came when they slid into a long tunnel and came out in the Pennsylvania Station.

"So this is New York!" Billy said.

"Don't get stampeded, now," Little Jeff advised. "Take hold of my hand and I'll steer you. Good old New York! Good little old New York! Haven't seen her for fifteen years but she sounds just the same! I wonder if Pat Thayer is still running that chop joint on Second Avenue. And Frank Bacon ought to be a big theater owner by now. And the Francis boys and the gang at old Nagle's Bar—well, well, well, how she's grown!"

Wally Stein knew modern New York like a book. He had been born, raised, educated there. With an easy familiarity that gave Billy Dreem a higher regard for his new manager Stein put them in a good hotel, arranged meetings for them, got them tickets for shows which the newspapers said had been sold out completely for weeks, introduced them at newspaper offices, brought about them a circle of fight fans, managers, promoters, pugilists—in short gave them the keys of the city and showed them where the locks were kept!

For the first week all four of the party were too busy to breathe. Stein was dickering with Sergeant and arranging training quarters. Billy Dreem was keeping fit in a small gymnasium in upper New York and trying to learn which way the avenues ran. Little Jeff was too excited to eat when he was with the rest, but that was seldom. He was always on the go—the one man in the

group who received telephone messages every ten minutes during the day and half the night. He was continually showing up with some disreputable old alley cat of a man he had once paled it with; often, on the other hand, he would appear with some financial magnate or looming figure in the theatrical world who had been a crony in the old days and had gone far. Little Jeff was happy.

And it was he, as it turned out, who located Aline Hines for Billy Dreem. Billy had intrusted his secret to the explosive little man; Little Jeff had disappeared then as though swallowed up by the subway and had been gone three days. At the end of that time he came in mysteriously, whispered three words to Billy and handed him a card. It bore an address on Long Island.

So Billy took a day off, engaged Little Jeff to put him on the right car, transferred to the proper boat, and wound up, finally, after many delays, with his hear. pounding and his face red, in the reception room of a little suite which bore the gilt-signed name, "Miss Hines," on the door.

Then Aline Hines walked into the room.

"I wondered if you wouldn't come to see me," she said. "Sit down. I have two free hours and I want you to tell me everything."

Billy sat down—but he felt more like falling!

CHAPTER X.

Billy Dreem had never before in his life sat down beside a pretty girl and talked to her for half an hour alone. He had known a few women, but mostly they had been friends of men he was acquainted with, or their wives, or they had been the sort who are attracted by fighters and who, for one reason or another, seek them out to gain something from them. With the first class Billy was never quite at ease because he could think of nothing to say. With the second class he was equally uncomfortable, not because he was unable to make conversation but because he disliked and mistrusted these women and was afraid that he would say so, which, he considered, would be impolite.

It was some time, therefore, before he overcame his embarrassment and feeling of being all hands and feet with Aline Hines—before he was able to talk easily and comfortably with her.

She was perfectly charming—all his memory and his imagination had painted her. She had no sophisticated and pert ways. She was as simple and natural as a child, pretty in an appealing and almost wistful fashion, and, he found, very impatient with the life she led. She did most of the talking at first. Billy learned quite a little about her.

"I wish you'd explain something to me," he managed to get up courage enough to say finally.

"If I can," she smiled.

"Of course, I don't want you to think that I think that you ought to—think—I mean—what I did in Waffle Kelly's the first time I saw you was nothing—but I thought maybe—well, Kelly said he thought from what you said——"

"What *are* you talking about?" she interrupted, laughing. "Go on and tell me. I haven't the faintest idea now."

"Well, why didn't you write me—at least give me a line on where you were or something?"

"Write you? I did. What did you think I was? After your kindness to me!"

"But I didn't get the letter."

"You didn't? Brewer said you did."

"Brewer?"

"Mr. Conville—yes. He told me that I shouldn't write to you care of Waffle Kelly's, if that was the place, because it wasn't a very nice restaurant. So I wrote you care of Mr. Conville."

"He didn't send the letter on to me."

"Send it on? I thought you and he were great friends!"

Billy scowled. Conville would say that—would say anything that came into his head to say, of course. A light broke over him.

"Was it Conville who told you things about me that made you think I wasn't much good? You wrote in your notes to me in Los Angeles——"

"Yes," she said, coloring. "I can see now that it was he who deliberately tried to make it impossible for us to be friends. Then when that terrible affair came out in the papers in Los Angeles, about that fight with——"

"The Kavinsky mess. Yes."

"Well, I misjudged you again. I was on the train coming East when it was all straightened out and it was only since you came here the other day that I learned that you had settled with Kavinsky and his gang

and that you stood very high in the prize-fighting game. I was ashamed to write you then, and I didn't know where to reach you, either. So that is why I said I was hoping you would find me. Do you see? Can you forgive me for misjudging you all this time —believing lies?"

Billy could and he said so with his ears burning and in a loud and fervent tone of voice.

The ice was broken then and any one who had been listening in would have sworn that these two quiet, modest, unsophisticated children were the greatest pals and friends in the world and would have been justified in supposing them the two greatest living chatterboxes.

On that day, though, both of them avoided one subject that was uppermost in their minds: neither of them asked the other about their profession. Billy was convinced that Aline Hines had no business in the movies, from what he had heard of them; Aline hated prize fighting and all its works and could not comprehend how a big, clean, straight, fine chap like Billy could associate himself with the sort of people she had been given to understand made up the bulk of the world of pugilism. They avoided this topic—but it came up in time.

Billy Dreem was a different person when he rejoined his crew that evening. He laughed, joked, skylarked and played practical jokes. He wanted to get into training at the first possible minute for the biggest and toughest fight he had ever had. He was full of confidence and spirits. They asked him what had come over him. He said it was New York. Only Little Jeff suspected the truth. He suspected that Billy Dreem was in love. And not even Billy himself had suspected that!

Billy Dreem's career for the year that succeeded his first invasion of the East is now so well known that it need only be touched on lightly. It came at a time when reformers were beginning to circumscribe the holding of public prize fights with all sorts of regulation, prohibition and restriction. The finish fight came into disfavor and even long contests were prohibited by many States. But through it all Billy Dreem was steadily climbing up in popularity and in his position as a fighter. His match in New Jersey with "Slugger" Nast was his one serious setback. There he was pitted against a heavier man, giving the weight gladly on his own and Wally Stein's theory that he had learned enough from Sergeant to wear the big fellow out. The ringside experts never quite understood what it was that beat Dreem, as he was beaten decisively. The truth was that he caught cold and the cold, by a perverse trick of fate, settled in his left ear. Billy went into the ring suffering the old torture of fear that that mastoid process was infected again. Nast caught him guarding the left side of his head. Unlike Sailor Bartlett, who had accidentally reached that same sore point in the fight in San Francisco, the Slugger was wily and a man of strategy and brains. He reasoned that no man protected an invulnerable point and he settled himself to a steady pounding of that disfigured left ear. Billy Dreem's courage forsook him and he went down.

For a time after that fight he was completely discouraged. Aline Hines, without knowing exactly what she was doing, was the person who pulled him out of the slump.

He had seen her often during those months—they had become true and loyal friends, though nothing more. Billy tried not to see her after the Nast fight, but she looked him up, indignant with him and yet gentle and almost mothering. Finally he confessed to her that he had been beaten not by the slugging riveter but by cowardice. She extorted the whole story from him by unrelenting though kindly pressure.

"You ought to be sent to bed without your supper, Billy!" she scolded. "If your ear is in bad condition you shouldn't be taking chances with it. If it is all right and your trouble is only imaginary you ought to find that out and then forget your left ear. You come with me!"

Billy Dreem protested but Aline Hines, sweet and gentle as she was, had a little streak of decisiveness in her that was not so much different from Billy's own obstinacy. She fairly kidnaped him. Meekly, in the end, he followed her to the office of a great specialist whom she had met; this man sent them to another surgeon, specializing in diseases of the eye, ear, nose and throat—the best man in the world, it was said, in those branches. The examination was thorough and complete.

When it was over the specialist burst out laughing.

"My dear Mr. Dreem," the doctor said, straightening and dusting his sensitive fin-

gers gently together, "you don't need my services. The man you want to see is a psychopath—or a brain expert! Your left ear is as sound as any I ever examined. In fact my opinion is that the battering you have taken there has developed the protective tissues and bone structures abnormally and that if you have a weaker ear it is certainly your right. Get out of here—and don't let me ever hear of you worrying about a mastoid infection again!"

In the taxicab that carried them from the surgeon's office uptown Aline Hines began to cry gently.

"Why, Aline!" Billy cried awkwardly. "What's the matter? Have I done——"

Her tears turned to giggles.

"You big silly boy!" she cried. "Can't you see? It's being happy that makes me cry! And hungry, too! Let's go to that little place off The Square and eat a thousand dollars' worth of food!"

Two months later Billy Dreem defeated Slugger Nast in the eighth round of what one sporting editor called a match between a pile driver and a trip hammer. They stood in the center of the ring almost without moving and slugged. Billy invited his opponent to find that left ear—took blows on it that would have stunned the average man and only shook them off and laughed in Nast's face. The big fellow was puzzled, angry, and disturbed. He was a badly beaten riveter when his seconds carried him from the ring at the end. The papers referred to Billy Dreem's astounding reversal of form and one of them went back over his record carefully and published a Sunday story devoted to what it called "The Two Billy Dreems—Which One Will Eventually Meet Young Corbin, Dreem, the Easy Mark, or Dreem, the Champion Slugger?"

For it was Young Corbin, his old enemy, Cud Clark, to whom, at last, Billy was now making his slow and careful way. In June of that year, in a Southern town, Corbin had won the middleweight championship in a hard battle with the old champ. Now, sitting on top of the world, Corbin had announced that he would fight no one for six months, perhaps for a year, and that he would not consider a match at all until some one came up out of the ruck who showed himself clearly entitled to a try for the diamond belt. The new champion was arrogant, sarcastic and impudent. He brushed aside as mere bush-league pretenders most of the middleweights in America, naming "Dreem, the four-flusher with the sore ear," as one of these. He admitted that a few men in his weight class had certain qualifications, but scornfully advised them to go on and learn to fight before they bothered him with their challenges. It was the most impertinent and cocky champion's pronouncement ever issued, but it served a certain purpose. It made the unthinking believe Corbin was the greatest of his time and it gave him a prestige that he soon capitalized in motion-picture contracts and vaudeville tours, so that money fairly rolled in to him and the sporting world began to wonder if he wasn't, perhaps, all that he set himself up to be.

Billy Dreem might have been impressed by all this posturing and strutting and bragging if he had not known the old Cud Clark of their common-school days. He saw the champion as he was—a bully, a braggart, essentially a coward and always a striker of poses. He went on with his own business steadfastly, gaining experience every day, enlarging his own powers, maturing, aging almost none, and now definitely looking forward to the end of his long, long pursuit of an ambition conceived in childhood and never once lost sight of nor abandoned.

Shortly after the Slugger Nast fight Billy went on a sort of barnstorming expedition that took him in a wide circle around the United States. On this trip he met and disposed of eleven men who stood in his way or claimed to. Most of his fights were easy. Occasionally he ran into a tough nut—as in that negro whose meteoric career gave him the name of "Skyrocket" Mann. Here, once more, Billy Dreem gave away weight recklessly, but here he had no dread of his ear to contend with—only the ebony-hued giant who faced him.

Mann knocked Dreem down, it will be remembered, in the third round, and claimed a foul in the eighth. The referee and the ringside spectators derided the claim and the fight went on. But the row had infuriated the negro and it was only with the greatest difficulty that he could be stopped, thereafter, when the bell rang. Three times he struck Billy Dreem after the gong had clanged. Billy begged the referee to omit the rounds and let them finish it toe to toe. The referee refused. Dreem took a tremendous beating, but he gave one, too. In

the fourteenth round the negro collapsed and for a time it was believed he would die. There was a great to-do over the matter but at last a jury of doctors agreed that the black had simply overstrained his heart through anger, and that none of Billy Dreem's blows had injured him materially. Mann fought only once after that, to be knocked out then by an inferior man.

It was on this swing around the circle that Billy saw his old San Francisco friends once more. The newspapers gave him a rousing welcome, Waffle Kelly gave him a dinner attended by all the sports of the State, Andy McNear presented him with a watch and chain that made him look like a prosperous Wall Street banker, and one day two men called on him and reminded him of the days when Cud Clark had bullied him into a one-sided fight below Rincon Hill.

"Do you know what became of Clark," Billy asked, plumbing for depth.

"Never heard," Simpson, the young iron founder replied. "I know he had to leave town because of that Mission District hold-up and murder and that he never came back. But where he went——"

"What murder was that?" Billy demanded curtly.

"An old pawnbroker named Levy or Levi. I've forgotten the details. But a gang of tough kids in the neighborhood were accused by the old man in a dying statement, and one of them was caught and confessed. I don't know whether he named Clark or not, but Cud disappeared and never came back. I wonder whatever became of him."

"I wonder," Billy Dreem said quietly, and changed the subject.

But after his visitors were gone Billy visited a public library, asked for and received several volumes of old newspaper files and in them searched until he found the forgotten story.

CHAPTER XI.

In New York once more Billy Dreem took stock.

Under the clever and loyal management of Wally Stein, for whom he had developed a sincere friendship, the fighter had accumulated a considerable bank account, in spite of his heavy expenses for constant training, and for traveling for himself and his crew. Between him and the top of his class there now stood but three men, Jack Wallace, who had recently emerged from the welter-weight division and had shown himself competent to meet heavier men with all the speed and science that had made him a king in the lighter class; "Biff" Cannon, a big and shifty negro; and "Soldier" McGowan, whose real name was Goldberg, and who had evinced that remarkable grasp of the fighting game that, in the past decade or two, has marked so many Jews of the younger generation, American born.

Stein proceeded to arrange matches with these men for Dreem, but while he was disposing of them a meteor flashed across the middleweight sky in that remarkable Belgian, Condé.

It was after Dreem had knocked out Cannon, the colored man, in Havana, with ease and dispatch and after his long and surprising struggle with McGowan, which Billy won only after eighteen rounds of the toughest going, that the newspaper cablegrams began to make insistent demands for an American tour for the new Belgian star. Condé was well-born, well-educated and in every way a gentleman. Never fighter took his profession more airily and with such evident contempt for it as an art. He seemed always to be amusing himself at it, yet his amusement, if the newspaper reports could be believed, was not shared by the man who faced him. Condé was a new type to fight lovers—their desire to see him in action became a unanimous demand on fight promoters.

Stein, Dreem's manager, decided that a bout with Condé, on any terms within reason, would be the greatest thing that could happen to Dreem; he was so impressed with the importance of the match that he packed hastily and started across to Paris to catch the foreign boxer there after one of his matches. Stein's plan was excellent but he had counted without "Blackie" Havens, the biggest promoter in America. Havens had cabled a trusted agent, meantime, and when Wally Stein was halfway across the Atlantic the wireless bulletins brought him the news that Condé had been matched to fight Jack Wallace, the former welterweight.

He did not see Condé, therefore, but hurried back from Liverpool to be on the job where he could get Havens' ear. Two weeks later he had the great promoter's verbal promise to try to arrange a match between the winner of the Condé-Wallace go and Billy Dreem. Stein was satisfied.

"It puts one or the other of them out of

the running," he said to Billy. "And every fight you can save yourself now, in the shape you are in, is ground gained. You're fit, Billy, and I'm going to keep you that way for Corbin."

But the fates interfered. Condé and Wallace fought a draw. Their managers got into some sort of wrangle due to the inability of the Frenchman, Lansier, Condé's representative, to make himself understood by Wallace's manager, "Butch" White. The result was that a return match became impossible and Billy promptly threw down the gantlet to both of them—they to name terms and the locations for the fights, provided only that the two battles came as soon as possible. Condé, it will be recalled, wanted to fight in Canada, but was prevented by Canadian legal restrictions, and compromised on South America. Wallace wanted to go West and finally got a big offer from Nevada. So, a third of the way around the globe apart, Billy Dreem fought these two men and won. They proved, as far as he was concerned, to be vastly overrated pugilists. Condé was a boxer and Billy's sturdy frame was scarcely shaken by his blows. Wallace was fast, a trifle under weight, and while shifty lacked the necessary punch to dispose of a man of Billy Dreem's frame and temperament. The way to Young Corbin was clear. The man who had been, as a boy, the bully and braggart Cud Clark, was confronted at last with the challenge of his old victim.

Meantime, while the newspapers put the issue squarely up to the champion, Billy Dreem had had an experience that had suddenly given him a new viewpoint in life and that was to have a remarkable influence on him. The incident itself was of slight importance—its consequences of the utmost.

On his way through the Panama Canal from Rio de Janeiro after the Condé fight Billy had met an English nobleman of high degree who had witnessed the Rio fight and who was eager, in his stiff British fashion, to meet the young American victor. The Earl of Downe was a thoroughgoing sportsman and had a good deal of friendliness and democracy in his make-up despite his high station. He and Billy became friendly and the earl manifested the greatest interest in him and liking for him.

They had been aboard the steamer several days before Billy learned that the nobleman was traveling with his wife and daughter. The earl never mentioned them and it was only by chance that he and the fighter came face to face with them. The Englishman raised his hat and was about to pass with his pugilistic acquaintance when his wife called him. He frowned; turned about. Billy, seeing with some amusement that the Englishman was embarrassed, started to move on along the deck, but the daughter, a keen, athletic girl, was squarely in his path. Billy could not escape. With ill grace the earl presented Mr.—ah—Dreem.

Billy managed to get away shortly, his ears burning. The daughter had been interested and anxious to improve the friendship but the earl had been almost openly rude. Dreem put the man's manner down to British snobbishness and decided not to have anything more to do with him. But the incident set him thinking. With characteristic directness he sought the earl out that evening, cornered him in the smoking room and faced him with this poser:

"Mr. Ballentine," he said abruptly, using the earl's registered name, "you were friendly enough with me, but you didn't want me to meet your womenfolks. Will you tell me why?"

"Because I don't consider chance acquaintances necessarily social equals," the earl said, quite as bluntly. "But that is not the important reason. The important reason is that you are a prize fighter, as you call it here."

"That bars me?"

"Does it not? Do you meet the—ah—best people in your own country?"

"The best men—yes. I've talked with the President of the United States and I know half a dozen big Wall Street men."

"Ah, just so. But their ladies?"

Billy paused a moment.

"No," he said, "they don't introduce me. I hadn't thought of it before."

"Exactly. Be good enough to tell me why an Englishman should accept you socially where your own people do not."

Then Billy asked the question that started a change in his whole life.

"I'm not married, Mr. Ballentine," he said. "But if I were, to a fine, educated, clever girl, say, would you introduce your wife and daughter to her?"

"Certainly not," the earl replied with candor. "Would you expect your American friends of—ah—position to do so?"

Billy gave that some thought.

"I don't know," he said. "It hadn't occurred to me before to wonder. I'm afraid not."

Like a blow between the eyes had come to him the thought of Aline Hines as his wife. He knew now that he loved her and that he wanted to make her his wife. He had learned all there was to know about her birth and rearing and he was aware that if she should marry a business man or a lawyer or a doctor she would be received without question by any society. Would society—would women generally, of the better class—the kind of women whom he would want her to know and associate with—would such women receive the wife of a prize fighter—a bruiser—a gladiator of the modern arena?

The answer was so clearly writ for him that it stunned him. For days he brooded the matter.

He reached New York loathing his profession—for the first time in his life seeing in a clear white light the childishness and silly nature of his long vendetta against Cud Clark.

Clark was a bully, a coward and a braggart as a boy. He had run with wild companions—turned criminal—become, if those old newspaper accounts were true, a murderer and then an outlaw—a fugitive from justice. In the best possible light he was a low-born, low-browed, brutalized prize fighter associating only with the lowest types of men, counting as his intimates people of the sporting and half world, most of whom Billy himself despised and avoided.

It was this man Billy Dreem had spent the best years of his life pursuing. It was this man he had trained himself to whip—to beat down in savage, brutal, primitive fashion, in revenge for old affronts and beatings administered by a cruel, coarse youth to a sickly boy who had crossed his path.

The monstrous absurdity of the whole feud came over him at last. It was this petty ancient quarrel that, he suddenly realized, stood between him and any possible chance of fitting himself to marry Aline Hines—to ask her to marry him. He was appalled, staggered. He thought on his way across the continent after the Wallace fight in Reno that he would go back, throw up the whole lunatic crusade, forget Cud Clark, put his considerable fortune into some business and try to win Aline Hines. And his purpose was not the less firm because he realized that she, too, was in a profession that did not make her the natural friend and association of the best women in the world. She herself had spoken of this, wistfully. Well, he would get her out of the movies! But first he must cleanse his own hands!

But habit is a strong master. Billy reached New York to find that the newspaper men of America had forced Young Corbin to come out with a statement as to his attitude toward a fight with Billy Dreem, the logical challenger for the title. Corbin had made one of his characteristically impudent replies. The newspaper statement ran:

> I have been keeping my eye on this Dreem person ever since he broke into the limelight with a few lucky scraps in the West. I understand he staged a faked fight in Los Angeles a couple of years back with a man named Kavinsky and got out of the mess by lying. Last year he was arrested for almost murdering a negro named Mann in Missouri and had to be smuggled out of town to keep from going to the pen.
>
> I'll fight trash like that when I have to, to keep curs from yapping that I'm afraid of him, but you can say this for me—that I'll never fight this Dreem till he has licked Soldier McGowan. I put McGowan out in the second round when I fought him and it took Dreem nineteen rounds to get a scratch decision. That's my last word to him—and I don't think he has the nerve to tackle McGowan on any terms.

Wally Stein read that bold and libelous statement aloud to the crew when it appeared, and Little Jeff almost burst a blood vessel. Stein wanted to start a criminal and civil libel suit at once. Billy Dreem sat quietly, looking off into the distance. They thought he was trying to control his anger. He was not, for he felt no anger. He was seeing the fight game and its participants and especially such men as Young Corbin in their true light. But he had no intention of letting this impudent and mendacious challenge pass.

The others wore themselves out with their rage. When they were through Billy said coolly:

"We won't sue anybody, nor answer back, nor deny anything this man has said. What he says and he himself aren't worth noticing." He turned to Wally Stein. "Can you get me a match with Soldier McGowan, Wally?" he asked.

Stein stuttered, he was so surprised.

"G-get you a m-match? Why, of course

I can. But you can lick McGowan again with a broken hand and a cigarette in your mouth."

"All right," Billy said, smiling. "If he won't fight me on any other terms I'll break my hand and get me a package of cigarettes. I want this fight—and I want you to get it on any agreement McGowan draws. Then we'll see what hole Cud Clark Corbin finds to crawl into after that."

He had put aside the thought of abandoning the fight game. The habit was too strong for him. But he felt almost as though Aline Hines must know of what he had been thinking on that eastbound trip. He went to her.

She was drawn, worn and tired.

"Oh, Billy!" she cried, "I wish that I could get away from this life. I swear it is taking all my self-respect and my good qualities away and replacing them with hardness and selfishness and a desire to please my public at all costs. I hate it all. I want a home and rest—I want a girl's natural life!"

Billy stammered.

"But you are going ahead so fast, Aline! I saw that you are to be starred soon in that Purple Hills story! I thought I would find you as happy as a queen!"

She smiled.

"Billy," she said, "the motion pictures are all right for some people. There are girls who are born to be players—comedians, tragedians—to amuse and educate the people with their mimetic talents. But I was born to be a housekeeper. I don't want to amuse the public. I'm their plaything—they take me up and dandle me and spoil me and dress me up in absurd finery and give me lovely things and then, when they are tired of me, they will drop me—forget me. I'm a plaything—not a woman. And I wasn't intended to be a plaything. Billy!"

He was struck hard—dazed—by her allusion.

"And I am a gladiator—a modern gladiator!" he cried. "Let's both get out of it, Aline. I'll quit the ring after my fight with McGowan, if I land him, and you quit after your next picture—the one you are to be starred in. Is that agreed?"

Again he had forgotten Cud Clark and the old feud. Before it had been the thought of Aline; now it was the physical presence, the beauty, the appeal, the wistfulness of Aline. He would be a gladiator no longer. He looked at her.

The girl put out a soft, warm hand—pressed his closely.

"It's agreed, Billy," she said. "And, oh, I'm so glad that it is!

But both were to break that agreement—within three months!

CHAPTER XII.

It was perfectly apparent from the first that Soldier McGowan had been deceived by some one into making this second match with Billy Dreem, but he made it as soon as it was proposed and seemed to have every confidence of winning it. His newspaper interviews were most sanguine. And for one reason or another he kept referring mysteriously to something that was going to happen in the eighth round. Billy laughed at this. Wally Stein did not.

"Corbin framed this match for you, Billy," he said. "Corbin has always been tricky and dangerous and I don't like the look of things."

"You needn't try to tell me that McGowan is in on the game, if there is a game," Billy said. "I like the Soldier and I'll say for him that he's one of the cleverest fighters I've ever met."

"I don't think McGowan is anything but a cat's-paw," Stein replied. "But Corbin—the man behind this fight—is the one to keep in your eye."

Billy went into training faithfully, as he always did. He was a little tired from traveling and more than a little sick of the whole sordid and mercenary business. More and more he realized that the game was highly commercialized and that fighters were only tools—playthings, as Aline had called them. "Gladiators," he thought, sourly. Well, he was almost through!

The girl's picture was being given a good deal of publicity and Billy was surprised to note how much she had grown in public favor in a year. Looking back it seemed incredible. He had discovered her three years before—it had taken the public a long time. But here, again, he realized that a large part of the success of an actress must depend on her managers, her directors, her press agents. There, too, the business was highly commercialized. He was impatient to get it all over with.

His feeling was not lessened by the receipt

of a letter from Andy McNear, the transfer man in San Francisco, and his warm admirer and friend. It read, in part:

> I can't help thinking about what you said when you were here, Billy, about quitting the fight game. Well, old kid, if you ever do that remember that the McNear Van and Storage Company has got a partnership ready for you on your own terms. I'm getting so I'd rather go to a ball game or a fight than work any day in the week, and if you were here you could take charge and run the old wagons and let Uncle Andy take a back seat.
>
> Kelly sends his regards, of course. When you get ready to lick Corbin save us two ringside seats. And good luck to you, boy!
>
> A. McNEAR.

These kindly words decided Billy Dreem. He wrote immediately telling his friend that he was going to retire sooner than any of them expected and asking for exact figures regarding the partnership of which McNear had written.

He asked Aline, shyly, if she would mind being the wife of a man who drove a truck for a living, and the girl looked dreamily off across the fields beyond the studio.

"If he were the right man, Billy," she said, "I wouldn't care if he were a White Wing! But I haven't been asked by the right man yet."

Billy wondered afterward if she hadn't left an opening for him there. But he was slow with words—particularly with words as important as those that would question Aline Hines about the Great Adventure, and he was glad he had not blundered into trouble.

The fight with Soldier McGowan loomed, came—passed.

There could be but one conclusion to such a match. Billy Dreem was fit, strong, experienced, determined. The old bulldog tenacity that had marked his earliest days was still part of his character. He met a shifty, eager, ambitious foe, and one really worthy of his best endeavors. But McGowan could not stand the pace. He had told reporters to watch the eighth round. Billy had smiled when he had read that—had laughed to himself when Wally Stein had worried about it.

There was no eighth round.

McGowan went down in the fifth. The bell saved him, and he fought like a wild cat through the sixth, holding on a good deal as he weakened, and barely lasting the period through. In the seventh Billy ended it all with a merciful, almost friendly, jolt on the point of the jaw. McGowan was out only fifteen seconds. He came up gamely and crossed the ring, to where Dreem stood looking a little wearily at the mob that acclaimed him—the Romans cheering their gladiator.

"Well, Dreem," McGowan said, putting out a hand, "there isn't a man on earth I'd rather take a licking from. Good luck to you!"

"There isn't a man I'd rather pass the title to, if I had it, than you, McGowan," Billy countered. "I'm sorry you were Corbin's straw man!"

"So am I!" the gamy Soldier returned. "But I don't think you'll ever get him to fight you for the belt."

"I've been wondering about that," Billy said.

They were friends after that—are friends to-day. But that is another story.

Two hours later in a conference with Stein, Little Jeff, Gallagher, and a sporting editor who had become a sort of unofficial adviser to Billy Dreem in New York, Billy interrupted their eager discussion of plans for the future. They were full of enthusiasm—full of confidence. The championship was in sight—with all that meant to Billy Dreem, whom they admired and for whom Stein, Gallagher or Little Jeff at least would have laid down and died. Billy spoke thoughtfully:

"Boys," he said, "before you go any farther I want to spoil all your plans. I'm through with the fight game."

They stared at him incredulously. None of his immediate camp followers could speak. The sporting editor, McGrath, said in his matter-of-fact tones:

"You're going to quit, Dreem? Without licking Corbin?"

"Yes, without licking Corbin."

"Well, blow my boots through a four-foot board!" Little Jeff exploded, suddenly jumping to his feet. "Stein, quick, get a doctor up here. The big fellow's gone clean bughouse!"

Billy laughed.

"It isn't as bad as that, Jeff," he said. "The fact of the matter is that I'm sick of the fighting business—I'm going back to San Francisco to take a partnership with Andy McNear."

"But you can't, Billy!" Stein protested.

"You've got to lick Corbin!" Gallagher said positively.

"Tell me why," Billy demanded sharply.

"Because he's the champ."

"That's no reason. I don't want to be the champ myself and Corbin won't be long. McGowan can whip him to-morrow."

"But McGowan isn't in the running."

"He would be if I dropped out."

"Of all the gold-plated fools!" Little Jeff bellowed. "Look here, young fellow, I've stuck by you for four years now and I've told all my friends that you were going to be middleweight champion of the world. They've believed me. If you throw me down, by Johnny Walker, I'll bust you one on the nose!"

Billy Dreem laughed, then he sobered.

"Jeff has hit on the only reason there is why I would fight Corbin," he said. "The reason, that my friends expect me to. But there's a lot on the other side of the scale. I don't want any more money. I don't care a rap about what you folks call fame, McGrath. I thought for a long time that I wanted to whip Corbin, for a reason all my own, but I'm getting older and more sensible. If I have to whip him I can wait till we're both old men and then maybe I can pull his beard or something. No, the truth is that the only people I care about are my friends. But they'll get over it."

"You know what your friends and every one else will say, Dreem," McGrath put in quietly.

"Of course. That I'm afraid of Corbin."

"They'll have every reason for saying it —don't forget that."

"As long as I'm not afraid of him——"

"Are you sure you aren't?" McGrath asked tonelessly.

Billy flushed—caught his breath. Then he laughed.

"Well, you stung me then, McGrath!" he confessed. "But you know I'm not, and I know it, and as a matter of fact nobody on earth knows it better than Corbin himself does. So that's that."

They tried every argument but Billy's old obstinacy came back in its full flower. He would not be shaken. They tried to get him to compromise. He shook his head.

"Well, Dreem," McGrath said finally, "I can see that you have some good level-headed reasons for the stand you take. I think you're wrong and I think that you'll change your mind. But in the meantime listen to my advice."

"All right, Mac!"

"Don't one of you birds say a word about this thing for the present. If you let a newspaper man get this story he'll make you the most unpopular man in America in five hours. I'm not going to publish it myself because I want you to change your mind. Let it rest. Think it over. You'll come to it. And the rest of you turkeys keep your gobble quiet or you'll have the whole barnyard going!"

McGrath left, a good deal disappointed in Dreem, but hopeful. Billy, tired of the discussion and weary after the strain of the fight, went to bed. Early the next morning Aline Hines telephoned.

"I didn't ring you last night, Billy," she said, "because I knew you'd be in bed early. But I'm glad it's all over. You're really going to quit, are you?"

"I am. Are you?"

"I have. My picture was finished day before yesterday and the company will break up to-day. I told Mr. Mixner yesterday that I was retiring. He went through the ceiling and hasn't come down yet."

Billy laughed.

"He will, Aline. When can I see you?"

"Say at the McAlpin at four?"

"Fine. Lord, girl, it's good to be through, isn't it?"

She hesitated just a moment.

"Y-yes," she agreed slowly. "But something Mr. Mixner said has worried me a little. It doesn't seem as much fun as I had thought it would be."

"What did he say?"

"Only that I owed a lot to my friends—to my public. He wants me to finish by starring in a feature film. Then, he says, if I had showed the world that I could go clear to the top I could quit without any one saying I was afraid to try it that high."

Billy spoke thoughtfully.

"Aline," he said, "do you suppose that's true—for both of us?"

"I don't know," she said. "But I can't go on. I won't go on. What do we care—what do either of us care what people say?"

"That's so." Billy's jaw snapped. "We're through. Four o'clock, Aline—dear!"

He heard her catch her breath—say good-by demurely—add, softly, "dear!" Then she hung up and Billy Dreem turned to face Blackie Havens, the great fight promoter, whom he had never met before and seldom seen.

"Morning, Dreem," Havens said, shoving

back his big hat and shifting an unlighted cigar in his lips. "Stein told me to come right in. I'm going to stage your fight with Young Corbin—and do it right. Are you ready to talk it over?"

Billy sat down, trying to hold himself steady.

"I've decided to quit the game, Mr. Havens," he said.

Havens looked at him for half a minute before speaking.

"Say that again, Dreem!" he barked then.

"I've decided to quit fighting. I'm not going to try to meet Corbin. I'm going to San Francisco into business."

No man on earth could have carried it off exactly as Havens did.

In leisurely fashion he extracted a match from his vest pocket, with steady hand he lighted his cigar. Then, after two deliberate, slow puffs he knocked the ash from his weed, rose, looked about the room idly, and went to the door. With his hand on the doorknob and his back still turned he spoke quietly, one sentence, and then passed out and went away.

What he said was:

"That's exactly what Young Corbin has been telling me for three years you would do, Dreem—but I didn't believe him till now."

Four hours later the newsboys were bawling on every leading street in American cities the tremendous news that Billy Dreem, logical challenger for the middleweight championship, had laid down cold and had retired from the ring.

In most of these journals the statement was followed by an interview with Young Corbin, the champion, asserting that he had always known Dreem would never face him in a finish fight.

CHAPTER XIII.

The lesson life had yet to teach Billy Dreem began ten minutes after those newspapers went on to the street. Stein, Little Jeff and Gallagher, the trainer, were all out of the hotel; Billy himself was depressed by some vague feeling he could not—or else would not—understand, and he decided to take a short walk. People stared at him in the hotel lobby—men turned away from him. A big theatrical magnate, meeting him as he passed out the door, purpled and stopped.

"See here, Dreem!" he snapped angrily; "that's a lie about your funking a fight with Young Corbin, isn't it?"

"Yes," Billy said, flushing.

The other man brightened.

"Well, that's good news!' he exclaimed. "When does the fight come off?"

"It doesn't come off," Billy replied. "It's not true that I'm avoiding a fight with Corbin, but I've quit the ring."

The theatrical manager's jaw dropped. He turned away growling.

"I thought you were one of the few white men in pugilism," he said. "I see I was wrong."

They parted. Billy, who had been expecting questions and had been aware that enemies would attack him, had not been prepared for instant and final condemnation from those friendly to him. The encounter gave him his first jolt. But he was to have many more.

From that moment on his education never ceased. The newsboy from whom he bought a paper containing the story of his retirement sneered at him. Everywhere people looked at him, sniffed and turned aside. Before that he had not realized how many people in the Broadway district he frequented knew him by sight. They seemed all to know him—they avoided him as though he were afflicted with some plague!

He tried to laugh this off—to steel himself against the hurt that registered. But they drove him back to his hotel room, disturbed and lonely, but stubborn and obstinate. As his obstinacy grew in him, too, his determination became more fixed—and the wound given him by public opinion grew more painful! He set his teeth.

Blow after blow fell. Of his three associates only Wally Stein came back to the hotel that night. Stein argued, pleaded, finally cried. Billy tried to present his side of the case but did it badly. Stein left him in anger and disgust. Billy began packing his bags.

He was to have seen Aline Hines at four; at three she had telephoned to say that she could not be there. She was holding something back. Billy thought she was near tears. He begged to see her. She said that several things had come up during the day to prevent.

"Oh, Billy!" she cried, "I wonder if we were wrong?"

"Do you want to go back?" he demanded

a little sharply. "Do you want me to change my decision?"

"I don't know, Billy," she said. "You ought to know."

Billy's obstinacy asserted itself.

"We agreed that we didn't care what people said," he reminded her. "We have to live our own lives! I tell you I'm sick of this mercenary game—I'm tired of being a gladiator to amuse a stupid, soft, well-fed public. If they want fighting let them get out of their tailored clothes and do a month's road work, train for two months, punch a bag, go to bed at nine o'clock every night, give up every pleasure and every luxury, and then step into a ring to be battered and hammered and punched and mauled——"

"Billy!" the girl interrupted sharply, "you're not scolding me, are you?"

"No," he said. "I'm sorry, Aline. But this thing is getting my goat. Let me talk to you about it!"

"Perhaps to-morrow," she said and he had to be content with that.

But on the morrow he received a note saying that she had gone to her home in Wisconsin. She would write him in San Francisco.

He took a westbound overland that night—shut himself in a drawing-room—tried to forget. His jaw was set and his forehead had taken on a permanent scowl.

But the lesson was not concluded yet. Life is an inexorable master—an insistent and merciless teacher.

Waffle Kelly swore, raved, tore his hair, made funny noises in his throat when Billy Dreem walked into the basement waffle parlor, unheralded.

"If they opened your head!" he cried, exasperated and extravagant in his disgust; "they'd find it was full of suet pudding! If your leg was cut off skimmed milk would run out of it! Put your feet in my ice box and I can tear up my ice card and refrigerate everything without expense! Look me in the eye, you onion, and tell me what you mean by this!"

Billy tried to explain.

"You don't talk English!" Waffle Kelly shouted. "I can't understand you any more than I could a tongue-tied Greek talking Russian! You say words but they don't mean anything! You're afraid of Young Corbin—that's your life history in five words!"

Billy tried to keep his temper and went away feeling that Kelly would get over his peeve. A newspaper man he had known in the old days stopped him.

"After a while, Billy," he said mournfully, "people will begin to believe that that lie about Corbin is true!"

"I've quit the ring," Billy said obstinately, "if that's what you mean."

The reporter went away shaking his head.

Andy McNear, big, heavy, a little more gray and a little more bald than he had been before, shook hands almost cordially. But Billy could see that it was an effort that the old man could not sustain.

"Yes, I wanted you here with me, Billy," he said. "I still want you. I believe in you in spite of everything, because I think you have a good reason for making this decision. But I'm afraid I couldn't afford to take you in. I'll do anything else I can for you—I'm still your friend. But the folks I do business with wouldn't understand. It would ruin us and I'm too old to start over. That's the long and short of it."

The expected letter from Aline Hines did not come. Billy, bruised, sore, bewildered but still stubborn began to avoid people. He began to feel that the whole world was full of stupid, selfish, narrow men and women unable to see another's viewpoint, unable to adapt themselves to the unexpected. Once in a groove they expected you to follow it. When you forced yourself out of it—took the unusual tangent—they were shocked and angered. He thought he did not care about what people said. He began to realize that he must have been mistaken. But his obstinacy became a dogged and bull-necked contrariness. He was a pariah and he suffered the tortures of the damned!

But he would not have been broken had it not been for Aline Hines.

She did not write—she came West instead.

Billy heard her voice on the telephone one morning and his joy almost made him cry. Aline was trembling—tense—overwrought.

"Meet me at the ferry-building flower stand at ten minutes to eleven," she said. "I want you to take a trip with me."

He was shocked at his first sight of her. She was thinner, worn, worried looking. Apparently her glimpse of him surprised her, also. Both of them were self-conscious. But Aline went through with her predetermined program steadfastly. She told Billy to buy

two tickets to Mill Valley—led the way to the ferry.

First by boat and then by train they were taken into the heart of a virgin redwood country—Muir Woods. They had little to say on the journey. Both of them were thinking ahead—getting ready. Aline was to take the offensive and Billy knew it. Instinctively he began to set up a defense.

Seated at last in the deep shade of a giant tree, their backs to it, their nostrils filled with the warm scent of the forest, and about them a deep and primitive silence, they had their struggle.

"Our mistake, Billy," Aline was saying, "was in thinking that we are free of life, independent, our own masters. We aren't. We have always been public figures, in a way. Nothing we did was of any use or account unless it pleased thousands and even millions of other people. If we had been clerks or farmers or something it would have been a little different, although I see now that all men and women in the world must go with the crowd to some extent. For us we have no choice. The public made us possible—the public has a right to say what we shall do with our lives now."

"I don't believe it!" Billy cried stubbornly. "Aline, I don't care what any one in the world thinks of me but you. It comes to that. I've loved you ever since that night in Kelly's, and now that every one else has turned on me I need you more than ever. But I couldn't go back to the ring, after once quitting, even for you."

He thought she would be angry at that but she was not.

"You have to go back, Billy dear," she said quietly. "I have to go back. I thought it was only fair to tell you before I did it, but this afternoon I am going to wire Mixner and tell him that I'll be on the lot in Hollywood on the first."

"You're deserting me too?" Billy cried.

"Yes, and I'm deserting myself. I quit, remember, when you did. I don't care about making one feature picture—to show that I can—that I'm not afraid. But I have to. If I don't I'm a coward. It isn't that people think me one—I will be one.

"Oh, I've been thinking a lot about it, Billy. It's hard to explain. But the fact is that both of us started to make a certain goal. I started to be a star in pictures—you started first to whip that old enemy of yours, as you once told me, and then that grew into a purpose to become the champion. It was my fault that you stopped. Wait a minute—I know. If it hadn't been for me you would have gone on through one more fight. I was disgusted, tired, fed up, before I reached my goal. I influenced you. I've come clear out here to try to change that influence and to get you to go back."

Billy thought for a long time. Dimly he saw what she was trying to tell him of the obligation they had, not to the world, to picture patrons and fight fans, but to themselves. It was, in a larger sense, what he had felt as a boy about licking Cud Clark. He couldn't start clean without doing it. Neither he nor Aline could live with their own hearts—consciences—inner selves—until they had proven themselves to the full.

"Do you want me to go back, Aline?" he demanded abruptly.

"No," she cried, catching his hand and clinging to him. "I don't! Billy, you don't know how I've hated the thought of your being a fighter to amuse the crowds—a gladiator, as you called yourself once. You don't know how I've suffered at the times when I have known you were in some ring, battering and being battered. I hate it, Billy—I hate it! I don't want you to go back! But you have to go!"

"You mean that—that neither of us could feel——"

"Neither of us could respect either ourselves or the other one if we didn't go back, Billy!" she said solemnly.

The light broke on Billy Dreem at last. It was himself he had to respect—it was his own spirit and his own honor and integrity and courage that he had to prove—to himself. That was what mattered! That was what counted! Not what the world thought! Not even what Aline Hines thought!

But what Billy Dreem thought! So the die was cast!

There were no pledges given or taken between them. It was as though life had marked time during this period of testing—during the term of the lesson. They left everything as it had been and parted almost solemnly.

Billy knew that the hardest grade to make would be the first one—the turning of the scale of public favor. He would advise with no one now. This was his problem—because he had created it. He had

to come back; more difficult, indeed, he had to swing the angry and somewhat stubborn public into letting him come back.

He did it all from San Francisco. His opening gun was an interview with an old friend—a sporting editor to whom he told the whole story of his retirement. The interview was brief and carefully worded.

Billy Dreem said, in effect, that he had made the mistake of supposing that he owed nothing to the public and everything to himself. He had found he was wrong, there; moreover he admitted that he could not even live with himself when he realized that he had shirked—laid down. He was, as he had always been, he said, confident of his ability to whip Young Corbin. He now wanted the chance to try, if the fight fans would give him that opportunity. Corbin, as champion, could make his own terms. But—and here a trace of Billy's bulldog determination flashed again!—he did not propose on any grounds to permit Corbin to evade the match. If the champion would not enter the ring with him Billy said bluntly that he would seek Corbin out and fight him wherever he found him, inside a ring or outside one.

The change of front on Dreem's part was received differently in different quarters, but slowly the opposition to him was beaten down by his persistence and obvious sincerity. Generally his new stand was accepted at its face value. Many sporting editors sneered at the comeback; a large number promptly decided the relative merits of the two fighters and gave Corbin the match out of hand. Indeed the opinion that Dreem had been afraid of Corbin and had only been forced back to a match with him by an outraged public opinion was almost unanimously accepted.

Corbin himself appeared to accept it, certainly. He replied instantly that he would meet Billy Dreem on a seventy-five-twenty-five-per-cent basis, the winner to take all motion-picture rights for himself. The champion was bitter, sneering, insulting—as always he was bold and impudent. He had convinced himself that Dreem was loath to face him; to him the bout was a set-up out of which he would come an easy victor. And he was shrewd enough to see that, thanks to Dreem's spectacular retirement and his sensational attempt to come back, the fight would be, financially, a perfect mine of gold.

Blackie Havens was agreed upon immediately as promoter. He had gauged the possibilities as to public interest in the event even more accurately than had Corbin. He knew that it would break all records and make the attendance one unheard of in the history of the American ring. And he governed himself accordingly.

Two-round Gallagher was the only man of Billy's old crew who refused to return. Sergeant, the master, came on posthaste and went to work again. Billy, never wholly out of condition, came back fast. The weeks sped.

The fight, as every one remembers, was held in a small Western town. Waffle Kelly, Andy McNear and a trainload of San Francisco men, most of them old-time admirers of Billy Dreem, were there the second day before the appointed date. From the East came scores of friends he had made there, with other thousands who knew him in his days of struggle up out of the ruck. The West contributed its thousands. But Corbin was an odds-on favorite.

CHAPTER XIV.

Few of us who went into the great out-of-doors stadium built especially for the Corbin-Dreem finish fight will ever forget the scene.

It was a blazing day and a great canvas had been spread high above the ring to shelter it. Its grateful shade fell, too, on some of the ringside seats, but outside its protected area the heat was intense. At three o'clock, when Young Corbin came swinging arrogantly down the aisle kept open for him, with his seconds and handlers forming a small army behind him, the pent-up fervor of the crowd was let loose in a pandemonium of noise. Corbin scarcely acknowledged it. He strode on like a haughty king, disdainful of his subjects. And his assurance and his air of conscious superiority communicated itself to the whole throng. Never man entered a squared circle with more confidence than that shown by Young Corbin, the middleweight champion of the world, on that day.

Billy Dreem came quietly, almost unnoticed, a few seconds later. Four men followed him. In his aisle, suddenly, stood Waffle Kelly. The little man, with his short leg and his head twitched to one side, was pale, tense, trembling. As his big friend

came down the narrow way and the applause began to rise Kelly's eyes filled with tears. He dashed them away angrily.

"You're not fighting for the title, kid," he said huskily. "You're fighting for your friends. And one of them asked me to give you this."

It was an envelope, addressed to Billy in Aline Hines' handwriting. He tore it open. Inside was a note—a few words:

> I'm pulling for you, Billy. My picture went over big at the pre-review. It's your turn!
>
> A.

From inside the note fell a tiny sprig of redwood. Its pungent odor filled the fighter's nostrils—in a flash there came back to him that day in Muir Woods when they two had fought it out, come to grips with life! He choked.

"Where is she, Kelly?" he asked.

"She's here. Came this noon. She'll be waiting for you, she told me."

"I'm going to win, Kelly," Billy said. "Don't any of you worry about that."

He went on hurriedly.

The interruption had held the packed arena breathless; the applause, that had been scattering, now increased. But there was no ovation for him. The stigma of his retirement still clung to him.

There was a moment's delay at the ringside while Little Jeff, sweating and for the first time in his life nervous, struggled to get Billy's chair through the ropes.

A familiar sneering voice came to Dreem's ears. He looked up.

There, boring him with eyes full of hatred, malice and cruelty, was the face—not of Young Corbin, the prize fighter, but of Cud Clark, of the Rincon schooldays. Corbin had deliberately pompadoured his hair in the fashion in which he had worn it as a boy. He had tied a handkerchief around his neck just as he had done in those far-off years. The effect was amazing—startling. No one but Billy understood the play.

Corbin snarled.

"What's wrong, Sissy Sore-ear?" he taunted in a low voice. "Afraid to come on up?"

Then he turned on his heel, laughed abruptly, and went back to his corner.

The San Francisco group, including Kelly, McNear and Simpson, the young iron founder with whom Billy had once gone to school, sat in the fifth row at the ringside. With them were a dozen others from the Pacific-coast city. All of them had watched Corbin closely, expecting a sensational interlude. Only Simpson and one other man started—stared—looked at one another with wide eyes.

This second man leaned forward—whispered into Simpson's ear.

"Bob! Did you see that face—Corbin's face?"

"Yes. Yes, Larry."

"Corbin is—he looks like——"

"Cud Clark."

"He is Cud Clark, Bob! We've hunted him for ten years."

"Do you still want him?"

"Of course. A murder charge never outlaws."

"Wait, then. After the fight, Larry."

"Of course. But Cud Clark! Corbin—all this time!"

There were announcements, challenges, pictures, introductions. The place was a babel of noise. The heat lay on the arena like a pall. The odors of perspiration and tobacco rose slowly. The smell of an impalpable alkaline dust mingled with them. Cries, shouts, the shrill yells of betters or cold-drink venders——

All cut by the stabbing knife of a gong!

A roar as Corbin leaped eagerly from his corner.

Silence. The pad of feet on canvas. The whisper of gloves as they met in the formal handshake. A quick-drawn breath and the thud of a blow!

Billy Dreem's head rocked to the right and instantly a whirlwind of shouts swept down on the ring, engulfing it. Corbin changed his position and struck again—again he rocked Billy Dreem's head with one of those lightning-quick blows under the left ear. Dreem, smiling a little, yet with his forehead furrowed with a line of pain, covered and retreated a pace. One could no longer hear the shouts—they crashed on the senses like heavy bodies persistently pressing. The din was beyond noise—it was a physical entity. Only sight and that engulfing uproar remained—taste, touch, and smell were drowned in sensation!

Corbin, remorseless, implacable, hating his adversary with a bitter and consuming passion, was as irresistible as a storm. He moved, machinelike, steadily forward—always forward. Billy Dreem shaking his

head from those first two blows felt a slow burning behind his left ear. He closed his teeth down—fought for mastery of the pain and of himself. But Corbin's pistonlike blows beat him back. He had no time to think—no time to gain control of his own forces. He was in retreat and the enemy gave him no time for coördination. His ear hurt. His heart was sick.

The face he looked into—malignant, hateful, sneering, cold, brutalized, cruel—was the face of Cud Clark.

For the moment Billy Dreem was fourteen and their stage that bare lot under Rincon Hill.

He could feel his ear burning—hurting. That and the face of the foe were all he was conscious of.

The bell rang.

Almost in a moment, it seemed, it rang again. Once more that terror of pain—that hateful face—once more the gong.

Again. Again. Nine rounds.

In the tenth—some time in the tenth, after an age of agony, Billy Dreem went down. He heard the awful voice of the referee, coming from a distance: One! Two! Three!——

Then the gong.

Little Jeff and Gus met Billy as he pulled himself slowly to his feet. They seized his arms. He shook them off.

Suddenly he heard—for the first time since the fight had begun—the blood-mad roar of the beast, the greedy shouts of the crowd. They were mad, insane for a spectacle of gory conflict—the bruising, battering, murderous thrust of defeat!

He looked out at their faces—drawn, distorted, cruel! They flung up at him a savage taunting! They lost themselves in a paroxysm of brutal lust! They screamed raucously to Corbin, beating themselves with the hands of savages driven insensate by the sight and smell of blood.

Billy Dreem gave them one sweeping glance.

They were his public—this was his beast.

He was the gladiator, paid to amuse them with his body, offered for the deadly blows of a brute like himself.

Billy Dreem clenched his right fist—felt against the palm the prick of a sprig of redwood. He threw back his head and burst into a roar of laughter.

His seconds dragged him to his corner but he did not need their ministrations. They thought him out of his head! He was never less so. He was a gladiator, stung at last to a consuming passion of rage against them.

A minute before the fight had appeared to be over. As a matter of fact it began in the eleventh round.

Outwardly Billy Dreem was unchanged. With the bell he advanced hesitantly, guarding his left ear with his shoulder. He feinted—began to retreat. Corbin, always snarling, and now impatient to have it over with, bored in.

He was stopped with the first real blow Billy Dreem had delivered, a right cross over the heart that shook the champion, angered him. He flung himself forward and was met by a left tap on the cheek—almost a feint, for it was followed by another blow over the heart. He had never been hit by Billy Dreem before with that right hand that the years had developed. It was as though Billy Dreem had suddenly brought into play a new weapon. Corbin shook his head, laughed and advanced. For the third time his body was shaken by one of those staggering body blows. Slowly the crowd began to realize that Dreem was putting up a fight. But it was a last desperate resistance. It was the beaten man with his back to the wall! They screamed at Corbin. Were they to be cheated of their spectacle, after all?

During four rounds it looked so. Dreem gained no strength—it did not appear that Corbin lost any. But the fact was that the champion's chest was beginning to bother him. His heart, hard-driven, speeded up to supply his body with the regular flow of blood that it burned up as in an incinerator, was beginning to weaken. Those crashing trip-hammer blows that drove in the ribs and bruised the tissues and muscles all about were going deep with their cruel force. Corbin became more wary. Now and again he gave ground. His tactics were altered.

In the sixteenth round Billy Dreem stumbled into a clinch. With his lips close to Corbin's ear he said, in a cold, steady voice: "Now we're going to fight those old scraps over again, Cud Clark!"

He broke away, tearing Corbin's chin and nose with a glancing blow as he went. He was suddenly like a man remade. Not a soul in the house but knew, from that moment, that they had misjudged the chal-

lenger. Steadily, carefully, swiftly—without a moment of hesitancy or doubt, Billy Dreem began to punish his ancient enemy. Corbin tried strategy—guile. He could not trap Dreem into any corner, force him against the ropes, catch him off balance, tantalize him into any waste motion or effort. Round by round he grew weaker and knew it. His seconds knew it. A few at the ringside knew it.

But Billy Dreem moved so skillfully that, to the majority of fans, it was still only a question of time when Dreem would blow up and Corbin come back and finish the whole thing with one of his vicious and irresistible punches. Dreem never forced Corbin too far. He never let him completely off. At the end of the eighteenth round, for example, he deliberately stumbled and half fell, and this moment's respite gave Corbin a chance to straighten from a rocking and painful blow in the face and to hold out for the bell.

In the twenty-third Corbin went down. Some said he fell, others that he had been dizzied by a previous blow. He took the count of seven. No one watched him with more anxiety than did Dreem. He came up savage—berserk. And that is why the fight ended, in the twenty-fifth round, with the sixty thousand men in the arena blood-mad, hoarse, beyond themselves, out of their heads with excitement—for during those two rounds Billy Dreem was deliberately baiting and torturing a madman.

Billy did not hear the crashing din that met him as he straightened from delivering the last blow. He heard nothing. He had won his fight with Corbin, but that was little enough. He had won his fight with himself and that was everything. With a half smile he tapped his left ear with his glove. The pain was gone. He had forgotten he had ever felt one there!

He waved his hands to the crowds because Little Jeff, with tears running down his face, screamed into his ear that he must do it.

He crawled through the ropes, found himself in a cordon of deputy sheriffs and policemen fighting to keep the lunatic crowd from overcoming him with their hysterical adulation.

Waffle Kelly caught his eye and he nodded and grinned. Beyond Kelly he saw his old schoolmates, Bob Simpson and Larry Frost. Larry was a sergeant of detectives in San Francisco now. Good old Larry! He must have got in late that morning. He waved to them. They did not see him. They were moving toward the ring—stopped the sheriff of the county and talked to him earnestly.

Billy Dreem went on toward his dressing room.

His guards fought, struggled, wedged a way for him.

He reached its quiet.

Little Jeff, entering, fell back, his face red.

Billy went in.

A tornado engulfed him. He felt arms about his neck, soft lips against his—heard choking, laughing, jumbled, unintelligible phrases. His heart leaped. He flung his bruised arms about that whirlwind—about Aline Hines.

"Now we can quit, Billy!" she was crying. "Now we have proved ourselves!"

Billy was about to answer.

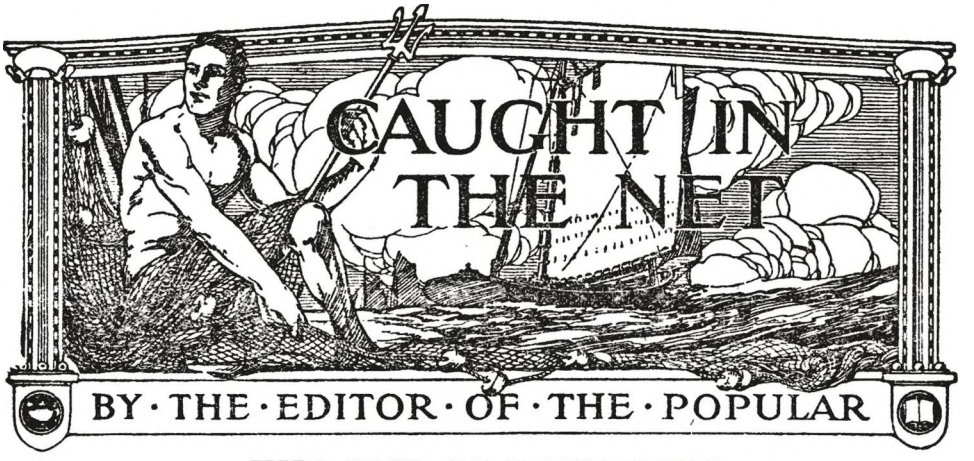
But the hoarse voice of Waffle Kelly cut in. It was raised in a reproving shout, half angry, half laughing.

"Well, if there ain't the town butcher ruining seventy dollars' worth of crêpe de swaw, then you can beat up four eggs and make me into a lemon pie! Wipe off your face, you big squash—you're getting Corbin's best gore all over that little girl's cheek! And she a star, too! Of all the boobs! You can't do anything with a calf but make veal of it, so help me Johnny!"

In the next number—"Money to Burn," a complete book-length adventure novel by Reginald Wright Kaufman.

A NEW RECORD

WALLACE H. SMITH, of Washington, D. C., has a unique war record, being the "most numerously wounded" man on the rolls. German bayonets and exploding shells gave him a total of one hundred and thirty-two wounds, as a result of which he was operated on thirty-two times by the army surgeons.



THE END OF DRUDGERY

A HEADLINE worth turning over in the mind blazoned its somewhat doubtful message of hope across the top of a recent newspaper column. The headline proclaimed as follows:

ELECTRICITY TO END DRUDGERY
BY 2023, ASSERTS STEINMETZ

The Steinmetz referred to in the headline is the "Wizard of Schenectady" whose exploits in the field of electrical invention and development have placed him abreast of the great Edison himself. It is doubtful that Doctor Steinmetz said precisely what the headline attributes to him. If there is any man alive who knows what drudgery means and appreciates its everlasting value that man should be Steinmetz. Like Edison's, his success is the product of unremitting toil. He is one of the world's premier drudges himself. And there can be little doubt that he is as well aware as any man that drudgery is the price of existence and advancement for the human race, just as it is for the individual, and that when drudgery ceases the vitality of the race will sicken and die.

The copy-desk man who wrote that headline misapprehended Steinmetz's meaning. What the great lightning master tried to make clear in the ensuing text was that at a not distant day much of the labor we now perform with our own hands will be accomplished by electric power and the energies we now apply to physical toil will be released for use at some other kind of drudgery—presumably mental.

One of the first lessons of life we must learn and accept is that "Man's work is never done." The accomplishment of one task suggests and leads to the undertaking of another. If the day ever dawns when labor of every kind now known is performed by the automatic machine it is very certain that we shall have invented new kinds of labor to keep us busy our full eight hours a day.

If the man of a hundred or more years ago could have foreseen the multiplicity and extent of labor-saving devices that serve the present generation he might very well have concluded, if he were a hasty reasoner, that the twentieth century would be a workless era. Yet there is more work to be done in the world to-day than ever before. We have found things to do that the man of 1823 never dreamed of. Moreover there are more people in the world demanding that things be done for them. As far into the future as our imaginations can stretch the cycle will continue to roll round. More and more work will be done by machinery, but more and more work, of new and different kinds, will be evolved by the indefatigable minds of men to be accomplished by human hands and brains.

As it is for the race, so it is for the individual. There are few men who at one time or another in their lives have not deluded themselves with the vain ambition of leisure. "Some day," says the average man to himself, "I will punch the

clock for the last time and go home for the rest of my life to enjoy the fruits of my labor in leisure. I will work no longer." But how few men ever fulfill that promise. Most of us are caught by death while we are still in the harness. We could not quit if we would because there is some occult urge within us that tells us cessation of work is stagnation and death. Those men who do quit cannot help themselves. Stagnation has already set in. The energy to work, or play, or do anything but sit and wait for the end has left them. There are, of course, a handful of men who leave their chosen professions deliberately while their vitality is still high. But they don't stop working. They write memoirs or do something equally arduous. When a man's work is done it is a sure sign that he is done himself. And when the race stops working the end of the world will be at hand.

TOLERANCE

TEACH us to be tolerant," ought to be a universal prayer at the present juncture of history. At no time, it would sometimes seem, has there been less of that amicable, healing spirit among men. Look where you will and you find a fanaticism that expresses itself in amazing self-righteousness, with utter disregard for the opinions and convictions of others.

On every side there is seething of animus. Religious conventions resolve into an uproar over medieval quibbles and evolution splits a sect into bitter halves. Club women assemble and before their session is over they have fought on State compensation to mothers and the rights and wrongs of child labor. Prohibition sows the seed of discord broadcast in the nation, interferes with international comity, and lashes its advocates and enemies into frenzy. Fore and aft, the poor old sturdy Constitution is riddled and raked by voluntary revisers, and the supreme court is lambasted by outraged critics. Congress is derided whichever way it turns. Capital warns us that labor is going crazy, and labor retorts that it is simply imitating capital in its stand.

These things, and kindred animosities too numerous to mention, are making up the day's work and talk. It is a lively picture that is presented, and it would be a healthy and inspiring scene if the blows exchanged were given and taken in sportsmanlike fashion. That they are not, seems to be the real trouble. There is too much rancor in the public ring, and the wranglers are all too anxious to make opposition a penal offense.

Tolerance is not an easy attitude to maintain, under any circumstances, and particularly in a country as miscellaneous in humans as our own, yet we must learn—and learn quickly if we want to find approximate fellowship—that you cannot go very far in life until you have realized that you must live with people that you dislike, and that though you may succeed in forming your own character you cannot form by force the character of your neighbor.

Home, school and church should unite in an effort to teach tolerance to the youth of this country. It is necessary to the welfare of domestic society and to harmonious inter-relationship with the world.

WHY NOT A MUNICIPAL COACH?

NOT long ago certain adepts of the much-discussed healing art of chiropractic gave utterance to a brilliant idea. We suspect that the idea was the child of some demon publicity agent's fertile brain. But be that as it may. The idea envisaged nothing less than the appointment of an accredited doctor of chiropractic to fill the prospective vacancy in the office of health commissioner of New York City. It is hard to see just why a chiropractitioner, or for that matter any other variety of curative specialist, should be preferred for a post whose responsibilities involve a wide and accurate familiarity with the entire field of preventive and curative medicine. There is no reason, of course, why a chiropractor, who was at the same time a broad-minded and able administrator, should not tackle the job of health preservation for a large community—provided he was ready to think in gen-

eral terms of accepted nygienic practice and prepared to avail himself of the advice and services of a competent staff of physicians and scientists. But, that being so, why not any kind of able administrator—an engineer, a lawyer, a college president, a banker, a merchant—for health commissioner?

As a matter of fact, why not a physical training specialist? We can visualize with a great deal of complacency the stalwart figure of Walter Camp presiding over the physical destinies of a metropolitan population. As an alternate candidate for the job we suggest William Muldoon. It might be well worth trying.

What a hopeful prospect! Walter Camp, health commissioner and municipal head coach! An entire city in rigid training!

There might be some grumbling of course. Folk addicted to burning the candle at both ends might protest the health ordinance which would close the theaters and dance palaces at ten-thirty and curfew out all lights at midnight sharp. And not a few, in the beginning, would protest loudly the screaming of sirens and tooting of whistles that routed them out of the eider down at six of the morning. Harsh words might greet the ultramatinal visits of Mr. Camp's burly training inspectors who would pass from house to house driving the reluctant inhabitants onto the streets each day for a prebreakfast constitutional. Some voices, too, would intone their owners' anguish to high heaven as they were herded to weekly mass meetings, one to each precinct, where instruction in the proper execution of the daily dozen would be imposed, under the watchful eye of the police.

Housewives, too, might grow rebellious at the curtailment of their culinary liberties, for a municipal edict would prescribe, from week to week, the health menu, and the entire city would eat at the training table; even in the restaurants à la carte service would be replaced by Mr. Camp's idea of a proper table d'hôte.

Loudest of all would sound the dirge of the smokers, reduced, under pain of fine, imprisonment, and complete abstention, to a miserable allotment of ten cigarettes, or the equivalent in pipes and cigars, daily.

The conceit is a pretty one. It is worth trying. It is worth trying, even though it could never succeed, if for no other reason than to prove to our radical legislators and our professional regulators of this and that, once again, that it is no part of the aspirations of a free people to be regulated, and ordinanced, and legislated out of their small personal vices into enforced and disciplined well being and morality. One of the strange peculiarities of the American is that, while he wants to be reasonably good, he would rather a thousand times be free in transgression than bound in perfection.

As for the chiropractic gentlemen who would like to see one of their number in the seats of the mighty, we think we are safe in warning them that the best way to discredit their art in the minds of the public is to attempt its popularization through the political channels.

TILDEN—THE GREAT

IN all the world of sport there is but one champion who can look forward to 1924 with fully justified confidence that the end of that year will find him still at the top of the competitive ladder. That champion is William T. Tilden 2d, the tennis wizard who for the fourth time has won the championship of the United States and who in international competition has proved himself the supreme master of the game.

In these days of intense competition and many contenders of high skill in all the branches of sport it is the lot of few champions to stand head and shoulders above their most worthy rivals. Even that mighty rib-toaster Jack Dempsey sees across the path that he must travel next year the shadow of the tragic-faced South American who with a mighty punch sent him headfirst from the ring last summer. In the golf championships, amateur and professional, it is a wise man who can pick the ultimate winner from among a half dozen players of almost equal skill. Zev, as he munches his oats these winter days, must sometimes hear the pursuing thunder of My Own's hoofs. Suzanne Lenglen, for five years the ace of women's tennis, knows

that before long she must match strokes with Helen Wills—dubbed "Little Miss Poker-face"—who this year won the American women's title. But on the tennis horizon of "Big Bill" Tilden there is no threatening cloud.

Tilden stepped into the tennis limelight in 1918, when he was ranked No. 2. He held that position in 1919, when he was runner-up to "Little Bill" Johnston for the championship. In 1920 he beat Johnston for the title and was ranked No. 1. Since then he has held the championship. Until this year Johnston, his closest rival, has been able to make a bitter fight for first honors. This year even Johnston was outclassed. Tilden lost but one match during the season, and in the national tournament decisively defeated his conqueror on that occasion, Manuel Alonso, the brilliant Spanish player. He has raised tennis from a sport to an art. Endurance, speed of foot and stroke, tennis brains of the highest quality—all are his. He can play every shot known to the game. Nerves as tightly strung as are his rackets sometimes get him into temporary difficulties, but those same highly strung nerves enable him to raise his game to unbeatable heights when most is at stake. To-day he is the world's greatest player. Probably he is the greatest player in the history of tennis.

Some day, of course, Tilden will go the way of Larned and McLoughlin and the other great ones of the past. Defeat lurks at the end of every champion's path. But before that happens it seems very likely that he will at least equal the record of seven national championships held jointly by R. D. Sears and W. A. Larned.

PITY THE VIRGIN ISLANDS

OUR island possessions often strike us as being more trouble than they are worth. In turn the Philippines, Porto Rico and Hawaii have given us a guilty conscience, and now it is the Virgin Islands that promise to haunt our collective mind.

War strategy caused us to buy them from Denmark in 1916. But these three islands—St. Thomas, St. Croix and St. John—have not prospered under American care. Two droughts have hit them hard. First, prohibition took away one of their chief means of livelihood, then Nature, not to be outdone by government, sent them a rainless period that has been prolonged for three years.

Either of these droughts would have been extremely serious, for the natives of the Virgin Islands have depended upon three things for a living—growing sugar, raising cattle and manufacturing rum.

If this were not enough to dismay the Virgin Islanders, the shipping lines, owing to prohibition and the trade war now on, have withdrawn their business from St. Thomas, which used to be a busy transfer point for Caribbean trade.

So, about twenty-six thousand persons living on the islands are idle and the majority of them are in a helpless position. Those well-enough off are leaving for live regions. But the bulk of the population—the poor—remain behind. They are pinning their despairing hopes on the next Congress. Two things they desperately want. They want the United States government to build reservoirs in the hills to hold the rain that falls during a torrential season, so that they may establish an irrigation system. And they want the ban of prohibition lifted, as it was for the Philippine Islands, so that the immemorial rum industry may be continued for their prosperity.

POPULAR TOPICS

SEVERAL of our foreign-trade records were broken last year. According to figures prepared by the Chamber of Commerce of the United States the value of our corn exports, 115 million dollars, was greater than ever before, and the quantity shipped, 164 million bushels, has been exceeded in only two years, 1897 and 1901. We exported over a billion and three-quarters pounds of sugar—a new record. Export shipments of sulphur, crude petroleum and starch were higher than in any previous year. Commodities for which 1922 was the second-best exporting year were

molasses, rye, petroleum products, crude asphaltum and raisins. Last year's quantity exports of automobiles, salt and hams have been exceeded only twice. Our 1922 wheat shipments totaled 165 million bushels—the fourth-best year on record. Substantial gains in quantity exports of various products over prewar averages were registered, among them being rice, malt, canned milk, oats, eggs, bacon, lard, iron and steel, alcohol, cigarettes, motion pictures, electric lamps, motor cycles, paints, soap and cotton cloth.

LAST year also established several new import records. Imports of raw silk, bituminous coal and linseed oil were greater than ever before both for quantity and value. Among the commodities which broke quantity-importation records were newsprint paper, crude rubber, brass and sugar.

THE people of the rest of the world must be getting either very honest or too poor to bother about taking care of their money. Last year our exports of cash registers decreased by 64 per cent from the prewar average.

THE Swiss are trying to get the Turks' Angoras. No, not goats—cats. A Swiss syndicate has asked the Turkish government to name its terms for an exclusive concession to buy and export the cats of Anatolia, where even the street cats are pure-blood Angoras. The members of the syndicate figure that they can buy the cats for a dollar apiece and sell them for fifty times that amount in Europe or America. The Turks figure that they can export a million cats a year, thereby gaining much revenue and even more sleep.

WE'VE heard so much praise of strong, silent men that it is a relief to know that so good a judge of values as Benjamin Franklin thought that sometimes silence was only gold-plated. Said wise old Ben: "As we must account for every idle word, so we must for every idle silence."

THE world's international trade last year is estimated at 45 billion dollars, an increase of 5 billion dollars over 1921. In making this estimate O. P. Austin, statistician of the National City Bank of New York, transformed the various currency valuations into American dollars at the average rate of exchange for the past three years. The world's trade for 1920 is placed at 65 billions, for 1919—the high-record year—at 75 billions, and for the year before the war at 40 billions. Higher prices were partly responsible for last year's increase, but the quantity of merchandize actually moved across international borders was greater than for the previous year.

UNCLE SAM'S importance as a merchant has grown steadily since 1910, when our share of the world's trade was 9.8 per cent. In 1913 it was 10.5 per cent; in 1916, 14 per cent; in 1920, 17.5 per cent. Last year it dropped to 16.5 per cent.

BRITISH taxpayers are becoming exceedingly weary of the doles given by the government to unemployed workers. At latest reports a million unemployed men and women were drawing four million dollars a week from the national treasury —and indirectly from the pockets of those Englishmen who either are working or who have capital working for them. Opponents of the dole system say that if it were discontinued the income tax could be cut in half and that its chief result is the encouragement of the twin sins of shiftlessness and thriftlessness.

The Unusual Adventures of the Texan Wasp

By James Francis Dwyer

Author of "The Underground River of the Oasis," "The Jeweled Ikon of the Czar," Etc.

V.—THE SCARLET JACKALS OF SEVILLE.

Mr. Robert Henry Blanc of Houston, Texas, waives the too-solicitous services of the escort provided by No. 37, and proceeds by water to Spain and freedom. His fancy bids him to Seville, his luck abets his fancy, and the romance of old Spain welcomes him with open arms.

IT was a fellow of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, who penned the report of the sensational escape of Robert Henry Blane, known as The Texan Wasp. The account appeared in the Gibraltar *Chronicle*, and the writer was very proud of it. He bragged about his descriptive powers to friends in the little café he frequented in Waterport Street.

The Cambridge man had taken the hobbles off his old typewriter and aired his knowledge. He began with a comparison between Robert Henry Blanc and gentlemen adventurers of other days. He mentioned Claude Duval, Captain Starface, Leonardo the Grand, "Swift Nick" Levison, Jack Sheppard, Count Peter—"The Masked Devil"—and many others; then, after asserting that the life of The Texan Wasp was more adventurous than the life of any one of the persons he had named, he told of the happening that took place at the Old Mole Gate of Gibraltar harbor on a late afternoon in early May. Told of it in that ponderous, long-winded manner that one expects from an English university man. Said the Cambridge Tripos winner:

The imaginative Dumas would have exulted in the impudence of this American, whom he would have thought a fit companion for his inimitable four—D'Artagnan, Athos, Porthos, and Aramis. This fellow from Texas—one of the largest States of America—is, in the words of Sam Weller, "a warm potato!" Captured in Algeria this "Wasp," as he is called, was brought from Tangier on board the *Gibel-Zerton* of the Bland Line, and when the boat was entering the Old Mole Gate the fellow, by specious arguments, induced his guard to allow him on deck.

He was brought up, securely handcuffed to the wrist of the guard, and the two stood close to the rail as the boat came slowly in. Suddenly this American turned upon the detective, lifted him in a most surprising manner and leaped with him into the water before the astounded passengers could interfere. An English officer, who was an eyewitness of the action, considers it the most extraordinary piece of impudence that has ever come under his notice.

In the leap this American, or, more correctly, this Texan, managed to snap the connecting links of the handcuff that bound him to the guard, so that when he struck the water he

was free. He started to swim seaward but discovered that the guard, unable to swim, was sinking. The fellow turned, supported the detective till a life buoy was thrown from the *Gibel-Zerton* then, with a jeering laugh at the distinguished passengers who lined the rail, he swam away at an incredible rate of speed. A fog was drifting in from the Strait at the moment and he was soon lost to sight.

This American is described as a great athlete. It is even rumored, with what degree of truth we do not know, that he won prizes for swimming when a student at one of the large American colleges! It is thought that he may have headed for Algeciras.

So much for the Cambridge man. Robert Henry Blane did head for Algeciras. Gibraltar seemed a cold forbidding place with the Ten Commandments pasted upon the face of the big rock; Spain stood for color and music, for light and laughter and gayety. Spain was Romance.

A lovesick *carabinero,* guarding a stretch of coast, heard the tinkling of a guitar plucked by the long fingers of a black-eyed señorita that he loved, and he forgot orders. He left his post for a few moments to kiss the white hand that was thrust down to him through the trellis of the arbor, and in those few moments Robert Henry Blane made a landing in Spain. He was free. Wet and tired and penniless, but free.

The Wasp circled the town, crossed the Palmones River and halted in a grove of cork trees above the main road that swept away up through glorious, golden Andalusia to Seville. A wonder road. A road along which had gone splendid cavalcades in the dead centuries. A highway upon which had tramped Carthaginian, Roman, Goth and Moor. Over its dusty stretches had ridden The Cid; Don Alonzo de Aguilar, that mirror of Spanish chivalry; Ponce de Leon, and a thousand others whose names are famous.

"I'll rest and see what fortune sends me," murmured The Wasp, then addressing the branches of the trees above him as if the god of good luck sat in the boughs he added: "I would like to go to Seville. The word is singing in my brain."

There passed picturesque peasants from Los Barrios and San Roque, queer country folk that drove sheep and cattle before them; gypsy caravans with scouting dogs as lean as their masters; carts with loads of cork from Castellar and loads of wine from the sherry country stretching from Algeciras to Jerez. And then to The Texan Wasp in his ambush appeared a miracle.

Across the river swung a gayly painted caravan drawn by two fat mules. A driver, wearing a white, stiff-brimmed sombrero, sat out in front, affectionately flicking the shining hides of the mules and joining now and then in the chorus of a song chanted by some one within the vehicle. The song roused The Texan Wasp. He sat up and listened intently. The soft warm wind from the river brought the words up to him. They thrilled him. The Spanish driver's pronunciation was not all that could be desired, but the unseen singer had a voice that defied the little twists given to the words. The song swept up the road and echoed against the hills over which the night was stealing softly:

"We'll put for the Souf! Ah, dat's de place
For the steeplechase and the bully-hoss race;
Poker, brag, euchre, seven-up, and loo;
Den chime in, niggers, won't you come along, too?"

The Texan Wasp sprang to his feet and joined in on the chorus.

"No use talkin' when de niggers want to go
Where the corntop blossoms and the cane brake grow:
Den come along to Cuba and we'll dance the polka-juba
Way down Souf where de corn brakes grow."

An order, roared in a voice of thunder, came from the inside of the painted caravan; the driver tugged at the reins and the fat mules halted. A head was thrust out between the flaps at the rear and a question was hurled at the grove that concealed Robert Henry Blane.

"Who in the name of all creation is singing?"

The Texan Wasp stepped out into the roadway and bowed to the owner of the caravan. "Good afternoon, Jimmy," he said sweetly. "I was just dozing in the grove when I heard a voice that I knew. How do you come to be in this part of the world?"

James Dewey Casey, the little American fighter who was known as "The Just-So Kid," took a flying leap from the wagon and grabbed the hands of Robert Henry Blane. He was followed by a large, black billy goat—one of the short-haired breed that you find on the islands of the Mediterranean—and just for a moment the meeting between the two men was upset by the goat's belief that his master had been attacked and required assistance.

"Down, you blighter!" roared The Just-

So Kid. "Don't you know a prince when you see one? Get down on your knees or I'll make you walk all the way to Seville."

Robert Henry Blane laughed as the billy goat obeyed the order, then he addressed the little pugilist. "Jimmy," he said, "I was just sitting there dreaming of places that I'd like to visit. And Seville was the one place that I had a hankering for. Curiously, I had no money, so I made a little prayer to the black-cat mascot I carry in my pocket and round the bend came your caravan with its fat mules."

The Just-So Kid waved his hand toward the wagon. "It's yours, boss!" he cried. "The mules, Don Ignatz, the driver, an' the wagon. It's all yours. Ignatz isn't a bad chap. I named him after a mouse in a comic strip that I used to read when I was living in America." For a moment the little fighter remained silent looking at the black goat, then he spoke again. "Why, you can have Rafferty if you want him!" he said. "He's yours! An' he's the best fightin' goat that the world has ever seen!"

"Jimmy," said the smiling Wasp, "I want a ride toward Seville. That's all. I've just swam across the bay from the Rock and I'm a little tired. Let's go."

Rafferty sprang back into the vehicle, Robert Henry Blane and The Just-So Kid followed, Don Ignatz cracked the whip, and the fat mules moved off.

Up through enchanted Andalusia, by sun-drenched roads of sweet romance The Texan Wasp moved toward "La Tierra de Maria Santisima" as the splendid country around Seville is called by its inhabitants. By paths of poetry that wound their way through groves of olives, oranges and pomegranates, by old crumbling towns that had grown beautiful in death the fat mules and the painted caravan came to Seville, the golden city, that sits beside the tawny Guadalquiver. And all the world had come to Seville. It was the time of the *Feria,* the great fair, and the city was crowded.

"Boss," said The Just-So Kid, "the caravan is yours. You saved my life at Marseilles the time you tossed me that fifty an'——"

"Jimmy," interrupted Robert Henry Blane, "I've a small cache in Seville. Four years ago I was here but I left in such a hurry that I hadn't time to draw some funds that I had in the Banco Hispaño-Americano on Calle de las Sierpes. If I can prove I am Robert Henry Blane I'm well heeled. Let's see if they remember."

The polite cashier listened to the story told by The Texan Wasp, took a specimen signature, consulted several large ledgers, then returned to the waiting American.

"We have seven thousand pesetas to the credit of Señor Robert Henry Blane," he said suavely. "The account has not been operated for some years."

"Jimmy," said The Wasp, "what does Rafferty like more than anything else?"

"Carrot tops," replied The Just-So Kid.

"Then, we'll take a taxicab and buy him a hundredweight of them!" cried Robert Henry Blane. "Come on!"

The *Feria* of Seville is one of the greatest festivals in the world. It is probably *the* greatest. It is stupendous, gargantuan, a little gross. It throws one back into the fifteenth century, into days of Elizabethan license and gayety. It dwarfs the tame carnivals of Nice and Rome, the gondola processions of Venice, and the Neapolitan Easter festivals. The *Feria* is a left-over from the fat days of old; a splendid unloosening of the knotted belt of high morale that the centuries have tied around the waist of pleasure. It brings thousands from every town in Spain; thousands from France and England; thousands from America. Hotel prices are doubled. The city forgets sleep. The Sevillians dance and sing for three days and three nights.

It was on the second night of the *Feria* that Dame Adventure tapped the shoulder of Robert Henry Blane and bade him follow. A glorious night. The perfume of spring was upon the city; the music of castanets and of guitars—the instruments beloved by the gay Andalusians—swept up into the sky and formed an invisible bed on which the little stars danced.

The Texan Wasp, in carnival costume and wearing the stiff-brimmed sombrero of the land, had picked his way across the crowded Prado de San Sebastian and halted for a moment to watch a gay game on the Paseo de Catalina. Ten of the sweetest daughters of Seville had offered their services for charity. They were seated on a plush-covered dais above a monster revolving disk, and for a single peseta a chance the dashing *caballeros* of the city could attempt to reach their lips by means of the swiftly moving and cunningly greased disk.

"For the poor!" cried the announcer. "Give to the poor! The poor of the Cathedral de Santa Maria de la Sede!"

Robert Henry Blane was amused. One by one the gayly dressed gallants sprang upon the great disk and attempted to ride upright the half circle that separated them from the red-lipped damsels on the dais. One by one they were thrown ignominiously and swept into the padded scupper that was beneath the platform of the goddesses. The watching crowd applauded each new contestant as he paid his peseta, were silent for an instant as he stepped upon the whirling disk, then broke into mad screams of laughter as the greased floor was whipped from under him, rolling the ambitious one, soiled and crestfallen, into the padded trough from which the attendants rescued him.

The Texan Wasp looked at the ten young women on the dais. Wonderfully beautiful were the ten. They possessed all the points of beauty for which the señoritas of Seville are famous. Their teeth shone like rows of baby pearls between lips that had the wet redness of hollyhocks at dawn. Their eyes were big and black and shining; their hair was piled in high masses, above which rose the great tortoise-shell combs beloved by the maids of Andalusia. Lace mantillas shaded the soft faces, and embroidered shawls that were worth untold pesetas hung from the white and shapely shoulders. The Cathedral de Santa Maria de la Sede had wisely chosen the sweetest ten to work for the poor.

The most beautiful of the half score caught the eye of The Texan Wasp. Across the great whirling disk the man and the maid looked at each other. The eyes of the tall American plainly expressed his admiration; the eyes of the maid of Seville flung a challenge across the intervening space. The flashing black eyes dared him to ride the whirling disk in an effort to reach her moist red lips.

Robert Henry Blane smiled. The maid smiled back at him. The loud-voiced announcer screamed his adjurations to the night. "For the poor!" he bawled. "Give to the poor! One peseta for a chance to kiss the sweetest mouths of all Andalusia. Aye, and of Granada and Estramadura! There are no señoritas as fair as these in all of Spain!"

The Texan Wasp moved toward the spot where the announcer marshaled the contestants, permitting them to step one after the other onto the greasy disk. It was a night to venture. A golden moon rode high above the Guadalquiver; breezes charged with the perfume of flowering trees came from the gardens and the Paseo de las Delicias along which lovers strolled.

An arrogant competitor, already convinced that his lips were pressing those of the most beautiful of the señoritas, shouldered The Wasp on the little runway. Robert Henry Blane returned the compliment. The arrogant one turned and surveyed the American coldly.

"The señor must be careful," he said slowly.

"You are evidently speaking to yourself," retorted The Wasp. "Sort of warning yourself against trouble, are you not?"

The Spaniard stopped. He was a tall, well-made fellow dressed in a carnival costume of black velvet. A striking and picturesque figure to the casual observer but the face would have disclosed a lot to an acute student of physiognomy. It was a mean face, crisscrossed with lines etched by greed and cowardice and by cold cruelty. In a high-pitched querulous voice he addressed Robert Henry Blane.

"The señor must stand back till I make my effort," he said. "I am before him."

The Wasp laughed. "On the contrary, I am before you," he said. "It is a small matter, but you are so rude that I refuse to stand back."

The eyes of the crowd were upon the two men on the runway. The ten damsels were interested. The American and the Spaniard standing together on the plank attracted the attention of all.

The announcer was quick to see the opportunity that offered to gather in pesetas for the poor of the cathedral. "Let the most generous señor have the place!" he cried. "The señor with the largest heart must go first! That is the rule!"

The Spaniard tossed a ten-peseta bill to the loud-mouthed cormorant. The Wasp retorted by throwing him a bill for twenty-five pesetas.

"Place for the Americano!" roared the announcer. "The Americano has a heart like the good Bishop Baltasar del Rio!"

The Spaniard flung back his cape and a little murmur came from the crowd, a murmur whose meaning was hidden from The Texan Wasp. The inside of the mantle was

decorated with an embroidered figure of a small animal—to the quick eyes of the Texan it appeared to be a representation of a jackal—and the momentary glimpse of the thing appeared to have an effect upon the crowd.

It also had an effect upon the master of ceremonies. He became immediately obsequious. The owner of the cloak flung a bill of fifty pesetas into the fellow's outstretched hand, and the announcer with a continuous muttering of *"Mucho gracias,"* tried to thrust the Texan aside so that the Spaniard could step upon the disk.

But Robert Henry Blane had come to a definite decision upon the matter of precedence. He told himself that he would either make the attempt before the Spaniard or he would ride with him in the direction of the fair damsels upon the dais. Hurriedly he flung a hundred-peseta note of the Banco de España at the announcer and held his place beside the other. For an instant he caught the eye of the beauty who had challenged him to make the attempt. Her face, lit up by excitement, held him to his purpose.

The Spaniard stepped upon the whirling disk. The Texan Wasp stepped with him. For an instant the two stood upright as the swiftly moving thing shot them forward, and in that instant the quick brain of the American acted. He tore from his own shoulders the carnival cape, dropped it swiftly and stood upon it. It gave his feet a purchase upon the greased floor of the disk.

Whizz! whizz! The revolving platform tried to wrench itself from under the feet of the two who had insanely stepped onto it. *Buzz! Zurr!* Some one had tickled the engine that whirled the wooden disk in its mad revolutions!

The Spaniard swayed. He flung out his arms in a wild effort to steady himself! He slipped, fell to the floor and was hurled by the motion of the disk into the padded trough. He whizzed by the feet of The Wasp like a black python being flung into space!

The greased surface of the disk tried to rid itself of the cape on which rode Robert Henry Blane. It couldn't. The tall Texan balanced himself as he had learned to balance during years when he competed at fancy riding competitions at Prescott, Arizona; Cody, Wyoming; Bozeman, Montana; and a score of other places where good riders gathered. The crowd screamed! The malefactor at the engine throttle reversed. The disk stopped for an instant, whirled itself in the opposite direction, stopped again and sprang forward! The Wasp had a vision of a purple-covered dais with a score of eyes brighter than those of the sirens who sang to Ulysses! He gathered himself together and sprang!

He landed before the knees of the maiden who had challenged him. The crowd shouted approval. He had conquered the disk.

Robert Henry Blane rose. He was a splendid athletic figure as he stood bareheaded beneath the electric lights. With the grace of Pierre Vidal, the prince of troubadours, he bent down and kissed the red lips that the damsel offered willingly, then he stepped from the platform.

The crowd moved back as the Texan sprang to the ground and into the little cleared circle came a disturbing figure. It was the Spaniard who had disputed the matter of precedence on the runway leading to the revolving disk. On the end of a cane he held the soiled cape of Robert Henry Blane which the Texan had tossed beneath his own feet to enable him to stand upright on the greased board, and he thrust the garment insultingly in the face of the American.

"The señor's clothes are so poor that they fall from him," he said sneeringly.

The Texan Wasp plucked the cape from the cane and tossed it into the face of the other. "I left it for the señor who lost," he cried. "It is the consolation prize."

The Spaniard, startled for a moment by the smothering wallop in the face, sprang forward in a curious catlike manner and was met by the unbending left which The Wasp thrust out to meet him. It sent him sprawling backward and before he could rise the alert, well-dressed police of Seville had thrust themselves into the scene of combat.

The Spanish police have a desire to gather in brawlers and onlookers. They grab at the nearest person, and Robert Henry Blane, blessed this particular kink in their make-up. While two husky members of the Guardia Municipal fell upon a burly onlooker, The Wasp slipped away.

Near the corner of the Calle San Fernando and the Paseo de Santelmo a weird figure in slouch hat and cape sidled up to Robert Henry Blane and spoke in a whisper.

"Run, señor!" he gasped. *"Run!"*

"Why?" questioned The Wasp.

"You have quarreled with the leader of the Scarlet Jackals!" whispered the ghost of Don Quixote. "They will kill you! Run for your life! The city of Seville is not large enough to shelter the person they hate!"

Robert Henry Blane laughed. "Run off yourself, Don Q.!" he said jestingly. "I'm enjoying myself immensely."

Two hours later the person in charge of the revolving disk that was working for the poor of the Cathedral de Santa Maria de la Sede decided to call it a day. He stopped the disk and gallantly helped the ten señoritas from the dais. It had been a very successful evening. The collision between The Wasp and the head of the Scarlet Jackals had fattened the bag considerably. The fellow grinned as he thought over it. It was clever of the church to harness the flesh and the devil in its service.

The most beautiful of the half score maidens turned as she reached the ground and found herself face to face with a tall and smiling person whose Spanish carried the soft drawl of the South as he spoke.

"It is all over?" asked Robert Henry Blane.

The beautiful one nodded her shapely head. "For to-night, señor," she murmured. "To-morrow we will work again for the poor."

"The lucky poor," said The Wasp, then he added: "I wonder if one of their number could act as an escort to the señorita. A humble delegate from the Confederacy of the Poor."

The girl looked puzzled. "Where is he?" she asked.

Robert Henry Blane bowed. "Before you, señorita," he said smiling. "The poor of the world sent me to Seville to thank you for your efforts and to beg you to let me act as your escort."

The señorita laughed gayly. "I live a long way from here," she said, "and, curiously, I love walking."

"The members of our confederacy always walk," said The Wasp.

"My father's home is on the Calle Méndez-Nuñez, near the Plaza del Pacifico," she whispered.

"It is but a step," said Robert Henry Blane. "I had hopes," he added gallantly, "that it was many kilometres on the high-road to Cordova."

The night had grown more beautiful. The big moon had gathered around herself a cluster of lambkin clouds that had lost themselves in space; the night breezes had found caches of new perfumes; the echo of castanets and guitars hung in the air. The gayest and most pleasing town in all the world was experiencing her gayest and most pleasing moments.

Robert Henry Blane and the lovely daughter of Old Seville walked back toward the center of the city. She told her name. It was Dolores de Riano. Her father was a merchant on the Calle del Gran Capitán. Her age, she whispered sweetly, was "twenty-one, less three days." The soft night wind ran off with the secret.

The two crossed the Plaza de la Constitucion, turned into the Calle de Tetuan, and dropped down a narrow alley toward Méndez-Nuñez. And in this alley the hate of the head of the Scarlet Jackals was made manifest to Robert Henry Blane. A cloak that seemed as large as the camel's-hair carpet of Mohammed was flung over the head of the Texan, and the hands of four highwaymen attempted to press its folds tight around his face.

It was one of these invisible hands that gave Robert Henry Blane his leverage. He seized the fellow's wrist as the thug deftly attempted to smother the victim—seized it with his own two powerful hands, then, although blinded by the cloak, he swung the attacker off his feet and whirled him round in a tremendous circle.

It was a performance that possessed something of the primitive. The human flail, unseen by the man who was wielding it, went out on a crashing circuit. The flying body and legs cannoned against the three others and bowled them over like so many ninepins!

One of the three, falling to the street, clutched the legs of The Wasp and pulled him down. The cloak was still around the head of the Texan but he fought himself free of it and belabored the two men who were still clinging to him. A handful of red pepper was thrown and the American was enveloped in the shower. It was a mad mêlée, Blane hitting out at every vulnerable portion of the three who tried to batter him into insensibility. Round them as they fought flitted night birds and inquisitive on-

lookers. Somewhere at the end of the narrow street a loud-voiced citizen bellowed for the police.

The Wasp, upon his knees, connected with the jaw of a big scoundrel who was heaving himself on top of him. The fellow dropped and as he fell the shrill scream of a whistle bit into the soft night. It ran like a pointed needle into the darkness, and the three other attackers halted for a second, turned and fled. The sound of marching feet came from Calle de Tetuan.

Robert Henry Blane sprang to his feet. The stunned thug lay upon the ground but Blane was not concerned with him. His thoughts were of Dolores de Riano. Where was she?

The narrow alley was cluttered with skulking queer people who sprang out of the way of the American as he rushed around seeking the girl. The police arrived and sprang immediately upon the stunned bandit who was endeavoring to get to his feet. Blane cunningly evaded a bright police lieutenant who was weaving in and out of the babbling crowd. He told himself that he had to find the girl. The attack was nothing. He had given more than he had received, and just for the moment he forgot the quartet that had attacked him with such little profit to themselves.

The Wasp hurried down the alley toward Calle Méndez-Nuñez. He brushed aside the jabbering mob that were attracted from the bigger street by the riot in the lane. He disregarded their shouted questions as to what had happened.

The lane turned abruptly as it neared Méndez-Nuñez and there in the dark angle The Texan Wasp found the girl he sought. She crouched in the shadows, sobbing softly, and for the instant she did not recognize her escort when he spoke to her.

"It is I, the American," cried Blane.

"Oh, gasped the girl, "I thought they would kill you! I thought——"

"Your shawl?" cried Blane. "Your shawl and necklace?"

The girl flung out her white arms in a gesture of despair. Upon the shapely wrist the light of the moon showed an angry scratch. She made a swift movement of her white fingers to her perfect throat and a queer hysterical laugh came from the red lips.

"Come away!" she cried. "They are the Jackals! The Scarlet Jackals! They are murderers and thieves! They took everything from me while the four were trying to kill you! Quick! Come away!"

Robert Henry Blane turned to rush back up the alley but the girl clung to him. "Don't leave me!" she cried. "I am afraid! Take me home! Our house is near! Take me home!"

The Wasp stood for a moment undecided. A man coming from the scene of disturbance cried out an answer to a question thrown at him by a youth who was hurrying toward the spot. "The Jackals!" cried the information giver. "The Jackals are on the job! Look out!"

Dolores de Riano, hysterical now, clung to the arm of The Texan Wasp. "Please take me home! No, no! At once!"

There was nothing else to be done. Robert Henry Blane with a choler that made speech impossible turned and hurried with the girl down the alley, swung to the right along Méndez-Nuñez toward the Plaza del Pacifico. There was nothing pacific about The Wasp. He was a very wild and angry American. His affair on the revolving disk in the earlier part of the night had brought down upon his head the wrath of the very select gang of murderous thugs who terrified the town; and their annoyance with him had brought misfortune upon the girl. He was a volcano of undiluted deviltry as he hurried along with the girl.

The home of Señor Juan de Riano was one of those Seville houses that are the most wonderful in the world. It possessed splendid entrance gates of wrought iron which opened into the enormous patio, and in the patio The Wasp met the father of the girl. An angry and sneering father when informed of what had happened. He looked Robert Henry Blane up and down and showed his contempt for the tall Texan in a manner that would have been exceedingly dangerous if he had been a younger person.

"The jewels are nothing," he said boastingly. "I am rich. The shawl I loved. It was the shawl of her mother and it is one of the most wonderful in all Spain."

Robert Henry Blane found an opportunity to make a comment. "The shawl and the jewels will be returned before morning," he said quietly.

The conceited merchant paused and looked at the American. "Before morning?" he questioned.

"Yes, señor," answered The Wasp.

Señor Juan de Riano laughed contemptuously. He opened his big mouth and flung his head back and laughed again. The words tapped some secret store of mirth within his fat frame and he became a perfect gusher of hoarse laughter. The girl, still hysterical and terrified, shrank back in the shadows.

Robert Henry Blane turned toward the iron grating that separated the patio from the vestibule. Señor Juan de Riano, still gurgling, followed him. The Wasp stepped out and the fat father controlled himself for a moment to turn his sneers into words. He lifted a bloated forefinger and pointed it warningly at The Texan.

"The Scarlet Jackals have killed a lot of men that were bigger than you," he said. "Much bigger and, perhaps, braver. This Spain of ours has bred many brave men, señor! Be careful! One stranger is nothing for the Scarlet Jackals to gobble up. A great fighter is at their head. My daughter has said that you came into collision with him this evening at the Prado de San Sebastian. Then take care! He hates Americans. They are his chief dish. Ah, a perfect devil is Hernando de Delgado! Look out for him!"

Robert Henry Blane bowed and walked out into the street, but as he reached the sidewalk the jeering voice of the Señor Juan de Riano halted him. "If you catch him, señor," cried the Spaniard, "bring him here to speak to me. Ring three times and I will come down no matter what the hour. But mind your ears! There are many people in Andalusia who wear their hair long on account of Hernando de Delgado."

From somewhere high up in the old houses that reared themselves up from the dark street came the dashing strains of the "Habañera" from "Carmen." Fitting music for Seville, the golden city in which the hectic heroine lived and died.

In the shadows across from the house from which the music proceeded crouched The Texan Wasp, and beside the American squatted the weird ghost of the large sombrero and the cape who had urged Robert Henry Blane to fly after the disturbance at the revolving disk. In the pockets of the old outcast were ten of the big silver dollars—fat, heavy *duros* with which the Texan had bribed the replica of Don Quixote.

"What floor?" questioned The Wasp.

"The fourth, señor," gasped Don Quixote. "The fourth. You cannot see because the blinds are strong and heavy."

"And the way up?"

The owner of the big sombrero made a queer noise with his throat. "There is no way up, señor," he whispered. "By the stairs, yes, but the stairs will take you quicker to heaven than to the cave of the Jackals. There have been others that have tried."

The Texan Wasp growled. "They didn't wish to get there as badly as I do, Don Q.," he said slowly. "I wish to be there and out again before the dawn."

The ancient outcast breathed a prayer. "The señor will be in paradise by dawn if he attempts to get into the place," he murmured. "It has been attempted before. Ah, yes! There was a clever policeman in Seville and he tried. Where is he now? In the cemetery! There is a beautiful stone above him, with his name printed on it in gold letters. And do you know who put up that stone? Listen! People say that it was put up by the king of the Jackals. Aye, by Hernando de Delgado himself! He paid the bill."

The Texan Wasp laughed softly. "I have treated you well?" he asked.

"Yes, señor!" cried the outcast.

"Then listen to this. If I'm killed please write a letter to Hernando de Delgado and tell him my name. Will you do that? Just my name, so that it will be printed properly on the stone."

"I will do it gladly," said the unhumorous guide. "What is the name?"

"John Barleycorn," said The Wasp. "I was chased out of America but a lot of my countrymen would like to know where I am buried."

"I will remember," said Don Q. "I think I have heard of that name."

"Possibly," said Robert Henry Blane. "And now, good night."

The weird ghost crept off into the shadows. The Texan Wasp scaled a stone fence and dropped down into a blind alley. He crept along the wall at one side of the alley till he reached a spot where the telephone wires swept down from a roof to flirt with a pole that was thrust up to meet them from the wall. He crouched beneath this pole and looked up at the wires. They were like streaks of black chalk drawn across the face of the setting moon. The Wasp counted

them. His mind went back to college days when he had done feats that were close to the impossible. And into his mind as he waited came the words of Señor Juan de Riano. The Spaniard had said that many persons in Andalusia wore their hair long to hide the fact that their ears had been lopped off by the king of the Jackals. "It's a game that one would fancy him playing," growled The Wasp. "But it is dangerous unless you have some one to hold the person you are operating on."

The little lost clouds that the old moon had shepherded during the early part of the night had gathered to themselves so many other lost ones that they partly covered the face of their guardian. The Wasp waited, watching the eclipse. He desired darkness. From high above him the music of "Carmen" came in desultory patches. He listened as he waited. The airs were played by some one who was interrupted at times in a curious manner. The American came to the conclusion that the player in some way was using the music to convey some meaning to others.

The little clouds made a fat, white pillow smothering the moon, and The Wasp stirred. He climbed to the top of the wall, then with a dexterity that was amazing he climbed the pole on which were the wires. He calculated the ascent made by the wires before they connected with another pole that thrust itself out from the back wall of the house that he desired to reach. It seemed a tough job but not altogether impossible.

He gathered four of the wires in his strong hands, and, stretching himself out along their length and holding by one hand, he managed to button his coat with the threads of copper inside. He was buttoned to the wires, and the coat would make a brake that would prevent him from slipping backward as he climbed. For a moment he considered the holding possibility of the pole, then the words of Señor Juan de Riano whipped his soul and he started to climb.

It was a job that required all the strength and suppleness of the man who had been the pride of his college. Slowly, carefully, inch by inch, Robert Henry Blane fought himself forward and upward. Now and then the moon peeped out for an instant and looked at him swinging in space. He was glad that those moments were few and far between. A person at one of the dark windows of the house would have had a fine bull's-eye to blaze at. The Wasp thought of the name that he had given to the ghost of Don Quixote. He thought what a joke it would be if Hernando de Delgado put the name "John Barleycorn" on his tombstone. What a surprise it would be to some American prowling through the lonely cemetery behind the military hospital in the years to come!

The moon peeped timidly; Blane glanced upward. Before and above him was the pole that was affixed to the wall. And close to the pole he could see a small window waiting to welcome him.

For a moment the Texan rested. The last two yards seemed impossible. The Wasp said a little prayer to the black-cat mascot in his pocket, then drove himself upward with a superhuman effort.

He clutched the pole and hung limply in space. He moved along it, disengaging himself from the wires. He flung out his right leg and felt the sill of the window!

He considered the possibility of balancing himself upon the window sill. Again the moon showed for an instant. There was no shutter to the window and one of the panes was missing. The Wasp calculated that a swift swing to the sill and a clutch at the frame would be possible.

He let go of the post and snatched at the frame. His fingers were cut by the jagged remnants of the broken pane but he held on. For one desperate moment the depths clawed at him, then he was safe. He thrust his hand in through the opening and turned the rusty lock within. He climbed inside. He was in the attic beneath the roof, a foul-smelling attic that was stuffed with all kinds of things. The music of "Carmen" now came from below.

Robert Henry Blane sat himself down on a bale beside the window and considered the matter that he had in hand. It was his pride that had brought him to the haunt of the gang that terrified the city. For an instant he told himself that he was rather stupid to take offense at the words uttered by the fat father of Dolores de Riano, then in the next moment he assured himself that he was right in making the promise to deliver back the shawl and jewels that had been stolen from the girl while she was in his company.

"They're horse thieves!" he growled. "If I get hold of Señor Delgado, king of the

Jackals, there might be a chance for a kind friend to put a nice tombstone on——"

The Texan Wasp paused abruptly and sprang erect. From the roof above him came the soft sounds of climbing feet. Some one who had no desire to make his position known to the world was on the slate roof immediately above the spot where the Texan was sitting.

Cautiously The Wasp peered out. The ledge of the roof was but four feet above him, and out over the spouting was a leg that was being pushed tentatively into space!

Mr. Blane watched the leg, fascinated by the manner in which it was thrust downward. It was followed by another. They were blind feelers in search of the window sill on which The Wasp leaned. Their owner was clutching the roof and was unable to see where his two limbs were going!

Lower and lower came the legs. They swung before the window. The toes of the shoes kicked the frame. They were within a foot of the face of the Texan. Solid-looking, honest shoes, The Wasp thought them. The kind that honest men wear.

The shoes found the sill; the toes rested on it. There was a pause. The Texan Wasp read the reason for it. The unknown found that he could not reach down and clutch the window frame without endangering his safety. Robert Henry Blane, unable now to look out without making his presence known, understood exactly what was happening. The man whose toes rested on the sill could not find a grip that was midway between the spouting and the window frame. The unknown's method of entering the house was a failure!

For five minutes the legs, having done their part of the work in finding the sill, remained inactive while the owner groped ineffectually with his hands. The legs possibly signaled that their toes only rested on the sill. The spirited music that heralds the approach of the bull fight in "Carmen" came from below. It seemed to mock the position of the man who was attempting to reach the window.

A mad impulse gripped Robert Henry Blane. He looked again at the shoes. He knew shoes. He had made a study of them. He was certain that they gave more indications of the character of their wearers than any other part of their apparel. And he was certain that the shoes on the window sill were worn by an honest person. A stubbornly honest person, he thought. He recalled a sheriff that he had known in Deaf Smith County, Texas, in the old days, who had worn shoes that were similar to those on the sill.

Robert Henry Blane reached out, took a grip of the unseen person's legs, then spoke in a soft whisper into the night. "It's all right," he murmured. "I'll hold you. Get a clutch on the window frame!"

There was a moment's indecision on the part of the owner of the legs. Just an instant of appraisal of the words that had been whispered into the night. Then he acted. He let go his grip of the spouting, and two muscular hands reached down and gripped the frame of the window as The Wasp supported him. A strong body blocked the window, shutting out the waning light of the moon, a bullet head appeared, and Robert Henry Blane stepped softly back into the thick darkness of the attic. Mr. Blane had recognized the person he had helped into the room!

The newcomer stood close to the window and endeavored to pierce the gloom. He did not seem in the least afraid, standing so that he was clearly outlined to any one in the darkness who might have wished to take a shot at him. For a full minute he stood thus, then he spoke in a whisper that was even lower than that which The Wasp had used in bidding him to enter the attic. He spoke in passable Spanish. Not the pure tongue of old Castile, by any means, but understandable.

"Thank you, friend," he murmured. "To tell the truth I couldn't get down or up. I guess I owe you something. I don't know why you helped me. I'm a little puzzled."

Robert Henry Blane crouching in the shadows, made a soft explanation, keeping to the tongue that the other used. "I don't own the house," he said. "As a matter of fact I think I would be an unwelcome visitor to the tenants."

Something like an amused gurgle came from the man at the window. "I believe they would think the same about me," he whispered. "That is why I came in over the roof."

Again there was a little silence then The Wasp spoke. "I have a grouch against this bunch," he said, "and I take it that you also wish to pick a bone with them. At other times you might have a disinclination

to running in partnership with me, but I have just done you a little service."

"A big service," corrected the other.

"All right, a big service," continued Robert Henry Blane. "Then here is my proposition. For to-night we will fight together. When dawn comes we will break the partnership."

"I'm willing," said the man at the window. "Whoever you are, I'm your partner till dawn if you're fighting the Scarlet Jackals. Come out of the shadow and let me see you."

The Texan Wasp stepped forward. The moon slipped for an instant from beneath the clouds and he stood revealed to the man at the window. A cool man was the person at the window. The tall American was pleased at the manner in which he took the discovery. For just a second he remained quiet, then he spoke.

"Bob Blane," he murmured softly. "Well, well. I knew you had got away from the fools after all my trouble but I didn't expect to meet you here. Why did you make this agreement with me?"

"It stands, doesn't it?" asked The Wasp.

"Sure," said the other. "We're partners till dawn. That is, of course, if you're up against the bunch in this place."

"I'm up against them," snapped Robert Henry Blane. "I'm choking with temper. That's why I'd like a good fighting partner, and, between you and me, I have never found a better fighter than a gentleman known as No. 37."

The great man hunter grunted. "Let's get busy," he said. "I want the leader of this bunch and time is flying."

Robert Henry Blane and the greatest man hunter in all Europe crept from the attic and moved cautiously along a narrow hall. They moved toward a point from which the music surged up from below. No light was visible, but the strains of "Carmen" directed them to the opening where the stairs led downward from the attic floor.

Not a word had passed between the two after the great sleuth had suggested that they should get busy. There was nothing to be said. For once in many months the desires of Robert Henry Blane and No. 37 did not clash. By an extraordinary happening the hate of The Wasp had centered on a criminal that the man hunter desired. The head of the Scarlet Jackals had defied local law, so the greatest lariat thrower that Justice had in her service had been detailed to rope him.

The Texan Wasp did not think of the agreement as he crawled along the passage. He thought only of the sneers of the fat father of Dolores de Riano. Hot hatred for the fat man flamed up in him. The conceited merchant had told Mr. Blane to be careful of his ears lest the king of the Jackals should lop them off! The Texan would have made a compact with the devil if by so doing he could get even with the band that had assaulted him and robbed the girl that he was escorting home.

It was Robert Henry Blane who found the stairs. He paused and touched the arm of the man at his side. No. 37 understood.

The music rolled up the unprotected opening in the floor of the passage. The two men listened to it for a few moments, then with the caution that might be used by Dyak head hunters they started to descend.

No sound of voices came to the man hunter and the tall Texan. At times when the music ceased for an instant the house was as silent as a tomb.

They reached the floor below the attic. The house, built in the Spanish fashion, possessed galleries that looked down into the court. Crawling side by side the two chance-made partners crept to the balcony of the gallery, rose to their feet and looked over.

The court was not lighted, but a soft, luminous glow that filtered out through a heavy silk curtain at the door of a room on the lowest floor made it possible for the two intruders to see. No. 37 leaned toward The Wasp and spoke in a whisper.

"The music carries a message," he murmured. "Some one is listening to it."

Robert Henry Blane nodded. He had come to the same conclusion.

The man hunter was listening intently. The soft glow made it possible for The Texan Wasp to see the strong face of the sleuth as he thrust his head forward in an effort to solve the mystery connected with the continuous playing. Robert Henry Blane noted again the strange details of the face—the details that he had noted on their first meeting at the gambling tables of Monte Carlo. It was an extraordinary aggressive face; the face of a human bloodhound.

For a moment Blane forgot the Scarlet

Jackals. He recalled the remark of a professor at whose feet he had sat in the long ago. The professor had asserted that the worry of Nature was the work of building up antidotes for those experiments of hers that had turned out bad. The Wasp thought that No. 37 was an antidote. For every five hundred persons that turned off the straight and narrow track Dame Nature built a bloodhound of the type of No. 37 to minimize their wrongdoing! He, Blane, and four hundred and ninety-nine others had made the detective; their faults were responsible for the cold eyes, the fighting nose and chin, the mouth that had become a lipless line. The five hundred were responsible for the cut of his clothes, for the very build of the respectable shoes that were so much like the shoes worn by the sheriff in Deaf Smith County, Texas. It was the law of the swinging pendulum. No. 37 was a moral Ironside that the careless Cavaliers of Crime had made!

The man hunter whispered another thought that had come to his mind. "That fellow is playing to the folk who are in the house," he said.

"They're very quiet then," retorted The Wasp.

"Sleeping," grunted No. 37.

"How do you know?"

"Guessed it. But I'll wager that they are. This strumming of his tells them that everything is right. It's cute. They can wake up and be comforted by the music. It tells them that he's awake and watching. Something like making a sentry whistle."

The Wasp nodded toward the court. "Let's go down," he said.

No. 37 turned and faced the American. "I'm after the leader of this bunch and no one else," he said. "His name is Hernando de Delgado and he's a tough bird."

"I know him," murmured Mr. Blane. "I collided with him this evening and I want to see him again."

"No killing business," cautioned the man hunter. "I want to take him alive and kicking to Madrid."

"Take him where you like," said The Wasp. "If you get him I want to have the loan of him."

"The loan of him?" repeated the detective. "For how long?"

"Ten minutes."

"No manhandling or anything like that?"

"I'll treat him as if he was a little baby," answered the Texan. "I am the kindest man that ever came out of my State."

No. 37 made a noise that suggested his doubts about the truth of the statement, but he followed the American quietly along the gallery and down the stairs to the floor below. The music helped them. The continuous playing drowned the little protesting noises of the woodwork as the two crept down the stairs.

They had reached the first floor and were standing on the circular gallery at a point directly above the door of the illuminated room when an unlucky incident announced their presence. The square toes of the respectable shoes worn by the detective unloosed a lump of plaster that dropped into the court with a noise that broke the thread of melody coming from the room.

The Wasp and the man hunter dropped to the floor and remained quiet. The silence seemed tremendous after the joyous notes of Bizet's opera. It was a silence that was more startling than any noise. It was more alarming than a siren. It had lungs of steel.

The curtain was thrust aside and the player stepped into the court. The two watchers on the gallery could see him through the carved screen of Spanish mahogany that made the lower portion of the protecting railing. He was a tall man with a weird white face that he turned toward the galleries. His alarm was plain. He sought the reason for the noise assiduously.

Robert Henry Blane and No. 37 watched him with unblinking eyes. And as they watched the silence seemed to grow and grow. It spread out from the court, a queer strange quiet that seemed to be hunting for some one to whom it could explain that intruders were in the house. The Wasp, as he waited, felt certain that the man hunter's deductions concerning the reason for the continuous music were correct. The silence that welled up from the court would have waked a multitude.

And immediate proof of its power was forthcoming. The detective and the Texan, eyes glued upon the court, received a surprise. They expected that members of the society of thugs and murderers would make their appearance to ask why their lullaby had suddenly stopped, but they did not guess the point from which the startled sleepers would come!

The Texan Wasp located the point. He nudged the man hunter and pointed to the

very center of the court. The floor was mosaic work, a black-and-white pattern in marble, and the floral circle, some three feet wide, the point from which the elaborate design went out, was moving slowly upward!

No. 37 and the Texan watched the circle closely. It came up like a huge mushroom. Not hurriedly, but in a noiseless, slow manner that would have made it hardly noticeable to a person standing in the court. It was the position of the two watchers that gave them a chance to detect it immediately.

At a height of three feet the lid remained stationary. A man slipped cautiously from beneath it. He was followed by another and another. The appearance of the third made The Texan Wasp and the man hunter bristle. The fellow was Hernando de Delgado, the king of the Scarlet Jackals of Seville!

No. 37 leaned toward The Wasp and made a motion that he had no desire to wait till the hole in the court spewed up further supports. The musician, in answer to the whispered inquiries of his chief, had led the three toward the lump of plaster that had been detached by the shoe of the detective, and as the four clustered around the spot, The Wasp and the detective acted. They rose noiselessly, climbed swiftly over the wooden railing and slipped down the smooth posts to the floor of the court.

It was Delgado who first noticed the sudden descent of the man hunter and The Texan Wasp, and he acted promptly. A bullet missed the head of Robert Henry Blane by the merest fraction of an inch. The Wasp felt its hot breath on his face as he whizzed down the post. He wondered about the possibility of reaching Señor Delgado before he could repeat the performance, and as he wondered the goddess of good luck lifted a finger for the American. One of the four members of the gang, evidently believing that darkness was the better medium in which to stage a battle, fired at the lamp within the room. There was a crash of glass, a sudden burst of flame, then a darkness.

Robert Henry Blane hurled himself at the point where the chief of the Jackals had stood. His outstretched hands gripped the short jacket of a man who was moving swiftly to another point. The Wasp clinched; the two went to the floor with a crash.

The Texan Wasp, in some unexplainable way, knew that he had grabbed his man. In the early part of the night he had shouldered the chief of the gang on the runway leading to the revolving disk, and now as he clinched in the darkness he felt certain that the person he grappled with was the same. A wild joy seized him. The man he struggled with was the dreaded person whom the girl's father had jeeringly hinted would trim the ears of any American he ran against.

Robert Henry Blane felt the handle of a knife as he gripped the right wrist of the chief of the Jackals. The Wasp shifted his grip and took a quick and terrible pinch, with thumb and forefinger, of the wrist bone. There came a grunt of pain from the other; the clattering of a knife on the marble told the effect of the squeeze. The Texan felt inclined to laugh.

Around the two rose a terrific riot. Curses, yells, screams of pain, and shouts filled the court. Robert Henry Blane wondered for an instant what the man hunter was doing, but the activity of the chief of the band gave him little time for speculation. A cry that had been raised in the darkness had prompted Señor Delgado to make a supreme effort to break the clutch of The Wasp.

The leader of the Jackals made a desperate attempt to shake off the American who was on top of him. The cry was repeated. It electrified the captain of the thugs. He rolled along the floor of the court, and The Wasp, clinging to him, had a vague impression that the Spaniard was trying to reach the opening through which he had come from below when the music ceased.

The truth of this surmise was brought home to the American in a startling way. Another yell came from the companions of the thug captain, then, to his astonishment, The Texan Wasp found that he was on the edge of the opening and that the cover was closing in the same silent manner in which it had opened. The thing was coming down with a terrific suggestion of force!

Robert Henry Blane understood the meaning of the shrill yells as he fought to get back from the grip of the steel cover that was descending slowly. The cries had conveyed to the chief of the Jackals the information that his followers were retreating through the opening in the floor, and the chief had made a supreme effort to go with them and take The Wasp with him! The closing lid grasped at the shoulder of The Wasp. He felt that the thing was worked

by some screw power and that it would crush a man caught between it and the edge of the floor. He wriggled clear of it. The man he was fighting was desperate. The chief of the Scarlet Jackals knew that the lid was closing, and insane with fury he made an attempt to thrust both himself and the American under the lid!

Robert Henry Blane freed his right hand and sent three crashing punches into the face of his captive. The rim of the descending lid bit at the Texan's shoulder. He fought the push of the devil he was wrestling with. The Spaniard unloosed a mad scream and thrust with all his strength. The Wasp heard the soft whirring of the greased screws. The fugitives were working hurriedly to close the lid. Again the Texan struck. His fist found the jaw of his prisoner and the fellow stopped struggling. The Wasp thrust himself away from the hole.

No. 37 struck a match. He was sitting on the bodies of two men whom he had beaten into insensibility. Without glancing at The Wasp he examined their faces and gave a little grunt of disappointment.

"I thought I had him," he growled. "I was sure I had him. Have you by any chance——" He had leaped to the side of The Wasp and thrust the match close to the face of the leader of the Jackals. A little cry of delight came from the mouth that was but a lipless line. "You have him!" he cried. "But he's mine! He's mine!"

"After I have finished with him," said Robert Henry Blane. "That was the agreement."

"Let's move!" cried the man hunter.

"A moment," protested The Wasp.

Hurriedly he searched the pockets of the Jackal's chief who was slowly coming to his senses, and from one of them he drew forth the flashing jewels that had ornamented the neck and wrists of Dolores de Riano. Flung carelessly across a chair was the shawl.

"I'm ready!" he cried. "We're off!"

A carriage drew up before the house of Juan de Riano in Calle de Méndez-Nuñez. From it descended Robert Henry Blane, the handcuffed chief of the Scarlet Jackals, and the greatest sleuth in all Europe. It was nearly dawn. A soft glow appeared in the sky above St. Roque.

"What's the game?" questioned No. 37.

The Texan Wasp did not reply. He dragged the chief of the Scarlet Jackals into the vestibule of the house of the pompous merchant. With a gesture he demanded the key to the manacles. The man hunter handed it to him. The Wasp freed one of the wrists of the gang leader, then locked the loose wristlet to a bar of the grating. Quickly he thrust into the hand of Hernando de Delgado the shawl and jewels that he and his band had robbed from Dolores de Riano, then he spoke quietly as he touched the electric bell.

"When Señor de Riano descends you must give them to him with your humble apologies," he said softly. "Be careful. I and my friend are going to step around the corner of the vestibule so that our presence will not disturb you, but we will have an eye on you. If you do not make a full apology I'll be tempted to make a target of you. Now, buck up! Here he comes!"

Robert Henry Blane and No. 37 stepped around the corner of the vestibule and watched. The fat merchant, accompanied by a servant, came to the iron grating, and to the pompous father of the girl the leader of the thugs handed the splendid loot, grunting out an apology as he did so.

The Texan Wasp grinned as he listened. "He's yours now," he remarked to No. 37. "And, by the way, our partnership is nearly at an end. See, the dawn is coming. Good-by."

The morning post brought a letter to James Dewey Casey, The Just-So Kid:

DEAR JIMMY: I'm leaving town hurriedly. Sorry I cannot see you. I inclose my fare from Algeciras to Seville. Bulliest trip I ever made. My regards to Rafferty and Don Ignatz.

Always yours, ROBERT HENRY BLANE.

The Just-So Kid fingered the bills for a moment then turned angrily upon the black goat. "He's a prince, he is!" he growled. "Any time you meet him an' you don't go down on your knees an' stick your beard in the mud I'll baste the life out o' you. Get that now an' keep it in your strong box for reference."

Another Texan Wasp adventure in the next issue.

The Lost Charm

By Roy Norton

Author of "Sleeping Dogs," "An Honest Troubadour," Etc.

With the help of Goliath, David doubles in *Sherlock Holmes* and *The Good Samaritan.*

A SMALL, wiry, red-haired man scrambled through the thick growth of brush, half slid and half plunged down a steep declivity and halted in the middle of the hard, worn road where he drew a deep breath, wiped the sweat from his face and consulted a huge silver watch.

"Quarter past ten and I sure ought to be in time for the down stage. It's seven miles from our camp here by this short cut, and I've done it in one hour and a half, and I win five from Goliath, and then from Hank," he muttered, after which he grinned cheerfully, rolled a cigarette, and planted himself in an attitude of repose on a roadside boulder. He took from his pocket a tiny parcel, unwrapped the newspaper protecting it and scanned the inscriptions on a half dozen letters as if to reassure himself that all had been correctly addressed, after which, for lack of anything further to do he sat and idly stared at the enormous panorama of mountains, forests, ravines and cañons that were visible from his perch and which formed a portion of the back edge of the Big Divide. The stillness was so profound that even the trees had lost their almost inaudible whispering and his ears, finely attuned to nature, could distinguish the faint murmuring of the river that, hundreds of feet below, cheerily and busily made its way over and between myriad boulders. For fully fifteen minutes he sprawled listlessly before he lifted his head and listened attentively with his face turned up the white, stony highway.

"Here she comes," he commented, and straightened himself, arose from the boulder and walked into the middle of the road where he stood waiting to intercept the oncoming vehicle. The noise grew louder, gained a crescendo of sound made up of clattering hoofs, a driver's voice admonishing his horses, and the screeching of brake shoes grinding on iron tires, and then the down stage swung round a bend and as the pedestrian waved his arms up and down came to a halt. The driver was using heavy-weather language and beside him on the box a man who had lifted a sawed-off shotgun lowered it with a grunt and stared downward.

"Lord Almighty! David, we didn't recognize you any too soon!" he exclaimed.

"And that's the truth," growled the driver, shifting in his seat. "You certainly did pick a mighty dangerous spot to flag us, this time."

"Why, what's the matter with you fellers anyhow?" David demanded. "One of you grabs leather and the other a gun as if you thought you were about to be held up and was ready to shoot on sight."

The driver and the express messenger

grinned at each other and the latter rested his shotgun between his legs and as he reached for tobacco remarked, "Reckon you ain't heard the news, pardner. It's just two days ago since this same stage was stuck up almost on this exact spot. Right down there at the next bend, in fact, a hundred yards from here. I wasn't along, but Bill here had no chance to put up a fight. Road agent got away with the treasure box."

"Well, I'll be hanged!" David exclaimed as if incredulous. "Who'd of thought it! Reckon that's the first holdup around here for as much as ten years, ain't it? How much did the feller get away with?"

"Only one package with seventy-five hundred dollars in it," the messenger answered. "But the worst of it is the sheriffs don't seem to have any idea at all who did it. They came up here within two hours, scouted around down there at the point, picked up the robber's trail and followed it clean up to the bare top of the ridge, got another little patch of it a half mile farther along and followed it down into the road and there it was lost. The feller was simply turning back toward Wallula Camp and for all that anybody knows may be there right now."

"Didn't bother the passengers, eh?" David asked thoughtfully.

"Wasn't any, same as now," the driver informed him. "And this gink was wise enough, too, so that he didn't bother the United States mail. Didn't want Uncle Samuel on his train along with the express company's men and the regular officers, I reckon. But—by gosh! He knew how! Just like old times, it was! And me takin' no chances, either. You can bet your head on that!"

"I can, Bill! I can!" David agreed, with a sarcasm that was wasted on the knight of the ribbons. "But what I stopped you for was to get you to mail this package of letters for me when you get down to the other end. Reason I happened to come here was that its just about seventeen miles less than carrying them into Wallula."

The messenger reached down and took the letters, the driver remarked that he must be "gittin' along" and then as he released the brake called over his shoulder facetiously, "If we get stuck up I'll hand these over too. Reckon they ain't worth as much as that seventy-five-hundred-dollar package the stick-up got and that had been shipped by Boss Shaughnessy! Haw! Haw! Haw!"

His laugh was drowned in the clattering of hoofs as the stage jumped forward, its wheels throwing up little clouds of dust and its momentum increasing as it reached the bend and disappeared around it. But David was left standing in the middle of the road with his mouth open and an expression of astonishment on his face.

"Shaughnessy—it was Tom Shaughnessy's money that was looted, eh? Wonder why he sent—hang it all! I'll bet there was something crooked in that holdup—just because it was Tom's money! I wonder if there was real money in that package? Yes, of course there must have been, because the express agent wouldn't have taken it on the blind. Um-um! Wonder if somebody who had been robbed by Shaughnessy, or some of his gang, didn't know it was being shipped and played even?"

He thought of the numerous crooked deals and gouges perpetrated by the boss of Wallula and his associates, all of whom had once been driven from the camp of Sky Gap by the more reputable citizens, and of the long-standing feud between this gang, himself, his lifelong partner Goliath, and his new partner Hank Mills, and grinned cheerfully as he thought, "Well, if any poor cuss has played even with Shaughnessy he's got my support. Luck to him!"

After again consulting his watch David leisurely struck back from the road, taking to the hillside in nearly the same place from which he had emerged, and climbed upward toward the crest. He paused after a few minutes and looked back toward the road that now lay considerably below and again his mind worked round the incident of the stage robbery.

"That would be the right place down there," he ruminated as his keen gray eyes scanned the white line that wound beneath. "And a man standing here would have had a grand-stand seat all to himself to watch the whole show. Or, if the chap that turned that trick had wanted to find a place to have a good look at the stage before he held it up he could have stood here, seen her as she came around that stretch up above, and then have had time to get down to that point and throw his gun on Bill as she came round that bend."

As if this thought proved interesting David began to scan the brush and ground

near by and almost instantly stopped in an attitude of surprise and whistled a note of astonishment; for all unexpectedly he had blundered on to a place where a man evidently had rested for some time. Had David been asked if he were an expert trailer he would probably have denied such craft; but Goliath, his huge partner, would have asserted that there was no man on all that great range who could "read sign" like this same wiry, alert, active, ferret-eyed man who now began moving around in a bent attitude peering at every impression in the earth, at every crushed bunch of grass, and at every broken twig of brush. David seemed actually exultant when he found a stump of a cigar which had been chewed as if nervous teeth had worked upon it long after its fire had expired. A minute later he found the gaudy band, frowned at it for a time, and then put it into his pocketbook, wrapped the cigar in his handkerchief, pocketed that also, and resumed his search. He paused over each footprint and again brightened when he found one in a patch of moist earth and sand that was clear and distinct. He got to his hands and knees and taking an old letter from his pocket carefully cut it out into an exact pattern of the footmark and with a stub of a pencil marked thereon every nail, noting little peculiarities of position as well as the fact that on the heel there was the imprint of a small iron plate almost new.

"That right boot heel was old, and the man had the plate put on because the heel was beginning to run over a little bit," David muttered. "Maybe he was a little bow-legged. Anyhow, he treads heavier on the outer edge of his heel than on the ball of his hoof. Must find a mark of his left foot that's clear." He continued his trailing. Finally this search was rewarded and again he paused and made another pattern, reasoning as he did so, "Nope, the man wasn't bow-legged, and the left heel had no plate and so doesn't wear off like the right. That shows that most likely he hits the right heel harder because he either limps a little or has had that right leg or foot hurt some time so that it steps just a trifle different from the other one. One thing is sure; he's a heavy man, and those marks were made by a town man's shoes and not by any miner's brogans or boots."

Yard by yard he followed the telltale trail until he had worked it out thoroughly in his own mind that the unknown man had been restless and moved about somewhat aimlessly as if his wait and watch had lasted for some time. Then came another discovery, that the man had seated himself or crouched down behind a heavy clump of brush and remained there for some time, occasionally with restless movements as if intensely interested in observing something while at the same time taking precautions to remain in hiding. David had put himself into the same position and found that he could look through small openings in the brush which had been made larger by hands twisting off one or two of the branches, and that he had an exact bird's-eye view of the spot in the road where the stage robbery had taken place. On making this discovery David once more uttered a tiny whistle and mused, "Uh-huh! That's the way, eh? There were two of them in it instead of one, as Bill, the driver, and the deputy sheriffs think. Maybe the one up here had a rifle beaded down on the stage all the time so that if it came to any sort of a show-down he could pot Bill or bring down a horse to make the game certain."

He devoted some time to seeking the marks where a rifle butt might have been rested and was disappointed because he could find nothing to bear out his reasoning. He still hoped to find some such indication, as he had made a complete detour and picked up the trails where the watcher had come and gone. They led away to the road below at a long angle and, proving that patience with keenness has its reward, David now made another most important find. It was nothing less than a coin watch charm with the few links connecting it to the chain from which it had been broken, at sight of which David's eyes widened as if he had found something unbelievable.

"Lord! Who'd of thought it! Wish Goliath or Hank was here with me so that if it comes to a show-down I could have a witness to prove that I did find this thing, and that it was here that I found it," he muttered aloud, and at the sound of his own voice looked around as if startled, then after putting the charm and piece of chain in his pocketbook, carefully marked the spot where he had found them by notching the bottom of some brush with his pocketknife. He resumed the trail which led him down into the main road where still another cause for conjecture was exposed. This was that the

trail had debouched almost exactly at a point where a smaller road branched off into the hills. This road David recognized as a private one that led to the Calora Mine, distant about two miles. The trail was lost, but David, now as keen as a bloodhound on a chase, turned off into the private road and followed it for some distance in the hope of again finding imprints of the crooked boot heel, but without success. He finally gave this up and was returning to the main road when he made another discovery and brightened eagerly.

"Horse and buggy been stopped here for some time," ran through his mind. "Didn't notice that as I went up because I was too busy looking for foot signs. Wonder who it could have been, and why? Couldn't be seen here from the stage road. Maybe it turned round and went back into the main road; or maybe it didn't come from the main road at all. Wish I could have found this before so many teams from the Calora had driven over it. Maybe, though, I can find some sort of tracks that'll show——"

He broke off and scanned the hard earth, rocks and dust inch by inch for a long time, and betrayed his disappointment when again he mentally commented. "Can't be sure about it. Maybe I'm imagining it. Everything so faint and beaten out; but it does seem to me that this buggy was driven up here off the main road, stopped, tied, stuck here for some time, then was turned round and driven back. The marks of the horse's fore hoofs show that, and look as if they might have been made just about two days ago, or—say—at about the same time the footprints I followed were made. If that's so, it accounts for a lot of things, and I dope it out about this way: Two men drove here and separated. One of them went straight back down the road, held up the stage, and after the job was done slid up the hillside to throw Bill off the scent; then after Bill and the stage had gone made his way back into the main road and finally returned here to the buggy. When the two who did the job first separated the man with the iron on his heel went and climbed up to that spot where he could watch and from which, if it came to a show-down, he could shoot. He didn't have to shoot, and probably made a bolt for it as soon as the stage had made a get-away, after which he also went down to the road and then back up here. The job was done and all the two men had to do was to drive away. The sheriff's posse, taking Bill's word that there was but one man, naturally picked up but one trail, followed it to where it came to the main road and was lost, and so entirely missed the trail left by the watcher a hundred yards away. Now which way did that buggy go and who was in it? It's my guess that I know one of the men that was in it and that it went straight back to Wallula where it came from, and from where it started probably mighty early on that same morning. Ought I to get word to the sheriff right away, or ought I to wait a day or two and see what turns up?"

For a long time he debated this and then made his decision for the latter alternative, after which he again took to the hills to return to his and his partners' claim and cabin.

Six days slipped away with the three partners waiting to hear any news concerning the stage robbery, chuckling over the information received in a roundabout way that no further developments had taken place, before the spell was broken by the chance arrival of a lank prospector from Wallula Camp who was invited to pass the night. He came opportunely as the partners were seating themselves for supper and Mrs. Hank Mills was cheerfully placing the food on the table. And almost the first question that he was asked was whether the deputy sheriffs had succeeded in learning who had "collared Shaughnessy's package."

"They have," he replied, an answer which caused all three of his male auditors to pause and look at him.

"And who was it, Tim?" David urged when the visitor showed signs of preferring food to recountal.

"Why, it was a chap named Ray. Tom Ray, I think his whole name is. Sort of a tenderfoot, so the boys say, although I don't know him pussonally. Comes from back in Iowa, or some of the corn States, and the pore durned fool must have got sort of discouraged because he hadn't found no pay streak up on Torren's Gulch where he had a claim, and is so hard up he has to beg for credit to get even some beans and sow belly and—well—does a fool thing! Goes and sticks up the stage and—what do you think! You'd never guess how they came to nail him! No siree! Not in a hundred years! That's what they calls 'the mysterious circumstances!'

"Sheriff gets one of these anymous let-

ters that says the writer's a woman and that this gink Ray done her dirt, so she's goin' to squall. Says he robbed the stage and that he's got the money hid somewhere, most likely under a loose board under the bunk in his cabin where he's keepin' it till it's safe to spend some of it. Well, the sheriff himself comes up, so the boys says, and goes out to this tenderfoot's cabin, and Ray pretended he didn't have nothin' to hide, wouldn't think of robbin' anything or anybody, and swears he never done no woman any wrong because he'd never had nothin' to do with a woman since he came to Californy, and that as far as he knows there's never been a member of the female sex in his cabin since he built it. They say he put up grand indignation talk—probably tryin' to bluff it out, you see. But it didn't go. Not at all! Sheriff and his men goes in, pulls out the bunk, finds the board and there, in a nice tin cracker box, is Shaughnessy's money all done up in the package the way it was shipped. Ray hadn't even busted the seals. When it's shown to Shaughnessy he proves it's his because he'd taken down the numbers on the bills, which were new ones he'd got from somewhere."

"What? What's that? New bills, you say?" David exclaimed. "Then he must have got 'em from some bank, and the only bank in Wallula is one he's not friendly with, because we all know he had a row with the manager when it opened because said manager wouldn't play in on the Shaughnessy game. Besides, since when does any one suppose Tom Shaughnessy's a careful enough business man to take down the numbers on bills he's going to ship out by express?"

"Don't know about all that, but I'm just tellin' you what I heard and what's common talk about the camp."

Goliath, big, phlegmatic, and apparently wholly occupied with his food, lifted his dark eyes slowly and after waiting to see whether any one else had questions to ask or information to volunteer inquired, "Did you say this fellow Ray is working up on Torren's Gulch?"

"Yes. They say he's got a prospect up there."

"And he hadn't struck pay?"

"Not that any one knows of."

Goliath resumed his meal and it was not until the conversation had again died away that he again offered an interrogation.

"Tim, didn't Charley Evans have a claim on Torren's Gulch, one time, a while ago? You ought to know that country. You were up there a while back."

"Him? Charley Evans, you say? Sure, he had a claim up there. Number Four above; but he sold out to Pinder. Got a thousand dollars for it and I told him at the time I thought he was either lucky or a fool. Pinder's got Number Three, too, come to think of it. And that makes me think of another thing, Shaughnessy's got Number One and Two below and, if I'm not off my reckonin', this chap Ray must have owned Number One above on the gulch. I don't know who owns Discovery and Number Two above but I think it's a man named MacPharlane, or something like that."

He had his eyes on his plate, hence did not see the start of surprise or the scowl that crept over David's face, nor the exchange of swift glances between David and Goliath. And suddenly, as if to divert the conversation, David began to talk volubly of something else. It was not until their guest had gone to his blankets and the partners were left alone that night that Goliath remarked, "Guess you're thinkin' about the same as I am, ain't you, Davy—that there's something fishy about that Ray deal, and that perhaps it was wise not to show too much interest or ask too many questions out there at the supper table?"

"You've got it, Goliath," came the prompt reply. "And to-morrow you and I are going to take a long trip. Clear down to the county seat and to the county jail. If I'm not off that young feller Ray needs help about as badly as anybody ever did. It's up to us to give it. Hank can stay here at the mine and keep things going till we get back and—maybe lie to anybody who comes along as to where we have gone. Get me?"

"Got you," said Goliath, and then, "Good night."

The lank prospector might have been surprised on the following morning had he known that within an hour after his departure David and Goliath were driving away over the hills in the opposite direction in a creaking old buckboard behind a pair of fat mules that philosophically and leisurely trotted as if they had knowledge of a long journey ahead.

It was nearly three o'clock in the afternoon when the partners left their mules in a feed stable, brushed the dust from their

clothes, and after a brief stop at a restaurant presented themselves at the county jail and asked for the sheriff. And the sheriff, being an old friend of theirs, granted their request for permission to interview his prisoner and as a further evidence of confidence gave them the use of his private office.

"I've got just one condition, David," he said, "and that is that if you hear of anything I'd ought to know you'll tell me. Because, between us three, I can't get this thing quite straight in my own mind, and if this young chap Ray is a criminal my judgment of human nature isn't worth a cuss any more. I can't make myself believe, in spite of the fact that we've got him shut up, that he held up that stage; and that's the honest-to-God truth!"

Ray was brought into the office and started in surprise when he recognized his visitors. He had the look of a helpless and hunted animal and when David and Goliath thrust out their hands and said, "No use in asking questions, because we've come to help you," threatened to break down. At first he could tell them nothing that they did not already know and made the same protestations of ignorance and innocence that had been made at the time of his arrest.

"We've heard all that and believe you," David said at last. "But what we want to learn—who are your enemies?"

"But I haven't any, that I know of," Ray insisted. "I came West from Iowa and worked in two or three mines and watched and picked up all I could because I want to be a miner. Then I went to Wallula and was one of the first to stake a claim on Torren's Gulch, and since then have been too busy trying to find gold on it to fool around the camp, or make enemies. I've kept my mouth shut, and women don't come in my catalogue because"—he stopped, flushed, looked embarrassed and then boyishly added —"because the reason I came West was to try to make money enough to marry a girl I grew up with back there in Iowa. And now—my God! What will she think when she hears of this!"

He rested his head in his arms on the table by which he sat and for a moment gave way to despair.

"There! There! Don't take it to heart, son," Goliath rumbled, laying his huge hand on the prisoner's bent shoulders. "That girl is too good to hold anything against you if you're proved innocent, and my pardner and me are goin' to do that, or go the limit tryin' to do it."

But David sat apparently unmoved and with his eyes fixed absently on the window beyond.

"Come, come!" he said finally. "Pull yourself together and answer some more questions. Do you know a man named Shaughnessy, or one named Pinder, or one named MacPharlane?"

Ray looked up and appeared perplexed by this line of interrogation as he answered, "Why, yes. I know all three of them. They're all of them good friends of mine. Mr. Shaughnessy wanted to buy my claim but I wouldn't sell it at any price he would give. The best he would offer was a thousand dollars. Then Mr. Pinder came and told me confidentially that his ground, which is above mine, was no good and that he was going to sell to Shaughnessy for five hundred and advised me to sell out. After that Mr. MacPharlane came and I didn't like him quite so well. He told me confidentially that Shaughnessy was a bad man to cross, and said that I ought to make friends with such a man rather than try to go against him in anything he was after, and intimated that Shaughnessy would make trouble for me if I didn't sell. But of course I didn't believe that and told him so in mighty plain language. He sort of lost his temper and let it out that the reason Shaughnessy wanted my claim was that he's got those on both sides of my ground and, as I understand it, wants to get a solid unbroken string of claims which he's going to sell to some capitalists back East, or make a stock company out of and sell stock; or something like that. But of course one can't believe anything one hears from a fellow like that MacPharlane. I was too wise for that; and, besides, Shaughnessy doesn't own them all because Pinder has a lot of ground—which proves that what MacPharlane said was a lie."

David sat with a dry smile on his face as he listened to this, and Goliath merely scowled in open-mouthed astonishment.

"Yes, and that's not all of it, either," Ray asserted. "Mr. Shaughnessy sent me a letter that I got only yesterday in which he says that he is sorry to hear that I made such an awful blunder—because of course he thinks like every one else does that I'm guilty—but that, notwithstanding my arrest, and knowing that probably I'll need

money to defend myself, he is still willing to pay me a thousand dollars for my claim. You can't call that unfriendly, can you?"

"Oh, no! Not at all!" David said with considerable sarcasm and then, winking over Ray's head at his partner, got to his feet and said, "Well, Goliath and I must be going now; but all I ask you to do is this, leave things to us and don't under any circumstances sell that claim unless we tell you to. You'd better give me that letter Shaughnessy wrote—for safe-keeping. I'll see him in a day or two and may want to talk the matter over with him. I reckon you can trust us, can't you?"

"I've heard so much about you two that I'd trust you with my life," Ray blurted as he produced the letter and handed it to David, who carefully pocketed it.

They gave him a few more words of encouragement, told him that if it came to money for defense they would find it for him, and after he had been returned to his cell by a deputy went outside to the waiting sheriff.

"Sheriff," said David, "we promised to tell you anything we could find out about this Ray case. Well, we're going to do it; but to save repeating it, we'd like to have you go with us to the prosecuting attorney's office so he can hear what we have to say at the same time. Is that good enough?"

"Sure. I'll go right over to Hillyer's office with you now," the sheriff said. "He'll be glad to see you two fellows any way, because he's a right smart admirer of yours and a good friend, isn't he?"

"Hope so," Goliath growled with a grin as he recalled a past episode in their career where the prosecuting attorney had turned a blind eye on their manipulation of a Sky Gap election which worked for an improvement in law and order. And he proved so when David sat and painstakingly detailed all that he had discovered and expounded his theory.

"Shaughnessy's got hold of some boobs back East who want to buy a mining property. The fact that there has been a little gold found on Torren's Gulch makes that the ideal ground to sell to any but the old-timers at the mining game who know the one color of gold in a pan doesn't make a paying mine, and that there are gulches which are as spotted as a fawn. Everything goes well until Shaughnessy tried to buy out this tenderfoot Ray, and because Ray's inexperienced and wants money enough to marry his best girl, he won't sell for a thousand dollars and Shaughnessy doesn't want to pay any more than he has to. He's got to have the ground to put the deal through. When he can't get it decently he turns around and goes after it crookedly, which is the way he knows best, anyhow.

"He gets that seventy-five hundred that can be identified, then he and one of his pals, either Pinder or 'Crook' MacPharlane, drive down there into that side road with a buggy. Shaughnessy gets on the high point to signal when the stage is coming, and the other man sticks her up, and they go back and plant the money in Ray's cabin, then write the anonymous letter. The watch charm I found is the only thing that was bad for them. I recognized it the minute I found it because I've seen it on Shaughnessy's chain a hundred times. After our talk with Ray it was all plain. They framed up on the boy to get him out of the way and to buy his mine for a thousand dollars when he became so desperate and helpless that he'd sell his right eye to clear himself, and they do it under the bluff of friendship, damn 'em! Doesn't it look that way to you, Hillyer?"

For a long time the district attorney pondered and then said, "Yes, considering the past record of that gang, and the clean record of Ray, it does; but—I'm afraid that what you've learned, and what we know, doesn't constitute proof enough to either convict Shaughnessy and an unknown man or to clear Ray. And the worst of it is I don't at this moment see how we can get more evidence against Shaughnessy or actually learn who his confederate, the actual robber, was. They're so clever that they have absolutely covered their tracks. What do you suggest, David?"

"Why, just this. That you give me a week or ten days to do a little nosing around in my own way. Then, if I can get what you call 'evidence enough,' it's easy going. If I don't, why in any case you can state that, owing to disclosures which it's not necessary to divulge, and with the consent or concurrence, or whatever you call it, of the court, you are convinced of Ray's innocence and—turn him loose. You could do that, couldn't you?"

For a time the prosecuting attorney considered, and finally shrugged his shoulders as he said, "Yes, I could; but it might de-

feat me for my next election. However, that makes no difference. I wouldn't convict an innocent man if I could help it, even if I never again held a public office."

"Hillyer, you're a white man," David exclaimed as he stretched his hand toward the attorney, and Goliath stood up and rumbled as if the long silence was unusual with him and he now found it necessary to make a noise.

"Ten days then, you're to give, and I'm satisfied," David said as they turned and left the office.

"I don't see how you expect to get any more evidence than you've got already, Davy," the big man remarked after they were on their way to where their mules were stabled, preparatory to the start on the return journey.

"I don't expect to get much," David remarked with a grin that exposed his white teeth. Goliath looked at him steadily for a moment and then remarked: "Davy, you're up to some dodge. I know it by the way you look."

"Goliath, old hoss, I am," was all that the smaller man vouchsafed by way of explanation for the time being, and later actions proved that he had confessed the truth.

They drove away together; but on the following morning at a certain point where the trail split they separated, and Goliath, after a, "So long! Good luck," turned off on the home trail and David took to the road, philosophically, for the long tramp to Wallula.

David's actions in Wallula were peculiar. He seemed intent on making numerous visits and always they were to men whom he knew he could trust and to none of them did he impart reasons for his sole request which invariably was, "I want to find out if Pinder and MacPharlane were in town on the night before that stage was robbed or on the day when the robbery took place, and I don't want any one to know that I'm trying to get the information."

The third man he confided in listened and made a calculation on his fingers.

"Nine days ago," he remarked thoughtfully. "That would bring it on a Sunday night—week ago last Sunday. Um-m-mh! I think maybe—just maybe, I say—I can find out something from a chap I know. You see the Almoran Mine laid off three days just then on account of a broken main pump and the men were paid off. Most of 'em came to camp for a bust. One of 'em, Bill Wainwright, the foreman, is a poker fiend and he got pretty heavily trimmed in a game that lasted from nine o'clock Sunday night till ten o'clock Monday morning, and that game was in Big Pete's saloon where most of the Shaughnessy gang hangs out. Get me?"

David wriggled with excitement.

"I get you so hard that if you'll go and get a horse and ride over to the Almoran and find out what Wainwright knows, or doesn't know about Pinder, MacPharlane, or Shaughnessy between the hours of nine o'clock Sunday night and ten o'clock Monday morning, I'll pay the expenses, and you'll be doing me a mighty big favor," he ripped out with unusual vigor.

An hour later his friend had gone for a five-mile ride, and David, to all appearances was merely dawdling around the streets as if enjoying a spell of laziness and idleness. But inwardly he was impatiently counting the hours that must reasonably elapse before he could expect word from his volunteer investigator. He had ample time to be impatient, because it was not until after dusk that his friend returned and betrayed his presence by a light in his cabin window, toward which David hastened within a few minutes after it became visible.

"Well?" he demanded as he closed the door behind him.

"Two of 'em ain't accounted for, but one of 'em is," the messenger answered. "Yes, one of 'em sure is, and that's Pinder. He sat in the game with Bill Wainwright, and Bill can remember the days and dates and times, you can bet, because Pinder won two hundred and twenty of Bill's hard-earned money. And, what's more, he wasn't satisfied to let go of Bill after they knocked off at ten o'clock Monday forenoon, but insisted on takin' Bill to breakfast and wanted him to have another sit-in to get his revenge. Nope. Bill and that guy Pinder didn't part company till about noon when Bill pulled out for the mine. Now, about the other two. Bill didn't see them either Sunday night or Monday mornin'; but if you want me to make some more inquiries, Dave, I'll see——"

"No, use. Don't bother about them," David interrupted. "And don't say anything to anybody about my ever having been nosing around. I've learned all I have to know for the present. And—I've got to go now.

Going back to our mine first thing in the morning. Play even with you some time for this. I'll say you've done me a good turn all right and I don't forget."

He was out of the door almost before he had finished his sentence and within half an hour, having an early start in view, was in his bed. Furthermore so early was that next morning's start that it was not yet noon when he was driven up to the cabin which was his destination and was greeting Rosita Mills and complaining of hunger.

"And you may as well lay in plans, Rosy," he said to Mrs. Mills, "to take care of the man from the livery stable down in Wallula, because he's going to stay here the rest of the day and part of to-morrow with us. And after that—I got to talk to the others and think it over a little before I can say exactly what will happen."

But what did happen was that on the following afternoon, timing themselves so that they would arrive in camp late at night, David and Hank drove away with the man from Wallula and Mrs. Mills knew that on the next day Goliath was to make the same journey with the partners' mules and buckboard. Also that if she feared to be left alone she could accompany him and visit the camp for which she had no very pleasant recollections.

The "Real-Estate-and-Specialty-in-Mining-Properties" office of Thomas Shaughnessy stood at almost the end of the business portion of the main street, modestly, inconspicuously, as befitted a place of such importance that sooner or later all must visit it. It was later—much later—at nearly three o'clock in the morning when David visited it, while Hank kept a watchful eye up Main Street for the solitary night watchman who seldom strolled that far because frequent visits were not necessary, and—Wallula paid his wages because Shaughnessy had so dictated. David, being a very amateur burglar, had a bunch of door keys big enough to open the doors of a city, all of which he had purchased at the county seat. Patiently he tried about twenty keys before he found one that opened the rear door of Shaughnessy's office after which, carefully using an electric torch, he pulled down the shades over the front window and with an air of relief went into Shaughnessy's rear office and made straight for the letter files.

He paid not the slightest attention to the small safe in the corner, but did pay much to the letter files. For a time he began to fear that what he sought could not be found and then, with a chuckle of satisfaction, came to a compartment, made the correspondence therein into a roll, and pocketed it before returning the letter file to the exact position in which he had originally found it. Cautiously he put the shades up again, cautiously passed out of the rear door and with the same caution locked it. Five minutes later he and Hank were slipping through the back streets to the cabin of a friend which had been put at their disposal during its owner's absence, and there, safe, secure, unalarmed, they gloated over their theft.

Shaughnessy on the following day was unaware that he was under constant espionage; that the espionage became more rigid as dusk fell; that it continued while he ate his lonely meal in a restaurant and made a tour of various resorts where it was his custom to be seen for a short time; and, most of all, that there were certain individuals who were gleeful and declared that luck had played their way when he returned to his office alone at nine o'clock of the autumn evening. He was seated at his desk in his private office when the door opened almost noiselessly and he looked up to see two visitors. The first, a short, red-headed man, grinned sardonically as he said, "Hello Tom. Glad to find you alone. Didn't expect us, I reckon."

"No, of course not, and don't know that I care to see either of you, as far as that goes," the boss growled, leaning back in his chair and wondering what misfortune was about to disclose itself. Always unexpected meetings with these two partners had been attended with misfortune. Misfortune seemed to have become a habit where they were involved.

"No use in getting nasty or fussed up about it, Tom," the smaller man declared with the utmost amiability. "We never look you up because we like you. You know that."

"Well, what have you come for this time?" Shaughnessy demanded after a moment's hesitation in which he recovered himself and appeared as cool as if he had neither fears nor apprehensions.

"Why, we've come to help you out, just for a change," David replied as he deliberately seated himself in a chair on the opposite side of Shaughnessy's desk and mo-

tioned Goliath to close and guard the door. "We've come to sell you Number Two above discovery on Torren's Gulch and—Shaughnessy, we've talked it over and we think you're going to pay for it just"—he stopped, leaned forward and with a hard tapping finger to punctuate his sentence said—"seventy-five-hun-dred dollars!"

For an instant any connection between those figures and the amount lost in the stage robbery and so peculiarly recovered did not seem to penetrate Shaughnessy's mind, and then, veteran gambler and expert dissembler as he was, his face turned slowly red, then white. His eyes lowered themselves under the motionless, fixed, and boring scrutiny of the steel-gray eyes that stared at him unblinkingly, menacingly, mockingly.

"What's—what has—why seventy-five hundred dollars, and—and how do you happen to cut in on this deal anyhow? You don't own that mine!" he exclaimed.

"We're asking seventy-five hundred because we know you've got that much in cash down in the hands of the prosecuting attorney of this county marked 'Exhibit A' in the Ray case. Second, we're asking it because we know that in a deal with the Curlew Mining Investment Company of No. 162 Dearborne Street, Chicago, you are putting this Number Two claim into the block of claims as your own and making the statement that it cost you seventy-five hundred dollars, even though you don't own it and hadn't a chance of buying it until to-night. We know that the company has been organized on a false basis to sell its stock just because you don't and never did own this property, and that you and MacPharlane got so desperate that in order to put the deal across and get Ray out of the way you even put up a fake stage robbery to land Ray in jail, where he'd fall for your game."

He leaned back triumphantly even as Shaughnessy lost his head, grew purple, sputtered as if he were about to be overcome by a stroke of apoplexy and roared with a brawling oath, "That's a lie. You can't prove any bunk like that and you know it!"

"Prove it? Can't prove it?" David retorted with an air of amused irony. "Why, I can hand stuff enough over to the prosecuting attorney of this county to have you in jail by noon to-morrow, and what's more—by Heaven!—if you don't close with us to-night my partners and I will see that you and MacPharlane are landed there to-morrow if we have to kill you and haul your carcases in to show that we have you!"

He had half arisen to his feet, crouched forward and now ended his threat with the emphatic bang of his fist on Shaughnessy's desk.

There was a moment's silence in which the fat boss of Wallula gasped, drew back and then stared around furtively as he heard the sound of steps walking crisply and hollowly over the board walk outside.

"Hoping MacPharlane or Pinder will come and make an interruption, are you?" David asked, reading his mind. "Well, I hope so too. We've got a man posted at the outer door who'll welcome either or both of them—with a gun. We don't allow for any chances in our game. We play to win, and you're a fool if you don't see that it's so and come across. You take my advice and sit down until I tell you what we're going to prove in the matter of that stage robbery if we have to hand you and our proof over to the county attorney."

Shaughnessy leaned back helplessly in his chair and muttered hoarsely, "All right. Shoot! What have you got?"

"We're going to prove that you got the bills for a plant and that you took the numbers and shipped them. And then that you and MacPharlane went down to where the stage was robbed in your buggy, which you drove into a side road, where you tied the horse. Then you went up to a high point a hundred yards this side and watched for the stage and Mac went on down to the bend and was ready when you signaled it was coming. He stuck it up and hit for the high ground and the barren rocks and then came down into the main road. You broke for the main road after the stage left in such a hurry that you even lost your watch charm. Here it is!"

Shaughnessy could not suppress either his astonishment or his anger. He bent far forward, glared at the bauble in his tormentor's hands and muttered almost inaudibly, "So you've got it, eh? No wonder I couldn't find it! Looked everywhere——"

David slipped the charm back into his pocket and with a grin went on, "Here's the butt of one of the cigars you smoke, and the band that came off it!" Again he made an exhibit. "But that isn't all. Here are two patterns of your shoes made from your footprints and—why, man! You've got the

shoes on now with the plate on the right heel; put there because your right leg is a little game due to getting a shot near the knee before we ran you and your gang out of Sky Gap."

Shaughnessy who had been sitting aghast suddenly shifted his right foot backward as if to conceal his shoe, and David grinned as he had proof that his surmise had proven true.

"Why, I've even got a sheet of paper taken out of your office which is of the same kind, watermark and all, that the anonymous letter was written on, and it's the same kind you used when you wrote Ray that nice friendly letter renewing your offer of a thousand dollars for his claim. Also, Shaughnessy, I've got some similar goods to pull about MacPharlane which don't need to concern you unless I have to put it all in the hands of the county attorney, together, as I said before, with two prisoners, alive or dead. Now, do we deal?"

For a long time Shaughnessy sat, discomfited, changing color, shifting his eyes, and now and then lifting them up to stare with unveiled hatred at the little man who sat silently observant across his desk.

"Damn you!" he growled at last, with an air of resignation, "you and that big pardner of yours are always butting in on my game and—and you'll do it once too often. I'll tell you that. But, I'll say this!" He paused and then with reluctant admiration added, "You never make a play that you aren't ready to raise to the limit and—I'll admit this—you seem to know how to make your bluffs good!" He pondered heavily for a full minute more and then with a sigh asked, "If I agree to this, and pay over the seventy-five hundred for that claim, does that clean the slate and does the matter drop as far as Hillyer goes?"

"It does. All we want to do is to protect that poor boob Ray, and we know how to do that without troubling you."

"Then it's a go!" Shaughnessy said, as if relieved to have come to a decision.

"We'll be with you all the time, Shaughnessy, all the time, until the money is paid over in cash," David asserted sweetly. "In a way, we'll act as if we were right fond of you—until then. Cash will talk. We'll go with you to the county seat to-morrow to get Ray to make out the deeds to the claim and to give you his receipt for the seventy-five hundred in cash. And after that—you can go to hell your own way as far as we're concerned!"

It may be that Hillyer still wonders whether the right course was pursued in the case of the last Big Divide stage robbery, but if so he has never said anything and merely smiles when asked why he released young Mr. Ray who, overcome by his great good fortune, pocketed the proceeds of his mining experience and is now said to be a prosperous farmer in the Middle West.

For a long time David never went near Wallula when he did not wear a watch charm which, if Mr. Shaughnessy happened to be in sight, he fondled and twirled with an exaggerated air of proud possession. Mr. Shaughnessy on such occasions invariably threatened to fall dead through an angry rush of blood to his bullet head, and needless to say, David invariably hoped he would!

Other stories by Roy Norton will appear in future issues.

A PERSUASIVE LETTER

GRAHAM B. NICHOL, now chief of the division of information and publicity in the bureau of internal revenue at Washington, had an adventurous youth in the course of which he cruised around Nome during the famous "gold rush" and returned to "the States" empty-handed. For a short while thereafter he was not rolling in money. During this period of slender means, he got a bill for a suit of clothes from a tailor named Berry, whereupon he perceived at once the necessity of moving the knight of the scissors to patience. Taking his pen in hand, he wrote:

"Your father, the elder Berry, would not have been such a goose, Berry, as to send me a bill, Berry, before it was due, Berry. You may look very black, Berry, and feel very blue, Berry, but I don't care a straw, Berry, just now for you and your bill, Berry."

Vagrom Men

By J. Frank Davis

Author of "'Whoso Diggeth a Pit——'" "Through to the Finish," Etc.

Hamp Gerrish demonstrates his familiarity with the works of two great dramatists—William Shakespeare and Colonel Colt.

WADE HAMPTON GERRISH of Texas allowed himself to forget that Randall Hazard, sitting as his host in the aisle seat on his right, was quite possibly devising a plan to rob him of his eye teeth, and gave himself up wholly to the enjoyment of "Much Ado About Nothing."

It was a notable performance of the New York theatrical season, and even in the "all-star" cast one character stood out mightily.

Johnston Temple, survivor of a school of acting that knew how to read blank verse, is seventy-two years old. He no longer gets leading parts in Shakespearean revivals, but always his bits stand out. You recall his grave-digger in "Hamlet," of course; not an actor in two generations has slapped *Yorick's* face with such delightful unction. This night, naturally, he was playing *Dogberry.*

"You shall comprehend all vagrom men," he pompously commanded the "most senseless and fit" member of the watch. "You are to bid any man stand, in the prince's name."

Hamp Gerrish settled back in his chair with a sigh of intense satisfaction; this part was being played exactly as it ought to be. And when, to the worried query of *Seacoal,* "How if he will not stand?" Temple inimitably made that delicious response beginning, "Why, then, take no note of him," the Texan chuckled happily.

"You're sure giving me a treat," he told Hazard when *Dogberry's* absurd charge to the Messina constabulary was past and the curtain fell on the act. "When you told me you had theater tickets and asked me to come along, I figured maybe we'd be tired business men."

"Don't like the T. B. M. shows?" the oil magnate asked.

"Oh, yes, I like 'em, especially if the singing has music in it, but you can see them any week in the year. Good Shakespeare, now—you see, I'm one of those ol'-timey fellows that still read him."

"Me, too," Hazard said. The slight smile that was on his face almost extended to his eyes. "I suppose it would have been politer, asking you to a show, to inquire what kind of a show you would like to see—but I wanted to see this one."

This was so intensely characteristic of Randall Hazard's reputation for ruthless selfishness in all things that Gerrish had to suppress his natural desire to retort, "Surely; why be polite?" He merely said: "You couldn't have given me a pleasanter evenin', suh."

It was the Texan's second meeting with

the man who, directly and indirectly, controlled more oil and oil lands west of the Mississippi than any other petroleum magnate in America.

The former occasion had been a purely social contact. Hamp Gerrish, ex-cattleman, former sheriff and Texas Ranger, now capitalist, bank president and himself no small oil producer in his own section, up from Texas on business that had no connection with Hazard or Hazard's corporations, had been invited by a New York banker friend to spend an evening at the most fascinating of American indoor pastimes, the players being amateurs of both wealth and skill, among them the famous multimillionaire.

In draw poker, as in affairs of commerce, Hazard was whole-hearted; whomsoever he found to do he did with all his might. He and Gerrish, during the friendship-ceasing four hours that they spent together, acquired much respect for one another's technique. If quantitative respect, on such occasions, is based on the sums that are transferred after the final round of jack pots Hazard must have respected Gerrish the more deeply, for, just before the close of the session, there appeared a certain full house in the Texan's hand which he played with such accomplished deceit as to convince Hazard beyond peradventure that it was probably a straight and at best no more than a small flush—and Hazard, being at that moment possessed of five hearts among which an ace and king loomed encouragingly, bet according to his convictions.

Perhaps he was thinking, now, of the check he had written to the Texan's order. That his mind was on their social clash was evident from his question.

"Pierce called you 'colonel' that night we played cards at his house. Military title, or were you an officer in your Texas Rangers?"

"They don't have any higher rank than captain in the Rangers—and I was a private in that outfit. I was a trifle old to do anything more than head a few money drives in the war. That 'colonel' of mine came after a darned good fight, but it didn't have much bloodshed. I had happened to back the right man for governor, and he put me on his staff." Gerrish smiled whimsically. "Drew my sword in a raffle, as the fellow said. Disappointing explanation, isn't it?"

"You've understood poker ever since you were old enough to know the names of the cards, I suppose?"

"I don't understand it yet," the Southwesterner deprecated. "But I like to play it."

"If I wasn't leaving town to-morrow afternoon for a fortnight I'd certainly organize a party to help you get your like. If you could stick around until I get back from——"

"I'd admire to, but I can't this time. However, I'll be in New York some day again, and if the invitation is still open then——"

"It runs permanently." Hazard's teeth showed in what was as near a genial grin as he ever exhibited. "I'm by way of liking to learn new things about the game myself and my opportunities to study the methods of you Texans that were born with a deck of cards in your hands have been limited. Are you as shrewd in business as you are at poker?"

"Shrewd business can be learned," Hamp opined, "but poker is a gift of nature. I was right fortunate to get hold of you this evenin' before you had left your office, you being about to go out of town that a way. If I hadn't been able to get your private telephone number from Pierce I'd have had to go home without seeing you. Your secretary—I'd got him before, on the phone that is listed in the book—allowed seeing you before you left was natchully impossible."

"I had told him not to let anybody get at me," the magnate said. "Had you written him—before you left Texas, I mean—trying to make an appointment?"

"No." Gerrish explained the omission simply. "I'd have had to state my business."

"And I wouldn't have seen you?"

"Probably not, suh. You'd have shunted me off on some understrapper that I wouldn't care to do business with a-tall. Besides, the kind of errand I've got with you couldn't be done with any lieutenant, either first or second; not in a million years. The only man I want to see is you. I'm aiming to lay some cards down on the table, face up, with no bluffng——"

"All right; all right," Hazard interrupted. "After the show we'll get your bags and run out to my Long Island place, as I suggested when you phoned, and I'll listen. I don't want business on my mind in the theater."

"I appreciate your courtesy, suh." Hamp said it in all sincerity; he knew how unusual it was for Hazard to give any one opportunity to discuss business affairs with him away from his office. "It was mighty kind of you to figure I had come a long way——"

"Give me no credit at all; I never even thought of that," Hazard broke in with the candor that made him noted and hated. "I had two tickets for a show and nobody around that I wanted to be bored with, and my family is away and there is nobody at home to-night at my house, and I couldn't very well stay in town at a hotel because there are some things I've got to get myself in the morning before starting West. For your company I was willing to trade the nuisance of having to hear what your business is, after hours. That's all there is to it."

"Yes, suh," agreed Gerrish softly. "Then we'll just credit it to my good luck, as the darky woman said when they told her her husband had been fatally shot, but they didn't know who by. I'll try to get the matter out of the way right prompt—when we tackle it out there at your house. Did you ever see as good a *Dogberry* as that old man Temple? I never did. I must get hold of a Shakespeare soon and read that watch-instructing scene over again while the way he speaks it is still fresh in my mind."

"I've got a pocket edition in the library with good type. Remind me of it before we go to bed and take it along to read yourself to sleep with."

The curtain rose on Act Four.

Hazard's limousine, waiting for them when they came out of the theater, stopped at the Texan's hotel while he got overnight luggage, and then rolled swiftly across the bridge and down through the sleeping suburbs of Queens Borough to where the magnate's great house stood empty and dark in its acres of lawns, gardens and shrubbery.

The chauffeur received commands as to his hour for morning appearance and disappeared toward an invisible garage at the rear. Hazard used his latchkey and they came into an entrance hall and thence made their way to the library.

While Hazard left him there for a moment Gerrish appraised the shelves of books that filled two walls. Just above a stout-appearing small safe fitted into a niche in the shelves he came upon a red-leather-bound set of Shakespeare, one play to a volume; the edition, no doubt, to which Hazard had referred. He had taken "Much Ado About Nothing" down and was verifying his host's promise as regards its type when Hazard returned with a decanter and glasses.

"Materials for a nightcap," he remarked. "No bootleg stuff; I had it before the war. Keep it in a vault and if I died they'd have to hire a burglar to get at it; not a living soul but me knows the combination. Found that Shakespeare, did you? Drop it into your pocket and take it along with you when you go to your room."

He and Gerrish poured moderately and swallowed with appropriate salutations.

"All right," Hazard snapped, this rite concluded. "Find the most comfortable chair in sight and get your business off your chest."

"It's about that Swartham lease in Elmore County," said Hamp. His eyes were on Hazard's face, but what he saw there was entire lack of expression. Hazard's business face, he observed, was his poker face. He believed that Hazard personally knew all about the Swartham lease but he wasn't any surer of it now than he had been before. The president of the Great Continental Oil Company and its scores of subsidiaries and associated enterprises looked inquiring, moderately interested, noncommittal. He did not speak.

"One of the companies I'm interested in —the Texland Consolidated—was wildcatting in that direction," the Texan continued. "You people had that lease—a four-hundred-and-eighty-acre piece of stuff off the northeast of us. Your experts didn't believe oil would be found anywhere around there, but you had picked up the lease cheap when we showed signs of getting into that section, in accordance with your usual policy of having a bit of land somewhere handy to other fellows' wildcatting."

For all Hazard's expression showed this might have been either fresh news or ancient history.

"Well, we got a dry hole with our first well and everybody thought we were through and that we had proved the territory no good, but our geologist was so darned positive that we made another try. In between the time we brought in that duster and the time it got out that we

were going to take a chance and drill once more your people decided they'd like to eliminate any risk of loss on that Swartham lease, so you sold an option on it to one Henry Millman for three hundred dollars, which was exactly the bonus you had originally paid for it.

"The option was for a year and called for transfer of the lease to Millman at three thousand dollars. Millman told your people that he believed in the field and that some time—within a year, he was gambling—somebody would come along and put down a well that would prove it. You played safe. If the field got proved you would be selling at a thousand per cent of cost; if it didn't you had your money back."

"Millman, of course, representing you," Hazard commented.

"Not in the slightest degree, either directly or indirectly," Garrish surprised him by replying. "That is one of the reasons I wanted to have this little talk with you, personal. I figured it might make a difference in your policy if you understood the exact facts, and you would feel more certain of them if I told you face to face—giving you my personal word, suh."

"Whom did he represent?"

"Henry Millman and nobody else. I don't guess you know who Henry is; he hasn't got famous yet. He's a kid geologist; only out of school a couple of years. Most of his work down there has been as assistant to one of the big fellows—Rollins. He told Rollins he believed in that Elmore County field and Rollins laughed at him. That left him free to play his own hunch. He bought the option. Not much money, three hundred dollars, but more than he can afford to lose—to say nothing of the fact that the value involved now isn't three hundred or three thousand."

"You had tipped him to the fact that you were going to drill again?"

"No, suh. And I didn't even know he was thinking of buying the option until the day he did it. Then I happened to learn about it accidental, sort of, and I gave him some advice as to getting a New York lawyer to represent him in dealing with you. Because that attorney had done some Eastern law work for me, your people jumped at the conclusion that I was behind the boy."

"Very interesting," remarked Hazard dryly.

Gerrish's tone became a trifle frigid.

"I reckon my reputation some ways must be more or less familiar to you. Please remember, suh, that I am giving you my personal word."

"I believe you, of course. How did you come to know this—er—Millman's plans?"

"I was going to mention that, because it might have a bearing on your decision as to what you want to do. Henry is married—a little over a year. There isn't a nicer little lady in the whole State of Texas. I've known her ever since she could talk. Her daddy was as square a man as ever forked a hawse. He and I, when I was a youngster, worked together for the Lazy-D Triangle. He wasn't as lucky as I was; didn't leave any money to speak of when he died; that Mamie girl of his didn't bring any dowry to young Millman when they got married."

Gerrish paused a second. He added, then, earnestly:

"What would be ordinary shrewd business methods dealing with me, suh, that I would be expected to stand up under without hollering, might not be the methods you'd want to follow dealing with a couple of nice kids like that. Well, some time after Henry bought that option of you, we put down another hole and got a thirty-six-hundred-barrel well, and then the Duane-Hamilton people went in half a mile north of the Swartham tract and got a four-thousand-barrel one——"

He shrugged and spread his hands: nothing more as to the enhancement of value of the Swartham lease needed to be said to any oil man. It was now worth what it would bring. With the right to purchase it at three thousand dollars Henry Millman was relatively rich.

"And right now," he said, "Henry and Mamie sure need the money. There's a baby. Arrived only week before last."

When Hazard still sat expressionless, Hamp brought his statement to a close.

"I concluded to come to see you, if I could get past that secretary of yours. Believe me, suh, I haven't got a dollar's worth of personal interest in it. Well, I told you I aimed to lay all my cards on the table, face up. Henry Millman hasn't got that option, and your people say they haven't any record that he ever had it."

"If you—er—if he hasn't it, and our records don't show anything——" the magnate began, but Gerrish interrupted:

"Wait a minute, please, suh. The attorney I recommended Millman to engage here in New York was Ellis Chambers. Absolutely honest, reliable man, wasn't he?"

"So far as I know. He had that reputation."

"He telegraphed that he had the option, and confirmed that by letter. For good and sufficient reasons—legal ones that have nothing to do with the situation I am putting up to you—it was thought best for him to keep it here in New York. All Millman had was a copy of it. Then Ellis Chambers died last April. You remember?"

Hazard nodded. "Left his office one afternoon to go home and dropped dead on the street, didn't he?"

"Had a stroke of apoplexy on the street and was taken to a hospital, and died there forty-eight hours later without recovering consciousness," Gerrish corrected. "And on the very day that he tumbled over with the stroke we brought in that thirty-six-hundred-barrel wildcat in Elmore County and proved the field—and that option became worth real money."

"Yet you say Millman—where is it?"

"It was in Chambers' office safe. Forty hours after his seizure, when everybody knew he was going to die but before he actually had died—which meant that no steps had been taken or even thought of to investigate his business papers on the part of his associates—the safe in his office was forced during the night. Opened by some one able to work the combination—not a stiff job for any good professional—and one of the inner compartments pried open and papers taken. One of those papers was the Swartham lease option."

"But you say my people have told you they have no record of the sale of any such option."

"They would, wouldn't they?" Gerrish asked. "Especially if by any chance they had heard the details of the robbery in the Chambers office—and it was in all the newspapers. In strict business, it was up to Millman to produce the option, wasn't it?"

"Well, if he can't, and if my offices haven't a record of any such transaction why——"

"Yes, suh," Gerrish agreed mildly, when Hazard left that sentence discouragingly unfinished. "In law, I reckon that's exactly so. That's why I figured it wasn't any use dealing with subordinates any more. But law and equity are different. My coming to you is sort of a matter of equity, as you might say. You see I wasn't sure you had ever heard of the matter—or that you ever would unless I told you personally."

"I never have," Hazard assured him, and now Hamp knew from his eyes that Hazard lied. "I'll look into it. If there is any record of any such paper——"

"There won't be, I expect. But you might be able to find one of your men—Dillhaven, for instance, the man that signed it—who will have some recollection."

"If I do I'll straighten it out," Hazard promised, and lied again.

Playing any hand after he was convinced an opponent was certain to win was not a futility that Hamp Gerrish indulged in. He had satisfied himself of two things: Hazard was wholly familiar with the Swartham lease transaction, and Hazard had no intention of not taking advantage of the fortuitous burglarizing of Chambers' safe and Millman's consequent loss of the option. Hazard was old-fashioned in his business methods and morals; much of his commercial technique went out of style among most big men ten or fifteen years ago. He now had an advantage; it meant money to him to retain it and he proposed to do so.

Gerrish was a judge of men and he had verified for himself what others had told him would be the magnate's course of action. He was not foolish enough to waste a single further word. Without the slightest show of anger or regret he figuratively threw his losing hand into the discards.

"Thank you, suh," he said. "That is absolutely all my errand. I wanted to be sure you understood the situation and that you personally would make some effort to get at the facts."

"I will."

Hamp lighted a cigarette. "I reckon you'll be wanting to get to bed," he remarked, "and me, I've been on a sleeper three nights——"

"I'll show you to your room," Hazard volunteered promptly. Fifteen minutes later the Texan, the heavy window shades in his bedroom drawn, his coat, vest and shoes removed, was sitting under a reading light with the Swartham lease and Randall Hazard's sharp practice put resolutely out of his mind and a smile flickering across his face as he read again, while the figure and voice of Johnston Temple filled in his mental

picture, *Dogberry's* droll interpretation of the *Prince of Messina's* law.

He was still reading when slippered feet sounded in the hall. Hazard, coming from the direction of his own room, was passing toward the stairs. Gerrish heard him start to descend and something more impelling than curiosity sent him to his door. As he opened it there came an unfamiliar voice from the library below; a sharp voice, not loud but insistent:

"Put 'em up! Quick! Now back up there against the wall. If you make a move to drop 'em you'll get drilled."

Hamp reached his open suit case in three noiseless steps and lifted from it a Colt .45. He assured himself, although he already knew, that it was loaded. Silently he took the route his host had taken and descended the stairs.

In the lighted library, clearly visible from the dark hall where the Texan paused to get a clear understanding of the situation, Hazard, pajama and bath-robe clad, his face bleak with anger and chagrin, stood rigid, his hands uplifted. A medium-sized man, holding an automatic threateningly, was removing a smaller pistol from a pocket of the magnate's robe. Gerrish was surprised, as the man backed away, stuffed the little weapon into his hip pocket and lowered his gun, to see that his face, a hard but not especially vicious one, was not masked. The explanation came to him instantly; this burglar had expected to find the house unoccupied.

"You can take 'em down," the fellow was advising Hazard. "But don't try anything funny. Stand right where you are. I'm going out of that window that I came in at, and for some time—maybe five minutes, maybe ten—I'm going to be right there, in the dark, where I can look in at you. Your night watchman won't be coming by; he's tied up. If you make a move to telephone —although even if you did telephone, it'd take the cops ten minutes and more to get here—I'll shoot. You better stay here fifteen minutes, so's not to take any chances."

"Who gave you the combination of that safe?" the oil man demanded, and Gerrish's eyes went across the room to where the steel box now stood with its door wide open. When the burglar ignored the question, Hazard went on:

"You know by now, I suppose, that there isn't any money in it, or any papers, either, that are of value to any one but me. If you've already taken any, suppose you look them over and make sure."

"Meaning you might buy 'em of me for cash?" asked the man.

Hazard hesitated. "Perhaps," he conceded against his desires, acknowledging the other's control of the situation. "That depends upon what you've got."

"Thanks for the tip," the thief said. "What I ain't got I can take. Let's suppose I've got 'em all. Which ones do you want back?"

He dropped his pistol into his side pocket. As his hand came out, Gerrish, in the doorway, spoke sharply:

"You can't get back into your pocket quick enough!"

There was a fine use of psychology in the form of this unexpected challenge. Had Hamp cried "Hands up!" or "I've got you!" or some similar phrase the thief might have tried to retrieve his automatic and Gerrish would have been obliged to shoot him. But Hamp answered in advance the question his mind was bound to ask at the first quiver of alarm. For a split second he wondered if this statement in a cold, steady, strange voice was true; in that split second he half turned and his eyes fell upon the Texan, whose forearm rested untremblingly against his hip while from his hand, as unwavering as a coast-defense cannon and at the moment seeming to loom almost as large, projected a long black .45.

"Lift 'em high!" supplemented Gerrish. The man obeyed.

"It'll save you from sudden death," the Texan said conversationally but convincingly, "to remember three or four things: This gun's loaded. I know how to use it. I've got a legal right to kill a burglar, and I haven't got any conscientious scruples a-tall about doing it. And you can't jump so fast that I can't get you. Fix those facts in your mind and we're all set.

"Go over there, Hazard, and come up on him from in back and get his firearms. Don't get between this gun and him—and it would be a good idea, too, not to get exactly behind him; these forty-fives shoot awful heavy at this distance and the bullet would probably get you after it had gone through him."

The magnate took the automatic from the captive's side pocket and his own pistol from the hip.

"Lay them over on your desk, out of his reach," Gerrish commanded. "I take it you heard a noise down here, came down to take a look-see, and caught him at the safe."

"He had a gun lying right there on the floor in front of him, and when I snapped on the lights, before I could get mine out of my bath-robe pocket——"

"You're some lucky to be still with us," Hamp commented, hard put to it to keep out of his voice the contempt an old-time Texan feels for the man who carries a lethal weapon without knowing, in emergency, what to do with it. "What do you want to do next? Call the police?"

Hazard reached for the desk phone.

"I've got a burglar," he said, when he had secured the connection and given his name. "Get here as soon as you can. . . . Yes, he had opened my safe. . . . Yes, I captured him."

"You stand quiet while I look you over a little more," Gerrish told the thief. He stepped closer and the man had opportunity to observe that the pistol which bore so steadily on his midriff was cocked and that the trigger was already pressed, so that only the muscles of its owner's thumb stood between him and dissolution in a painful form. He shrank as he identified the Southwestern technique. "For Heaven's sake hold that thumb steady!" he gasped.

"Depends on you," Gerrish assured him. "It'll probably hold if you don't go to make me nervous."

The Texan's left hand patted the burglar under the arms and around the belt. He lifted the points of the fellow's vest to see that no weapon was concealed in front—a hiding place that in more than one historical case has been fatally overlooked. As the right-hand point of the vest came up, the pin of a small metal badge pricked his finger.

"Well, what do you know about that?" he muttered. "Stand steady!"

He removed the badge and passed it to Hazard, who had replaced the telephone receiver. The oil magnate held it close to an electric light and read its inscription aloud:

"'Lanwell & Griff Detective Agency.' So! Who hired them to do this job?"

"The district attorney," the intruder replied.

"You're a liar! Somebody wanted some paper in that safe. What paper?"

"As long as he was putting up his pistol when I happened to drop in, preparatory t using both hands to get out through the win dow with, a good way to find out might b to look through his pockets," Hamp su gested. "Go to it. He'll keep his hand up."

"All right. I know when to quit," growle the visitor. "You can go all through me you want to, but what you are looking for in the inside breast pocket of my coat."

Hazard found it, a folded document two sheets. He looked up from his swi identification of it to exclaim:

"So Kenburg thought if he had this pe sonal letter of his back he could win th suit of his, did he? He's wrong, but I' glad to know just what evidence he thin I've got and what he thinks I haven't g Lanwell & Griff, eh? A clever outfit crooks. I suppose you are one of those c burglars——"

He stopped short and stared hard.

"I thought there was something famili about your face," he said. "Now I reme ber. I saw you in court, four years ago- or was it five?—after that Billington ro bery. You got off light. Two years, wasn it? Your name is——" He frowne "Dearing. Fearing. Leary. Seary. That your name. Seary. Well, Mr. Seary, t courts aren't partial to housebreakers the days. Your Sing Sing bit will be more tha two years this time."

"Take another guess," countered the ma "I'm going out of that window right awa quick, and I ain't going to be charged wit no crime at all. That's a little advantag I've got in dealing with you. I know to damn much."

Gerrish's eyes were on Seary but he sense an almost imperceptible pause before Ha ard said: "Got some kind of a blackm bluff that you think you can run, ha you?"

"No bluff," the other retorted. "I'll ju say, so's to save talk: You and me didn come together that time, you doing busine with Lanwell himself, but I was the La well-Griff operator that pulled a certain j *you* hired done not so many months ag Remember?"

"You're crazy!" cried Hazard.

"Like a fox!" Seary sneered. "Say, ain't got no time to stand here gassing wi that bull coming hellity-larrup on a mot cycle. We won't have no misunderstandin I mean that job on a certain office safe, o

night last April, to get an oil option. The owner croaked in the hospital next day. Now, Mr. Hazard, you let me out of this window this minute and keep your trap shut about who I am—you and your friend, here—or I'll spill that whole story."

"Will you?" said Gerrish mildly. "It's a promise."

Hazard looked quickly at the Texan, whose expression was bland, then back at Seary. He gestured toward the open window. "Get out!" he snarled.

"Stand still," countermanded Gerrish. "I reckon as long as I did the capturing, maybe it might be just as well if I got consulted a few as to the terms. I'm figuring it might be more fitten if this hombre stayed right here and met the police."

Ensued a period of silence, not five seconds long, perhaps, but it seemed a full minute. Gerrish broke it with a soft but significant remark to Hazard:

"There's only one way to play a hand like you've got. Ditch it!"

From the absence of hesitation with which the magnate replied, it would appear that he already had reached that conclusion.

"Oh, well," he growled. "As regards that paper you wanted me to look up in our office, I'll see that a proper record is found of it."

"Couldn't we go a little farther than that?" queried Gerrish. "I don't doubt your word, of course—any more than you doubted mine when I assured you, a while back, that I didn't have any personal interest in a certain business matter—but your chauffeur might try to beat a train to a grade crossing, or you might happen to get a swallow of wood alcohol, or something. Natchully that document we were talking about isn't in existence; there isn't the slightest doubt it got destroyed. But there's pen and ink there on the desk in front of you."

Hazard looked across at Hamp truculently and exclaimed:

"See here, Gerrish! When I say a thing will be straightened out, it will be. I'm not in the habit of having my veracity doubted or conditions made."

"It's awkward, being a creature of habit, that a way," Hamp admitted courteously. "Just as you please, of course. How long does it take an officer to come from the police station?"

Their eyes clashed steadily for a moment. Then Hazard dropped into his desk chair, reached for a pen, wrote rapidly and ungraciously pushed the paper across the desk.

Gerrish read it and smiled amiably.

"Almost word for word like the old one," he said. "And still at three thousand dollars. Well, that's satisfactory. I suppose some fellows, under such circumstances, would put the screws on and get the price lowered, but I won't; this is fair enough. That Mamie girl I mentioned will sure be right grateful to you."

He turned to the private detective. "Come here," he commanded. "Witness Mr. Hazard's signature."

Seary scowled, hesitated, made virtue of necessity and penned his name. The writing above the magnate's autograph was brief. He read it.

"Well I'll be cussed!" he breathed dazedly.

"I've no objection now to our friend leaving us," the Texan remarked to Hazard when the new option was safely in his pocket.

The capitalist glowered poisonously at Seary and, this time without words, waved an eloquent hand toward the window. They heard the detective's feet strike the ground outside just as the staccato sputter of a motor cycle sounded in the distance.

Hazard met the policeman at the front door, with Gerrish, his pistol no longer in sight, hovering genially in the background. "I'm sorry," he greeted the officer, "but I'm afraid I've got you all the way here on a false alarm."

"Are you Mr. Hazard?" demanded the new arrival, peering suspiciously. "I know you by sight, but in this light——"

"Come in and make sure. I am certainly Hazard, and this is Mr. Gerrish of Texas, who is staying here with me to-night."

"Maybe, after that long ride, the officer might like a li'l' snifter of chill preventative," Gerrish suggested. "If that before-the-war stuff of yours strikes him as being as smooth as it did me——"

The policeman, in the light of the library, relaxed somewhat his official attitude of distrust as he saw that this was indeed the owner of the place. Hazard pushed toward him the decanter and glasses. He poured without noticeable restraint.

"Before the war, eh?" he remarked, sniffed, and became convinced this was no false claim. He lifted his glass in a toast:

"God preserve from all harm the cellars of the rich!"

He set the glass down reluctantly, let his gaze linger on the decanter, and waited a decent moment for an invitation to repeat, if such was in any one's mind. Then he asked:

"What happened?"

"It was all a mistake on my part, officer. I thought there was a burglar, and there wasn't."

The policeman's eyes narrowed skeptically.

"The sergeant was out and I happened to answer the phone myself," he observed. "You said you had grabbed him, didn't you?"

"Perhaps it would be nearer correct to say there was a misunderstanding," put in Gerrish. "Mr. Hazard was quite sure he was right when he spoke, but later developments—let me pour you another little drop or so."

"Thanks. He had already cracked the safe, you said."

"Listen, officer." Hamp Gerrish's smile was never more engaging, his soft drawl never more persuasive. "There was some advice covering cases like this, given a long time ago by the best chief of police the town ever had."

"You'll be meaning 'Big Jim' Slattery, I suppose," said the policeman. "Here's happy days! He was chief when I was new to the force. What was this advice?"

"An officer asked him, about a man he was being sent after, 'How if he will not stand?' Having friends in authority, or something like that, perhaps. And the chief said: 'Why, then, take no note of him, but let him go; and presently call the rest of the watch together and thank God you are rid of a knave.' "

The policeman nodded judicially.

"Yeah," he unhesitatingly decided. "That was Big Jim."

More stories by J. Frank Davis in early issues.

COPY CATS GET NOWHERE

RUN from the "success professor" who says to you: "Look into Henry Ford's life and find out how he has worked his way up, and then you do likewise; you're sure to get to the top."

You cannot succeed in your life's work by merely copying any man. There is no set rule of success.

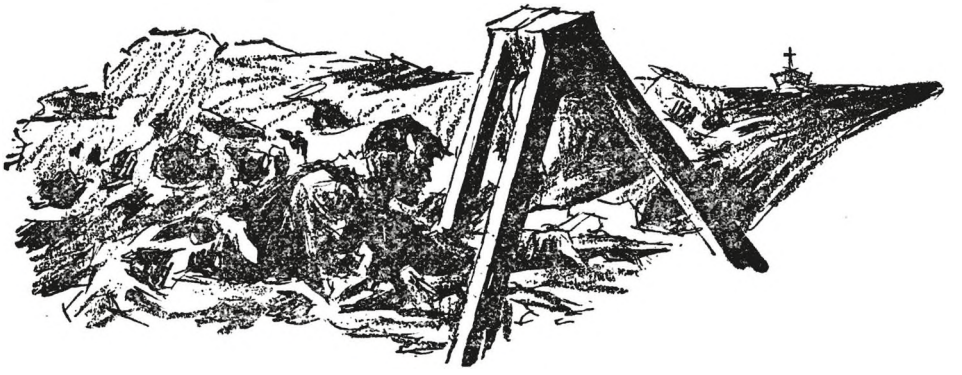
Daniel Willard, who first went to work for ninety cents a day and is now president of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad, said recently: "I think one of the most important elements of success is accuracy backed up by all-around dependability."

Harry F. Sinclair, who made a lot of money as a druggist before he piled up a lot more as a petroleum producer, told a friend of his in Washington last spring that he had achieved success by paying no attention to any of the Rockefeller rules for success. "The man succeeds," he said, "who is willing to take a chance. I like people to know I'm a gambler; they bring me their new ideas and plans. If you let precedent bind you down you'll never get anywhere. In the long run all of life and all of business is the art of taking chances."

Christy Mathewson, famous conqueror of tuberculosis and opposing batsmen, once said of baseball: "Spirit is the big thing. In my opinion spirit is ninety per cent of victory."

The wealthiest man in the United States Senate told this writer: "A young man in business may show me his methods of work, and they may fool me; he may be such a clever copy cat that I will think he is bound to follow in the footsteps of any great man he has chosen to imitate. Therefore, methods of work don't particularly interest me. But let me watch a young fellow and perceive the spirit in which he tackles his job and I'll forecast his future and his end accurately. Ambition and the determination to beat opposition are the real foundation of a big career. Slavish imitators have neither backbone nor originality. There never has been and never will be a Number 2 Edison or a Number 2 Carnegie. No two men are ever made in the same mold."

The only workable recipe for success is this: "Make your own."



Four Bells

By Ralph D. Paine

Author of "Anchors Aweigh," "First Down, Kentucky!" Etc.

(A Five-Part Story—Part V.)

CHAPTER XXI.

THE HAPPINESS OF PAPA BAZAN.

FOR once in his career Don Miguel O'Donnell was a battered, defeated soldier of fortune. He had lost his schooner and was bound to accept whatever terms might be dictated or face the unpleasant alternative of being marooned on Cocos Island. A prisoner in the cabin, he was stanching the blood from a cut on his cheek when Richard Cary came down from the deck and said:

"Here, let me fix that for you. My steward is coming aboard to help patch up your men. Sorry, but a couple of them are past mending. It was a dirty job you forced on me."

"I wish to God I had left you alone, Captain Cary," replied Don Miguel without a trace of animosity. "I was the stupid one. It was in my mind that you might try to capture this vessel but those machine guns made me feel easy. I lose and I must pay."

Cary smiled. He could afford to. It was a waste of breath to denounce this veteran adventurer as a murderous blackguard who had brought disaster upon himself. He had behaved according to his own code which gave the spoils to the victor.

"Aye, you lose," said Captain Cary. "You have until sundown to get your shore party and supplies aboard and make sail. If there is no breeze I will tow you to sea."

"And if I am not ready to sail by sundown, what then?"

"I shall sink your schooner. And I won't feel at all backward about using the machine gun you made me a present of."

"Machine guns are trumps," said Don Miguel. "I am leaving Cocos Island before sundown. It will not be healthy to stay longer. To wait for another ship to take me off would be too much like Robinson Crusoe. Six months, a year? Quién sabe?"

"You are fed up with Cocos Island?" observed Cary. "I feel something like that myself but I shall stick a while longer."

"To find the treasure, my dear young man? Yes, I see you are in a hurry to go back to your camp and dig, just as soon as my schooner is on the ocean again."

"Right you are. I expect to occupy the camp to-night. Señor Bazán will be fidgeting to get ashore again."

"I hope you will find something," very courteously replied Don Miguel. "Perhaps you will find something to-night. Señor Bazán seems to know exactly where to look for the treasure. I was not so lucky with my chart of Benito Bonito's boatswain."

Soon after this interview Captain Cary returned to the *Valkyrie*. Mr. Duff was left as prize master with a guard of five men. Señor Bazán was found asleep in a deck chair after wearing himself out with fears and anxieties. Ricardo felt his pulse. It relieved him to find that the old gentleman

had survived such a racking night as this His heart was behaving far better than could have been expected. Apparently the sea voyage had been good for it.

Well, there would be no more clashes and alarms on Cocos Island. The argonauts from Cartagena could remain as long as it should please Ramon Bazán to hunt for the pot of gold at the rainbow's end. They had found an awkward neighbor in Don Miguel O'Donnell but he was departing bag and baggage.

Captain Cary slept late into the forenoon. The black cares had lifted. His own wounded men were on the way to recovery. His was the satisfaction of having fought and maneuvered his way out of an exceedingly tight corner, with the favoring aid of the goddess of chance. He felt a young man's pride in defying the odds and smashing a way through adverse circumstances.

When he came out of his heavy slumber Ramon Bazán hovered beside the bunk. His spectacles were on his nose. He was examining the chipped ear and the grazed arm which Ricardo had covered with strips of plaster.

"All's well," yawned the hero. "What do you say? Shall we shove off to the camp to-night?"

"I hope so," chirruped Ramon who was in high spirits. "The men have told me all. Do not trouble yourself to talk too much now. Do you know what I have decided? To give you half the treasure as soon as we find it. It will be my gift to you and Teresa, three millions in silver besides the gold ingots. You must chase after that girl and marry her, Ricardo, if it will make you happy. With this treasure you can live quiet and safe. If you keep on fighting like this Teresa will have no husband. Of course, when I die you will get my treasure too, you and your sweetheart, except what I give to the splendid officers and sailors of the *Valkyrie*. There is nobody to leave it to, only you and Teresa. Now you will have some fun in digging up this Cocos Island."

"Oh, I have had fun enough already, and a bully good run for my money," Ricardo assured him. "It is very fine of you to feel this way but what do I want with three million dollars? Supposing we let it rest until we turn up the treasure."

"If we miss finding it," uneasily pursued Papa Ramon, "I have not much to leave Teresa. There is my house in Cartagena and some more land, but this steamer and the voyage have cost me thousands of dollars."

"Please forget it," urged Ricardo. "If I can find Teresa and she still loves me, what else in the world do I want?"

"That girl used to tease me and call me a horrid old monkey but I will never scold her again," said Papa Ramon. "Yes, Ricardo, perhaps there are more precious things than money. I have been learning it for myself. Loyalty? Is that the word? It is bigger than life itself. Why did you capture the schooner? Why will these men follow you anywhere you say? It is not for money at all."

"It is never too late to learn," laughed Ricardo. "I should call this a liberal education for all hands of us. Travel and entertainment, with frequent trips ashore. It puts it all over a cruise in a banana boat."

It was late in the afternoon when the watchers on the *Valkyrie* saw Don Miguel's party come down the road to the beach dragging the last cartloads of the stuff they wished to take with them. Their boats carried it off to the schooner. Prize Master Duff, at a signal from Captain Cary, withdrew his guard and returned to the steamer. A light breeze was sighing off the land. Shortly before sunset the tall sails were hoisted and the anchor weighed.

The schooner rippled slowly past the *Valkyrie* to trim her sheets and follow the fairway out beyond the headlands of the bay. Don Miguel O'Donnell paced the quarterdeck, a straight, vigorous figure of a man who bore himself gallantly. He raised his hat and bowed in courteous farewell. As he turned away, however, his hand went to his cheek, to feel that ugly cut which had marked him for life. It was a gesture which did not escape the scrutiny of Richard Cary. He made up his mind to steer clear of Ecuador. Soon the schooner caught a stronger draft of wind and heeled to its pressure as she made for the open sea.

Captain Cary mustered a landing party and beckoned Señor Bazán. Alas, the old gentleman was the picture of unhappiness. It had occurred to him, as an appalling possibility, that the pirates of Don Miguel O'Donnell might have discovered the treasure during their one day in camp. Perhaps it was some of the bullion in canvas bags that they had been trundling in the carts.

To soothe Papa Ramon it was advisable to lose not a moment in investigating the camp. And so they lugged him along in the hammock slung from a pole.

To his immense relief the excavation which they had begun close to the face of the cliff was found to be no deeper nor had the gravel been disturbed elsewhere. Captain Cary's first task, after they had put the tents to rights, was to detail a burial party for the body of the sailor which had been hidden in the bushes during the forced retreat. Papa Ramon wept. He had turned quite sentimental. He would pay for many Masses to be said in the Cathedral of Cartagena for the soul of this valiant mariner.

The air was uncommonly cool at dusk. The wind suddenly shifted and swept in from the sea. It was a refreshing night for tired men to rest their bones in sleep. They were eager to be up with the dawn and resume the toil with pick and shovel. Therefore most of them were in their hammocks as soon as darkness fell. Papa Ramon was nodding in his tent, after pottering about until his legs rebelled. Richard Cary wandered to a smooth rock and sat down to smoke and ponder. His nerves were still taut. It was difficult to relax.

The camp became silent. The only sounds were the rustle of the coconut palms and the music of falling water. For some time he sat there and then prowled to and fro. The sky presaged fair weather. The sky was brilliant with stars and almost cloudless. Little by little he felt lazily at ease. He decided to go to his tent.

Just then he heard a bell. Its notes were sonorous. The air fairly hummed with them. They were lingeringly vibrant. They were the tones of such a bell as had hurled its mellow echoes against the walls of Cartagena when the galleons of the pirate fleet had ridden to their hempen cables. To Richard Cary's ears the sound of this bell seemed to come from a distance and yet it throbbed all about him. It was the bell of the *Neustra Señora del Rosario* which had been mounted upon the roof of the *Valkyrie's* forecastle.

He was accustomed to hearing it daily on shipboard as it marked the passing hours and changing watches but even there it never failed to thrill responsive chords in some dim recess of his soul. Until now, however, it had not been heard as far inland as the camp. The fresh breeze blowing across the bay and the silence of night were conditions peculiarly favorable, thought Cary, but he stood in an attitude of strained attention.

Dong—dong——dong—dong!

Four bells! Richard Cary scratched a match and looked at his watch. The hands pointed to a quarter after nine. By the ship's time two bells had struck and it was not yet three bells.

Dong—dong——dong—dong!

The galleon bell tolled again, *four bells,* so far away and yet so clangorously insistent, as loud in his ears as though he stood upon the ship's deck. He seemed also to hear Teresa's voice attuned in harmony with it, to hear her saying in the patio:

"There is something about this old bell, very queer, but as true as true can be. If anything very bad is going to happen to the one it belongs to, this bell of the *Neustra Señora del Rosario* strikes four times, dong-dong, dong-dong. Four bells, like on board a ship. When there is going to be death or some terrible bad luck. It has always been like that, way, way back to my ancestor Don Juan Diego Fernandez."

While Richard Cary listened the bell sounded its warning once more and then was mute. He was not dreaming nor was he under the spell of those visions which had so often disquieted him. He rubbed his eyes and stared at the tents, the bare cliff, the yellow streaks of gravel. The sailors were snoring in their tents. For a long moment he stood bewitched and helpless. He refused to believe and yet he dared not disobey. He was pulled two ways. Common sense flouted it and yet he himself had known what it was to live in two worlds at once. What shook him free of this trance was the voice of Ramon Bazán who called out piteously. Cary ran to the tent and found the old man sitting up in his cot.

"Thank God you have come, Ricardo. In my sleep I had a fearful dream. Four bells! I heard it and then I was awake, and I thought I heard it again. I feel very sick. Has the time come for me to die? You didn't hear any four bells, did you, Ricardo? I am shaking all over."

"Nonsense, Papa Bazán," exclaimed Ricardo, patting the bony little shoulder. "I heard the bell, but it just happened that the wind brought the sound to us. Four bells? Perhaps the ship rolled in a ground swell and swung the clapper."

"Then you did hear it, too?" quavered Ramon, clutching Ricardo's arm. "It is no nonsense, not when the bell sounds like that. We must get out of this camp and go back to the ship. It is the safest place to be. Not for six million dollars will I stay here to-night. We must all go to the ship, I tell you. Will you take care of me, Ricardo?"

"Back we go to the ship, Papa Ramon," readily agreed Richard Cary. "I feel like a fool but I'll confess I feel as creepy as the devil. I am whistling to keep up my courage. If there is a curse on this Cocos Island we may as well get out from under. When it comes to fighting with spirits a machine gun is no use at all."

"Quick, Ricardo. Get the sailors to carry me in the hammock. I cannot walk out of the tent."

Cary lifted him from the cot. He clung like a frightened child. At the lusty shout of all hands the men came boiling out of the tents. They slept with one eye open. Was it another attack? They crowded around their captain. He was at a loss to explain it. The thing seemed too preposterous for words. While he hesitated Ramon Bazán plucked at his shirt and implored him to make haste.

"Jump out of this. Vamose! To the ship. On your way, boys," thundered Captain Cary.

They obeyed on the instant. Some new danger threatened. The captain was very much alarmed. When he gave an order like this it meant something. Excitedly they straggled toward the trail. A grotesque exodus for brave men, if they had known it, and Richard Cary reproached himself as a coward but he was in a cold sweat of impatience, nevertheless, to set foot on the deck of his ship. Trudging behind his men he found himself glancing back like an urchin in a haunted lane.

The pace slackened. One or two sailors ventured timid questions. He was still evasive. He gruffly mentioned a warning message. They inferred that perhaps Don Miguel O'Donnell had come sailing back to make a stealthy landing. Bewildered but trustful they plodded on, swinging lanterns and sleepily conversing. The two who bore Señor Bazán in the hammock halted to ease their shoulders. The others waited.

A terrific explosion rocked the earth. The detonation stunned them. The first thought was that a volcanic eruption had blown up through the dead crater. They rushed to the nearest opening in the jungle. They could see the dark loom of the hill climbing to the little lake in the bowl at the top. It was undisturbed.

They turned to look in the direction of the camp. The sky was a glare of crimson. They could hear the crash of rock falling from the cliff, of débris raining from the air. Then came a roaring, grinding sound like a landslide. Huddled together, the fugitives were dumb until Captain Cary spoke up:

"I have a notion that we pulled out just in time. Let's go take a look."

They rushed back to the end of the trail and out into the clearing beyond the ravine where the tents had stood. There were no tents and no coconut palms. They had to climb over huge heaps of broken rock which had been jarred from the crumbling, fissured face of the cliff. Their excavation was buried many feet deep in earth and stones dislodged from the steep slopes above the cliff. Great ragged holes yawned in the gravel. Richard Cary took a lantern and explored the chaos. He returned to report to Señor Bazán who had been laid on a blanket found wrapped around the splintered stump of a tree.

"Four bells was right," said he. "The camp is blown to glory. And a big piece of the hill is dumped on top of it. This Don Miguel was a poor loser. I wish I had killed him with his machine gun. It's easy enough to figure how the trick was done. He had a lot of dynamite left, so he told his gang to mine the camp. They cut the fuse long enough to burn several hours. I stumbled over one of his iron pipes. They ran the fuse through it, I suppose. 'An excellent joke,' said Don Miguel, eh, Papa Ramon? 'Perhaps you will find something to-night,' said he. He has a sense of humor."

"He couldn't forgive you for whipping him," feebly piped the old man. "Four bells, Ricardo. Now I do not have to die."

"I should say not. Now you can live to be a hundred. And we'll have to give you a vote of thanks for putting the galleon bell on the steamer. Not that I am convinced, but it was a most extraordinary coincidence."

"You are a fool, Ricardo," snapped Papa Ramon, with a flash of the old tem-

per. "And Teresa would call you worse names than that. It was the intercession of the Blessed Lady of Rosario for whom the galleon was named."

A sailor exploring the débris with a lantern suddenly went insane, or so it appeared. He screeched, slid into a hole on his stomach and wildly waved his legs. His comrades scampered to haul him out. Instantly they too became afflicted with violent dementia. Cary went to investigate. He caught up a lantern and peered into this fresh excavation torn by the explosive. A frenzied sailor was filling his straw hat with tarnished coins. Another was struggling to lift a heavy lump of metal but had to drop it for lack of elbow room. Cary reached down and jerked the two men out of the hole. They danced around him spilling Spanish dollars from their hats and shirts. He slid down and tossed out the weighty lump which looked like bullion fused and roughened by heat.

He ran to fetch Papa Ramon and spread his blanket close to this miraculous gravel pit. The sailors darted off to search for bits of board to dig with. One of them was lucky enough to find a broken shovel. By the light of the lanterns they made the gravel fly like infuriated terriers. They turned up more coins, hundreds of them, and a closely packed heap of those roughened lumps of bullion. They discovered rotten pieces of plank studded with iron bolts and braces. They piled the booty on Señor Bazán's blanket. He let the blackened Spanish dollars clink through his fingers. He fondled the shapeless lumps of bullion.

He was a supremely happy old man nor was his emotion altogether sordid. He was happy for Ricardo and Teresa. And the spirit of romance, the enchantment of adventure had renewed, for this fleeting hour, the bright aspects of his youth.

"We have found it," he gasped, his voice almost failing him.

"Don Miguel found it for us," replied Ricardo. "The laugh is on him, after all. I wish I could send him the news. It would make this the end of a perfect day."

Ramon Bazán chuckled and tried to say something. After a thickened, stammering word or two his voice died in his throat. He swayed forward, his hands filled with Spanish dollars. They slid from his helpless fingers. Ricardo caught him in his arms and gently laid him down. The wizened brown face had turned ashen. It was pinched and very old. In his shirt pocket was a little leather case with a vial in it. Richard Cary found it and forced a capsule between the bloodless lips. It failed to revive him. A second capsule was no more effectual.

The worn-out heart which had been so often spurred by the powerful drug had made its last rally. Presently Cary discovered that it had ceased to beat. He told the sailors that Señor Ramon Bazán was dead. They were shocked and very sorry. Crowding around the blanket they bared their heads and crossed themselves, earnestly muttering the prayers of their church.

Even their simple souls comprehended that fate had not been unkind to this aged man. His departure was not essentially mournful. It could even be regarded as a felicitous ending. He had achieved the goal of his desire which bright fortune is vouchsafed to few. Most men spend their lives in search of some treasure, hidden or elusive, and rarely do they find it. Nor do they understand that the joy is in the quest and not in the possession.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE FACE OF THE WATERS.

They wrapped the body of Ramon Bazán in the blanket and Richard Cary took the light burden in his arms to carry it back to the ship. It was right and proper that he should be the bearer. It appealed to him as an affectionate duty. In the morning they would build a coffin and find a burial place beyond high-water mark on the beach. It was a pleasanter spot to lie than in the unholy desolation of this torn landscape near the cliff, with its recent memories of bloodshed and commotion and its ancient memories of abominably evil deeds.

A subdued procession followed Richard Cary down the dark trail. The Colombian sailors whispered uneasily and were very willing to await the friendly light of day before trying to find more treasure. Could it be that the very touch of the Spanish dollars and bullion had killed Señor Bazán? Had an unearthly vengeance smitten him because he had led them straight to the place where the treasure was, with that pirate's chart of his? If he had not come to Cocos Island the secret hoard would still be undisturbed.

There were things that no man could ex-

plain. What was the message that had warned *El Capitan* Ricardo to flee from the camp? How had it been brought to him? It had saved them all from being as dead as poor Señor Bazán. It was a question whether honest sailormen had not better let that treasure alone. Life was sweet to them. However, it was for their captain to tell them what should be done.

When morning came the *Valkyrie* displayed the Colombian colors half-masted. The owner of the ship reposed in his own room, a peaceful old man whose fevered anxieties were stilled, who had acquired a certain dignity denied him in life. Chief Officer Bradley Duff stole in to look at him. Emotional in such circumstances, he blew his crimson nose and wiped his eyes. He did not know just why, for there was no reason to give way to grief. In his time he had seen many a better man slip his cable. Dutifully he muttered aloud:

"The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away and what do you know about that? Anyhow, you got what you wanted, didn't you, Papa Ramon, and you sailed off into the great beyond as happy as a kid with a Christmas stocking. There is only one drawback. Coin to blow and no chance to blow it! It breaks my heart to think of a thing like that. But, hell's bells, what could an old man blow it on? Here's hoping you have laid up treasure in heaven for it's your only bet——"

Richard Cary interrupted this impromptu elegy and beckoned the chief officer outside to say:

"All hands will go ashore that can be spared from duty, Mr. Duff. Clean clothes —make them look as smart as you can. At ten o'clock this forenoon."

"At four bells, sir?"

"Yes, at four bells. It seems appropriate. Have the bell tolled during the burial service."

"Right, Captain Cary. Let me tell you, though, the prickles ran up and down my back when the man on watch banged out four bells at six o'clock this morning. If it's all the same to you, I won't have four bells struck after to-day."

"I am not anxious to hear it myself. And so you heard it last night when I did? The bell actually rang itself? Did you look at the clock?"

"I looked at the clock with my two eyes as big as onions," earnestly answered Mr. Duff. "It was eighteen minutes after nine. I had come on deck after saying good night to the chief engineer. Charlie was fussing and cussing some because his leg hurt him and he was missing all the excitement. Dong—dong——dong—dong, went the silly old bell, and I went as far as the bridge to bawl out the anchor watch. Nobody was near the bell. Says I to myself one of those Colombians has an extra drink under his belt and is skylarkin' just to get a rise out of me.

"I stood there looking at the shack of a fo'castle we knocked together and the bell hanging in the frame on top of it. I'm a son of a gun if the bell didn't ring again. I was as flustered as a woman with a mouse in her petticoats. I had heard the yarn—why Señor Bazán insisted on fetching this old relic along. Well, sir, I was froze to the deck like a blasted dummy, my mouth wide open, and I'm a liar if she didn't hammer four bells again. Three times is out, says I, and something is due to happen. It did. That infernal explosion made my teeth rattle. From here it looked as if old Cocos Island had split herself wide open. I was never so thankful in my life as when you showed up on the beach with all hands accounted for except poor Ramon Bazán. That was his own private signal the bell tapped off, as I figure it."

"And you examined the bell?" asked Cary. "I haven't had a chance to look it over."

"Yes, sir. I made myself go for'ard and I climbed on the roof. I flopped on my back and felt inside of this spooky bell. It was a brave deed, Captain Cary. Please enter it in the log that Bradley Duff was meritorious. The tongue of the bell is hung on a swivel bolt and there is a lot of play in it, due to wear and corrosion. The ship was rolling last night, a strong breeze blowing straight into the bay and considerable ground swell. The tongue might possibly have swung to strike the rim of the bell, but it never happened before not even in that gale off the Colombian coast. That's all I can say, sir, and I have to believe it or admit that I've gone clean dotty."

"What else can we say, Mr. Duff? The more we guess the less we know."

"But who will it warn next time, now that it has done its duty by Señor Bazán? What about that, sir?"

Ricardo was immensely startled. This

had not occurred to him. He looked frightened as he replied:

"Señorita Teresa Fernandez, his niece? I wonder if I shall hear four bells if any fatal misfortune hangs over her. I may not know where she is. Suppose I am not there to help and protect her! You and I are certainly going dotty. I want to get this ship to sea again."

"First time I ever saw you downhearted," said the sympathetic Mr. Duff. "Sit tight and forget it. Señor Bazán was due to pass out anyhow. He was living on borrowed time. It's different with a healthy girl that knows her way about, though I know there's nothing worries a man as much as a sweetheart. Lord love you, I used to have 'em from Singapore to Rio."

Cary turned away. The talk was getting too intimate. He called himself an idiot for letting such strange fancies distress him. He had lost a devoted friend in Ramon Bazán, for all his whims and crotchets, and he felt badly shaken by it. When later in the morning the ship's company decorously assembled on the beach he was deeply affected. Solemnly the bell tolled on the *Valkyrie*. A prayer book was lacking but Ricardo said the verses he had learned at his mother's knee. And when the grave was filled the sailors covered it with gorgeous wreaths of tropical flowers. An assistant engineer, with cold chisel and hammer, cut the dead man's name and the emblem of the holy cross on the boulder.

Thus they did for Ramon Bazán who had fared venturesomely forth from Cartagena to find his journey's end on this lonely, storied island of the wide Pacific.

It was not demanded of them that they should any longer be idle. And so Richard Cary led them to the devastated camp to view it by daylight. They were bold and eager again. The terrors of darkness had faded from their minds. Instantly they fell to enlarging the hole in which they had discovered the treasure. They expected to uncover tons of it. Disappointment was their lot. In all they uncovered no more than three hundredweight. This seemed trifling. They were uncertain where next to explore. At random they shoveled the gravel and threw out scattered coins and bars of bullion.

The greater part of the treasure might be underneath the vast heap of rock which had fallen from the cliff or it might be buried far under the landslide from the higher slope. All the rest of the day they toiled but it was a gigantic task for a few men and they felt baffled and discouraged. They doubted the truth of the saying that faith can remove mountains. There was no inclination to tarry after the sun went down behind the lofty hill. The shadows of night were fearsome company.

For Richard Cary the enterprise had lost its zest. He kept his thoughts to himself until evening when he went to Charlie Burnham's room. These two were kindred spirits, in a way, youthful tropical rovers who had wandered far from rugged New Hampshire farms. They were sprung from the same kind of stock. They spoke the same language and were ballasted with like traits of character. Because they understood each other Cary could lay aside the masterful pose of one whose word was law. It was safe to make a confidant of Charlie Burnham.

"Instead of raising such a row you ought to be thankful you didn't lose a leg," said Cary as he pulled a chair close to the bunk. A grin was on the homely, honest face of the chief engineer.

"Little old New Hampshire was never like this," said he. "Give me another week and I can steam slow speed ahead on a crutch. All that really bothers me is that I never got a crack at those outlaws. You'll have to hand it to Don Miguel O'Donnell. The trick of bumping you off with dynamite was neat. He was a mining engineer, all right. What's the big idea now? Do we get rich quick or not?"

"A thundering lot of rock and dirt to move, Charlie, and then we don't know what's under it. Too much for this short-handed crew to tackle."

"I can swing the job, Captain Cary," eagerly exclaimed Charlie. "It means a trip to Panama to get me a donkey boiler, for one thing. I can shift a winch engine ashore and rig a derrick to handle that rock. Then I'll want some more iron pipe to run Don Miguel's hydraulic line over to our location. We can wash that dirt out in no time. It's a cinch, now we know it's there or thereabouts."

Cary was unresponsive. His mind was far away. After a long pause he said:

"Listen, Charlie. Your scheme is good enough and I don't propose to stand in your way. And I waive all claim to any more

treasure you may find. Out of what you have already, I shall take the share that was promised me as master of the steamer when we sailed from Cartagena. That will be stake enough."

"You sound as if you meant to quit us," was the reproachful accusation. "Please don't do that. Why, I can see us cleaning up millions. And there isn't a man in the ship that wouldn't be tickled to death to give you half of it. You are the whole works, sir."

"There is nothing to hold me now that Ramon Bazán is dead," explained Ricardo. "I had to stand by—there was an obligation—but now I am free to look after my own affairs and go my own way. You raise a question that puzzles me. This steamer is left on my hands. I am Señor Bazán's agent, I presume, until I get in touch with Cartagena or find his niece. He left no instructions. You can have the vessel for a small charter price, if you like, to go ahead with your plans. I see no objection to that. She will be earning something and Mr. Duff can take the command. If it costs too much to operate her, why not take her home to Cartagena and then come back in a small schooner?"

"Great Scott, Captain Cary, we can't lose all that time," excitedly protested Charlie Burnham, rumpling his hair with both hands. "The boys will want me to charter this old boat. They have dug up enough silver to pay their way for some time. But see here, sir, you've got me puzzled too. How much of this treasure stuff honestly belongs to us? What if we do find the rest of it? Señor Bazán outfitted the voyage and it was his chart that steered us to the right place on Cocos Island. We might not have found a thing, though, if Don Miguel hadn't blown the scenery upside down. What's the answer?"

"Send me word when you find your millions," smiled Ricardo. "Then we can talk it over. I swear I don't know what the answer is just now. It is too tangled for me. As far as I am personally concerned I don't want to touch any more of the cursed plunder than I can help. All I ask is enough to send me on my way. A week more, shall we say? This will give them time to dig their fool heads off and tire themselves out. And by then you will be able to get down to the engine room."

"Huh, the only thing to make you talk this way is a girl," snorted Charlie. "It's all right, Captain Cary, and you have handled this proposition like a wise guy from start to finish, but the best of us skid. It's Cocos Island for mine."

"Well, I think I got what I was looking for," said Ricardo, with a cryptic twinkle. "I have only one fault to find with Don Miguel O'Donnell. He was born about two hundred years too late. I wish I might have met him in these same waters before machine guns were invented."

"He would have been there with the goods," heartily replied Charlie.

Captain Cary spent little time ashore after this. Mr. Duff was delighted to take charge of the volunteers who grilled in the sun and made slaves of themselves with pick and shovel. He had been a boss stevedore, among his various employments, and his Spanish vocabulary was like hitting a man with a brick. Vociferously he told them what to do and how to do it. They accomplished prodigies in moving rocks and gravel. He had to admit, however, that it was a job for Charlie Burnham's ingenuity and equipment.

They did find more scattered bullion, blown hither and yon from some undiscovered hiding place. It handsomely rewarded them for their pains but made them more than ever dissatisfied. Not a gold ingot had they found. Gold was the word to conjure with. It tormented them. At the end of a week they packed their silver hoard in canvas sacks and weighed it on the scales in the ship's storeroom. Captain Cary calculated that they had scraped together something like seven thousand dollars' worth of dollars and bullion.

They held a conference. Mr. Panchito, the cheery second mate, addressed them with his arm in a sling. As a compatriot he was able to bombard the crew with an oration. He persuaded them to demand no more than their wages, to be paid them on arrival at Panama. The greater part of the booty was to be intrusted to the chief engineer as the managing director. He would make all the necessary arrangements for a return voyage to Cocos Island.

"Alas, my brave men, we must lose *El Capitan* Ricardo," passionately declaimed Mr. Panchito. His eloquence was hampered because one arm was in a sling. "What shall we do without The Great Yellow Tiger who conquered Cartagena with

an iron bar in his hands, who has conquered this Cocos Island with nothing but his courage in his hands, who has conquered his shipmates with the goodness of his heart, who laughs at us naughty children and punishes us when we deserve it? *Viva el capitan!* Shout as loud as you can."

They shouted and Ricardo turned red. In this manner the finish of the chapter of Cocos Island was written for him. The *Valkyrie* sailed at daybreak, her engines complaining loudly as she plodded out to sea. Charlie Burnham sat on a stool in the stifling compartment and luridly told the engines what he thought of them. The firemen briskly fed the coal to her and, for once, there was no grumbling. They were rich men and they expected to become vastly richer.

It seemed as if ill omens and misfortune had been left astern. An ocean serenely calm favored the decrepit *Valkyrie* as she laid a course for Panama. Only one of the wounded men was still confined to a bunk and he was past all danger. It was a ship whose people had been welded together in a stanch brotherhood. Nothing could dismay them.

They made light of it when Charlie Burnham sent up word that the crack in the propeller shaft didn't look any too healthy to him and he thought he had better tinker with it. Give him a day and he could fit a collar and bolt it on the shaft before it broke clean in two and punched the bottom out of the ship or something like that.

Captain Cary approved. The engines were idle while the *Valkyrie* rolled with an easy motion and Charlie's assistants hammered and forged and drilled. Night came down with clouds and rain and strong gusts of wind. There was nothing to indicate seriously heavy weather. It was murky, however, with a rising sea. Soon after dark Captain Cary went to the bridge to relieve Mr. Duff.

"With no steerage way she slops about like a barge," said the latter. "It may turn a bit nasty before morning. The barometer doesn't say so, but my feet ache more than usual."

"It will be a thick night and some sea running, most likely," remarked Cary. "I don't look for a gale of wind."

"In a steamer not under control it feels worse than it is, sir. How is Charlie coming along with his shaft collar?"

"He will have us shoving ahead by morning, Mr. Duff. And a couple of days more will see us in Panama Bay."

Walking the bridge alone, Captain Cary had never seen a blacker night than this, with the rain beating into his face and the spray driving like mist. Her engines stilled, the ship felt helpless and dead, while the seas swung her this way and that. It was a tedious watch to stand and the captain fought off drowsiness as the hours wore on. It was almost time to go below when he saw a steamer's lights so close at hand that it startled him. Invisible at a distance they suddenly appeared, glimmering red and green, out of this shrouded night. They indicated that this other steamer was on a course to strike the disabled *Valkyrie,* which could do nothing to avert collision.

Cary held his breath, expecting to see the vessel turn in time to pass ahead of him. Instead of this she threw her helm over too late. Blundering hesitation and a poor lookout made a smash inevitable. Cary gripped a bridge stanchion and awaited the shock. There was nothing else to do. He heard a confused shouting in Italian. Then the vague shadow of the prow loomed a little way forward of the *Valkyrie's* bridge, moving slowly as the steamer trembled to the thrust of a propeller thrashing hard astern.

They came together with an infernal din of fractured plates and twisting frames. With a fatal momentum the stranger clove her way deep into the *Valkyrie's* side. It cracked her like an egg. Here was one peril of the deep which she was entirely too decrepit to withstand. It could not fairly be expected of her. She heeled over with a lugubrious lamentation of rivets snapping off, of beams buckling and groaning. It shook the bridge like an earthquake. Richard Cary clung to his stanchion for dear life and stared with a horrified fascination. He was wondering whether this misbegotten Italian freighter proposed to cut clean through the *Valkyrie,* like a knife through a cheese, and proceed on her way. The crumpled bow could drive ahead no further, however, and the two ships hung locked together.

"Hold where you are," roared Captain Cary. "Keep the hole plugged. Don't back out. Let me get my people off before this vessel sinks."

The frightened Italian skipper was more concerned with investigating his own dam-

ages. Paying no heed he kept his engines reversed and sluggishly backed out of the gap he had torn. Hysterically blowing his whistle he drifted off in the darkness until his lights were lost to view. Captain Cary lost no time in damning him or in making signals of distress. His job was to get the crew off a ship that was dropping from under their feet. He could hear the sea rushing into the hold.

His first thought was for the men in the forecastle. He made his way over the splintered deck which was humped like a cat's back. Beyond the chasm in the ship's side he found the wooden structure still intact but tipped on a crazy slant. Already the men were bringing out the one wounded comrade who was unable to help himself. They were excited and noisy but ready to do whatever their captain said. He drove them aft ahead of him, telling them to find their stations just the same as at boat drill.

By now the others came rushing up from the engine room and stokehole. The safety valve had been opened to let her blow off. This was the only farewell ceremony that any one had delayed to perform. The water had been splashing to their knees when they scrambled for the ladder. Luckily the crippled Charlie Burnham had turned in for a nap and came hobbling from his room in the state of mind of a young man who regarded this as one thing too many.

There was no panic. The habit of obedience was more than skin deep. This was the finish of the old hooker and it was time for them to go. Two boats were promptly swung out. There was room and to spare in them.

"Mr. Duff takes the number one boat," said Captain Cary. "Stow Mr. Panchito carefully and look out for his broken arm. The chief engineer goes in the other boat."

"What about our treasure?" demanded Charlie Burnham, in anguished accents. "If we have to lose it, this shipwreck is a mighty serious affair, let me tell you, sir."

"Let 'em go get it then," rapped out Captain Cary, "but you'll all be drowned if you fiddle here five minutes longer."

Jubilantly they dragged the canvas sacks from the storeroom and flung them into the boats. Even this brief delay was perilous but Cary had not the heart to refuse them. So fast was the steamer sinking that the waves were even now breaking across her well deck. She was going down by the head and her stern was cocking high in air. Had they stayed too long? As he shouted to lower away Cary wished he had parted the fools and their money.

One boat plopped upon the back of a crested wave and was safely shoved away from the perishing ship. The other waited for the captain but he told them to let go and pull clear. Glancing forward he saw the *Valkyrie's* bow plunge under in a ghastly smother of foam. Were all hands accounted for? He had to satisfy himself of this before he was willing to quit the ship. It was the imperative demand of duty, the final rite of a commander faithful to his task. Had any of those reckless idiots been left in the storeroom wrestling with their cursed bags of silver? He felt sure he had shoved or thrown them all into the boats but he could not afford to carry the smallest doubt with him.

The ship was deserted. This he ascertained in a minute or two. Running to the side he was thankful to find the second boat well away without mishap. They were yelling to him to jump. Just then a tall wave flashed and toppled across the deck. It washed him from his feet, rolled him over and over, and flung him against a skylight. The breath was knocked out of him. He felt the ship lurch and quiver in the last throes. A rending concussion tore her apart. Clouds of steam gushed through gratings and hatches. The stern rose until it stood almost on end as the *Valkyrie* plunged under the sea.

Whirling like a chip, Richard Cary was sucked down with her. He was unable to help himself. Some convulsion of water spewed him to the surface in an eddy of foam and vapor. He was too feeble to swim or to cry out. Instinctively he kept himself afloat. All sense of direction was lost. He did not know where the boats were. The sea was much rougher than had appeared from the deck. It pounded and strangled him. It bore him down into dark, seething valleys of raging water and tossed him up again.

A broken piece of timber scraped his shoulder. He thrust an arm over it and so eased his exertions. He tried to shout but his voice was weak and broken. Frequently the water submerged him. Suffocation constricted his lungs. The vitality had been hammered out of him. Once he caught a glimpse of the masthead light of the steamer

which had sunk the *Valkyrie,* as though she were groping about to find the survivors.

He took it for granted that his own boats were searching for him. So black and windy was the sea that it was very possible to miss him. They would expect to be guided by his strong voice calling to them. He was drifting away from the spot where the ship had gone down. His energies were so benumbed that the loudest sound he could make was like the cry of a gull; unheard above the hissing clamor of the seas that broke over his head.

For perhaps an hour Richard Cary clung to the drifting piece of timber. Once or twice he fancied he saw the shape of a boat but it was well to windward of him and his voice was blown away. Finding a man afloat in such a night as this was merest chance. Loyal as his shipmates were, they were men accustomed to the hazards of the sea and it would be concluded that he had been drowned with his ship. It was a miracle, as he well knew, that he had been cast up alive.

He did not see the masthead light again. Probably the Italian freighter had picked up the boats and resumed her voyage. All hope of rescue was gone. Unless the sea quieted he could not struggle much longer. Daylight was far away, and what then? Ramon Bazán and his ship, both gone, and now it was Richard Cary's turn. But they were old and worn out. They had lived their lives. He had been so strong in the sense of invincibility, so secure in the splendid supremacy of youth and strength. Life and youth, love and strength and ambition, the sea extinguishes them all.

Tenaciously enduring, refusing to surrender until the last gasp, he heard the galleon bell.

It was tolling for him. He was too far gone to wonder. It seemed not in the least fantastic that the bell should be tolling his requiem, even though it had gone to the bottom of the sea. At first faint and far away, it was growing louder. A phantom bell that tolled in mockery! Its grave reverberations rose above the commotion of the waves to signal the passing of the soul of Richard Cary.

It tormented him to listen to the bell that had been drowned fathoms down. In God's name why could it not let him go in peace? He rallied from his stupor. His mind cleared. A phantom bell? He wildly denied and denounced it. He was conscious of a curious illusion that the bell was drifting past him. Could he be wrong? Was it calling to him with a voice of help and guidance instead of mockery? It had saved him from death on Cocos Island. Was this another intervention?

He released his hold of the piece of timber and swam in the trough of the sea, gaining strength for this last effort. What difference if he hastened the end by this much? The bell tolled in the air above his head. It was so near that it could not elude him, he babbled. He would clutch its brazen tongue and throttle the knell it sounded for him.

Like surf on a rock, the waves spouted over some dim floating object that bulked large. Richard Cary saw the wan flicker and curl of them. He put out an arm to fend himself off. His hand slipped along the edge of a board. He groped again and caught hold of a massive upright. Painfully he hauled himself up on a platform of boards awash with the sea. There he sprawled flat. Soon he was able to sit and maintain his grasp of the upright which was firmly fastened to the platform. He could breathe and rest although the water gushed over him. Reaching up, he touched the rim of the galleon bell. It vibrated to the strokes of the heavy tongue as the platform tossed and pitched with a motion giddily violent.

His refuge was the roof of the wooden forecastle house which had been torn bodily from the bolts securing it to the *Valkyrie's* deck. Loosened by the collision it had been carried down and later brought to the surface by its own buoyancy, perhaps not until after the boats had abandoned the search for their lost captain.

A haunted bell but one that could be kind as well as cruel! Twice now it had preserved Richard Cary from the immediate certainty of extinction. He clung to his wave-washed raft with the bell clanging over him but he had ceased to despair of rescue. He was granted a surcease from the unavailing struggle to survive. He dared hope to see another blessed dawn. With clearing weather and a falling wind he might hang on and keep alive for two or three days. Other castaways had done so with much less pith and endurance than his own.

Meanwhile the galleon bell, riding in its frame, would be a conspicuous beacon by

day. At night its brazen-throated appeal would carry far over the face of the waters.

His courage was hardened, the spark of confidence rekindled, and he felt strong in the faith that this was not to be the end of Richard Cary.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE CASTAWAY.

By conventional standards, Jerry Tobin, owner of the Broadway Front on the liveliest street in Panama, was a disreputable person. The queer, turbid world in which he moved had its own rigid standards of appraisal, however, and by these he was rated as a person of solid integrity. He was on the level. This verdict is sometimes denied those who sit in higher and more sanctified places. In the era before the darkness of prohibition had dimmed the bright lights of his café on the Broadway of Manhattan he had enjoyed the esteem of politicians, actors, race-track magnates, prize-ring celebrities and gentleman idlers who respected his opinions and often accepted his lucid, dispassionate judgments.

Prosperity had attended his tropical exile but dollars could not altogether solace a homesick heart. Mrs. Mary Tobin was even more unreconciled but she was never one to complain. Seldom questioning Jerry about his own affairs, she lived her life apart from them. When she had first known him he was a serious-minded, athletic young policeman on a Sixth Avenue beat and she was the daughter of a desk sergeant of the precinct station. In that neighborhood were her friends, her church, and her lifelong associations. In middle age she had been pulled up by the roots and it was hard adjusting herself to this remote, exotic environment.

Blown by the winds of chance, Teresa Fernandez had been borne in like a leaf in a gale. Mary Tobin's loneliness and unspoken discontent were banished. This dark-eyed, handsome girl from Cartagena, bright and sad by turn, who seemed to confide so much and yet paused on the brink of revelation, was a figure of fascinating romance. She flamed against Mary Tobin's quiet background. Jerry was tight-lipped by habit. Teresa felt grateful for his reticence. Finding her in trouble, he had befriended her. Nothing was said about an impetuous antique dagger which had literally stayed the hand of an intruder called "Sheeney" George. With a delicacy that did him credit Jerry inferred that it wasn't the kind of thing a lady liked to have told on herself.

It was distressing enough, as Mary Tobin viewed it, that Teresa had felt compelled to cut off her lovely hair and go wandering about as a young man. That Jerry proposed to find some way of sending her to Cocos Island did not seem quixotic. Mary Tobin was eager to aid and abet. This relieved Jerry's mind. The situation might have been awkward.

"Of course you will be helping her to get to her lover, Jerry," said sweet-voiced, motherly Mary Tobin. "And how can you manage it? 'Tis worth the money whatever it costs."

"I have found a gasoline yacht that will do, and it's fit for her to live in," he replied. "All I want now is the right skipper and I have sent word to Captain Ed Truscoe that had a Canal towboat and quit her last week. He's a buddy of mine. You know him, Mary."

"A fine man, Jerry, but will we want to let Teresa go alone? I was thinking I might ask myself along but I'd be seasick every minute and——"

"And you'd be in the way after she meets up with this walloper of a sweetheart of hers. The old crab of an uncle will be chaperon enough and more too. They'll want to wring his neck."

"But does it seem right to send her off by herself, even with Captain Ed Truscoe?" persisted Mary. "An older woman ought to be kind of looking after her."

Jerry permitted himself a grin as he gruffly exclaimed:

"Miss Fernandez can look after herself, take it from me. Don't let that worry you. So it's all right to blow her to the trip, is it? It will set me back some berries. She wants to put her own money in it, quite a bundle, but I said nothing doing. This is Jerry Tobin's joy ride. 'Drop in and see us when you come back,' said I, 'and show us your prize exhibit. We'll tell you whether he is worth it.' "

"What do I care what it costs?" smiled Mary Tobin. " 'Tis more real pleasure than I have got out of anything since we said good-by to the flat on the West Side. From what Teresa tells me this man of hers is the finest one that ever trod the green earth,

Here's a woman that said the same when Jerry Tobin was courting her."

" 'Tis worth something to have you blarney me like that," said Jerry whose harsh face could soften with tenderness. "Well, we are young but once, Mary girl. So I will get that gasoline yacht away from here in a couple of days if I have to shanghai Captain Ed Truscoe."

Thus it happened that Teresa Fernandez was whisked away to sea with no say in the matter beyond the affectionate gratitude that welled from the depths of her heart. The gasoline cruiser was small for an offshore voyage but Teresa was too seasoned a sailor to mind the long Pacific swell. Captain Truscoe, veteran towboat man, was unperturbed in anything that would stay afloat and kick a screw over. He was a thick-set, bow-legged chunk of a man, hard and brown, who seldom smiled and talked with an effort. Teresa perplexed him. At table together in the little cabin, with a Japanese steward dodging about like a juggler, Captain Truscoe stared and pondered. Now and then he bit off a brief question or two.

"What about this uncle? Who let him loose?"

"He ran away from home like a naughty boy and I must coax him back," replied the amused Teresa.

"Better had. They tuck 'em in padded cells for less. Jerry mentioned a young man, master of the ship. What about him?"

"I am sure I don't know why he went away on this crazy trip, Captain Truscoe. That is one thing I must find out. It is all very much mixed up."

"Sounds so. None of my business, I suppose. Known Jerry and his wife long?"

"Not very. They were wonderfully good to me."

"They liked you, Miss Fernandez. Jerry told me to keep on going if I missed your people at Cocos Island. 'The limit is off,' says he."

"But how will I know where to go next?" cried the troubled Teresa. "I am sure we shall find them. Good gracious, Captain Truscoe, don't you suggest such things to me."

By way of diverting her, he brought out photographs of his wife and three young daughters in San Francisco. His comments were terse.

"Nice woman. Thrifty. She saves my money. Good kids. I meant to go home but Jerry grabbed me. You ought to get married and settle down, Miss Fernandez. Best thing for a pretty young woman."

Teresa colored at this and turned the topic. There were long hours when she was solitary and somber moods oppressed her. The sense of fear and uncertainty was like a crushing weight. Jealously guarded was the secret of the real purpose of her quest. She was afraid of murmuring it in her sleep. It stood beside her as a dark shadow in the likeness of Colonel Fajardo.

Such were her meditations when the yacht sighted the lofty hill of Cocos Island and stood in to approach the black headlands that guarded the bay. Soon the passage opened to view and the sheltered water with the glistening beach, the jungle and the coconut palms. Captain Truscoe was at the wheel. Teresa stood at his elbow. Tensely anxious, she dared not say what was in her mind. The skipper bit off a chew of tobacco and rapped out:

"No vessel in here. What about that? A wild-goose chase!"

"Is there no other anchorage?" implored Teresa. "Why, I was sure we would see the rusty old *Valkyrie*."

"No other holding ground for steam or sail. Look at the chart for yourself."

"But they were bound to Cocos Island," panted Teresa. "My friend the gunner's mate—the young man I met in the Broadway Front—he saw the *Valkyrie* heading this way when he spoke to her in his destroyer. And Mr. Jerry Tobin was absolutely certain of it."

"Come and gone, maybe," said Captain Truscoe, "but I never heard of these treasure lunatics scamperin' off like that. We'll take a look ashore."

He ordered the motor dory made ready. No sooner had the yacht dropped anchor than he went to the beach with Teresa. She felt a quivering apprehension of misfortune. They crossed the level sand and came to the boulders strewn in stark confusion. Teresa saw wreaths of flowers, black and withered, on a yellow mound and the name of Ramon Bazán cut in the face of a huge, rough stone.

With a cry she ran to kneel beside the grave, her face buried in her hands. Her grief was genuine, her remorse sincere that she had been no more affectionate toward this fretful old man who, in his own way, had been fond of her. It was incredible

that he should have ceased to live. From childhood she had taken it for granted that he would always continue to sputter and to flit about on his furtive errands. He had seemed as permanent as the ancient house in which he dwelt.

She was bewildered, all adrift. There was nothing to explain it, merely this pitiful grave amid the primeval desolation of Cocos Island. Captain Truscoe was both sympathetic and observant. He was studying the inscription on the boulder. The date was chiseled beneath the name of Ramon Bazán.

"Only two days ago," said he. "If your information checks up right, Miss Fernandez, they couldn't have stayed here much more than a week. And we just missed 'em. A kettle o' fish and no mistake. Sorry about your uncle. You found him, didn't you?—but it's a shock."

"Yes, he will never run away any more," sadly said Teresa. "He was very old and I suppose it was time for him to rest. But how did he die, Captain Truscoe, and where are Captain Cary and the ship and all her people?"

"Gone somewhere, Miss Fernandez. Would it be back to the Isthmus? How do you feel? Want to go aboard or shall we rummage about?"

They moved away from Ramon Bazán's boulder and discovered the well-worn road with the wheel ruts and a clutter of small carts and lumber. In so short a time this road could not have been made by the *Valkyrie* party.

"Another crowd, but their vessel has gone, too," said Captain Truscoe. "Here's a trail off to the left that is fresh cut. That looks more like your outfit."

They entered the leafy path which had been chopped by the Colombian sailors. They advanced slowly with a certain caution. At length they discovered the devastated camp close to the shattered cliff, a torn, upheaved waste of rock and gravel. They found fragments of canvas, bits of clothing, battered cooking utensils, broken tools scattered far and wide. Captain Truscoe picked up an empty brass shell from a magazine rifle. He tossed it in his hand as he said:

"This was a violent place to be. Blown up and shot up. Quite recent. Any sensible man would leave it in a hurry and put to sea. I guess it was too much for your uncle."

Teresa was speechless. It was too much for her. She was frowning at a broken pail on which was stenciled *S. S. Valkyrie*. What was buried underneath those horrid masses of stone and earth from which uprooted trees protruded?

"I don't blame you for feeling upset," said the skipper. "This gets my goat."

"Oh, I don't want to stay here," Teresa found voice to tell him. "Please help me get back to the yacht."

She had been living in the hope that Cocos Island would be her journey's end but now the road was blinder, blacker than ever. Later in the day she ventured as far as the verdure near the beach and gathered fresh flowers to leave on the grave of Uncle Ramon Bazán. Captain Truscoe sturdily explored the road built by Don Miguel O'Donnell and returned with an extraordinary story of the abandoned hydraulic pipe line and elaborate equipment.

"All hands scurried away, like rats from a hulk," he reported, very hot and tired. "Now what?"

"I wish I knew," mourned Teresa. "I can tell you nothing. You are much wiser than I am. I am finished. Now my poor uncle is dead there is nothing to guide me. Is Captain Cary in command of the *Valkyrie*, or is he also dead on Cocos Island?"

"It does look mighty random," agreed Captain Truscoe. "There is this comfort—somebody was alive and able to take the steamer to sea. She never rambled off by herself. When it comes to figuring where she went your guess is as good as mine."

"I can guess nothing. We had better go back to Panama. Is it not so? And I will thank Mr. Jerry Tobin and say good-by."

"Better stay with 'em until you get your bearings, Miss Fernandez. Maybe the *Valkyrie* will turn up there."

"Perhaps. I shall not try to find the ship and Captain Cary any more. I have done all I could. If the ship does not come to Panama I must go back to Cartagena. It is where I belong. I thought I could get away from Cartagena, from something very unpleasant for me, but it is no use. It must be as God wills."

"Stay away if it's as bad as that, Miss Fernandez. All right, we said first thing in the morning. Homeward bound means better luck sometimes."

They made a smooth run of it until a thick night with rain and a boisterous sea

compelled the small cruiser to reduce her speed. She was tossed about more and more until Captain Truscoe hove to before his decks were swept. Toward morning Teresa Fernandez was in the drowsy state between waking and dreaming. She heard a bell. It was distant, almost inaudible. Her heart throbbed painfully as she listened. The sound came to her again, the ghostly whisper of a bell, but deep-toned and familiar. It was like no other bell in all the world, by land or sea.

Was she dreaming? No, this was the stateroom of the yacht, with the water surging against the round ports. After some time the far-away lament of the galleon bell came to her ears again. It seemed as though its intervals were cadenced, that it was tolling a message which she dreaded to hear. Four bells! Dong—dong——dong—dong!

She could interpret it. Uncle Ramon Bazán was gone. To her had been bequeathed the galleon bell. It was sending her its warning of some impending disaster. It meant that she was fated to return to Cartagena and to accept the penalty for the deed she had done. The bell had been taken from its frame in the patio and carried to sea on the *Valkyrie*. No matter where the ship might be she would hear the bell sound its tidings at the appointed time. How could she doubt it? The legend had dwelt among her kinsfolk for centuries. It was interwoven in the fabric of her inherited beliefs. And now that she heard the bell she felt certain she would never see Richard Cary again.

The little stateroom suffocated her. She resolved to go on deck in spite of the wind and weather. She dressed and snatched an oilskin coat and sou'wester from a hook. Sliding back the cabin hatch she crawled out into the welter of rain and spray. The yacht was still hove to, riding buoyantly. Teresa groped her way forward to the wheelhouse and wrenched open the door. Beside the hooded binnacle lamp stood Captain Truscoe steadying himself while the flying water swashed against the windows. He grasped Teresa's arm as he said:

"Lonesome down below? Nothing to worry about. This flurry will blow itself out with daylight."

"Did you hear a bell?" besought Teresa, trying to speak calmly. "A ship's bell? No, you would not hear it. The bell was for me and nobody else."

"I can't hear much in here. Too much racket outside. What's this about a bell young lady?"

"I heard it," she answered. "And then I thought—perhaps it might be just ringing inside my head."

"I'll step outside. There is nothing in sight," he replied, willing to humor her.

They went out together and held fast to a railing. In a vessel as small as this the sea was very near and clamorous. Stolidly Captain Truscoe waited and listened but he could hear no distant bell.

"You imagined it," he shouted in Teresa's ear. "Dishes and glasses banging about in the pantry, possibly."

"It is not ringing now," said she. "Yes, it may have been imagination. It was a strange thing to hear. It frightened me."

"Better go back to bed. The sea is quieting down. I'll be under way soon."

She hesitated and then went aft to the cabin, the captain escorting her. As yet there was no sign of dawn in the watery obscurity of the sky.

"If you hear a bell you will call me?" she asked.

"Sure thing, Miss Fernandez. Hope you get to sleep. Your berth is the most comfortable place."

Troubled sleep came to her and she did not hear the phantom bell again. The sea was turning gray outside the ports when she awoke and felt the engines pick up speed. Rolling heavily, the yacht swung off to resume her course to Panama. To Teresa it seemed fantastic that she should have paid such serious heed to the fancied message of the galleon bell. It was a warning of another kind, that her nerves were all jangled. The hallucination ought to be dismissed.

This she was trying to do when there came a knock on the door and Captain Truscoe was saying:

"You were right. I heard the bell just now, off the starboard bow. It's not bright enough to see far but I'll try to find out what that bell is."

"But I never heard it again," she exclaimed. "Are you sure?"

"Positive. You are all battened down like a bottle inside here. There is no trouble about picking up the sound of the bell on deck."

Teresa flew into the oilskin coat. She was out of the cabin in a twinkling. Clear and

musical came the voice of the galleon bell. It was ringing persistently, flinging out a brazen appeal, nor could Teresa detect the cadenced and ominous intervals of four bells. She understood why she alone had heard it so faintly in the night. Her ear was sensitively attuned to its vibrations. They had been an intimate part of her existence.

Now the bell was ringing for all to hear. It was somewhere in the gray waste of sea, mysterious and invisible. Teresa was reminded of the miracle of the marble pulpit which had been wonderfully borne up to float with the fickle currents until it was cast ashore under the wall of Cartagena to be carried to the cathedral in devout procession.

"Santa Marta and the angels!" she piously exclaimed, crossing herself. "But I see no ship at all, Captain Truscoe, and what is the bell of *Neustra Señora del Rosario* doing out there in the ocean and making so much noise?"

"Gone mad, I should say. It may be on the bottom and a mermaid is pulling the clapper. I'll believe anything."

"It is floating, I tell you," joyously cried Teresa, who was not mad at all. "For once it rings good news. You can know that by the way it sounds. It is time for a blessed miracle to happen to poor Teresa."

Captain Truscoe wiped his binoculars and gazed again. Daylight was driving the mists away. The lowering clouds were lifting. A clear sunrise was heralded. A dark speck was discovered against the heaving sea. The yacht plunged toward it, flinging the green water aside. The speck grew larger. Underneath it was a white ruffle of foam like surf playing on the back of a reef.

Soon they could distinguish the galleon bell suspended between two upright timbers which swayed wildly to the thrust and swing of the waves. The timbers projected from a platform like a raft. Huddled between them was an object that moved. It was a man who waved something white to let the yacht know that a castaway was on the raft.

Teresa Fernandez needed no binoculars. Inner vision told her that Richard Cary was found. It could be no one else. For whom else would the galleon bell have wrought this miracle?

She watched him very slowly haul himself to his feet, like one dead with exhaustion but indomitable. He stood holding himself erect, his arms around the crosspiece from which the bell was hung. His shirt fluttered in rags. He was drenched and bruised and battered. Like a young god he towered in the sight of Teresa Fernandez. His yellow hair was like a glowing aureole.

The yacht swept to leeward of the raft and slackened away. Captain Truscoe and two men jumped into the motor dory. Richard Cary paid them not the slightest attention. All he saw was a girl in an oilskin coat and sou'wester, a girl who unconsciously held out her arms to him. Ah, she knew Ricardo loved her. It illumined his face even before his voice came huskily down the wind:

"My girl ahoy! This is the luckiest treasure voyage that ever was."

She blew him a kiss. Captain Truscoe watched his chance and jockeyed the motor dory close to the raft. Stiffly Richard Cary released his grip of the timber and poised himself with a seaman's readiness. Into the boat he lurched and fell like a log. His tremendous vitality enabled him to revive and to gain the deck of the yacht with two sailors heaving at his shoulders. They helped him to the cabin where he sprawled upon a couch.

Teresa followed. Maternally her first desire was to have him warm and dry and tucked in bed where she could nurse him. She stood aside while Captain Truscoe ordered the steward about, demanding hot whisky, blankets and clean clothes from the biggest man on board. Shakily, with a man to lean on, Richard Cary was able to reach the captain's room.

"Please wait until the sea is smooth enough to hoist that bell aboard," said he. "Don't let it go adrift. It has been a good friend to me."

While watching the door for Teresa he fell blissfully asleep. She tiptoed in an hour later. She had felt no great impatience. It was enough to know that he was safe and near to her. Leaning over him, she let her fingers lightly brush his ruddy cheek. Brave and simple and honest he looked as when she had first known him. She wondered what he, too, had dared and suffered while they had been absent one from the other. In a word or two he had told Captain Truscoe of the loss of the *Valkyrie*. All hands saved in the boats. This

would be like her Ricardo, preferring not himself.

She summoned her courage to meet the ordeal of her confession. The warm tint faded from her olive cheek. She was like the Teresa, grave and resigned, who had fingered a rosary in her room of the *Tarragona* before she had gone to the wharf to confront Colonel Fajardo, when she had been willing to pay the price as a woman who had loved and lost.

Ricardo opened his eyes and smiled. He was not too weak to open wide his arms and draw her close, so that her head was pillowed on his mighty shoulder. She sighed and whispered:

"You do love me, Ricardo, everywhere and always? As I love you?"

"More than when I loved you and lost you in Cartagena, Teresa mine," he told her.

"And are you too tired to talk to me?" she anxiously entreated him.

"I had a rough night but I feel strong enough to start a riot if you dare to leave me," he replied with the laugh that she so delighted to hear.

"Please don't look at my hair," she implored. "It is all gone. Now I look like a black-haired boy. But I cut it off for you. Will that make you forgive me?"

"All I can see is that you are beautiful, Teresa dear. I thought you might have been ill with fever."

"Yes, Ricardo, if love is a fever. And I am not cured of that. I was trying to find you. And in Panama I was a young man in a barroom hunting for news of you and your ship."

"The Lord save us!" he exclaimed in dismay. "Is that my reputation? And I got into all this trouble trying to find you in Cartagena. You went to Cocos Island. I hear, so you know Señor Bazán is dead. His time had come. But how did you know where to look for me? What did you think? Did you get the letter I wrote in your uncle's house?"

"Not a word, Ricardo. All I had to tell me anything was the brier pipe you left there. Then I knew you were alive and so I followed you. It was because I could not understand—because I had to find you——"

Her solemn demeanor perplexed him. She drew away and took a chair, her hands clasped, one little shoe tapping the rug. For his own part he had so much to explain that he burst out:

"No wonder you couldn't understand. It is a long story and I can give you only the first chapter of it now. That night when I failed to come back to the ship? You warned me to be careful and so did old McClement, the chief engineer, but I had a grand opinion of myself. Colonel Fajardo decided to blow out my light. I annoyed him. His bravos bungled the job. They left me dead in the street, or so they thought."

"Did Colonel Fajardo think so?" asked Teresa in a low voice.

"He must have felt upset about it that night because I wasn't quite as dead as a mackerel. But I was supposed to die in jail where they threw me. So he must have been cheerful enough next morning. Did he show up at the ship before she sailed?"

"Yes, Ricardo, he came down to the ship. I asked him and he lied to me. I knew he lied."

Teresa's eyes were so wistful, so profoundly tragic, that Ricardo, greatly mystified, clasped both her cold hands in one of his and forbore to break her silence. She was struggling with the temptation to withhold the secret from her lover now that her justification had been vouchsafed. Why tarnish her fair name in his sight and perhaps repel him? Men were very jealous of the goodness of the women whom they truly loved. She fought down the temptation. Better to live without Ricardo than to live with a shadow between them. She was about to speak when he said, with visible embarrassment:

"It will never trouble me but you ought to know. I can't go back to Cartagena. I suppose you might call me a fugitive from justice. The world is big enough to get away from it, but I wasn't very gentle with Colonel Fajardo's bravos. Three of them are not singing and playing the guitar any more. And there was a fight on Cocos Island but that is a closed incident. I can forget it all if you can, Teresa darling, but I have to confess to you."

"You are a strong man who was fighting for his life, Ricardo," tremulously returned Teresa Fernandez. "And I am only a woman who saw her lover dead and knew there was no other way to punish the wicked one who had killed him. If you say I should go back to Cartagena and suffer the punishment of the law, I will go. You have only to say one little word. There is no

more Colonel Fajardo. Do you understand?"

Richard Cary gazed at her in great pity and love and admiration. Who was he to judge? Had he not taken justice into his own hands when he had boarded Don Miguel O'Donnell's schooner and courted fatal conflict? Had he slept any more uneasily for it? He had waged private war from the galleried streets of Cartagena to the palm-fringed bay of Cocos Island, like a roving Cary of Devon. Was there one law of justification for a man and another for a woman?

"If you believe in your heart that you did wrong and ought to pay for it, Teresa," he slowly responded, "then we will go back to Cartagena together. You and I walk hand in hand from now on. But for the life of me, I can't see it that way. Is it going to make you remorseful and unhappy? Mind, I go with you if it ought to be done."

"Ricardo, I am not a bad woman," she earnestly answered, "but I swear to you I feel no sorrow or shame. When it happened I was willing and ready to pay the price but it was not asked of me. And it was doing penance when I went back to Cartagena just because I had to find out about you. What you have told me, that death did strike at you in the dark, is enough to make me at peace with myself and with God who must judge me. You know how you felt and what you said when you sailed across the Caribbean in the *Tarragona* and saw my old city of Cartagena. You had lived and loved and fought there long ago. Perhaps it was that same Richard Cary that went to Cocos Island. And who knows but what I was another Teresa Fernandez, of the very long ago, that took it into her hands to punish the man who had killed her lover. If it had not been for her there would have been no punishment for him at all. Does it make a difference, Ricardo, in what you think of me?"

"Only to make me love you more," said Ricardo. "We are not going back to Cartagena. Life begins now. We have had enough of the past."

"Then I can be happy," smiled Teresa, but she also sighed. "If I have been wicked and must suffer for it, there is something that will tell me, and it is not my own conscience. Some day and somewhere we will have a home with a garden, Ricardo, and the galleon bell will hang there as it did in my uncle's patio. It is a joyful bell now, for it has learned to ring good news. But if the day ever comes when Teresa hears it toll four bells for her, then she will know it is time for her to go. And she will go very gladly, for it will be enough, my precious, my splendid Ricardo, to have lived and loved with you."

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE TRANQUIL HAVEN.

Richard Cary's younger brother William was waiting at the railroad station with a noisy little automobile in need of paint. The New Hampshire hills were no longer blanketed with snow as when he had driven the tall sailor to the train in the pung and had bade him good-by for the voyage to the Caribbean. In drowsy summer heat, the village street a shimmering canopy of green, William seriously reflected:

"It was right here, by gosh, that Dick busted the big guy's arm and slapped him into a snow drift for playing a dirty trick on a stray collie dog. That kind of opened my eyes. Huh, I guess I'd better watch my step while he's home this time. But mother'll put him in his place. He dassn't get gay with *her*. And she's got something to say to Dick. He never wrote her for weeks and weeks—and now he's fetchin' home a wife he found somewheres down there. And he never consulted mother at all. I s'pose he figures he can get away with it. I don't think!"

The wandering Richard may have been in a state of trepidation when he swung Teresa from the parlor car but he masked it with that lazy, amiable demeanor that had so annoyed William. The youngster displayed both admiration and embarrassment as he caught sight of Richard's foreign bride. "Snappy and mighty easy to look at," was William's silent verdict of approval, "and she sure would knock 'em cold in little old Wingfield. Dick might act dumb sometimes but he knew how to pick a peach."

And now Teresa won the boy's undying allegiance by kissing him on the cheek and exclaiming in English instead of the gibberish he had dreaded to hear:

"My gracious, Bill, but I am so very glad to see you! Ricardo has told me much about you, but it will give you the swelled head if I repeat it."

William blushed to the very last freckle and impetuously replied:

"He don't have to tell me a thing about you, Mrs.—Mrs. Dick Cary. You win."

Teresa laughed and glanced, with a vivacious interest, down the quiet street, at the square colonial houses, the three or four stores, the brick post office, and the Grange Hall, all shaded beneath the arching elms. She turned to Richard to say:

"It is almost as sleepy as my old Cartagena, but different. It is your home, where your ancestors have lived, and I shall love it."

"For a while, perhaps," smiled Richard Cary. "It will be soothing. I am homesick for it myself, like finding a safe harbor to rest in."

He went to look after the luggage while Teresa chose to sit in the front seat of the battered little car with William. She had questions to ask, by way of forewarning herself, and the younger brother answered them artlessly.

"Well, it's this way, Mrs.—Mrs.—do you really want me to call you Teresa, honest? —all mother knows is what Dick wrote her from Panama after he got shipwrecked or something. He didn't spill much news—he never does—about all he said was that he had made a voyage in the Pacific and came near going to the bottom—and he was coming home to see the folks for a spell before he beat it off somewheres else. Then he mentioned that he had got married in Panama to a Miss Fernandez. And there's that."

"And was his mother angry with him, Bill?" demurely inquired Teresa with the air of a timid saint.

"Oh, not mad but upset. Dick has always kept her guessing and this was one thing too much. Why, he told her last time he was home that he was off the girls for keeps. She don't think Dick is fit to look after himself. Mothers get some funny ideas, don't they? But say, Mrs.—Miss—Teresa, you don't have to worry. I'm hard to please myself and mighty particular when it comes to women. And you've put it across with me already, let me tell you."

This time it was Teresa who colored with pleasure. The omens seemed more auspicious. When Richard rejoined them he insisted upon riding in the back seat with the luggage. A furtive wink conveyed to Teresa that such an experience would not be unfamiliar. William protested. He was expecting to make a parade of it, with Dick and his pippin of a bride conspicuously together in the tonneau. Wingfield would certainly sit up and take notice. He, William, would give 'em an eyeful.

He accepted defeat with good grace because the consolation prize was seated beside him. As he spurred the flivver down Main Street he flung over his shoulder to Richard:

"Did you have any adventures this trip? When I asked you last time you joshed me something fierce, and I got sore. I hope you're going to act decent and loosen up to a fellow."

"Well, Bill, it was exciting in spots down yonder in the Caribbean," answered the deep, leisurely accents of Brother Dick. "Why, I went ashore one night at Cartagena to buy some picture post cards to send you, and first thing you know, I——"

Teresa gasped. It was no tale to tell in Wingfield.

"And then what?" eagerly demanded William.

"I had the most awful dose of prickly heat you ever saw in your life. Hold on, Bill, stop the car. Here *is* something really exciting—a new porch on the minister's house, and Charlie Schumacher has painted his barber shop, and Frank Cressy is building an addition to the livery stable. And you dare to tell me, Teresa, that my town is as dead as Cartagena? Here comes Colonel Judah Mason to get his mail. Spry as ever and ninety-five years old last Christmas Day."

"You make me awful tired," sulkily muttered William. "Just because you're bigger than a house you think you can treat me like a kid without any good sense."

Teresa mollified him with flattering words and a deference that indicated he had found a kindred soul who could appreciate him. She became silent, however, when the car jolted into the lane between the stone walls and approached the low-roofed farmhouse snuggled close to the ground upon a windy hill. Her heart sank. She faced an ordeal more disquieting than when she had ventured into the Broadway in the guise of young Rubio Sanchez on pleasure bent. She fancied the mother of Richard Cary to be a woman of formidable stature, harsh and imperious, who ruled her household with a rod of iron.

Richard caught a glimpse of his mother's face at a window, sitting there in her best black gown where she had aforetime kept watch for him or had fluttered a handkerchief in farewell. Now she came quickly to the granite doorstep, a wisp of a woman whose thin features were set in lines of apprehension. Her mouth was austere, her eyes questioning. They dwelt upon the huge figure of Richard Cary with an expression commingled of affection and rebuke. Before she could greet him he had leaped from the car and picked her up in his arms like a featherweight of a burden. It was a rite of his home-coming and as always she objected:

"Bless me, Richard, that's a trick you learned from your father that's dead and gone. I used to tell him it was dreadful undignified."

He let her down at the threshold and turned to present his wife. Teresa stood wistful and uncertain, yet with a certain amusement that she should have felt terrified at meeting this gray-haired little woman who looked as if a breath might blow her away. Richard cried, in a mood of boyish elation:

"Didn't I tell you I simply had to make the southern run, mother? Something was pulling me. Now I know why. Teresa was at the other end of the towrope."

"I am pleased to meet your wife, Richard," primly replied Mrs. Cary. "We'll do our best to make her comfortable and happy here, I am sure. Your room is ready and dinner will be on the table in half an hour."

"All I ask is to make your son happy," said Teresa, her emotions near the surface. Her tremulous smile was disarming and the inflections of her voice stirred the mother's heart. Presently Teresa went upstairs but Richard lingered below. Anxiously his mother exclaimed:

"You don't know how thankful I am to have a few minutes alone with you. Seems as if I couldn't wait. I don't mean to fret, but who is she and who are her folks and how did it happen? She don't act as foreign as I expected and she's as pretty as a picture and has sweet, ladylike ways, but how——"

"Better get acquainted before you borrow trouble," drawled the beaming Richard. "To begin with, she is an orphan, which ought to appeal to your sympathy. The last near relative she had, an uncle, died not long ago. He was the old gentleman I sailed for in the *Valkyrie* that was lost in collision. When it comes to family she can match ancestors with the Carys and Chicesters and have some left over."

"And where did you meet her, Richard?" was the firm interrogation.

"On shipboard going south. It was pretty close to a case of love at first sight."

"Hum-m, I never set any great store by hasty marriages, but there's exceptions to every rule and let us hope and pray this will be one of them. She dresses real elegant, I must say—in good taste but expensive. I'm saying nothing against your wife but if she's extravagant and slack how can you support her and keep her contented? Has she means of her own?"

"I didn't marry her for money," carelessly returned the son. "As far as I know she didn't have a penny when I met her. Now please take time to get your bearings and you will bless the day I first laid eyes on Teresa Fernandez."

Mrs. Cary sighed, brightened a little, and tripped to the kitchen to look in the oven. In the low-raftered dining room the table was already set with the pink luster ware, the Canton cups, the thin silver spoons, the hand-woven linen cloth treasured in Grandmother Cary's cedar chest. When Teresa came downstairs she wore a white waist and skirt much like the uniform, plain, immaculate, in which Richard had first beheld her. She appeared so briskly efficient, so different from Mrs. Cary's conceptions of the indolent ladies of Spanish America that it was like a rift in the cloud.

At the dinner table it was Teresa, alert and light of foot, who left her chair when anything was needed from the sideboard or kitchen. To Mrs. Cary's objections she replied, like a gay mutineer, that she was one of the family and expected to earn her passage. So deftly did she wait on them that the infatuated young William could not eat for watching her. Richard Cary's mother, a martinet of a New England housekeeper of the old school, felt her doubts and scruples fading.

They were nearer vanishing entirely when, after dinner, Teresa donned an apron and insisted upon washing the dishes and tidying up the kitchen. Sweetly but firmly she refused to listen to the mother's protestations and sent her to the porch to sit and talk with Richard. William hovered in the door-

way until he was permitted to ply a dish towel, subject to a rigid supervision of his handiwork. Teresa sang lilting snatches of Spanish ballads as she toiled. These New England women, she reflected, so proud of their housekeeping? Pouf, had they ever lived in a steamer of a first-class passenger service? Teresa Fernandez, once stewardess of the crack *Tarragona,* would show them something.

This was understating it. When, at length, Ricardo's mother was permitted to enter the kitchen from which she had been so amazingly evicted, her demeanor was critical in the extreme, as if expecting to have to do the work all over again. The competent Teresa, still singing, was wiping the last specks of dust from remote shelves and corners. William was polishing the copper hot-water boiler for dear life.

"Captain's inspection?" cried the blithe Teresa. "We are not quite ready, Bill and I, but to-morrow—*Valgame Dios,* I will help you make your house shine from the main deck to the top."

Mrs. Cary inspected, marveled, and was conquered. It was beyond belief that her careless, absent-minded Richard should have shown the surpassing judgment to select a jewel of a wife like this! Inherited reserve breaking its bonds, the mother exclaimed:

"Teresa, my dear, you are smarter than chain lightning. First thing you know I'll be bragging about you to every woman in Wingfield. I shall propose you for membership in the home economics department of our Woman's Club."

"And I will dance the fandango with William to amuse them," said Teresa, with a naughty twinkle in her eye.

In the afternoon she walked with Ricardo across the rolling fields of the Cary farm. With a pair of black horses William was mowing a thick stand of red clover. The strident clatter of the cutter bar was like a familiar song to the elder son, to carry him back to his boyhood. His mind was at peace, relaxed and untroubled by turbulent memories.

The tranquil landscape had laid its spell also upon the heart of Teresa. Her eyes filled and her voice had a pensive cadence as she said:

"Is this a dream, Ricardo mine? Or was all that a dream, down by the Caribbean Sea, and is this true? I feel just like you, that I have had two lives to live. Ah, how I pray the dear God and the Holy Mary to have this life last, maybe not here, but anywhere with you. This is what I told you when I found you drifting with the galleon bell."

"We'll forget the galleon bell," he told her; "I am sure it will never ring again. And we will say no more about the Spanish Main. Let my mother guess and wonder what happened."

"Yes, Ricardo, it could not be told in Wingfield," sighed Teresa. "Not the least little bit. Already I can see that. We will be a mystery, you and I—or is it better to say a secret romance?"

Like a processional vestured in beautiful garments of green the days of the brief New England summer went gliding by. Brawny and untiring, Richard helped William with the haying and did the work of three hired men. Teresa took more and more of the household routine upon herself and the mother was affectionately compelled to enjoy the first vacation in years. In their leisure hours the married lovers wandered through the countryside in the disreputable little car or went fishing for long hours on the pond.

To his mother Richard made no mention of future plans. She was accustomed to his indifferent moods when at home from sea but now he was a man with new responsibilities. These ought to arouse his ambition and make him bestir himself. Therefore she ventured to inquire:

"Are you calculating to spend the winter with me, Richard? Not but what you and Teresa are as welcome as the flowers in May, but she is used to more comforts and luxuries than we can give her on this old farm, and how do you intend to take care of her? What money I've saved in the bank belongs to you, and I don't begrudge your spending every penny of it, but—well, it kind of worries me. You told me she had no means of her own——"

"That reminds me, mother," her son replied, blandly unconcerned. "I found a letter from Cartagena in the mail box. Teresa has gone to the village with Bill so she hasn't seen it yet. It is from a Señor Alonzo de Mello, a banker who looked after the business interests of Teresa's uncle. I sent him a report from Panama of the loss of the *Valkyrie* and the death of Señor Ramon Bazán. He incloses a letter to Teresa in Spanish. Here is what he writes me:

"DEAR CAPTAIN CARY: I send you my joyful congratulations on your marriage to Teresa Fernandez, whom I have always loved like my own daughter. Your report was received, informing me that both the ship and poor Ramon Bazán were no more. It will interest you to know that on the day before he sailed from Cartagena he made a will, properly executed, leaving everything he possessed to his niece. There had been other wills like this, but he had torn them up in fits of temper.

"Your report was confirmed in all respects by the officers and crew of the *Valkyrie* who, as you know, were landed at Corinto by the Italian steamer *Guiseppe Balderno*, which sank your vessel in collision. They made their way back to Panama, arriving there soon after you sailed for New York. My agent interviewed them in behalf of the estate of the deceased owner. They proposed chartering a sailing vessel in all haste and returning to Cocos Island. This information was confidentially imparted.

"The insurance underwriters have accepted the evidence of total loss, with no negligence on the part of the masters and crew of the *Valkyrie*. I am therefore remitting, as per draft inclosed to the order of Señora Teresa Cary, the sum of forty thousand dollars in settlement of the marine policies issued against the vessel. I am also writing Teresa regarding the house and contents and such other property as belonged to her departed uncle. Peace to his soul! My cordial salutations to a gallant shipmaster who deserves better fortune on his next voyage. Placing myself at your disposal, I am,

"Faithfully yours, ALONZO DE MELLO."

Richard Cary's mother was trembling with excitement as she gasped:

"Why, Teresa is an heiress—forty thousand dollars right in her hands and other property besides! And she never so much as hinted that she might be a rich woman. That is every bit as much as Judge Judah Mason's fortune and he is the wealthiest man in Wingfield."

"Teresa didn't know," explained Richard. "There was no putting your finger on poor Ramon Bazán. He was very flighty. Here comes Teresa now. This ought to please her."

"If she doesn't get stirred to the depths I shall feel like shaking you both."

The heiress gracefully descended from the antique flivver, assisted by the adoring William. To her Richard calmly announced:

"Here is a draft for forty thousand—insurance on the *Valkyrie*. Uncle Ramon forgave you for all your insults."

"And he left his money to me?" cried Teresa in accents of self-reproach. "And I was so awful horrid to him! It is from Señor de Mello? What does he say?"

Richard gave her the inclosure in Spanish. She read it swiftly to the end and looked up to observe:

"He even left me the little brown monkey Ricardo. That is too much. I will send word to give that monkey to somebody that will be good to it. The house he can sell or rent, Señor de Mello says, if we do not wish to live in Cartagena. Poor Uncle Ramon! I am sad and ashamed of myself because I was not always nice to him. I guess I must cry a little."

Presently the heiress brightened and went on to announce, with headlong ardor:

"First I will buy William a big, new shiny automobile and give him plenty of money to go through college with. Then I will put an electric-light plant in this old farmhouse, and a tiled kitchen and plenty of bathrooms and—let me see—I think I will give your church in Wingfield a new organ. How much money have I got left, Ricardo?"

"Quite a bundle, sweetheart. Don't stop yet. I am enjoying it."

Mrs. Cary raised her hands in horror, shaken to the depths of her thrifty soul.

"For the land's sake, child, keep the money for yourself. What sense is there in spending it on us? I declare you make my head spin like a top."

"Then I will talk it over with Ricardo," said Teresa. "He can help me find some more ways to spend it."

These profligate intentions could not be thwarted nor did Richard Cary attempt to do so. He realized that gratitude and affection impelled her, also that it was more than this. When alone in the world and earning a living at sea she had been anxious to gain money and save it. Now she had a shield and a protector in her yellow-haired giant of a husband who could master all things. And there was a sense that in doing good to others she was doing penance for a certain tragic episode which the fates had darkly, inscrutably thrust upon her.

Not many weeks after this sensational shower of riches, another letter came to Captain Richard Cary. It had been mailed from a Costa Rican port. The writer was the unterrified Charlie Burnham, late chief engineer of the *Valkyrie*.

DEAR SKIPPER: Here we are again, on Cocos Island, and all hands sorry you aren't bossing the outfit. Mr. Bradley Duff is still going strong and sober, and is a good old scout. He didn't fall off the wagon even when we blew into Jerry Tobin's dump in Panama. You sure

did put the fear of God into him. Mr. Panchito, the second mate, bought a hundred dollars' worth of fancy shirts and neckties. He is one natural-born strutter. All hands are well and still with us. You ought to have heard us yell when we learned you had not been drowned in the condemned old *Valkyrie*. We had to give up that night she went down. Bradley Duff punched the Italian hophead of a skipper in the jaw because he wouldn't stick around the wreckage and hunt for you any longer.

Now about the treasure. Better come back and watch us root it out. I extended Don Miguel O'Donnell's hydraulic pipe line, and it works pretty. We have been washing for two weeks and the nozzle kicks the gravel out in great style. The dynamite that Don Miguel touched off under us mussed things up something frightful. What makes the worst trouble is the tremendous chunk of cliff that was jarred loose and spilled all over the place. The rock is soft, but hard to break up and handle.

Anyhow, we have uncovered some more silver, but no gold ingots so far. What we are getting out now isn't so scattering, but in solid lots of bullion—sometimes as much as we can load into one of Don Miguel's two-wheeled carts. I should say we are nearly a hundred thousand dollars to the good. You don't see us quitting, do you? Atta boy! The agreement stands and all hands have signed a paper to that effect. Half of what we get goes to you. Jerry Tobin told us in Panama that you had married Papa Ramon's niece, and how the wedding was pulled off in his bungalow.

Now if Señor Bazán left his property to this Miss Fernandez, as perhaps he did, you and she will have to split fifty per cent of the treasure. That is how Bradley Duff and I dope it out. Your wife has a look-in because it was her uncle's chart that steered us to where the treasure was buried. And you draw down your slice because if you hadn't chased Don Miguel O'Donnell off the island, where would we be at now?

This letter is sent in a Costa Rican fishing schooner that touched here for fresh water, being blown offshore. We filled the crew full of rum and kept them close to the beach, so they didn't get wise to our finding any treasure. They thought we were just another bunch of loonies that had come to rummage around, like so many other parties that have been to Cocos Island before.

I will send you another report as soon as I get a chance. Please tell your wife that we have built a nice stone wall around her uncle's grave and we put fresh flowers on it almost every day. Adios, until we meet again with bells on. Sincerely yours,

CHARLES R. BURNHAM,
Chief Engineer.

There came a September day when summer lingered in the warm haze and the softy westerly winds. A wanton touch of frost had painted the foliage, here and there, in tints of yellow or crimson. Teresa and Ricardo motored farther than usual nor turned until they reached the sea coast, many miles from Wingfield. A small surf crooned among the weedy rocks or ran hissing up the golden sands. On the distant horizon was a sooty banner of smoke from a steamer's funnel. A coasting schooner lifted a bit of topsail as small and white as the wing of a gull.

Hand in hand the lovers climbed the nearest headland. While they stood there, the wind veered. Instead of breathing off the land, with the scents of field and woodland, it blew strongly from the eastward. It came sweeping over the salt sea, with a tang and a boisterous vigor unlike the soft airs of the summer that tarried reluctant to depart.

Cool, pungent, it seemed to Richard Cary such a wind as had whipped the Caribbean to foam and pelted the decks with spray when he had joyously faced it upon the bridge of the swinging *Tarragona*, the wind that long ago had blown the clumsy ships of Devon across to the Spanish Main.

He sighed and brushed a hand across his eyes. Teresa stood with parted lips and face aglow. A long silence and she said:

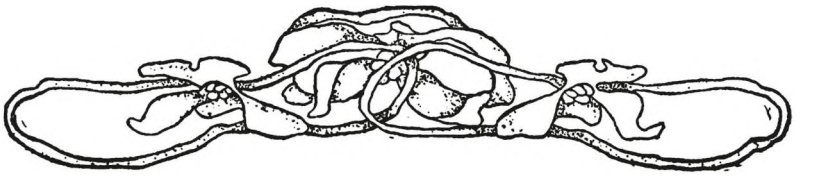
"I feel it too, Ricardo. Shall we go south again? Not to Cartagena, but——"

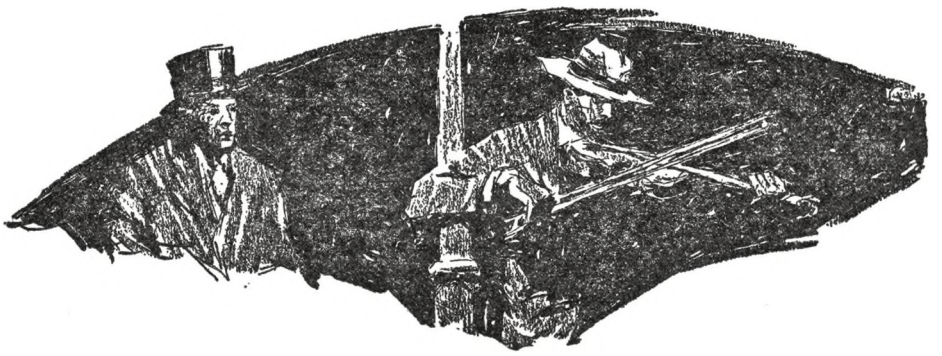
His arm swept toward the south in a gesture large and eloquent as he exclaimed:

"Nor to Cocos Island, Teresa dear. But you and I belong in those seas, somewhere. We have always belonged there. We have been at anchor long enough."

"The wind and the sea," she murmured. "Yes, they are calling us. We had better go."

THE END.





Sharps, Flats, and a Fiddle

By Victor MacClure

A harmonious combination of circumstances ends a little out of tune.

TWO men in evening clothes descended the broad marble steps of a dignified mansion in a quiet square. One was a youngish man, slim and tall, of a manner so keen as to hold something predatory. The other was older, stout and strong of build, fresh-complexioned, clean looking, and bluff and hearty of demeanor. His appearance was suggestive of success in business. Both men, however, were rogues.

"What I can't fathom about you, Archie," the older man was saying with a touch of exasperation, "is this habit of straight gambling. If you were rigging the game I'd understand. How much have you dropped?"

"Close on a couple of hundred," the other answered sourly.

"Dammit, Archie—when you know that we're up against it!" The older man swore under his breath. "I have only about twenty pounds left in the wide, wide. And you?"

"Somewhere about the same."

"No move in sight, either. We're down to our emergency hundred. You're a good bit of a flat, Archie!"

"Oh, confound it, Groot!" the man called Archie almost snarled. "You know very well how it is with me. If there's a game on I must be in it. And there's no fun if it's rigged——"

"How do you know that this game you've just left wasn't rigged against you?" Groot demanded.

A short, unmirthful laugh escaped from the other's throat.

"Huh!" he said. "You ought to know me better than that, Groot!"

"Well," Groot admitted, "you're certainly a wizard with the cards. It's a marvel to me how you can keep from stacking the pack."

"Oh, you'll never understand, Groot. The game is more than the money—that's all."

The stout man grunted.

"If something doesn't come our way soon," he said moodily, "we'll be in the soup."

"Time we thought up something, then," Archie replied tartly. "Let us get to the flat and brood."

"All right," Groot agreed.

They passed out of the quiet square, heart of the fashionable quarter of the city, into equally quiet streets of much the same character. They went on in silence until they reached that thoroughfare in which stood the tall block of expensive flats where they rented their apartments.

Along the street, some one was playing the fiddle, and the tone that welled up from the instrument, even at some distance, was round and satisfying—a tone produced only by few masters of the violin. A rendering of that "Viennese Caprice" so favored by Kreisler was in progress and the player was bringing to the haunting melody more than a touch of the genius of a great fiddler.

Groot laid his fingers on the arm of his companion.

"By Jove, Archie!" he exclaimed. "That mendicant can play!"

"Sounds so to me," the other replied casually. "What about it? Lots of these beggars can play."

"Not like this fellow," Groot asserted. "You have as much ear for music as a stuck pig, Archie—for all your fake culture. I want to say that that fellow, whoever he is, is one of the very few great fiddlers I've ever heard!"

"Then for Heaven's sake, say it!" Archie said impatiently. "Say it, Groot, and let us get on!"

"I'd like to have a look at him, Archie," Groot said wistfully.

"Oh, confound it, Groot! What's the use? I'm not going to have the blighter up in the flat drinking our whisky and eating our food! I'm not going to listen to any hard-luck tale to-night—I've a hard-enough luck yarn of my own!"

"You indulge yourself at cards—and that when you owe me money," said Groot. "I indulge myself more cheaply with music. I want to see this fellow."

"Let's get upstairs. We don't want any of that stuff to-night."

The stout man hesitated. He heard the throbbing call of the violin, and he had something of a soul for music, the good Groot.

"You nip up to the flat," he said to his companion at last. "I shan't be long. I simply must see who's playing. He's a wonder!"

"Oh, all right. Please yourself," Archie said grumpily. "But none of this Haroun al Raschid stunt. I'm fed up with your beggar geniuses. I don't want anybody in the flat to-night. Mind!"

And with a curt nod the younger man wheeled into the entrance to the block of flats, leaving Groot to proceed up the street toward the musician.

The last notes of the "Caprice" had died in the quiet street, and when Groot came within seeing distance the fiddler was pulling a tentative bow over the strings, tuning them. In tuning, the musician turned the string pegs to the light of a street lamp, and as he held up the neck to the glare, to examine what appeared to be a faulty string, the rays of the lamp fell on his hitherto shadowed face.

The fiddler was nothing if not romantic looking. His shabby dark clothes clung to his spare figure with distinction. A wide hat rested on a head of longish curling hair. His dark eyes were deep set under heavy black brows, and his pale face was all the paler by contrast with the Vandyke beard of a brown almost black. His full tie was knotted carelessly over the peaks of his low collar.

The man who was approaching gave a little start of amazement as he marked the fine features of the player.

"Good God!" he whispered. "Salvatore Rossa!"

Transfixed, Groot watched the fiddler. Hidden as he was in the shadows beyond the glare of the street lamp the stout adventurer escaped the notice of the intent musician. Nimble fingers played among the pegs, then the violin was fifted under the caressing chin and the street once more was filled with melody. The fiddler was playing an old French saraband which Groot did not know, but as he listened, as the phrase goes, with all his ears, the stout music lover could almost imagine that ghosts in costume as from a picture by Boucher tripped the measure in the shadows beyond the street lamp.

"Rossa, by thunder!" he muttered. "It must be Rossa—I can't be mistaken! A little thinner than he was when I heard him play in the Kursaal at Ostend, but Rossa for a thousand pounds! What a bit of luck!"

He crept into the shadow of a projecting portico and from there he watched the player intently. He heard the dainty fragment tumble gracefully into its contenting coda and he saw the fiddle come down to the side of the player. For a moment the player stood with the erect, lithe poise of a swordsman—then Groot saw him bow as to an imaginary audience. The attitude, the gesture, was characteristic. The watcher was convinced. He stepped out from his shadowed vantage and walked up to the player. Off came his hat.

"A thousand thanks, maestro!" he exclaimed. "You have played divinely—as usual!"

For a moment or two the musician eyed him with an air of bewilderment, then a slim hand passed wearily over the puzzled deep-set eyes.

"Maestro?" the player faltered. "I am

no master, signor. I am only a poor student of Milan—a poor student of Milan——"

His voice tailed off in a dreary whisper.

"And your name, then?" Groot demanded.

Again came that slow movement of the hand over the eyes.

"If I only could remember!" the fiddler cried in despair. "If I only could remember! But I cannot—my name—how I came to this cold country—I cannot remember. I am bewildered. I am in some bad dream!"

"You are——" Groot was beginning, but stopped hastily.

The fiddler was reeling on his feet and the stout adventurer caught him by the arm.

"How is this?" he asked. "You're ill. Why, you're as thin as a reed!"

The dark eyes of the fiddler gazed dully into his, uncomprehending, unseeing, infinitely weary.

"I wish I'd learned Italian properly!" Groot muttered. "*Quandro*——" he began. "How long is it since you fed?"

"I have not eat', signor," the other said dully, "not eat' since two—threea—days."

"Come with me," said Groot. "I think I can help you. At least I can find you something to eat and drink."

Obediently, like a child, the musician hastened to obey. He picked up a velvet cloth from the violin case which lay at his feet and with almost reverence began wrapping the fiddle in it. Groot would have helped him but the fiddler put out a defending hand.

"No, no," he muttered. "I alone. You mighta break—drop——"

Fiddle and bow were placed in the case, and that was snapped to. Then with the case under his arm the player indicated his readiness to follow. Groot led the way down the street and presently was showing his charge into the elevator of the block of flats. The attendant gazed owllike at the pair and when he had taken them up to the third floor pressed the button for descent shaking his head doubtfully.

As Groot slipped his latchkey into the lock and swung open the door of the chambers to usher in his protégé, his crony, Archie, came out of the sitting room. A look of disgust crept into Archie's face when he saw the fiddler.

"Dammit, Groot!" he whispered. "You have done it after all! It's a bit thick—this!"

"Shut up, Archie!" growled the other, with an apprehensive glance at the visitor. "Help me. Find some food for the maestro. He's starving!"

And with his free hand he made a quick sign that made the younger man's eyebrows go up in faint astonishment.

Slightly bewildered then, for the sign from Groot had indicated that some money-raising scheme was afoot, Archie began ransacking cupboards and cellarettes for food and wine. In a little the table was spread with a cold supper, flanked by a bottle of hock. Groot placed a chair and with a courteous wave of the hand invited the bemused fiddler to be seated.

The sight of the food brought a wolfish gleam into the stranger's eyes. Nevertheless, he hesitated diffidently, and it was only when his two hosts combined to persuade him that he consented to seat himself. Groot poured out a glass of hock and patted the stranger on the shoulder.

"Drink a little of the wine, maestro," he murmured. "It will make you ready for the solids. Believe me, I understand what it is to be famished. Meantime—while you satisfy your hunger—my friend and I will leave you. We must see what we can arrange for your comfort."

He nodded to Archie, who led the way out of the room. Groot looked back from the doorway and saw the fiddler fall with avidity on the cold chicken. He nodded to himself contentedly and followed his confrère into the other room.

"What's the game, then?" Archie demanded as soon as the door was closed on them. "Gone mad?"

"Not on your life," the stout man chuckled. "Do you know who that is next door?"

"Can't say I do," his companion answered languidly.

"It is Salvatore Rossa!" said Groot.

Archie became interested.

"What? The violin player who disappeared about a month ago in Paris—the man all the fuss has been about in the papers?"

"That's the man."

The younger man scratched his chin and gazed hard at his stout ally.

"Well," he said at last, "what's the game? I don't see your drift."

"Don't you? Well, I'll tell you, Mr. 'Smart Archie' Fulcher. That guy's suffering from loss of memory—what they call

amnesia. He doesn't know where he is. He doesn't even know that he *is* Salvatore Rossa."

"Do you?" the other demanded keenly.

"Do I know the nose on my own face?" Groot laughed scornfully. "Of course I know him. It is hardly a year since I last heard him play in the Kursaal at Ostend. I was in the second row of seats. I'd know the man anywhere."

"Right-o. But where do we come in?"

"Why, don't you see? We help him to get back his memory. We fix him up to get back to Paris, or Italy, or wherever he wishes to go——"

"Yes. And then?"

"Then," said Groot, exultant, "then in his gratitude he forks out. He's as rich as Crœsus and reputed to be generous."

Archie Fulcher looked at the stout Groot for a moment in silence, and scorn warred with perplexity in his thin, aquiline countenance.

"I say, old man," he said at last, "what's the matter with you? Getting old—or what? I've never heard you pull anything as childish as this before. Where do you see a haul? I can see only a gold cigarette case—at the very most. You're losing the touch, Groot."

"We could hint——"

"Bah! What's the good of hinting? You don't propose to hold him for ransom, do you?"

Groot slowly shook his head.

"There's something the matter with me," he muttered. "I could have sworn there was money in the thing—somewhere. I felt sure there was money in it. Must have been his playing. He's a wonder, and you know what I'm like with music, Archie."

The other nodded. "I always think I can buck a straight game of cards," he said.

"Damn!" Groot exploded. "I'm a fool! What I need is a maiden aunt to look after me—or a keeper! I could have sworn there was money in the thing—somewhere. Oh, well, let's go and wake him up. It'll be something to earn the gratitude of Salvatore Rossa, anyhow."

"Just a minute, Groot!" Archie said suddenly, out of a pause of deep thought. "Wasn't there something in the papers about Rossa taking a valuable fiddle with him?"

"Yes, by Jove. He's supposed to have taken his Strad with him."

"Strad?"

"Yes. A Stradivarius—supposed to be worth three or four thousand pounds," said Groot. Then he whistled. "By thunder! I believe he has the thing with him. He was mighty careful of the one he's carrying, anyway."

Fulcher grinned at him sardonically.

"There's your money staring you in the face, Groot," he said crisply. "We've got to have that fiddle!"

"You aren't suggesting that we knock him on the head for the thing, are you?"

"Knock your grandmother!" Archie's voice was acrid with contempt. "We cozen it out of him—in the usual way. What's the matter with you, Groot?"

"I don't like it, Archie."

"Rubbish! The point is, can we dispose of the thing when we've got it?"

"Dispose of it?" the other said absently. "That would be easy. Old Levacheur would jump at it."

"Then the next thing to do is to make certain that it is the Strad," Archie decided. "Are you a judge of a fiddle, Groot?"

"No, but we can be sure," said Groot, with an uneasy note in his voice. "Dammit, Archie!" he burst out, "I don't like the idea! The man's a great artist and to take his fiddle from him—why, it's like putting one's foot through a Leonardo da Vinci! There are few Strads left, fewer I imagine than there are pictures by Leonardo. Rossa and his Strad—curse it, Fulcher! It's a sacrilege!"

"Don't talk maudlin bosh, Groot!" the younger man said hardly. "Some other fiddler will get the thing. Rossa's not the only fiddler alive."

"I'd say there are moments when he is the greatest fiddler that has ever been. I hate the notion."

"Look here, Groot," Fulcher interrupted coldly. "I mean to have that fiddle. If you fancy you can talk me out of it you may as well save your breath. We're down to our emergency hundred and there isn't a darn thing in sight. I'm not going to lose a couple of thousand—or even one thousand—just to save you from your maudlin qualms. I want that Strad!"

"Maybe it isn't the Strad."

"It's a hundred to one it is, but as you say, we can find out. Come along!"

"What are you going to do?"

"You'll have to open the game," the other returned. "You can do this maestro stunt

—I can't. We'll get him to his senses, find out if the thing is a Strad, give him some money to get home, and hold the fiddle as security."

"Yes. And then?"

"Then we get to Paris as quickly as we can and carry out the deal with Levacheur."

"I don't like it, Archie—I don't like it!"

But even while Groot protested he was following the other toward the room where the victim sat.

They found their guest still sitting in his chair, which he had pushed back from the table. His head was resting in his hands. Fulcher nudged his companion to take the lead.

"Better?" asked Groot solicitously.

"Ah, *Dio!*" the fiddler exclaimed. "A thousand grateful thanks, signor. I was starving. I did not eat since two—threea days!"

He broke off convulsively to cover his face again with his cupped hands.

"If I only could remember," he muttered. "If I could remember!"

Groot regarded him intently for a moment, then put a gentle hand on the man's bowed shoulder.

"Maestro!" he said earnestly, and the kindness in his voice was too real for insincerity. "Listen! Look up at me!"

The man raised his head slowly and gazed up at Groot in puzzled fashion.

"In the street," said Groot gravely, "you wondered why I called you maestro. You said you were merely a poor student of Milan, and no master. I, who have heard you play, will tell you that the word was not misused. You may have been a poor student of Milan—once. You are now one of the greatest masters of the violin that the world has ever seen—an acknowledged master. But you have been ill. You have forgotten. Your name—your name——"

"God! Yes! My name?"

"Your name, maestro—is Salvatore Rossa!"

It seemed for a brief moment that color flamed into the pale face of the musician. His thin fingers grasped the arms of his chair and the two men heard them creak on the polished wood from the intensity of his grip. He staggered to his feet.

"Why—why—yes!" he whispered. "He was Salvatore Rossa—that poor man—who could not remember. I am he! I remember. What has happened? Why am I here? Where is this place? Who are you gentlemen?"

"I found you playing in the street, maestro," Groot said gently. "You have been ill. Take a glass of cognac——" He broke off hastily for the man had reeled on his feet.

"Ah, no. I am well—but bewildered. Is it—is it England, then?" the musician whispered.

"England, yes. London."

"I was in Paris when—when—*Dio!*—when I forgot!"

The slim hand passed over the sunken eyes.

"In Paris, yes?" Groot prompted softly.

"I was walking down the Avenue de l'Opéra with my Strad—with my Strad!" He broke off in a shout. "And where is my Strad?"

Archie darted a triumphant glance at Groot, but that parishioner was looking down on the carpet with something of shame in his expression. The fiddler gazed about him wildly until his eye fell on the violin case resting on a chair near by. Next moment he had the instrument in his hands, and he was caressing it, murmuring over it brokenly.

And now Archie Fulcher managed to catch Groot's eye. He made a sign to the older man but Groot shook his head and turned away with a gesture of distress. The music lover was at the end of his tether.

Fulcher took charge of the affair.

Ten minutes later the two crooks were alone in the flat—with the fiddle.

There had been some difficulty in persuading the maestro to leave the instrument. He did not need money. There were agents in London who would be only too pleased to advance him enough for present expenses, and the Ritz would trust him in any case, would honor his check.

Fulcher had assured him that there was danger in carrying so valuable an instrument at night in London, had frightened the still bemused fiddler with the prospect of losing his memory again and the possibility of leaving the violin in the taxi which would take him to the hotel. It might be wiser—didn't the maestro think?—to take the money they would give him, say one hundred pounds, to go quietly to the Ritz, and quietly slip back to Paris without any public demonstration. The Strad would be brought to him before noon in the morning

—on the honor of English gentlemen who passionately admired the artistry of the great Salvatore Rossa—and together they would go to the Italian embassy to arrange for the replacing of the passport the master had lost.

In addition, Fulcher had insisted, it was possible that the master experienced a feeling of gratitude? It would be a sufficient thanks to them both, a great honor, if the master would permit them to have the custody of such a famous violin—with its more famous association—even for the short space of a few hours.

At last, when Fulcher was beginning to think that drastic methods would have to be adopted if the Strad were to be levered from the possession of its owner, the master consented. Fulcher hastened to call a taxi and hustled the bewildered man into it, ordering the driver to carry him to the Ritz.

The two crooks faced each other over the booty.

"Doesn't look as if it were worth three thousand," Archie smiled.

"No," said Groot sullenly. "But you can bet that it is."

"Come along! We'll have to pack in a hurry. It's the first boat train in the morning for us. We'll be bargaining with old Levacheur to-morrow evening!"

Archie Fulcher stooped over the violin case to close it, and though he smiled contentedly his aspect was distinctly vulturnine.

At that precise moment, not very far round the corner from the flat of Fulcher and Groot, a taxi driver was arguing with what he took to be an eccentric foreigner. The bearded and shabby gentleman did not wish to go to the Ritz after all. He would walk. If half a crown would salve the injured feelings of the driver? It did. The taxi sped off.

For a moment the shabby gentleman looked about him, then he dodged into the shadow of an adjacent mews.

"H'm!" he murmured, as with care he removed a false beard, grinning at the painful tenacity of the spirit gum. "That was the fourth lot who discovered Salvatore Rossa this evening. Let's see. A fiver and a tenner is fifteen—and another twenty is thirty-five. Not so bad! These crooks were the best of all. A hundred quid for that old fiddle! It was worth ten—perhaps. Ninety and thirty-five is a hundred and twenty-five—enough to keep me in Rome for half a year and pay my fees to old Ramiro as well."

The beardless gentleman walked slowly down the length of the mews, reflectively picking pieces of dried spirit gum from his face.

"Lucky that none of the rescuers of Salvatore spoke Italian," he thought aloud. "That *would* have spilled the beans!"

And Billy Haywarde, most promising pupil of the violin in London, in whom perhaps a good actor was lost for a coming master of the fiddle, strolled out into the light at the other end of the shadowy mews, nodded light-heartedly to a large policeman, and walked easily to his cheap lodgings on the slummy fringe of Mayfair.

HOW UNCLE SAM DOES THINGS

WHEN an indignant statesman rises in his place in the Senate and announces that this government's expenses are computed in thousands of millions of dollars in every Congress, the average citizen cannot react to the statement. A billion dollars is an idea hard to grasp. A better way to understand the gigantic scale on which the United States does things and pays for them is to consider the expenses of any one of its institutions.

For example, at the Government Hospital for the Insane at Washington the 5,700 patients and their attendants consume in a single day 4,000 pounds of meat, 400 pounds of butter, 360 dozen eggs, 100 pounds of sugar, 2,150 pounds of potatoes and 3,200 loaves of bread, not to mention many other foodstuffs.

Dead or Alive

By T. von Ziekursch

Author of "Monarch of the Gray Herd," "The Horse of Castle Canyon," Etc.

Pride and duty drive a man to certain death.

THE story was told that La Branche had sworn he would not be brought in alive. Knowing La Branche and his ways men believed it, but it did not check the pursuit, merely made it more cautious. Of course he had been exceedingly foolish not to stop, but the customs inspector had been even more foolish in drawing his gun. There were very few who would have done that against La Branche, especially as he had never been known to draw first. But the law ordained that there were certain ceremonies that must be observed when a man would cross the border, even though he had tilted the cup once too often. In the last analysis the trouble was that although La Branche had winged him pretty badly the inspector's description had been perfectly accurate, and when a shooting affray caps numerous other wild escapades such as interfering with a shipment of gold to the extent of appropriating half of it, the natural order of things would be a pursuit to the finish. And, of course it may have been that La Branche figured the inspector recognized him and wanted him for that gold job.

Perhaps all this went through the thoughts of La Branche now as he leaned back against the boulder on the small bench of rock a full two thousand feet above the valley. He was a tall figure of a man, slender and dark. Even in his reclining position there was that sense of alertness. A spot appeared in the sky, drawing slowly nearer, and he saw it. Perhaps sight of the great eagle winging with deceiving slowness over the wild of peaks and ridges aroused envy in him. His eyes followed its flight. On another bench of stone opposite, and with the mile of depths that was the sheer cañon separating, a bighorn ram came into view and the lighter patches of hair were all that made it visible against the browns of the rock. La Branche saw it and his eyes took in the glorious leap with which it bridged the chasm to a small tablelike area of stone where a spot of green had caught its eye. Perhaps he envied it, too. Casually, his glance fell to the spot far below where the other man toiled up toward this precarious perch and whatever it might be that awaited his arrival. He saw that the other had found difficulty at the same spots where he had encountered trouble. A few moments he watched, then shifted his glance back to where the bighorn ram was joined by a smaller form, obviously a ewe. They grazed together, then the ram clambered without apparent effort, straight up the sheer face of the stone above, and the ewe followed. They were freedom and abandon personified.

The storm wind blew in from the west, heavy and damp, barely passing over the heights and its wild appeal was not lost on La Branche. It, too, seemed to carry the message of freedom. Deliberately he moved, straightened from his reclining position against the boulder and calmly studied the chasm in back of the bench on which he stood. It was all of fifteen feet across and beyond lay further chance for safety. La Branche rested his hand on the butt of the revolver and there was an almost negligible pull as he loosened it in the holster. Then he moved back to recline against the boulder again and his eyes were on the other man who was much nearer and coming up slowly.

His thoughts ran fast. From this height he saw every detail of the country below. It was as though the gift that was the eagle's had become his. The panorama upon which he looked down was gorgeous, wild, harsh. There was the silvered blue thread that was the creek he had crossed that morning and on either side of it the rock bottoms were broken, uneven, tossed and jumbled. All this he could see until the wind drove a heavy cloud of the storm below him through the cañon, shutting off sight even of the man who was climbing nearer. For a few moments the world below was shut out by that passing cloud and only the wild crests and ridges were visible above it. He could see the blue of the heavens far above the storm and something tugged at his heart—freedom, the life that was good.

He saw it all differently now. Inside something seemed to have softened, something that did not seek nor need the companionship of men. That moment alone with the heavens and the jagged heights did strange things. With it came a freedom that he had never understood before, a freedom that was of more than the body, that suddenly made obvious the falsity of the things he had pursued and for which he in turn was now pursued. In that moment a peace that was as an all-covering mantle settled and then came a fierce yearning, a terrible urge of restlessness. A lump was in his throat and the whole scene of gray cloud beneath, rolling past like ghostly slow-moving billows of a strange sea, the sharp pinnacles of the mountains, jutting through, symbolic of unconquerable freedom, the blue of the heavens above, the dot that was the eagle, all this fastened itself on his mind. Gold, the things of the world, all were dross in that moment. Perhaps in that short space an incarnation had occurred and the soul of a man found its body. Heavy sweat was on the brow of La Branche, his face was taut and strained. Before, even when he had discovered that from this retreat no further flight was possible, there had been a grim content. Nothing short of artillery could dislodge him here. True, any who pursued might wait at the bottom, far down there in the cañon when they realized they could not hope to reach that bench in the face of his gun—the cloud passed by and a hundred feet below he saw the other. He watched as the other's hand reached up. The fingers clutched a cranny in the stone and he came on.

The hand of La Branche moved slightly toward the holster. The other man could not loosen his hold now to draw. Every ounce of gripping power he had was necessary in that hazardous climb up the face of the mountain, almost a sheer precipice in spots.

La Branche waited, then deliberately stretched out flat on the bench, looking out over its edge. Plainly the other man knew he was there.

"Hold steady, Mathews," he called. "Not that way—throw your right hand over farther, there's a better hold."

The pursuer looked up at him and his face was bathed in perspiration. There was a question in his eyes and La Branche saw it and read aright.

"I said you were yellow, once, Mathews," he went on, "but I take it back now and apologize. Shut up! Don't try to talk to me now. There's a foothold to the right there and if you're steady you can come up that little sheep trail, but lean in heavily against the rock or you'll go kitin' down and it must be a couple thousand feet."

The other man was nearing but the struggle of his upward climb was evident to the one who waited. At last La Branche took off the belt and dangled it over the edge, reaching down until the other grasped it and clambered up those last few feet to the safety of the bench. Somewhat weakly he sat down and La Branche looked at him long and steadily. Then his glance turned away and in his eyes was the look of one who sees great distances beyond the horizon. At last he spoke.

"I said I wouldn't be taken alive,

Mathews, and you know that whatever else I've done I've never broken my word."

The other man looked at him and pointed to the small silver thing that glistened on his own shirt.

"Ed, I'm rather sorry right now that I'm wearing that," he said. "But you know it's dead or alive they've got you posted, and you—you helped get me this damned star."

La Branche settled on the boulder and held one knee in his clasped hands.

"That was a long time ago," he said ruminatively; then added, "I wonder whether I can still beat you on the draw."

"I was good enough then to get a hole through my card before any of the others except you could get their guns out," Mathews said. "But you did have an edge on me and I'm no better now than I was then."

"Except that you're a sheriff now," La Branche added.

"And see things from a different light," Mathews said.

There was silence for a few moments. The eagle came back down over the cañon and both men watched it.

"What do you suppose they'd give me if they could get me in?" La Branche asked, his eyes still fastened to the slow winging dark thing that crossed the endless vault of blue.

Mathews looked at him and there was a questioning thing in his eyes.

"Why, they'll give you twenty years, I'm afraid," he said.

La Branche leaned forward and picked up two small stones that erosion had loosened from the boulder on which they sat.

"How you going to get me down out of here?" he asked and a quizzical smile touched his features.

"Why, we'll have to risk our necks climbing down the way we climbed up," Mathews replied. "We did just as bad as this when we were kids."

"You didn't have the nerve when you were a kid that you've got now," La Branche said.

The other did not answer and La Branche looked away.

"I might have shot you off the side when you were coming up if a cloud hadn't passed between us," he said in a low tone.

"To tell you the truth I wondered why you didn't," came the answer, equally low.

"Something strange happened," La Branche said. "I haven't figured it out yet myself, but I saw a lot of things differently."

There was silence and the storm wind passed on, moaning mightily over the brooding heights.

"How is Edith?" La Branche asked and Mathews turned full on him, surprised at the unevenness of the tone.

"You knew, then?" he asked.

The other's head shook negatively but he did not look around.

"I was a dad last week," Mathews went on. He saw the other man start as though some terrific blow had fallen.

At last La Branche arose and stretched. Slowly he walked to the chasm at the rear of the rocky bench. His voice came subdued, tense.

"You never guessed I was pretty sweet on her," he said.

Mathews, too, had arisen.

"You certainly kept out of the way and made it easy for me," he said, his own voice hard now. "But I suspected it."

La Branche came to his side and they stood together looking down the steep height they had climbed separately.

"It would be impossible for a man to force another down here if the other didn't want to go," La Branche said.

"Alive—yes," Mathews admitted.

"Or dead," La Branche said, and went on, musingly. "Twenty years is a mighty long time. Why, twenty years ago I was just a little more than a baby when your ma adopted me—and twenty years from now I'd be an old busted-down creature, if I lived that long inside prison walls."

Another wind-driven mass of billowy cloud drifted down over the cañon, soft as eiderdown, rolling and expanding, shutting out the world below and leaving the two men side by side there on the rocky height like two stranded beings on a lone island. Only the jutting peaks and ridges of the mountain crests were visible above and the high blue dome of the heavens. Piercing as some tuneless pipe that sent its shrill message forth came the scream of the eagle, perhaps calling to its mate from the far skies. Great beads of perspiration stood out on the face of La Branche. The shoulders of Mathews had slumped and his head was bowed. The world was a thing apart from them now. La Branche turned with a sudden motion and broke into a fierce spurt of gathering speed. At the edge of the chasm in the rear

of the bench he leaped high, drawing up his spurred boots in a spasmodic jump.

Mathews had whirled about and crouched subconsciously, tense, his fists clenched, every muscle taut and his face strained. He, too, was giving the energy of a strongly muscled body, and mentally that chasm yawned beneath him, also. He saw La Branche sprawl, reaching, on the very edge of the rock beyond the chasm, his boots sticking out over the depth.

Mathews reached for his gun and took a slow step toward the chasm, but the other was up and had dived and scrambled behind the boulders that were heaped in crazy array beyond.

From the protection of the rocks the voice of the hunted man came.

"Don't try that, Mat. Remember I always could outjump you by a full five feet and I barely made it."

Mathews had backed away, seeking as long a run as possible, it seemed. Again came the voice of La Branche, sharp now.

"Hear me, Mat! I've got the drop on you and I'll bust a leg before I'll see you fall down there. You couldn't make it. Remember, man, you've got something besides duty to live for now. There's Edith and the youngster—better go back to them the way you are than be carried back when they find you down there on the rocks. Some day when the kid's growed up tell it about this, and you can tell it for me that I said its dad didn't have a bit of yellow in his make-up."

Mathews walked to the edge of the chasm that separated them and stood peering down into the depths. They seemed interminable, sharp rocks and steep sides. He looked at the far brink and the voice of La Branche came again, close at hand though the speaker was hidden.

"Realize now you couldn't have made it, Mat?"

Mathews nodded slowly.

Then La Branche spoke again.

"It'll take you three days at least to reach telegraph, Mat, and I'll be over the border to-night. I haven't done anything I can't atone for myself. Those clouds made me see a lot of things a heap different. Seems like I never figured out before that about the only thing that matters much is your freedom and you can't have that long unless you play pretty straight."

There was silence a while and then the voice of La Branche came and in it was something different, something that was human and understanding.

"Mat, I been wondering why you took the chance you did in coming up when you must have known I could shoot you off the side any time I wanted to. I think maybe I understand now. You believe it was duty made you do it."

"It was duty, Ed, duty that I was mighty sorry about," Mathews replied.

"Mat, I always could outride you and outshoot you and outjump you." La Branche spoke from the safety of the rocks. "You knew it down deep and I knew it, and—and I'm wondering if Edith—well, maybe Edith kind of figured it that way, too, in the old days, and I'm about convinced you were fool enough to take the chances you did just to prove you had as much nerve as I did and maybe a little more when it come to a big test."

There was no answer and La Branche spoke again.

"I believe that was the real reason, Mat, but I don't believe you knew it yourself. You thought it was duty. And, say, I'll hand it to you, I wouldn't have been able to do it myself with a gun waiting at the top the way you did."

Again there was silence and minutes passed. At last came the voice of La Branche from a greater distance, calling aloud:

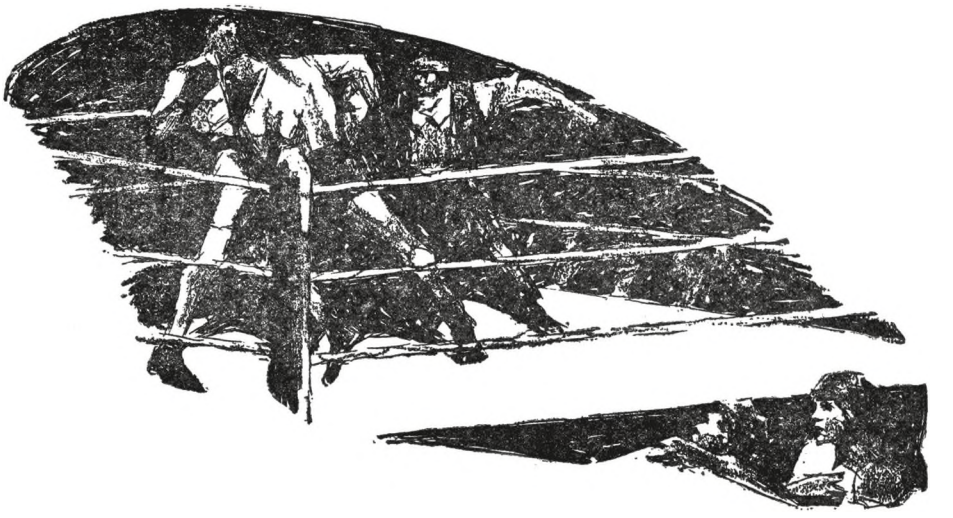
"Ho, Mat! I most forgot to tell you—that gold's cached under the rock pile where you jumped me out of camp this morning—and tell that fool inspector I'm mighty sorry I winged him."

Again there was a lapse and then the voice of the pursued came in a distant shout.

"So long, Mat."

Mathews walked slowly back to the edge of the steep slope and began the hazardous two-thousand-foot descent.

More stories by Mr. von Ziekursch in early numbers.



The Ring and the Girl

By Robert H. Rohde

Author of "The Hand and the Eye," "Macumber's Madness," Etc.

The Great Macumber crosses the double cross.

THE gymnasium of Professor Terence Rourke—in which persons with errands important enough to justify the interruption of superlative handball may find the Great Macumber almost any Tuesday or Friday afternoon—is open to all who aspire to physical fitness, irrespective of sex. Since beauty broke through her *jalousie* Professor Rourke has found it both expedient and profitable to conduct his institution on broad coeducational lines. His equipment embraces special apparatus and a private pool dedicated to the fair, and his women patrons are many.

Ordinarily, therefore, neither the Great One nor I would have had a second glance for Miss Alethea Bourne as she walked from the elevator toward Rourke's office in a corner of the big gym. But the girl was singularly unlike the trenchant damosels we were accustomed to seeing about the place. She was as hesitant as the others were purposeful. Her rap at the sanctum door of the mighty Terence was a flutter.

"I wonder!" murmured Macumber after the girl had vanished into the office.

"An unusual type—here," I remarked.

"That she is, lad. She'll be no rising queen of commerce, you can be sure. And she will not have come to Terence Rourke, of course, through any such motives as bring these terrifically earnest and pushing bachelor girls of the business world. For girls like her there'll always be plenty of men eager to fight the battles."

"Rourke," said I, "seems to be an old friend of hers."

"I know. I observed the greeting. There can't be a doubt that Terence was pleased by her visit, and if I make no mistake he was also surprised. But why, I'd like to know, should she be turning to *him* in her trouble?"

"Trouble?"

"Did you not take note of the look in her eyes? Of a certainty the lass carries a burden of grief. It was plain to see."

When the afternoon's proceedings had been wound up with my customary humiliation on the handball court the Great One's thoughts reverted to the girl in whose gray eyes he was so sure he had seen the flashing of distress signals.

"I'm curious about her, lad," he said. "It's a deeper matter than a purse lost in a strange town that brought her to Rourke,

I'm thinking. We must feel Terence out a bit."

"You don't think she belongs in New York?"

"I'm sure she doesn't. Becoming as it was, the dress she wore somehow lacked the city look; and the girl herself didn't have it. I'd be willing to venture a guess that her home is in—Wisconsin."

"Basing the guess on what?"

Macumber smiled.

"I'm out on a trembling limb, iad," he confessed; "but having gone thus far I'm willing to gamble still further that the place in Wisconsin she hails from is a town called Truscott."

"Is this clairvoyance?" I demanded.

"Scarcely," grinned the Great One. "Truscott, Wisconsin, is where Terence Rourke originated, and nowadays he has a big health farm there. I'm merely speculating. The girl may have been born and raised in Brooklyn which in some ways is as far from New York as is Truscott."

But Macumber might well have spared himself the qualification and taken credit once again for omniscience.

"A kid from home," the thick-ribbed overlord of the gymnasium was explaining presently. "Little peach, wasn't she? That's the way they grow 'em in Wisconsin. I wish I'd had something better to give her than good advice."

Rourke's strong teeth met with a click through the end of a fresh cigar.

"Can you imagine a girl like that," he wanted to know, "throwin' herself at a tin-eared gorilla of a second-rate prize fighter and her the daughter of the principal of one of the finest high schools in Wisconsin?"

"I can't, Terry," returned the Great One quickly. "Most certainly I can't. I couldn't imagine her looking on anything or any one connected with the prize ring except with horror."

"Well, then, that goes to show you don't understand women. I don't myself. Anyhow, this same apple-cheeked youngster you saw come in here this afternoon—Alethea Bourne, her name is—happens to be head over heels in love with a bruiser who fights under the name of 'Machinist' Mellody. And now, since he's turned her cold, her heart's about broken. It was that she came to tell me about. I didn't even know she was in the East."

"I can hardly believe you!" exclaimed Macumber. "How could a girl of her sort ever come into contact with a pugilist, in the first place?"

"That's easy. By the way, did you ever hear of this Machinist Mellody?"

The Great One's face was blank.

"I don't believe I have. I read the newspapers very closely in their other departments but I pay little attention to professional sports—prize fights still less than the others. There's too much fakery to suit me, Terry. What is the Machinist's chief distinction?"

"Getting Alethea Bourne to fall for him, *I'd* say. It's only because of the lack of likely material in the lightweight division that Mellody's managed to get a match with 'Kid' Gropp. They meet next week at the Hercules A. C."

"Gropp?" echoed the Great One. "Why, he's the lightweight champion, isn't he?"

"Not any more. Not since nearly a year ago. The title is held just now by a curly-haired gent who hasn't done much of anything but act in the movies since he won the decision over the Kid in the saddest ring spectacle I ever looked on at. Maybe you've seen the curly bird in the pictures —'Gentleman George' Byrnes, they bill him?"

"I've missed him," the Great One admitted. "But you haven't explained how the little girl from Truscott became acquainted with this Harmony fellow."

"You're off key on the name, Macumber," corrected Rourke. "Not Harmony—Mellody. But, as I said, that's easy to explain. Mellody comes from Truscott, too."

"You know him then?"

"Haven't seen him since he was a little shaver, I don't think. He's only about twenty-two now. Alethea's twenty-one, she says, though I wouldn't take her for more than eighteen or nineteen."

"Nor would I," said Macumber. "But I still can't see how a young fighter and the daughter of a high-school principal would move in the same circles even in a town as small as Truscott."

"You don't get the idea. Young Mellody didn't get into the fight racket in the regular way. You see, he enlisted in the navy while the war was on and was still in the navy when he began to get handy with the gloves. Before he finished his hitch he was lightweight champ of the Pacific fleet, or some part of it. Then when he was

discharged he thought he'd rather fight than work and a snide manager out on the coast named Otto Klein picked him up."

"And Mellody made good, eh? He must have, since a man like Gropp is taking him on."

"Yes," assented Rourke without enthusiasm; "Mellody cleaned 'em up around San Francisco, but that's not sayin' a lot. There never was a time when the country was so shy on lightweight material. The division's made up of a bunch of mongrel ham-and-eggers, and unless the Machinist has more than I think he has Kid Gropp would be a match for any two of him. At that, the Kid is vergin' on senile decay. He's close to forty, and in the fight game that classes him as an old man. No, up to now I wouldn't say that Mellody had run up against any real stiff competition. His string of winnings on the coast hadn't ought to be took too seriously. It was a case of one set-up after another."

"It's a wonder to me," said the Great One, "that a man like Gropp doesn't quit the ring. Haven't I read that he's been pretty close with his money?"

"The Kid's probably got the first dollar he ever took out of the game—and he's made plenty since then to add to it. He's well off, all right. Nobody could guess exactly what he's worth, and Gropp ain't the boy to tell. They say he's even got his own manager workin' on a salary, so that he ain't any more than a messenger boy."

"Why does he hang on, then, when he might retire? The man must be a 'glutton for punishment.' That's the phrase, isn't it?"

"Kid Gropp doesn't have to take much punishment off the boys he meets nowadays. They just save him doin' his daily dozen on the days he rocks 'em to sleep. And the reason he don't quit is because there's still good money in the fight game for him. He ain't a Madison Square Garden attraction any more, of course, since he let Byrnes slip it over on him; but he's still got a big following and can be sure of a ten-thousand-dollar gate or better any time he steps into the ring. The Kid's not passin' up easy money of that kind—not if he had to go in on crutches. And you can take it from me, Macumber, that it's a lucky thing for Gentleman George Byrnes he hasn't lost his ambition."

"How do you figure that?"

"Well, Byrnes is goin' great in the movies; they tell me his first picture was a clean-up. And Kid Gropp, bein' still out after the coin, is savin' him from gettin' his hair mussed or havin' his popular face changed around so that the mushy girls who simply dote on he-men wouldn't recognize their hero. Gentleman George's management at the fight end of his double-barreled career has the same reply for all the lads that want a try at the lightweight champion. They're told they'll have to whip Gropp before Byrnes'll look at 'em."

Macumber, who had been wandering about the private office idly inspecting the photographs of imposingly muscled men and wide-shouldered women which lined its walls, objected:

"I don't see that having the title defended by proxy is a very good proposition financially for Byrnes. And that's what it amounts to, doesn't it?"

"A lucky punch has made more than one champion," said Rourke. "Kid Gropp was off his feed when he tangled with Gentleman George or else he'd had a walk-over. One of these days, I suppose, he'll be lookin' for a return match with Byrnes—and I know who my money'd be on in that case. But in the meantime the movie sun shines for George and he's makin' hay. You can bet he's willing for Gropp to do the fightin'. If Byrnes was to go into the ring himself there'd be a lot more at stake than the lightweight championship. The picture public hasn't got any use for has-beens. I guess I don't need to tell you that, Macumber."

"You don't," confirmed the Great One. "You have made your point extremely clear. I'm truly grateful to you, Terry, for enlightening me in respect to the situation in what you call the lightweight division. It's an interesting bit of knowledge. But I'm still more interested in the tribulations of your very attractive little friend from Wisconsin. Did you say that your distinguished fellow townsman, the Machinist, had—ah—broken off with her?"

"He's thrown her over—ditched her. She was all right until he felt he was within reachin' distance of the lightweight championship, but now he's comin' into the big league he don't feel the same. And he's got her in bad, too, as far as the folks in Truscott are concerned. You see, her father supposed she was comin' East to visit an aunt in Baltimore. If it's found out back home

that she's been trailin' after Mellody instead—well, you know what a small town is, Macumber. There simply wouldn't be any more livin' in Truscott for the girl."

"How," I put in, "would the news travel a thousand miles back across the country?"

Terence Rourke began to search among the papers scattered over his disordered roll-top desk.

"The truth," was his sententious contribution, "has queer ways of gettin' around—most particularly that kind which is harmless in itself but does harm when spread."

He found what he had been seeking—a single-folded sheet of nondescript writing paper—and wheeled around to face Macumber.

"Here's the situation," he continued, "just to show you Alethea's angle. She and Mellody had a boy-and-girl crush. He was in her class at high school and until he left home the two traveled in the same set. If Mellody'd gone into a bank instead of the ring it would have been all right. I remember his people, and they were O. K. But Mellody, like I say, joined out with the navy and got himself mixed up with the fight racket. All the while he was away from Truscott—and I guess he ain't been back yet—the girl kept writin' to him, and him to her. By letter he talked her into the idea that prize fightin' was as respectable a way of makin' money as any other.

"By the time Mellody was through with the navy he'd sold Alethea on the pugilistic career. She was wild to see him, but so long as he stayed out on the Pacific coast there wasn't a chance. But when he wrote he was comin' East she begun to lay her plans. She sent a letter sayin' to be on the lookout for her, and about a week ago she blew into Trenton, where Otto Klein had set up trainin' quarters for the Machinist. I guess maybe she didn't look as good to Mellody as she used to. Anyhow, he wasn't long givin' her the gate. Just take a look at this!"

Rourke unfolded the scrap of writing paper which he had been twirling between his spatulate fingers as he talked and passed it to Macumber. It bore a penciled note, in handwriting fair enough except for its jerkiness. At the Great One's invitation I looked over his shoulder, and read:

DEAREST GIRL: You'd better get down to your aunt's as quick as you can. Something's happened I can't explain. Maybe you'll read about it. I've got to get away—fast. I won't see you any more but I won't forget you. I'd feel better to know you were back in Truscott and that everything was all right. Don't delay. Get out of Trenton the minute you receive this and forget you ever were here. I'm not telling you everything because you'd only feel worse. Good-by, dear—oh, but it's tough to have it! Good-by. TOM.

"Well?" queried Terence Rourke when Macumber looked up from the incomprehensible epistle of farewell. "How's that for the rush act?"

The Great One, frowning, read the note again before he answered.

"There's a ring of sincerity in it, Terry," he said slowly. "This letter was written in haste, under stress. You may take my word for it that the hand which held the pencil was plentifully agitated. The notion I'd get from it would be that Mellody had actually got into some sort of scrape and was making tracks himself."

Rourke tossed the letter contemptuously back upon his desk.

"You don't know what I know," said he. "The first thing Alethea Bourne is likely to read about her ex-pal Mellody is that he's been trimmed by Kid Gropp."

"Have you investigated?" demanded Macumber.

"Didn't need to. Alethea got the letter the first thing this morning. She knew she could count on me as a friend and came trottin' over to see if I knew what had gone wrong with Machinist Mellody, figurin' he'd have looked me up while he was so near. She didn't dast go near the trainin' quarters because Mellody'd told her to keep away—said he didn't want his manager to know she was in Trenton. But, as I said, all I was able to give her was good advice. That was to visit her aunt for a while and then go back to Truscott and wipe the Machinist off her slate for good."

"I still don't understand, Terry," protested the Great One. "You're a great hand at starting an explanation and veering off. Why was it you felt you didn't need to investigate?"

"Well, didn't I say the girl got her walkin' papers early this mornin?"

"I made note of that. But——"

"All right! And didn't you say yourself that the note sounded as if Mellody was makin' himself scarce at the time he wrote it?"

"That's true."

"And the letter must have been posted last night, mustn't it, for her to have got it in the first mail to-day?"

"It would seem so."

Rourke leaned back in his chair and threw one great knee across the other.

"Sure!" he cried, triumphant. "And now I'll tell you something, Macumber. Machinist Mellody's over there in Trenton right at this minute, punchin' his bag or his sparrin' partner."

"The deuce you say!"

"The hell I don't say. How do I know? Well, did you notice the young chap that was in my office just before Alethea Bourne come in? That was a sport photographer for the *Evening Advance.* Know where he'd been this mornin'? Over takin' action pictures of Mellody—at his trainin' quarters in Trenton!"

The Great One's right eyebrow went up.

"Eh? Mellody was there? Sure?"

"Mellody not only *was* there, but there wasn't any sign he didn't intend to stay there. Wherever he's goin' he'll not be on his way until after his battle with Kid Gropp. Wasn't Otto Klein handin' the *Advance* camera man a lot of the old stuff about his boy bein' sure to win in a walk? Now what do you think of Mellody?"

"I think," said the Great Macumber, after only the faintest hesitation, "that Kid Gropp would be the safer man to bet on of the two!"

II.

It is Macumber's habit to spend a half hour or longer in Terence Rourke's swimming pool at the close of his afternoons in the gymnasium, but on this day of the visit of Miss Alethea Bourne he was in haste to be dressed and away. He was ready for the street as I came from under the shower, and admonishing me to make speed in getting my clothes on walked swiftly out of the locker room and cut across the gymnasium floor. He was moving at such a rate that, tripping on the corner of a mat, he plunged headlong into Rourke.

When I joined them the redoubtable Terry was trying vainly to get the Great One back on the subject of the Gropp-Mellody bout and the corollary unhappiness of Alethea Bourne a subject which Macumber had chosen to drop altogether when it was made apparent he had been mistaken in thinking the Machinist's parting note inartificial.

"We'll have to be stepping, lad," said Macumber briskly as I walked up. "It's after four and I've a train to make."

"A train!" I cried. "For where?"

"Philadelphia train, of course," grunted the Great One, with a glance that silenced me. "So long, Terry. No, I'd not take a bet on Mellody even at long odds if I were you. The man can have no luck in the ring or out after the turn he's played the little lady from Truscott!"

"Why the rush?" I asked Macumber as we were descending in the elevator from Rourke's lofty establishment.

"Did I not say I'd a train to be catching? Am I in the habit of uttering falsehood?"

"What train? Why?"

"The Philadelphia train, as I said before."

Even then I could not be sure that the Great One was in earnest. But when we had jumped into a taxi in front of the midtown building whose upper floors house the Rourke gymnasium and had been whisked to the railroad terminal there no longer was room for doubt that we were headed out of town.

Macumber made a race for a gate marked "Philadelphia Express," through which we slipped sans tickets and swung aboard the club car just as the air brakes were letting go.

"Would you mind telling me," I asked the Great One when we had found chairs, "where we are heading for?"

"You surely saw the sign on the gate, lad," grinned Macumber. "Was the word not Philadelphia? Did I lie to the estimable Terence?"

"But what business have we in Philadelphia?"

"I haven't the dimmest notion," said the Great One cheerfully, and turned upon me a gaze of unconquerable and intolerable benignancy.

A few minutes later he hailed the news butcher and tossed a magazine into my lap.

"Amuse yourself, lad," he said. "There's a little matter I'd wish to turn over in my mind, and I'd prefer not to be talking."

We were passing through a small Jersey town south of that haplessly stifled and hopelessly overshadowed metropolis, Newark, when the Great One joggled my elbow. Glancing through the window, I saw momen-

tarily a long, low wooden building standing in the center of a half-fenced yard and displaying in vast letters on the side facing the railroad tracks the legend:

CHAMPION PHOTOPLAYS, INC.

Macumber took his pipe from between his teeth and surveyed me quizzically.

"That," said he, "is where the pictures starring Gentleman George Byrnes are made. You remember that Rourke was talking about him this afternoon?"

"Certainly I do," I told him. "He's the lightweight champion—the man who whipped Gropp. What makes you think that's his studio? The name of the company?"

The Great One handed his newspaper to me and pointed out a paragraph among the movie notes. It announced that Gentleman George Byrnes, fulsomely alluded to as the only really clever actor the screen ever had borrowed from the ring, had begun the filming of his fourth feature picture on the Champion Photoplays' lot at Wentwood, New Jersey.

"Oh," said I. "Thank you so much for the information. I could use more if you're in a mood to dispense it, maestro."

"Such as?" smiled the Great One.

"Well, I would rather like to know where we're going—and why we're going there. What is there for us to do in Philadelphia?"

"Nothing. Absolutely nothing I know of."

"Then why are we going there?"

"We're not, dear lad."

"But——"

"Oh, no; I didn't say we were bound for Philadelphia. I merely asserted we were *heading* for Philadelphia, and that is certainly the fact. The truth of the matter is we leave the train at Trenton. We're going to have a little heart-to-heart talk with Miss Alethea Bourne, youngster. There's something about this unhappy love affair of hers that I can't fathom—something sinister in the wind. What it is I won't attempt to say until I have talked with her; but I am positive that Terence Rourke is far off in his conception of Mellody. It would be no ordinary plug-ugly that has won the girl's heart, for one thing. And for another I cling to the belief that Mellody was without guile when he wrote that letter, though he be still in Trenton to-day."

I knew Macumber too well to scoff at the interest he was disposed to take in a matter which, to say the least, held no legitimate concern for him. I had known him to travel five hundred miles beyond his original destination, on one occasion, to find out why an elderly fellow passenger on a Santa Fe train tossed a blank square of cardboard out onto the platform of every station at which we hesitated on our way across Texas.

"How," I contented myself with asking him, "do you know Miss Bourne is not on her way to her aunt in Baltimore?"

"Because," said the Great One, "Rourke volunteered the information that she had refused to leave Trenton at once. She is sure that some danger threatens Mellody—and so, for that matter, am I."

"You asked Terry where to find her?"

"No, I couldn't do that, lad. I'm not anxious to have him know that I'm interesting myself in the case. It would be better that no hint of my activities in connection with Miss Bourne and Thomas Mellody—if, indeed, it develops I can be of assistance to either or both of them—get abroad. The garrulous Terry would be sure to talk."

"Trenton is a big town," I reminded him. "Presuming she is not registered at a hotel, how do you propose to locate the girl when we get there?"

"Ah, lad," sighed the Great One, "you do not give me proper credit. The letter having come to Miss Bourne by mail there would of course be an envelope, and the envelope would bear her address."

"Yes; I saw the envelope, maestro. Before we left his office Rourke pawed over his desk again, slipped the note back into it and put both into the breast pocket of his shirt. My eyes were wide open, even to details to which I attached no importance."

Macumber's eyes twinkled.

"Aye, youngster," said he, chuckling. "I saw where Terence tucked the envelope, too. At a fitting moment I possessed myself of it by an exercise of the lesser magic. Rourke's good arms were occupied just then in holding me on my feet. Did you not see it done from where you sat in the locker room? Stir yourself, lad. They're calling Trenton!"

III.

We found Miss Alethea Bourne in a quiet house on one of the quietest streets of the Jersey capital. Before we saw her we knew she had changed her own plans to conform

with Terence Rourke's advice. She had been packing, her landlady said, in preparation for an early-morning departure; and when she came from above it was plain to see that packing was not all she had been doing. She had been crying. Her eyes were red.

Macumber's mention of the name of Rourke proved a sufficient introduction. The girl was in no mood to question motives. She appeared, in fact, to take it for granted that we had had her story from her one friend in New York and were worthy of her further confidence. And she had, it appeared, a new woe to unburden. Ignoring Mellody's admonition as well as Rourke's counsel she had gone directly to the Machinist's training quarters on her return to Trenton—a dilapidated old farmhouse on the outskirts of the city. She had expected, and dreaded, to find the place deserted; but instead it was humming with activity. A small man with a large cigar whom she later discovered to be Mellody's manager, Klein, was hammering a portable typewriting machine on the narrow front porch. Two other men—sports writers, she surmised—were just leaving the house; and in the yard at the rear Machinist Mellody himself was pummeling away diligently at a punching bag.

From a distance the girl had called to him. At first he had not heard, at any rate had not heeded her. She called again, advancing; and then a strange thing had happened. The rattle of the punching bag had ceased. The man beneath it had given her only one glance and then had sprinted into the house without so much as replying to her hail or otherwise acknowledging her presence.

"I couldn't understand," she said. "I can't understand yet. I do know that I will never lose my faith in Tom Mellody. If he does not wish me to be near him there is some good reason, and he had a reason as good for not speaking to me when I went to him."

Macumber nodded then said with an air of fatherly reassurance:

"Things that seem inexplicable now will be straightened out in time, you may be sure. I have had experience in affairs presenting queerer aspects than this, Miss Bourne, and it was for that reason I came to talk with you. I do think I may be of service—if it is your pleasure."

"If you *could* do anything!" murmured the girl. She shook her head miserably. "But how could you?"

"You might, for instance, tell me more about your friend," the Great One suggested. "You have been in Trenton about a week?"

"Five days. I hadn't consulted Tom about coming, for I wanted to surprise him. I wrote the day I started and he met the train here."

"Did he act then as if he had something weighing on his mind?"

"Oh, no. He didn't approve of me coming to Trenton alone and without father's knowledge. But he was glad I had made the trip, just the same. I couldn't doubt that. We hadn't seen each other in more than four years."

"Had you never let him know you disapproved of his—his profession?"

Alethea Bourne colored, but her head went back proudly.

"I haven't disapproved," she said. "I know that his isn't an exactly conventional calling, but Tom never intended to be in the business long. It just seemed to him—to both of us—the quickest way of arriving at an objective on which we'd set our hearts. And if Tom wanted to be dishonorable he could have——"

The girl bit her lip.

"You were saying——" prompted Macumber.

"More than I should have said. Tom made me promise not to repeat what he told me. It was something connected with his fight with Mr. Gropp next week. I can't say any more."

"I'll not ask you to, Miss Bourne. But you can tell me what this objective was, can you not?"

"Oh, indeed. There's no secret about that. Tom, you see, has always had a taste for mechanics. Even while he was in high school he used to spend most of his leisure time helping around a garage back home. He loved to work around automobiles. When he went in the navy he became a machinist's mate—I think that's what they call it—and when he became a professional boxer he insisted on being known as Machinist Mellody instead of Sailor Mellody. Before he was in long trousers Tom had his ambition, and it's never changed. He wants to be the owner of that garage back home. That's what he's been fighting

for, Mr. Macumber. It would take him long years to save the money out of any salary he could expect to earn in Truscott. By boxing as a professional he was sure he could have enough to buy the business in two years at most."

"You've seen Mellody every day since you arrived in Trenton?"

"Every day—but not for long. Tom has been training religiously. He really believes he will win, despite all Mr. Gropp's experience and reputation. And if he should be the victor, then there would be only one more fight for him. That would be with the lightweight champion, and whether he won or lost Tom would be sure of making enough out of it to—to——"

"To settle down, of course," supplied the Great Macumber.

"Yes. He gave me his word it would be his last appearance in the ring."

Macumber's earnest gaze searched the girl's guileless gray eyes.

"You've seen Mellody and talked with him daily," said he. "Surely in that time he must have dropped some hint of impending ill fortune, if he had foreknowledge of it. Think carefully, please. You must search your mind. One word might set me on the track—enable me to help you both."

Alethea Bourne pressed her slender brown hands to her temples.

"No," she said. "I'm sure he never did. For a time he thought that his sparring partner bore him a grudge; and again, one night, he was set upon by thugs while out on a lonely run. But as for anything which might have a bearing on such trouble as his letter implied had come to him, I don't——"

"What about the sparring partner, Miss Bourne?"

"That was nothing. Tom feared that he perhaps had used the man too roughly and had earned his enmity. At any rate, the day after I reached Trenton the sparring partner seemed disposed to turn his bout with Tom into a real knock-down fight. He had a big advantage in weight and in a clinch struck Tom a foul blow which almost knocked him senseless. On occasions before that he had been ugly."

"Potential champions, I believe, are as a rule handled rather gingerly," remarked the Great One. "What was the upshot?" he inquired.

"Tom has been through a frightful grueling since he left Truscott," the girl said. "He's a hard man to knock out. Luckily he was able to block the blow, partly; and then, angered himself, he gave the man a drubbing he'll not soon forget."

"And that might well have been a motive for future villainy in the making, Miss Bourne. I suppose Mellody got a new sparring partner after that?"

"No; he didn't. The man realized he had let his temper get the best of him and might have injured Tom severely. When it was all over he apologized and promised he'd be careful not to lose control of himself again."

"This sparring partner had come from the Pacific coast, too?"

"Oh, no. Mr. Klein and Tom came on East alone. Their finances weren't in good shape, I know. Tom had written me that his fights on the coast hadn't paid him well. They were a means to an end, in themselves. Tom was making a reputation. He told me before he started—when he didn't know he would be able to get a match with a first-class lightweight at once—that he might have to wait several more months for a real opportunity to make more than enough for carrying expenses. They picked up a sparring partner in Trenton. Then, after a week or so, Mr. Klein said Tom should have a heavier man opposed to him in his practice bouts and brought over a new partner from New York."

"I see," said Macumber. "And I don't imagine that after Mellody had accepted his excuses and kept him on the man would be harboring his grudge. Now please tell me about this attack you've mentioned. Did it occur before or after the fracas with the sparring partner?"

"It was the very next night, I'm sure. Part of Tom's training routine is an evening run, which he takes a couple of hours after dinner. Sometimes his sparring partner goes with him, but on this night he was alone. He was trotting along a deserted road beside a canal when three men——"

"This was the road he was in the habit of following?" interjected Macumber.

"Yes; he seldom varied the route. It was at a turn in the road that the three men jumped out from behind a clump of bushes and blocked his way. It was quite dark and Tom isn't sure they didn't mistake him for some one else. But they wasted no time making certain. For the next few minutes Tom had his hands full. At least one of the

men was armed with what Tom called a black—black——"

"Blackjack?" suggested the Great One.

"Yes; that was the word he used. In the midst of the mêlée Tom was struck on the head with the blackjack. The impact staggered him."

"Do you know where he was struck?"

"Behind the left ear. Tom said a heavier blow might have killed him. It left a swelling and a nasty cut."

"Then what happened, Miss Bourne?" probed Macumber.

"Luck was with Tom again. He was having a hard time of it to keep his feet when two automobiles, traveling close together and headed for the city, came along the road by the canal. The men fled when the machines slowed down. The driver of one of them carried Tom back into Trenton and he made a report of the incident to the police when he got there. There was a small item about Tom's adventure in a local newspaper the next day."

"Your friend," commented Macumber, "has surely not found the road to the championship any too smooth, Miss Bourne. May I ask when it was that you last saw him?"

"Yesterday afternoon. Usually he came over to visit me directly after dinner and before starting on his run. But he came earlier yesterday because a chance had come up for him to make a couple of hundred dollars for a few minutes' work last night. He needed the money so badly that he couldn't refuse. Mr. Klein had had to borrow to cover the last week's expenses, he told Tom."

"Do you feel at liberty to tell me how Mellody earned the extra money—or how he was to have earned it?"

"Oh, it was perfectly legitimate, Mr. Macumber. I agreed entirely with Tom on that. Of course I can tell you. It was arranged through Mr. Klein. Three or four men in New York—sporting men—thought they might bet on Tom in his fight with Mr. Gropp if heavy enough odds were offered against him. The betting already had been two to one on Mr. Gropp, and they thought that by a day or two before the fight they would rise to three to one or even four to one—for of course Mr. Gropp had the reputation and Tom was comparatively an unknown.

"But before they would risk their money at any odds, these men wanted to see Tom box. They offered two hundred dollars to have Tom go to New York last night and put on an exhibition bout for them with a prize fighter of their own selection. It was not to be a regular public match, you understand."

"Mellody went?"

"I'm not sure. I know he intended to go but I didn't see him after he left the house here."

"Certainly he started in that direction," said the Great One. "The postmark shows his letter to you was mailed in Brooklyn. But, by the way, Miss Bourne, do you know if much has been printed in the New York papers about Mellody since his arrival in the East?"

"There has been very little. Mr. Klein sent articles which he wrote himself to the newspapers almost every day but they seldom were printed. When they were they were heavily blue-penciled. Lately Mr. Klein had been getting discouraged. I don't think that even the Trenton papers have sent reporters or photographers to Tom's camp before to-day."

"You tell me that Klein had been becoming discouraged, Miss Bourne. Was that merely because he didn't get as much publicity as he expected, or did he doubt Mellody would prove himself a better man than Gropp?"

The girl hesitated.

"He—he had changed," she said. "I think the reason for that was that Tom had told him frankly he didn't intend to stay in the fight business, whether or not he should win the championship. When they first came East, Tom said, Mr. Klein told him he was sure he would defeat Mr. Gropp. He was elated when he succeeded in making the match. But lately he has been different—downright pessimistic—although Tom's confidence has been growing steadily as the time for the match approached."

"It's usually, I fancy, the other way round," remarked the Great One. He looked at the girl with a shrewd twinkle in his eyes and added casually: "So Klein discovered so many qualms that he was anxious to sell out, eh?"

Miss Alethea Bourne's face showed her astonishment.

"How could you know that?" she gasped.

"Isn't that what you all but told me some moments since?" smiled Macumber.

IV.

Before we took leave of Alethea Bourne the Great Macumber had obtained from her the address of her aunt in Baltimore. She would spend at least a fortnight in that city, she said, before returning to Wisconsin.

"You'll probably hear from me before long," the Great One assured her. "I'll make it my business to hunt up your Thomas Mellody and find out what's on his mind. In my own humble opinion, Miss Bourne, 'twill prove but a magnified trifle."

I had anticipated that Macumber's next visit in Trenton would be to the training quarters of Machinist Mellody, for his methods habitually are simple and direct. But instead the street car which we boarded took us back into the heart of the city.

The Great One, whose years of trouping have lent him an extraordinary familiarity with virtually every American and Canadian city large enough and prosperous enough to support high-class vaudeville, led the way into a near-by newspaper office when we alighted from the trolley. We climbed a narrow flight of stairs to the editorial rooms, where Macumber inquired for the sporting editor. The next five or ten minutes he spent in conversation with a shirt-sleeved youth who twirled an immense pair of shears on his thumb as he talked, while I loitered at a distance.

"You told him there would be something suspicious to watch for in the Gropp-Mellody go?" I asked the Great One when he rejoined me.

"I came not to give information, but to seek it," replied Macumber. "And what would be your own opinion, lad, of the impending battle?"

"I think," said I, "that you spoke wisely when you told Terence Rourke that money bet on Gropp would be better invested."

"You share Manager Klein's mistrust of the prowess of Machinist Mellody?"

"Isn't the whole business obvious to you by now?" I demanded, not without asperity. Macumber's cresty playfulness was roiling.

"In some degree," he said seriously enough. "I'd be happy to hear your personal suspicions, none the less."

"Very well, then," I told him shortly. "My belief is that Mellody the obscure has discovered at last which side his bread is buttered on. I'm satisfied he's decided to take whatever sure money has been offered to him for handing the fight to Gropp. Why a man of the caliber of Gropp should enter into such a deal I won't attempt to say. Perhaps he's getting so old he feels himself slipping and doesn't wish to risk another defeat. For that would finish him with the fans. Or possibly he simply wishes to earn his money as easily as possible and is anxious to sidestep a hard battle with a younger man. The fight game is honeycombed with such chicane, maestro. I have followed it, perhaps, closer than have you."

Macumber had listened gravely as we walked along toward the station.

"How about the girl, lad?" he reminded me. "And how about the letter?"

"I agree with Rourke. Mellody wants to get rid of her. At least, he doesn't want her to be a witness to his purchased fiasco. He has boasted to her of his certainty of whipping Gropp. He has stood before her, also, as an upright and uncompromising soul beyond the reach of the briber. Her very hero worship may have lent him strength to resist the first temptation. But let's assume the price was raised, and the temptation became too great to be put aside. That might well be without Gropp going too deep in his own pocket. No money is so timid, you know, as that of the man who lives by gambling. He wants a sure thing every time, and he'll pay to get it—pay with the other fellow's money!"

"Most interesting, lad," congratulated the Great One. "Most ingenious, upon my word."

"I'm sure I'm right," I went on, when we were aboard our train and flying toward New York. "I won't say that Mellody doesn't intend to take his dirty cash back to Truscott, the garage and the girl. That answer lies purely in the realm of speculation. But the letter we can surely accept for the transparent device it shows itself. I'm sorry for Alethea Bourne, maestro. She's too fine a girl to fall to the lot of a double crosser."

"She is that!" echoed Macumber heartily. "I intend to see that she has a fair deal. This is proving a wonderfully absorbing case, youngster. I'd not back out of it now for considerable. Aye, and if fortune favors I'd not be so positive but what there'll be a likely piece of siller to be picked up before we've finished with it. Ah, don't wince, lad. It's not blackmail I'm considering but the entirely honorable project of backing my judgment with my good dollars

in the rising controversy of Mellody versus Gropp."

He laughed at my look of shocked disapprobation.

"Oh, 'tis but a vagrant thought," said he. "I've not decided that I shall plunge heavily on the battle of the lightweights. I must wait and see how matters develop. But truly I see no harm in taking advantage of such inside information as I may have accumulated by the night that Mellody meets Gropp. Those who wager the other way would no doubt consider they'd adequate ground for their choice. Have I not made use of private knowledge in the stock market to the marked improvement of my bank account, lad? And then did you have aught but plaudits for my enterprise?"

He had me fairly on that point. Before I could muster a valid distinction he had dexterously switched the subject.

"I wonder," he said, "if Terry Rourke will have missed the Mellody letter by this time."

"So do I."

"Little he'll worry, and little should we. He'll forget he transferred it to his pocket and think it lost in the deplorable confusion of his desk."

"You're going to return it to him?"

"I'll see that he finds it about him in due course. And while I think of it, lad, since I plan that Terence shall have his letter this night I might as well enter the firm name which the envelope bears in my notebook."

"But it was a blank envelope, maestro."

"On the face of it, to speak both figuratively and literally, it was blank. You are quite right there. But it may be useful to you to know that some business concerns as well as many hotels favor the envelope flap for their imprint. It's an imported affectation, if you wish—but it's done. See here!"

The Great One took the soiled and crumpled envelope from his pocket and turned it over. Along the lower edge of the flap, following its curve, tiny types spelled out: "Gorham, Jeeps & Gregory."

"Sounds like a law firm," I hazarded as Macumber copied the names.

"Not necessarily, lad," he said. "The corporate title has become the usual thing, but still there are many firms besides those of lawyers which cling to the old fashion by styling themselves by the names of their members—brokers, bankers, jewelers, shipping agents, engineers, and so on."

"But what difference does it make where the letter came from so long as we know where Mellody is now?"

"Strict attention to details," responded the Great Macumber with unction, "makes for perfection of the whole. Lad, have you forgotten the copy book?"

V.

It was on a Friday evening that the Great Macumber projected himself into the infelicitous romance of Alethea Bourne and Machinist Mellody; and the Gropp-Mellody battle, as I learned from a sports page on our return from Trenton, was scheduled for the night of the following Monday.

This intelligence seemed strangely to disturb Macumber when I passed it on to him.

"It leaves little time," he said. "Will you take a look, lad, at the weather forecast?"

Perplexed but unquestioning I followed instructions.

"To-morrow and Sunday will be warmer but cloudy, with light and variable winds," I informed him.

"Good enough," he said. "Like enough a high wind out of the west would be an ill wind for us and for the girl."

"What possible connection is there between weather conditions and a prize fight that is to be held indoors, maestro? Now, if the sport in which you are interesting yourself were a horse race I could——"

"It's just a detail and may have no bearing whatsoever. On the other hand the direction and strength of the wind might well prove a vital factor."

"How?" I persisted.

The Great One glowered at me.

"If you'd ever stir more than a quarter of your brain into action at the one time," said he, " 'twould be as plain as the not unprominent nose on your face."

Then he stalked out of our joint apartments in the unparagoned Hotel Rawley to smuggle back the Mellody letter into the keeping of Terence Rourke, who invariably remained at the gymnasium until midnight, his official closing hour.

In the morning Macumber left the hotel without me. He was expecting a call, he said, from our vaudeville booking agent and considered it best that one of us stay close to the telephone; but that I recognized as subterfuge.

"And what are your own plans?" I inquired.

"They are many," he said; "so many that I think it's as well I don't have you along. It's a fact that one can get about a deal more briskly than two. Among other errands I intend to learn a bit more about the shifty and capable Mr. Gropp. Also, I shall look up the Messrs. Gorham, Jeeps & Gregory."

"Still worrying about the letter that Mellody wrote to his girl from back home?"

"Worrying would not be the word," said Macumber. "Au revoir, youngster. Mind you don't stray too far from the phone."

Felstein, the booking agent, didn't call. I hadn't expected that he would. But some three hours after the Great One's departure I did get a message for him by telephone which gave me something to think about.

The voice at the other end of the wire was that of the private secretary to a broker in whose home Macumber and I had given no less than a dozen demonstrations of the magical art and through whom the Great One does the bulk of his periodic trading in the Street.

"Tell Professor Macumber," he said, "that Mr. Crane says he's welcome and can go as far as he likes."

"Welcome to what?" I asked.

"Don't you know?" came back over the wire.

"I do not."

"Then the professor will," said Crane's Man Friday airily—he is a person for whom I never cared a great deal—and broke the connection.

It was not long afterward that Macumber called up.

"Did you hear from Feltstein?" he wanted to know. I caught the ghost of a chuckle.

"Not yet," said I. "But I have a mysterious message from Selden Crane's secretary. Through him Crane says that you're welcome and may go as far as you like—whatever that means."

"Excellent!" cried the Great One. "Crane hadn't arrived at his office when I dropped by and I had no time to wait for him. I'm glad to hear my note did the trick. He says I may go as far as I wish, does he? Well, that may be far indeed, lad. By the by, you need not be looking for me back to-day—and possibly not to-morrow. It depends in a measure on the wind. I guessed right. Wind is a factor. While I'm out of town I'd be pleased if you'd purchase three ringside seats for the Gropp-Mellody bout."

And that was all. A click punctuated the first of the half dozen questions that came rushing to my lips. Macumber had gone off the wire—gone without saying whither or why. I did not hear from him again until Monday afternoon and I did not see him until Monday night. Returning from a stroll in Broadway I found a note in my box at the Rawley. It was a message from Macumber:

> I'm back, feeling like a millionaire. Hoped to catch you in but again had no time to wait. More details pressing. I'll see you at the Hercules A. C. this evening. Leave two tickets at the door in my name when you go in. We may be late.

I had obtained the fight tickets through a friend of the Great One's and mine, a sports writer on one of the big dailies. The seats were excellent, in the row fronting the ring and directly alongside the section reserved for the reporters. To the left sat Gentleman George Byrnes, the lightweight champion, in the midst of a group of satellites representing both pugilism and the screen, I judged from their queerly contrasting appearances. My newspaper friend pointed Byrnes out to me.

"A flivver champ if there ever was one," was his comment. "There were plenty like me who thought he'd be slaughtered when he got into the ring with Gropp last year. I can't get over the century note he cost me. It was the hardest money I ever lost. But there's no use hollering. This is a funny game."

When two of the three preliminary bouts had been staged and there still was no sign of Macumber I began to worry lest he should not be in time for the meeting of Gropp and Mellody. But as the principals in the third bout were being introduced he appeared at my side. With him was the girl from Truscott, Wisconsin. She wore a traveling suit that matched the gray of her eyes—eyes which just now held a look of bewilderment. She looked about eagerly and showed her disappointment plainly when she could not find the face she sought.

"He'll not be here yet," the Great One told her. "Have patience. There'll be no doubt of his winning when he sees *you* here."

But Machinist Mellody, when he arrived

a quarter hour or so later, did not notice the girl at the ringside. He had entered from a far end of the great amphitheater and climbed into the ring from the side opposite to that at which we sat. Gropp, spindly but sinewy, crawled through the ropes a moment afterward and was received with cheers far greater in volume and much longer lasting than the perfunctory greeting accorded the stranger.

Machinist Mellody, I saw, was no prize beauty. He was not a second Gentleman George. Alethea Bourne had not exaggerated when she told us Mellody had undergone a frightful grueling since leaving Truscott. He was broken of nose and battered of ear; his hair was close-cropped and bristly. But when he had thrown off his bath robe I forgave him his battle-scarred face. I'd never seen a cleaner build. He was perfection. Although Gropp, with his stocky body stilted up on long thin legs had an obvious advantage in height and weight, I surmised that Mellody if he would could give him as hard a battle as he'd ever fought in his life.

A moment after the two were in the ring I sensed there was a hitch. Southworth, the fight writer who had obtained our seats for me, left his seat and came back grinning.

"Mellody's manager couldn't stand the suspense," he explained. "He's ginned up in some road house over in Jersey and the boy's sparring partner—all there is to his stable—along with him. Mellody had to ditch 'em and come alone. He'll have to pick up some roustabouts here for his corner. Can you beat it?"

"The distinguished lightweight champion," I remarked, "appears to have been doing a little drinking himself."

"He don't have to train very hard to knock the big villains stiff in the movies," said Southworth. "They're paid to fall—and this game's getting the same way. Not that the great majority of scraps aren't on the level, but——"

He cast an amused glance toward Gentleman George, who had risen and was waving a fistful of big bills.

Macumber, sitting beyond the girl and nearer Byrnes, raised his voice.

"What kind of money is that, neighbor?" he asked cheerfully.

"Good money. Gropp money."

"What's the price of it? What odds will you lay?"

The lightweight champion's eyes lost some of their dullness.

"Two to one. All or any part."

"Two to one? You're joking, man!"

"What do you want?"

"I've seen a dozen bets made at three to one or better—and I've taken a couple myself at that price."

Byrnes turned to wink at a florid lady in his party.

"Oh, all right, Shylock. Call it three to one. What's th' difference? How much you want?"

"Save out taxi fare if you haven't a car of your own and count the roll," said the Great One crisply. "I'll take it all!"

An electric thrill shot through me. In the champion's hand was at least one thousand-dollar bill. I'd seen it. It was wealth he was flaunting, no less; and I was not surprised by his announcement after he had stuffed a few of the smaller notes back into his pocket that his end of the bet ran to three thousand dollars.

"I haven't the pleasure of your acquaintance," Macumber said, "but I suppose you know Mr. Southworth of the *Standard*. I'm glad you do. Suppose we make him our stakeholder?"

Into Southworth's hand the Great One counted ten hundred-dollar bills, and glancing into his open wallet I saw he had brought plenty more of them. They stayed where they were, though, for at that moment the gong sounded and the case of Mellody vs. Gropp went to trial before a jury of five thousand.

I have seen, perhaps, as many prize fights as the average man, but I do not hold myself competent to describe one in technical detail. Accurate reports may be found in the files of the newspapers—accurate yet not complete reports. I can only offer some sidelights that the dailies did not carry to make up for my deficiencies in other respects.

Up in the ring the two circled, jigged, came together and pulled apart. Gloves padded on gloves and thwacked against flesh. They were hitting a fast pace, as fast as ever I'd seen. I could not see that either was getting the better of it; sometimes, indeed, I found it hard to distinguish one man from the other, so much alike had the buffets of former battles made their features. Once Gropp went to his knees, and made a tigerish recovery. Again Mellody

stretched his length on the floor, but he was up again as the count had been started above him. There were no other knockdowns. It seemed to me the tempo of the bout increased with each new round. And then a cool disillusioning voice sounded at my ear—Southworth's.

"Wouldn't it make you sick," the *Standard* man was saying wearily. "They're stalling. Getting away with murder—and something like fifteen thousand dollars. I thought there was something phony about Gropp's last couple of fights. This lad's a set-up. He's taking the cue from the Kid at every turn. By and by he'll lay down and die. See if he doesn't. The first fall he took was a piece of clowning. Next time he goes down he'll stay down. Macumber should have known better. It would be bad enough to drop a thousand on a square fight. Byrnes was in the know. He and Gropp are thick as burglars."

I glanced over toward the girl, heartsick for her. The color had gone from her cheeks and her eyes were sparkling with excitement. Mellody spied her just then. He was advancing from his corner. The gong had signaled the opening of the sixth round. He grinned, and for an instant his battered countenance lost its expression of professional ferocity. He waved a glove, and with it blew a kiss. Then his eyes went to Gropp.

Southworth jolted me between the ribs with a sharp elbow.

"Here's where the dirty work comes in," he whispered. "Just look at the Kid coming out. Watch that crouch. See the difference? He's going to put the bee on the hired man. The fight's gone far enough, he's saying to himself; the fans have had their money's worth, and hadn't ought to be kept awake any longer. Wow! Look at 'em go! Doesn't it look real?"

What I had been watching before had been a clever exhibition of sparring. I knew that now. This was true fighting—at any rate something that had the appearance of true fighting. It was in semblance knockdown-and-drag-out fighting, with the science submerged.

Gropp, breaking from a clinch, turned loose a mighty swing. With a toss of his head Mellody eluded it. His left glove shot to the other's chin. The smack of it might have been the explosion of a small firecracker. Gropp rocked to the blow.

"Zowie!" said Southworth. "*That* was almost worth the price of admission. I'm glad I came. They're going to make it artistic."

From where I sat I could see Gropp's glare, see his lips move and hear the sibilant of the word he spat at Mellody. Then he was rushing again, his face contorted with passion. Gentleman George Brynes, I told myself, held no monopoly on the histrionic talent of the prize ring. Gropp could act with the best of them. Even with the sophisticated Southworth at my side I felt a tingling. That look of Gropp's was murder.

I turned to Southworth. His superior smile had gone. His face was set. His eyes were riveted on the ring.

"Yes; they're doing their stuff," he said. "You couldn't see anything finer on Br—— Quick! Oh, pretty! And you missed it!"

There had been a staccato crack and a thump. When I looked again to the ring the referee's finger was beating time inexorably over a sprawled and quivering body. Behind me the amphitheater was in an uproar. The man left standing was Machinist Mellody. And the count was ten.

VI.

As the glove which had been kissed to Alethea Bourne was lifted by the referee in token that the world's lightweight championship stood menaced for the first time in a year the Great Macumber slipped from his seat.

"You just stay here, Miss Bourne," he said. "I'll bring him to you. Look out for her, Southworth, won't you?"

He hurried off to where Mellody was climbing through the ropes, coming into violent collision at the end of his journey with a large and apoplectically red man in an amazing vest. This personage the obliging Southworth had pointed out to me as Kid Gropp's manager, one Flannery. He was intent on reaching the Machinist, and only growled at Macumber, at whose heels I was trailing.

"What the hell does this double crossin' mean?" he snarled, pulling the smaller Mellody around to face him. His voice was doubtless meant to be a whisper, but both the Great One and I heard. "Does Klein think he can get away with it? We'll blow the whole works, that's what! We can stand it better than you can."

The Great One placed a gentle hand on the arm of the man with the vest.

"I don't think you realize whom you're talking to," said he. "This happens to be Machinist Mellody—the original and only Machinist Mellody."

The fallen Kid's man of business stared at him.

"He is, eh? And who the devil are you?"

"I don't think that really makes much difference," replied Macumber, "since I have complete knowledge of the framing of the Gropp-Mellody fight. I've got an affidavit in my pocket that is in the nature of a confession and would make beautiful reading in the newspapers. It's signed by Otto Klein, Mellody's ex-manager, and contains your name and Gropp's. He's not a strong citizen, Klein. When I confronted him with Mellody this afternoon he squealed for mercy. I made the affidavit the price of it, and—oh, Flannery, don't you want to hear the rest?"

Much closer to apoplexy than he had been before the man with the vest had left us.

"I don't think the Gropp camp will be heard from again," said the Great One, gazing after the rapidly retreating back of Flannery. "Klein's affidavit is yours, with my compliments, Mellody. I feel sure it will prove a guarantee that you get your proper share of the gate. But that is a comparatively insignificant matter. There's a lady waiting for you on the other side of the ring—a lady from Truscott, Wisconsin!"

I was to know Machinist Mellody quite well later on, in those days when he was training for his easily won battle with the lightweight champion, Byrnes—his biggest and his last fight. But our acquaintance did not advance far that Monday evening when the double cross got twisted and snapped back on the plotters who had evolved it. Macumber insisted on leaving Mellody and the girl from Truscott alone with each other, despite their protests.

The Great One, although the Hercules A. C. is on Washington Heights and the Rawley just off Times Square, insisted on taxiing it to the hotel. He was lofty in his possession of the swiftly won wealth.

"We can afford the luxury, I think," he said. And with the glow in his soul matching that in his short and potent pipe, he volunteered much information which I had anticipated having to worm from him by arduous questioning.

"When Miss Bourne told us about Mellody's engagement to make some easy money in New York," he said, letting his eye fall on the mounting tariff with no visible sign of distress, "I was satisfied I had the answer to the letter. I had suspected before that it was not Mellody at the training quarters in Trenton after the note had been mailed. The substitution would have been easy. Mellody was unknown in the East—and besides, one prize fighter looks very much like another, as a rule. It would be just the question of getting rid of the Machinist himself, you see."

"How *did* they get rid of him? And what's happened to the substitute? I presume there was one?"

"There was one. He's now on his way back to New Orleans at my expense—or, let us say, the expense of Mr. Byrnes. 'Young McTurk,' he styles himself. How they got rid of Mellody I'll tell you presently. 'Twould have been a fine job if it hadn't been for the girl and her fortuitous visit to Terence Rourke's gymnasium. What's more important, I think, is how I got the Machinist back.

"I'll ask you to follow my reasoning closely, lad. We start by assuming that, since Mellody could not be bribed, couldn't be disabled by an inimical sparring partner, and eluded gangsters sent to beat him up and cripple him, it was decided to get him out of the way. That was the last resort. The match couldn't be called off without his consent, very well, and Gropp knew from the man sent to test him out—this with Klein's connivance, of course—that he'd have small show with the Machinist.

"I didn't think for a minute the crowd would go to the length of murder. And yet, to get Mellody effectively out of the way, he must be in something tantamount to a temporary grave. They must get him out of the country—beyond reach of the newspapers. For if he were to see even a line concerning the defeat of Machinist Mellody by Kid Gropp they could be sure there'd be something doing, a hard comeback. It seemed to me the one way they could accomplish that purpose would be to get him aboard a ship—a ship without radio, a ship bound for a distant port and certain to take a long time to get there. And that, lad, would be only a sailing ship.

"Of so much I felt reasonably sure, then, when we started back from Trenton. I

knew the man at the training quarters wasn't Mellody. The Machinist, you know, had a bad cut behind his right ear from the blackjack. In the newspaper office in Trenton I saw pictures taken that morning of the pseudo Machinist. One showed the territory behind the right ear very clearly. There was no wound, no sign of a dressing. Mellody really had been on his way—somewhere—the night before when he wrote that letter.

"The envelope, of course, afforded a vital clew. I made inquiries of the Messrs. Gorham, Jeeps and Gregory. They are shipping agents, lad. The envelope was one from a box supplied to the master of the *Mary Ross,* a square rigger outbound for Rio. She sailed early Friday morning last and I was quite certain the real Mellody was aboard her—fleeing from a phantom.

"I was then put to it to devise a means of overtaking or heading off the *Mary Ross.* Radio would be of no service. She had no wireless equipment. But Selden Crane was my friend, and the owner of a fast yacht. I asked him for the loan of her. You had his reply when he had read my note. We caught up with the *Mary Ross* well down the coast. Moral suasion won the release of Mellody. He had been shipped, not altogether legally, as an ordinary seaman. I brought him back by rail. We arrived at noon to-day. I'd dropped a wire to Miss Bourne in the morning and she got in a couple of hours later from Baltimore."

Macumber paused in his elucidation to refill his pipe.

"There was still Klein to be attended to. I'd hoped to be able to stage my little party just as it came off to-night. Mellody and I went to Trenton together. Klein caved in. I really have his confession. But what I valued still more was the information that neither Gropp nor his manager ever had seen Machinist Mellody. And they didn't know Young McTurk from Adam, either. They merely had Klein's word for it that he was pretty close to a double for the Machinist. Klein was McTurk's manager a couple of years ago, and knew he'd be game. He wired transportation to him, and up he came, arriving on Thursday of last week."

"But what," I asked, "was the scheme for getting rid of Mellody?"

"Simplicity itself. An old game. It's used by confidence men in one form or another every week. Mellody came to New York for a supposed exhibition bout. In the midst of it his opponent collapsed. One of the men present had passed himself off as a physician. He said the man was dead. Klein, abetted by the others, did the rest. He told Mellody he was in a nasty mess. The bout had been held without a permit, he said, and that would mean a charge of second degree murder at least. Mellody was led to believe that at least twenty years in prison stared him in the face. That meant death to his romance. He was only too anxious to get away. The master of the *Mary Ross* had been sounded out and greased. He was ready to take a chance with the shipping regulations. Mellody was escorted aboard the vessel. Then he thought he must send some parting word to the girl and start her toward her people. He may thank his stars he did, for it was that envelope he borrowed from the skipper which brought me to him. Otherwise—well, you can imagine what his life would have been."

"I can—vividly," said I. "But what I can't understand is why Kid Gropp had such a holy horror of defeat. He had no title to lose."

Macumber smiled.

"I'd not be so sure of that, lad, if I were you. The Kid, you see, hasn't been worrying so much about himself as about Byrnes. He had made Byrnes champion by handing him the decision in a fight there's still a deal of gossip about and the one reason he stayed in the ring was to protect his protégé. Old as he was, Gropp felt he could handle almost any rising lightweight that came along. And others he thought he could fix."

"Why," I wanted to know, "this extremely Samaritan spirit on Gropp's part?"

"It wasn't exactly Samaritan, as I've gathered the facts. The Kid, youngster, has ambitions beyond the ring just as Machinist Mellody. And so long as the title stays where it is—which, between us, I do not think will be long—he stands in a fair way toward achieving them. The whole combination is positively delicious."

"What combination?" I demanded.

"Kid Gropp," said the Great Macumber, "happens to be sole owner of Champion Photoplays, Inc.—starring Gentleman George Byrnes!"

More Great Macumber stories in early issues.

A Chat With You

THIS is our twentieth birthday. We don't mean ourselves, personally, but the magazine. At that age a girl may use a lip stick or a man may light a cigarette, generally speaking, without parental interference. They have arrived at a greater degree of freedom with each passing year. We have not. You—if you happen to be a reader, and you must be—are just as tyrannical as ever. For all you know it might be our secret desire to fill the pages of the magazine with chess formulas. Or we might want to take to lip-stick fiction. That makes no difference to you. If we live to be a hundred you are still the boss. There is no growing up for a magazine. He is always a mere boy. The reader may be younger in years than the magazine but he is older in authority. As far as he is concerned we are still in short trousers and must go in the way a good magazine ought to go.

* * * *

WE may as well confess that we have never found the discipline particularly trying. Personally we have tried only one chess problem as long as we can remember and we gave that up unsolved at the end of two hours. As for the lip-stick fiction, the illustrations of it in other magazines are enough for us. We never read it. Once in a while we light a cigarette but nobody has said anything so far, so we think we can get away with that. We must confess that we have been brought up liberally. We have done pretty much as we darned pleased and we don't seem to be any the worse for it. We have grown much bigger and we have tried to grow better. Now and then you have written to us, patting us on the back and telling us that we were doing fine.

* * * *

WE never in all the twenty years printed a story we did not feel like printing. We have failed to get a few that we wanted, and found afterward in book form or in other magazines, but it was our fault that we did not get them and not yours—and it has not happened often. It pays in the main, we think, to give a boy a free rein to a certain extent and let him poke about a bit for himself, and the same rule ought to apply to a magazine. Think of the number of interesting people we have brought home and introduced to you and kept for dinner without any hint from you at all. People you had never heard of before, but who now are well known. We found Ralph Paine, for instance, in Forest Hills, New Jersey, some fifteen years ago and he has been staying with us, a welcome guest, ever since. Longer ago than that we found A. M. Chisholm, at Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada. We have a hazy memory that he was connected with the Union Trust Company of that town. He has spent a lot of time with you. He's coming back again with the best story he ever told, just after the beginning of next year. Edison Marshall we found hunting Kodiak bears in Alaska. We have a picture of one he killed that looks as if it weighed a ton. He's starting in to tell you a good story in the present issue. Francis Lynde we found perched away up on the side of Lookout Mountain, in Chattanooga, and Montanye we saw first looking out of the window of an apartment on Riverside Drive. H. H. Knibbs was discovered in New Mexico. Reginald Wright Kauffman was first seen by us in Columbus, Pennsylvania. He has written the complete novel, "Money to Burn," that opens the next issue. James Francis Dwyer we found on the Riviera, while Holman Day came fresh from Maine. So you see it has paid to let us ramble a bit, even in our young days.

* * * *

WE wish some statistician would figure out the average age of a POPULAR reader. We have had letters from you indicating all ages. Sometimes you were a boy of ten, sometimes you were a gentle-

man who still felt well and vigorous at eighty-five. Sometimes you presented yourself in the guise of a married woman with grown-up sons and sometimes as a girl of eighteen.

Also we would like a composite picture of the readers of the magazine. You see, we have never really seen your face and you are more apt at disguise than any detective we ever read about. We have caught fleeting glimpses of you while you were on the job reading us in railroad trains and other places, but each time you were some one else. Do you look, in a composite photograph, like Abraham Lincoln, like Roosevelt, or like George Washington? Do you wear a mustache or are you clean shaven, or have you just bobbed your hair? For twenty years we have been trying to get a steady look at you, but we are more puzzled than ever.

* * * *

NOW, starting on our twenty-first year, we lead off with a good number. We know a lot more about the business than when we began and our interest in it has grown steadily.

The next number, is, we think, a little better than this. The Kauffman novel is coming out later as a two-dollar book—and will be worth the money. The short stories are by Knibbs, Oscar Wildridge, Montanye, Kenneth Latour, Dwyer, Talbert Josselyn, Clay Perry and Albert W. Tolman. Is it the best number we have ever issued? Answer that question yourself. At any rate it is the biggest collection of the best stories you can buy at the news stands.

Statement of the Ownership, Management, etc., required by the Act of Congress of August 24, 1912, of THE POPULAR MAGAZINE, published semimonthly, at New York, N. Y., for October 1, 1923.

State of New York, County of New York, (*ss.*)

Before me, a Notary Public, in and for the State and county aforesaid personally appeared Ormond G. Smith who having been duly sworn according to law deposes and says that he is President of Street & Smith Corporation, publishers of THE POPULAR MAGAZINE, and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management, etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption, required by the Act of August 24, 1912, embodied in section 443, Postal Laws and Regulations, to wit:

1. That the names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business managers are: *Publishers*, Street & Smith Corporation, 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; *editor*, Charles A. MacLean, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; *managing editors*, Street & Smith Corporation, 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; *business managers*, Street & Smith Corporation, 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

2. That the owners are: Street & Smith Corporation, 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y., a corporation composed of Ormond G. Smith, 89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; George C. Smith, 89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; Annie K. Smith, 89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; George C. Smith, Jr., 89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; Cora A. Gould, 89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; Ormond V. Gould, 89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

3. That the known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding 1 per cent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities are: None.

4. That the two paragraphs next above, giving the names of the owners, stockholders, and security holders, if any, contain not only the list of stockholders and security holders as they appear upon the books of the company, but also, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting, is given; also that the said two paragraphs contain statements embracing affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustees, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of bona fide owner; and this affiant has no reason to believe that any other person, association, or corporation has any interest direct or indirect in the said stock, bonds, or other securities than as so stated by him.

ORMOND G. SMITH, President,
of Street & Smith Corporation, publishers.

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 28th day of September, 1923. Frank M. Davis, Jr., Notary Public No. 202, New York County. (My commission expires March 30 1924.)

No More Diphtheria

NOT so many years ago Diphtheria was the black enemy of childhood. All over the world it claimed a frightful toll. And the tragedy was that three-quarters of its victims were little tots under six—hardly more than babies. Swiftly it struck with deadly result—*without warning*—and there was no sure way to combat it.

Then came Antitoxin. Children who received this treatment at once enjoyed a better chance in their struggle for life. And the Diphtheria death rate was lowered. But Antitoxin is effective only after Diphtheria develops. It *checks* the progress of the disease—but it does not give lasting protection. Now comes a great triumph of medical science—the Prevention of Diphtheria!

Today, eminent specialists state positively and definitely that through modern preventive treatment—

Diphtheria can be Stamped Out!

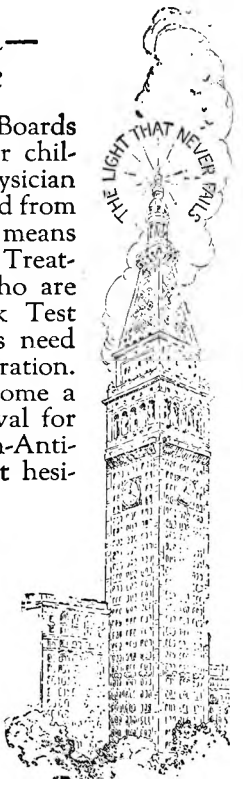
Some children are able to resist the germs of Diphtheria. Others are not. The wonderful discovery of Dr. Schick of Vienna, is now being used to show which children need protection—which are susceptible and which are not. The Schick Test consists in giving the child a tiny injection in the skin of the arm. If, after a few days, a red spot appears where the injection was made, the child is susceptible. If no spot appears, the child is immune.

Children who show by the Schick Test that they are liable to Diphtheria can be given at once the Toxin-Antitoxin Preventive Treatment. This treatment consists of three injections of Toxin-Antitoxin, one each week for three weeks.

The Schick *Test* does not make the child immune—but authorities agree that the Toxin-Antitoxin *Treatment* does. Experience shows that both test and treatment are painless and harmless.

If you love them— Make them safe

Experienced Health Boards urge that you take your children at once to a physician and have them protected from this deadly scourge by means of the Toxin-Antitoxin Treatment. The people who are introducing the Schick Test into the public schools need your heartiest co-operation. If your child brings home a request for your approval for the Test or the Toxin-Antitoxin treatment, do not hesitate to give permission



Thirty years ago, 115 out of every 100,000 persons died of Diphtheria each year. In recent years, the number has been 15 per 100,000. But, even at this low figure, there are more than 15,000 deaths from Diphtheria annually in the United States.

The Metropolitan Life Insurance Company is making every effort to teach mothers that this disease is entirely preventable and urges them, as well as others in charge of children, to take no chances with Diphtheria.

As a result of the educational campaign among its policyholders, there has been a very marked decline in the death rate from Diphtheria among children insured in the Company. Between 1911 and 1922, the rate declined 34.1 per cent. It is still lower so far in 1923.

The Metropolitan Life Insurance Company will gladly mail a leaflet entitled "Diphtheria and Its Prevention" to any one interested.

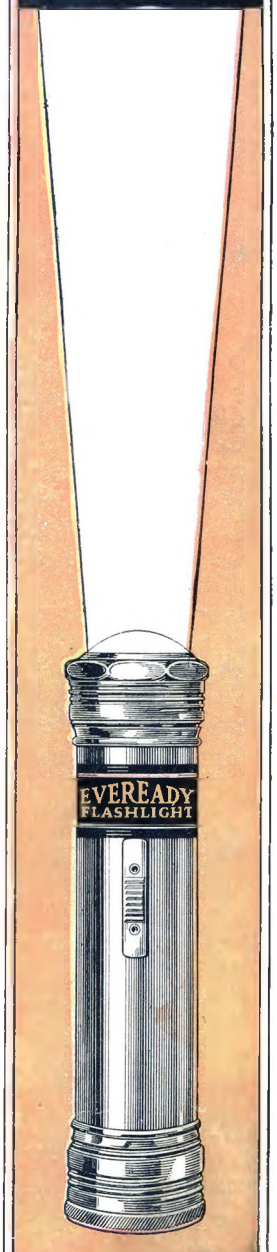
HALEY FISKE, *President.*

Published by

METROPOLITAN LIFE INSURANCE COMPANY—NEW YORK

Biggest in the World, More Assets, More Policyholders, More Insurance in force, More new Insurance each year

EVEREADY STANDARD
TUBULAR FLASHLIGHT
FOR INDOOR USE



EVEREADY
FLASHLIGHTS
& BATTERIES
—they last longer

". . Covers off as usual . . My Eveready Flashlight is as necessary in the nursery as a quiet footstep . . "

The EVEREADY FLASHLIGHT is the minute man of light—instant light when you need it, right on the spot you want it, and nowhere else

Ever turn on the light in the nursery, and wake up the youngsters? Not pleasant for you, and certainly not pleasant, nor good for the youngsters.

Why not avoid it by using Eveready Flashlights. The proper light in a nursery at night—or a sick room—and in a bedroom always. Mothers, physicians, and nurses all need them.

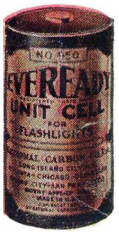
Every home should have plenty of Evereadys. Handy, dependable, portable light, useful from cellar to garret. Safe too. Flameless, it can not set anything afire.

Outdoors—in traveling, hunting, boating, fishing, and motoring—it protects against accidents by avoiding mistakes.

* * *

The light of a thousand uses, and one use often repays a thousand times the small cost—65 cents to $4.50.

There are 60,000 Eveready dealers trained to deliver Eveready service with the sale of Eveready Flashlights and Unit Cell Batteries; at electrical, hardware, drug, sporting goods, and general stores, garages, and auto accessory shops.



Eveready Flashlight Batteries fit and improve all makes of flashlights; they give a brighter light; they last longer.