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SECOND OCT. NUMBER

On Sale Sept. 20, 1929

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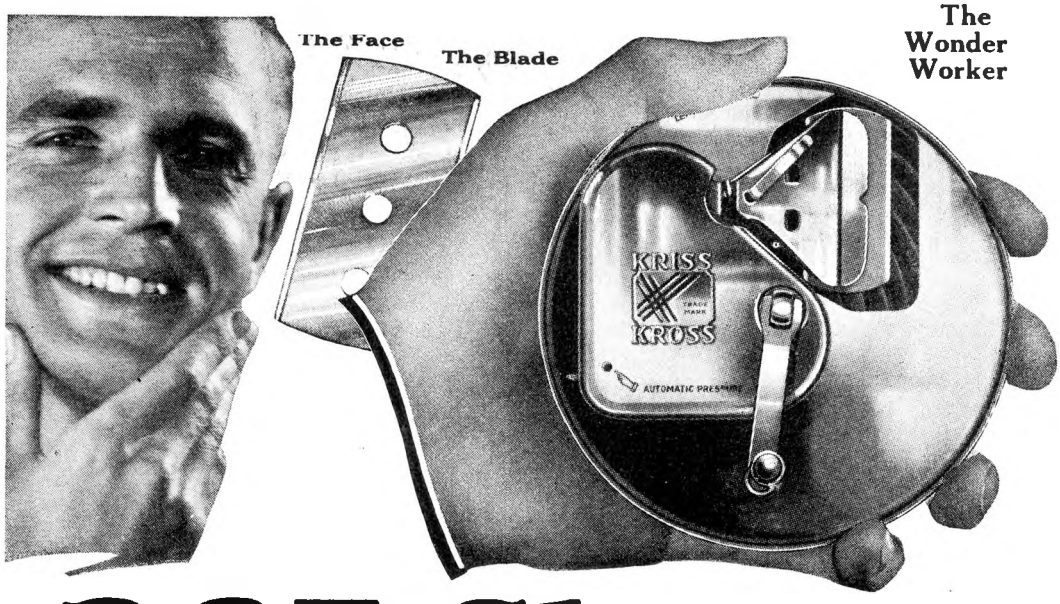

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KRISS-KROSS CORP.

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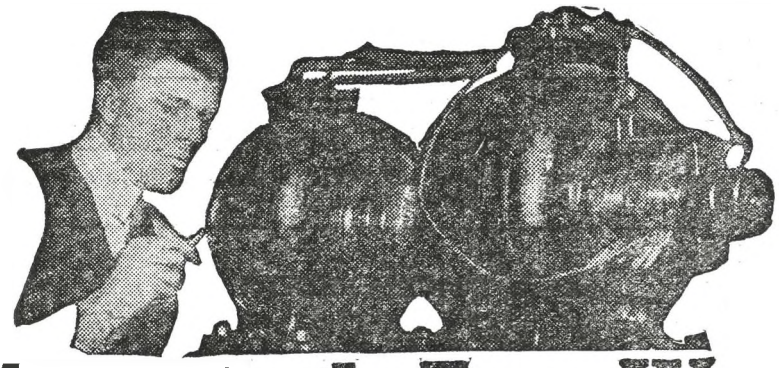

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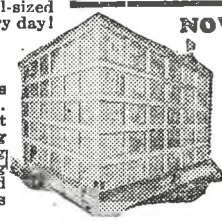

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IN THIS ISSUE

THE JADE BLADE, By Sean O'Larkin

A murder mystery as clever as any you ever read. Laid in a luxurious "ranch house."

Volume XCVII Number 3

TWICE-A-MONTH

The Popular Magazine

Title Registered U. S. Patent Office

CONTENTS FOR SECOND OCTOBER NUMBER

Twice-a-month publication issued by Street & Smith Corporation, 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York. Ormond G. Smith, President; George C. Smith, Vice President and Treasurer; George C. Smith, Jr., Vice President; Ormond V. Gould, Secretary. Copyright, 1929, by Street & Smith Corporation, New York. Copyright, 1929, by Street & Smith Corporation, Great Britain. Entered as Second-class Matter, December 22, 1927, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under Act of Congress of March 3, 1879. Canadian Subscription, $4.72. Foreign, $5.40. This issue dated October 20, 1929.

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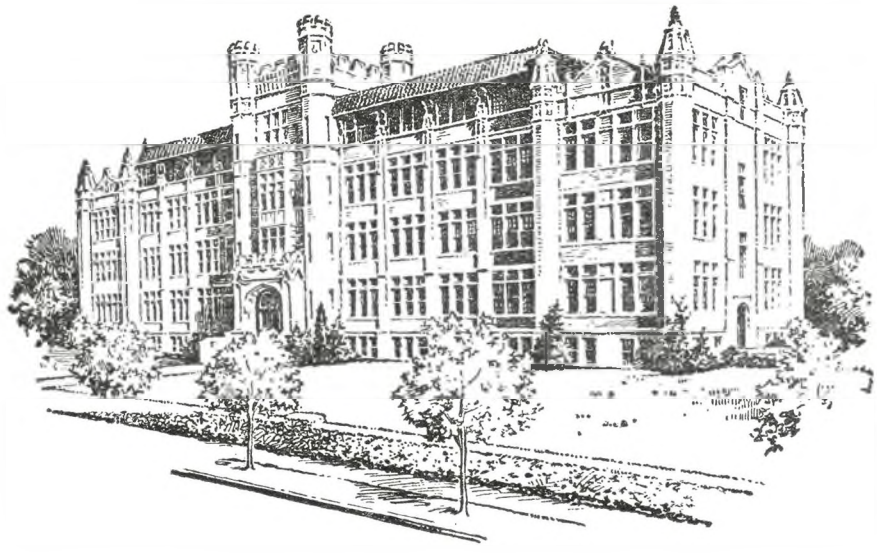

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There are twenty beautiful girls pictured here. To be sure, they all look alike, but, examine them closely. **TWO** and only **TWO** are exactly alike in both dress and features and all the rest are different. See if you can **FIND THE TWINS.**

Clues! The beautiful twins are dressed just alike—their hats and clothing are just the same. Some of the girls have beads on, others wear earrings—the hats on some have a checker-board pattern, etc. The twins, however, who are alike are dressed identically the same in every way—so, study each girl carefully and if you can **FIND THE TWINS** send the numbers of them to me at once. YOU may become the winner of a Buick Sedan or $1825.00 CASH MONEY,—without one cent of cost to you. I will give away ABSOLUTELY FREE, a new Buick 4-door Master Six Sedan and 9 other new Closed Cars, including 3 Coupes, 3 Sedans and 3 Coaches and the winners can have CASH MONEY instead of the automobiles if you prefer. 15 BIG FREE PRIZES will be given—totaling $7500.00 in CASH MONEY.

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You Cannot Lose! Absolutely everyone who takes full advantage of this opportunity WILL BE REWARDED;—but HURRY—FIND THE TWINS (the two girls who are dressed just alike) and rush the numbers of them and your name and address to me today on a postal card or in a letter, and just say:—"Girls No. . . and No. . . . . are the **TWO** who are just alike and are therefore, **THE TWINS.** Please tell me how I can get this MAGNIFICENT Buick Sedan—or—$1825.00 CASH MONEY, without obligation or one penny of cost to me.

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Write or Wire
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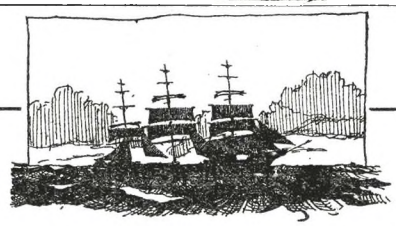

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SEA STORIES

the fiction magazine of the ocean, brings the world's romance to your own home, on the fifteenth of each month.

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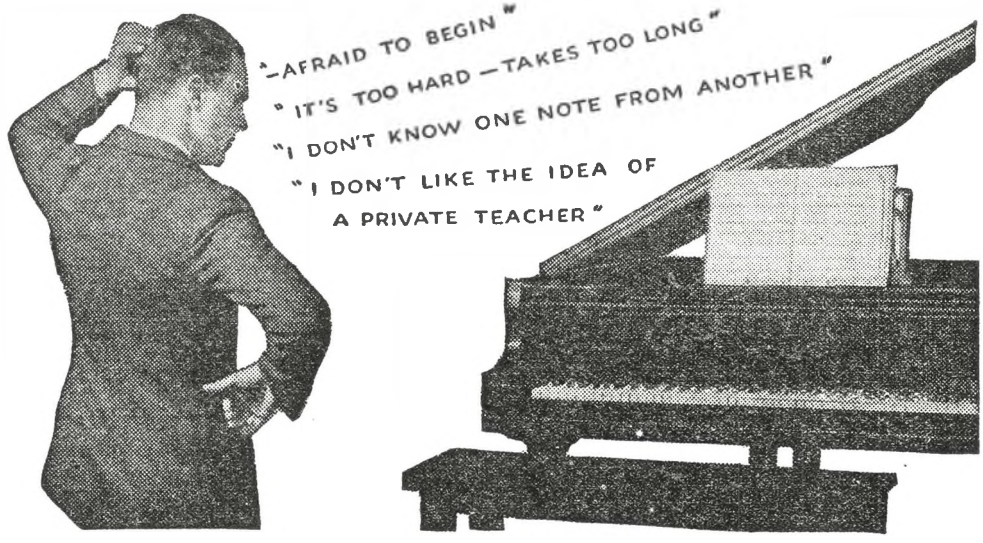
No alibis *now* for not learning to play!



Easy as A-B-C to become a popular musician on any instrument this "no teacher" way

WHY let your imagination run loose and keep you from becoming a popular musician? Haven't you heard that there is a way of learning to play your favorite instrument in a few short months? Without taking lessons from a teacher! Without paying expensive fees! Without any tiresome technique or dry-as-dust exercises to struggle through—a way that has been vouched for by over a half-million people in all parts of the world!

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A Minute With—James Sayre Pickering

THE EMPEROR'S SECURITY

"WHAT could you pawn a thing like that for?" I asked Silas Tipping, referring to a ring which had just been left with him by one of his customers, and which he was examining with some care. It was a large diamond, rather poor as to color, but beautifully set, and was evidently worth a great deal of money.

"About ten per cent of what it's worth," said Silas looking up. "It all depends, though. Sometimes, if you look as though you were going to redeem it, you may get more. The best way is to make a deal with a private individual. That's what Napoleon did with the Pitt diamond.

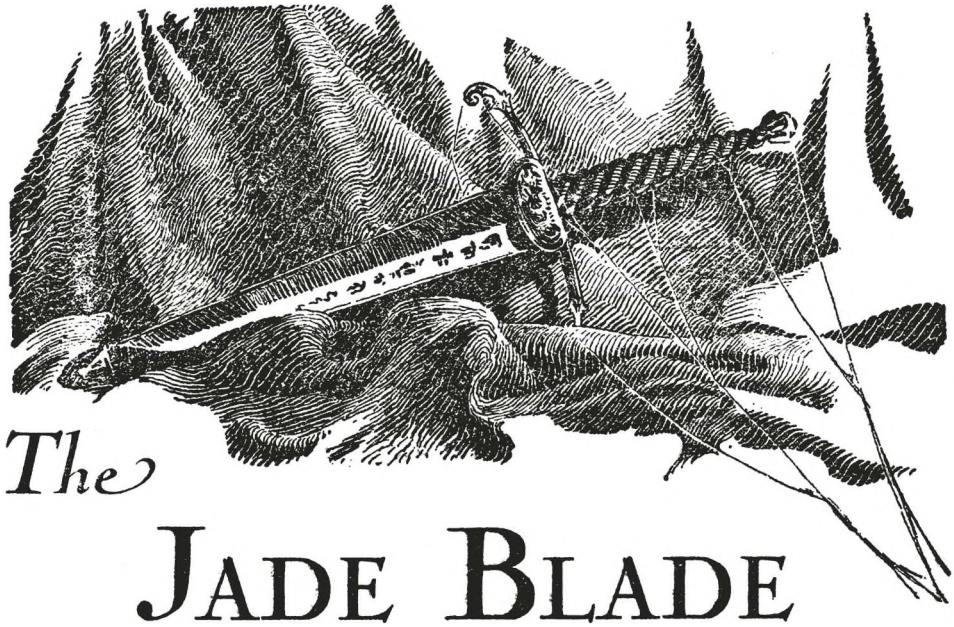
"That is a wonderful stone. I've seen it, in the Apollo Gallery, at the Louvre. It's a cushion-shaped brilliant, nearly an inch each way across it and just a little less than an inch deep. It weighs over one hundred and sixty carats. That's a Golconda diamond. It was found in the field in Hyderabad, near the town of Golconda, where the great diamond market used to be before the fields were worked out. They say it weighed over four hundred carats in the rough.

"The Pitt was bought by Sir William Pitt, who was then the governor of Fort St. George, in Madras, from an Indian merchant. He paid about twenty thousand pounds for it. He took it home with him, and had it cut. He gave it to the right people, and they spent two years on the job and charged him five thousand pounds. He sold the small stuff that came off the outside for seven thousand pounds, though, so he didn't lose money. He did lose something else, though. His peace of mind. He didn't have a night's sleep, he says, for about ten years, until he sold the stone, in 1717. He got a good price for it, from a man who paid for it with very dirty money. It was the Duke of Orleans, the Regent of France, who bought it, and he paid Pitt a hundred and thirty-five thousand pounds for it.

"The diamond was called the Regent, then, and it lay in the Garde Meuble with the rest of the French regalia until it was stolen."

"Stolen! A stone like that?"

Silas nodded. "The Revolutionary mob stole it. It must have frightened them to death! What could they do with it? No one would buy, if he could. They didn't know what to do with it, so they did the obvious thing—they put it back! Then along came Napoleon, and he put it up as security to finance one of his wars. I don't know who made the loan—no one does, but it must have been repaid, for the stone is there, in the Louvre, for all the world to see. That diamond, for that reason, has probably had more influence on the course of history than any other jewel. It has a price on it, now. The French government will sell it to any one who has five hundred thousand pounds in cash. I don't know why they put a figure on it in pounds. Perhaps there is no number high enough to signify the number of francs they want."



The JADE BLADE

An Exotic and Impressive Mystery Story
by the Author of "The Devil's Widow,"

SEAN O'LARKIN

CHAPTER I.

THE CURTAIN RISES.

(Saturday, July 13th: 2.30 P. M.)

SAMUEL JOHNSON, who was no sleuth, had his Boswell; Sherlock Holmes and Philo Vance, who *were* sleuths, had their Watson and Van Dine. Thus, through such astute biographers, the deeds of these great will live for all time.

Doc Wethers—Lemuel Wethers, M. D.—was neither Johnson nor detective. But he was great. In him one found the Johnsonian sense of justice, Holmes' powers of analysis and deduction, and Vance's flair for a bright word and the gift of cautiously and indirectly approaching his goal.

It is for these reasons that I undertake the biography of Doc Wethers' one *cause celebre,* his only venture into the realm of crime. Posterity may one day pause before his name and rightfully pay homage to "his light beneath the bushel."

My meeting with this medico of the cow country occurred on that fatal day when an innocent automobile ride with Jim Rorke, the sheriff at Yellow Creek, precipitated me into the tragedies at White Crescent Ranch. It was a Saturday and the thirteenth of the month to boot.

Rorke and I were returning from Harlings where we had lunched after he settled some business involving range rights in which he was interested. We

were enthroned in my flivver, an antique contraption better known to my friends as *"The Woman"*—a name chosen because of the car's inability to make up its mind whether to run or loaf.

Rorke, his two hundred pounds slouched in the seat beside me, was gazing over the desert on which the July sun had exploded its burning whiteness, dimming the blue of the sky and the gray, cactus-splotched sands.

"The West!" he discoursed. "Say, buddy, the West is gettin' to be jest like New York. And it's jest about as dull. The radio and the movies done it. They put newfandangled ideas into our folks' heads and now everybody is puttin' on dog the way they do back East. Why, we got nearly as many automobiles in Yellow Creek as we got ponies. The boys go see Tom Mix and then turn up on the range with trick outfits from mail-order houses. The West ain't what it used to be!"

"But you must get some excitement out of life, Rorke," I ventured.

"Bein' sheriff these days ain't what it was twenty years ago," he growled. "Everybody's too busy makin' money to be bad. The only trouble I get is with the Mexicans and that's because they get bad ideas goin' to the movies. Why the gang that stuck up the Harlings Bank three months ago used sawed-off shotguns. When I asked 'em why they didn't use regular irons they said they'd seen a movie about a Chicago holdup and guessed that only sawed-off shotguns were fashionable."

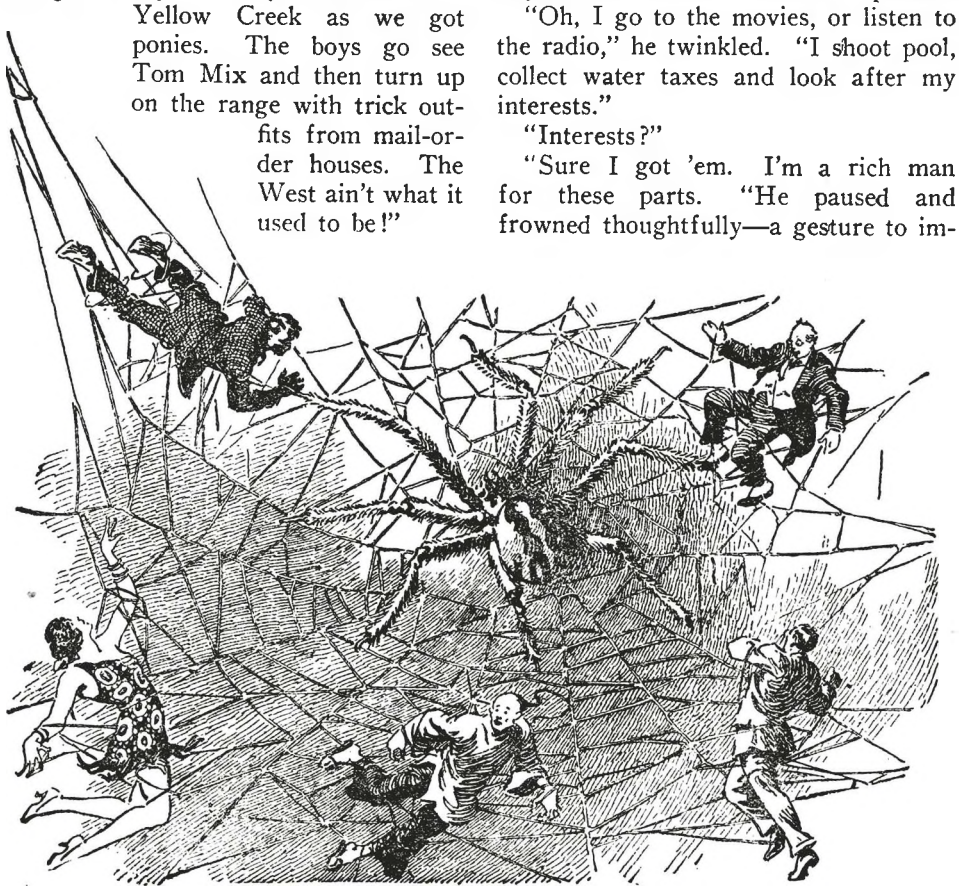
I laughed. Rorke was pleased with his sally; he continued to puff his double-charged cigar into infinity.

"Then what do you do to kill time—if you find business so dull?" I queried.

"Oh, I go to the movies, or listen to the radio," he twinkled. "I shoot pool, collect water taxes and look after my interests."

"Interests?"

"Sure I got 'em. I'm a rich man for these parts. "He paused and frowned thoughtfully—a gesture to im-



press me, I thought. "I own half of the Double Ring and a quarter in the Bar Square. I make more outer cattle than outer makin' Yellow Creek behave itself. Next year I'm gonna retire."

"And look for excitement?"

"Nope, I'll travel. I've been about Europe and South America."

"Why don't you run over to China?" I said lightly. "They're always fixing up a good scrap over there."

Rorke shook his head slowly. His eyes were narrowed with disinterest.

"China don't appeal to me a-tall," he said. "I guess I'll be lookin' in on Africa or India. I got a buddy in Bombay."

The Woman sneezed, claiming my immediate attention. For the moment, I forgot the trend of conversation while I directed sincere prayers and polite cuss words to her radiator cap. We were ten miles out of Yellow Creek and if my tin Pegasus went on strike, it meant a long hike for one of us and a chance to be baked into a chocolate layer cake for the other. And I was West for my health; and the doctor hadn't prescribed any hiking or baking.

"What ails lizzie?" Rorke chuckled. "Has she cow fever or a misery?"

"Needs a drink, I guess."

"Then let's stop at Andy's gas station. It's that tin shack on the right, dead ahead. Andy runs it all summer for tourists and then goes broke all winter in Tia Juana."

Sunlight danced and simmered on the tin roof of Andy's gas emporium. *The Woman* one-stepped and hesitated. I prayed anew.

"Don't go back on a pal, *Woman,*" I whispered. "You pulled me out of Mexico. You stood by me in Canada. And I've been a real friend to you. The desert is no place for prima-donna stuff, *Woman.* Save it for a cool garage!"

Whether it was my prayer, my sarcasm or the sight of the gas station, I never knew, but *The Woman* perked up her fenders like a filly on the home stretch and began wheezing bronchially. We moved and reached Andy's a few minutes later.

A little, prunelike man ambled out of the tin box that staggered under the weight of a newly painted wooden sign, which announced to road and desert:

ANDY'S FILLUP—FOR MAN AND MOTOR.

"Hi, Andy!" Rorke shouted. "Turn out a drink for all hands."

Without a word and only a smile for the sheriff, Andy blinked and dove back into the tin house.

"Andy only talks to hisself," Rorke explained. "He's alone so much, he's the only guy he knows real well. And he's somethin' of a prophet, too—if you let him tell it."

The old fellow popped out again, laden with a bucket and drinking cup. Rorke and I took the cup and quenched our thirst.

"Gonna use your phone, Andy," Rorke announced, peeling off his riding gloves and sliding out of the seat. "Gotta find out how Yellow Creek is gettin' on without my skin and bones."

He disappeared into the gloom of the shack. Andy unscrewed the radiator cap and began to give *The Woman* her drink. Suddenly he cocked his head toward me and drawled:

"You and Jim been to Harlings?"

"Yes," I said; "I drove Rorke over on business."

"Guess Jim's saving Marybelle."

"Who's she?"

"His horse, mister. He goes all over on Marybelle, but I guess the heat's too much for her on a scorcher like this. He takes care of her like she was his wife, perfuming her and all."

I started to laugh, when Andy laid the bucket on the bumper and approached me. A fanatical light gleamed in his eyes.

"Do you ever get hunches, mister?" he asked. I shook my head. "Well, mister, something's going to happen. A life is going to pass from these parts—soon—to-day, maybe."

"What do you mean?" I stammered, surprised by Andy's manner. "Somebody is dying every minute all over the world."

"But they ain't all being murdered." "He winked, then, turning on his heel, walked back to his bucket, completed *The Woman's* drink and replaced the cap.

Rorke reappeared in the doorway, his eyes contracted in meditation. As he stepped into the glaring sunlight, I beheld, for the first time, I think, the real Jim Rorke. Till then I had regarded him as merely a country sheriff, a man no different from the butcher and the baker. But now I saw in him a quality that set him apart—he was a prince of good fellows. Close on to fifty, the bloom of youth still softened his features. His steel-blue eyes were the eyes of a square shooter, eyes that asked nothing of his neighbor except that he mind his own business. Jim Rorke was real stuff and I was proud to know him, to have him for a friend.

"How's the bus, buddy?" he called jovially to me as he climbed back into his seat. "We got a little travelin' to do—if liz is up to it."

"She's had her drink," I explained. "She's good for nine more hours, tin camel that she is."

I then mentioned Andy's augury of death to him.

"Say, Andy!" he called. "What's this I hear you said about some one bein' bumped off around here?"

"I know," Andy said with insistence, a weird smile brightening his sallow face. "It come to me last night, Jim. It come to me the way it did when McKinley was shot—just a kind of feeling that something's wrong."

"Well, thanks for the tip, Andy," Rorke said, trying to repress a chuckle. "We'll be seein' you again."

I applied the starter and stepped on the gas. *The Woman* wiggled and chugged and with reluctance rolled forward. She was a bit testy but she held her nose toward Yellow Creek.

"Funny what Andy said," Rorke mused. "Say, we turn into the range road before we get to Yellow Creek. Lou Betz is meetin' us there."

"He's one of your deputies, isn't he?"

"Yep. What time is it, buddy?"

"Two fifty," I replied, glancing at my Yankee. "What's up?"

"Don't quite know. Eben Cass, who lives out to White Crescent, phoned Betz jest before I did and said he wanted to see me. He's scared about somethin'."

"Eben Cass? Isn't he the millionaire rancher who owns White Crescent?"

"Right you are. And he's the meanest man in the country. But you ought to see what the movies done to him. He's got a ranch house like a movie star's boudoir. He had his shack done over by an interior decorator fellow from Los Angeles."

"I suppose he makes his dough in cattle?"

"Nope, he lives on his income. He hasn't got so much as a hen on his property. He lives alone with a chink and two old cowhands. The chink is his valet, chief cook and bottle washer. The cowmen sort of look after the place, clean the garage and care for some posies he tries to grow on his front lawn."

"What's he scared about?" I asked.

"Couldn't make out half of what Lou said. Lou talks like he had a mouthful of potatoes. But he's ridin' out to the range road to meet us."

I was interested in Eben Cass. His attempt to cultivate a "front lawn" in the heart of a desert was a common topic of conversation in Yellow Creek. But few men had much else to say about

the recluse. I gathered from their manner that he was about as popular as a rustler.

"Where did Cass make his money?" my curiosity prompted me to ask.

"Oh, he was a lawyer in Frisco once. Made a pile, I hear, and then three years ago he bought White Crescent's hundred acres, sold the herd for a song, canned all hands except 'Bowlegs' and Leary and settled down to jest livin' quietly. A lot of swell people drive out from Los Angeles to visit with him."

We were nearing the range road when I became aware of a cloud of dust sailing toward us; at its head was a horseman, who, I surmised, was Lou Betz. *The Woman* was brought to a halt at the mouth of the road. Hot, arid desert dotted with sword-leafed yucca and lonely cactus engulfed us, forcing down upon me the weight of vast silence. The furnace breeze that slid across the floor of the white sand was weirdly soft.

The lone rider reached us with the swift grace of a hawk. Betz swung out of his saddle and swaggered over to the car, his deputy's shield winking proudly in the golden shafts of light.

"'Lo, chief! 'Lo, Drake," he said with his faint, effortless smile. "What do you make of it, chief?"

"Of what?" Rorke growled. "Say, Lou, you gotta learn to talk on the telephone. I couldn't hear half what you said except Eben Cass was scared stiff about somethin'."

"Scared about somethin'!" Betz cried. "Man alive, his life's been threatened!"

"What? By who?" Rorke demanded, rising up from his seat.

"He didn't say. All I got out of him was that he wants to see you pronto because his life is in danger. He said it was menaced or threatened or somethin' like that. I says you were to Harlings, so he says for me to get after you. Then, as luck would have it, you call up. Now here we are."

"No we ain't!" Rorke snapped. "Drake, I don't like the looks of this. Don't let's lose a minute gettin' to White Crescent."

"Want me along, chief?" Betz asked.

"Nope. You hold down the office. I may need you later."

Betz remounted, and as he wheeled about, I sent *The Woman* up the range road—the world's worst road. We bounced along at thirty-five, and, to make matters worse, the sun hung low and did its best to blind me. Presently a roof top indicated the proximity of White Crescent. The group of ranch buildings was nestled atop a gentle rise in the desert floor—hardly high enough, I thought, to be called a crescent. I later learned that the name concerned branding. The main building was a rambling dobe bungalow sprawled in a puddle of green, its red-tiled roof a dull splotch of color against the desert glare. Pepper trees and barrel cactus seemed to be the principal vegetation.

The car sputtered up to the door of a tiny patio. We were greeted by a little fat Chinaman with the wickedest face it has been my fate to encounter. He had come out of the house and was approaching through the patio gate.

"Mister Cass no here now," the chink hissed as he waddled to my side. "He no here now, I say."

"Forget it, Ching Lu!" Rorke barked. "Cass sent for me." The sheriff climbed out and started to brush dust from his coat. The chink stood by admiring Rorke's dapperness, his suede gloves, tweed riding suit and floppy Stetson.

"Mister Cass go away," Ching Lu persisted.

"Stow it, Ching," Rorke growled. "Jump on that running board and show Mr. Drake where the parking shed is. If we let liz cook here in the sun the seats'll be hotter'n new butter cakes."

With a shrug of resignation, Ching Lu obeyed Rorke and got on the running board, pointing straight ahead to

the road that wound around the left side of the house. "Shed there. Go," he said, and off we went as Rorke entered the patio.

The road I followed led to a long, low shed a hundred yards behind the house. It adjoined another building which I took to be the outfit's quarters.

The Woman bounced like a broncho and stopped dead. Before I could ascertain what had happened, my eyes fell upon four automobiles under the shed. They were high-powered roadsters.

"Are those Mr. Cass'?" I asked Ching Lu, pointing to the cars.

"Mister Cass no here," Ching Lu replied with a glare that told me I was too inquisitive.

I managed to get *The Woman* going again and the chink signaled to me while I cut in between two of the cars. When I got out, I patted *The Woman* on the hood and whispered to her cap:

"A car is judged by the company she keeps. These are all fast cars, *Woman*. Go thou and be likewise!"

Ching Lu regarded me with mingled fright and wonder. People don't usually whisper to their flivvers. And on the return to the house, he kept a respectful distance and a wary eye on me.

When I raised my head to drink of the sudden coolness that came from the north, I noticed a man with a checkered shirt mending a fence that ran parallel to the house, a dozen yards from it. He waved to the chink and stared after me. In front of the house, kneeling in the shade of the peppers, I beheld another man. Seeing me, he got up and I almost burst out laughing at his legs. They were shaped like ice tongs. In his hand he held a box of pansies; I gathered that he was trying to plant them.

"I'm no nut," he grinned, seeing my interest in the pansies. "I know these won't grow here. But the boss says I must try to coax 'em along. He says where there's a will there's a way."

I was about to make a horticultural suggestion when Rorke's voice hailed me. The sheriff was standing in the doorway of the house. I crossed the patio followed by the Chinaman. Beads of perspiration glistened on Rorke's forehead; his hand clutched my arm like a vise.

"Hell's broke loose, Drake!" he gasped. "He's dead! Eben Cass has been killed!"

CHAPTER II.

INTRODUCING DOC WETHERS.

(Saturday: 3 P. M.)

CHING LU shrieked and crumpled, face foremost, on the sands of the patio, his bloodcurdling cry reverberating from the dark hall beyond the open door. Never before had I heard such a horrible sound from human lips and never do I want to hear it again. Rorke, his rugged face now ashen and taut, stared helplessly down at the chink's unconscious body.

The bowlegged man came running into the patio, pansies still clutched in his fist.

"Who hit him?" he asked, looking from Rorke to me.

"He's fainted, Bowlegs," the sheriff said slowly. "Pick him up and throw him in the kitchen." The man who answered to Bowlegs slung the beefy Oriental over his shoulder as though he were a bag of meal and thumped into the hall. I watched him kick open a door and vanish.

"This looks mighty bad, Drake," Rorke whispered. His eyes were peering intently into the dim light of the hall. "Come along with me."

I followed him into the house. In the center of the hall we paused. Rorke was listening for a sound of some sort; nothing reached my ears save the murmur of the breeze in the pepper trees. Then, for the moment, I forgot that I was close to tragedy. The sumptuousness of the Cass home was dazzling, the

like of which I had only seen in my newspaper days when I tracked evasive men and women of wealth to their Fifth Avenue mansions to learn about a divorce, a swindle or a marriage. The beauty of this strange hallway which was apparently lined with doors—closed, enigmatic doors—was subtly shot with an unholiness that was indefinable. A few cushioned Florentine chairs were tucked in corners, and a brass lamp studded with varicolored glass hung close to the center of the ceiling. Here was regal luxury in the heart of a sun-baked desert.

"That's funny," Rorke mused. "That's damn funny!" His eyes flashed from door to door, seeking their secrets.

"What's wrong?" I whispered.

"There are four people in this house beside the dead man and the chink. See those two doors on our right? They lead to the two bedrooms and there's a man in each room. The door dead ahead is Cass' library; his body is in there. There are three doors on the left side. There's a woman in the room nearest the library; that's the parlor. The next room is the kitchen where Bowlegs took the chink, and that last door goes to the dining room where another man is settin'. Not one of those visitors bothered to make a peep when Ching Lu shrieked. That's what I mean by funny. It isn't natural for people not to be curious about a scream; it isn't human. And it's certainly peculiar that they stay in those rooms—with a murder here and all."

Bowlegs came out of the kitchen mopping his brow.

"Very, very warm in there, sheriff," he grunted. "Ching must 'a' been bakin' a cake. The stove's goin' full blast. I doused his face with water and he came to. I left him lightin' a cigarette. He says he's all right now."

At this point, the other cowhand whom I had seen mending the fence in the rear, clumped in through the front door.

"Gosh," he grinned, "who're you brandin' in here, Rorke? I ain't heard a shriek like that since I seen a talkin' movie in Los Angeles."

"'Lo, Leary," Rorke grunted. "It was just the chink throwin' a faint. Meet Mr. Drake, boys." I shook hands with the two men, their very presence giving me a conscious sense of greater security in that odd desert mansion.

Rorke stepped up to the library door. Kicking it open, he said tensely:

"Come on in here, boys, and take a look at what's happened."

We filed into the library that shouted lavishness. The walls were decorated with a beautiful woodland mural; burdening them was every imaginable curiosity from a Malay kris to a Icelandic bow and arrow. Bookcases were overflowing and their tops cluttered with fine pieces of Chinese and Japanese porcelains. A filing cabinet was artfully hidden behind a rare Gobelin tapestry.

Then I saw the body.

A skinny little man was sprawled across the top of a fine old Queen Anne table which was serving as a desk. The handle of what appeared to me to be a paper cutter protruded from the top of his shiny, bald head. A puddle of blood discolored the yellow blotter beneath the ugly wound.

"He shore does look kinda dead, don't he?" Leary whispered tremulously.

"Very, very corpselike, I'd say, if you asked me," Bowlegs remarked in a hushed tone.

"Of course he's dead, Leary. You'd even be dead if some one was able to stick a knife through that head bone of yours," Rorke grinned.

"Looks like murder," Leary ventured with awe.

"Naw," the sheriff winked; "he was playin' mumblety-peg and the knife slipped."

"Very serious predicament, ain't it?"

Bowlegs remarked. "Very, very serious indeed. I seen a lot of shot men in my day but none that was ever stuck with steel. Very interestin', I'd say—from my point of view."

Rorke was moving about the body, surveying it from every possible angle. His head nodded with conviction.

"Taken by surprise, I'll bet," he said. "Poor Eben Cass! And I was only talkin' to him on the phone yesterday. Never knew he had an enemy in the world."

"Guess you didn't know Eben so well then," Leary grunted under his breath. If Rorke heard, he made no comment.

"Very mean cuss, Eben was," Bowlegs agreed. "But he wasn't worth killin', if you ask me——"

"We're not askin' you, Bowlegs!" the sheriff snapped. Turning to me, he added: "Drake, I phoned Doc Wethers and Lou Betz. The doc's on his way over and Betz is sendin' four men out here."

"But," I interrupted, "we're leaving that hall unwatched. Those people in there——"

"I've done that purposely," Rorke smiled. "I've had my eye on that hall and the front door—the only way out—since we came in here. I'm waitin' for one of those people to make a move before we question them. They can't get out through the windows because they're barred like this one." He indicated the library window which was adorned with a beautiful iron *reja* of Italian workmanship, its supports set firmly into the dobe.

"Now, Leary," the sheriff said, turning to the man, "did you see any one come in or go out of this house during the afternoon?"

"Nope. How could I? I was mendin' the fence out back. No one can enter this house except by the front door. The kitchen door is always locked. No one can use the windows, as you said. All I seen was the three men and the woman who came in the cars. Ching showed them where to park, then they went around to the front of the house."

"You saw no one near this library window, did you?"

Leary said that he hadn't, nor had he seen any one in the room or inside the window.

"Well, I'm convinced," Rorke said, "that the murderer came in through the only entrance to the house—the front door—and entered this room by that there door." He pointed to the carved, oaken portal behind me. "Now, Bowlegs, did you see any one enter or leave this house during the afternoon?"

"I been in the garden, sheriff, tryin' to educate pansies to like desert sand. I saw three men, a woman, you and Mr. Drake here go in, but I saw no one leave except Ching, who was in and out helpin' with the parkin'."

Rorke's eyes met mine. I read in them the conclusion which I had reached. The murderer was still in the house! The sheriff went to the door and glanced at the other doors; they were still closed, impenetrable and baffling in the problem they presented.

"I looked into each room the minute I discovered the body," Rorke said, half to himself. "The three men and the woman were still in 'em. They jest looked at me and looked away."

"Shall I go get their names and find out what they were doing here?" I asked. My willingness to be helpful has gotten me into worse situations. Rorke shook his head.

"I'm playin' a waitin' game," he said. "Doc Wethers and my deputies will be here soon. Then I go after those folks in person—when I have the place properly surrounded."

The lights in the library and hall flashed on with surprising brilliance. Rorke and I started.

"S'only me," Bowlegs explained. His hand rested on a switch. "Very, very

dim here, and bein' that there's a corpse around I thought a little light'd cheer us up."

Rorke grunted his thanks.

A point of glitter flashed from the top of Eben Cass' head; it was light on the handle of the knife. The sheriff bent over it, then, standing back, he signaled to Bowlegs and Leary to inspect the weapon of death.

"Ever see that before?" he asked.

"Shore," Leary said. "That used to hang on the wall over there under that Sioux tomahawk."

"Very, very convenient for the murderer," Bowlegs said. "I remember when Eben had me hang it there. He said it was hard luck and wanted it off'n his desk. Used to use it as a letter opener."

"When did you see it there last?" Rorke asked.

"This mornin'," Leary said, "when I came in about gettin' a new tire for the car."

Rorke made mental note of this point. He turned to me and said:

"Drake, you take a seat out in the hall and watch those doors. I'll scratch around in here and see what I can see. You, Leary, go back to your fence as though nothin' had happened. Keep an eagle eye on all the windows. Bowlegs, you hang about out front and do likewise. Stop any one who tries to leave. Hop it!"

I followed the two cowhands out of the room. They went through the front door while I sank into a walnut choir stall in a corner of the hall from where I could watch all doors except the front door. The library door stood ajar and I could hear the sheriff puttering about beyond it. His job of seeking clews with a corpse for company was one I didn't relish, though I'd seen my fill of corpses.

Somewhere a clock was ticking loudly, egotistically; it accentuated the catastrophic stillness of the ranch house. The closed doors caught my fancy. If there was a person behind each, what was he or she doing now? Why hadn't they inquired as to the cause of Ching Lu's scream? What had they been doing when the murderer was abroad? Which one of them was the killer? Or were they all in league and now sitting back waiting for proof to find them out?

My eyes, riveted on as many doors as they could possibly take in, had their vision blurred by concentration. Why were these people acting so strangely? Surely they had overheard snatches of conversation in the hall and through the open library door. They must know a murder had been committed. It was the oddest situation imaginable!

Rorke poked his head out of the library.

"Anythin' doin', buddy?" he whispered. I shook my head. "This is an awful mess." Suddenly his finger went to his lips and another finger was extended toward the bedroom door nearest the library.

A faint click, the sound of a doorknob turning, was audible in the sepulchral silence. My eyes, glued to the shining brass of the knob, saw it move ever so slightly. Then the oaken panel swayed inward—ever so slightly and noiselessly. Some one within was holding the door open a little, evidently to hear better what was being said by Rorke and me. Was the occupant of that room the murderer? His action was certainly a stealthy one. Was it guilty, too? My heart raced wildly the way it did the morning I went over the top. Killings and good heart action are hardly compatible.

"If the murderer gets away," Rorke said loudly, his eyes on that door, "he'll have to grow a pair of wings. And if he gets out of this house—he'll have to be better'n Houdini was!"

The bedroom door was quickly shut. The snap of the released knob echoed sharply. Rorke stepped toward the

door, reached for the knob and then hesitated, shaking his head. His glance to me said that he would bide his time. An instant later, we were hailed from the front door.

Blotting out the desert sunlight with his pudgy bulk was a big man of patriotic coloring—red face, white hair and pale-blue eyes, the eyes of a baby. It was Doc Wethers. I'd seen him about Yellow Creek.

"'Lo, doc!" Rorke boomed. "Meet Mr. Drake here. Bill, this is our local sawbones, coroner and vet."

"Yes," Doc Wethers smiled, taking my hand, "I'm the friend of man and beast—and if it weren't for sick horses in these parts, I'd starve."

"Step in here, doc," the sheriff said. He pushed open the library door. "Take a look at what's hit Eben Cass."

My commission as guardian of the portals was momentarily forgotten. This man Wethers interested me. He was just the sort of fellow one would expect to find in the country medico—a jovial, expansive sort of man who took life and death for what they were, a vigilante on the Great Border Line. He took one look at the body, the position of the knife in the skull and gave a low, long whistle.

"How did it happen, Jim?" he asked. "Who's the guilty critter?" He swung around and pretended to glare suspiciously at me.

"Search me, doc. But I'll be findin' out before sundown."

The doctor bent over the body and an eager glitter in his pale eyes illuminated his ruddy face. He studied the position of the body, the head and the angle at which the knife penetrated the skull. His long, fat fingers ran over the dead man's back and arms. He sniffed the air over the body inquisitively and then, stepping back, he shook his head, puzzled.

"What's this peculiar odor I smell?" he inquired, twitching his nostrils. "Smells sharp and familiar but I can't quite place it."

Rorke ventured to smell the air but he shook his head.

"Don't smell a thing, doc," he grinned. "My sniffers never were too noble. Guess I'd better be seein' you about 'em."

"Well, no matter," Doc Wethers sighed; "we must get on with business. You probably want me to give the pronouncement." The sheriff nodded. "Eben Cass has been dead less than half an hour—nearer to fifteen minutes, I'd say. The condition of the body, still free of *rigor mortis,* indicates that, but I couldn't swear to it, of course. Death was instantaneous. The blow was struck haphazardly, I'd say, and the blade, making its way through the soft spot in the skull, touched the *medulla oblongata* or thereabouts. Cass must have been bending over that letter he was reading when the murderer let fly."

Rorke reached for the letter. Cass' face was resting on it and both hands were on the desk, the fingers touching the edges of the sheet. It was just the position one's hands would take in reading a letter laid flat on the table. Carefully, the sheriff drew the letter from beneath the heavy, lifeless head.

"H'm, this is interestin'," Rorke grumbled as he scanned the penned matter. "It says: 'Dear E. C., I'd see you in hell first.' It's signed with the letter 'S.'"

"A precise and profane but very concise communication," Doc Wethers grinned. "Who could Mr. S. be? Who was in the house at the time, Jim?"

"Three men and a woman. They're still here, doc. And we haven't heard a peep out of them. Ching Lu let out a war whoop and collapsed when I announced Cass was dead. But none of the four who are now lollin' in the other rooms so much as opened their doors."

"Deafness is a sore affliction," the doctor winked.

"I've looked in on all of them. I'm sure their hearin's good."

"What time did you get here, Jim?"

"Can't say for sure, doc. Drake and I turned into the range road at about two fifty. It's less'n ten minutes from there."

"You were talking to me about your discovery at three sharp," the doctor said. "I looked at my watch."

"It wasn't a minute after I found Eben that I called you. And I've put through a call for four deputies."

Doc Wethers sank into a chair and stared at the remains of the bald-headed lawyer.

"I've a hunch, Jim, that you missed meeting the killer in this room by a few seconds. It's just a hunch, of course. It's now three fifteen and Cass is still mighty warm."

CHAPTER III.

"FEE-FI-FO-FUM——"

(Saturday: 3.15 P. M.)

RORKE proceeded to narrate to the doctor what had transpired from the moment we first heard of the threat against Eben Cass' life. The sheriff told how we had lunched at Harlings and on the return to Yellow Creek how he had come to phone his office while *The Woman* was getting a drink.

We fixed his telephone call to Betz at between quarter to three and three fifty when I looked at my watch as we pulled up on the range road to await the deputy sheriff.

"Well," Doc Wethers said, "that ought to mean that Eben was alive at least at two o'clock and possibly later. Of course, knowing Lou Betz, I don't put much stock in his fixing the time of the call. Eben might have phoned at one o'clock or the minute before Betz heard from you, and he'd have said Cass had 'just called.'"

The sheriff nodded and continued his account. He told of Ching Lu's statement that Cass wasn't at home, and attributed this to the chink's desire to follow out his master's orders not to be disturbed. After leaving me to park the car in the chink's company, Rorke said, he entered the house and went directly to the library door, knocking thrice. There was no answer, and thinking that the old lawyer might be dozing, he opened the door and peered in. It was then that he saw the man with his head on the Queen Anne table, and, still thinking Cass was asleep, he entered the room to rouse him. A light gleamed on the handle of the blade and Rorke realized then that the man was dead—had been murdered.

"I phoned you immediately," Rorke said, "and then I put through a call to Lou tellin' him to send out some men. But the thing that gets me is the way those four people behaved in these rooms when Ching Lu screamed. The cry was loud enough to wake the dead. Yet no one so much as said, 'What's the shootin' for?'"

"That," the doctor said, "is mighty significant. Now let's get to work."

"All right, doc; I appoint you chief medical examiner. You can pronounce old Eben dead as a doornail and remove the knife and move the body and help me all you can."

"Fine. But we won't move the body. I've an idea how we can use it—the old theory, you know, about confronting the guilty with the body—trial by ordeal et cetera."

"O. K. with me."

Doc Wethers bent over the lawyer again and, after laying the knife on the table, inspected the wound and the length of the blade—which I guessed to be six or seven inches. He probed for heart action and other signs of life as a matter of form and then, stepping back, said:

"I pronounce this man dead."

As he mopped beads of perspiration from his brow with the back of his

hand, I saw him smell his fingers. Extending them to Rorke and me, he indicated that we sniff them, too. We did.

"It's the same odor that I smelled over the body before," he said, his face a study in puzzlement.

"It's a case of 'fee-fi-fo-fum' maybe," Rorke grinned.

"Maybe."

The odor was a sharp one and familiar to me. Yet I could not for the life of me identify it; it was somehow, I thought, associated with my childhood—my home. That was where I had come across that odor before—at home as a boy.

Quickly, Doc Wethers stooped over the body and sniffed at the dead man's head and shoulders.

"It's gone now," he said.

"Gosh!" Rorke said. "I thought you were goin' to discover that old Eben used perfume."

The doctor's eyes fell upon the blade. He picked it up just below the hilt and sniffed at the handle and his eyes grew bright with interest. "Smell this," he said to us. The odor was strong upon the handle.

"Whatever it is," the doctor said, "it has the peculiar quality of sticking to whatever it touches. There's a lead for you, Jim—a clew, maybe. That odor might be associated with the murderer in some way. I ought to know what that smell is, but just because it's so familiar I can't place it."

The weapon of death fascinated me. The handle, I saw, was green. The hilt and blade were amber colored. A closer inspection revealed that it was an exquisite piece of jade workmanship. I pointed this out to the two men, who studied it with avid eyes.

"Look!" Doc Wethers cried. "See those fine Chinese characters on the lower side of the hilt, delicately carved around it? And that's odd, too: there're no finger prints on the handle except where my fingers touched in pulling it out of the wound. Now jade holds moist prints, and everybody's hands are moist on a hot day like this unless——" Here he hesitated.

"Unless what?" Rorke asked with interest.

"Unless the murderer wore gloves or wiped off the handle after striking the blow. But the latter's improbable. He or she used gloves. This smacks of a planned job."

"But lots of people wear gloves—ridin' and drivin' gloves," the sheriff said. "I wear 'em and so does Drake here. The murderer might have been wearin' 'em without a thought of concealin' finger prints."

"Maybe so—but keep your eyes peeled, Jim, for gloves that have a familiar, bitter smell on them. It might help—particularly if that smell matches the one on the handle."

Rorke and I impulsively pulled out our gloves and sniffed at them. Mine smelled of automobile grease and oil; the sheriff passed his to me and, after one sniff, I grinned, "Horse," and we all laughed. The doctor smelled our gloves inside and out.

"These gloves have strong, definite odors on them," he said at length. "But I'm certain that if they ever contacted with that odor on the knife, they'd retain it. By the way, Drake, you use Lifebuoy Soap a lot, don't you? I can sniff it inside your glove. And I don't think Jim will ever rid his hands of that Cooney's Horse Soap smell."

We all laughed at this astuteness. We were interrupted by a call from the hall. Four men stood just outside the front door, splashed with the sunlight in the patio.

"Here's my police force," Drake said. "Let's go out."

Standing in the doorway, flanked by the doctor and me, Rorke briefly told the four men what had happened. I noticed that none of them was particularly moved at news of the lawyer's demise.

Then Rorke assigned one to sit on the front doorstep with orders to let no one pass him; the others were told to take up positions from which they could watch the windows on each side of the house and the rear.

"No one can get out by the windows on account of the bars," Rorke said; "but you may see something suspicious."

The men departed to their posts. Rorke turned to us and said solemnly:

"Now for the third degree, maybe. One of the five people in this house, settin' in those rooms, must know what happened in the library before three o'clock to-day—before Drake and I got here."

"Who'll you begin on?" the doctor asked.

"Ching Lu?"

"Why not the strangers who behaved so queerly?"

"Just a hunch and because the knife was a chink's—even if it used to hang on the wall. Chinks like to use their own implements when they do a killin', I'm told." He paused and a smile settled on his lips. "I've another idea. We'll question the chink in the hall where we can be heard by those in the rooms. If we get nothin' out of him we'll have the other four pretty well unnerved."

"Not a bad idea, Jim," Doc Wethers agreed.

Turning to me, Rorke laid his hand on my shoulder and growled with a twinkle in his eyes:

"William Drake, I hereby appoint you here and now as one of my deputies. You won't get a badge, though. You'll be butler in this here court of inquiry and fetch in the parties concerned."

"Suits me, sheriff," I said happily. This was a great opportunity to play a rôle in the thick of a murder mystery. The West had nothing better to offer me at the moment. And this was a murder case which, according to Hoyle, should have been laid in some city millionaire's mansion and not in a desert ranch house.

"Deputy Drake, go fetch Ching Lu."

CHAPTER IV.

AMONG THOSE PRESENT.

(Saturday: 3.30 P. M.)

STEPPING up to the kitchen door, my hand sought the knob and I turned it. The panel swung away from me, revealing the saturnine Ching Lu sitting in a chair facing me. His eyes, half shut, were like two glass balls, white and shining. He seemed unaware of my presence.

"Ching Lu," I said from the doorway, "the sheriff wants to talk to you out here in the hall."

The man did not move.

"Come on, Ching Lu; snap out of it! We can't wait all day for you." I figured that the fellow had fallen asleep. But my request remained unfulfilled. I entered the kitchen, which bore silent testimony to the proverbial cleanliness of Chinese culinary establishments—in America, and moved close to the chink. He appeared to be in a deep lethargy, his chest rising and falling with the tempo of a sleeper; opium was my immediate conclusion. My nostrils, already familiar with the poppy stench from Chinatown dives, were disappointed.

"Something's wrong with Ching Lu," I called to Doc Wethers and Rorke. "Better take a look at him."

The two men came into the kitchen. After a perfunctory examination, the doctor shook the man vigorously. Ching Lu remained still and mute, his eyes still half shut, still gleaming

"He's doped up!" Rorke snapped. "This is a hell of a time of day to hit the pipe—right after hearin' Eben Cass is dead."

"He's not doped—as far as I can make out," Doc Wethers murmured. "I

suspect he's playing possum for one reason or another."

He cut the sheriff's exclamation of surprise short by firmly gripping the back of the chink's neck and exerting a gradual pressure. I could see the man's eyes open slightly, but for all the doctor's creation of pain, the chink remained obdurate. The doctor extended his hand to Rorke.

"Jim, let me have your bracelets," he said slowly. The sheriff produced his handcuffs, his mouth agape as he watched the doctor snap the chink's wrists together through the back of the chair. "I'm not saying a word, Jim, but I'm taking a little precaution. I'll swear that by the way this man is breathing, his heart action and the condition of his pupils, he's not doped."

"Then let's make him talk," Rorke insisted.

"No," the doctor said, shaking his head. "Let's let him change his own mind. Meanwhile, we'll find out just who's who in this house."

Rorke approached Ching Lu and slapped his face. He tried poking the man in the ribs with a pudgy finger, tickling his armpits and pulling at his pigtail with sharp jerks. I began to laugh to myself. The Chinaman never gave a sign of annoyance or consciousness. Growling to himself, Rorke returned to the hall. Doc Wethers and I followed, closing the door after us.

"Well," Rorke said, "who'll we tackle first—the men or the woman?"

"The woman."

The sheriff stepped up to the door nearest the library on the left and threw it open. The doctor and I peered over his shoulders into the parlor. My eyes blinked with amazement. The room was done in Chinese Chippendale, and from what little I knew about period furniture, the suite I was looking at was the rarest of antiques.

A woman, smartly clad in a tweed suit, her face veiled, was sitting by one of the barred windows, silhouetted against the fine Bruges curtains of lace. Our peremptory entry had startled her and she was looking in our direction.

"Pardon me, madam," Rorke said tartly. "I'm the sheriff. Will you please tell me your name?"

"What for?" The woman's voice was cold and nervous.

"The police have taken charge of the house. We must find out who's in it."

"Really." The voice was airy now, forced and patronizing. "Whatever on earth has happened?"

"Your name, please?" Rorke barked.

"Well, if you must know, it's Helen Jones."

Doc Wethers gave me a sharp nudge and winked. Rorke was thanking the woman.

"Would you mind removing your veil, please?" the doctor interrupted. The woman hesitated a moment as though determining a course of action and then complied.

I started. That face was not unfamiliar to me. The woman was darkly beautiful. Her flashing eyes bored us haughtily, but feigning composure, I could see. For the life of me the woman was like the odor on the jade blade; I had her name on the tip of my tongue, but that was as far as it got.

"How long have you been here?" Rorke asked quickly, her face evidently evoking no recognition in him.

"Since two thirty."

"You came here to—why?"

"To see Mr. Cass by appointment—legal business, you know." The woman tried to smile casually.

"What is your business, please?"

"Really?" The eyebrows arched with annoyance. "Well, I suppose I must tell everything: I have no business; I live on my income—from my husband's estate."

"Where do you live?"

"Los Angeles." There was vagueness in her tone.

"Why are you waitin' in this room?"

"I'm waiting to see Mr. Cass, of course." The woman dropped her eyes from Rorke's gaze. I saw the sheriff start.

"You haven't seen Cass yet?" he asked.

"No," she replied with a shake of her head. "I drove out here this afternoon. The Chinaman helped me park my car in the shed and showed me into this room, telling me to wait here till Mr. Cass was ready to see me."

"Did you hear any suspicious noises in this house while you were waitin'?"

"I haven't heard a sound. In fact, I'm afraid I've been dozing. Besides, the rooms are sound proof, I think."

"What makes you think that, Miss Vining?" Doc Wethers asked suddenly. The woman stood up quickly, terror distorting her lovely face. And, of course, I knew then who she was. Who didn't know Lois Vining, one of the country's most popular movie stars? But movie stars off the silver screen aren't always as easily recognized, since screen faces and flesh-and-blood faces often have little in common except a general resemblance.

"Why—why, Mr. Cass once told me so," she said in a quavering voice.

"Well, I'll be——" Rorke grunted. "Of course, you're Lois Vinin', the movie actress!" She nodded. "Why did you give a false name, Miss Vinin'?"

"When you said you were the police," she said rather glibly, "I was afraid of—of unpleasant publicity."

"Why? What are you afraid of?"

"Nothing—nothing!" The woman was fighting to maintain self-control. "Naturally, as a nationally—internationally known actress, I fear the slightest unpleasant publicity. We all fear publicity. Please tell me what is wrong?"

"Eben Cass has been murdered," Doc Wethers said bluntly.

With a sigh, a sigh verging on hysteria, the woman sank into her chair. Her hands slowly went to her eyes.

"How awful!" she murmured.

"He was killed while you were in this—this house," Rorke announced. He was bending over her, watching every move she made.

"You're not implying—not saying that I——" The woman was suddenly cool. Her eyes blazed up at Rorke's

"We imply nothing," Doc Wethers said. "Please try to recall if you heard any sounds of any nature while you were waiting here, Miss Vining. We'll look in on you a little later."

The doctor picked up her needlepoint hand bag, which had fallen to the floor, and dropped it into her lap. She caught it with her knees. Then he took the sheriff's arm and led him toward the door.

"Am I to understand that I'm under arrest?"

"No," Rorke said; "but we'd like you to wait here till we complete our investigation. By the way, Miss Vinin', did you hear a scream a little while ago?"

"No—I told you I heard nothing."

"Drake," Doc Wethers said, "stand by that window with Miss Vining. I'm going to make a little experiment." With that, he and the sheriff left the room and closed the door behind them.

Lois Vining looked up at me imploringly. Her beauty at close quarters was dazzling. I was willing to swear, after receiving a smile from those eyes, that she was as innocent as I was of the murder of Eben Cass. Then a shriek, clear and piteous, broke the quiet of our mute tête-à-tête. The woman saw the horror in my face and dropped her eyes, burying her face in her hands.

"Oh, my God!" she moaned.

Rorke opened the door and stared at me. With considerable effort, I nodded and left the room. Without a word to Lois Vining, the sheriff shut the door and faced me.

"Did you hear it?" he asked.

"I did—clearly."

"I knew she was lying," Doc Wethers smiled. "That's why I made my little experiment. I think that squawk of mine scared the wits out of the deputy on the steps. Guess he thought I was bitten by a rattler instead of an idea."

"And you will notice," Rorke growled, "that the fellows in the other three rooms aren't makin' a peep about that second scream."

"Let's see who's in the dining room?" the doctor said, going over to the door on the left next the front door. We opened it and entered the dining room.

A tall, handsome man of about thirty-five arose and stood facing us. His fairness of skin and hair shone brightly in the somber setting of teakwood. The dining-room suite, I saw, represented a fortune in teakwood inlaid with ivory; the craftsmanship was oriental—either Chinese or Malayan.

Rorke introduced himself and learned that the occupant of the room was Walt Stone, a surgeon from Hollywood; he had arrived at the ranch house at two o'clock to keep an appointment and had remained in the dining room where Ching Lu directed him. He had not seen Cass and had heard nothing. As a matter of fact, he admitted with a calm smile, he had "dozed a little in the stuffy, warm room."

I thought the fellow altogether too composed to be telling the truth. My eyes fell upon a door leading to the kitchen; Doc Wethers nudged me again to indicate that he was reading my thoughts and had made the same observation.

"Didn't you hear two screams, Doctor Stone?" Rorke demanded. "One at about three and another a few minutes ago?"

"No," Doctor Stone smiled, "I heard nothing."

"You're not hard of hearin', are you?" Rorke asked brusquely.

"No, my hearing is excellent, thank you." There was a trace of sarcasm in the man's voice that I didn't like.

"Well, we're sorry to detain you, Doctor Stone," Doc Wethers said blandly; "but we'd like you to wait a bit till we've finished our investigation. You were in the house, you know, at the time of the murder——"

"Murder? Who's been murdered?" I could see that the man was pretending surprise.

"Eben Cass!" Rorke snapped.

"Eben Cass dead," the surgeon said, half to himself. "I suppose the dirty swine had it coming to him."

"Really?" Doc Wethers smiled. "Why were you visiting Cass, Doctor Stone?"

"Legal business, you know. He was my lawyer."

"Thank you," Doc Wethers said tartly, moving toward the door. "We'll see you later."

Doctor Stone smiled and politely bowed us out of the dining room. It was he who closed the door after us.

"What do you make of it, doc?" Rorke asked, scratching his head. "Are we dippy or is the world full of liars?"

"No, Jim, but there are a few of them in this house—liars, I mean. Now for the next one." He walked over to the bedroom door on the right next the library.

As we entered the room, we were confronted by another door. It led to the bathroom, I saw. The bedroom was sumptuous enough for a Metropolitan Opera prima donna, its colors being soft blue and gold. It was hardly a man's room, yet there was a regal elegance to it. Sitting on the edge of the bed was a portly gentleman in his fifties who looked like a St. Bernard dog; his heavy jowls were quivering noticeably and his eyes, set deep beneath shaggy brows, stared at us, hideous and bloodshot.

After a brief introduction, Rorke

elicited this information: the man was Martin Osterman, a Los Angeles banker, who had come to the ranch house to keep a two fifteen P. M. appointment; Ching Lu had ushered him into the bedroom where he had been waiting ever since; he had not seen Eben Cass; his presence in the house concerned "legal business" with the old lawyer. He had heard not a sound and admitted that he had "fallen asleep." Trembling like a leaf, he denied having heard the two screams.

"Weren't you listenin' at that door a while ago?" Rorke asked, recalling our experience with the quietly opened and shut portal while waiting for the doctor to come.

"I don't remember going to the door," Osterman said. "No, I never opened it."

"Did anybody else open it?" Rorke continued. "Did anybody come in here from the bathroom? That room connects with the other bedroom, you know."

"No," Osterman said dumbly, "I didn't know it. I wasn't in the bathroom."

"Eben Cass had been murdered," Doc Wethers spoke up. His eyes were riveted on the banker.

"Murdered?" The man seemed relieved. "He's dead?"

"Murdered men are usually dead men," Rorke growled.

"He had it coming to him—from what I hear."

"What's that? What have you heard, Mr. Osterman?" the doctor demanded.

"He had lots of enemies—crooks he prosecuted when he was district attorney in Fresno—men he outwitted in business. Cass was a mean man, gentlemen. He had few friends. He gave up his practice under a cloud, I heard —something irregular in his line of business."

"Do you know anything specifically?" the doctor asked.

"No, I'm just giving you my general recollection of things I've heard. I couldn't even remember who told me. I've a very poor memory, gentlemen."

Doc Wethers asked Osterman to wait at the ranch house until the investigation had been completed. The banker agreed and we left him, shivering on the bed, a forlorn figure who knew that we knew him for a liar.

"Imagine a banker with a rotten memory," Rorke laughed when we returned to the hall. "Do we look like saps? Do these folks think they're kiddin' us one bit?"

"If they do," Doc Wethers grinned, "we must let them. There's a reason for this lying, Jim. These people are either in cahoots, or know who did kill Cass, and they're scared to death to let on."

"Strikes me about the same. Let's have the last one on the mat, doc. And I'll lay you twenty to one that he's a liar, too."

"The bet doesn't interest me, Jim. I know the cards are stacked all around."

We entered the second bedroom and found a dapper fashion plate of a man pacing the floor. I decided that he was afraid to sit down lest he spoil the razor crease in his trousers. He was tall and gaunt and easily sixty if he was a day; but he was as spry as a lad of fifteen. Somehow, the background of chintz and yellow silk with Chinese *appliqué* fitted his debonair personality; he was a man of the world, accustomed to luxury and life's material comforts.

Crisp questioning on Rorke's part revealed that he was Stanley Lucas from Los Angeles—a collector of antiques—who had dropped in to see "dear old Eben" about one thirty. It was rather odd for the Chinese servant to have shunted him in the bedroom to wait, but Eben was an odd cuss. No, he hadn't seen the old lawyer. No, he hadn't heard a sound nor a scream nor two screams. With a sweet, kindly

smile he confided that the heat had made him drowsy and that he "had taken forty winks in the arms of Morpheus." His visit was partly social and partly business—"legal business."

"Eben Cass has been murdered," Rorke announced finally.

"You don't tell me!" Lucas gasped. "Indeed! Indeed! Dear me, that's tragic! Well, a lot of people will breathe easier now, I suppose."

"And what do you mean by that?" Rorke asked.

"Oh, nothing. I guess I mean that dear old Eben had a lot of enemies and people who were afraid of him."

"And why should people be afraid of him?" Doc Wethers purred gently.

"Oh, I can't really say. People are afraid of lawyers, I suppose, especially those who have great power."

"I don't follow you," the doctor smiled, "but I think I understand you just the same."

Lucas' jaw drooped slightly but he kept up his debonair manner, smiling like a Cheshire cat.

"I'm frightfully confused, gentlemen. News of Eben's death is a terrible shock." He continued to smile and flash his white teeth. "Eben and I were the dearest of friends."

It was obvious to me that Lucas was as relieved as the others to have Cass' death affirmed to them. I didn't doubt for a minute that they already were certain of it. Lucas agreed to wait for the conclusion of the official inquiry and we left him patting his cravat and resuming his parade among the chintz and yellow silks.

Doc Wethers, who appeared to be the prime mover in the investigation now, led us back to the library after whispering to the deputy sitting on the steps:

"Stand in the doorway, brother, and don't take your eyes off those doors. If any one comes out, hail me."

Once more in the gruesome library, Doc Wethers sat down and glanced at the corpse and the blade, glistening on the table a foot from the fatal wound.

"Get the idea, Jim?" he grinned. "Know what those people are afraid of —were afraid of?"

"Of givin' their hands away!" Rorke grunted. "I believe they're all in cahoots—the woman, too. I never came up against such a pack of liars!"

"If you were in their boots, you'd be scared, too."

"Why?"

"Eben Cass was blackmailing them!"

CHAPTER V.

HIDDEN SKELETONS.

(Saturday: 4 P. M.)

"BLACKMAIL?" Rorke echoed questioningly. "That would give each of 'em a motive."

"It might," Doc Wethers nodded, "and then again it mightn't. However, I'm confident of one thing, Jim: these folks are here to-day to comply with Eben Cass' extortion. His death hasn't quite solved their problem. Whatever the old lawyer's weapons were, they're still in a condition, I think, where they can harm those four people."

"You mean Cass had the goods on them in the form of papers or letters or somethin'?" the sheriff asked.

"Yes, precisely that, Jim. Do you realize who these four people are? Lois Vining is one of the biggest stars in the Hollywood constellations; she draws down about five thousand a week despite her poor manners. Walt Stone makes nearly as much operating on the movie stars as well as on some of the nation's biggest men. His is no small reputation as a surgeon. Martin Osterman, if you read your newspapers, is the wealthiest man in Los Angeles. His bank just merged with three others—gobbled them up and Osterman's fortune went up a few millions. Stanley Lucas is the *crême-de-la-crême* of Los Angeles society, the king of the blue-

bloods masquerading as an antique collector. He lives on the income from five millions."

"And they're all a pack of liars, for all their cash!" Rorke snapped.

"They're afraid of the one thing that money can't help once it's unleashed—scandal. Whatever Eben Cass was holding over their heads must be serious enough to ruin them if it became public property. No wonder Walt Stone referred to Cass as a 'dirty swine'!"

"I've made mental note of that crack, doc," the sheriff grinned. "And Lucas sayin' 'dear old Eben' didn't cut any ice with me, either."

"Jim, this nut is getting tougher to crack every minute. We're dealing with people who are more concerned with protecting their reputations and good names than in looking out for their lives. They don't realize that the charge of murder may be leveled at them any minute. All they're thinking of is the hidden skeleton in their closets."

"But, doc, why are you so cocksure about this blackmail business?" Rorke asked. I appreciated the force of the doctor's logic, but I, too, felt the sheriff's question was in order.

"Call it a hunch, if you will—I just feel it, believe it after watching the terror in those folks' eyes. "The doctor was making no effort to convince us." It struck me that they were afraid of more than the accusation of murder. The homicide charge might be a mistake but this other sword of Damocles that hangs over their heads could never be considered a mistake by the public—the newspapers. That's what they're so scared about—frightened to the point of lying."

My eyes fell upon the filing cabinet disguised as a tapestry-covered bookstand. The cloth that covered it was a veritable treasure from the Gobelin factory. Impulsively, I pulled out the topmost drawer after flinging the tapestry aside. Rorke came and stood looking over my shoulder. The drawer was filled with bulging folders marked with names from A to L.

"Let's give a look into some of those folders, Drake," Rorke said reaching for a handful. I did likewise.

My folders revealed such letters as the following:

> Please give me another month to meet your request, Cass. I'm frightfully short of funds at the moment and am negotiating a mortgage on my house.
>
> ANDREW BROWN.

Clipped to this was a yellow carbon copy of Cass' reply which read as follows:

> You are trying to avoid the arrangement we made in Oakland. If I do not have your check on my desk within five days I shall turn my information over to your wife.
>
> E. C.

I handed the folder pertaining to Andrew Brown's dealings with the old lawyer to Doc Wethers, who glanced at the letters and then began grinning at Rorke.

"Not a bad guess, eh?" he said. "What do you see, Jim?"

"Gosh!" the sheriff gasped. "Here's a fellow being bled for a thousand a month. It seems Cass has the goods on him for embezzlin' a bank and doin' time in Sing Sing back East nine years ago. The fellow fell down in his payments and Cass is jackin' him up by threatenin' to tell his present employers. He writes that the victim is makin' thirty thousand a year and has no excuse for bein' unable to pay."

Rorke gave this particular folder to the doctor and glared down at the dead body.

"So that was your little game, Eben," he growled through clenched teeth. "No wonder you had a house that looked like a palace. Gee, doc, whoever the murderer was, he did a lot of folks a kind favor!"

"But murder is murder, Jim," Doc

Wethers said quietly. "We're not concerned with a murderer's philanthropy."

"With blackmail for a motive," I blurted out, "you'd have a mighty hard time convicting the fellow who killed Cass."

"Possibly," the doctor nodded; "but we're only concerned with obeying the law, Drake. Murder is against the law and we must do our duty in apprehending the killer. What the jury does is the jury's business."

"The law is pretty hard sometimes, doc," Rorke remarked.

"So is life, Jim." The doctor got up and approached the files. "What do the other letters you've read reveal, Jim?"

"The same, doc. Blackmail is obvious as the fingers on your hand."

Doc Wethers got up and began rummaging through the drawers marked A to K and L to Z. He went through all the folders, once, twice, and then turned to the sheriff and me.

"Boys," he said, "go carefully over those files and tell me if they're alphabetically correct."

We did as he suggested. I noted that the compartments marked L, O, S and V were empty; all the others were filled with data and letters. The sheriff made the same discovery.

"Gosh!" he cried. "The L, the O, the S and the V folders are missing—Lucas, Osterman, Stone and Vinin'!" He stared at Doc Wethers with his mouth slightly open.

"It does look rather serious, doesn't it, Jim? But what I can't fathom is why the person who emptied those files took all the folders instead of the one pertaining to him or her. Of course, Cass might have taken the folders out. He was expecting those people. We must make a search, boys."

Without another word, understanding perfectly the task before us, we fell to work looking for the missing folders. Doc Wethers went through the table drawers without disturbing the body. I saw him draw forth a sealed envelope and a revolver and lay them to one side, covering them with a newspaper. Rorke rummaged through piles of papers and folders, books and periodicals. I devoted myself to every logical place a man might put those folders for handy reference if he were expecting the persons involved in their contents; then I peered into every nook and corner, behind chairs and tables and bookcases, and the other two men followed suit.

"I don't see 'em," Rorke said. He mopped his forehead and sighed.

"Neither do I," the doctor said conclusively.

"And Cass wouldn't be likely to remove those folders from the room," I said.

"Not likely," Doc Wethers said. Turning to the sheriff, he added: "Well, I'm convinced, Jim, that the murderer got them. But he or she can't have gotten very far with them. We'll have one of the boys search every room in the house."

"Good idea," Rorke said.

"Jim," Doc Wethers said slowly, "I've been trying to figure out what was wrong about the position of that body for some time. Now I've got it. There's nothing wrong with it. The fault lies with the killer. He was left-handed, Jim."

"Left-handed!" the sheriff exclaimed. "How on earth do you make that out, doc?"

Doc Wethers went up to the Queen Anne table and took the blade of death in his right hand. He was standing to the right of the body, facing it.

"If I strike at the skull this way"—he made a pass with the knife—"my right hand naturally takes a downward direction. A right-handed blow would have struck the skull farther back and the blade would have stood more or less upright. But as we saw and as the wound indicates, the course of the blade was parallel to the desk. Now"—he

changed the jade blade to his left hand and made a pass—"with the blade in my left hand, the blow is quickly and easily struck. Of course, I'm assuming that Eben Cass was bending over his desk, reading that letter we found. His head was almost in the position we found it in."

"But he might have been sittin' up," Rorke said. "Then a right-handed blow would have been natural enough. The killer would have raised the knife over his head and let fly."

"I'm inclined to believe," the doctor said, "that in that case Cass would have been instantly aware of the action. He might have made an outcry or a struggle to avoid the knife. The murderer didn't want any fuss with the lawyer. He bided his time and struck when the lawyer's eyes were concentrated on the desk."

"Well, I guess that's what you might call problematical, doc. It doesn't sound right to me. But I see your point. It's easier to strike left-handed in that position you're standin' in than it is to use the right hand."

"And the trueness of the blow, I think, indicates the left-handedness of the slayer. If I were killing any one with a knife, Jim, I'd use my right hand because I'm right-handed. Besides, under that emotional strain, habit would rule me."

"It's a theory, that's all," Rorke said, unconvinced. "But I'll keep it in mind. If one of those folks outside is left-handed we may scare somethin' out of him."

Rorke produced the letter we had found under Cass' face. It had been signed with the letter "S." When I saw that paper again, Stone's name flashed into my mind.

"This letter," the sheriff was saying, "might be Stone's on account of the signature. It's handwritten, too, and we might compare that fellow's with the writin' on this paper."

"Not a bad idea, Jim. Have Drake here get him to write out his name and address for us."

"Right-o! Deputy Drake, go get that fellow's handwritin'."

The plan seemed a good one and I left the library. My knock on the dining-room door brought me a cheery, "Come in." For a moment, I hesitated; I'd forgotten to bring writing materials. But then another idea occurred to me and I entered the room.

"Doctor Stone," I began, "the sheriff would like to have your name and address for future reference. Will you write it out for me, please?"

"Gladly," he smiled. "Have you pencil and paper?"

"No," I said apologetically.

"Never mind," he beamed. "I've a fountain pen. I'll rip a sheet out of my prescription book." Stone proceeded to produce these and, leaning on the dining-room table, wrote what I had asked for. He wrote with his left hand.

I pocketed the paper casually and thanked him.

"Will I be detained much longer?" he asked. "I've several patients to see and it's a four-hour drive to Los Angeles."

"Sorry, but I don't know," I said, and took leave of him.

Returning to the library, I gave the surgeon's name and address to Rorke and mentioned his left-handedness. He compared the handwritings.

"I thought so," he grunted. "The writin's identical. In fact, it's the same color and shade of ink. Stone's the man we want to grill a bit."

"Good!" Doc Wethers said. "Let's have him in here, too. We'll try confronting him with the murdered man—trial by ordeal, you know. They say murderers give themselves away in the presence of the body. I don't believe it for a minute, but it might be an interesting experiment."

"Deputy Drake!" Rorke snapped. "Go fetch Doctor Stone."

CHAPTER VI.

AN ARREST.

(Saturday: 4.30 P. M.)

AGAIN I crossed the hall and tapped on the dining-room door. Again the surgeon's cheery voice bade me, "Come in." From the doorway I explained my mission and asked Doctor Stone to follow me. He frowned as a man does when he is perturbed or taken off guard in a moment of great precaution, but instantly he regained his composure and followed me quietly into the library.

Rorke and Doc Wethers stood in front of the Queen Anne table, shielding the body of Eben Cass with their own bulk. Doctor Stone bowed formally and looked attentively from the sheriff's rugged countenance to the doctor's bland face.

"Have you ever been in this room before, Doctor Stone?" Rorke asked.

"Oh, many times, Mr. O'Rourke."

"Name's Rorke without the trimmin's," the sheriff growled. "When were you in here last, Doctor Stone?"

"Oh, about a month ago."

"Ever see this before?" Rorke asked, stepping aside to reveal the corpse to the surgeon's gaze.

Doctor Stone blanched; involuntarily he took a step backward. Then, peering hard at the dead man, he pulled himself together, bolstering up his nerve with a faint whistle. I saw his eyes wander from the body to the blade. He moved up to the table quickly, stared hard at the jade blade and then swung around and looked at the wall at the spot where the cowhands testified the blade usually hung.

"He was knifed!" Stone gasped.

"You didn't hear any shots, did you?" Rorke asked.

"He was knifed—by that?" Stone whispered, pointing to the blade and not hearing the sheriff's suggestion.

"What do you know about that knife?" Rorke demanded. "Why does that particular knife upset you?"

Stone collapsed into a chair and covered his eyes with his hands as though blotting out some unpleasant sight.

"I never thought——" He suddenly arrested his emotion and sat there silent and sullen. "Well, what do you want of me, Mr. Sheriff?"

"There was bad blood between you and Cass, wasn't there?"

"No, there wasn't."

"Cass had somethin' on you, didn't he?"

"No, he didn't." Stone's voice was freighted with terror.

"He was drivin' you to the end of your rope, wasn't he?"

"I don't understand, Mr. Sheriff."

"Why did you tell him that you'd see him in hell sooner than——"

"Then you know—you know——" Stone whimpered.

Rorke flashed the letter we had found beneath the body.

"You wrote this, didn't you, Doctor Stone?"

"Yes, yes, I wrote it—day before yesterday."

"I begin to get the hang of this, doc," Rorke said to Doc Wethers. "Stone here came in this afternoon. Cass took out the letter and was questionin' him about it. Stone knew where that knife was—or where all the knives hung; he sneaked it off the wall and when old Eben was bendin' over the threatenin' letter, he let him have it in the head."

"Rorke, you can't accuse me——" Stone screamed.

"I think," Doc Wethers interrupted, "that your theory is a bit far-fetched, Jim. It would be a good idea if Doctor Stone came clean and told us why he was here, just what his differences with Cass were and why he evaded the truth in our earlier quizzing."

"I'll tell!" Stone cried. "I'll tell everything! Cass was a dirty, thieving blackmailer! He had something on me and he was bleeding me for all I'm worth. I've paid him over twenty thousand dollars in the past five years. I lost a lot of money in the stock market this spring and I couldn't meet Cass' demands for three thousand dollars; I just didn't have it. He had no mercy for me—he threatened——"

"Dear me," Doc Wethers sighed, "what fools these mortals be. I suppose till the end of the world men and women will believe in blackmailers just the way they used to believe in the bogy man as children. Don't you know, Doctor Stone, that nine tenths of the blackmailers of the world will never give you away and the other tenth would never be believed. A blackmailer is a psychological criminal who trades on the human being's fear of having his ego—his conceit—hurt. And believe me, some people pay pretty dearly to pacify the ridiculous bogy man of adulthood."

"I know—I know," Stone sighed. "but when one comes to grips with the situation, one daren't take the chance of being exposed. If my patients ever knew what Eben Cass threatened to tell——" Here the horror of the thought silenced the man.

"What was it?" Rorke asked.

"I can never tell. Thank God Cass is dead. The secret will rot in the grave with him." Stone was exultant, almost leering in triumph at the corpse.

"That's a very serious statement, Doctor Stone," Doc Wethers said. "Now tell us why you denied hearing two screams."

"But I didn't hear them—I swear," Stone insisted. There was something changed about the man; one moment he was hysterically suppliant and seeking sympathy, the next he was craftily and coolly on guard. I decided that the surgeon's account of his persecution by the old lawyer was largely a good piece of acting.

"That's very, very odd, Doctor Stone, "Doc Wethers said icily. "Have you by any chance communicated with the others in the house?"

"I didn't know there was anybody else in the house except Ching." Stone's eyes fell from Doc Wethers' as he said this.

Just then Leary came through the hall and knocked on the open door. Rorke went over to him and only the buzz of their conversation, muffled behind the backs of their hands reached us. The sheriff turned swiftly to Stone.

"Will you swear, Doctor Stone, that you never left the dining room from the moment you entered this house till we invited you in here?"

"Certainly. I never left——"

Rorke addressed himself to Doc Wethers.

"I'm afraid, doc, we'd better hold this fellow. Leary came in here to tell me that Osterman has been tryin' to budge the bars on the bedroom window. He saw Stone here and remembered seein' him at the parlor window, which is in the rear of the house, before Ching Lu's scream was heard."

"Well, Stone, what about it?" Doc Wethers asked. "Do you know Lois Vining?"

"That man must be mistaken," Stone insisted, glaring at Leary. "I never left the dining room."

Very quietly, Doc Wethers approached the surgeon and reaching out with his hand, said:

"May I see your hand, Doctor Stone —either hand?"

The surgeon proffered both. Doc Wethers took them in his, and I noticed that while he scrutinized them thoroughly as though he were a palm reader, he likewise smelled them. I saw him nod and smile with satisfaction.

"This odor I noticed on your left hand, Doctor Stone—what is it?"

Stone sniffed at his hand; bewilderment was in his eyes.

"I don't know. Something I must have touched, I guess."

Doc Wethers handed Stone the instrument of death; the surgeon refused to take it. The handle was extended for him to smell; he did so and trembled visibly.

"Rather a coincidence, isn't it, Doctor Stone?" Doc Wethers was grinning. "Left-handed, aren't you, Doctor Stone?" Doc Wethers beamed.

"Why—er—yes."

"What a pity," Doc Wethers sighed. "The murderer was left-handed."

An agonized scream burst from Stone's lips. He fell on his knees before Doc Wethers, whimpering:

"I didn't do it! I swear to God I didn't!"

Doc Wethers was about to say something when Rorke interrupted.

"Doctor Stone," he said, "I arrest you for the murder of Eben Cass."

"Hold on, Jim——" Doc Wethers began.

"I'm satisfied, doc, that this is the bird we want. There's the smell on his hands, his bein' left-handed, his knowin' where the knife was, and the threatenin' letter, not to mention the motive of bein' hounded to death by Cass for blackmail money. Stone's admitted enough for me."

"But not enough for me, Jim!" Doc Wethers said tartly. "I'll admit that things look badly for Doctor Stone, but I want to question the others first before we come to a decision as to just who is the guilty party. Don't forget our theory of collusion and coöperation in the crime."

"Well, we'll go ahead, of course," Rorke growled; "but I'm goin' to hold Doctor Stone. He's still holdin' out by denyin' he heard those two screams. Besides, I believe Leary did see him at the rear window. The man's a liar!"

Stone was sobbing weakly, kneeling in front of a chair as though saying his prayers. Doc Wethers, I could see, was patently ruffled by the sheriff's tactics; he was on the trail of something and the impulsive Rorke had bungled.

"All right, Jim; you're boss here," Doc Wethers said. "Before you take Doctor Stone away, I want to ask him one more question."

"Go on," the sheriff said.

"Doctor Stone," Doc Wethers asked, picking up a folder from Cass' filing cabinet, "have you ever seen one of these before in this house?"

"No, I haven't," Stone replied, after looking carefully at the folder. "What is it?"

"No more of your play actin'!" Rorke snapped. "Get on out of here! Leary, take this bird back to the dinin' room and sit over him. He's a prisoner of the county and, if he tries to get away, plug him."

Leary led his prisoner back to the dining room.

"Jim, you behaved like a jackass," Doc Wethers said when we three were alone again. "I had an idea I was experimenting with when you ruined everything by the arrest."

"Who's runnin' this investigation, anyway?" Rorke was mad.

"I'm sorry, Jim. I thought you wanted me to help you. I'll leave now if I'm in the way."

Doc Wethers reached for his hat and turned to the door. He was not anxious to leave; he was having too much fun and excitement. The sheriff, his face a study in befuddlement, called:

"Aw, forget it, doc. I'm sorry I got sore, but I'm all up in the air about this thing. Of course I want you to help. You stick around and help examine the others."

Rorke grabbed the doctor's hand and pumped it.

"Now, Deputy Drake," Rorke said, "go get Martin Osterman who's been tryin' to get through the window bars."

CHAPTER VII.

A PIECE OF INFORMATION.

(Saturday: 4.45 P. M.)

OSTERMAN sprang away from the window when I thrust open the door to the room after a faint, perfunctory tap. He was, I surmised, engaged in the rather public process of wrenching one of the iron bars of the grating loose. He was, perspiring freely—a red-faced St. Bernard.

"The sheriff wants to see you, Mr. Osterman," I said.

"What are they doing in that room next door, young man?" he asked, with bulging eyes. "I heard some one scream a minute ago."

"A little third-degree stuff," I winked. "They've made an arrest."

"Who?" The voice was eager, relieved.

"Can't tell," I smiled. "You'll have to ask the sheriff."

We made our way to the library. As before, Rorke and the doctor were concealing the body of Cass behind them.

"Mr. Osterman," Rorke began, "why was Eben Cass blackmailin' you?"

The banker staggered backward as though struck a heavy blow. His lips trembled; he stared at the sheriff, hardly believing that he had heard correctly.

"I repeat, Mr. Osterman—why was Cass makin' you pay him money—makin' you buy his silence?"

"You know, then!" the banker groaned. "Yes, Eben Cass was blackmailing me for the past seven years. I've paid him upward of fifty thousand dollars to preserve the happiness of my home—of my wife and children. Cass threatened to disgrace me—my whole family—so I paid him to keep quiet."

"When did you first meet Cass?" Doc Wethers interposed.

"In China about fifteen years ago. I didn't see him again until I was attending a convention in San Francisco—a banker's convention. Cass bumped into me on the street, recognized me and had me to dinner. Naturally he learned my whereabouts and presently I received his first demand for money."

"I take it, then," Doc Wethers smiled, "that Cass had knowledge of certain doings of yours—in China."

"Yes—yes." Osterman seemed dumfounded.

"Have you ever seen this before, Mr. Osterman?" Rorke asked, reaching behind him and producing the jade blade.

"That knife!" Osterman whispered. His eyes flew to its familiar resting place on the wall. "It has blood on it!" His voice trembled with fear.

Doc Wethers and the sheriff again stepped aside and the banker beheld the corpse. He tried to blubber something as his popping eyes took in the remains of the crime. Then he collapsed in a heap on the carpeting.

"Quite a stunner, that sight was!" Doc Wethers snapped. "Hope it isn't a stroke." He felt the banker's heart. "No, he's only fainted."

"I'll get a glass of water from the bathroom," Rorke said and went out of the room.

"Poor Osterman," the doctor said to me. "He's trying hard to hang onto his secret. If people weren't so silly—so afraid of being misunderstood! If these people would only tell the truth we wouldn't be having all this mess."

Osterman, whose head was lying in the doctor's lap, stirred slightly and began to mumble. Doc Wethers put his finger to his lips for silence and lowered his ear to the banker's lips.

"Walt Stone—hold your horses——" The man's words grew more audible at each whispering. "The knife—Stone had one in China——"

The doctor's eyes sought mine and I nodded.

With considerable effort, Osterman sat up and looked about him, dazed. He was like a man who had been knocked unconscious by a blow and who, in re-

covering, had let his border-line thoughts run loose.

"I must have fainted," Osterman said sheepishly. "I'm awfully sorry, gentlemen." Doc Wethers helped him to a chair.

"Now," the doctor said, "please tell us the truth. Did you hear any strange sounds this afternoon before the approximate time of the murder."

"I'll tell the truth. I lied before—about the screams, because I didn't know what was happening—how safe my secret was." Osterman was a pitiable picture, but somehow I didn't like the way he glanced out of the corner of his eye to see how his story was impressing the doctor. "I did hear a scream—the time I don't know. A few minutes earlier, I did hear some one moving sort of on tiptoes, through the hall to the library. The library door opened and closed. After a moment of silence, another door opened, some one came into the hall and entered the room opposite mine. I didn't look out but returned to the window, hoping Cass would soon be through and ready for me."

Osterman's story, if true, was a revelation. He did hear some one enter the library. He did hear some one, Stone possibly, leave one room and go into the parlor where Lois Vining swore she had been alone.

"I hadn't been back at the window five minutes," the banker continued, "when I heard the scream. It paralyzed me with fear. I've had forebodings all day and I knew something was wrong. Yes, I did listen at the door, opening it slightly after the sheriff took charge, and I heard him mention murder. That froze the blood in me and I staggered back to the bed. My only thought was that I had been in the house while the murderer ran amuck; I was bound to be suspected."

"Ah, I'm glad you appreciate the limitations of the human mind, Mr. Osterman," Doc Wethers said a trifle sardonically. "Of course, we had to suspect everybody. Your story has been very interesting."

"I hope I've helped you."

"You don't recall where the first footsteps came from?"

"No."

"Are you sure the second set of footsteps didn't go into the library, too?"

"I couldn't be sure."

"Come now, Mr. Osterman, you must have some inkling as to where those first footsteps came from. You were listening at your door."

"Well, I think they came from the room next to this one—the other bedroom. It may have been only Ching."

"Quite true," Doc Wethers nodded. "Now tell us about this knife. You seem familiar with it, Mr. Osterman."

"I've only seen it on the wall here before," the man replied evasively.

"You mentioned that Walt Stone had one like it in China!"

Osterman's jaw dropped; his eyes narrowed as they focused upon the doctor—the incredible doctor who seemed to be reading his very thoughts. The banker obviously was not aware that he had betrayed this information while semiconscious.

"Yes, Stone had one like it in China."

"What is the knife's particular significance, if any?"

"Oh, it's just a curio."

At this juncture, Rorke entered the library, a glass of water in one hand and a handful of wet paper in the other.

"Oh," he said, his eyes flashing upon Osterman, "I see that our patient is settin' up now."

Doc Wethers briefly narrated the gist of Osterman's story—the two sets of footsteps—the fact that one pair came from the room occupied by Stanley Lucas and that the other came from the room occupied by Walt Stone—the fact that Stone had been in China and had had a knife like the jade blade.

"Humph!" Rorke snorted. He set the glass of water down on the table. "This is all very interestin'. Mr. Osterman has been very obligin'. But take a look at this."

He opened the palm of his hand and sorted out some of the wet scraps of paper—torn sheets of paper. My eyes widened as I beheld the heading for the O folder, one of many bits into which the folder had been torn.

"I found this in the bathroom," Rorke said. "Then I did a little investigatin', and let me show you what else I uncovered."

Rorke stepped into the hall and bade us follow him. Osterman hesitated by the Queen Anne table. Without a word of warning, the sheriff drew his gun, cocked it and covered the banker.

"I think what I've got to show will interest you, Martin Osterman!" he barked.

"Yes, yes, of course," Osterman replied, trotting out after us, his eyes alive with terror and riveted to the sheriff's gun. We entered the bedroom Osterman had been occupying.

"Drake!" Rorke snapped. "Lift up that there mattress!"

I obeyed him. Doc Wethers cried out in surprise. There, packed toward the center of the bed beyond the sight of a casual searcher, were three folders. They were the L, the S and the V folders, their contents torn to useless fragments.

"Well, doc," Rorke grinned, "do I make another arrest or don't I?"

CHAPTER VIII.

DOC WETHERS REFLECTS.

(Saturday: 5 P. M.)

THE missing files," the doctor mused. "It does look rather conclusive—too conclusive, in fact."

"Huh?" Rorke grunted. "What do you mean by that, doc?"

"Just this, Jim: if we had only a little evidence to go by and no suspects at all, I'd feel convinced that we were up against something pretty easy in the way of solving. But Jim, man alive, we've got tons of suspects and evidence in the form of motives, lies, statements, and what not! Why, we've got one prisoner already. You thought Stone didn't have a leg to stand——"

"Stone!" Osterman cried suddenly. "Is Stone under arrest?"

"He sure is," Rorke grinned; "and you'll be keepin' him company pretty soon."

"But Stone—he——" Osterman, with great resolve, refused to continue his statement.

"I think, Mr. Osterman, if you can tell us anything that will help us on this case it will certainly materially lighten the suspicion already directed at you." Doc Wethers spoke in a kindly, persuasive tone. "I'm inclined to believe all that you've told me so far, Mr. Osterman."

The Los Angeles banker seemed to be wrestling with some inner problem, the source of a great emotional turmoil. He looked at each one of us dumbly and then, when his eyes fell upon the missing folders, his face lighted up with a bewildered horror.

"What—what importance do you attach to those folders?" Osterman asked point-blank.

Rorke frowned angrily.

"Quit stallin', Osterman!" Rorke barked. "Come clean and stop this kiddin'. You took——"

"Just a minute, Jim," Doc Wethers interrupted. "I think Mr. Osterman is entitled to an explanation. These folders, Mr. Osterman, were taken from a filing cabinet in Eben Cass' library. We believe that they are involved in the crime in that the murderer removed them for the purpose of destroying the evidence they contained."

"Good Lord!" Osterman moaned. "You're accusing me of killing Cass! I

swear I know nothing beyond what I've already told you—except——"

"Except that the moon isn't made of green cheese!" the sheriff sneered.

"I think you're about to be interesting, Mr. Osterman," Doc Wethers smiled. "Except what?"

"I told you about the two sets of footsteps, doctor. I didn't tell you that Doctor Stone came into my room shortly before I heard Ching Lu's scream."

"Stone went to your room? Why?" Doc Wethers asked.

"He said that he had been waiting a long time and was growing annoyed. He recalled seeing my car in the shed and decided to look me up for a chat. We started to talk about a golf match at Santa Barbara when Doctor Stone lighted a cigarette; he inhaled the wrong way, I guess, and started to cough, so I went into the bathroom to draw him a glass of water. I must have been in there over a minute, letting the water run cold."

While the banker's story didn't impress me overmuch, I saw that Doc Wethers wore a credulous expression. Rorke was more skeptical than ever.

"All of which insinuates that Stone planted the folders under your mattress while you were in the bathroom," Rorke said. "Well, if he did, what about the destroyed O file that I found part of? That is your initial, Mr. Osterman."

"I know nothing about it—nothing," the banker whined.

"Just when did you receive Doctor Stone's visit?" Doc Wethers asked. "Before you heard the footsteps in the hall or afterward?"

"After I heard the footsteps that led to the library door."

"But," the doctor pointed out, "you said that you heard the second pair of footsteps come from the direction of the dining room and go toward the parlor. That accounts for Stone visiting the parlor. He was seen in there."

"Granted there's a word of truth in what Osterman says," I spoke up, "how much time elapsed between the footsteps we know to be Stone's and Ching Lu's scream when the sheriff broke the news to us on the front steps?"

"I couldn't say accurately," the banker said. "Maybe it was two minutes—maybe five."

"I think," Doc Wethers ventured, "that Doctor Stone was in his bedroom while the murderer was busy in the library."

"Unless, of course," I couldn't resist saying, "Stone and Osterman were together in the library."

"Of course," Doc Wethers smiled. "I suppose, Jim, that you'll be wanting to hold Mr. Osterman in view of what you've discovered?" Rorke nodded. "Well, put him in with Doctor Stone and we'll go about our own business."

"May I phone for my lawyer?" Osterman stammered as we ushered him across the hall to the dining room.

"I don't think it will be necessary—just yet," Doc Wethers said enigmatically.

Rorke confided the banker to Leary's care. Osterman and Stone glared at one another but gave no word of greeting or recognition. It looked to me as though "the conspirators were going to hang separately."

"On second thought," Doc Wethers said as he was about to leave the room, "I must beg one favor of you, Mr. Osterman. May I have your name and address." He took out a pencil and paper; the banker, with a bold right-handed scrawl, gave the desired information.

While he was pocketing the paper, Doc Wethers picked up Osterman's right hand and smelled it. The satisfied expression that he wore disappeared; he signed for Rorke to come forward and smell the banker's hand.

"And you think he's innocent!" Rorke winked after sniffing at the hand. "He's even got the odor of death on him. He

and Stone are in cahoots—and maybe there's more in this, too."

Rorke and I followed the doctor out of the dining room and back to the library. He went up to the Queen Anne table and picked up the envelope and revolver he had previously taken from the drawer and covered with newspaper. He opened the envelope and, handing it to Rorke, began reading the legal document it had contained.

"Cass' will! The devil!" Rorke gasped. "What does it say, doc?"

"Not much and quite a lot," the doctor replied. "It's a very simple instrument. It's dated July 9th, four days ago. Cass bequeaths a thousand dollars apiece to a dozen friends and relatives of whom you're one, Jim."

"The devil you say!" Rorke said with surprise. "The old boy must have liked me a little." He swelled with homely pride.

"Then come the five-thousand-dollar bequests; Leary and Bowlegs are among those favored. And then comes the surprise of surprises——"

"What's that?"

"Cass leaves the rest of his entire estate to Ching Lu whom he describes as 'my honorable and devoted servant.'"

"Ching Lu—he comes in for millions or I'm a coyote!" Rorke cried.

"No," Doc Wethers smiled, "there's a serious hitch. It considerably heightens the mystery we're involved in. This will is worthless. It isn't signed."

"Not signed——" Rorke and I were flabbergasted.

Doc Wethers tossed the testament to the sheriff and concerned himself with a brief examination of the revolver. As I glanced over Rorke's shoulder, I saw that the will was typed and bore not one handwritten correction or notation. It might have been typewritten by any one so far as the law was concerned, though it was likely that Cass was the writer; a small portable typewriter was tucked away in a bookcase beside the desk. Cass, I was certain, was his own typist—in fact, his whole office force."

Doc turned to Rorke.

"Jim, this changes the complexion of matters a little. We've been paying too little attention to the chink. This will provides him with a motive, too, you know. He might have seen it and made his plans accordingly, awaiting its signing. Besides, he had plenty of time in which to commit the crime. Why, the lawyer might have been dead half an hour before you found the body, though I couldn't swear to it; my hunch still is a few minutes to three o'clock as the fatal hour."

"But what about Stone and Osterman, doc? They've got the odor on their hands that we found on the knife handle. We found the missing folders in Osterman's room. Stone is left-handed, which fits into your theory of a left-handed killer. They're both unscrupulous liars when it comes to savin' their necks."

Doc Wethers lifted the cover to a copper box on the table and fished out a cigar. As he bit off the end he offered the box to me and Rorke; we all lighted up, heedless of the gruesome business of helping ourselves to the dead lawyer's humidor; nerves that need steadying are selfish nerves.

"Jim," the doctor said reflectively, "we're up against something diabolical. This is no cheap, two-cent murder; it's a crime that might have been planned by a scientist, so carefully has every step been covered by confusion. It's a crime, Jim, worthy of the Oriental mind, but I don't level the accusing finger at Ching Lu yet.

"I don't believe, Jim, that Eben Cass was a careless man. He lived by his wits, and such living called for accuracy and the taking of no chances. Yet this puzzles me: after notifying your office that his life was in peril, Cass neglected to sign his will—if he actually prepared that documment, and we assume he did

—and he neglected to avail himself of the simple protection of his revolver. We might even assume he knew from just what quarter he was to expect danger."

Tapping the revolver he was studying, Doc Wethers added:

"This weapon isn't loaded. Is it likely that a man whose life has been threatened will sit calmly behind an unloaded gun—a man of Eben Cass' type?"

Rorke emitted a low whistle.

"That sure is a stickler," he said. "But maybe Eben didn't have a chance to load it. Maybe the murderer was upon him almost immediately after he talked with Lou Betz."

"That's quite likely. We understand that he phoned your office between two thirty and two fifty. You were talking to me from White Crescent ranch house at three. The murderer pounced on him in those ten minutes. But I fail to see why he didn't load his gun before or while he was trying to enlist your protection, Jim."

"The murderer," I ventured, "might not have been the enemy he feared. We're assuming from the position of the body and the nature of the blow that Eben Cass was taken off guard."

Doc Wethers nodded.

"Quite true. That, of course, admits of the possibility that he was slain by any one of the five persons in this house at the time. Yet, he telephoned for help at a time when the four visitors—Lucas, Osterman, Stone and Vining were in the house!"

"He might have feared one of them and was killed by another that he trusted behind his back," Rorke said. "That's about the size of it!"

"It is!" Doc Wethers said between frantic puffs on his cigar." And we have two prisoners so-called and three suspects to be still questioned. Jim, I tell you, this is the work of a murderer worthy of some respect; he's diabolical. I'm convinced that we must look for some one who was trusted by Cass; who knew the layout of this house very well; who knew where the jade blade hung; who knew of Cass' and Ching Lu's habits and moreover, who knew just who would be here to-day."

"Why do you say that—that the murderer would know who would be here to-day?" I asked quickly.

"Because if one person killed Cass that person would only steal the folder concerning himself or herself. The four folders were stolen to add to the mystery—to give the slayer greater latitude for escape—to spread suspicion."

"But Stone and Osterman are in cahoots," Rorke insisted. "And I'll bet we'll find the woman and Lucas knowing more than we think. Why do you say only one person is involved in the murder—is the killer, doc?"

"I don't say so," Doc Wethers smiled. "I only think it likely. Now let's have another look at my pet suspicion—Ching Lu."

CHAPTER IX.

THE TAINTED GLOVE.

(Saturday: 5.15 P. M.)

WE went into the hall where Doc Wethers signed us to stand aside. He took his watch out and then paced the floor from the bedroom where Lucas was languishing. Again, he measured the distance from the dining-room door to the parlor door, to the library door, and from the parlor to the bedroom where we had found Osterman.

"You know, Jim," the doctor said, "there's something to these two sets of footsteps that Osterman heard——"

"If he heard 'em at all!" the sheriff grunted.

"I'm inclined to believe that he did. Now the footsteps he thought he heard coming from the bedroom where we've got Lucas might have come from the front door. Ching Lu was the one person in and out of the house most of the

time. Osterman might have heard him."

"Ching Lu wears slippers," Rorke said. "He walks like a cat!"

"Interesting! Very interesting!" Doc Wethers stepped to the kitchen door and threw it open. "Hello!" His was an exclamation of surprise rather than a greeting.

Ching Lu was preoccupied, trying to slip back over his wrist one of the steel bracelets. He looked up on our sudden entry and grinned sheepishly. A thin curl of smoke seemed to cling to the man; as I watched him harder, I saw that the course of the smoke was in the seat of the chair the chink occupied—something he was sitting on.

"Oho!" Rorke chortled. "Is that there chair gettin' too hot for you, Ching?"

The Chinaman's eyes flashed at him, half frightened, half defiant.

"So you're a Houdini, too!" Doc Wethers smiled, inspecting the handcuffs that now partially bound the man's wrists together. "What flexible hands you've got! It must have been easy for you to wiggle out of that bracelet, get up and wander around. Now get up again and let's see what you're sitting on."

"Me no get up," Ching Lu sighed. "Me velly sick."

Rorke grabbed the chink by the back of the neck and jerked him to his feet. There on the chair was something black and charred, still smoldering. It was a glove.

The sheriff and the doctor pounced upon it. Ching Lu sprang for the door with a grasshopper leap, yelling as though the seven unholy demons were after him.

"Stop him, Drake!" Rorke bellowed. His gun was half out of his holster.

Instinctively, I flew at the Chinaman. A low tackle, worthy of a Yale-Harvard game, brought my man down just as he got between the doorposts. The house shook with the thud of our falling bodies. Ching Lu struggled and squirmed, but I had his legs locked in my arms. Again Rorke's big hand descended on the scruff of the man's neck and lifted him bodily to his feet as I scrambled to mine.

"What's the big idea, Ching?" Rorke barked. "Tryin' to run out on us?"

"Me velly flightened, boss!" Ching Lu gasped, still out of breath. "Me no wantee stay here."

"You'll stay, chinkie, till we cart you off to the hoosegow." Rorke turned to Doc Wethers. "Say, doc, you may have the right steer after all. Ching certainly is actin' up mighty strange."

"Looks that way." Doc Wethers had the stove open and was poking around in the coals. Suddenly his hand darted into the simmering opening and brought forth another glove, unburned.

Holding fast to the chink's neck, Rorke went over to the stove and stared at the glove. It was of kid and designed for a brawny hand. It was a dress glove and not the sort used in that part of the country for riding. There was an obvious newness about it that suggested to me it might never have been worn.

Doc Wethers turned on the light over the kitchen table, since dusk was stealing into the house, and spreading the two gloves out before him, he sat down and bent over them. The charred glove, I saw then, was only half destroyed; the other half was only scorched. It was for the right hand. The left-hand glove was quite intact.

"Go on, doc," Rorke said; "give 'im the nose test."

The doctor sniffed first at the good glove and then at the burned one. Without indicating any discovery, he opened up both gloves and turned them inside out, again smelling the kid skin. His nose lingered long over the left-hand glove and then his eyes were slowly raised to the expectant sheriff's.

"Jim," he said, "this right-hand glove

was never worn. The good part of it, despite the scorching it got, still smells of the store inside and out. But the other—the left-hand glove—has been worn. There's that same telltale smell on the outside—the smell that was on the jade blade; and on the inside is a faint trace of a very, very familiar soap. I can't quite make out what it is."

He offered the gloves to the sheriff who, keeping his grip on the chink with one hand, held up the gloves with the other and sniffed at them.

"Right you are, doc," he grinned. "But I can't make out any smell inside the left glove. But as I've said, my smeller's not much good."

The gloves were then passed to me. The results of my sniffing were the same as the doctor's. The odor he referred to on the inside of the glove was sharp and tarry.

"Maybe it's dog soap," I said, being reminded of that.

"Maybe." Doc Wethers replied laconically. "It'll come to me after a while."

"It's the murderer's glove all right," Rorke said. "It fills the bill—left hand, smell and everythin'."

"I think so, too, Jim. And the killer came in here to destroy the one link that might give him or her away. Judging from the position of the left glove in the stove, the person must have been in a hurry. It was thrown back too far and fell on cooling ashes, while the right glove went right on the edge of the flames and burned slowly."

The doctor, who seemed deep in thought as he spoke, opened his eyes with a quick blink and looked straight at Ching Lu.

"Now, Ching," he said, "we're your friends. We want to help you. Tell us how you came to find this glove."

"Me no do it!" Ching Lu whined. "Me no do it! Me likee boss! Me no killee."

"No one said you did anything," the doctor said. "But why did you pretend to be drugged—unconscious—when we came in here a little while ago?"

"Me velly flightened!"

"Frightened of what?"

"Death! Me no wantee die!"

"Sounds fishy, doc!" Rorke grunted. "Come on, chinkie, and speak out. What do you know?"

"Why did you slip out of the handcuffs and go to the stove?" Doc Wethers asked insistently.

"Me velly flightened! Me no do it!"

It was an exasperating predicament. Ching Lu was patently doing his best to harass us, to annoy us by his stupidity into leaving him alone. I'd seen such tactics used before by foreigners.

"Ching Lu, or whatever your name is," Doc Wethers was saying omnisciently, "stop playing the coolie-chink. Your pidgin is all wrong. You're mandarin bred!"

For a moment, Ching's fat, evil face sagged; his mouth gaped. Then he uttered a low, pained cry and tried to cover his face with the folds of his full sleeves.

"What's this?" Rorke snapped. "Ain't Ching the chink I've known him to be, doc?"

"No, I've suspected him for a long time—years. His pidgin is too studied; it isn't a bit natural with him. He has to think in English to get his pidgin right. He talks English as well as you or I, Jim."

Rorke stared at the Chinaman and then gave him a severe shaking. The man's mass of fat quivered in Rorke's grip.

"Come on, Ching, and say somethin'."

"How did you know, doctor?" Ching Lu asked, with blazing eyes, in English more Oxford than Harvard. "In what way did I betray myself?"

"Oh," Doc Wethers smiled, "just today, for instance, you were too 'velly flightened' and you 'wantee' go away. Chinamen who speak pidgin English because they are handicapped even by a

limited Chinese vocabulary don't use words like 'frighten' or translate them into 'flighten.' You've played the dumb chink hereabouts, Ching Lu, because you wanted all of us to believe that you were an ignorant, uneducated chink cook. The type you tried to portray don't use words like 'frighten,' nor does it pick up such words for use in the pidgin vocabulary."

The evil Oriental face for a moment lost its terror and smiled with an accompanying bow. But terror was the basis for Ching Lu's true expression in that hour.

"Now," Doc Wethers added, "we should like to have your story—the whole story—particularly what you did to-day. But first let me smell your hands." That last request would have seemed ludicrous had we not known the import of it.

Ching Lu extended both hands and the doctor sniffed at them. He merely looked at Rorke, nodding as though to say, "I told you so."

"Now—your story, Ching Lu."

"It is true—I am of the mandarin class. Mr. Cass took me from my father's house in payment for a debt of honor. It was he who taught me the rudiments of pidgin dialects."

"He wasn't much of a teacher," the doctor said lightly.

"You were a slave here?" Rorke queried quickly.

"I might be called that. Mr. Cass saved my father from disgrace when he was visiting China fifteen years ago. To repay him for his kindness, my father offered him anything that he possessed. Mr. Cass took me—because he said I could be trusted for his work. I did not know Mr. Cass' true business until I arrived in San Francisco. Then it was too late to turn back, or to run away or refuse his bidding. A word from Mr. Cass would have ruined my father, might have resulted in his death."

"H'm," Rorke said, slowly rubbing his chin," Cass' blackmailin' even extends to China."

"Yes, Mr. Rorke," Ching Lu replied. His eyes were steadily fastened to the sheriff's. "Mr. Cass feared no man and no law."

"He sure was scared to-day, from what I heard," Rorke grinned back. "What do you know about to-day's doin's?"

"Very little, Mr. Rorke." The Chinaman's politeness was aggravating. "Mr. Cass retired to his library after luncheon. He instructed me as to where his visitors were to wait for him. I knew them all as frequent callers. As they arrived, I showed them to their rooms, interrupting my work to do so. Then I went to the kitchen to brew some tea for myself. I heard Mr. Rorke drive up, and, having no instructions to admit him, I tried to send him away. That is my reason for that lie.

"When I learned of Mr. Cass' death a few minutes later, the shock caused me to lose consciousness. I came to my senses again in the kitchen, where I suddenly noticed something strange. I knew that somebody had been in that room while I was away."

"How did you know that?" Doc Wethers asked.

"I had the teakettle over the fire when I went out to meet Mr. Rorke and his friend. When I looked at it again after coming to, I saw that it had been moved. Before I could ascertain why, you came in and I pretended to be drugged. After you handcuffed me and left, I managed with diligent struggle to free myself from the chair and the braces, as you call them. I inspected my stove. I found the charred glove. I never put it in there."

"Who did, then?" Rorke snapped.

"Whoever came into the kitchen while I was parking that gentleman's car," Ching Lu said, pointing to me.

"When did you last see Cass?" Rorke asked, adding ominously: "Alive?"

"At the lunch table—not after that—dead or alive!"

"What is that smell on your hands, Ching Lu?" Doc Wethers shot at him, his eyes searching the chink's face for a sign of understanding.

Slowly, watching all of us, Ching Lu raised his hands to his face and put them to his nose. A smile suffused the evil countenance and contempt stole into his gaze. He looked at the gloves as though recalling our conversation about them.

"I—I don't remember," he said. "I suppose—you—found—the odor—on—the—instrument—of death?"

"Damn you, you yellow dog!" Rorke shouted, advancing with upraised fist. "You'll play along with us, Ching, or I'll bash your face in!"

"I'll think it over, Mr. Rorke," Ching smiled—or rather leered, for there was something unholy in that look he fastened on Jim Rorke.

CHAPTER X.

"FOR HONORABLE MURDER."

(Saturday: 5.30 P. M.)

BY George, I'll make you think and think quick!" the sheriff blazed at the Chinaman. "You speak now or I'll——"

"Hold on, Jim. Don't get excited," Doc Wethers said quietly. "Ching Lu is not the type of man to be frightened by threats. He's already outwitted us once. Let him take his time."

"I'll hold him as a material witness," Rorke announced.

"If you must, Jim. But it really isn't necessary as long as he stays here in this house."

"I'm goin' to lock him up—in the bathroom where he'll be away from the others. I'm dead sure that his story is just pure cock-and-bull and that he's in league with the rest of this crowd. They just descended on Cass to-day like a pack of wolves and slaughtered him and now they're playin' 'who killed Cock Robin,' thinkin' we're as dumb as we look."

Doc Wethers resigned with a shrug of the shoulders. Ching Lu, propelled by Rorke's hand at the back of his neck, trotted toward the door and into the hall. I distinctly saw the door to Lucas' room close and I heard the click of a doorknob from the parlor where Lois Vining was. In fact, the others heard the sounds, too.

"Somebody's been listenin'," Rorke whispered to the doctor.

"And we know who, too."

We saw Ching Lu shoved unceremoniously into the bathroom. The door to Lucas' room was locked and Rorke turned the key to the other door when we stepped out. Ching Lu was left to contemplate the splendor of Cass' purple-tiled bath.

"But why didn't we force him to speak?" I asked Doc Wethers. "He knows something."

"Working under pressure as we are," the doctor replied, "we might have wasted too much time. We still have Miss Vining and Mr. Lucas to quiz. Besides, a man who doesn't want to talk—particularly a Chinaman with such evil eyes—may not tell you anything even if he does talk. And all you've done is waste time."

"Well, doc," the sheriff said, "you know what I'm after in this investigation. Let's split up. You take Lucas and I'll take the woman, or vice versa. We're up against it for time. Night will be along soon, and I want the murderer by then or we'll take the whole outfit back to Yellow Creek and lock 'em up."

Doc Wethers nodded. The plan was agreeable to him.

"And you, Drake," Rorke said to me, "go out and hunt up Bowlegs and get his story straight, suspicions, and theories. and everythin'."

So for the sake of time, we divided

forces. The sheriff told the man at the hall door to pass me. Doc Wethers promptly went into the room where Stanley Lucas was pacing ceaselessly. I paused in the patio to give the man holding down the door a cigarette and light, when Rorke strode over to the parlor door.

"Some spooky house, ain't it, brother?" the man said. "It's jest like somethin' you see in the movies—high livin' and death."

"You haven't noticed anything suspicious since you've been on duty?" I asked, trying to make myself useful.

"Well, I have and I haven't. While you folks was in the kitchen jawin' at the chink, the lady in the parlor poked her head out and then pulled it in fast when the gent in the bedroom took a look."

"Did he see her?"

"Nope, she was too quick for him."

"We heard their doors close. Rorke and the doctor are pumping them now."

"You know, brother, that woman has a pretty mean face. Who is she?"

"Lois Vining, the movie actress."

"Oh, the star of 'Passionate Roses'! I never did like her or any vamps like her. Had a gal once who was her spittin' image and jest about as cussed."

I left the man, who strolled back to his post, and made my way across the sands toward the squatting form of Bowlegs Bolan, gardener extraordinary. The sun was on its way to China and well behind the rim of western hills. A cold, gray light was settling over the desert, giving a suggestion of coolness in the airless void.

"How are the posies, Bowlegs?" I asked when almost on top of the cowhand. He started and sprang to his feet, his eyes strangely narrowed. "Do they grow better at night?" I laughed.

"Gee, you scared me!" he said, a slow grin settling on his lips. "Very, very jumpy I am ever since a Mex tried to jack me one night when I was carryin' a pay roll. He came up behind me like that."

A glance to earth surprised me. There were no signs of flowers or planting. Bowlegs had been simulating work, but there were no indications that he had so much as broken the desert floor. I decided not to mention this to him—but to save it for the sheriff and doctor.

"Tell me, Bowlegs, just what did you see going on around here this afternoon? Rorke wants me to make a report for him."

Bowlegs took a toothpick from his vest pocket and allowed it to wander from jaw to jaw while he meditated.

"Lemme see now! First came that whippersnapper named Lucas, all gotten up like a Christmas tree. Ching showed him to the garage and then ushered him into the house. Next came the gizzard carver from Hollywood named Stone. Ching took him into the house and parked the car for him. In fact, that's what he did with the others, showin' 'em in and parkin' their cars for 'em. The guy with the bloodhound jowls called Osterman was next to show up and then the dame from the movies, Miss Vinin'; she was the last. All was quiet and still. Once I saw Stone standin' in the front door lookin' out when I passed the patio——"

"You saw Stone in the front door? He swore he never left his room. When was that, Bowlegs?"

"Oh, jest before you and Jim Rorke come up."

I made mental note of this valuable point. We now had plenty of circumstantial evidence with which to confront the self-confident surgeon whose very manner belied the truth of his statements.

"And what do you know about Ching Lu?" I asked.

"Not much. He's the boss' pet; sort of takes the place of a dog or a monkey, you know. They're great pals and jabber a lot when they're alone. I don't

know how the boss stood his talk but they used to chatter on pictures, and books, and art, and everythin'. They'd lock themselves in the library to do it and all we'd ever hear was a mumble.

"Then the next thing you'd know, Eben would have Ching by the pigtail whalin' hell outer him or kickin' him like he was a football. And the chink never peeped, but gave Eben dirty looks as though to say, 'I'll git my lick in yet.' All the trouble would start over Ching spillin' somethin' on the tablecloth or disagreein' in an argyment. Once Cass roared: 'You may be from Oxford but you're mighty thick-headed!' Where's Oxford? Up in China or Montana?"

"When did Cass give Ching his last beating?"

"Oh, a coupla days ago—the day, I think, when Ching found out he was to get into Cass' will and testament."

"What!" I cried. "Did Ching know about the will?"

"Sure. He was cleanin' the boss' desk that day when he saw it and read it all through. Me and Leary is in it, too. Gosh, you shoulda seen the wallopin' the chink got! I had to drown him with water to wake him up. But to-day they made up—hadn't spoken since that day either—and we seen 'em walkin' around the place arm in arm like two old love birds!"

"So they made up to-day, eh?" That point struck me as highly significant. Did Ching believe that the will had been signed? I thanked Bowlegs for his help and went directly back to the house. The man at the door stopped me and borrowed another cigarette and light and then I entered the house.

Loud voices were coming from Lucas' bedroom. The society man was evidently in high dudgeon. The door was pulled open and Doc Wethers, red and moist, stalked out, followed by the dapper Lucas.

"My dear doctor, your questions are simply outrageous!" the latter hissed. "You've no right to interrogate me. You have no authority. Nor can the sheriff hold me this way. I shall communicate with my friend the governor immediately upon my return to Los Angeles."

"Oh, hush up!" the doctor said with annoyance.

"How dare you insult me by telling me to hush? I've been civil to you, Doctor Wethers. I've told you that I never left my room, that I never heard any screams and that I heard no footsteps in the hall at any time. I refuse to be suspected this way."

The man's rancor was childlike and amusing. He was proud of his wrath and oblivious of the pleasant smile with which Doc Wethers was regarding his tantrum.

"You asked me about a knife—a jade blade. I know of only one, Doctor Wethers. It came from China where I've seen many and it hung on the library wall. Those knives are used for honorable murders——"

"'For honorable murders,'" Doc Wethers quoted him, imitating his tone, his eyes lowered and thoughtful.

"Why, yes. It's an old Chinese custom, I'm told. The small knives are usually made of jade and on the under side of the hilt are Chinese characteristics stating that the weapon may be used for honorable purposes. Doctor! Was that the knife that killed——"

Doc Wethers cut him short with a nod.

At this juncture, Rorke came out of the parlor, smiling.

"Well, doc," he said, "I've got a little piece of news. Lois——"

"Lois!" Lucas gasped. "Is Lois in there?" A shaking finger pointed to the parlor door.

"Sure. Didn't you know it, Lucas? You've been listenin' a lot to what's goin' on here."

The body of Stanley Lucas grew taut

and rigid. For a moment I thought he would topple over backward; his face was ashen and his lips, a hair line, quivered ever so slightly. Then life seemed to return to that solid shell, and as Lucas squared his shoulders that seemed weighted to drooping, he turned and walked back to the bedroom. At the door he called over his shoulder:

"Mr. Sheriff, will you please step in here?"

We went into the room almost breathlessly, so commanding was the man's personality in those few seconds. He closed the door after us, forced his tightly pressed eyelids open and faced us.

"I am guilty, gentlemen," he said in a scarcely audible voice. "I confess. I killed Cass."

"What!" Rorke and the doctor cried in one voice.

"I killed Eben Cass with that jade blade. It was a matter of honor. I have nothing more to say at present, gentlemen."

CHAPTER XI.

CUL-DE-SAC.

(Saturday: 6 P. M.)

STANLEY LUCAS, his confession of guilt made, turned his back on us and walked slowly, weakly toward the window. The sheriff indulged in his favorite gesture of amazement, scratching the back of his head. Doc Wethers dropped down to the edge of the bed, Buddhalike in contemplation of the society man's sudden revelation. I saw it all now, the ease with which Lucas had committed the murder; but one thought troubled me: were the others in the house his accomplices? How were we to explain their strange behavior?

"Fate," the doctor murmured to me, "often helps the guilty." The remark was cryptic and I made no attempt to fathom it.

"I mean," he pursued his thought, "that I don't believe a word of what Stanley Lucas has told us."

"I swear it, gentleman! I'm a man of honor!" Lucas had wheeled about, having overheard the doctor's remarks. "I am not in the habit of telling lies, though I did try to deceive you this afternoon."

"I'll get a pen and paper, Mr. Lucas," Rorke said, "and you can dictate a formal statement to me and sign it in the presence of witnesses." He started from the room.

Doc Wethers suddenly got up, cordially smiling. He caught Rorke by the arm.

"Just a minute, Jim. I'm not satisfied with this surprise confession. It's too—too melodramatic to suit me. There's a reason behind it. I think I know what it is."

"Please don't try to make me retract the truth, doctor," Lucas said grimly. "I killed Eben Cass because he was hounding me. I am wealthy but there is a limit to what I can stand—as a man. I paid blackmail money to Cass, but I would not stand for——" His lips were suddenly compressed as though the mind had commanded immediate silence.

"Will you please tell us about your concern for Lois?" the doctor said.

"Lois? What do you mean? Please let us have an end to all of this, Mr. Sheriff. Arrest me; charge me with the murder. I'll not hinder your prosecution in any way—though I think a jury will regard my story favorably."

"No doubt about it," Rorke said sympathetically. "Eben Cass wasn't any too popular in this county and when it's known he was a blackmailer—— Well, you've got sort of an unwritten law on your side, Mr. Lucas."

"Very well then, Mr. Sheriff. Let us be getting back to Yellow Creek. Dismiss the other suspects. And please grant me one favor? Don't let any of them see me."

"But Lois——" Doc Wethers

stopped and changed the trend of his remarks, noticing that Lucas started at the mention of the name. "We'll have to confront you with the others to ascertain whether they saw you about the house at the time of the murder. We can't convict you, you know, on your own confession, Mr. Lucas."

Trembling, Lucas appealed to the sheriff.

"Must this be done?" he said in a piteous tone.

"Just whom are you shielding, Mr. Lucas?" Doc Wethers demanded. The eyes of the two men met. For an instant, I saw hatred blaze in Lucas' and then they dropped, acknowledging that the doctor was the master of the situation. The society man was checkmated and he knew it.

"Very well. I'll tell you this much: Lois is my daughter. Cass was blackmailing me by threatening to reveal to her an escapade I figured in in China some years ago. He has letters from a woman as proof. Lois regards me as something of a paragon of the virtues—all the virtues. I love her dearly and I've done everything in my power to keep her from knowing what Eben Cass had to reveal. I came here to-day to put an end to the menace, to mine and my daughter's happiness."

There was something convincing about Lucas now; the ring to his voice seemed genuine enough. Yet I was still suspicious. Was he play acting?

"You knew who was in the house at the time of the crime?" the doctor asked bluntly.

"Yes—er—I thought I did. I didn't know that Lois was here."

"Please describe how you committed the murder, Mr. Lucas?"

"Let's take him in the library," Rorke suggested.

"No, let him explain right here." Doc Wethers had an insistent note of command in his voice now. "Yes, Mr. Lucas, we are waiting."

"Well, I came in here and was put in this room by Ching Lu. When he left me to park the car, I took stock of the situation. I knew that Osterman and Doctor Stone were expected and when I heard some one in the next bedroom, I thought it one of them. It occurred to me that I could use the jade blade that hung on the wall in the library. I went to the door of that room and knocked. Cass bade me enter and, when he saw me, he seemed annoyed and went on reading a letter. I took the knife from the wall as though to inspect it and approached the table where Cass always sat. He didn't look up, never suspecting. I took out my handkerchief, covered the handle with it to destroy finger prints and then struck. Cass fell back in his chair and I quickly left the room. I've been in here ever since."

Doc Wethers winked at Rorke.

"Where did you strike Cass with the blade, Mr. Lucas?"

"I—I don't remember—I just struck at him and fled."

"You took nothing with you?" Doc Wethers lifted Lucas' thin hands and put his nose to them. The man was docile but puzzled.

"Nothing."

"Really, Mr. Lucas, you've wasted our time." Doc Wethers was growing irate. "There's not a word of truth in what you say. You don't know how Eben Cass was killed or even why. Jim, there's no trace of that odor on him. Now why have you lied to us, Mr. Lucas?"

For answer, Stanley Lucas crumpled up on the bed and dissolved into tears. I have seen few men cry and Lucas, the dapper bon vivant was a heart-rending spectacle. His frail body shook with sobs.

"Is Lois Vining your daughter?" Doc Wethers demanded.

Lucas raised his tear-stained face; his eyes shone brilliantly—almost gladly.

"No—is that who was in that——"

"I thought there was a mistake," the doctor smiled.

"Oh, thank God for that," the elderly man sighed. "I thought my daughter was in the room from which the sheriff just came. I'll tell you now—the truth and——"

"It's about time," Rorke sneered.

"Lois, my daughter, get into a scrape at college. It was over a man—an unpleasant thing but harmless, though it might have damaged her in the eyes of the world. Somehow, Cass got word of it. He has spies everywhere, gentlemen. He began to blackmail her, too, threatening to tell me and the newspapers. I never knew until I saw her here one day. Somehow, she came here without an appointment on a day that I was paying my monthly dole. Cass always made his victims bring the money to him—in cash. I wormed the truth out of her. The poor child—she's only eighteen—was frantic. She swore that she'd kill Cass—now that I knew. When I thought she was in that room I believed that she had made good her threat."

Doc Wethers went to the door and, with a wave of the head, beckoned to us to follow.

"If your dramatic little scene has lost the murderer for us, Mr. Lucas, we shall make it unpleasant for you," the doctor growled. "Come on, boys."

We left the bedroom, closing the door tightly. I took advantage of the moment's silence to tell them what I had gleaned from Bowlegs Bolan. Doc Wethers was surprised to hear about Ching Lu's beating, his knowledge of the will and the reconciliation. He was likewise surprised at the cowhand's pretense of planting flowers. I could see his alert mind revealed by his pale-blue eyes, making mental notes of these points.

"Now, Jim," he said, "what did you get out of the Vining woman?"

"Jest this, doc. She and Stone are or were sweethearts."

"She admitted it?"

"Sure. That's why he came into her room. He told her to hold out on Cass and not to pay any more blackmail money. In fact, she said, he told her to hotfoot it for her car and beat it."

"Meaning, I suppose, that he knew what was in the wind; that Cass wasn't long for this earth and wouldn't have any further need for her cash? Did you give her the hand test, Jim?"

"Smell 'em? I sure did. They were all perfume like all ladies use. I couldn't sniff that funny odor we're after."

"H'm? Well, I think I'll have one more go at our friend, the chink. Drake's dope from Bowlegs is mighty interesting, Jim. Let's have Ching Lu tell us more about it. He might have believed the will was signed and then settled his score with his abuser."

"You're dead set on him, doc!"

"I have a hunch that he knows something—something that would give us the key to this mess. I'm not saying that he's the murderer—but I might go so far as to say that he knows who is, or has a pretty good idea."

Rorke swung over to the bedroom door. As he pushed it open, a startled scream came from the room. We all piled in.

Stone was standing in the middle of the room, facing us, his fists clenched and his eyes afire. How had he eluded Leary and arrived in that bedroom?

"You bungling fools," he sneered. "Now what do you suspect?"

"What are you doin' in here?" Rorke barked. "How in hell did you get out of the dinin' room?"

"I squirmed through the keyhole and I'm here to take a nap!" the surgeon laughed. "Try and find out now!"

"You didn't scream when we came in," Doc Wethers said. "Who else is in here?"

Rorke brusquely pushed his way past

Stone and went to the other side of the bed; Lois Vining rose, her face as white as the sheets.

"Interesting!" Doc Wethers grinned. "Now tell us about it. Drake, go to the dining room and find out how Doctor Stone got away from Leary. Make sure Osterman is still in there."

I ran across the hall and banged the door open. Leary and the St. Bernard of a banker were chatting by a window.

"How did Stone get away?" I cried breathlessly.

"Huh?" the cowhand grunted. "Oh, Stone? He went to the bathroom. I knew it was all right because there's a man on the front door."

Back I ran to the bedroom and reported to Rorke. From the look that came into his face, I thought he was going to have an apopletic stroke. What he said about Leary's mentality isn't printable.

"Ye gods!" he bellowed. "Here we're tryin' to run down a murderer and that sage buzzard let's a man under arrest stroll about the house! Well, Stone, what are you doin' here—and you, Miss Vinin'?"

"Leary told the truth," Stone smiled. "I came over to wash my hands and face—to put a little cool water on myself. It's beastly hot in that dining room, you know."

"And you, Miss Vinin'?"

"I have nothing to say!" The woman was insolently defiant. "I'll not talk to a hick sheriff any more. You're positively insulting. You no more know what you're doing than do those cactus plants out there!"

"I don't, eh? Well, we'll——"

"Tut, tut, Jim. Let them alone. What's that on your finger, Doctor Stone? Blood?"

The surgeon looked down at his hand where a trickle of red stained the fingers of his right hand.

"I must have scratched it as I jumped away from the door," he smiled apologetically. I almost thought he'd light a Murad and be nonchalant.

"All right. Please get back to your rooms." Doc Wethers was commanding once more. Rorke went to the door and saw the surgeon return to the dining room without so much as a word or look for Lois Vining, who proudly walked into the parlor and slammed the door.

"Now get Ching Lu out, Jim. I think they were trying to get to him—to make a deal, perhaps. We'll get him and pump him first."

"Hello!" Rorke sang out. "What's this?" He held the key to the bathroom in his hand and there was another key in the lock.

He turned the key and threw open the door. A cry of astonishment flew from his lips as we crowded into the room. Huddled in the bathtub, already soiled with blood, was the chink. The jade blade protruded from his heart.

Doc Wethers quickly stuck his hand inside the Chinaman's blouse and then withdrew it.

"He's dead, Jim. It got him right over the fifth rib."

CHAPTER XII.

THE PRIVATE DETECTIVE.

(Saturday: 6.20 P. M.)

"HOW long's he dead?" Rorke asked in an awed tone, staring down at the silent figure over which the doctor was stooping.

"Can't say, Jim. Only a few minutes. The body is still quite warm."

"They got him while we were in Lucas' room!"

"They? Who?"

"Stone and the Vinin' woman. Didn't you see the blood on his hand? He passed it off as a scratch. Doc, we have that surgeon comin' and goin'. He's lied on every point—not hearin' the chink scream, walkin' in the hall just before the scream, bein' with the Vinin' woman and seen by Leary at the back

window, bein' seen by Bowlegs at the front door, now bein' found in here just before we turn up a second killin'. And there's his threatenin' letter to Cass! Doc, we've got the real murderer. He's left-handed and his hand smells of the stuff, too. I'm goin' to cart Stone and the Vinin' woman off to the jail."

"But why should he kill Ching Lu?"

"The chink had somethin' on him."

"But how did Stone know it?"

Doc Wethers made a funny little sound; I couldn't fathom whether it was impatience or annoyance. His hand sought the knob to the door giving on to Lucas' bedroom; the knob turned and the panel swung open. Lucas stood so close to the door it almost hit him.

"This ought to interest you, Jim. This door's unlocked. I saw you turn the key in it when we locked Ching up and put it in your pocket."

By way of reply, Rorke fished the key from his pocket.

"Gosh!" he grunted. "This house must be full of keys."

"Another murder on your doorsill, Mr. Lucas," Doc Wethers smiled coldly. "Ching Lu is dead—in this bathroom. What do you know about it?"

Lucas staggered backward, his hands fluttering helplessly before him. His eyes were on the verge of bursting from his head. I couldn't quite make out whether we had surprised him or our bloody discovery of the Chinaman had unnerved him.

"As God is my judge, gentlemen—I know nothing—nothing!"

"This door to your room was locked. Now it's unlocked." Rorke stamped into the room and thrust his jaw close to the society man's. "Where's the key, Lucas?"

"Tut, tut, Jim. He didn't open this door," Doc Wethers said with conviction. "If he had he'd have locked it again from his side. The murderer unlocked the door from the bathroom to cloud our trail a little more and to divert suspicion to a man who is lily pure so far as this crime is concerned."

There was logic in the doctor's words, but somehow I did not feel that I could subscribe to it. Something was radically wrong with Stanley Lucas' behavior.

We filed through the Lucas bedroom toward the hall. The sheriff took the dapper fellow's arm and led him across the hall to the dining room.

"I think you'll be safer where we can keep our eye on you, Lucas," Rorke said. "Get in there and stay there. Now, Leary——"

"Yes, sir?"

"How long was Stone out of this dinin' room on pretext of goin' to the bathroom?"

"About—about two minutes, sheriff—two minutes before Drake came in and asked me. Maybe it was three minutes, but no longer." Leary was emphatic in his estimation of time.

"Time enough to go to the library, get the knife and then fix up old Ching Lu so he wouldn't have anythin' to say," Rorke commented.

"H'm!" Doc Wethers was not impressed. "Why, Jim, should he go to the library when we might have popped out of Lucas' room any minute? How did he know just where we were? And why should he kill the chink?"

"Say," Leary interposed, "we heard everythin' you guys were sayin' in the kitchen."

"Through that serving door?" Doc Wethers observed.

The cowhand nodded.

"Maybe somethin' the chink knew about the gloves scared Stone and——" Leary was bursting with theories and ideas.

"Maybe," the doctor nodded. "H'm, maybe Stone is worried about those gloves." His eyes sought the surgeon's; the latter met his unflinchingly, defiantly.

With sudden agility, Doc Wethers

darted out of the room. Rorke and I pursued him into the parlor where Lois Vining, in her best movie manner, rose from a chair to greet us with all the insolence at her command.

"Let me smell your hands, Miss Vining," Doc Wethers said point-blank.

The woman began to laugh.

"How amusing of you!" she gurgled. "Why, the sheriff has just been smelling them, too. Do you want the name of the scent for your best girl, doctor?"

Abruptly, Doc Wethers walked over to her and, taking up her two hands in his, sniffed at them.

"You've recently put perfume on your left hand, Miss Vining," he said sharply. "Is it a new fad for women to perfume the palms of their hands? Some of the older scent lingers, too."

"What on earth are you driving at?" she demanded.

"Jim, Miss Vining still has a trace of that odor we seek; it's on her left hand, too. She's drenched her hand in a different perfume to kill the pungent odor. I decided to check up on your own investigation of this point because I know your sense of smell isn't too good, Jim."

"Well, does that make me an Elk?" Miss Vining sneered. "What's all this about?"

"Why did you leave this room against our orders and go into that bedroom?" the doctor asked.

"I've refused to——"

"They've hung women for murder in this State, Miss——"

Lois Vining receded from us. Her hand went to her mouth to stifle a scream. Her lips silently formed the word: "Murder!"

"I—I saw Doctor Stone go in there. I wanted to talk to him," she whispered, shaken and nervous.

"About what?"

"I wanted to find out just what has happened here. It's been nerve-racking, sitting here alone, listening to you men moving about in the outer hall, knowing that Eben Cass is dead—murdered—in the next room."

"You opened the library door, didn't you, Miss Vining?"

The woman stared at him with unbelieving eyes and then nodded. I saw that Doc Wethers was taken aback by this reply. Had his query been a stab in the dark?

"Before the murder was discovered?" he ventured.

Again the woman nodded.

"And what happened? What did you see?"

"Mr. Cass. He was sitting at his table reading a paper. He looked up at me and said, 'Please wait till I send for you.' I went back to my room."

"Well, that's the admission I've been waitin' for," Rorke grunted. "We've stopped believin' fairy tales, Miss Vinin'."

"It's the truth!"

"Maybe," Doc Wethers smiled.

"How long before the Chinaman's scream did you see him?"

"About ten minutes before."

The doctor bowed to the movie actress and walked out of the room. Rorke followed and I closed the door after us. The sheriff tried to speak to the doctor, but the latter went into the dining room.

"Doctor Stone," Wethers said, "I believe you told me you cut your finger somehow when we surprised you in the bedroom."

"Yes."

"Let me see the wound or scratch."

The surgeon extended his right hand. There was a red scratch that had evidently been bleeding on the index finger.

"Oh, that," Leary spoke up. "He got that on his chair in this room."

Stone glared fiercely at the cowhand.

"Now, doc," Rorke said, "let's call it a day. I want the woman and this fellow Stone. We'll hold Osterman as a material witness because the missin' folders were found in his room. And

we'll hold Lucas on account of his muddled story."

"Suit yourself, Jim," Doc Wethers said. I could see that the white-haired medico was disappointed. He had had elaborate theories and while working them out to himself, without telling the sheriff, he had failed to reach any conclusions that proved his points. He strolled into the hall and began pacing slowly from the front door to the library door, his head bowed in serious thought.

Rorke was in the dining room barking out orders to Leary, Stone and Osterman. He was perturbed because he hadn't enough handcuffs to shackle all of his prisoners. But he contented himself with reiterating the order to shoot to kill if one of the prisoners tried to make a break for freedom. He was happy; he had the mystery solved.

Nearing the library door, I saw Doc Wethers pause. His nostrils were twitching like a rabbit's. He stared hard at the door and then knelt down and put his nose to the doorknob. A moment later he sprang to his feet and dashed into the kitchen. I followed.

The doctor proceeded to open all the cupboard doors and peer within. Dishes, food supplies, pots and pans were revealed to our gaze. Then the odor that we sought assailed my nose; it must have struck the doctor's at the same time. Our eyes met and then simultaneously fell to a dark corner behind the stove. There rested a small tin can covered with a dirty chamois cloth. The doctor pounced upon it and held up the can—a half empty can of Miracle Brass Polish. We held it to our noses; it was the very odor, pungent and eternal, that had clung to the jade blade and to the hands of the suspects.

"I think," said the doctor, "that I've made a more important discovery than you'll realize at the moment!"

Before I could ask the meaning of this, the telephone bell in the library rang. Doc Wethers replaced the Miracle Brass Polish in its corner behind the stove and went into the hall. Rorke was just entering the library and we filed in after him. The sheriff took up the receiver.

"Hello," he said. "Yes, this is White Crescent. Who, Cass? You want to speak to Cass. Who are you? . . . Peter Jenkins of Barstow . . . a private detective. . . . Well, Mr. Cass is dead. . . . Yes, he was murdered about three o'clock. . . . Yes, knifed. . . . This is Sheriff Rorke talkin'. . . . What was your business with him? . . . You won't tell. . . ." Rorke put his hand over the mouthpiece and said: "Doc, you take this fellow on. He may know somethin'."

Doc Wethers stepped forward and took up the telephone.

"Hello, Mr. Jenkins," he said. "This is Doc Wethers of Yellow Creek talking. . . . We'd like you to help us out in this case. . . . Tell us anything you can. . . . What happened? . . . Well, Sheriff Rorke came out here in response to a call for help from Cass. . . . Cass telephoned his office at about two thirty or later. . . . The body was found at three or thereabouts. . . . What's that. . . . Yes. . . . Yes. . . . Is that so? . . . Thank you. . . . Yes. . . . We'll communicate with you if anything further develops. . . . Yes, we'll be glad to call on you. . . . Good-by."

"Well," Rorke said, "what's on his mind?"

"He said he was talking to Cass at about ten minutes to three and the old fellow never mentioned any fright or threat on his life. He said he did investigating for the old devil and thought it strange Cass hadn't mentioned his fears to him."

"That's a funny slant!"

"Yes, Jim. I'm convinced that there's a diabolical mind behind all this."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE BLADE AGAIN.

(Saturday: 7 P. M.)

RORKE brought the jade blade back to the library. The doctor and I had carried the old lawyer's body into the bedroom Osterman had occupied and covered it with a sheet. We accorded the Chinaman's body the same respect, laying it on the bed in the other bedroom. Then, with the gloves beside the knife, lying mutely in a circle of light from the table lamp, Doc Wethers made a brief summation of salient points, all the while staring at the two clews almost expecting them to speak, to reveal the identity of the slayer.

"It's odd, Jim," he said, "that three of the suspects—Miss Vining, Osterman and Stone had that odor on their hands. I'm inclined to believe that they came into this room at some time or other and either saw Cass dead or alive. Lucas was untainted by the scent. Is the murderer among those four?"

"Stone's the boy!" Rorke snapped. "The others are in cahoots!"

"I'm not so sure, Jim. Things look pretty bad for Stone. He's lied at every bend in the road. Evidence points to him in the deaths of the lawyer and the chink. But the man is too much of a blundering, lying fool to be a murderer. That's my hunch. Now Osterman dissembles with his whimpering and desire to tell the truth. I don't like that. Lucas gave us a ride with his fake confession. It might have been a very clever ruse to throw us off the track, a ruse calculated to let us prove him a liar on his own confession. I don't swallow his story either. And the Vining woman—you never can tell when a woman is lying or what's on her mind. Lois Vining is fearful for some reason. She either knows the murderer or has a pretty good idea and is afraid to speak up."

"She knows it's Stone," Rorke blurted out. "She won't squeal on him. They've been sweethearts."

"Maybe so. That odor, Jim, is Miracle Brass Polish. Drake and I discovered the can in the kitchen behind the stove."

"Why didn't you tell me before?" The sheriff was angry. "You can't hold out evidence like that, doc!"

"I didn't mean to. It just occurred to me now to tell you. I've been awfully absent-minded trying to unravel this little mystery. So many thoughts crowd into the mind, facts are often dislodged. But I think the old bean is working again. Now call in your men and we'll be moving back to Yellow Creek. But first I want to make one last inspection—the outfit's shack."

"Huh? The place where Bowlegs and Leary sleep?"

"And where Ching Lu slept."

"Go to it. Take Drake along for protection or for a witness. I'll get things ready here."

The sky was filled with night when the doctor and I trudged over the desert sands to the outfit's shack next the automobile shed. It would be dark in a few minutes. Behind us the ranch house was ablaze with lights. I could hear Rorke bellowing from the patio to his deputies to join him there, and dim figures started walking toward the huddled building.

We reached the shack and entered. It was equipped with electric lights which we turned on. I stood to one side to let Doc Wethers go about his business. There were two bunks in use at our end of the shack. One was cluttered with magazines of mystery and detectives and crime. The name "Bolan" was scribbled on the covers. But Doc Wethers, paying no heed to anything in the place, went directly to the telephone.

"This is what I want," he grinned. "It's an extension from the house phone. I could have done what I want from

the library, but I'm convinced that the walls have ears. It's a spooky house for all its grandeur, Drake."

The doctor first called the operator at Yellow Creek. His conversation was rather meaningless to my ears.

"Hello, Mabel," he said. "Yes, it's me. . . . I'm helping Jim Rorke on a job at White Crescent. . . . Yes, I'll come around and look at your neck. . . . A boil? . . . They're not serious. . . . What time did Cass call the sheriff's office this afternoon? . . . H'm? . . . What? . . . Yes. . . . Yes. . . . Oh! . . . That's interesting. . . . Are you sure? . . . You're a bright girl, Mabel. . . . Of course I'll come around and look at your neck. . . . As soon as I'm through here. . . . Now put me through to Hank Pringle's store in Barstow. . . . Thanks."

"Find out anything, doc?" I asked eagerly.

"Lots." Then he turned to the mouthpiece again. "Hello, Hank. This is Doc Wethers on the wire. . . . Have any call for fancy kid gloves lately? . . . Within the past week or so? . . . Oh, about a size ten. . . . Something to fit an elephant. . . . You did? . . . Who was it that bought them? . . . Yes. . . . Don't know him. . . . Who? . . . Did he? . . . Are you positive? . . . In an automobile? You know him by sight, you say? . . . Did he make any other purchases? . . . What? . . . Oh, yes, I know. . . . I remember now. . . . How's things up your way, Hank? . . . Sure, I'll drop in and see the little girl. . . . Don't you worry. . . . Probably nothing but prickly heat. . . . There's lots of it this time of year. . . . All right, Hank. So long."

"What are you up to, doc? You've got something up your sleeve."

"I've had it there for some time," he grinned.

"But you didn't let on to Rorke."

"Jim's all right, but I didn't want him to bungle this on me. He's a bit sentimental about the blackmailer's murderer and I'm not. I'm a bug on duty even if it does hurt."

I took out my cigarettes for a smoke and the doctor took one, too. He puffed in silence, his eyes snapping and his head nodding while he checked over his thoughts. It was aggravating to sit before a man who held a possible solution to the two murders and who wouldn't give so much as a hint.

He picked up the phone again and asked the chatty Mabel to give him information. When he was put through he asked for the Hollywood telephone number of Lois Vining, which was given to him after a brief delay. His next move was to call long distance and ask for the Vining number. Instead of hanging up, he held the line and presently I heard him say:

"Hello, is Miss Vining in? . . . Oh, this is an old friend. . . . Yes, Miss Vining and I met in China. . . . What? . . . Oh, about a year ago. . . . What? . . . Not in thirteen years? . . . Oh, there must be some mistake, then. . . . I'm very sorry to have disturbed you. . . . Yes, similarity in names. . . . Thank you."

"Lois Vining?" I said.

"Just a little ruse to feed a hunch. I wanted to find out if she had been in China. Now I know that the actress, the banker, the surgeon and the society man, like Cass and Ching Lu, have all been in China—and at about the same time."

"Doc, is your particular pet suspect one of *the* suspects?"

"H'm, well you might say—one of my suspects."

Again the doctor took up the receiver and asked Mabel for a number in Yellow Creek.

"Hello . . . hello! . . . Is this

you, Frank? . . . Hello? . . . Hello there——"

He threw the receiver on the hook and got up, his eyes narrowed.

"I've been cut off—at the house."

"The murderer was listening in?"

"Only on the last call—I'm sure."

"He's in the library, then. We can find out from Rorke, who was in there alone when we get back."

"There's a phone in every room, Drake. I know that house like a book. And they're all connected on the same trunk. You probably didn't notice them because artistic old Eben took great care to hide them in cabinets and boxes and what not. Let's be moving back."

It was quite dark out now. We made our way cautiously and stumbling around to the front of the house. That uncanny feeling of being watched came over me. Were the murderer's eyes following us from some window in the house? The curtains were partially drawn and I couldn't see a thing.

As we entered the patio, I noticed that the front door was open but that the hall beyond was in darkness. A hubbub of many voices reached us from within. The doctor was a gray figure beside me in the heavy dusk, a dusk not quite as ominous as the inkiness of the unlighted hall.

A dull flash. Something sang in the air.

"Ouch!" Doc Wethers cried. I heard a clatter on the stones of the patio.

"Murderer's grow clumsy when cornered," the doctor muttered, lighting a match and stooping to the stones.

There at his feet lay the jade blade.

CHAPTER XIV.

DOC WETHERS ACCUSES.

(Saturday 7.30 P. M.)

THE doctor drew out his handkerchief and, dropping it over the jade blade, picked it up and slipped it into his pocket.

"The trail's getting hot, Drake," he whispered. "The killer knows I suspect him now."

"Then it isn't Miss Vining?"

"I haven't said so in so many words, have I? Hold your horses, Drake. Our death-dealing friend evidently prides himself on being adept at knife throwing—but nervousness gummed his fingers this evening. The flat of the knife just hit my chest, plumb center, too. A steadier hand would have found my heart in all likelihood."

We entered the dark hallway as Bowlegs Bolan was turning up the lights. Simultaneously, "Big Bill" Leary came out of the dining room and, opening the kitchen door, hollered:

"Come on out, boys! The parade's startin' up!"

The men from the sheriff's office, laughing, and smoking, and chewing, piled out into the hall. Rorke appeared from the parlor, hat and gloves in hand, followed by Lois Vining, ready for travel, too. Leary then turned out Stone, Osterman and Lucas from the dining room, crowding the magnificence of the Florentine hall with such a variety of apparel that it resembled a movie set.

"Well, doc," Rorke said, "turn up anything?"

"Yes, Jim. I think in all fairness to those we've accused we ought to name the murderer here and now."

"Huh? Let me in on it, doc!" Rorke's face expanded into a broad grin devoid of rancor. "Say, I'm entitled to know somethin' that's goin' on, doc. Ain't I the sheriff here?"

"Listen, Jim: we questioned five suspects this afternoon, didn't we? I didn't make a single accusation, did I?" Rorke thought for a moment and then shook his head. "You jumped at all the conclusions, Jim. Now I've got a conclusion. I'll give it to you straight. I'll make my accusation now."

"Who is it?" Rorke whispered.

"First have two of the boys carf out that little kitchen table."

Rorke gave the order and two men disappeared into the kitchen. All eyes were upon the doctor now. While waiting for the men to return with the table, Doc Wethers whispered to the sheriff:

"Lend me your gun, Jim. Slip it to me so that no one sees us." The pair turned away from us and I masked Rorke's holster from the view of the others while the revolver changed hands.

"This bird is a devil," Doc Wethers whispered. "I may have to use the iron when I spring my big scene."

Rorke nodded.

The kitchen table was brought in and set down before the doctor. The latter instructed Rorke to lay on it the gloves and the blade.

"They're still in the library," Rorke said. "I'll get 'em."

We watched the sheriff enter the room where Eben Cass met his maker. A moment later, he popped out with the gloves in his hand and his jaw drooping.

"It's gone, doc! The knife's gone!" he blurted out.

"We'll find it in a jiffy," the doctor smiled. "Lay the gloves on this table. "He took from his pocket the gun and the last will and testament of Eben Cass which he placed beside the tainted gloves. Rorke stood at his elbow, scanning every face in the room.

Stone was as insolently defiant as ever. Osterman, with his hangdog expression, stood back from the rest, cringing. Lucas, his face white, bit his lips to hold his nerve. Lois Vining sat down and, while her face was a mask of icy hauteur, she nervously toyed with her needlepoint hand bag. Bowlegs Bolan's eyes were popping as though he expected Doc Wethers to pull jack rabbits from his hat. Big Bill Leary cut a chew of tobacco and stuck it in his jaw. The other men were curiously expectant. I noted that they and the two cowhands were toting guns at their hips. The sheriff's men were obeying regulations, I reasoned, but it struck me as odd that the two cowhands should be armed at all.

"To begin," Doc Wethers said, "we have in this room the killer of Eben Cass and Ching Lu." A murmur of surprise and uneasiness was audible. "Doctor Walt Stone, a Hollywood surgeon, is accused by the sheriff, as the murderer of those two men. Lois Vining, Martin Osterman and Stanley Lucas are charged with being his accomplices or material witnesses; their exact status in the eyes of the law, I understand, is to be determined later.

"Doctor Stone was named as the killer because of certain pieces of circumstantial evidence which point to him. There were, of course, no eyewitnesses to either murder. Each of the parties named has a motive for the crime—namely, blackmail. However, while we have no sympathy for a blackmailer, our duty forbids any sympathy for a murderer no matter what the provocation may have been.

"Each one of the suspects knew Eben Cass in China a number of years ago. It was there that the errors of their ways provided the blackmailer with his bludgeons over each of them. However, Cass was not blackmailing Miss Vining because of any sin of hers, venial or mortal. He was threatening to reveal to the public a fact that would impair her standing as an artiste in the motion-picture world—a fact only known to a few—a fact which I, personally, happen to recall at this late hour."

Lois Vining was rigid in her chair, a picture of terror and wrath framed against the gorgeous Florentine carving behind her. Her fingers had snapped open the clasp of her hand bag.

"Quite some time ago," the doctor went on, "I had dinner in Barstow with

an old college chum of mine who was a missionary in China. It must have been ten or twelve years ago. He told me a story——"

"Stop!" Lois Vining's voice was hoarse and unreal. She had risen. A gun glistened in her little hand. Leary sprang at her. There was an explosion and when Leary stood back with the gun in his fist, the woman fell into the chair, sobbing convulsively.

"It hit the floor," Leary grinned. "Look at this pretty pearl-fandangled thing!"

"I'll continue my story since it has a slight bearing on my conclusions. My friend told me of a young man, stranded in China without a job. He was extraordinarily handsome. Some Chinese players came along and they offered him a job—the rôle of a mute in one of their plays. Now, as you've probably heard, in China there are few women actresses. Men play all the women's rôles. This young man was cast for such a part. His name was Louis Vincent. He earned his bread and butter as a female impersonator. Years later, when he returned to the States, he could only act women's parts by virtue of his Chinese training and sooner than starve again, he became a female impersonator in life as well as on the stage. He called himself Lois Vining."

She, or rather, he, offered no protest. His face, that cold, beautiful face, was buried in his long, slender hands.

"Lois Vining rose to stardom in the motion-picture world. Her career was serene until Eben Cass came upon her and recognized Louis Vincent. A few others knew the secret and one of them was Doctor Walt Stone who was not Lois Vining's sweetheart but Louis Vincent's physician. The story of Louis Vincent never occurred to me until I learned that Osterman, Stone and Lucas had been in China, too, and that Cass knew them there. Then as thoughts do, the Vincent story came to mind. We did not know that Lois Vining had been in China, but I telephoned her Hollywood home a little while ago. Whoever spoke to me made a rather unconscious slip. I asked, 'Is Miss Vining at home?' and the reply was: 'No, he isn't in just now, but she'll be here shortly.'

"Lois Vining or Louis Vincent came here to-day to kill Eben Cass. The first thing I noticed when we met was the small revolver she had hidden in her needlepoint bag. Women don't carry guns in this part of the country in broad daylight unless there is a need for them. Lois Vining had a need and a motive. She was at her wit's end and feared for her career.

"But Vincent didn't kill Eben Cass with that gun or with the missing jade blade," Doc Wethers said decisively.

"What!" Rorke snapped. "You start to prove that she came here to murder Cass and now you say she—I mean he didn't do it! But he was in Cass' room. We smelled the brass polish on her—his hand. He admitted it, too. He was in the bedroom just before we found the chink's body in the bathroom!"

"Suspicious circumstances, Jim, but Louis Vincent is innocent. I think he was deterred from his own crime by the discovery that there were three other men in the house. Perhaps Doctor Stone reasoned with him."

"Then who in thunder is the killer you're goin' to name?" Rorke was angry now, his face clouding for a storm.

"Bowlegs Bolan is the man," Doc Wethers said quietly.

CHAPTER XV.

THE MURDERER.

(Saturday: 7.45 P. M.)

GRAB him, boys!" the sheriff sang out. "Here, slip the bracelets on him!" Four men had pinioned the cowhand's arms to his side, and Rorke proceeded to snap the handcuffs over the startled man's wrists.

"Say!" Bowlegs spluttered. "Say, what's the big idea? The doc's gone nuts! You're all daff! I didn't——"

"Of course you didn't do it, Bowlegs," Rorke sneered. "The little knife did it. But who pushed the knife?"

"I'm taking a very roundabout course in accusing you, Bowlegs, but I'm sorry that I must do it," Doc Wethers said kindly. "Who had a better opportunity than you to stab Eben Cass? You were alone in the front of the house. You knew the lawyer's custom of tucking his visitors into the other rooms to wait. You just tiptoed across the hall, opened the door, made some excuse to Cass for being in the library and, when he paid no further attention to you, you reached for the jade blade on the wall and let him have it in the head. He was probably bending over the table reading a paper. "Then you went back to your pastime of pretending to plant flowers on the desert."

"You're bughouse!" Bowlegs roared. "I never killed Eben Cass."

There was something incongruous about the doctor's charge. I was surprised and as I reasoned it out, I realized that if the cowhand had killed Cass, certainly he couldn't have killed Ching Lu. That second murder was probably committed while I was out front talking to Bowlegs and learning about the Chinaman's knowledge of the will. He had no opportunity for that second crime. And we were supposing that the killer was responsible for the two deaths. Leary's name flashed through my mind. He had the opportunity. He was in the house. We had not checked against his having left the dining room while guarding Stone and Osterman. Was he in cahoots with Bowlegs?

"And now," Doc Wethers said, "I'll provide Bowlegs' motive for killing Cass. He knew about the unsigned will. He was a beneficiary to the tune of a thousand dollars. He wanted that money. When he saw that Ching Lu and Cass had made up after the chink's beating a few days ago, he concluded that the will had been signed. He told his story to Drake here, in such a way as to throw suspicion on the Chinaman himself."

"But how did he kill the Chinaman?" Rorke asked. "We were in the house all the time. We'd have heard him come in. He didn't get by the man in the patio who was guardin' the front door? Besides there's no smell on his hands and he's not left-handed. Say, doc, isn't there——"

The doctor waved the sheriff aside with an impatient gesture. He turned to Bowlegs again.

"I'll explain all that in due time, Jim. Now, Bowlegs, let me tell you something else I discovered. I've done a little telephoning. About a week ago you took Cass' car and drove over to Barstow and stopped into Hank Pringle's general store. It was there that you bought a pair of kid gloves—dude's gloves. The same gloves are here before me on the table. You wore them when you came into the house to hide any finger prints. You're clever, Bowlegs. Drake and I saw all the detective-story magazines in your bunk in the shack. You know how finger prints betray. But before you killed Cass, you telephoned to Lou Betz in the sheriff's office and, imitating your employer's voice, you led him to believe that Cass was reporting a threat on his life. You wanted the sheriff to hotfoot it out here and then be confronted with death and mystery. Then you went into the house and did your dirty work."

"Take him away or I'll get mad!" Bowlegs groaned. "He's crazy or I want to be!"

"We've got the goods on the murderer," Doc Wethers said pleasantly. "Mabel, the telephone operator at Yellow Creek, has identified the man who made the false telephone call in Cass' name. Hank Pringle told me over the

phone the name of the man who bought the kid gloves in Barstow—I called Hank's place on a hunch because it's just far enough away from Yellow Creek for such a secret purchase and most convenient. And I've got one more conclusive clew. The inside of the tainted glove has a strong smell of Cooney's Horse Soap. It's a soap that smells a hand for weeks and is almost as bad as Miracle Brass Polish. Bowlegs Bolan uses Cooney's Horse Soap!"

"But I ain't got a horse, you idiot!" the cowhand shouted. "We use a flivver on this ranch! There's no horses around here!"

It struck me that Doc Wethers had made a fool of himself. What he was saying sounded ridiculous. Yet he was beaming pleasantly, his head now cocked toward the sheriff.

"No you don't, doc! No you don't!" Rorke's voice was hoarse and vicious. He reached for the gun on the table. My heart pounded wildly. His action was purely instinctive and he was reaching—he grabbed the gun with his left hand.

"You're pretty smart, doc, smarter by a damn sight than I ever thought!" It was not the Rorke that I knew but a fighting, snarling human, beaten and cornered. "You turned the tables, doc, but you don't do your damned duty! You don't hang me!"

He backed himself to the wall and leveled his gun at the deputies who were armed.

"Stick your hands up, all of you!" he barked. "I'll plug the first one that reaches for his iron! You're not goin' to take me! You, too, doc, stick 'em up!"

"But Jim——"

"Don't play innocent any longer, doc. You've got me! I killed Cass and I killed the chink because I thought he knew, and I'd have turned you off sooner had I only known. But you're smart, doc! Too bad the knife missed you in the patio; it slipped in my hand! Nerves, I guess!"

"But Jim, I couldn't accuse you. I had to do things this way—by showing you my hand through faking an accusation against Bowlegs. I had to force you to admit that you were beaten. It's pretty tough, Jim, for one old friend to accuse another of being a double killer point-blank. I couldn't do it nor could I let you off."

Rorke glowered.

"Sorry but I don't share your sympathies. You tortured the life out of me these past few minutes, lettin' me know that you knew. You should have nailed me the minute you were certain."

"Now, Jim——"

"'Now, Jim'—nothin'! If you ever get me, you'll have to prove I'm the real killer."

"I can do that, Jim. The killer tried to get me by throwing the jade blade at me. His finger prints are on it, I think."

"Right you are! Now, doc, hand me that little piece of evidence, the knife." Rorke reached out to the doctor.

Doc Wethers dropped his hand into his pocket. He drew a revolver. With an oath, Rorke pulled his trigger. The hammer snapped but there was no explosion.

"Sorry, Jim," Doc Wethers smiled, "but you've got Eben Cass' empty gun in your hand. I'm holding yours. I borrowed it with a little foresight. Leary, get the handcuff key from Rorke's vest and release Bowlegs. Then snap them on the sheriff."

We watched this exchange of steel bracelets in silence. Rorke was fuming but helpless. As the gyves bound his wrists together, Rorke leaned against the wall weakly. Doc Wethers produced the jade blade from his pocket, uncovered it and held the blade to the light. There, near the tip of the blade, in blood that was both Cass' and Ching Lu's, were three finger prints. They

marked the position of a knife thrower's fingers.

"I guess these'll be yours, Jim," the doctor said, a trifle sadly. "You'd have killed me, Jim?"

"I'd have killed any one who stood in my way, friend or no friend."

"A murderous heart grows blacker and blacker every minute," Doc Wethers reflected. "And I was almost tempted to let you off, Jim—to hold the secret forever. But you sealed your own fate with the killing of Ching Lu."

"What made you suspicious first?" Doctor Stone spoke up. He was calm and curious—the surgeon in the operating theater. "It's a very interesting piece of detective work."

"My first clew," Doc Wethers grinned, "was Jim's lack of necessary smells."

CHAPTER XVI.

THE CURTAIN FALLS.

BUT first let me apologize to you, Bowlegs," Doc Wethers said. "I'm sorry to have outraged your feelings, but, as I've said, I couldn't come out point-blank and accuse Jim. I used you as a subterfuge—as sort of a framework on which to hang my evidence and let Jim know that I was aware of his guilt."

Bowlegs shyly grinned and extended his hand to the doctor, who took it in a firm clasp.

"No hard feelin's, doc," he said. "I guess you had to do it that way if you say so. But you sure made me mad for a minute. Very, very, disconcerting to be named for murder and called a liar in the bargain."

"Now we must hurry," the doctor went on. "It's getting very late and the —the ex-suspects must be on their way. You all look pretty fagged out for all your nerviness, folks.

"To begin my brief explanation, I'll try to reconstruct the crime for you: Jim had Mr. Drake drive him to Harlings on business and for luncheon. On the return trip and at about quarter to three, they stopped at Andy's gas station for water and Jim made his fake phone call to Lou Betz in Cass' name, and then he called Betz himself and received news of the threat on Cass' life and undertook the investigation himself. In Mr. Drake, who was with him practically every minute, he had a watertight alibi.

"Jim didn't take Betz to the ranch house with him but had him ride out to the range road and report the fake Cass conversation in Mr. Drake's presence. You can call Lou Betz on the phone and say it's President Hoover and he'll believe you—otherwise, Lou is a fine fellow.

"Jim's next step was to gain entrance to the library unseen. He knew that four people were waiting in this house. He'd been listening in at the central office on pretense of studying the local telephone system as against being bored at the movies. Mabel, who identified his as the voice that phoned Lou Betz twice from Andy's gas station, told me about this listening business. Jim picked this particular day to kill Cass because the full house afforded him the maximum opportunity to create mystery and suspicion.

"Let me say right here that while Jim accused each one of you four suspects, he never meant to have you convicted. He was much too sympathetic about the murderer for his own good. He was willing to throw you all into the mess of a murder trial, confident that whoever was accused would be acquitted by a local jury. But that was mean of Jim since it meant revealing the blackmail you've been trying to hide.

"Well, Jim left Ching Lu to show Mr. Drake where to park his car and walked into the house and directly up to the library door, which he thrust open. I believe his were the footsteps that Mr. Osterman heard when eavesdropping at the bedroom door. Somewhere, prob-

ably in the patio, while walking slowly, Jim changed from his riding gloves to the kid gloves we found. When he grasped the doorknob to the library, his left hand glove contacted with a heap of brass polish. Evidently Ching Lu had been interrupted in the task of polishing that particular knob.

"Then Jim entered the library. Cass was surprised to see him, but he made some excuse that put the lawyer at his ease. If you know Cass you'll recall he was the sort of chap that would dismiss you with a grunt and pay no more attention to you. That bit of bad manners cost him his life probably. He turned to reading a note on his table and failed to see Jim pull the jade blade from the wall. I don't know why Jim took that knife; he might have taken one of the Malay kris or a tomahawk or a Congo club. Anyway, he walked up to the side of the desk and before Cass looked up, the blade in Jim's left hand shot into Cass' skull, killing him instantly.

"Jim then went to the files and took out the L, O, S, and V folders. I think he secreted the O folder on his person —that would have been easy; and the rest he hid, if I'm not mistaken in my guess, under the cushion of that Florentine chair you're sitting in, Mr. Vincent. Now, why did Rorke take that O folder, and why was that the only one completely destroyed? I think Doctor Stone's natural mistake revealed that. If you'll remember, Doctor Stone, you were taken to task rather sharply by Jim when you called him 'O'Rourke' instead of 'Rorke.' I was impressed by Jim's concern over having you get his name straight.

"Well, after the folders were safely tucked out of sight, Jim stepped into the kitchen, removed the teakettle from the lid, lifted the lid and tossed the kid gloves into the flames. But he tossed the telltale glove too far back and it wasn't harmed. He probably went to the trouble to get the extra gloves, being an extra-precautious fellow and knowing something about finger prints, too.

"Then Jim replaced the lid, left the kitchen and met Mr. Drake and Ching Lu on the front steps. News of his employer's murder sent the Chinaman into a faint; probably poor Ching was surprised out of his wits, believing that he had fallen heir to a great fortune. Sudden wealth does shock lots of folks that way; it would me, I know.

"I might add here that probably while waiting for Mr. Drake and Ching Lu to return and after he had been to the kitchen, Jim put through the phone calls to me and to Lou Betz, reporting the murder. Jim, your voice sounded mighty odd to me then, but I guessed at the time that the discovery had unnerved you.

"Our greatest obstacle in arriving anywhere this afternoon was caused by the ex-suspects. I believe that Doctor Stone, growing restless with impatience, looked in on the other rooms and saw Mr. Vincent and Mr. Osterman. I dare say, like Mr. Vincent, he even poked his head in the library door and was told by Cass to continue cooling his heels; that's how he got the brass polish odor on his left hand. And Mr. Osterman probably had done the same thing a little earlier, his hand becoming scented, too. I believe that Mr. Vincent told the truth when he described his few words with Cass. If Mr. Lucas ever left his bedroom, he never opened the library door."

The men, as they were referred to by Doc Wethers, nodded in confirmation of his deductions. The doctor went on:

"I'm also inclined to believe that you all were listening at your doors when Jim told Mr. Drake and Ching about the murder. Thereafter, you built up flimsy alibis on 'Mum's the word' and denied leaving your rooms or hearing a thing,

screams or any other sounds. Three of you had been out of your rooms, a murder had been committed and you didn't want to be implicated in any way, considering your relationships with Cass, the blackmailer. If people would only be open and aboveboard, there'd be fewer unhappy arrests going on in this world.

"Jim's first dangerous move, even before I really suspected him, was to search Mr. Osterman's room while Mr. Osterman was in the library with Drake and me. That gave him time to plant in the bed the folders hidden under the cushion and to completely destroy the O folder. Then he let us discover the folders. It diverted suspicion to Mr. Osterman.

"Well, I wasn't aware that Jim was the murderer until we discovered the tainted gloves in the stove. We found the left-hand glove intact and when I smelled brass polish on the outside and Cooney's Horse Soap on the inside, I thought my heart would stop beating. A little while before, I had smelled Jim's and Mr. Drake's gloves. Jim's riding gloves smelled horsy on the outside and of Cooney's Horse Soap on the inside.

"Jim, by the way, is the only man around here who uses that expensive brand of soap because of his love for Marybelle. Then, a few moments later, I discovered the source of the smell for the first time—brass polish on the library doorknob. Everybody who had touched that doorknob had the brass smell on his hands. And Jim, who had used the library door hadn't the smell on either his hands or his riding gloves. That discovery clinched my suspicions. That's what I meant by lack of necessary smell.

"We found during our investigation that Mr. Vincent, Mr. Osterman and Doctor Stone had the brass-polish smell on their hands. Mr. Lucas was free of it, and when I had one good look at him I was willing to take oath and bet my brown mare that he'd never kill a man, no matter what the provocation was.

"Of course, you ex-suspects played right into Jim's hands and befuddled the mystery by denying that you had heard Ching Lu's scream and that you had been out of your rooms. You all behaved abominably—but quite humanly, I'm afraid. Terror, fear of scandal, had you in the grip, leading you straight to merciless notoriety.

"I don't know what prompted Ching Lu to behave the way he did, but I reckon it was his impulsive suspicion of Jim. Fear made him play possum at first, then he noticed the teakettle. Maybe he, too, smelled the Cooney's Horse Soap in the charred glove he retrieved from the stove. Anyway he frightened Jim and was put out of the way. Instead of putting him under Leary's eye with the other suspects, he was isolated in the bathroom. I never dreamed what Jim had in mind or I'd have prevented that move.

"Jim's next step was to divide the investigators, namely himself, myself and Mr. Drake. He suggested that I quiz Mr. Lucas while Mr. Drake requestioned Bowlegs. He elected to examine Mr. Vincent, who was then Miss Vining. Mr. Drake and I went about our business immediately; and if I'm not mistaken, before Jim went into the parlor he went to the library, got the knife, went to the bathroom and polished off the Chinaman. He used the knife to heighten the mystery, unlocked the door to Mr. Lucas' room to throw suspicion in that direction and further mystified us by leaving another key in the other bathroom door. But that mystery was wasted on me when we found Ching's body. I was sure of the murderer then because I had my eye on Mr. Lucas, Leary was watching Mr. Osterman and Doctor Stone and Miss Vining would have bumped into Jim in the hall if she had been the guilty party.

"To make more certain of my facts,

I went to the outfit's shack supposedly to look around but in reality to telephone. Mr. Drake listened to some pretty cryptic remarks. But I learned about the origin of the telephone calls from Mabel and from Hank Pringle in Barstow I identified the purchaser of the kid gloves.

"Another point which convinced me further was the call from a private detective, Peter Jenkins. He said he had been talking with Cass a few minutes before he was murdered and some time after Cass' supposed appeal for help. Cass never mentioned any threats on his life to Jenkins. That, to my mind, was very unnatural.

"The fact that Jim is really left-handed—a fact I was never aware of before—was attested by the way he grabbed at the empty gun a few minutes ago. That gun was more convenient to his right hand but instinct betrayed him.

"Now I must apologize, too, to Mr. Vincent. I had to betray his secret to mislead Jim into giving me the real opportunity to force his hand. He had, only a few minutes before, attempted my life by throwing the blade at me from the darkness of the hall while Mr. Drake and I were crossing the patio. He scented trouble in my direction, having probably taken up the telephone while I was in the midst of calling Lou Betz. Afraid that I was asking for outside aid, he cut me off and then tried to knife me. The library was probably dark, so, after throwing the knife from the hall, he stepped into that room, closed the door and turned up the lights again. In that way, my assailant vanished from the hall which we entered a second or two later."

"But about Vincent?" Doctor Stone interrupted. "How did you know Miss Vining was a man?"

"I didn't know it. I was tipped off. Do you remember your 'Huckleberry Finn'? In that book, Huck masquerades as a girl but is found out by a woman who drops a ball of yarn into his lap. Instead of letting the ball fall into his shirt as a girl would have done, Huck caught it with his knees, an instinctive male reaction. I let Vincent's hand bag drop into his lap the first time I met him and noticed that he caught it with his knees instead of in his skirt. That's a point for you female impersonators," Doc Wethers smiled. "Now, Jim, how wrong am I?"

Rorke strolled over to the table, his manacled hands in front of him. His eyes, small and tired, stared at the doctor, who dropped his from his old friend's face.

"You're a mind reader, doc. You haven't missed a trick. My name is O'Rourke. Like the others, Cass got his hooks into me when I was in China —a fact nobody around here knows. I killed a man there in a fight and tried to live it down. Cass made me pay. I didn't mind the blackmail until my daughter—she's goin' to school back East—wrote to me and said she'd received a funny sort of letter from a man named Cass inquirin' as to whom I was. I went to Cass and he said he was jest teasin' me before raisin' my dues to him.

"The fact that he had dared to look up my kid sort of drove me off my head. I didn't reason. I jest decided to get him before he could ever write to the girl again. And I did get him. I'm sorry about Ching Lu, but that had to be—from my point of view."

Doc Wethers cleared his throat and spoke unevenly.

"It's too bad about the Chinaman," he said. "No jury would have convicted you for killing Cass. But the Chinaman, I'm afraid, means prison. The circumstances ought to save you from the rope."

"I don't mean to swing, doc," Rorke said evenly, gazing steadily at Wethers, "nor will I do time."

My eyes were upon the table.

Rorke's hands were close to the blade, drawing closer every minute. His fingers touched it. I clutched the doctor's arm and was about to say something to attract his attention when he swung around and pushed me away from him.

"Don't crowd me," he said gruffly. There was a tear in his eye.

A cry went up from the onlookers. When I recovered my balance, I saw Rorke sinking to the floor. His two hands were clasped to his breast. The jade blade was no longer on the table.

"It was best that way," Doc Wethers murmured.

A moment later he was on his knees beside his friend. He drew the red knife from the lifeless hands.

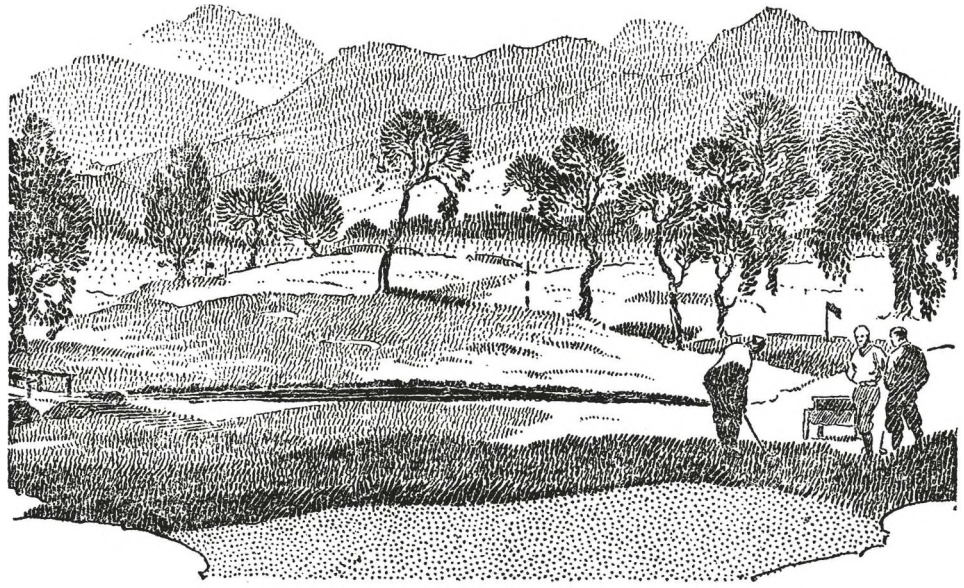
"For honorable murder," Lucas whispered.

"He's dead," Doc Wethers said calmly, looking up at us. "I think this is the end of bloodshed at White Crescent. But there is one favor I must ask of all you gentlemen: please treat as sacred confidences what you've heard and seen here this afternoon. The living have their own lives to lead. This man confessed the murders and took his own life. That is all the world need ever know."

And the world was never a whit the wiser. We all kept the secrets unfolded at White Crescent—even this loquacious writer who has really given you names and places that don't exist.

WILLIAM HEMMINGWAY *says:*

"*The* PLAYBOY WORKS BEST"



Take Your Exercise for Fun—and It Will Do You Twice As Much Good.

NOWADAYS, when almost every man who amounts to anything is taking his regular exercise every day, most of us have fallen into the hands of solemn "scientific experts," and we've forgotten how to play. We do tiresome stunts, which leave us jaded, when we ought to play, which would make us happy and efficient. If we turn our exercise into play, ready to tackle anything that comes along and have all the fun possible, we will benefit twice as much as if we go on mechanically in a stifling, cut-and-dried program—so many ups, so many downs, so many twists right and left. A friendly Austrian riding master reminded me of this truth the other day as I was cantering with him in the park, preparing for a hard-riding Western trip.

"Ah, Meester Hemmingway," he exclaimed, "you do not need riding master! Oh, yes, I am glad to ride with you; but do not waste your *monnaie!* Gentlemen who ride the horse for the doctor, for the liver, for the stomach; oh, yes, they need riding master. But you—you go out to have fun. You have fun with the horse; the horse, he have fun with you. You need no riding master!"

Probably the exercise efficiency sharps, the solemn birds with card-index minds who promote this and that system of mysterious movements with high-priced apparatus, will denounce

this idea as heresy; but in the course of many years' experience I have found that fun-making exercise is the best: any kind of play that makes a fellow hop, skip and jump and forget all about his business and his worries in a play that starts the pores streaming and isn't kept up too long—that's the stuff that pays best in the long run. I've seen it proved by all sorts and conditions of athletes, from the bootblacks who swim in the city hall fountain and dodge the cops, to the shining football stars who are looking for fun every minute they're in the field. The same thing is good for old fellows, too—in moderation.

That is why I am asking every reader of these lines to come out and play. It pays. Young or old, busy or idle, play's the thing for you. And maybe you'll try it if you will spend a few minutes reading how one hard-working man has managed to keep fit during a long and busy and trying life with lots of sport by the way. Let me put modesty on the shelf and tell you how I've come to sixty years sound in wind and limb and ready for a frolic or a foot race.

Ancestors helped a lot. Even though Doctor Holmes said the best way to live long is to have an incurable ailment and nurse it, the chances of surviving are rather in favor of the fellow who starts in the race of life fairly fit—and isn't too proud or reckless or dumb to nurse his strength. In the present case the ancestors were decent, clean-living folks who had to work hard for their keep. There is no remote history of extreme age in the list, though the subject's mother lived eighty-six joyful years and his father relished life keenly up to the last week, when he fell peacefully asleep toward the end of his ninety-ninth year.

I weighed in on the first day, they say, at nine pounds and gained steadily thereafter on the normal diet appointed by nature. There must have been present a rather large degree of will-to-live; for they have often told of my seeming to die of cholera infantum before one dawn in my first year—neither breath nor pulse nor warmth apparent—and of resuming business soon after daylight, to the sad disappointment of a worthy undertaker.

Just what causes the will-to-live is hard to find out. All the doctors I've asked ascribe it to heredity. The old-fashioned phrenologists, so much believed in two generations ago, called it vitativeness and said it proceeded from a brain convolution at the top of the back head, and charted the bump of it in individuals as low, medium or full when they gave you an examination. Certain it is that some men are born with a tendency to hang on to life which seems to pull them up out of desperate situations in which others die, although of greater physical vigor. If physiologists could discover the cause of this predisposition to go on living and show us how to cultivate it, that saving art would be worth many serums. For the greatest aid to living is the unspoken, unconscious yet unconquerable will to exist.

A most important factor in the present case was the loving and intelligent care lavished on us in childhood—yes, and long after. Right there is one of the most efficient aids to length of years. Good feeding, too, with the right proportions of the varied elements needed to build up healthy bodies and minds; no fads or isms; incessant watchfulness as to proper protection against bad weather; regularity in eating, sleeping and all the details of personal hygiene—nothing was overlooked. As every physiologist knows, good care during the period of growth is better than many years of doctoring and tinkering in middle life.

I grew up in the country, in the township of Newtown, Long Island, now a part of Greater New York, but then real open country, with big farms near our village, plenty of woods to play In-

dian in, and a good swimming hole. In District School No. 12 we learned our three R's and had more fun and games than there is room to tell of here. Fights, too. All boys fight, and will fight, alas! for many a day to come, even though the gentle Mr. Howells wanted to cut out the fight between Tom Brown and Clogger Williams when he edited Harpers' new edition of the old classic. In a good school, with such an upright, able, real, human teacher as we had in William Sylvester Worth and a class of big boys who would not let the little fellows go too far, a brisk little battle now and then seemed the best way to settle the squalls that sprang up among us youngsters.

We enjoyed the advantage, too, of a fair proportion of lads of Irish blood in all our classes, and with their guidance we learned a lot about the manly art of self-defense and collar-and-elbow wrestling. Will I ever forget Joe Loughran, who taught me? He was so demure in his conduct that we nicknamed him "Quaker." And he was as honest as a Quaker. He coached me so faithfully that I beat his brother Jack in a little turn-up—and Joe refereed it, too, and saw fair play. Good old Quaker: the grass has been green above you for many a year! And can I ever forget the day Jack and I fell out over the technique of flying a kite, and I thought I'd whack him again—and his auburn-haired sister Annie chased me, and as I was going over the pasture fence caught me by the fullness of the galligaskins and yanked me back and gave me a scientific lacing! Hair pulling? Nothing of the kind: good, honest punches. My ears ring now as I remember.

The games and the wrestling and occasional little fights gave us lads a tremendous amount of exercise—just what we needed for good, symmetrical growth, not only in muscle and heart and lung development, but in self-reliance; yet we never guessed that we were exercising at all. One or two swims a day from May till October helped, too. Besides, there were the wood to chop and split, the coal to carry up from the cellar, and the water to lug into the house in generous quantities; also the garden to hoe and weed, and the leaves to rake up in the fall. All of these jobs of work were so mixed into the busy program of every day that we took work, play and study in their turn and had not the least idea that we were carrying out a first-rate scheme of health and strength culture.

We fathers of to-day are paying thousands of dollars every summer to maintain our boys in camps where they are taught the things—for their lasting good, of course—which we picked up in the country without paying for in money. We were really paying in part for our keep, too. It never struck me till this moment, and I'm as surprised as the honest man who discovered that he had been talking prose all his life. The modern rush to the cities has robbed most American boys of their ancient birthright. What rink or park lake ever had the beautiful, smooth, uncrowded ice we used to skim over on Baldwin's Pond? Listen, city boy, did you ever go out for chestnuts or hickory nuts? Did you ever hear of Criskatoms—if that's the right way to spell them? We didn't spell them—we ate them. How can you expect to get any real taste in the dusty nuts you buy in little paper bags from the yeswehavenobananas man?

A lady asked me the other day what is the best way to serve tomatoes, and unto her these words I then did say:

"Set the old alarm clock for five; so that you'll have plenty of time before daylight. Have the kindlings ready overnight; make a quick wood fire for your coffee and eggs; no time for toast. You get to the woods at daybreak, just as the birds begin to feed on the dog-

wood berries. The nip of frost is in the air, and the musty aroma of the brown leaves as you dodge among the trees makes you feel twice as much alive as you ever were before. And if you're lucky enough to bring down a few birds to stuff in your pockets, you wouldn't trade places with Solomon in all his glory. By eight o'clock the birds have stopped flying, and—by George! you're hungry!

"Cross over to old man Koelsch's tomatter lot, and if you search carefully among the dry old vines you'll find here and there one that was too green at picking time and has grown and ripened alone. You gather half a dozen or so and sit down in the sun in the lee of the stone wall. You break open a plump, crimson globe, its meat as crisp and gleaming as the heart of a watermelon and its particles all set on edge by the night's frost, and you fish up that little brown paper cone from your vest pocket—there were no waistcoats in them days, ma'am—and out of that cone you springle the pepper and salt on that juicy fruit.

"Well, that's the best way to serve tomatoes."

Does any city boy know that striking an ax on tough wood thirty or forty minutes every day but Sunday, all the year round, builds up in the nervous system a mechanism for resisting shocks that cannot be excelled? Hundreds of shocks travel up the ax handle, hit the nerves in the hands and distribute themselves throughout the whole system, so that you are fortified to withstand any ordinary bump or smash that strikes you. Bob Fitzsimmons' years of pounding on the anvil gave him a shock-absorbing capacity that was uncanny. Good men dropped him with blows that looked dynamic enough to finish him. Fitz sprawled on the floor, really unconscious for three or four seconds; rose, half conscious, to one knee and listened to the referee count up to eight or nine seconds—then stood up fully restored to all his power. In like manner the chopping and other hard work we country boys did in the day's routine was constantly strengthening us for the struggle of life, though we knew nothing about it, and adding to our reserves of endurance to carry us through many a hard mix-up.

At seventeen I was a proud young telegraph operator in charge of a station on the Long Island Railroad—operator, ticket agent, express agent, Western Union manager, baggage-master. For five years before that I had walked eight miles a day to and from good old Trinity School in New York over a route that had not yet dreamed of street cars, walked it regularly five days a week except during summer vacation—rain, shine, frost or blizzard. That routine added a lot to endurance, to say nothing of the sixteen-inch calves it built up. The new work at the station was excellent for developing the arms and back—juggling trunks and boxes, handling heavy freight; never too much at one time, but a good jag of work every day. I put on twenty pounds in ten months. Once I carried a sack of salt for an old farmer who couldn't make his green colt back the wagon near the high platform—three hundred and fifty-three pounds of dead weight. A foolish stunt, though it showed how hard work had strengthened me.

After two years in the operating room of the Western Union Telegraph Company at No. 195 Broadway, I got a job receiving Associated Press dispatches on the New England circuit, ten thousand words a night to be written with the pen. Long hours at the desk every day, with no exercise to speak of, plus the habit of eating heartily, had brought on indigestion; so I went to N—— determined to play in the open air and sunshine all I could every day. I found good ice and merry companions at N——, and I skated daily from one

o'clock till five; then ate a fair meal and sat in at the wire from seven p. m. to two a. m. There was a break of just thirty minutes every night for luncheon —or "tunch," as Bill Ramsdell used to call it in his queer but mighty effective Morse. Instead of eating my tunch, as a sensible fellow should, I'd strip down and spar twenty-five minutes with the young telegraph editor of the *Bulletin*. He was a good man, and we lammed each other prettily. Then I'd go back to my wire and take the A. P. report with the right hand and tuck away the tunch with the left—slowly, however, for I had read Dio Lewis and had learned the importance of thorough chewing, which I have kept up ever since.

The telegraph editor was the youngest vestryman in the State: therefore a black eye he gave me stopped him in mid-career; for he thought he wouldn't look very well with an ornament like that as he took up the offertory at St. George's of a Sunday morning; so he gave up sparring, feeling that his turn on the black eye might come next.

Primitive man was a playboy. He lived by hunting; so he mixed a great deal of sport with his daily job of rustling for a living. Although he probably never thought of it, the chances are that he stalked the proud stag and sped the feathered arrow into him quite as much from the love of good hunting as from the hunger urge. That was a sad day for the human race when our ancestors learned that by digging the earth and working the soil they could make the wild grasses and vegetables and fruits grow more tasty and nourishing. For that led to more and more of toiling and moiling and less and less of hunting, until at length daily sport was off the program of man. And in our modern day, what with machine production in monotonous factories and equally dull mental toil in offices, poor man has little or no chance for sport. Yet the life habits of primeval man are still more deeply ingrained in our fibers than the acquired efficiency habits of the last few centuries; so as soon as a fellow reverts to play and has enough sport every day—not "training"—he begins to live again in tune with his race instincts, and of course he thrives.

Certainly I throve, gained in weight and strength and had no end of fun. When the ice grew mushy in February, I began to walk eight or ten miles a day, to the great scandal of many a kind-hearted farmer along the road who would pull up his nag and invite me to climb into his buggy or wagon. How many minutes I've taken to explain to incredulous old boys that I was walking for fun! One persistent Samaritan simply couldn't get it at all, and as I kept trying to explain the idea he burst out:

"Well, git in anyhow and ride a spell. 'Twun't hurt yer feet none, will it?" And if he still lives he remembers me as a harmless loon he couldn't persuade to leave off tramping the Bozrahville pike. What did the "Playboy of the Western World" say?—"I'm destroyed walkin' the roads av the world since Chuesda was a week!" Nonsense. It made a man of him. See how he lit into his Da when they fought it out in Michael James Flaherty's shebeen—he who had been so afeared of the old man ever before.

It was about this time that I read Dio Lewis. Does any one to-day remember that champion of whole wheat bread and bitter foe of the frying pan? If memory isn't playing me false, he accounted for the epileptic fits of a notorious old king by the fact that he ate great quantities of meat breaded and fried in rich sauce. But there was a deal of sound sense in his preachments, too, and he made me quit fried foods and stick to roasts, broils and stews. And I ate plenty of vegetables and drank much water, with little or none at meals.

But it seemed to me then and has seemed more so since that all diet fads are wasteful and foolish, to say nothing of the pleasure we miss through them. Hasn't Nature fitted us with incisors, dog teeth and molars? Yes. What are they for? Why, so that we can live on the grasses, the meats and grains. Take them all in reasonable amount and variety, and your innards will convert them into energy and you'll enjoy life. And that goes for the vegetarians, the grape-cure, milk-cure and fruit-cure nuts and all the rest of the hypochondriacs who believe that if only they can follow a fad weird enough and extravagant enough they'll flourish like the green bay tree. Eat moderately every kind of food, chew thoroughly, have fun at meals—and you'll not need the doctor.

By the time the frost was out of the ground I had acquired four pleasant sparring partners, who would come out and play with me afternoons on the grass plot. Those happy days of punching! Oliver Brown, old Yale half back, agreed one day to box right through half an hour without stopping for rests in the Queensberry style. His chum who held the watch was so entertained that when he remembered to look we had sparred forty minutes; so we decided to make it an even three-quarters of an hour. After a tiny interval we heard Stanley peevishly exclaim: "You fellows have been at it sixty-five minutes. Keep it up all day if you like, but I'm going back to study law." Even the famous "One-round" Hogan never had one round as long as that. After that came bath, a hard rub-down, an hour's reading; then supper, and away to the A. P. night dispatches. Nine hours' sleep—and the same program next day.

Those boxing bouts were not for blood nor knock-outs nor any of that foolishness; neither were they soft flapping. We thumped one another heartily, and whenever a fellow got home a good one the lad on whom it landed would politely grunt, "That's a peach!" or some such frank praise—and grin and try to land a peach, too.

But another sport now came in season and put the gloves and clubs behind the door: there was a beautiful tidewater river to row on, and old man Fahnestock had excellent wherries to let—swift racing boats with fixed seats and flaring gunwales, in which the hardy puddlers and rollers of the Cold Spring Iron Works used to race on pay-day afternoons, betting their last dollars. Under their influence I turned waterman, and a waterman I am to this late day. Give me a skiff, canoe, dory, gig or shell, and I'll voyage in her and find fascinating strange lands and new skies to admire, even though I always go down the same river. Soon after breakfast every day I strolled down to old man Fahnestock's float and sculled away in a wherry, often with the young vestryman, or, if he was not free, with a sandbag wedge away aft to trim the trip and keep her on her lines. Fahnestock, at eighty-four years of age, was still the best fancy skater in the eastern part of the State. If any one brought in one of his boats scratched or muddied, his vocabulary was the blitheringest ever heard; yet he is enshrined in my memory as one of Nature's noblemen. For this reason: his regular rate was twenty-five cents an hour, but he let me have my boat all afternoon for fifty cents.

Any wise old coach will tell you that a fellow gets more development out of living in a boat, strolling about in her as the whim takes him, than he will derive from an equal amount of time spent in drudging away so many minutes at twenty-four to the minute and so many at twenty-eight and so many at a racing pace under the critical eye of the coach. I must have built in a lot of strength and watermanship; for a few years later I was picked for No. 4 in a racing eight on the Harlem River. Yet there were several moments in New England wa-

ters when I wouldn't have bid five cents for my prospects in a racing eight, or anywhere else on earth. Trying to swim one hundred feet under water brought that about.

Three miles below town was half a mile of sandy flats, over which the water ran four feet deep at full tide. I anchored my wherry at the head of this sand patch in the first hour of the ebb, dove off the stern and swam three feet below the surface as far as I could go. Soon I achieved forty feet of distance, then sixty and more. I thought I was cautious and careful and very conservative because I swam in the shallows: no one but a fool would swim alone in deep water: I was swimming alone, but in shallow water I was perfectly safe. Yes, I was!

After a week of practice I waited till the second hour of the ebb, when the tide was racing like mad, and tried for a record. A clean, smooth dive shot me along for twenty feet, and then I swept ahead with long and sweeping strokes, submerged, my eyes watching the shining yellow sands that gleamed in the green-gold light of the sun that filtered through the dancing salt water. Twenty-one strokes! Twenty-two! By this time I must have gone more than eighty feet, shooting forward like a torpedo with two legs, when——

The kraken, or an octopus or some other slimy monster suddenly had me by the back of the neck and was dragging me down to gurgling death. I was so sick with horror that I could not guess what it was; but it held me fast, my head drawn down and a hideous mass of dark, tangled strands beneath my eyes. My legs continued to go forward as my head went down, and I felt my feet break through the surface of the river and wave in the air. They say that as a man drowns his whole life flashes before him in swift panorama, a sort of sublimated historic film. Mine didn't. Instead I saw a picture of Max Woodard, cashier of the Chelsea Bank —who had gone downriver in his racing gig five minutes ahead of me—come swinging back at his leisurely stroke to discover my feet sticking up like a channel buoy. He would fish me out, of course, but too late, then go on upriver and report the incident. The tragedy would give old man Fahnestock's wherries a bad name for ill luck—and as I still struggled with the slimy monster that held me down I could see the old man dancing with rage and hear him cussin' a blue streak.

Somehow I drew my feet down on the solid sand, gave one mighty heave, and shot up above the surface. There I started on a run—or as near a run as a lad can come in four feet of water—for my boat. I didn't know what I was running from, but I wouldn't trust the water enough to swim in it. My leap into the stern sheets of the wherry would have done credit to a salmon. I tore up the anchor and rowed half a mile or so before I began to emerge from my panic. Then I began to laugh shamefacedly and plucked off my neck a thick, tough wreath of eel grass and other weeds which I had swum into and which I had wrenched free when I broke away. I dressed slowly and thanked God I was alive and rowed back to the boat house. After that I kept up the daily row, but tried no more "fetches" under water—"sort o' lost taste fer it," old Fahnestock said.

I had to go South for six months on business. Within two weeks I was a member of the Athletic Club, exercising an hour and a half each evening in the armory of the famous Richmond Blues, an infantry company whose history ran back to Colonial days. I wasn't much concerned with history then, because I was so busy trying out strange boxers. At one hundred and fifty-four pounds, wearing a pair of trunks and a pleasant smile, I was eager to go on with any two-legged thing that came along—in a

perfectly friendly way. The big ones were the least bother—probably ashamed to punch a mere middleweight too hard—but, oh, how the lads of my own weight did sock! Ned Waldron, a human projectile full of TNT, though he weighed only one hundred and thirty-five, nearly put me down and out and would have outed me but for a little accident.

I can still hear the voice of Doctor Michaux pleasantly coaching, "Now, boys, smiling faces!" as Bill Selden and I traded punches. Bill's left caught me low on the right brow and closed the eye with an enormous lump. We were mixing it merrily when the doctor stopped us, remarking that one more on the eye would make an awful mess. So Bill and I reluctantly shook hands, to signify the end of the bout. We dined together and spent the evening enjoying Modjeska as *Camille*. This little incident gives you an idea of how earnestly we worked and with what complete amity we gave and took good, solid poundings. All for fun and health.

In the next year I was being initiated as a newspaper reporter in New York, working for a flimsy shop. What is a flimsy shop? This one supplied all the papers with all the news it could cover in town. My job was to get what was doing, say, in Essex Market police court; dash down to the office and write it on six or seven sheets of manifold with a stylus; hustle out on two or three more assignments in the afternoon; do several more at night—and be on hand ready for work at nine next morning. Meals were more or less sketchy in that shop, for pay day was uncertain in its timing; and one might guess that there was no time for exercise. There couldn't be a worse guess. I brought in a set of gloves that had seen service at Richmond, and had a nice set-to with one friend or another about five o'clock every evening. Indeed, Ashley Cole, the city editor, adopted me as a sort of pet apprentice because I was willing to wrestle with him—and threw him once; by accident, of course, for I was no wrestler. But I'd try any game.

There is a good point to remember, all ye who exercise for health: the man who is ready to try anything that comes along, with appreciation of all, though he may prefer a few that especially appeal to him, is the one who will get the most fun as well as the most health out of his program. Incidentally that spirit recommended me to Mr. Cole and thus secured for me his professional coaching, which was invaluable. Thanks to him, I found myself within the year on the staff of a morning newspaper, working from one in the afternoon until through with the day's news—perhaps at midnight or two o'clock in the morning. I exercised mornings in the Young Men's Gym until a two-legged hyena stole my new maroon gym suit out of my locker, after which I shook the dust of the place off my feet and joined a rowing club on the Harlem River.

I took lodgings in Harlem and got out on the river nearly every morning. On a dull day I'd tackle the city editor after luncheon—who can resist an appeal then?—and get free for the day. On the river, of course. What a river it was! Above McComb's Dam Bridge it was really beautiful, with long stretches of meadow and wooded hills near High Bridge, a chowder on Bronson's stranded barge restaurant that would win Lucullus, and a lovely, winding reach that led under Farmers' Bridge and curved around to Spuyten Duyvil. All that part is solid land now and part of Kingsbridge. And here is something no New Yorker will believe: the river then was actually clean enough to swim in! I've been in too many times to count, including once in March, on a dare, when hands and arms were already curled back on their way to the float long before my feet had finished the dive into the cold river water.

Our club ordered a new eight-oared shell. Did half as much excited speculation ever boil about a new battleship as we had about that shell? It was being built by Waters of Troy, of papier-mâché, probably the finest model of racing craft ever seen by the eye of mortal man. Every few days we had bulletins about her, and meanwhile twenty of us worked three evenings a week in John Wood's gymnasium, No. 3 East Twenty-eighth Street, from eight to ten o'clock Monday, Wednesday, and Friday evenings, getting ready to try for seats in the boat next spring. We had half an hour on the rowing machines, where we were taught to reach out farther than the human frame could stretch, taught how to keep scrupulous time, how to hold that slide and to catch and finish as one man. We did a dozen stunts on the chest weights, and after that boxed, wrestled, played handball, or tumbled and performed on the bars and the flying rings.

When that wonderful new boat was launched, with its nice, varnishy smell and its excellent oars right from the Donoghues' shop at Newburgh, I was one of the lucky eight chosen to man it. Gentle reader, let us, as the proper old Victorian novelists used to urge—let us draw a curtain over what followed. It came to this: for three years I trained and raced in the eights. It was all wrong, of course—the idea of any youth on the staff of a morning paper leaving the office at five every evening from March to October and taking three nights for gym work all winter! So far as I have ever learned, no other man has ever done such a thing. I bless the good heart of Jimmy Graham, who saw that I was clean daft on rowing and gave me enough work early in the day to yield a living.

During those three years all in our crew built up a capital of health and strength that has lasted us ever since. We all sat in the shell twenty years after our time and did an exhibition half-mile brush with the champions of that day, and it looked so good that the papers reported it as a real race—though, of course, the champs had held back so as not to show us up. *Phew!* weren't they mad when they read in the papers that the old boys were foxy and jumped their bow two feet ahead at the finish! A few of us are dead now, but in no greater proportion than among the non-racing crowd. And I believe that every one of us old racers works harder and enjoys life more than our friends of equal age who never raced.

But what about "athletic heart," that bugaboo that haunts every track, field, river and training table? Just this: I had read so much about it that six weeks before our first race I had the doctor give me a thorough examination.

"Your heart *is* bigger than that of the average young man," said the doctor. "The folly in the talk about hypertrophied hearts is that too many doctors regard the heart of the sedentary man as the normal. Your heart is bigger than that of the sedentary man, but that does not make it abnormal. It would be abnormal if it had not grown to its present size in order to pump blood to support the work your arms, shoulders, loins and legs do in rowing. So long as you take a fair amount of exercise every day and go into a race only after long and careful training, it won't do you one bit of harm."

And that was the program we followed year after year. Perhaps some of us strove a little too hard in games. Once after a sea trip in which our schooner was laid on her beam ends and for sixty hours we did not know whether we were coming out of it alive, I got back to the office pretty well fagged out with fear and excitement. Yet after a night's sleep I went up to Wood's gymnasium, found that I had lost three pounds—and plugged away as hard as I could, to create a hearty ap-

petite and so bring back the lost weight. It brought it, too, though perhaps the strain was not the best thing for the physical and nervous mechanism in the long run. Yet there was some excuse: youth and moderation are seldom companions. Also if we had all practiced moderation all the time our crew would not have won so many races, and we who raced might not have done so well in our lifelong vocations.

Just the same, I would give a great deal if I could persuade every athlete to do only enough and never too much. Even more is it necessary for the middle-aged man who has given up competitive athletics to practice moderation in exercise, for two reasons: 1. The heart is becoming less resilient every day and therefore should not be worked so hard; and, 2. He who spends most of his energy upon business or profession cannot spend very much on exercise under penalty of going bankrupt in vitality.

Although well under thirty when the managing editor stopped my racing, I knew that it would be dangerous to let the physical mechanism built up by hard exercise grow rusty and thus become a menace to health, as I had observed in the cases of several old college athletes; so I mapped out a regular program of work. I got in from three to six miles a day of walking while covering assignments, but that was not enough. On at least three mornings a week I played around the gymnasium for an hour, using the chest weights a little—only three-pounders—boxing and playing handball. In a big city one can always find a few men at liberty to exercise in the forenoon. Then on Sunday afternoons and holidays we would walk along the Palisades, or up in the Bronx, or through Van Cortlandt Park, or along the old aqueduct. There are a thousand entertaining walks around New York, or any other city, waiting to charm everybody who has sense enough to take them. During these early middle years I kept in mind an ideal—to do enough work to keep me not quite in the pink of condition, but to stay in such good fettle that two weeks of hard training would put me there.

The royal and ancient game of Scotland began to flourish in this country early in this century. A good friend lured me into it as gently as a real-estater coaxing a customer into buying a sand barren. Not without struggle, though; for I swore the silly mess of foozles and stymies and putties, or whatever they called 'em, was fit only for schoolboys or gaffers. But he coaxed me down to Staten Island, where the first hour on the links showed me a new world. Since that day merely to think of life without golf would be like contemplating life without salt, or butter, or gloves or a hat.

Thus began a schedule of golf three or four times a week that has been kept up to this day. Probably it did some harm at first; for I had been in a champion racing crew and played at scratch in handball and was pretty good at some other things, and could see no reason why I shouldn't be in the front rank of golfers. Alackaday! What says George Low? "Gowf is a humblin' game." Aye, a verra humblin' game. But it took two years of topping and slicing and tearing the turf to tatters to convince me that I could never become first class, and during those years doubtless the game burned out more energy than it added. But after I came out of that purgatory into sanity, and began to appreciate the modest joys of going around with fellows of my own class, able to play regularly in the low nineties with occasional breathless excursions into the higher eighties, lo! golf has been a mainstay of good living ever since.

For twenty years now my physical machine has been kept up to par by golf, say three times a week from April to December; not too much of it at a

time, but enough to afford proper exercise and no end of fun. From forty to sixty I have watched with care to make sure of moderation on the links, even in vacation rarely playing more than thirty-six holes a day, and never doing that two days in succession. My wise doctor laid down the rule very clearly.

"When you are using your energy on business or professional work," he said, "it is suicide to hurry off to the links and play eighteen or twenty-seven holes as hard and fast as you can. Eighteen holes a day, played without worry or fussing over poor shots, is enough for any middle-aged man. Of course, when you are on vacation, with nothing on your mind, when you are quite relaxed, you can play thirty-six with safety. But even then I wouldn't do it more than two days in succession. When you've emptied the reservoir of energy, you simply must give it time to refill—or you're in for trouble."

All of which I carefully memorized and heeded. We had a foursome up in one of the Westchester clubs once a week, sometimes oftener. Three of the four would come in after the morning round, absorb cocktails and eat a luncheon that began with oysters, went on with soup and continued with a meat entrée and two vegetables, then a salad, dessert and demi-tasse. How often they laughed at my meager luncheon of a sandwich and a mug of ale—there was ale then! Three of our four are dead now. There is little doubt that their deaths were hastened by their habit of eating those heavy luncheons and hurrying out to play eighteen holes more—to say nothing of bridge until late at night.

A big meal between rounds is the golfer's deadly enemy. But will most husky golfers, no matter what their age, believe this or govern themselves accordingly? Well, if they won't, they'd better look out. Greater than the perils that lurk in the overlengthening and overtrapping of American courses is the fatal art of the chef. Shun him and his exquisite works. If you would get the best out of golf, let your luncheon be light, never tempting, just enough to take the edge off the appetite the game creates, and let dinner wait until at least an hour after the last putt has been holed. That interval of rest is very important.

Watch these pages for other contributions by William Hemmingway.

PITY THE PIONEER

NO doubt, in many Colonial towns, this scene was enacted: A man who had been West rode up to the tavern on horseback and told tales of his travels. Their adventurous spirit thus aroused, a few hardy souls dreamed of going where he had been. After much urging and pleading, they got their families to go along with them, and at last, with the jeers and head-shakings of the townsmen following them, they moved slowly out toward the unbeaten trails, in plodding, hopeful ox trains. Many of them perished, but many also got through—and in this way, just as in every historical case, civilization spread.

The pioneer, the innovator, the inventor, may be compared to shock troops that bear the first brunt of the attack. Frequently they go down gloriously to defeat, but with the knowledge that they have smashed the first barriers.

Orville and Wilbur Wright were pioneers who won through. At the very moment when they were experimenting with flying, and making real flights in Kitty Hawk, North Carolina, in 1903, authorities and scientists here and abroad were writing treatises to prove that men would never fly. And to-day we smile.

When Vincent Lander Travel Lecturer, Got Off Stepped into the Most Bizarre

The CAVE *of* DESPAIR

CHAPTER I.

THE CORAL MOUNTAIN.

ONE of the things we learn at school is that a certain kind of polyp, the variety known as the coral, builds islands. Starting at the bottom of the sea, the industrious little zoöphite colony works upward through the ages until it reaches the surface of the ocean when the coral animals who happen to be on top of the heap perish through contact with the air and further elevation of the coral mass ceases.

The result is a white rock reef which may be big enough to become an island in the course of more ages through the action of the ocean in washing soil upon top of the rock and of birds dropping seeds from which spring grass, and trees, and flowers.

What makes the coral animal so industrious nobody knows, though it is probably the same blind urge which causes a man to work day and night for many years to pile up vast sums of money which he never takes time to spend or enjoy and which he leaves behind him when he dies of overwork.

Anyway, coral islands abound all through the tropic portions of the globe and they are usually circular or oval

the Boat at the South Sea Island of Murotoru He Adventure of His Colorful Life.

In Four Parts—Part I

By FRED MACISAAC

in shape with a lagoon in the center. Sometimes they are inhabited by cannibals and sometimes by gentle natives who have been converted to the Mormon Church, like so many in the Marquesas Islands, and sometimes they have no inhabitants at all.

In all the wide world, however, there is no other coral island like Murotoru in the South Pacific where the events which go to make this story took place.

After the coral animals had taken ten or fifteen thousand years and infinite labor to build, in one of the deepest parts of the Pacific Ocean, a particularly large and substantial coral island, great natural disturbances occurred below the crust of the earth in this particular place and the sea bottom upon which the island rested was thrust violently upward many hundreds of feet. With it went the coral colony, to the astonishment of the inhabitants, who promptly died when exposed to the air. Instead of a splendid residence for countless billions of coral animals, the vast structure was rendered unfit for polyp habitation. No longer a coral atoll, Murotoru was a circular tableland rising six or seven hundred feet out of the ocean; the only coral mountain, so far as is known, in the Seven Seas.

To the first navigator who set eyes on it, it appeared to be a high island plateau, but the first white man who scaled its precipitous walls discovered that it was really a gigantic bowl, the rim of which was from half a mile to a mile wide and the interior of which was a crater, three or four miles in diameter. The crater, of course, was the ancient lagoon.

This first visitor marveled at the crater and at the multitude of birds which made residence there, then descended to his sailing ship and went on his way. Never did it occur to him that this was a treasure island, richer than any of the fabled isles upon which pirates buried their gold and jewels.

For thousands of years the sea birds had nested there and the elevated lagoon was stored with guano.

Vincent Lander heard of Murotoru while in Tahiti. It was east some six or eight hundred miles, at the very limit of the French island domain. Weird tales were whispered in cafés of Papeete of the horrors of the coral mountain where a French company was getting out the guano. Every shovelful of phosphates cost a life, he heard; the place was hell on earth; the officials were fiends. Such reports he took with a grain of salt; what interested Lander was the phenomenon of the island itself, and he determined to visit it.

Lander was an American whose business was lecturing all over the United States upon the strange and exotic lands and life to be found on our globe. From October to May he toured America; from June to October he voyaged far and wide in search of material. He illustrated his lectures with his own pictures and he carried with him several cameras, including a motion-picture equipment.

Papeete, capital of Tahiti, had disappointed him; it called itself the Paris of the Pacific but the best one could say for it was that it was a provincial French town, making allowances, of course for tropic color and climate. He sought the primitive and he found the Polynesians of Tahiti civilized and Christianized—and not improved thereby.

A small steamer sailed every three months from Papeete to Murotoru with supplies for the Guano company, but the next sailing was two months distant and as time was most important to Lander because his lecture dates were immovable, he voyaged to the guano island upon a small schooner, the *Jean D'Arc*.

The sort of lectures delivered by Vincent Lander were not the result of travel upon luxurious liners. In various parts of the world he had experienced primitive conditions, sailed on crazy craft, burrowed in mud and slime and hewed his way through fever jungles. But he had never before made a voyage upon a copra schooner.

For three weeks they sailed over a tumultuous ocean, burned by the sun, swept by warm salt waves, eating poisonous food, nauseated by the smell of copra mingled by oil and gas from the small engine which drove the craft about three miles an hour when there was no wind to fill the sails.

The captain was a half-caste, the crew were natives, so he had no companionship during a voyage which lasted three times as long as he had expected. Hardship, however, doesn't do a healthful man any harm, and it was a very fit young Anglo-Saxon who tumbled into the schooner's boat after his first shave in a fortnight, his eyes alight with interest and anticipation.

As they approached the island he had made several photographs. From a distance it looked like an old-fashioned stone fortress rising out of the sea, apparently camouflaged, for it was streaked with white and green. As the schooner drew in, the great height of the rocky walls impressed him and he

saw that the green streaks were due to a multitude of vines which ran from the summit down to the sea.

During the voyage he had lounged about the schooner nearly as naked as the crew, but he was arrayed now in white linen with a sun helmet, and in his breast pocket were letters from the agent of the company and from the governor of the islands to the superintendent of the works upon Murotoru.

The schooner was unable to anchor because the water within a few yards of the shore was a thousand feet deep. She had lowered her sails and would cruise about until her boat returned, since the landing of Vincent Lander was her only business at this island. Lander marveled at the height and steepness of the coral cliffs ahead. At first glance they did not seem scalable; then he discerned that the cliff was not really perpendicular, for he caught the glitter of steel rails and the descending car of a funicular railroad.

Bump! The bow of the boat had thrust itself into a curious sort of sand; actually it was coral dust, which rose in a white cloud and irritated nose and throat. Lander sank ankle-deep in it when he leaped from the bow of the boat to the strand, and the dust cloud accompanied him in a walk of twenty yards which brought him to the landing platform of the funicular, upon which two men in white uniforms were waiting to welcome him.

One of the sailors, carrying a package of letters, tossed them upon the platform and received in return another package done up in oilcloth, whereupon he grinned, waved good-by to Lander and returned to his boat.

A small, soldierly looking Frenchman, clean-shaven, with coal-black eyes and a long, narrow and rather pleasing countenance, extended his hand as Lander mounted the platform.

"You are very welcome, sir," he said cordially. "You are English, is it not?"

"American."

"Indeed! You are the first American to visit us."

"I have letters from your agent in Tahiti."

The two Frenchmen exchanged glances and laughed. The second man was fat and genial.

"And if you had no letters you would be equally welcome," said the first. "Visitors are so rare we embrace them."

The small man introduced himself as Juan Dupres, the superintendent, former colonel in the French army, and the fat man presented himself as Baptiste Colombe, company chemist. They were the rulers of Murotoru. Upon learning Lander's name and profession they exchanged glances and then Dupres said:

"We shall be charmed to have you as our guest. You are perfectly free to occupy yourself as you please, except in the matter of photographs. I would wish that you agree to submit to me all your prints and allow me to censor them."

"As your guest I should not dream of photographing forbidden things," he replied. "But I did not expect to find censorship in this remote Pacific isle."

"In all probability," replied the superintendent, "I shall find nothing to censor. Let us enter the car. Although our ring mountain is not high enough to affect the temperature much, we like to think it is cooler up above."

The little car, grumbling on its cog-wheel, began to crawl up the side of the cliff. Lander had often been a passenger on funiculars but never before upon one pitched at so steep an angle. He hoped that the rather rusty safety chains would not part before they reached the top. He soon discovered that the mass of vines did not sprout from the cliff itself—for there was no soil on the coral rock—but were tendrils from the jungle at the summit, some of them two or three hundred feet

long. And presently they arrived at the top and found themselves upon flat land where the tropic vegetation was much more profuse than upon ordinary atolls.

The funicular came to a stop beside a narrow-gauge railroad upon which stood a grotesque little engine and two flat cars upon which benches had been placed.

"Behold the *Chemin de Fer d'Etat* of Murotoru," said Dupres with an extravagant gesture. "Laugh at it if you will, but it is the only railroad in the islands of the South Pacific and its fame has spread far and wide. *A voitures,* messieurs."

Laughing, they climbed upon one of the cars, whereupon an almost naked yellow man in the cab of the engine opened the throttle, a second nude yellow man began to throw sticks of wood into the furnace, and the train jogged off at about eight or ten miles an hour over a roadbed which was exceedingly uneven.

The landing had been at eight in the morning; it was now nine, and already the sun was shooting down upon them its intolerable rays. Their wide-brimmed straw hats protected the faces of the Frenchmen, but Lander was stewing in his helmet and his thin linen suit. When the train plunged into a forest, a tunnellike darkness fell, but the heat seemed intensified and the jungle steamed.

White men have learned to endure tropic heat but they never have become indifferent to it, and all three were perspiring profusely. Lander had already been five or six weeks under the South Pacific sun, yet he found himself suffering now as much as upon his first day in Tahiti.

"Those are curious-looking natives on the engine," he said to Dupres. "They don't look like Polynesians."

"They are not," replied the Frenchman. "Our laborers are Anamese."

"Contract laborers from Indo-China? But I should think the climate would be deadly for them." Dupres frowned, and Lander thought he had been indiscreet. Colombe spoke. "When you see our works, Monsieur the American, you will understand much."

The lecturer nodded. Experience had taught him to accept things as he found them when no effort of his own could improve them.

The train was plowing through a dense, dark jungle; instead of air they were drawing steam into their lungs. They choked upon wood smoke, for the cloud from the engine stack was unable to penetrate the leafy roof of the tunnel. A quarter of an hour of this sort of thing and they darted into blinding light; they had come out into a clearing which was evidently island headquarters.

The railroad ran along the edge of the cliff. Below—five or six hundred feet below—was the ocean, multicolored. Beside the railroad was a broad coral path; beyond, a strip of dark-green, well-kept lawn and a row of pretty white-coral bungalows with palm-thatched roofs and broad screened-in porches. The ground sloped downward ahead and Lander had a glimpse of a wall beyond which was a native village and a number of barracklike buildings and factories with tall smokestacks, and then the little train came to a stop.

"We are *chez nous,* monsieur," declared Colonel Dupres. "Let us descend."

Lander saw people on several porches and it was evident that his arrival awakened great interest. Colonel Dupres and Colombe bowed to ladies who appeared at right and left, but they led the way to a cottage directly opposite, where a slender, white-robed feminine figure stood behind the screen awaiting them. They walked up a gravel path bordered with bright tropic blooms.

"*Cherie,*" the colonel said, "here is an American gentleman come to stay

with us for a while. Monsieur Lander, my daughter Hyacinth. Monsieur, my daughter, the mistress of my house."

CHAPTER II.

THE FLOWER OF ANAM.

LANDER was staring almost rudely, for the girl was weirdly beautiful. She was small with tiny hands and feet. Masses of blue-black hair were piled high, Japanese fashion, upon a lovely little head. A pair of large eyes that were unusually long and very black were looking at him in frank appraisal, a pair of full, red lips were parted in a welcoming smile that exhibited teeth as white as bleached coral and as regular as well-matched pearls. There was a cunning little nose, and a broad yet dainty chin. The contour of her face was round rather than oval and her complexion was like the skin of a ripe peach.

She was breath-taking, this young woman, possessing all the charm of a French girl—and different, somehow, strange, exotic. The figure was as fetching as the face, rounded, curving, but not plump—though neither was she slender.

"You are very welcome, Monsieur the American," she said with the fluted tones of a Parisienne, as she extended her little hand frankly, like a boy. The hand was so small and soft; like a doll's hand, he thought. And then she turned to speak to her father and her profile was astonishing. Full face, she was all Parisienne; in profile she suggested the East—the nose was a trifle flat, the cheek bones were high. He remembered exquisite Japanese ladies in Tokio who had profiles something like hers.

Colonel Dupres understood his expression. "The mother of Hyacinth was a princess of Anam," he said simply. "She died long ago."

A house boy having carried in Lander's luggage, the colonel suggested that he inspect his quarters, and in five minutes he was luxuriating in a tepid bath and considering the marvelous result of the union of France and Anam.

An hour later he sat at table on the screened porch, having consumed a refreshing cocktail, perfectly iced, discussing a meal which had begun with melon, and was followed by a deliciously cooked fish accompanied by fired bananas, washed down by chilled champagne.

Hyacinth sat, smiling, opposite him. She was demanding what the French ladies in Papeete were wearing. Dupres and Colombe were the others at table. The heat was intense as ever, but Lander did not suffer from it now. Despite the perspiration which oozed from the roots of his hair, he was content. The girl facing him was a superb example of a Frenchwoman; the white silk dress she wore was admirably cut. When she turned to talk to her father or Colombe and her Mongolian half made itself evident, she was still lovely. Her mother, the princess of Anam, must have been very beautiful, he thought.

"About five o'clock, when it is cooler, we'll give you a look at the crater," Dupres was saying.

"It was my impression," he replied, "that guano was found only on the rainless islands off the coast of Peru. I thought the stuff had to be dried for centuries to be of value. You must have a heavy rainfall here though, don't you?"

"About a hundred inches a year," replied the engineer. "You are partly right. This situation is unique in the world. The base of the old lagoon is coral, which carries off moisture, and the deposits of guano, through the action of moisture have hardened, in many places, to rock, which makes it more difficult to handle. It is not as good a fertilizer as the Peruvian guana, but there is phosphorus enough to make it very profitable mining."

"Have you a large crew of workmen?" the American asked.

"About five hundred Anamese, a hundred Chinese, and fifty or sixty Polynesian fishermen with their women and children."

"And how many whites?"

"Twenty-four, all told."

"Is it very arduous labor?"

"Horrible! Horrible!" exclaimed Hyacinth. "It is hell on earth, monsieur. The poor people never live out their term of service. It is abominable."

"Cherie," reproved her father.

"But it is the truth," she declared defiantly. "These ignorant men are told lies in Anam. They are fascinated by the wages and do not dream of the dreadful conditions and they die."

Her great dark eyes were suffused.

"It is like this, monsieur," said Dupres. "The work must be done and white men could not do it, even if white labor was available. We pay wages four or five times greater than the yellow men could earn at home, and, when they die, their money is sent to their families to save them from starvation."

"But it seems unnecessary that they should be killed by their labor," commented Lander. "Shorter hours, better living conditions, good food, isn't that all that is needed?"

"Did you ever smell a bottle of ammonia?" demanded the girl. "What good are those things if the work people are breathing the fumes of ammonia all the time."

"They work only five hours a day, with a long rest period in the heated time," said Dupres. "You shall see their houses. We force them to be clean. We have a good hospital with doctors and nurses. They eat better food than they ever had in Anam and those who survive return home rich according to their lights. But the work, as Hyacinth says, is killing. There is nothing to do about it. The world demands its phosphates."

"Then let the world go without them!" exclaimed the girl. "Yesterday Mockla died. He was within a month of his freedom."

"Let us talk of something pleasant," pleaded Colombe. "Monsieur, tell us of America and Europe. I have been marooned on this island four years. Dupres has been here five, with one vacation in Tahiti. Little Hyacinth has never seen a greater city than Papeete."

"In another year," said the girl, with a rush of high spirits, *"mon père* will resign and take me home to France. I shall see Paris then."

A step upon the porch behind them and Colombe and Dupres rose, while Lander followed their example, for some one had entered. Vincent saw a tall, slim dark person in military whites. He was French but the American was sure that his Gallic blood was mixed with Polynesian, for he had the high cheek bones and broad nose common to the Marquesans. He was under thirty, powerfully built, and not bad looking, but he did not appeal to Lander, perhaps because of the proprietory glance he cast upon Hyacinth.

"My apologies, monsieur," he said pleasantly enough. "I had affairs at the barracks or I should have come to welcome you sooner."

"This is Captain Lemaitre," stated Dupres. "Commander of the troops of Murotoru. Monsieur Lander, *capitaine,* who makes pictures and lectures upon them in the United States. You are in time for coffee and a liqueur."

Lemaitre bowed to Lander, crossed to Hyacinth, lifted her little pale hand and kissed it gracefully, and drew up a chair.

"Then you have an army on the island?" inquired Lander.

"But yes, of a sort," replied the captain. "I have fifty Chinese guards, well armed and well disciplined and officered by whites."

"There is danger of rebellion?"

"No, just a necessary precaution. The coolies are too intelligent to think of a revolt. I trust you will be with us for some time, monsieur."

"No longer than is necessary to find transportation back to Tahiti, sir. I have engagements in America."

"Then you will remain a month," said Dupres. "Our supply steamer will come from Australia and sail for Tahiti in about four weeks. In the meantime we are all delighted to have a guest, are we not, Hyacinth?"

The girl smiled happily. "It is exciting. Think, Jules!"—to Lemaitre—"monsieur travels all over the world. He knows New York and Paris and Tokio and Shanghai."

"And now monsieur makes the acquaintance of Hades," said Lemaitre.

Lander lifted eyebrows. "Why? Aside from the heat, it seems delightful here. What could be more beautiful than the view of the sea from this porch. And what a charming bungalow, and I have just eaten a delicious luncheon and met a very lovely young lady."

"Merci, monsieur," laughed Hyacinth.

"You have not yet seen the crater," replied the captain. "Then you will know what I mean."

"It is our custom to retire for a couple of hours after luncheon," said Dupres. "The siesta. Mong will show you to your chamber, Monsieur Lander."

The girl rose, the others pushed back their chairs, and the American followed the Anamese to a large, whitewashed room which contained a cot bed with an insect canopy above it. He was not in the least sleepy, but he yielded to local custom. There was a gentle breeze blowing from the Pacific, hot as from a furnace, but more acceptable than still air, and this breeze he augmented by turning on an electric fan. He lay naked on the bed for an hour without closing his eyes, then, curiosity stronger than fear of the sun, he rose, dressed, picked up his small camera and tiptoed out of the bungalow.

The houses of the settlement were all located within a hundred yards of the edge of the cliff with a gorgeous view of the ocean. The little world was sleeping, save for a few dogs curled up in the scanty shade; nothing moving was visible as he looked up and down. To the right was the jungle, at the foot of the street was a high stone wall with gates to permit road and railway to pass, and upon top of the wall was a sentry box. Beyond the wall were a number of large buildings. After photographing the bungalow of Commandant Dupres and making some pictures of the tiny white settlement, he moved slowly toward the wall. A Chinese soldier in a dirty white uniform saluted him smartly and opened the gate when he indicated by signs that he wished to pass through, and he found himself immediately in the native town.

Here was more life. From hundreds of huts built originally according to a plan by the company but changed at the whim of the Anamese, and permitted to fall into disrepair, came an unpleasant smell of sweating, unwashed men, women, children and animals. Dogs were running about. Naked almond-eyed children came out to stare at the white stranger. Women, almost equally unclothed, peered at him from the bamboo lodges. He moved on under a burning sun, passed the village, and came to a long, low, thatched structure open to the air on all sides, in which he saw men lying on cots. This was, no doubt, the hospital. He saw a white-robed Tahitian woman moving between the cots, a nurse; and presently he came to a small bungalow upon the porch of which sat a man with red whiskers.

"Do ye want a sunstroke?" demanded this individual. "Haven't ye any sense at all? Come up here, now, and tell me all about yerself."

"An Irishman!" Lander exclaimed. "For Heaven's sake, what are you doing here?"

"Company doctor," replied the red beard. "I twigged you for an American as soon as I laid eyes on yer. How about an ice-cold drink?"

They shook hands and Lander dropped upon a steamer deck chair beside the physician.

"Mulligan's my name," said the doctor. "You're Mr. Lander. Dupres invited me to lunch but I have a case of beriberi that kept me. What brought ye to this devil's island?"

"I don't think it's so bad," he replied. "Since you have an ice machine you can temper hell to suit your taste."

"Americans set lots of store on ice. It's the worst thing a man can take in his drink in the tropics. Bad for the stomach. But I must say it's refreshing."

"What are you doing on a French island?" demanded Vincent.

"Sure, I'm a Frenchman. At least I lived in Tahiti for twenty years and speak the lingo like a native. I'm here because the pay is good and there are many interesting diseases." He grinned. "And I'm safe from the women."

"I met a very charming woman at the superintendent's."

"Oh, aye, Hyacinth. She don't bother about me. She'll probably marry Lemaitre, the scut."

"I don't like him," admitted Lander. "But why do you call him a scut?"

"Because he's a filthy brute. It's the native in him. He's one quarter Polynesian, and the way he treats—— Well, I shouldn't be talking."

"Then it is brutality which is responsible for the heavy mortality on the island. I suspected as much."

"No, no. The sun, the heat, the salt dust, the ammonia, the phosphates, do the killing. He's just an overbearing bully. Labor's too valuable, here, to permit it to be maltreated. That's why I'm hired and I have an assistant and four nurses. He's just the kind that would rather kick a soldier than speak to him decently. The chinks hate his guts."

"Surely Mr. Dupres would not permit his daughter to marry the man."

"Oh, Dupres isn't on to him the way I am. He sticks to his office pretty much; but I go everywhere. The fellow isn't above fooling with these yellow women. He's felt the bite of my tongue, never fear."

"What is the trouble with the natives, the chief cause of illness?"

"They get lung trouble, and blindness, and lots of them die of sunstroke."

"It's pitiable."

The red beard made a gesture of impotence. "After all, they're only coolies."

"But human beings."

"I suppose so. Just the same, the life of a coolie, even in the Chinas, isn't overlong. Hardship and starvation carries them off."

"But with all these deaths, doesn't the government of Anam protest? It could refuse to permit them to come here."

Mulligan laughed. "The country is overpopulated. The wages are good. When one of these fellows dies, his pay is turned over to his relatives back in Indo-China and you bet the relatives don't complain. It's not slavery, you know; they come willingly. After they find out what they're up against, it's another matter. If they ever rise——"

"Is there danger of an insurrection?"

"Even a rat will fight in a corner. You said yourself these were human. Well, lad, I got to make me rounds. You'll find the aristocracy waking up by the time you get back to the house."

"I'm glad I met you, doctor; we must have another chat."

"It's good to hear the sound of English, even on a Yankee tongue," said the Irishman with a laugh which took

the curse off his slur. They shook hands understandingly and Lander strolled back to Dupres.

He was perspiring profusely from his slight exertions and he had time to bathe and change before the others were stirring. On the porch iced drinks were set out, and, as he picked one up, Dupres and Colombe put in an appearance.

"Want to see the crater this afternoon?" asked the superintendent.

"If it won't inconvenience you."

"I'll send Colombe with you. I have work at my desk which will occupy me until dinner time."

"Would mademoiselle like to accompany us?" he ventured.

Dupres shook his head. "She hates the crater," he replied. "It's almost an obsession. You see she is half Anamese. I hate it, myself, but the work must be done."

CHAPTER III.

A PEEK INTO HADES.

"IT'S four o'clock," said Colombe. "Let's get aboard the train, monsieur."

Lander walked with the fat Frenchman to the spot where they had left the railroad train and saw that the engineer and fireman were already upon the absurd little engine. It immediately moved down the slight slope, through the gate in the wall, skirted the native village, the hospital and factories, and after half a mile, swung upon a branch line toward the interior of the island. For ten minutes they crawled through a tunnel roofed with vegetation, then Lander saw a bright light ahead and presently they turned to the right upon the brink of a mighty chasm.

At first he thought of the Grand Canyon of Arizona, but the place lacked the color of that masterpiece of nature. This vast pit was yellow and grayish white. It must have been four hundred feet to the bottom and it was at least three miles wide. At the bottom he saw what looked like clouds of smoke, but Colombe told him they were salt clouds.

The thing grew on him with its immensity and its dreariness as he gazed. He thought of pictures he had seen of lunar landscapes, a mass of pits and craters, or of the illustrations by Doré of Dante's "Inferno."

Into this vast pit the sun poured its now slanting rays, their heat so intense as to give the idea of visibility. The floor and sides of the pit reminded him of honeycomb, for they were perforated with tiny holes, and things were crawling in and out of them—— Merciful powers, those things were men! They looked no bigger than ants, these laborers who were burrowing like moles down there. As he became accustomed to the spectacle he saw that they were busy as bees. There were hundreds of creatures moving about far below, naked as far as he could see, save for the conical straw hats of the Anamese.

He made out lines of railroad track and small cars pushed by men. He saw them working with pick and shovel on the surface and disappearing like rabbits into holes.

"How can human beings stand such labor?" he gasped. "It must be like roasting on a spit down there."

"About fifty-five degrees centigrade. That's between one hundred and thirty and one hundred and forty Farenheit. A white man would die in a couple of days. These fellows last for months, even years," said Colombe.

"Isn't the bottom of that pit below sea level?"

"No. If it were it would be worthless. The lagoon, originally, was probably three or four hundred feet deep in the deepest part but there is a layer of guano from twenty-five to sixty or seventy feet deep over it. A lot of it has turned into rock and has to be crushed like a mineral. It's been ac-

cumulating there for thousands of years, and the surface stuff has been spoiled by rains. We are practically mining down there."

"Just what is guano made of?"

"A little of everything. Dead birds, dead fish, rotted vegetation, and the excrement of millions of sea birds. We get phosphate and sulphate of lime in greater quantity than they do on rainless islands, not so much urate and oxalate of ammonia."

"I've seen enough," he said sadly. "I suppose such things are necessary."

"Can't be helped," replied the Frenchman cheerfully. "I was shocked the first time I saw it, and it almost killed me the first time I went down to the workings. The ammonia you know."

Lander was coughing and choking.

"If you get it here, think how it is below," said Colombe. "Want to go down?"

"I am afraid I couldn't stand it. In a few days, when I get a little more acclimated——"

The fat man chuckled. "You don't get acclimated to this sort of thing. Fortunately my work is in the laboratory. We have a big factory, you know; make phosphate crystals and manufacture acids. I'm in charge of that end of the business. It's bad enough. *En avant?*"

Lander answered by climbing upon the flat car.

"You say you have twenty-four white people here."

"We call them white, but six or eight are Polynesian half-castes. There is Dupres, the superintendent, myself, four chemists, an overseer and two assistants, three or four women, the doctor and his assistant. And we call the four nurses white, but they are half Tahitians. You know—mothers were natives, fathers beach combers. Then we have three English seamen who came here in an open boat, deserted from some craft. I have them in the factory, but they are not much good. Then there's Hyacinth—and even that darling is only half white—and Lemaitre—he's got a Polynesian streak in him. That's the total of the Lords of Creation. Oh, yes, two Tahitian-French lieutenants in our little army."

"I presume I shall meet them all."

"Can't avoid them in a tiny place like this. Not a bad lot, though we have our troubles with some of them."

"I saw one of your Chinese soldiers. He seemed well drilled; at least he saluted smartly."

Colombe grinned. "Lemaitre is a Prussian for salutes. We have fifty Chinese coolies armed with good rifles, and we have a couple of Lewis guns. More military than we need, perhaps, but it overawes the laborers. We often have to drive some of them to their work. I don't blame the poor devils."

Further conversation was stopped by the arrival of the train at the village. "Want to see the factory?" asked Colombe.

"If you don't mind."

"We'll walk down."

They returned to the native town, continued on past the hospital and the doctor's cottage and reached a long, low, shedlike structure of galvanized iron, from the window of which came a powerful and unpleasant odor.

"After all, I don't suppose I would learn anything by entering," Lander said. "I am enormously ignorant regarding chemistry."

"They are bottling ammonia, and sulphuric acid," smiled Colombe. "I'm sure you wouldn't like to go in."

"Who does that work?"

"Some Chinese, and a couple of score of Anamese women. It's the soft job on the island. Would you like to see the Polynesian village?"

"Where is it?" Lander asked. They had come to the end of the settlement.

Colombe led him to the edge of the cliff and bade him look down. Some four hundred feet below was a ledge

of coral rock and upon it had been erected a score of Marquesan huts. A small flotilla of fishing boats rocked in a tiny cove.

"They provide the colony with fresh fish," said his guide. "Originally the company employed Tahitians in the crater but they couldn't stand it. They are big men but have no stamina. The little Anamese are really stronger; at least they have more endurance. I am sure Dupres will have iced drinks for us."

Lander took the hint and followed him back to the white settlement.

As they passed the wall, Colombe pointed inland and Lander saw a row of huts in the rear of the array of white bungalows.

"The military barracks," he said. "Captain Lemaitre and his lieutenants live in this first cottage."

A woman in a blue kimono opened a screen door on the porch of the third cottage and called to Colombe in French.

"Mais oui, madame, certainment," he replied. "It's Madame Lauret, wife of one of my assistants," he explained. "She wants me to bring you to call on her. Let's get it over with. Hyacinth will be furious."

"Why?"

"Doesn't like her," he said with a chuckle. "Madame is a trifle—well, she is not very serious."

Polynesian women are often very attractive, and when they are half French they are sometimes beautiful. Madame Lauret was young, still under thirty. Her skin was a very light brown, a sort of tan. Her eyes were large, black and lustrous, her mouth small and painted vermilion, and her hair—well, she had got hold of a bottle of peroxide. The mass of yellow tresses, contrasted with heavy, beautifully arched eyebrows of jet, was rather startling. But there was no denying that madame was very pretty. Her blue kimono, over almost transparent pink lingerie, was coquettishly open at the breast. It was evident that madame possessed a very remarkable figure. Her feet, without stockings, were thrust into blue mules. Her smile was engaging; she had the splendid teeth of the Tahitian.

"Permit me, madame, to present Monsieur Lander."

She extended both hands. *"Enchanté, monsieur. Vous parlez Français, n'est ce pas?"*

"He speaks excellent French, madame," declared Colombe.

"Ah, that is delightful, for I have no English. You must sit down, monsieur. It is wonderful to have a new man on the island. These company officials become so tiresome," she cried. "In a moment there will be drinks."

"We are due back at Colonel Dupres'," protested Colombe.

"Zut! Let him wait. Take a chair, monsieur. This frightful heat! It is better in Papeete, is it not?"

"I found it very hot there."

"Well, it is not the north pole, but at least there is life, society, good music, in Tahiti."

"Where is George?" asked Colombe uneasily.

"My foolish husband still labors at the factory. He is so faithful you should raise his wages, Monsieur Colombe."

Colombe threw a whimsical glance at Lander. "That is why we were summoned."

"But no, but no! It is to Monsieur Lander that you owe the good fortune. Ah, here are the drinks. And there is plenty of ice. You Americans love the ice. I also."

The men accepted tall glasses of gin and mineral water, and madame leaned close to Lander and pressed her shoulder against his as she touched glasses with him.

"To our better acquaintance, monsieur," she cooed.

"Merci, madame."

"You will remain with us a long time, I hope?" she asked.

"I understand I cannot get away for a month."

Her eyes were bright. "In a month so much may happen," she said significantly.

CHAPTER IV.

ISLAND SOCIETY.

AND now we must go," stated Colombe resolutely. "The colonel must surely be impatient."

"But we shall see you often, my husband and I," declared madame. "And I am so lonely during the afternoons. You will always find me glad to see you, monsieur."

"You are very kind," mumbled Lander.

They escaped and continued upward. The sun had dropped into the sea, and now the western sky, which the settlement faced, was suffused with the magnificence of a South Sea sunset. In ten minutes it would be quite dark, for there is no twilight in the tropics; but during its brief glory there is nothing so astounding as the southern sky when the sun has slipped below the horizon.

"What do you think of her?" asked Colombe.

"She is very cordial."

"Beware of her, my friend. Her husband is a fool and she thinks herself a seductress. A Frenchwoman with Tahitian blood is not worried about marriage vows. We have had to ship away two young men who lost their heads over her. We would send her away except that her husband is a very excellent chemist."

"You need not worry about me; I have always had a horror of peroxide blondes. But she is beautiful."

"Lemaitre thinks so," said Colombe, "and one or two others. There will be murder done over that woman some day."

There were lights already upon the Dupres porch and the sound of a phonograph playing a seductive American dance tune.

"I thought—it seemed to me that Captain Lemaitre was much interested in Mademoiselle Dupres."

"Oh, he would like to marry Hyacinth, but that does not blind him to other beauty."

"Mademoiselle Dupres is amazing," observed Lander.

"Yet she is of mixed blood and she must marry in the islands. It is only here that men are free from prejudice. I could wish her a better man than our *capitaine*."

Upon the lighted porch they found Hyacinth, Lemaitre, and three or four others. There were Monsieur and Madame Farnole; the man small, black-eyed and black-mustached, the woman fat, swarthy with a suggestion of mustache. Provincial French, both of them, whom Colombe introduced as one of his chemists and his wife. And there was a tall, gaunt man with terrible greenish eyes and a long, narrow face with a slit of a mouth who was Captain Schmidt, the field superintendent or overseer. Colonel Dupres thrust a drink into the American's hand after introductions and demanded to know what he thought of the crater.

"That men could possibly labor there seems incredible," he replied.

Schmidt smiled significantly. "Man can do what he has to do," he said in a rasping voice. "I have been descending into the crater for two years."

"Ah!" exclaimed Hyacinth, "you have made your daily visits but you do not dig in the holes nor push the barrows through the salt dust."

"My dear Hyacinth," reproved her father, "Captain Schmidt does more than any other white man could do."

"It is my nightly prayer," retorted the girl, "that the bottom will fall out of the crater and all the phosphates vanish with it."

"As I told you," Colonel Dupres said to Lander with a shrug of his thin shoulders, "the child is obsessed."

"When you are married and live in Papeete," declared Lemaitre with a languishing look, "you will forget the horrors of this island."

"They will come to me in my dreams," she replied. "Captain Lemaitre, please change that phonograph record."

The topic of conversation now shifted to the outside world, and these exiles discussed the conferences of the League of Nations at Geneva, the ill-starred polar flight of the *Italia,* the transatlantic aviation exploits, and the problem of German reparations. It was not the first time that Lander had been impressed by the active and inquiring minds of French people of all classes and their ability to make interesting and even amusing conversation upon any subject under the sun. Finally the visitors departed, one by one, only Colombe and Lemaitre remaining to dinner with the colonel and his daughter and their guest.

"I met your doctor this afternoon," said Lander to the colonel. "I was astonished to find an Irishman on this island."

"The Irish one finds everywhere," Dupres replied. "They are a strange race—a brilliant one but a little mad. Doctor Mulligan makes of himself a hermit, but he is a splendid physician."

Lemaitre scowled. "A sneering, inhuman dog, that's what he is. You will some day regret retaining him in his office."

Hyacinth eyed him coldly. "How can you say such things?" she demanded. "He does all that he can to ameliorate the suffering of these poor people. I have known of him sitting up all night with a dying coolie."

"I do not attack him as a physician," apologized the captain. "As your father said of his race, he is mad and therefore dangerous"

"He impressed me as very sane," observed Lander. "I liked him."

The captain threw him an unfriendly glance but devoted himself to his plate.

The American was rewarded by a grateful glance from the girl.

"You would not care to voyage to Japan, perhaps, monsieur?" asked Colonel Dupres.

"Not this year, sir. Why?"

"I have wireless information that in two or three days a Japanese freight ship will put in here to take on a thousand tons of phosphates for Yokohama. I would not advise you, however, to travel on a Japanese cargo boat, for the food consists only of raw fish and rice —and a very small quantity of that. The little brown men of Nippon live on less than any other race of humans."

"If you will permit me, I shall remain until your supply ship takes me back to Tahiti. I left certain luggage there."

"We shall be delighted to have you."

"How can you make such a suggestion, *mon père?*" demanded the girl. "Monsieur Lander has only just arrived."

"In his interests, my dear, not in ours."

"Our guest made the acquaintance of Madame Lauret, a little while ago," said Colombe.

Lemaitre threw a swift glance at the American and dropped his eyes on his plate.

"No doubt she called you in," commented Hyacinth contemptuously.

Lander smiled. "She was very pleasant."

"But of course," said the girl. "A new man would give her palpitation of the heart."

"Hyacinth does not admire madame," remarked Colombe.

"I hate her. She is a vampire," cried Hyacinth hotly. "Her husband does not beat her. It is an error."

"Please, my child," pleaded the colo-

nel. "This is a small community and remarks are repeated."

"I am not afraid of her," declared the little spitfire.

"Now, Monsieur Lander," said Dupres, "we wish to make your stay as pleasant and profitable for you as possible. I presume you wish to make pictures, and all our facilities are at your disposal. Should you wish to descend into the crater Captain Schmidt will accompany you, and myself or Monsieur Colombe will take you anywhere about the island. I suggest you do not leave the settlement alone, for there is danger."

"Wild animals? Serpents?" Lander asked.

Dupres shook his head. "There are no wild beasts upon so small an island, though there are poisonous insects and serpents, yet that is not what I mean. The whites, as might be expected, are violently hated by the other races here, and, if you presented a good opportunity, you might be assassinated. There are, hiding in the bush, several score of runaway contract laborers——"

"Slaves, he means," said Hyacinth.

"No," denied the colonel. "We have no slaves. All our people are freemen who have sold their services by contract. These have fled and have arms of a sort and are murderously inclined."

"You have an army," replied Lander significantly.

"Pardon, monsieur," said Captain Lemaitre, "I have half a company of Chinese soldiers who know nothing about bush fighting. They are well drilled and good shots and brave, and can defend us adequately; but the jungle is almost impenetrable and we wish to take no chances of losing half our men in an ambush."

"The captain states the case exactly," said Dupres. "They are harmless in the bush and we are content to prevent other laborers from escaping to swell their numbers. Only, if they encountered a solitary white man, they would probably kill him in an exceedingly painful manner."

"And serve him right," said Mademoiselle Hyacinth. "They are my people, monsieur; brave Anamese who have rebelled against injustice. I admire them."

Dupres laughed. "As for that, so do I. Nevertheless there is grave danger."

Lander nodded. "I shall be very careful, sir."

Lemaitre laughed. "Without doubt, Monsieur the American."

"How do they live?" asked Lander, ignoring the gibe.

"There are wild pigs on the island, sea birds; and then they descend the cliffs at night and catch fish."

"I am waiting for the day they get courage enough to make an attack," boasted Lemaitre. "With my machine guns——"

"Oh, brave man," cried Hyacinth. "With your machine guns, you fear not the unarmed."

"I fight to save you and all the whites," said the captain, flushing and turning reproachful eyes upon her. "Your father is a French officer and your mother was a princess, mademoiselle. Why do you take the side of these swine against your own people?"

Hyacinth's eyes were bright and her olive cheek a dark crimson.

"Because they are oppressed," she declared.

To himself Lander muttered: "She doesn't like him. She won't marry that scoundrel."

His own vehemence surprised him. Why had he taken such a pronounced dislike to the French captain? Was it jealousy? He did not think so. Mademoiselle Hyacinth was beautiful and fine but she was Eurasian, and he came of an old established and prejudiced American family which regarded mixture of its blood with other than the Anglo-Saxon race with horror.

Hyacinth was fascinating, winsome, appealing and delicious, but even had she been all French he did not think he would have fallen in love with her; she was not his type.

He did not really know what his type might be, as a matter of fact, for he had never been greatly attracted by any woman; but, in a general way, his type would probably be blond, cool, serene, blue-eyed, tall and representatively American.

Just the same, he hated the way Lemaitre looked at her. She was too pure and sweet for this island Don Juan.

The delightful French banter was going on all about him, and both Hyacinth and the captain were merrily taking part. Presently it was eleven o'clock and the girl gave the signal for breaking up the party.

Lander found his chamber fairly cool, now, and he fell asleep almost immediately, bringing to an agreeable end his first day on Murotoru.

CHAPTER V.

WHAT THE CAMERA SAW.

SOUNDS of activity awoke him shortly after six in the morning. The air was heavy with the fragrance of frangipani and other tropic blooms; the gentle breeze was shaking the slender trunks of the coconut trees and causing their great leaves to ripple and rustle. What woke him was the peanut whistle of the little locomotive, moving with its load of laborers on the flat cars toward the hellish crater.

He rose and got into his thin white clothes, crossed the hall which divided the Dupres house into two parts, and went upon the porch, where the Anamese servant was dusting, and then out into the little village street.

He saw several men going toward the lower town. A squad of Chinese soldiers were lined up for inspection down near the wall, and there was smoke coming out of the chimney of the factory below. Walking to the edge of the cliff, he looked down and saw the black heads of swimmers and a half dozen outrigger canoes moving seaward. Evidently the island fishing fleet on its way to work. The sea was very calm this morning, and, directly below, it was shadowed by the high coral cliff, as the sun rose on the other side of the island.

He went back for his camera and got some very pretty shots of clouds, and sea and fishermen, and even ventured to photograph the soldiers. These appeared to be unusually sullen for Chinese coolies, a race always ready to smile and be amused at trifles. Several of them scowled at him and others regarded him impassively as he aimed his camera at them.

There were thirty men in line. Evidently the remainder of the garrison had been on duty all night and had been permitted to turn in. The sergeant saluted him and asked if he would like to see the men drill, and, upon his assent, put them through the French manual of arms, which they executed smartly enough, after which they marched back to their barracks. No officers appeared, which meant that Lemaitre did not set store upon morning inspection.

Lander moved toward the upper side of the village, came to the edge of the jungle, skirted it and found it possible to continue on at the very edge of the cliff where the vegetation line stopped for lack of soil. He proceeded in this way for a quarter of a mile, when a cleft in the coral stopped him. There was a sheer drop of twenty-five or thirty feet before him and he had no inclination to descend. Ahead, the cliff was less precipitous and he saw a ledge two or three or four hundred feet in advance upon which stood a white goat solemnly looking down at the sea, which thundered against the rocks at the base of the precipice. Mechanically he aimed his camera at the animal, ar-

ranged his telescopic lens, but just then the goat unexpectedly darted forward and lost himself among the rocks. He had been frightened, and the cause of his fright was soon apparent, as an Anamese woman came around a turn and stood on the ledge where the goat had been. She carried a heavy package under her right arm.

Lander smiled. This was a better picture. Again he pointed the camera and was sighting it when a man appeared from nowhere, dropped on his knees, and kissed the woman's feet. The fellow was naked to the waist but wore tattered white trousers. Excitedly Lander pressed the bulb, and a second later the woman touched the man on the shoulder. He rose and took the bundle from beneath her arm.

In his eagerness to get a second shot, Lander took a step nearer to the edge of the cliff and his foot broke off a chunk of soft coral rock which went bumping down, lifting a cloud of white dust. The man extended his hand to the woman on the ledge, they stooped and vanished from view, while the photographer cursed his stupidity. The tableau of the pair on the narrow ledge halfway down the precipice had been very striking. He could only hope that his first picture was successful.

Carefully he retraced his steps until he reached the clearing, pausing here and there to take a picturesque shot. But the scene on the ledge was on his mind.

Last night he had asked how the outlaws lived and it had been explained that they caught wild pigs, sea birds, and occasionally secured fish. Now he knew that they had other sources of supply. He had seen a woman from the village carrying a package which she delivered to an outlaw whom she met by appointment upon that narrow ledge. As the cliffs were of coral, doubtless there were many caves, and the outlaws, instead of hiding in the steaming jungle, were probably comfortably housed in dry caves overlooking the sea.

This was information which Superintendent Dupres would be glad to possess, and undoubtedly it was Lander's duty to tell him what he had seen. Had he not peered into the inferno of the crater yesterday, he would not have hesitated, but these outlaws had escaped from the killing slavery of the phosphate beds, which meant they had courage and initiative and were only exercising the right of every man to improve his condition. Dupres had said they were dangerous only to white stragglers; the settlement was well guarded; and, to report the spectacle on the ledge would mean that the brutal Lemaitre and his savage Chinese would hunt down the poor creatures and slaughter them with machine guns.

Lander decided that it was no business of his to make a report, and he hoped that the refugees would continue to be free. He had used up all his plates and now he returned to the Dupres house, left his camera in his room, and found the colonel on the porch when he came back to it.

"At work already," smiled the Frenchman. "Was the morning light adequate?"

"Very nearly perfect," Lander replied. "I got half a dozen interesting pictures, I feel sure. I wonder about developing them. I have an outfit and, with the use of a bathroom——"

"This house is yours," replied Dupres with an expansive gesture, "but Colombe has a completely equipped dark room at the factory. If you can stand the odors, you may get better results."

"If he has no objections."

"But he will be delighted. You are an honored guest, monsieur. You will show me all your prints?"

"Naturally, colonel."

"We have only *petit dejeurner*, but if you wish eggs——"

"No, thank you. Coffee and bread and butter is my ordinary breakfast."

Dupres clapped his hands, two servants appeared and set out plates of rolls and French bread upon a coverless table.

Then they brought big tin pots, one containing hot milk, the other coffee. Dupres seated himself and Lander drew up a chair. In five minutes, Mademoiselle Hyacinth, sweet, cool and cheerful, came to join them.

"You are up early, monsieur," she charged.

The colonel nodded. "He has already been abroad with his camera, this energetic American. Presently you will see how beautiful is our island when pictured by an artist."

"Perhaps monsieur might be willing to take our photographs, *mon père,*" she suggested. "And even give us copies."

"I'll be delighted, mademoiselle. And I would like permission to use them on lantern slides when I deliver my lecture in the United States."

She laughed delightedly. "I consent and so does my father."

"Whenever you are ready," the colonel declared.

After breakfast the girl vanished, the colonel went to his desk, and Lander packed his plates and strolled down to the factory in search of Colombe, who welcomed him heartily and showed him the dark room, ordered everything made ready for him, and left him to his resources. The place was without ventilation and hot as a Turkish bath, so Lander stripped to the skin and then set to work. All of his pictures turned out well, but the scene on the ledge required great care to enlarge it enough to make it worth anything. He had used a rare and very expensive lens for this shot. It came up beautifully, and he found himself eagerly awaiting the result.

It was even more effective than he thought, that spectacle of a man kissing the feet of a woman between sea and sky. The figures were small but very clear and he smiled triumphantly when he picked up the wet print to study it. The smile slowly faded; he uttered an exclamation of astonishment as he looked upon the face of the woman. He was looking at Hyacinth Dupres.

It was Hyacinth who was the ministering angel of the outlaw. It was the delicately natured French-Anamese girl who penetrated the jungle, worked her way down the cliff, and stood on the narrow ledge with the kneeling man. How had she made her way back to the house so rapidly, changed her dress, and appeared cool and unconcerned at breakfast with her father and his guest?

The back of the man was toward the camera. He was a big, well-formed fellow, burned brown by the tropic sun, yellow-skinned and almond-eyed without doubt, and probably chief of the outlaws. He had vanished with Hyacinth into a cave; perhaps there was a secret passage through the cliff which permitted exit somewhere close to the house. That would explain her quick return.

He remembered, now, how warmly she had championed the outlaws last night and how she had jeered at Lemaitre when he talked of his machine guns. She was half Anamese; of course her kinsfolk won her sympathy. But it was dangerous business, visiting them in their den and lairs—and it ought to be stopped.

What should he do about it? He had promised the colonel to show him all his prints but he could not betray the brave young girl. He might destroy the negative but this was one of the most remarkable pictures he ever had been fortunate enough to secure, and, like all good photographers, he hated to lose a fine plate.

The whites on the island went about their business serenely because they supposed that the outlaws were lurk-

ing in the jungle on the other side of Murotoru, instead of which it appeared that they were hiding close by and they might swoop down upon the settlement at any time.

If there was a passage through the ground from the ledge to within a short distance of the Dupres house, it might be used for a foray by the wild men. It was his duty to report what he had discovered to Colonel Dupres; yet, to do it, he must betray Mademoiselle Hyacinth.

He was perspiring as much from mental distress as physical discomfort in that hot box, and, gathering up his materials, he opened the door and staggered out.

"Very hot in there," said a chemist to whom he had been introduced. It was Monsieur Lauret, husband of the friendly lady of last night. He was a small, very thin man with burning black eyes and a very sallow skin. He was extending his hand to look at the prints and Lander almost turned them over to him before he realized that Hyacinth's picture was among them.

"Later, monsieur, if you please. I have some retouching to do," he pleaded.

He left the factory and walked slowly and irresolutely toward the bungalow of Colonel Dupres. Was there any other conclusion to be drawn from the photograph than that Hyacinth was in communication with the outlaws?

Wasn't it possible that she had stolen down there to meet a lover?

If that was the case why was she carrying a bundle? The bundle, most likely contained tea, canned goods, the sort of things the Anamese could not get for themselves. If it was a lover from the settlement she was meeting, he would be in no need of supplies. No, the man was an outlaw but not necessarily a member of the band of wild men against whose ferocity he had been warned. The child was taking a frightful risk, in any event, even if she was not endangering the entire white settlement.

He reached the porch without making a decision, and he found, alone upon it, lying in a hammock, her knees drawn up to make a resting place for a book, the subject of his concern. His face cleared. The thing to do was to show her the print and see what happened.

CHAPTER VI.

LANDER MAKES A BARGAIN.

AND how have your photographs turned out?" Hyacinth demanded, observing the wet prints in his hand.

"Excellently, mademoiselle. Where, may I ask, is Colonel Dupres?"

She laughed. "Poor father thinks he is working at his desk. I just looked into his study and he was fast asleep."

"There is one of my pictures which puzzles me greatly," he said hesitatingly. "I am distressed about it. I do not know what to do. Would you look at it and give me your advice?"

"But certainly." She extended a little brown hand. In it he placed the print, watching her closely.

He saw a faint flush creep into the golden cheeks as she gazed and he saw her little bosom agitate itself. Her eyes, when she lifted them, were clear and fearless.

"How extraordinary!" she said in a low tone. "May I ask how you secured this picture?"

"From the top of the cliff. I used a telescopic lens."

"Did you know that you were photographing me?"

He shook his head. "You were too far away to be recognized. It was only when I enlarged the print——"

She laughed gently. "How surprised you must have been!"

"Mademoiselle, what shall I do about this picture?" he demanded gravely.

"It is very simple." She tore the print into quarters. "Now it is settled."

"No. I still have the plate. And I have promised your father to show him all my pictures."

She planted her absurd little feet on the floor and leaned toward him pleadingly. Her expression was irresistible. At the moment she was all French.

"This, you must not show him," she declared.

Lander looked troubled. "I don't want to get you into difficulties, mademoiselle, but you appreciate my position. Will you tell me what you were doing on that ledge so early this morning?"

"Certainly, my friend. I often rise early and prowl about the cliffs. I encountered an Anamese who paid me the homage due the daughter of the commandant. *Voila!*" Her eyes studied him.

"And you carry with you a large, heavy bundle when you prowl about in the early morning?"

"*Zut,* you are difficult. What do you think I was doing, monsieur?"

"I was forced to conclude," he said gravely, "that you were carrying supplies to somebody. My deduction, mademoiselle, was that you were giving aid and comfort to one of the outlaws of whom your father spoke last night."

"And if I were, you would betray me?" she whispered.

Lander made a gesture of despair. "You see my position."

"But if your so remarkable camera had failed to work well, you would not have known that it was I."

"I wish it had failed," he said miserably. "If you could show me a really good reason why I should not take this print to your father——"

The girl stood up and spread out her arms. "I have done no harm," she pleaded. "You forget, monsieur, that my mother was Anamese and the tortures inflicted upon her people in this dreadful crater tear my heart. I can do nothing, but for those brave ones who have escaped is there harm that I should take them tea and rice which they cannot get on Murotoru?"

"Your mother was a princess and these are coolies. You have nothing in common."

"Aruku is no coolie," she declared. "He is a Prince of Hué."

"Aruku is the man you met on the ledge?"

She nodded.

"But if he is a prince, he did not have to work in the crater. Your father would have set him free."

Hyacinth looked nervously around. "Will you walk with me, monsieur? Here we shall be overheard, perhaps. Come to the edge of the cliff and sit down with me under that coconut tree over there."

She clapped an Anamese straw hat upon her lustrous black hair and led him across the street and the railroad to the brink, where a courageous coconut palm had succeeded in rearing itself on scanty soil.

"Now sit down, my friend, while I tell you what you do not know."

They seated themselves in the small circle of shade made by the fronds of the tree and the girl began her explanation.

"Fifty years ago Anam was an empire which included Tonkin, Cambodia, Indo-China and the present province of Anam, of which the capital is Hué. The people were happy and contented under the rule of their emperor. They were a peaceful, joyous people, monsieur, who made war only upon the wild tribes of the mountains. They were as civilized as the Chinese or the natives of Siam or Burmah. Then came the French, who forcibly occupied Indo-China and compelled the poor emperor to cede to them the province. From Saigon they intrigued and fomented strife so they would have an excuse to intervene, and they stole one province after another until only Anam

was left to the emperor. This was not enough, so they brought about a civil war and sent forces, ostensibly to assist the emperor, and then compelled him to accept a French protectorate for Anam.

"From that it was but a step to be the actual rulers of the country, and the French garrison never left Hué. My father was an officer in this army and it was in Hué that he met my mother and married her, and I was born in Hué. My mother loved my father, who was very kind to her, but she never forgot that she was Anamese and that our country had been stolen so that France should have an empire and exploit it. From her I learned our sad history."

"But, really, mademoiselle——"

"Wait," she said imperiously. "My father left the army and became an engineer and he took me to Tahiti. He left me there, my mother having died, with nurses, while he returned to Europe to fight for France. I had almost forgotten Anam when he became the superintendent of the phosphate company on this island and brought me here five years ago.

"Meanwhile the Polynesian natives had died like flies in the crater and it was necessary to have docile laborers whose deaths would not provoke great anger through all the French islands, so the company began to import them from Anam, that so-helpless country whose princes dared not protest against the exportation of their subjects. Oh, I know that it is contract labor, that the men come willingly, dazzled by promises of high pay; but they are poor, ignorant people. If I tell you that hell is a wonderful country where you will grow rich, you can't be blamed if you agree to go there, but I am to blame for not telling you that you will be burned in eternal fires."

"I understand all this," said Lander. "It's terrible but it can't be helped."

"Please hear me," the girl went on. "In Anam there are often troubles. Some of our princes still love their country and wish to set it free. But the French have spies everywhere and there are plenty of Anamese rogues to betray the patriots. A year ago they arrested Prince Aruku, a cousin of the late emperor, and they gave to him the choice of being beheaded or signing a contract to come to Murotoru to labor in the phosphate fields for three years. He came. On the same steamer which brought him and a hundred other laborers came a letter to my father from the authorities at Hué which informed him of the rank and crime of Aruku and warned him that he must never be released to return to Hué to foment revolution. He was practically condemned to death in the crater, monsieur."

"I begin to understand," said Lander.

"I have read this letter; my father was so careless as to leave it lying open on his desk. And naturally I suffered greatly for this brave young man. He was different from the other laborers, tall, strong, handsome, no darker than I, not like the coolies, and I considered it horrible that he should be condemned to death for being a patriot.

"I found an opportunity to speak to him. He supposed he would be released when his term of service was up and was determined to work obediently and live to go back to Anam. It was I who told him of his doom and it was I who encouraged him to escape. Eight months ago he broke through the cordon which surrounds the native village, with six companions, and found a safe hiding place. Captain Lemaitre led several expeditions against him but did not find him, but from the bush the prince and his men killed several soldiers.

"During the past six months, various Anamese have escaped and jointed the outlaws, until there are about sixty of them. Prince Aruku has found a secret pass through the coral cliffs to the place where you saw us meet this morn-

ing, and when it is possible I go to give him what supplies I am able to accumulate for him. Now I am in your hands, *Monsieur l'Americaine.*"

"You are in love with him, aren't you?"

She blushed furiously. "No," she denied. "I pity him. That is all."

"He adores you."

"But naturally. He says I am the Goddess Mooronik come back to earth. She is a mountain Goddess of Anam."

"I won't betray you," Lander promised. "But this is a situation that is extremely dangerous for the white colony. Your prince would slay all the white men if possible."

"Except my father. He has promised to spare my father," she declared.

"In a few weeks I shall sail away," he said slowly, "and what goes on here is no affair of mine. But I can't stomach the slaughter of a score of Caucasians by a band of wild brown and yellow men and I don't think either you or your father are safe. If they were just escaped laborers they would probably not be very dangerous, but this prince of yours I presume is educated and daring and a capable leader. Surely your sympathy for Anam is not strong enough to make you side against your own people, mademoiselle. You are half French."

"There is nothing he can do, poor Aruku," she replied quickly. "It would be just retribution if the phosphate works should be destroyed and these profiteers of human blood annihilated. But it cannot happen. Aruku wishes only to rescue some of his people, capture a vessel, and escape to some uninhabited island where they may live like free men. Without weapons he would never dream of attacking the settlement."

"But you said he promised to spare your father. That means he has some idea of killing in mind."

"Oh, when he is furious about the wrongs of the Anamese, he raves like that. But he will not do it. Surely, monsieur, you would not wish these poor people to be hunted down by Captain Lemaitre and his Chinese with rifles and machine guns."

"All my sympathies are on the side of your prince and his band," he admitted. "Just the same, the situation is impossible. I will make a bargain with you. You must stop visiting Aruku. You must give him no more encouragement and take him no more supplies. Why, the fellow is capable of carrying you with him into the jungle and you would die there in a few weeks. For your own sake you must cut communications; don't you see that?"

"And if I agree, you will promise not to mention what you have discovered to my father?"

"Yes, I'll keep my mouth shut."

She dazzled him with her smile. "You are a very good man, Monsieur Lander. I thank you."

He followed her example and got upon his feet and then they returned to the house. Lander broke the glass plate before her eyes, then carried the remaining negatives into the study of Colonel Dupres, who inspected them casually and passed them without question.

As the day wore on, Lander became more and more uneasy, for his silence seemed treason to his host. Aruku, in the jungle or in the caves, had three score followers, and Aruku, though he might adore the young Eurasian girl, must be meditating some horrible revenge upon the whites for his sufferings.

Lander knew nothing about the inhabitants of Anam, but he had traveled far and wide in China, and, while he admired many things in the scheme of civilization which is the oldest in the world, he had been appalled by the ferocity of the maddened Chinese. And never, even in medieval Europe, had

such diabolical punishments been invented as are practiced to-day by the mandarins who are out of reach of European interference.

The most trivial crimes are punished in the most atrocious fashion and decapitation is the mildest form of legal retribution. · A few years ago, in Paotingfu, he had been attracted by an American film whose posters in the lobby of a Chinese cinema theater caused him to stop. While he felt in his pockets for cash to buy a ticket, two policemen came along, drove a nail in the wall, and, from a sack, drew the head of a man from which drops of blood still dripped, which they hung by the pig tail to the nail. Then they fastened beside it a ticket for the picture show.

It seems that the owner of the head had slipped into the theater without paying and had been captured and beheaded for the offense. The ticket he should have bought had been placed in the lobby beside the frightful object to warn others of the perils of going inside without a ticket.

The Anamese were cousins of the Chinese and they were justly infuriated by the sufferings they had experienced in the crater. Thought of the punishment they might inflict upon the whites in this settlement if they got the upper hand made him shudder.

On the other hand, Colonel Dupres was a veteran soldier who had spent years in Anam and knew its natives and he was aware of the identity of the chief outlaw, Prince Aruku, so he should know what to expect from him. But he appeared not to be much concerned and not in the least apprehensive of an attack upon the settlement. He seemed to have confidence in Captain Lemaitre and his company of fifty Chinese soldiers with their rifles and machine guns. And most likely he was quite justified. Nevertheless——

Lander, who had been a second lieutenant of infantry with the A. E. F., had some slight experience of the art of war and it did not seem to him that the settlement was properly protected.

In the comparative cool of the period before sunset the lecturer set out to study the defenses of the place. The white village, as has been stated, consisted of a single row of houses located within three hundred feet of the brink of the cliff, with a wide, white coral road in front and a railroad track running parallel to it beyond. There was a gentle slope of the cleared ground toward the native town, the hospital, and the factory below the wall which was constructed of coral two feet wide and was ten feet in height. The wall extended from the brink of the abyss some two hundred and fifty yards to the natural wall of the jungle. A broad firing platform was placed about four feet below the top of the wall and extended its entire length, and there were sentry boxes at the two gates which permitted the road and the railway to pass into the lower town.

This appeared to be an adequate defense against an uprising from below, but he had observed no defense of the white settlement above. He strolled with apparent casualness in this direction until he came to the dense growth of trees, bushes, and vines which had blocked his progress this morning. He moved into it a few feet and uttered an exclamation of surprise.

The jungle had grown over a high entanglement of barbed wire, most ingeniously contrived, and peering at it closely, he saw running in and out lines of copper wire which could serve no other purpose than to convey electric current. The entanglement could be electrified at will and keep an enemy at bay far more successfully than a stockade of bamboo posts.

He whistled in admiration and followed the barbed wire along until he came to the opening in the jungle

through which the railroad passed. Now he observed for the first time a high gate of wire, lying in the thick grass, which was undoubtedly used to stop this gap at nightfall. This looked more like it.

"Might have known that Dupres was no fool," he muttered as he retraced his steps. Two hundred yards behind the cottages the jungle stopped and he had wondered at a lack of defense from the rear but this bristling wire barricade, as deadly as the third rail of an elevated railroad system, must run the entire length of the upper and lower towns, serving with equal effectiveness to keep the Anamese from escaping into the jungle and to prevent the outlaws from bursting out upon the settlement. No need of sentries here, for, when the current was thrown on it, the wire fences were more terrible than rifles.

"No wonder old Dupres isn't alarmed," he said to himself. "Wonder how any of the Anamese, managed to make their escape. Most likely jumped off the train coming from the crater or going to it. They could never get out of the village at night."

He walked slowly in the rear of the row of cottages toward the Chinese barracks. It was very hot, and he was perspiring from every pore. There was no sign of life at the rear of the houses. As he approached the barracks, however, his ears were assailed by a frightful cry and he quickened his steps, to come around the corner of the low, long building and witness as brutal an outrage as he had ever laid eyes on.

To be continued in the next issue.

RIGHT AND WRONG AVIATION

TWO new uses for the airplane have been discovered. One is praiseworthy, the other deserving of the severest condemnation.

The first use, which is the admirable one, is the solving of traffic problems in congested cities. An official investigator flew over New York City the other day, and saw at a glance what was wrong. Most of the traffic was concentrated along Broadway and Fifth Avenue. Thousands of automobiles at the rush hour were creeping block by block northward, while only a few blocks to the east and west were the river-line avenues, on which a few sensible drivers were making excellent time. The result of this survey will probably be that much of the traffic in the center of the town will be diverted.

The second use, which is the disheartening one, is the hunting of game from the air. When an observer in a plane, holding field glasses to his eyes, swoops low over a forest, spotting deer in the glades, it seems to us that sportsmanship is dead. The next step in hunting, obviously, is to drop bombs that will maim or stun the animals so that a corps of trained human retrievers on the ground may fare bravely forth, swing scores of "gallantly" slaughtered carcasses on their doughty backs, and return from the "hunt" with horns blaring through the greenwood!

Shall this came to pass? Speak, O ye sons of pioneers, shan't we keep *some* of our ideals?

The Toughest Kid in New York Had a Cop for a Friend.

ROUGHNECK

By ROBERT CARSE

MAL MAHONEY was born a roughneck. It came to him, that innate savagery of nature, from his father and his mother—by direct inheritance. His father was an Irishman, a stevedore boss on the South Street docks, a born fighter, drunkard, and roughneck. His mother was a County Mayo woman, small, thin, with narrow face made startling by her dark but flaming eyes. She, too, though, as was her husband, and as was her only child, was hard-jawed and hard-fisted.

She died when Mal was nine, unwilling to remarry, unwilling even to try to get over the great sorrow which had come to her when Mal's father had been brought home from a dock brawl, a great, stiff bulk of flesh, the broken blade of the knife still deep between his wide shoulder blades.

After that Mal was brought up by a cousin of his mother's, a South of Ireland woman and a consummate beer drinker, with nine children of her own. It was rather natural that Mal's "bringing up" took place on the littered pavements of First Avenue, in the shadows of the Gas House, under the high wood-and-steel structure of the "L" and the old docks along the East River. It was more natural that he should early assert his greatest inheritance from his parents: the almost illimitable ability to take and give punishment.

He was small, and dark, and thin, like his mother. But he had his father's hands and jaw, his father's way—so the corner saloon historians remembered—of hitting short and straight from the shoulder with either hand. Even for his age, his size, his companions and his

neighborhood, he was a roughneck who stood out head and shoulders above the rest.

It was Mal who led the raids on the wop fruit carts along Avenue A and, when one particularly long-legged and long-winded Sicilian pursued the running gang too far and too fast, stopped, and gave battle. Mal was not tall enough to reach the enraged Sicilian's chin; but he already knew the virtues and the efficiency of a kick on the shin, followed at once by a kidney blow. It took just those two simple acts, speedily and shrewdly delivered, to bring the big Sicilian sprawling to his knees. He made a move to get to his feet, get his eager hands on the grinning but white-faced boy beyond him. That he failed to do: first, Mal caught him cleanly on the point of his unshaven chin with a sharp-smacking right. The Sicilian relaxed, moaning, and Mal swaggered on, cap pushed back, chest thrust out—a real roughneck, and proud of it.

At the corner, a bit nervously, the gang—six youths, all under the age of twelve and all with the sophistication of twenty-two—waited for him. He came up to them at his swagger, but slowly, never deigning to turn his head and search the street behind for the beaten Sicilian.

"C'me on, Mal!" husked one of the younger, and more apprehensive, members of the gang, "le's blow!"

"Why?" snapped Mal, staring with hard, gray eyes. "I ain't afraid of no ginny—nor two ginnies—nor a hull street full o' ginnies!"

"Chees—I guess you ain't!" admitted the boy at whom he stared. "But dat guy is gonna beat it down to th' corner an' call Flynn, spill 'm 'n earful——"

"What th' hell!" grunted Mal, reaching out a brown and hard hand for one of the stolen oranges. "I ain't scared o' Flynn; he's a frien' o' mine. He'll tell th' ginny t' git th' hell."

The gang collectively thought that over for a moment, searching the face of their thin little leader. Mal went on contentedly eating his orange, sucking at the pulp with great noise and satisfaction. Mahoney was right, they told themselves silently at last. What he said had a big basis of truth: Flynny, the young corner cop, was a friend of Mal's—had never chased him or given him away to an irate storekeeper yet. Mal was the sort of guy to have to lead the gang. Boy, oh, boy, how he had handed the sock to that big ginny!

Mal Mahoney had finished his orange. He tossed the small remains into the gutter.

"C'me on, youse," he commanded. "Le's go swimmin'!"

Making a compact ring about the boy chosen to hold the remainder of the oranges within his shirt, they swung off past the Municipal Lodging House and to the river. It was late April, and the gray, scummy water was cold and very uninviting. But they had agreed to go swimming, and they did. Mal Mahoney started it, was the first to strip off his clothes—cap, shirt, trousers—mount to a pile top and dive off, his scrawny but muscular body cleanly cleaving the gray water. The others could do nothing else but follow. If they did not, they knew, Mal Mahoney would throw them in, and then duck them.

When the red sun was wiped out by the dismal roof line of First Avenue, they called it a day, got back into their clothes again, all but Mal Mahoney shivering a bit, and started toward "the block." They hurried now; it was suppertime, and a kid that was late might have no supper held out for him—his hungry, sock-footed father, or his numerous brothers and sisters were likely to eat it for him. Most of the gang, as they turned the corner, began to run, promising to meet by the ice-cream wagon afterward. Mal alone walked, disdainfully; he was a tough guy, a roughneck, and must show these others

that supper was a small thing in his life.

Thus it was that he was captured by Flynny, the cop. That Flynny caught him was no fault of Mal, who knew that the slim, long-legged and red-headed Irish patrolman went off tour at four o'clock, and Hemmelsmacher, a big, fat and lazy German-American, relieved him, but took over none of the petty complaints of the local storekeepers. Mal had seen Hemmelsmacher as he turned off the avenue, leaning with his back against Joe Esperanto's cigar-store window, hands behind his back, ash stick hanging from his shield by rawhide thong.

So when Flynny reached out of a doorway as Mal was stalking by, whistling contentedly, the black-haired lad was greatly surprised. Not so much so that he did not make a lightninglike and graceful sidewise wriggle that was almost successful as he caught sight of the blue serge, the badge and brass buttons. But the patrolman's hold was sure, and hard, and, recognizing his man, Mal relaxed, turned up his face and asked, casually:

"What th' hell, Flynny?"

"Arragh, yer quick as a rat!" admired Denis Flynn. "Now stand still, ye eel, and listen to me."

The patrolman took his ham hands from the boy's shoulders and leaned back in the doorway, looking down.

"Mal," he said slowly, "ye sh'u'd cut it out."

"Cut what?"—with the beginning of a hard look about the eyes and thin-lipped mouth.

"B'atin' up full-growed men ye've thieved from first."

"Ah, g'wan!" Mal laughed. But he saw Flynny's eyes were gray and somehow disturbing.

"Mal," the policeman said quite softly, "ye'll end up in th' school, lest ye stop."

The boy's eyelids flickered shortly.

"Elmira, yuh mean?"

"Elmira, I mean. Ye ain't no father, no r'al old woman, an' yer runnin' high and wide, wi' yer old man's name, an' his blood. It's a young roughneck you are now, lad, an' proud of it."

Mal Mahoney cocked his hands on his hips and spat into the gutter, a gesture which gave him time in which to gain his composure, badly shaken by this new, and very strange, attitude of his friend.

"G'wan, Flynny!" he scoffed. "Who ain't a roughneck, down in here?"

He expected the tall patrolman to smile; to his surprise, he did not. He was serious.

"Yer tougher 'n them, Mal," he said in the same soft voice, "an' ye've more brains. Which makes it all th' more dang'rous——"

Then the boy laughed, full-throatedly.

"All because I poked a push-cart ginny in th' chips, huh?"

"No!" Denis Flynn straightened up as he spoke. "I'm leavin' th' beat, th' precinct, t'-morra, goin' to th' Bronx—Brook Avenue. Th' lieutenant give me th' tip-off when I come off tour to-day. An' th' new guy who'll be on th' beat won't be like me, Mal, nor like th' Heinie, too good-natured, er lazy, to chase yez. I'm sayin' good-by to yez, lad, an' warnin' yez, because I like yuh. Get me, Mal?"

Moved by the man's poorly hidden emotion, Mal Mahoney nodded, his eyes suddenly hot.

"Got yuh, Flynny. An', 'at's a tough break fer you. Well"—he held out his brown hand—"don't take no phony money from them Bronx Dutchmen, Flynny, an' send us a postcard when yer natchalized!"

They grinned, Irishman to Irishman, hand grip firm and tight.

"Guess I don't get no supper!" predicted Mal, and thus broke away. Even then, he did not run; walked, slowly, stopping from time to time, to shy rot-

ten vegetables and empty tin cans at the garbage barrel cats, or shadow-box with himself before a street-lamp standard. Denis Flynn watched him from sight, up the steps of the brownstone stoop and through the door of the old tenement house in which he did no more than sleep and eat.

"A tough kid," said the patrolman, half aloud, "a real roughneck. God, I dunno!" He stepped out of his doorway, and toward the station house, feeling, for all his twenty-four years, very sad and old.

The new cop on the beat, found Mal and his gang, was just as Flynny had prophesied, a tough one. He was a gray-headed and thin man, made bitter by many unproductive years on the force, a big family, a sick wife and bad feet. He was of Hungarian extraction, and had small sympathy for the Irish and Italian population of the Gas House district. For a time, remembering Flynny's advice and pleas, Mal kept a tacit truce with the man, then forgot it, for it was summertime and the gang were eager to go, looking to him for leadership and the planning of interesting raids.

He did not fail them. They ran their block until the bedeviled storekeepers took to sitting up all night in their shops, half bricks and heavy clubs handy. That pleased Mal, pleased his vanity, while it warned him to seek other fields for the time being. He took his gang, now some two dozen big, south, along the avenue, and into the home territory of other gangs.

They did more than resent the coming of the Gas Housers; they fought it bitterly. One whole afternoon and evening, half bricks, slingshot stones, dead cats and dogs, indescribable filth, was hurled back and forth in pitched battle, keeping pedestrians, policemen and pushcart peddlers off the streets and in safe doorways. Just before sundown, a broken broom handle as a sword and *shillalah,* Mal led the last charge. The incumbents broke and ran, after six of their number had been severely beaten and kicked on their way.

That night, as Mal was finishing the few scraps which comprised his belated supper, seventeen crestfallen and tired boys trooped up to the steps before his tenement, and waited there for him to appear. He was their new leader; from him they took orders.

It was about a month later, when two other small gangs had decided to capitulate and join his clan, that Mal was brought to the realization that his mob needed some place in which they could gather, share loot and cigarettes, plan out their next raids. In short, a good hideaway. After several days search, they found it: a small brass foundry, off Second Avenue, unused now, and boarded up, awaiting some new tenant and industry.

At night, Mal and six of his skillful lieutenants broke into the place, explored it. Nothing could be better: the office, where dusty desks, spittoons and filing cabinets still remained, would be Mal's own headquarters, and their counsel room; the rest was theirs, to do with as they pleased.

There the gang met—until one night, when Mal was over at the Garden, watching the end of the Six Day Bike Race, using a ticket he had found fluttering toward a sewer mouth, it burned to the ground. Mal did not get there until the third alarm had been turned in by a battalion chief and the big trucks roared, screaming, past the Garden. Then he ran full tilt for the place.

Throughout the huge crowd straining against the fire lines were all his gang, wide-eyed, nervous, but still unafraid; Mal would fix things. With his coming, they clustered about him, slowly, and without undue movement.

"Who did it?" he rasped, thin, hard face bathed in the brilliant reds of the reflected flames.

"'Chippy' Mariotto," whispered one cautiously.

"How?"

"Fergot to put his butt out. We was in th' office——"

"Chicky, th' cops!" said one, standing sentinellike on the outskirts of the group. To right and left, Mal pushing them, they started to squirm away through the crowd. Mosts of them got away. Mal, and five more, were caught within the ring of detectives, fire department officials and plain-clothes men who suddenly formed about them.

"Shut yer heads!" whispered Mal, just as the ring finally tightened, allowing them no avenue of escape. "I'll do the chin'."

He did, ten minutes later, in the East Twenty-second Street Station, backed against the wall of the detective bureau, separated from his gang. The police and the fire department, the owner of the building, an Armenian real-estate broker, had a number of facts and charges to confront him with. Simply, it was a well-known fact, for which, he realized any number of reputable witnesses could be produced, to show that he and his gang had been using the place as a headquarters and hideaway for weeks. The criminal charges, now, were unlawful entry and arson. The unlawful entry charge, by itself, was a big laugh; they were all kids, all minors. But, coupled with the arson charge, and the complete wiping out of the valuable building, it was not.

"Which one of you kids did it?" prompted the deputy fire marshal, a big and red man. "Come on, come clean, we got you, and you know it."

Mal Mahoney looked straight back, a composed, mature half smile on his lips.

"You *sure* we did it, mister?"

A growling sound came from the official's throat; suddenly he swung away from Mal and upon his five confederates.

"You!" he barked, pointing a large, hairy hand at the smallest and youngest one. "Do you want to go to the reformatory, too, or do you want to tell me all about it?"

The boy, an Italian of eleven, whitened, reddened, eyes supplicatingly on Mal's for a moment. Then his assumed shell of manhood cracked:

"Yessir," he gulped, beginning to weep, "we done it!"

"Who?" rasped the immediate question. But the Italian lad had now again found Mal's eyes, and was stubbornly silent.

"All right," said the big, red man at last, "I'll see that you all go up!"

"No, yuh won't!"

The big man, the detectives and precinct captain, turned, staring. Mal Mahoney smiled his insult at them.

"I done it, yuh thick donkey! I'll take th' rap!"

The weeping Italian youth began to speak in a sobbing voice, but Mal Mahoney's eyes silenced him; he was a roughneck—and now he'd prove it, once and for all.

Although some of the more openly spoken papers talked against it editorially, Mal Mahoney went to Elmira Reformatory two weeks later. Nothing could stop him from it; not himself, nor the representations of a patrolman named Flynn, stationed in a Bronx precinct. The penniless relations with whom he lived had very little to say in his favor, or his defense. Even his school record was bad: checkered with long "hooky" absences, bad marks and records of classroom insubordination. He went to Elmira, smiling, still cocky.

He came from that place, just seventeen years old, two days before America went into the war. He had not been home and on the block eighteen hours before he enlisted in the United States army, representing himself as twenty-one years of age, and fully looking it. As a casual, he entered the ranks of the Sixty-ninth New York Militia Regi-

ment, trained with them, went with them overseas. For the first and only time in his life, soldiering, was Mal Mahoney happy. Here was where he, a roughneck, belonged.

During the war, back in rest billets after a long siege at the front, Mal Mahoney met his one time friend and would-be counselor, Flynny, the cop. The big, red-headed Irishman was a sergeant in another brigade, now attached to the division Mal's own outfit was a part of. Mal Mahoney, recognized the ex-patrolman, was no longer a kid; he was a man, and a good soldier. Silently, he was thankful for it.

The two spent many hours in talk, reminiscing about the "block," old Gas House days, and what had happened to the corner gang. So and so had been killed at Soissons; Joe, the Greek, had got the French Cross last week; Chippy Mariotto had gone home, full of shrapnel and gas, but smiling, glad to be on his way back to the block—in any condition.

Then the division went up to the front. The two brigades fought side by side, flanked by French territorials. In that six-day battle Mal Mahoney's brigade was welded with the one in which Flynny, the cop, fought, and, as one unit, cut down by casualties and deaths to the size of one full-strength brigade, they attacked, time and again.

On the seventh and last day of that battle, Mal Mahoney, the young gangster and reformatory school graduate, took three German concrete pill boxes with Flynny, the former cop. Together, they stabbed, shot, grenaded, worked, captured German machine guns. Then a fresh American division came in, consolidating the line, taking over what they had gained, and they went back. Mal's colonel had seen the work he and Flynn had done. For it, weeks later, they got the French War Cross, and the American Distinguished Service Medal.

Back in billets again, Flynny talked many hours with Mal Mahoney. He was direct and uncompromising now. In simple, hard words he reviewed Mal's past life, emphasizing the danger that the war had saved him from.

"Yer no rat, kid," grunted Flynny, lying in the warm sun of a French hayfield, the other beside him silently. "Yer a fine lad, an' a swell soldier. But, ye'd 'a' been one—a gun-totin' alley rat if this here war hadn't come, t' save ye."

Mal Mahoney grunted forth a cynical curse; the iron bitterness put in his soul by those years in the reformatory school was still there.

"What're youse after, Flynny?" he rumbled, face hard, eyes narrowed as he looked at the other man.

"I'm after youse joinin' th' cops when this thing is over an' the Jerries are whipped for keeps."

"Th' cops!" Mal Mahoney uttered a harsh laugh. "With th' record I got at headquarters right now!"

"Arragh!" rumbled Denis Flynn. "Ye know, an' I know, that th' reason we got them medals was because yer colonel was handy; lots o' good lads got none, who done more. But, two medals, up agin' th' reform' school—an' th' word o' 'Red' Flynn to a coupla lads he knows in th' department?"

They lay a time in silence, listening idly to the distant groaning of the guns at the front. Mal Mahoney sprang suddenly to his feet and Flynny saw that the younger man's face was twisted with pain, and with longing.

"Ah, wait! This ain't over yet. Come on, Irish, we go get some chow!"

But when it was all over Sergeant Denis Flynn came to him again, this time in Brest, as they waited to go aboard the gray and black splashed transport that was to take them home.

"Look, Mal," said Flynn, and thrust a letter into the other man's hand. Mahoney read, and his eyes widened, and, slightly, his hand trembled. The letter, with a month-old date, was from the

former captain of the East Twenty-second Street Station, now a deputy inspector at headquarters. In it, praise was given for Flynn's work, and the last line of it ordered Mal Mahoney, if he was willing, to report for a police department physical examination and civil-service test as soon as he came out of the army.

Mal handed back the letter, reached up into his upper blouse-coat pocket for a cigarette. He did not speak for a time, just smoked steadily, and that silence made Flynn nervous.

"How about ya?" he demanded roughly. "D' yez wanta, or no?"

"I like fightin'," answered Mal Mahoney, "an' it looks like there ain't gonna be no more war. Sure—I guess so, Flynny!"

Before the two could even shake hands on it, whistles blew and orders boomed down the dock; the division was embarking for home—at last! Swinging up his Springfield, Mal Mahoney fell into line, and, with a wave of the hand at the other man, Flynn ducked away at the run toward his own command, a great grin of triumph on his face.

The same grin was there six months later when he saw, seated high in an armory in New York City, Mal Mahoney get his diploma of graduation from the police school, handed to him by the gray-haired, thin man who was the police commissioner. Flynn, himself, had more cause than that to be happy. He, himself, had just been raised to the rank of first-grade detective sergeant, ordered to report to the homicide bureau at headquarters.

For months, then, he did not see Mal Mahoney; was far too busy with his own work to do so. But, through the numerous underground channels of headquarters, he heard of the young rookie cop. Mal Mahoney was attached to the distant Spuyten Duyvil precinct as a bicycle patrolman; his captain, lieutenants and sergeants liked him; he had the makings of a real cop. Then Flynn heard that Mal Mahoney had made a good pinch—had found two second-story workers pulling a job on a big Riverdale estate; in a running fight had killed one of the yeggs, captured the other and brought him into the station, loot and all.

That bit of work brought the name of Mal Mahoney to the attention of the higher-ups in headquarters in Manhattan. He was transferred, as a good man with possibilities, to a metropolitan precinct from the usually uneventful and sleepy Spuyten Duyvil district. Flynn, going on duty several nights later in headquarters, looked over the precinct assignment list, then cursed broadly. Some stupid donkey on paper work at headquarters had assigned Mal Mahoney to his old stamping ground, to the one bad place in the world for him—the Gas House district!

Denis Flynn did all he could to have that order changed, only to find that, after all, he himself was nothing but a newly made detective sergeant, and had better stick to his homicide squad knitting, and let the assignment lists alone. But, that night, late, Flynn made a point of it to jump a taxi on Grand Street outside of headquarters, and go north, to the East Twenty-second Street Station.

He had not been in the place since his old patrolman days; the desk lieutenant, the clerical cops, the reserves, and Mike, the fat and sleepy janitor, all greeted him warmly, complimented him upon his new rank. But the big, red-headed detective came quickly to the reason for his visit. Where was Mal Mahoney stationed? What was the lad's beat?

The desk lieutenant, with a shrewd, inquiring glance, told him. Flynn shook hands with them, bade them good night, and went out, over toward First Avenue —and the beat he himself had paced in the years before the war. He found

Mal Mahoney leaning up against the window of Joe Esperanto's cigar store, ash stick hanging from his shield by its rawhide thong, hands clasped behind his back.

Mal straightened up when he heard the peculiar policeman's tread as Denis Flynn neared him. Then he recognized the detective and moved his lips in a short smile, holding out his hand. Flynn took it, tightened his own great paw about it, and indicated that they step back from the street and into some doorway for a quiet smoke and conversation. This they did.

"How is it goin', lad?"

"Rotten!"

Flynn swung his eyes to the other man's face.

"Whadda ya mean, Mal?"

"Why'd they shift me down here? Every lad and gal on th' block knows me; all th' old-timers knew me old man and woman. Me, Mal Mahoney, here, t' catch me old pals, run th' kids in for liftin' an apple fr'm th' Greeks, er th' lads fer being drunk of a Saturday night, or for scrappin' a bit with their wives——"

"Forget it, Mal! Go easy on it, lad. Ye remember——"

"Sure I remember how you used to handle us, handle me, Flynny! But you had no patrol sergeant like Maginna!"

"Who, Mal?"

"Jerry Maginna!"

"Ah, is th' big fella back? And what's he doin' t' you, lad?"

"He thinks he's still in th' war, still a sergeant o' M. P.'s. He found me helpin' a drunk home one night, a lad who was a pal o' the Old Man's. 'Lock 'm up!' he says, 'an' get back on yer post, yuh mush-headed rookie!'"

Flynn's mouth formed into a straight and grim line; he, in his day, had known the swaggering, belligerent patrol sergeant also.

"And what did ye say, lad?"

"I told 'm to go along with himself, or I'd give 'm a piece of the ash over th' head as a souvenir!"

"An' he went?"

"Sure, he went! But he reported me to th' captain—who's a real man, if a Scotchman, an' did nothin'."

"So yer all right, then?"

"No. I come into the house last night, and some of th' lads on reserve had a pair o' gloves and was boxin' in the dormitory. Would I box? Sure, I would. Then, in comes Maginna. 'So yer a box-fighter, rookie?' 'Somewhat,' I says. 'Enough t' take youse over, sergeant.' 'We'll see!' he says, and grabs for the other pair o' gloves."

In the darkness of the doorway, Mal Mahoney, born on this block and born a roughneck, smiled.

"I belabored 'm until he didn't know whether he was in Central Park or on top o' Grant's Tomb! One o' th' lieutenants come an' stopped it."

Denis Flynn made a clucking noise with his tongue.

"Mal, t'was th' last thing ye should 'a' done. He'll be ridin' yez now, just achin' for a chance t' catch ye off beat, or havin' a smoke, or a talk with a lass —an' black-record ye out o' th' department!"

"Have no fear, Flynn! I'll watch th' big donkey!"

"Will ye, Mal?"

"I will, Flynny!"

Denis Flynn let go a sign of relief.

"I must go now, lad. But as soon as I can pull it, I'll get ye out o' here, and over into Thirtieth or Charles Street and away from that guy. Ye'll hold tight, lad?"

"I'll hold tight, Flynny. I like th' cops."

They smiled at one another over their crossed hands, then Flynny was gone, hailing a down-bound night-hawk cab. For a month, then, his own duties kept him so busy that he was unable again to get up and see Mal Mahoney. But, slowly, cautiously, he began his propa-

ganda with the few higher-ups he knew personally in the department to get the new patrolman shifted to another more fortunate precinct.

But, in that month, things broke badly for Mal Mahoney. He had just come off night tour; was going home in the gray, cold light of dawn, to his little flat off Third Avenue. On the corner of the block where he lived was a cigar store, closed now, and only dimly lighted by one weak bulb in the back of the place. Mal passed the store every morning on his way home and, with his newly developed policeman's instinct, studied the interior. Now he stopped short, and stared.

Four men were in there, in that dim place, three behind the counter, one just within the slightly ajar door. Cleaning the dive——

Whack!

A forty-five slug ripped through the plate glass, drummed over his shoulder and bit into the brick wall of the movie theater across the street. Four guns were going in there now. Four. Mal, although off duty, wore his service .38 in a rubber holster on the back of his belt. Shooting, he jumped into the doorway. The man nearest to the door, a broad fellow with his back to him, pitched forward as Mal drilled three bullets through him. He swung his gun, roared forth the rest of the chambers at the other three.

But the light had been smashed out under the thud of a .45 and the place was in darkness. Men rushed past him, shooting, striking, kicking, and he went down, one of them locked tight in his arms. The fellow pulled convulsively at his automatic. In that split second Mal Mahoney jerked back his head, instinctively. Powder burned his face and eyes; into the wood of the counter the heavy slug smashed, to bite his skin, his eyeballs with sharp fragments of wood and lead. He was blinded, and the man with whom he fought was jerking loose from him, battering at his head and hands with the heavy automatic barrel. Mal made one more desperate clutch at him, closed his hands on air, and heard his opponent slamming out through the door and down the street.

Shots rapped. A taxi's motor screamed as if opened full out. Then he heard the ponderous rush and Irish voices of policemen, and staggered forth, hands to his smarting eyes, to meet them.

"It's Mahoney," he told them. "I got one o' them; he's in there, on th' floor."

They grunted, and leaped past him, into the place. He, able to see vaguely now, made his way to the bullet-wrecked door. Two patrolmen and a detective from his own station house were stooped silently over the man sprawled on the floor.

"I got him?" asked Mal.

"Youse got him!" said the detective in an odd, harsh voice. "Did you look when you pulled your rod and shot, rookie?"

"No! I plugged fast. But, what's it to you?"

"It's this to me, you mug. This man is Sergeant Jerry Maginna, and he's dead! You bumped him clean and let them other guys get away! Put out yer mitts; you're under arrest!"

Mal Mahoney rocked a bit on his feet, blinking his eyes, so that he might see. They had turned the dead man's face up now, and, staring, Mal recognized the features of his patrol sergeant, and the gold badge of the department, pinned to the blood-soaked vest. He opened his mouth, to curse, to explain, to expostulate, but no words came forth.

After the Bellevue ambulance had come, taken away the body to the morgue for examination and police autopsy, the detective and two hard-faced patrolmen led Mal Mahoney off to the station house. The detective had al-

ready talked with headquarters on the phone, and inspectors, a deputy commissioner, and, finally, the chief inspector himself, was there, for Jerry Maginna had been well known in the department. His was a Tammany Hall family, and his first cousin was a precinct captain in Flatbush.

Over and over, Mal Mahoney told his story, mechanically, and, at last, they locked him up, after taking away his badge and empty gun, in his own station house. There Denis Flynn, who had been out on a case, found him hours later. They let Denis in to talk with him. Once more, Mal Mahoney, in a weary, monotonous voice, told his story. Denis Flynn cursed and shook his head in sorrow when the younger man was through.

"It's a tough break, lad, an' none o' yer making. Ye was just doing what he thought was yer duty. But, every lad in the house knows about yer scrappin' wid Maginna, and 'tis that which looks bad against ye. Down at headquarters they're thinking, I know, that you was in on th' job with th' three that got away—and plugged Maginna when he jumped yez."

There was no emotion at all in Mahoney's voice when he said:

"Let 'em think that, Denny, if they want to. I shot th' guy, one way er another. I don't care."

"Yeah, I know, lad. Ye don't now, but ye will t'-morra! I'll see that ye get a fair and sqaure police trial, and I'll not turn me ear to a pillow until I find them three who pulled that job!"

Seeing to it that Mahoney had plenty of cigarettes, matches, chewing gum and magazines, he left him. In the morning, the young patrolman was taken to the Tombs. Flynn was not there to comfort him, buoy him; Mal did not see the red-headed detective for weeks. The first thing he learned about him was on the eve of his trial, when one of the good-natured old guards in the Tombs stuck an evening tabloid edition into his hands.

There, with widening eyes, he read of Flynn. Denis had done it! Denis, working alone and night and day for over a month, had captured the three men who had broken into the cigar store on the corner of Third Avenue the night Sergeant Maginna had been shot to death by a young rookie patrolman, now held awaiting trial for murder in the Tombs. And all three, under police examination, denied that any fourth man had worked with them, and confirmed, quite fully, Mahoney's own story of the gun-battle.

The week following, Mal Mahoney came to trial. In his defense the three rat-faced gangsters testified. The jury did not debate long. The verdict handed down was that of not guilty; in the words of the judge, his shooting of Maginna was a tragic blunder, the work of a green and too eager upholder of the law. But, that same day, as he went from the court building with Denis Flynn, Mal learned that he was no longer a member of the New York City Police Department; things looked too badly against him, even now.

His drawn and lined face went white when he heard that; he spat a savage curse at the headquarters clerk who told it to him, handing him also the typewritten order signed by the commissioner. With difficulty, Denis Flynn got him through the packed reporters and camera men and into a taxicab. Ten minutes later, alone, in Denis Flynn's flat on Columbus Avenue, they faced one another. For once, Flynn knew nothing to say; he had hoped against hope that the department and the commissioner, taking the verdict of the court, would free the lad from any stigma, and restore him again to good standing as a uniformed man. Now, words were no good.

Suddenly, Mal Mahoney stood up. He held out his hand.

"Stay where y' are, Flynny," he ordered in a harsh voice. "I'm goin'."

"Goin' where, lad?"

"Outa this town—where they treat a man like that."

"But where, lad?"

"Anywheres. South, prob'ly—Mexico—any place they need a good roughneck, old soldier and cop. Si' down, and so long, Flynny!"

He was gone through the door and down the steps before Denis Flynn could do more than get up from his chair. In the street Mal Mahoney stood indecisively for a moment, handling the small wad of police department pay in his pockets—all he had in the world. Where *did* he want to go? South was as good as anywhere. South, to Mexico, where there was always a revolution, and place for a guy with guts and a real roughneck. Pennsylvania Station, then; that's where trains for the South pull out.

A taxi had halted hesitantly at the curb.

"Pennsylvania Station, Jack!" grunted Mahoney, stepping forward.

At Thirty-fourth Street, their machine was blocked in an eddy of trucks, taxis and drays, held up from crossing Seventh Avenue until the traffic patrolman could straighten things out.

The taxi driver heard the racket of shots first.

"Hear that?" he yelled excitedly, swinging half around. "What th'——"

They both jumped out of the cab, to look, climbed up onto the fenders and hood so that they could see over the intervening cars. A gray United States mail truck, wheeling out from in front of the post office on Eighth Avenue, had been caught in the traffic jam as it attempted to cross over into Seventh.

Now, about it, crowded two big, black sedans, and, from the sedans, one in front, one on the side, came the red lick of automatic flame.

"Stick up!" bawled the taxi driver. "See that mail guy fall outa th' truck!" Mal Mahoney slid down to the macadam.

"Give's yer tire iron and stay here!"

He grasped the heavy piece of metal, and was then tearing after the blue-clad traffic policeman down Thirty-fourth Street. Bullets cracked overhead, smashed whiningly into the side of a truck before him. The big traffic cop, who had been a dozen paces in front of him, strangely doubled up and fell, gun sliding across the little macadam aisle between the cars.

That gun Mahoney grabbed, then rushed on. Men from the leading black sedan blazed at him. He blazed back; running, saw his stream of lead smash the windshield, knock one man sprawling and writhing into the street. Other men, he saw fleetingly, had wrenched open the back of the big armored mail truck, were fishing forth the canvas sacks carrying, probably, thousands of dollars of highly negotiable securities.

Then a bullet hit him in the thigh, and he went down, still shooting. The gun was empty; he started to drag himself up, to hear, from Eighth Avenue, the chatter of other police revolvers. The stick-up men, four of them, in a compact little body, guns swaying to right and left to intimidate the cowering, running crowd, swung toward him. One passed him by, lying there, bloody, dirty, serge suit and bare head giving him the appearance of an unfortunate passer-by reaped down by a chance shot.

Two others passed, lugging the heavy sacks of loot between them, glancing back over their shoulders for sight of the police chase from that direction, hoping, obviously, to make their getaway in the packed crowds on Seventh Avenue before they were overhauled.

The last man, a tall thug with a scarred face and prison-clipped hair, jumped high over Mahoney's prostrate body, small but precious sack clasped to his chest, smoking gun held tight and

level ahead of him. Mal let him run a pace or so, then, rising to his knees, flung with all his feverish, insane force the borrowed taxi tire iron. It hit the big gangster leader flush at the base of the brain, and knocked him endwise upon the walk.

Half running, half crawling, Mal was upon him, battering at him with fists and elbows, clutching up and away the big automatic from the relaxing fingers. One shot, downward, he fired, then yanked up his prize and let the other three, just vanishing behind a deserted truck, have it in the backs. Two dropped, screaming, twitching. The third, venomously, swung—to die here instead of in the chair at Sing Sing; Mal Mahoney killed him with a bullet between the eyes.

The hot automatic was empty. His shoes were pooled with his own blood; he was awfully weary and sick. He slid, slowly, to his face on the pavement, closed his eyes.

The soft brogue of the nurses in St. Vincent's Hospital was in his ears when he came to consciousness. At once, before he could speak, blue-clad men formed a wall of bodies about his bed. He looked up at them with sardonic and incurious eyes. The thin, gray commissioner was there, chewing at his mustache ends, and beside him, the chief inspector, a tall, brown, straight man, who had spent almost all his life in the department. The others—captains, inspectors, detectives. Yes, and there was Flynny and his red head, his buck teeth and big smile.

"Ya got a cigarette, Irish?" he croaked, looking straight at Flynn. Self-consciously, Flynn came toward him.

"Ye can't smoke yet, lad. Not an hour ago they took ye fr'm th' operatin' table, bein' after that bullet in yer leg. A smoke'll make ye sick. Anyhow, th' commissioner would have a word wi' ye. Ain't that right, sir?"

"It is."

The thin, gray man had stepped forward, taken Mal Mahoney's limp hand in his.

"It seems," he said with some embarrassment, "that we've been all wrong about you, young fellow. And that we should listen to men like Flynn, here, more. We—we want you back in the department, Mahoney, and want you quite badly. The chief inspector and I have just decided that you would make an awfully good partner for the detective, for Denis Flynn, here. What do you think?"

"Well," said Mal Mahoney slowly, eyes shutting on warm and involuntary tears, "it's hard fer an Irishman t' give 'no' fer an answer, commissioner!"

Another story by Robert Carse will appear in an early issue.

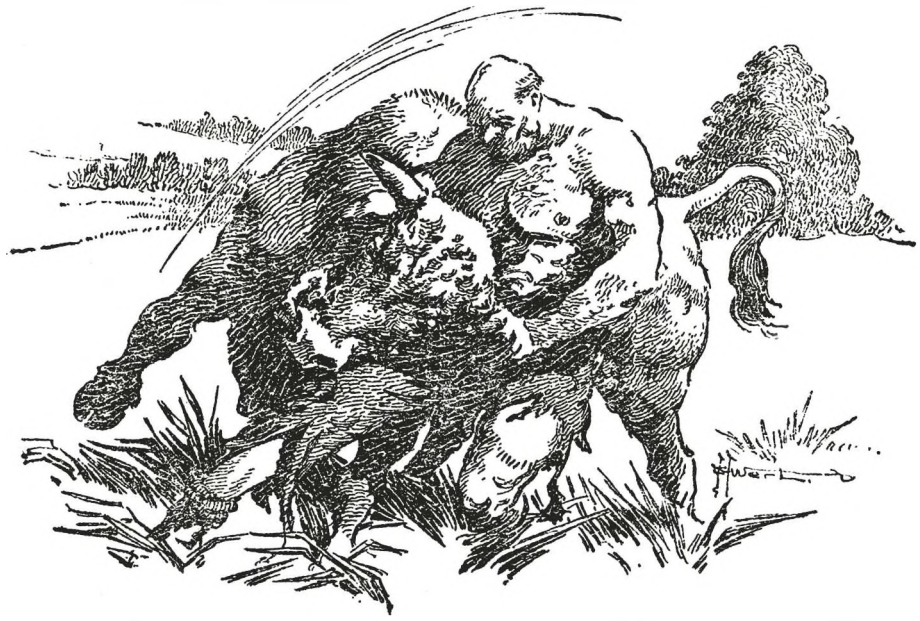
THE SECRET OF THE WHITE ELEPHANT

IN Siam and Burma the white, or albino, elephant is still regarded as sacred, and dire punishment falls upon the head of any one who harms or kills one of these revered pachyderms. They are believed to bring good luck to the crops of the land. And it is believed that a white elephant will protect and watch over the faithful in case of attack.

The Buddhist tradition is that the great teacher, Buddha, was born of a white elephant. This has become one of the fundamental beliefs of that creed—which explains why it is considered sacrilegious to hurt one of the rare beasts.

NATHAN *the* UNBEATEN

By N. DE BERTRAND LUGRIN



A Giant Father of Stalwart Sons and His Struggles with Man and Beast.

WE Thanes have always been big men. The first of our family came out to America in 1735. Two brothers, they were, sent to mark spars for the king's ships. And they served under Sir William Pepperill in the seige of the great French fortress, Louisbourg. The elder of them, Nathaniel Thane, was a giant, nearly seven feet tall and big in proportion. And the younger, Ezekiel, was only a shade shorter.

I can remember my own grandfather, though he was old when I knew him. He had to bend his head to get into an ordinary door. The doors of our own house, the homestead on the River St. John, known as the "Highlands," were made to special measure, seven feet six inches—in case any of us bettered Nathaniel's height. But none of us did. My father was six feet four and tipped the scales at two hundred and ten, when he was in his vigor. He lived to be old. And he got a bit stooped. His coffin was just six feet.

But when I was a lad my father's stature and strength were tremendous. Sunday afternoons, in the wintertime, after the big midday dinner, the men from twenty or thirty miles around would congregate down on the river for tests of strength.

Clear, bright sunshine, the air cold as chilled steel. The river frozen solid a couple of feet deep, packed snow on top, and little fir trees marking out the arena.

The men would strip to the waist, box with bare fists, or wrestle till one would think their backs would break or their muscles tear through their skin. There was no one to match dad.

I can see him now, with his long legs wide apart, his slim white torso, brown arms and gigantic shoulders, his crinkly yellow hair, and his short beard sticking out almost straight from his chin as he held his head back. Arms akimbo, spine finely erect. The sun full on his laughing face, his gleaming teeth. Eh, but we were proud of him, the six sons of us! The time he took on Mosey Dillon, the big French bully from Madawaska—that was a day! And the fight with Carlyle Hamilton, the seven-foot logger from up Grand Falls! Dad could hold Ezra Collins and Willie Raymond, two of the strongest men in Carleton County, one in each hand, and them struggling like mad to get at one another over some trouble they'd had about a woman.

They brought Jim Findley, a burly fighting man, down from Boston one winter. He was English born and had won the heavyweight championship in London for wrestling. We had a record crowd on the river that Sunday—men from Aroostic County, from Grand Falls, Woodstock, and even aristocratic little Fredericton, the capital of the province. They came in their sleighs, driving fast horses along the river road, between the long lines of marking evergreens. The air was full of the tinkling of sleigh bells. It was very cold, but marvelously bright. Late January.

That was the longest fight my father ever had. Because even after he had thrown Findley three times, the man from Boston wanted to keep on. So they did. I remember Findley said afterward that he still considered himself an unbeaten champion, because my father was not a man but a gorilla.

"My people came from Scotland," dad told him, laughing.

"That's the same thing," said the Boston man.

One summer a lot of the farmers along the river lost some of their horses. There'd been a French half-breed trapper going and coming. His name was Pecheur. Nobody liked him. But people gave him work, because there was always a shortage of labor. And then it turned out that he'd been stealing horses and taking them over the line and selling them. He disappeared suddenly and a posse of men went in search of him. Finally they believed that they had found him. He'd shaved off his beard and cut his hair close. But they were pretty sure of him. He was haying down at Dennison's place, as if he was as innocent as a babe—never speaking a word of French.

The deputy sheriff and another man called at our house. "We think we've found Pecheur," they told father. "Come along, Nathan, and arrest him." Pecheur was a lean, wiry fellow, strong as a boa-constrictor.

"Arrest him yourself," said dad. "I'm no sheriff."

"I'll make you one."

Pecheur was on top of a load of hay. Little Ernest Dennison was pitching up the grass to him. Nobody else in the field. My father jumped the fence and walked across toward them. When Pecheur saw him he just went on, stirring around at the hay, feigning indifference.

"Come along here," called my father. "Come down here. I want to speak to you." Only he said it in French.

Taken off his guard, the half-breed shouted, *"Nom d'un chien, qu'as tu donc——"*

Father showed him the badge. *"Vous savez bien.* Get down out o' that."

Pecheur had a pitchfork in his hands. My father nothing at all.

"You try to arrest me and I'll stick the tines into you," shouted the half-breed. And he came to the edge of the

load, balancing the fork, just above dad. But when he saw that father was coming after him, he waited till dad was up and then he slid down.

Quick as thought dad was after him. He was not trained, not scientific, but his footwork was marvelous. He dodged under the threatening fork—to one side of it—back from it. And then he made a feint and, as Pecheur thrust the tines at him, grabbed the handle just above the heel. The fight didn't last long after that. Father broke the form, flung it away, and closed with the half-breed. He had him down when the deputy and his assistant came from the hedge where father had bade them stop till he had finished his job. Father would never have brooked any interference in a fight, no matter how it was going.

But the hardest fight my dad ever had was not with a man at all, but with a bull. And it was Silas Briggs who was responsible for that.

The Briggs farm adjoined ours on the south side. They weren't the sort of folk one would choose for neighbors and we had little or nothing to do with them. Silas was mean, cantankerous, always looking for trouble; and he had two sons who were just as bad. His wife, a sharp-tongued woman, was a good butter maker but a poor cook. Maybe that was why her menfolk were so peevish. Meet them on the road and they wouldn't speak to you, no matter how good the weather might be.

"Jealous of you, Nathan," said Giles Dearborn, who kept the store at Hartland village. "Jealous of your farm, your stock, and your family. I know." And who should be a better judge than Giles? The whole countryside went to his store, and he had a sympathetic ear for everybody's troubles.

We knew Briggs was cutting our timber, but we'd never caught him at it till one day in early spring, when the snow was not yet off the ground. Dad, in his moccasins, came upon him suddenly this side of the dividing fence, sawing up a birch tree. Dad didn't say much, just pitched him back on his own property and threw his ax and saw after him.

"I'd take it out of your hide, but you're not man enough," my father told him. "Next time I catch you I'll have you summoned."

That made Briggs furious. He was a husky fellow, short, but stocky, with enormous arms on him. He'd boasted for years that he'd like to fight father. Maybe dad would have given him a chance if it hadn't been for mother. She wouldn't allow it.

"You'd have to beat him, Nathan, and he'd never forgive you. It's bad enough as it is."

When she heard that father had flung him over the fence, she made a to-do about it. "Now you'll see," she wound up.

"Would you have me let him cut the timber?" asked dad. "I didn't hurt him, merely picked him up by the seat of his pants and dropped him."

"He'll try to get even." She shook her head, but scurried into the pantry to laugh. That was mother—seeing a funny side to everything, and often having to hurry out of the room or behind a door in order to keep her dignity and hurt no feelings.

But she was right about Briggs.

He lay in wait for my father one night on the road close to our place. Dad was coming from the stables, and it was almost dark. Briggs hugged the fence, knee-deep in the grass. He had a cudgel in his hand, big enough to brain a man. Before dad could see what he was up to, he hit at him, just missing his head, but striking his arm so that it hung paralyzed for a few minutes.

"Not man enough to fight ye, eh?" he cried. "I'll show ye! Not man enough to fight ye, eh?"

"Not half man enough." Dad reached

for the cudgel with his left hand, but Briggs held it beyond him, and tried to get another lick at him. So father caught him by his right shoulder with his one hand and forced him to his knees there by the fence. "Drop it, Briggs." He spoke as one speaks to a dog.

Briggs swore, struggled, wouldn't drop it. The next moment he was lying squirming and groaning on the ground.

Father bent above him. "It's your collar bone," he said sympathetically. "Get up and come along to the house." The collar bone had snapped in the iron vise of my father's left hand.

But dad seldom gave way to anger. He always held himself in stern control. However, he did not believe in sparing the rod, as we boys had good reason to know. We bore him no grudge for the whippings he gave. It was the way all lads were brought up in those days. We admired him and boasted of him to our friends, who were frankly envious that we should have the strongest man on the river for a parent—envious even of our thrashings.

"Gosh, I bet he brings blood the first lick," they said, as if to be punished by such a hero was a great honor, and scars thus won were marks to be displayed with pardonable pride.

But I've seen father bring in lambs that were sick or lost in the snow, tenderness itself. And if any of the beasts got themselves hurt, his great hands were all gentleness. Cows that were coming in, mares due to foal—nothing was too good for them. He was the biggest breeder of stock in the province. He specialized in shorthorn Durhams. Hambletonian horses, Southdown sheep and Berkshire hogs. Every year we took our animals to the big provincial fair at St. John, and always carried off most of the prizes.

The most famous animal we ever had —and they talk of him to this day—was Lord Dufferin, the shorthorn bull.

He was the bull my father fought in a fight that has gone down in the history of the Maritimes. I was only a lad at the time, and since then I've seen bull fights in Madrid and Mexico, bull fights with the mounted picadors, the banderilleros and the armed matadors. But none of them compared with father's fight. For he tackled the animal with his bare hands, and alone. I've never heard of a man equaling that. It was worthy of Chiron, the centaur, and his heroes.

Lord Dufferin was the handsomest bull I've ever known. He was a clean cream color with great red-brown patches along his sides and on his hips. His head was enormous and his polished horns branched out at right angles from a nest of glossy brown curls. He had a beautiful, brave, passionate eye, and he walked with the dignity of a mighty emperor.

I remember well the day he was born. I had gone the half mile or so across the fields to the valley where his mother was, for we knew it was about time for her, and dad wanted her brought to the stock barns. Now the valley is faced by a high ridge on one side that runs down to the creek. When I saw Bess, his big, raw-boned mother, she was beginning to be uneasy, and, catching sight of me, she walked straight up to the top of the ridge, and there her travail came upon her. When the calf was born, an enormously big calf, he rolled instantly down the slope, and did not stop till he reached the creek, where he lay half in and half out of the water.

I thought he had been killed. I ran down, followed by his bellowing mother. But nothing had happened. He staggered to his feet almost at once, and tried to blunder up the bank. Old Bess was loath to let me touch him, but I managed to help him to her side and her joy was very manifest.

Lord Dufferin grew fast. From the first we knew he would make an exceptional animal. He belonged to me.

My father said that if I hadn't been there to look after him when he was born, he might have drowned. I took great pride in him. Fed him entirely—great pails of milk and bran. His appetite was insatiable. At two months old he was as large as most bulls of six months, and when I would take him down to the creek to water him I was never on my feet for the whole of the way, simply dragging along at the end of the rope. I could not begin to hold him. He was playful, too; let me ride on his back. And he would follow me round the field, like a dog, nosing me or cavorting before me as much as to show me just how big and strong he was.

At a year he weighed well over a thousand pounds. His playfulness was rather rough now, his horns beginning to grow, and dad had taken over the care of him. But he used to come at my call, and jump and run about where I could see him, watching me with his beautiful eyes. And sometimes, even now, I went into the corral with him, to stroke him and pet him because I thought he was lonely.

Stockmen from all over the county came to see him, stood about criticizing his points. He knew he was being admired, too, and would hold up his magnificent head and strut about. They all wanted to raise calves by him. We knew Dufferin would make a small fortune for us in time.

Now after father broke Briggs' collar bone he and his boys made no secret of their bitter enmity. They said they were going to "get" us, the lot of us. We didn't quite see how, unless they poisoned our wells or something wholesale like that. In fact, we were rather amused by the report. Except for them we had none but friends all up and down the river. Besides, there were seven of us, big and husky. I remember the fall dad took us down with him to the fair at St. John. There was a cattle man there from Kentucky who wanted to meet father.

We were at dinner in the hotel dining room, father at the head of a long table, three boys on either side of him. You'd never have believed him the father of us all. He looked no more than thirty, though he was past forty. He'd married at nineteen. I was the youngest, twelve at that time, and small and spindly. But the others were all close to dad's height. Peter and Joseph and Paul were fair like dad. Jonathan and David, the twins, and I had dark skins and black hair like my mother's people.

Collins, the hotel proprietor, came into the dining room, bringing the man from Kentucky. An elegant figure he was, with black side whiskers, a broad, black hat, high, varnished boots, and his clothes very smart.

"This is Nathan Thane, the finest stock breeder in New Brunswick," said Collins. And the seven of us rose as one man and bowed as we had been taught to do, from the waist down—exactly as the Kentucky man did, sweeping off his hat till its brim touched the floor.

"My family," said dad, waving his hand around the table.

"Good God, that isn't a family, that's an army!" said the Kentuckian. "You're the Lord's own stock breeder, Thane."

I only tell this to show that there were too many of us and we were too big and well able to take care of ourselves to stand in fear of anything Silas Briggs might do.

Nevertheless it was galling to have little, annoying things constantly happening that we couldn't rightly blame any one for, but that we felt were due to Silas or his sons. Fences were broken down. We lost a heifer calf mysteriously. Twice we found sheep slaughtered and half eaten. It was a rare thing for predatory animals to come near the farm. We were certain that Briggs' Airedale, a vicious brute which

he usually kept on a chain, had been allowed to get loose and go after the sheep. But we couldn't prove it.

Our farm was nearly a thousand acres, and the main highway ran through it. It was bounded on three sides by water—a creek at the south end, which overflowed every spring and fall, and a creek at the top. We had a narrow strip of about twenty acres on the river side of the highway. Then the ferry creek meandered along for about half way on the west side, emptying into the main stream just above our place where the ferry ran across by means of an overhead wire, the current carrying it.

It was a beautiful stretch of country. Like another planet. So green and so level. Nothing more vitally green anywhere than the intervals and the lands bordering the river. Nothing more gracious and godlike than the trees. They marched along the river banks. They intertwined their branches above the brooks. They gathered in the shallow dips of the land, like friends tarrying to gossip. Beech trees, hazel with their store of nuts in the autumn; the silver birches, slim and graceful as young girls; clumps of butternut trees; cherries along the line fence. A lordly avenue of maples grew on either side of the main road.

And the sugaring-offs in the spring! Great buckets of golden sap! Stringing out the golden sirup in the snow till it was hard and brittle!

Most of the trees are gone now, they tell me. There was an oak beside the house, wider than the house, taller than two houses. I could crawl out to its branches from my bedroom window. It was as much alive to me as any human. I used to talk to it and it would answer back. I built myself a nest in a deep crotch; lined it with moss. Sometimes on warm nights I slept there.

At the bottom of the farm a sturdy snake fence separated the Briggs place from ours. And, besides that, there was the thick stand of timber—fir, spruce, cedar, maple, tamarack, birch and ash—from which we cut our winter fuel. Not a finer lot of hardwoods than ours on the whole length of the river. Then the creek ran for halfway this side of the boundary as well. No excuse for stock getting out of our place into the Briggs', nor for the Briggs' cattle to break into our fields.

"We'll have to put a ring into Lord Dufferin's nose," said dad one morning. "He's getting pretty big and unmanageable." We had finished breakfast and were out on the back porch, father giving orders to us all, like a general directing his officers. Joseph and Paul were to finish the plowing. "Hilary, you get the rest of the potatoes ready for planting. David and Peter had better sow the north field this morning, and Jonathan has to ride into town for the harness. I'll look up a ring for his lordship. The lot of us ought to be able to fix him up some time this evening."

"He's going to make a monster," dad went on. Paul was unchaining the collie, who was barking and straining at his leash. "But Hilary"—dad turned to me—"you keep away from him. Don't you go into the corral any more."

"I haven't been in for a week, but he wouldn't touch me."

"Oh, wouldn't he just!"

"Surely," called mother's voice from the kitchen, "you're not letting Hilary feed the bull now, Nathan?"

"Certainly not. Not since two months ago. And don't let me catch you in the corral again, my boy."

"Listen! He's been bellowing all morning."

Paul started for the gate, followed by Joe and the collie.

"He misses me," I said. "He wants to play; he's lonesome."

"'In the spring——'" laughed dad. "The spring's in his blood. He ought to be out in the open. Well, we'll fix

him to-night so that anybody can handle him."

To me, as I walked down to the stables, the spring seemed to have got into everything's blood. It was a morning on which to sing or whistle. Joseph was warbling in his high, sweet tenor. The collie's bark was gay, like laughter. Cocks were crowing. Birds piped in the apple trees. A flock of pigeons whirled over my head, alighted behind me, and circled round one another, cooing ecstatically. The neighing of Black Mate, the stallion, came to me from the stock barn, and from far away sounded an answering challenge. The gobbler strutted around the stable yard, his tail widespread. And up and down, between the pig house and his pen, Goliath, the boar, moved restlessly.

The stables were across the road from the house. I finished my work there. Then I was supposed to go and cut potatoes. No kind of work for a day like this.

What a din Dufferin was making. I'd just run down to the stock barns for a minute. I recrossed the road, jumped the fence, and soon topped the rise from where I could see the whole of the highlands. Just below me was a froth of apple and cherry blossoms, for the orchard was on the slope of the hill. Then the red barns and the silo. Left of the barns was the satiny sheen of young wheat, for here in a five-acre field we had planted some prize seed that the government had given us to experiment with. The barn hid the bull's corral and the stockyard which surrounded it. But I could see the billowing meadows beyond, and the high ridge where Lord Dufferin was born.

What was that in among the trees? Cattle! And our own stock had been driven a mile north to the other pasture just after milking. Cows were coming out into the open down to the water. Some of them running. Not our cattle at all. Not a shorthorn among them.

Dad would be furious. This meant that the line fence was down again. Probably Briggs had broken it on purpose, although he'd pretend, as he always did, that it was an accident.

I ran down the hill. I'd try to drive the stock out. Dad would be along presently. As I reached the barns, Dufferin's roaring echoed through the big emptiness there. Fascinated, I stopped. Then I went in. Poor old Dufferin, wanting to get out and play about in this wonderful weather! I ran through and opened the door which led into the corral.

One glance, and I banged it to and dropped the bar.

Only just in time. The next instant there came a crash against it. Lord Dufferin was loose. He'd pulled up the iron staple and his rope was hanging only on one horn. He was mad with excitement. He could see those marauding cattle—wanted to get out with them. There was no play about him any more. He'd attack anybody or anything that interfered with him—no doubt about that.

Thrilled with excitement and sympathy I got out of the barn and ran down the side to the stockyard, clambering over the fence. He couldn't break through the bars of the corral, I thought. And I wanted to see him. I'd call to him, try to quiet him.

He was standing now, pawing the ground, shaking his head and trying to get the rope off.

"Poor old Duffy—good old Duffy," I called.

He raised his great head and looked at me through the bars, was quiet for a moment, then tore around his pen, as if to tell me what he wanted.

Over on the far side of the wheat field two little heifers poked their heads over the fence. Nondescript animals, they could only belong to Briggs. He'd turned them into our summer pasture to try and lure Dufferin out. He was no-

reasoning dad was part of the frustrating of that desire.

He pawed the ground for a moment, raised his head for a mighty bellow, lowered it and charged.

For a second an awful fear gripped me. Then I saw dad step lightly aside, just when the bull seemed on top of him. He struck the animal's flank a resounding blow as it passed him.

Dufferin wheeled instantly and was back in a cloud of loosened soil.

But my father was ready. He leaped in the nick of time, and brought his club into play. Dufferin, not checking his speed at once, plunged on to the ditch, where he slid to a stop.

The heifers set up a soft, plaintive mooing, trying to reach heads across the bars. The bull tore up the ground in a frenzy. Only one desire mastered him for the moment, the desire to annihilate what stood between him and freedom. He flashed round.

But he hesitated. Stood there switching his tail. Dad had always been good to him. Yet just now he had hurt him with the club. Duffy didn't understand. Why couldn't he get out there with those other cattle? Why should dad try to stop him and beat him on the flanks! His great eyes were fixed on father. I thought he looked dejected—reproachful. He began to advance slowly as dad backed toward the stockyard. Step by step, step by step, dad was luring him into the corral.

Then one of those wanton cattle set up a shrieking bellow. Dufferin stopped, quivered all over, lowered his head and plunged at father.

Missed—again. Dad was agile as a cat. And once more his stick crashed, this time on Duffy's head.

I felt a sudden rush of pity for the bull. He was getting the worst of it. He stood in a furrow, apparently crestfallen, puzzled, swinging his great head from side to side.

Dad moved up to him slowly, speaking to him. With one hand he tore at his shirt. Ripped it off. Held it in his left hand as a matador holds his muleta. His naked torso gleamed white. He was within ten feet of the bull.

"So, boss! Good Duffy! So——"

But old cunning, born of ancestors trained to fighting men since the early days of Rome, was functioning now in the bull. He waited till dad could almost touch him, then, in a flash, he lowered his head, twisting it so that the shorthorns might impale his enemy, and charged.

I screamed, for dad was down. One horn had caught in his overall, ripped it up. He lay there——

Only for a second. While Duffy lifted his head for the toss, dad was free —running to the side, turning, facing the bull again.

Dufferin began to walk slowly round him, and dad pivoted where he stood. It was as though the two took stock of one another. Like fighters in a ring. Dad's head was thrust forward, his hands clenched. Every muscle tense. He'd dropped his stick; it was useless. Last time it had struck with a weak double slap.

I tried to call, but twice my voice choked before I could make him hear.

"I'll fetch you another stick, dad."

"Keep out of sight, Hilary. He'll charge the fence there. It's not strong."

Dufferin had swung round at the sound of my voice, and I slid down behind the rails, peering through at the bottom. He ran a few steps in my direction, but seeing nothing, turned again. He seemed to swing like a top.

The two were at close quarters now. The bull plunged his head down to toss. Again and again. Only to miss. Only to see dad a half dozen paces away.

Dad was trying to throw his shirt over Duffy's head, to blind him. But it was too light. It fluttered like flying paper. Then it caught in the bull's horn, and for a time it dangled.

torious for that sort of thing. Too mean to raise stock legitimately.

Rumbling growls from the bull. His head was free of the rope now, and he was at the small gate leading from the corral into the wheat field. Then I noticed that the top bar of the gate was down—had been taken down.

Plaintive calls came from the heifers. The bull ran around the corral in a frenzy of impatience. Thrust against the gate. Tried to break through the remaining bars. Then, baffled, ran round again.

"No good, poor old Duffy," I shouted, laughing at his helpless rage, but sorry for him. "No good; no can do." But I'd hardly spoken when he made a dash, heaved up his great bulk and vaulted the gate, crashing down the second bar.

He was off across the wheat field like a small cyclone, to where the heifers called. But the field was ditched all round between the wheat and the fence. He was brought up short. It was too big a jump, too dangerous. He stood there venting his wrath in a long roar that shook the earth.

Meantime all of the cattle were working their way up along that farther fence. Most of them feeding, for the clover was new and thick; but some of them frisking about tantalizingly as though to taunt the bull with their freedom.

Dufferin began to walk up and down the ditch, looking for a place to get over. All at once I saw that at the southeast corner of the fence, the bars had been moved—two of them. He could step over there easily enough. But he hadn't seen the break. He was concentrating on the west fence, where the heifers were.

Time I got dad or somebody. I met dad hurrying down through the orchard. He had a stout club in his hand.

"Briggs' cattle are in, eh?"

"Yes, and Dufferin's broken out of the corral. He's in the wheat field."

"I saw him." Dad was running, I trying to keep up with him.

"The fence is down at the corner nearest the road," I called.

"Can you get the bars up?"

"I'll try." We were in the barn. "What are you going to do?"

"I'll get the bull while you're putting up the bars. You open the stockyard gates. Then go round and drive the cattle in. Dufferin will go back to the yards once he sees them. Better get some of the boys to help you when you've fixed the fence."

Dad went out of the corral into the field. I was following him, but he told me sharply not to set foot on that side of the fence. "On no account, Hilary. Keep in the stockyard till you get to the corner. Hurry now."

No need to tell me that. But I watched him as I ran, feeling an immense thrill of pride. No one but my father would go out alone and tackle an unringed bull. Why, only a year ago, Dolf Magee was bored to death by their Jersey, and it wasn't nearly so big as Dufferin.

Dad moved lightly, confidently over the green furrows, a picture I can see yet. Hair and beard gleaming bronze, his shirt a blur of sky-blue. So tall he was, so easy-stepping, and yet watchful as a lynx.

Dufferin, engrossed in his passionate quest, did not notice him at first. Up and down beside the ditch he moved, head high, nostrils dilated, switching his tail.

Then out of the corner of his eye he saw——

He stopped in his tracks—jumped around.

Father was about a hundred yards from him, advancing slowly. "So, boss—so, Dufferin. Quiet now! Good Duffy."

But the bull was beyond cajolery. He'd grown up—felt the urge which is stronger than life. To his instinctive

No more strategy. No more pauses. Dufferin stopped not at all to consider, but plunged madly, recklessly. The air was full of clods, of clouds of dust and green. Sometimes Dufferin stumbled in a furrow. Sometimes my father, springing first to one side and then another, now back, now forth, would fall. Once I thought it was the end. The bull was on him when dad tripped and fell. But he was jerked to his feet, and I saw that he held Duffy by the nose. So, for a moment or two, they stood. Then the bull wrenched himself away.

Suddenly I became aware of shouting —from some distance off, but coming nearer. I spared a lightning glance. Here came Briggs and his sons up from the creek. Other men and boys pelting down the highway, jumping the road fence, streamed across the pasture.

"Nathan Thane's fighting the bull! Nathan Thane's fighting the bull!"

From over the rise to the left my brothers came.

Again dad was down, the bull above him. I couldn't see, for a moment, because of the dust.

But they were close to me now—the noise of them, the hiss and groan of their breath, the pounding of the bull's hoofs, the foam from his nostrils and mouth, the smell of his sweating body, the lash of his tail through the air. Up came his head! Was dad impaled? His long legs described a semicircle against the sky. Again I screamed, crouching there.

But father's feet were on the ground. He was holding Dufferin. Holding him —one hand around a horn, the other in the gaping nostrils.

Then began a fearful struggle.

Foot to foot. Eye to eye. Giant man against giant beast.

Dad was now completely naked except for one leg of his overalls. His body was mired, bruised. His face, his hair, his beard, were caked with mud and sweat. His breath came whistling. His chest pumped up and down like a bellows. But he held the bull.

Dufferin writhed and twisted, backing, jerking, trying to thrust, to loosen that iron hold.

But dad's grip was not to be broken.

The muscles of his arms and shoulders stood out in great knots The veins, the cords of his neck were swollen almost to bursting. Water streamed from him. There was a gash in his thigh from which the blood ran.

Slowly, surely he pressed, and twisted the bull's neck, trying to throw him.

Through Duffy's nostrils the breath smoked. His flanks heaved mightily. His coat was dripping. He gave a last lunge forward.

Dad, with his left foot braced, was waiting for just that final movement. Using the momentum of the plunge, he turned the bull's head. I could hear the creak of the muscles. The animal lost his balance and fell.

He fell with a thud and a snorting groan, one side of his head down in the trampled wheat, one eye showing, still red and rolling. But his body was prostrate and curiously quiet. He made no further effort. He submitted to his master.

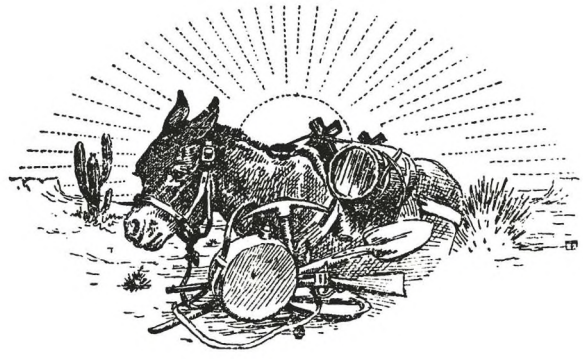
And dad sat on his humbled neck, holding one horn.

Thirty or forty men and boys lined the fence. David and Paul with goads, and Peter with a rope. But Briggs was sneaking off, followed by his sons.

"Just a minute, Silas," called my father, his voice hoarse and broken but triumphant. "You've smashed my fences and spoiled my prize wheat, but I'll be damned if you ever raise a calf by my bull."

And as Briggs and his boys slunk away to drive their cattle home, the jeers of the crowd followed them.

Watch these pages for another story by N. de Bertrand Lugrin.



The Desert Rat

By Frank E. Barbour

HE lived in the land of sun and sand,
Of glistening salt and rippling dune,
Where nothing moves but the simmering air
That dances and boils in the heat of noon,
And silence hangs o'er the greasewood flats,
Where Joshua trees, their arms flung out
In agony of warning, tell
Of bleaching bones, starvation, drought.
Alone he lived, no one knew how.
Alone he died, no one knew when.
But he loved that land of thorn and barb
As you and I love the haunts of men.

PEARLS *of* GREAT PERIL

By CAPTAIN FREDERICK MOORE

In Two Parts—Part II. *The Story So Far:*

John Henslow has been employed for some months as secretary to Doctor Renard, a planter who lives otherwise alone with his servants on the tropical island of Marinda. Henslow, unknown to Renard, has served a term in the penitentiary. One day he learns, apparently accidentally, that Renard has long been carrying on a considerable undercover traffic in pearls, and has a large and exceedingly valuable collection of them on hand in the bungalow, unknown to any one save his trusted head house boy, Alim, who is suspicious of Henslow. Since Renard knows of Henslow's discovery, the latter offers to relieve an embarrassing situation by leaving the island. Renard won't hear of it, gives him his confidence and shows him the pearls. Meantime one Baxter, who has known Henslow in the past, comes sailing into Marinda on Captain Kellett's *Fleetwing*. He knows of the pearls, figures Henslow means to steal them, and intends to get in on the game. Baxter arranges for the *Fleetwing* to take him and the pearls out. He explains to Kellett that he and Henslow are to dispose of the pearls for Renard, but that Kellett must not even say a word to the touchy Renard until all the secret arrangements are completed. Renard welcomes Baxter as a friend of Henslow's. Baxter secretly puts his proposition to Henslow, who accepts

CHAPTER VI.

SET FOR THE KILLING.

I TELL you, we're done right now!" repeated Henslow. "You're a tenderfoot—a 'griffin' they call eggs like you down this way. If you knew the South Seas, you'd know the pearling skippers are a canny and hard lot—and Kellett's been a pearler. He can't be trusted! He'll crook us!"

"Now, now!" soothed Baxter. "Keep the old shirt on, kid. I'm no fool."

"Kellett's got us!" mourned Henslow. "We're finished before we start!"

"Kellett's as easy to read as an electric sign on old Broadway. He's playing the game straight—with me, poor

sap. He thinks that *both* of us are in Renard's employ."

"The hell you say!" Henslow was astounded.

"Kellett thinks we're Renard's undercover movers of pearls. When we show up with the pearls aboard the *Fleetwing,* Kellett will be strong for us—and everything will look legit. He's to get a fat price for taking us to any port we name, but of course he can't know what happens ashore before we leave. He'll sail on our say-so."

"Oh, well," said Henslow, with great relief, "if Kellett thinks we're on the level, that's different. For a minute I thought you'd tipped him to our game. If you've got him fixed like *that*—you're the ninth wonder of the world!"

"I ain't so bad," admitted Baxter.

"But—he may verify your yarn by asking Renard what——"

"The skipper won't open his mouth. Kellett's the kind of a boob who keeps his word. And he gave me the idea himself, so I played him careful. I had an advance tip on him. He's a greedy bird—he can smell a dollar a mile away. He's out for cash, and we can hand him plenty. I made his mouth water on what we'd be willing to pay him to get Renard's pearls through to market for the old doctor."

"How are you so damned sure about Kellett, anyway?" asked Henslow, his brows puckered.

"Because he tipped me off about the pearls himself. Of course, I knew already they were here, so I only played him along. You know, I think he'd almost do anything for his share."

"It is funny that he told you—a stranger—about Renard's pile. I didn't know he had the lowdown—never could be sure."

"Johnnie, Renard's pearls are common talk. You know that—you got your tip in Sydney yourself, didn't you?"

Henslow nodded. "What else would bring me here?"

"Nothing—and I knew it."

"But I took a chance on being fooled, George. Down this way hidden pearls are everywhere. Every old chinkie washing shirts on the water front is supposed to have a fortune in pearls. Even beach combers are suspected of playing poor to slip through with a few stolen pearls."

"I suppose that's how Renard's managed to live so long."

"You said it. Nobody really believes the yarn. I did—but I knew I was taking a long shot."

Baxter's face dropped. "I'm glad I didn't hear you tell it in Sydney, or I'd never come to Marinda Island."

"Here's something I want to ask you," Henslow said. "How much did Kellett know about your picking up info on Renard in Sydney, before you went aboard the *Fleetwing?* Sure he wasn't trying you out when he broke the news that the old man here had pearls?"

Baxter pulled a wry face. "Would he have taken me as a passenger in the first place if he thought I was a crook after Renard's pearls?"

"Under certain conditions, he might," Henslow replied. "Kellett always has a queer little twinkle in his eyes when he looks at me. I've never made out just what's behind that twinkle."

"I'll tell you what I think it means," said Baxter thoughtfully. "Kellett's been studying you. He's not so sure of just how dangerous you might be."

"Why should I be dangerous to Kellett?"

"Yeah, why? I've sized it up that Kellett would like to split the pearls three ways."

Henslow shook his head decidedly. "No. He wouldn't play with strangers that way. But he might be after the pearls."

"You mean he wants to kill Renard himself?"

"More likely he's got it in mind to kill us after we get aboard with the pearls.

If we make this slip-out with the schooner, we'll have to watch Kellett."

"Oh, I've doped that already. He'll bear watching."

"But he's got us under the guns, when it comes to Renard. If the skipper should get confidential about the fact that he knows we're to take the pearls to market——"

"There'd be no percentage in that for Kellett," Baxter objected. "And I primed him that unless he keeps his mouth shut hard, the deal to carry the pearls is off. I can laugh at him if he tells Renard I admitted being in the doc's employ. And, for that matter, Kellett volunteered all the information."

"Well, if Kellett tries to talk private with me about pearls," said Henslow, "I'll give him the baby stare. So Kellett can be laughed down, if he gets confidential with Doctor Renard. All we have to do is say that you strung him along—that you didn't have to tell him your business because he suspected you were hired by Renard."

Baxter threw out his hands. "That's it! It's watertight!"

"Whoof!" ejaculated Henslow. "You handed me a jolt before I understood what the game was with Kellett! Man, I could hear big brass keys grate in the lock again! And you can't think of a pen on this island without going batty. Sky! Sea! Flowers! Servants! George, I haven't tied my own shoes of a morning since I hit Marinda"

Baxter laughed heartily. He hooked an arm through Henslow's right, and they started toward the bungalow. "You're a born aristocrat, Johnnie! This life'll make you too soft. You—who bumps three guys off, and asks for a match when the bulls say you're ready to take the chair!"

Henslow's eyes hardened. "Don't you worry about me going soft!"

"But Renard is strong for you—you've certainly got him ready to pull a surprise on him."

"Yes, I've played a cagey game with him—the frank-and-honest stuff. If Kellett was to tell him I was a jailbird, Renard'd probably toss him into the bay." He laughed quietly.

"Well, we're all set, kid, for a mop-up. And I arrived just in time."

"You sure did. And while you've got the chance you might as well slip me that extra gun."

Baxter reached under his coat, brought forth the small weapon, and passed it over.

"That's all I've been waiting for, is a gat," said Henslow.

"There's one little detail I want to mention," said Baxter. "I've fixed the Sydney post office with a letter addressed to myself. I left an order with the postal authorities that all mail addressed to me is to be turned over to the police ninety days after I sailed from there in the *Fleetwing*—unless I claim my mail before that, or send a forwarding address."

"What the devil do you want the police to get your mail for?"

"So they'll open it. And if they do, they find a picture of you, and your finger prints—regular headquarters stuff."

Henslow gasped. "Of *me!* My picture! And prints! Say, what's this line of chatter?"

Baxter took his companion's arm, and drew him along. "It's insurance, that's all—on myself. If I don't send that forwarding address, it'll be tough on you."

"You've got a trustful nature!" mocked Henslow.

"You're a killer, Johnnie. I can't say how the pearls might work on your mind, after we've got 'em. I always keep an ace in my shoe."

Henslow laughed under his breath. "Don't be a damned fool! I'd rather have half the pearls, and get clear, then hog the lot and try to work alone. I've had all of the pen I want, George."

"Glad you feel that way about it. I'm covered, that's all."

As they moved on, two white-clad figures were slowly climbing the slope to the bungalow—Captain Kellett and Doctor Renard. The dinghy from the schooner was on the beach, and two of Kellett's native seamen beside it.

"I've a hunch the skipper'll go back aboard for the night," said Henslow, when Baxter made reference to the boat.

"Suits me. We'll have a chance to talk over our plans."

"When Kellett comes back from hunting sandalwood," said Henslow, "there's got to be a good reason why he can't see the doctor—if we've got the pearls copped. And Alim can't be around. I know where we could leave the pair of 'em, in case we don't have to kill 'em. Kellett mustn't have any suspicion that there's anything wrong. The yarn'll have to hold water, even with the house servants and the plantation help. So we'll have the old doc and Alim up in the jungle looking for herbs —strange and rare herbs. He's an amateur botanist, the doc, and Kellett'll be willing to sail with us on our say-so."

"We'll see how it falls, when Kellett leaves the bay. Say, but you've been getting set for the job!"

"I've had all the time in the clock to think. I'll have a typewritten letter for Kellett from the doctor, that'll set the skipper's mind at rest. All we've got to do is be ready when Kellett comes in again."

They drifted up through the palm grove toward the house.

CHAPTER VII.

AN ALARMING REPORT.

HE kept me tied up in Sydney for almost two weeks," complained Captain Kellett.

"After he took passage with you for Marinda Island, he delayed your sailing?" inquired Doctor Renard with mild surprise.

Kellett, climbing the easy incline through the shadowy palm grove, turned his head to peer in the direction of Henslow and Baxter. "I delayed my own sailing," he answered grumpily. "Heard he was puttin' questions about you in the bars along the Sydney water front. Was pumpin' anybody and everybody, but cautious about it. So I passed the word around that I was bound for Marinda, and waited for him to hear it. And I got him! Both feet in my bowline!"

"That was clever of you, skipper. I knew at once that he wasn't looking for copra."

"Copra, my eye!" scoffed Kellett. "Before he got to Sydney he didn't know copra from mast slush! In the bars, he spent a pile of money buyin' drinks for pearlers. Pearls was *all* he talked. Your Sydney man made a full report on him to me—hung close to that Thursday Island crowd, and heard aplenty about this Baxter."

"Have the Australian police got Baxter's record?"

"If they've got it, they couldn't find anything to pick him up on. Seems he's travelin' as a tourist—or was, when he arrived. Well, I says to myself, 'All right, I can look after this bird.' And the police let him sail with me without tellin' him that he must be a good boy. I figured it out like this, doc—and your Sydney man agreed: If I brought Baxter along, it was a blamed sight safer for you than to leave him in Australia, and have him breeze into Marinda with somebody else—with a crooked skipper, you understand."

"It was obvious that he was coming here—and you were wise to do the fetching," agreed Renard.

"I thought so. If he'd got in with an outfit wantin' to cut your throat and plant you ten feet deep in your own jungle, not so good for us, hey? So

I played the simple mind with him, and begged him with tears in my eyes to let me carry him away with your pearls—just as a protection to you."

Renard laughed. "But he must've suspected you understood it was to be illicit?"

"No. I fooled him with the yarn that you was hirin' him and Henslow to land your pearls safe in the American market—and skip these waters secretly. It was all midshipman's pie to him, and he swallowed it without chewin'."

The elder man shook his head sadly. "The beginning of crookedness is to think everybody else is a simpleton!"

"Yes, and I'm glad of it!" returned the skipper earnestly. "If crooks didn't always believe they're slicker'n other folks, the bad eggs wouldn't be so easy to catch. Just because Baxter can't see a lot of police around, he thinks anything he wants is his."

Renard smiled. "Is he armed?"

"Wasn't armed when he hit Australia. Customs told me that. After I got him aboard, I combed his belongings as well as I could, but I couldn't find even a loose ca'tridge."

"Still, we can be sure he's got weapons."

"Maybe. I suspect he's got one hid in the linin' of his big helmet—or up a sleeve. I figured that if I took a gun away from him, he'd be wise to my game with him."

"Yes, much better to let him think he's absolutely fooled—until we're ready to act."

"Has Henslow got a gun?"

"Alim's never been able to locate one. Not even when Henslow was stripped for swimming. But then, Henslow's no worry to me."

Captain Kellett halted and slapped both thighs after the manner of a cock who is preparing to crow. "No worry?" he repeated, glaring at his companion. "And Henslow the dear, old friend of this crook I've just landed here?"

Doctor Renard shrugged. "Henslow's harmless, skipper. I'm convinced of that."

The exasperated young captain of the *Fleetwing* reached both hands to his cap, as if to tear it from his head in two directions. "Doc!" he cried, keeping his voice low, "you mean to tell me you trust Henslow?" He waved an arm toward the two far down the beach. "You think that pair rambled off by theirselves to talk about old times in New York? You think Henslow ain't in on this business to crook you? Doc, this is where Henslow gits his gun! Why, he's simply been waitin' here for Baxter to show up!"

"Possible," agreed the doctor, "but not probable."

Kellett writhed. "Sometimes, doc, you git my goat! Yes, you do! Here you think this Henslow's honest! You got too trustin' a nature to be rich, man!" Off came his cap now. He mopped his brow.

"For six months I've had Henslow under very close observation."

"He wasn't ready to pull nothin' on you, doc! Did you expect him to steal your pearls before his partner got here?"

"I'll swear he's safe—and loyal to me," persisted Renard. "In fact, I've satisfied myself on that point—satisfied myself completely."

"Aw, doc!" mourned Kellett. "I been in your employ a good while now. This is the first time you've ever let your guard down."

"Oh, no, my guard's not down," denied the doctor gently. "I've taken no chances with Henslow—not one. Just the same, I'm convinced that this Baxter won't be able to turn Henslow against me."

"Oh, hell!" exploded the skipper, addressing a square of sky beyond the high tops of the coconut palms.

"Anything's possible, naturally," Renard resumed quietly. "I always

plan with that thought in mind. But I really do like young Henslow."

"Jumpin' cockroaches!" chanted the captain helplessly. "He's drawed his pay six months, waitin' for his mate to come and help him rob you—maybe shoot you—and you talk that way! What's the matter with you, doc?"

The doctor laughed down in his throat. "Well, skipper, I suppose you'll faint when I tell you that I've shown Henslow my pearls."

So dumfounded was Kellett by the news, that he could not find words for a reply. He started on by himself, breathing hard. But Renard strode up beside him. Then Kellett pulled an efficient-looking revolver out of a hip pocket. "By the Lord Harry!" he swore, "when they're ready to come up your front steps again, I'll kill the both of 'em!"

Renard took the skipper's arm. "Now, listen to me, captain! I showed Henslow the pearls for two very good reasons."

"I'll bet you did!" Having examined his weapon, the skipper stowed it carefully away. Then, glaring straight before him, and thrusting a cigar into the grip of his teeth, he slowed his pace a trifle. "Doc," he added in a lower key, "I stick right here on Marinda until this business is all over. After that—well, I can see it ain't safe to leave you here alone no more."

Again the doctor laughed at Kellett's exasperation. "I'm getting old, eh? And feeble-minded? Well, skipper, what was the use of my trying to cover up the fact that I had pearls? Will you answer me that? You admit yourself that it's being gabbed about in Sydney and all through the pearling grounds. By your own admission, Baxter got the full story there."

"Well, gossip—that ain't pearls, is it? Not like seein' 'em?"

"Here's something I want to point out to you: If Henslow's in on this proposed robbery—if he sent for Mr. Baxter to come and share in it, then why did Mr. Baxter have to wait around Sydney for two weeks, learning what he already knew from Henslow? Can you tell me that?"

"Yes, I see what you're drivin' at," Kellett admitted. "And it sounds sensible enough."

"Baxter hung around Sydney picking up such information as he could, because Henslow hadn't written him about my pearls. And I've seen every letter that Henslow has sent out from here. Not one has been addressed to any Baxter."

"Aw, Baxter's what we call a name for the articles—it's a phony name, doc. Maybe he wanted to check up in Sydney just how much the pearlers knew. Meantime, you go and show his partner more'n a million dollars' worth of pearls!"

"I arranged to have Henslow overhear Alim and me talking about pearls. Why? To see whether or not he'd admit he'd overheard us. And he did—came straight to me, said he knew the secret, and offered to leave the island as soon as he could."

"He's smart as paint!" declared the captain stubbornly. "Confidence, that's his play, eh? Naturally, doc, I can see that you fell for it."

"Alim had been fretting me," went on Renard. "So I made up my mind to see how Henslow would act when he knew the whole truth."

"And he was awful surprised! That kind of a gent is good at pretendin' things. It's worked with me, once or twice. That's how Henslow lives without havin' to work, doc."

"Yes, Henslow was surprised—at the value of the collection. But I felt that I'd insured my own safety, to some degree."

"Funny kind of insurance, doc, if you want me to say what's in my head. And you're so damned perfectly insured that

if I don't watch out, you'll be killed before I get away from Marinda."

"With Alim around, what chance would Henslow have to get the pearls? Or to injure me? Henslow can't turn over in his bed at night without Alim knowing it. He can't go fifty feet from the bungalow without being shadowed by one of my house boys. He's been under constant observation. And suppose he was to get the pearls into his hands—he couldn't make away with 'em."

"A hell of a lot of good that'd do you, doc if they had you planted."

"Henslow's been one man against many here, Kellett—and he knows it. It has been impressed upon him constantly in various ways. But now it'll be interesting to watch what happens—and I want you to stay with me until Baxter goes."

"If either one blinks a suspicious eye while I'm here," the skipper answered, "I'll blast 'em both over the tops of your palm trees, pickled with lead."

"Just don't be rash, and don't jump to conclusions. Give them a chance to get in deep. It's bad enough for me to have to keep Alim from using his kris. And here I've got you bent on a shooting spree, and ready to go off half cocked. Now, skipper, take it easy."

"Alim's the only feller around here that keeps my hair its regular color," declared the captain almost wistfully. "As for the balance of Marinda, it'd turn me white!"

"The next few days promise to be amusing," went on Renard. "You know, down here, I don't get much in the way of entertainment. Life has its dull side. And I enjoy a touch of excitement."

"What you want?" demanded Kellett. "A shootin' gallery—with yourself for the target?"

"I'll enjoy watching how Henslow and Baxter work—so don't kill 'em too quick, skipper."

"Oh, well, as long as you intend to turn your place into a circus, I'll take a ticket. But you're playin' with fire, doc! They've got the thing rigged on us."

"Mr. Baxter thinks he's got *you* rigged."

"He has—so that if he makes a false move, I'll——"

"Alim'll be using his lower ribs for a sheath to hide his kris in, before you can do much," declared Doctor Renard. "Now—it looks as if they're on their way home from the beach."

CHAPTER VIII.

TAKEN FOR A RIDE.

BAXTER came tiptoeing to Henslow, through the door that connected their rooms. "Strikes me the skipper's sticking around this house pretty close these last two days," he whispered.

Henslow, who was pulling down the sides of a fresh white jacket, lifted a cautioning hand. After that, for half a minute, they stood without moving, and listened.

From the big living room came regular snores—Captain Kellett was asleep after a session with an old newspaper; from the direction of the front veranda sounded an occasional *creak-creak*. Doctor Renard was in his hammock for his regular afternoon siesta.

Baxter, looking into the mirror which Henslow was facing, screwed up his own features to show wholehearted disgust, and shook his fist in the direction of the snoring skipper. Then he stepped back into his own room. He had on only his underwear and trousers, having just finished shaving. Now he carefully dusted his jaws and neck with powder.

Henslow followed him. Baxter was stroking face and neck with his open palms. The younger man stepped to his shoulder. "Be careful, George!" he

warned, in barely audible tones. "I don't believe Kellett's asleep—he's playing 'possum."

"He was going to leave yesterday," Baxter scolded. "And be gone a week. Now he says he's going to-morrow—but he won't. I'd like to know what he's on the stall for? He's getting on my nerves, Johnnie. Besides, he's lapping up fizz and gin—and I'm afraid he'll pull the confidential stuff about what he talked to me about aboard the schooner."

Henslow nudged an elbow into his companion's side. "Hush!" he warned. "I've lost track of Alim. Don't you let that hunchback see you strapping a gun over your shirt. Is it out of sight, in case he should slide in here?"

Baxter nodded. Then, as, stooping, he looked out through a partly open *kajang,* searching as much of the side veranda as was visible, Henslow also stretched his neck—to see where Baxter had hidden his automatic. Holster and harness were on the matting behind Baxter's suit case, and the suit case lay on its side close to the bed.

As Baxter drew in his head, Henslow gestured for caution. Then he took hold of the rope which controlled the *kajang,* and let the plaited awning descend inch by inch into its square in the house wall. Bending to secure the rope on its cleat, suddenly Henslow kicked the suit case, sending it under Baxter's bed. And along with the bag, thrust in with it, went Baxter's pistol and its shoulder gear.

Swift suspicion in his eyes, Baxter wheeled. "What'd you——"

"Alim!" interrupted Henslow. "Coming to you with fresh water. He mustn't see——" He checked his words. A quick *pat-pat-pat* along the matting of the side veranda told them a soft-shod native was going by.

For an instant Baxter turned his head away from Henslow to follow the passing servant. "That sneak of a hunchback!" he charged, and added an oath. "He's been hunting every possible excuse to be running in and out of my room. You know what, Johnnie? I believe——"

"Stick—up—your—hands!"

The words came in a low monotone from tight-drawn lips that barely moved. And it was Henslow who spoke them.

Instinctively Baxter's hands lifted. He faced about slowly, breath suspended, full eyes bulging with astonishment. As he made the turn, he thrust his left foot behind him, and lowered his body a few inches. He appeared to be shrinking away from Henslow. But he was crouching—getting ready for a spring at the younger man, who was now between him and his own weapon.

"Careful!" warned Henslow, "or I'll unload this gun into you." In his right hand was the automatic Baxter had given him. The weapon, held close to his own body, was pointed straight at Baxter's sparely clad middle. "Don't start anything. You know me. I'll shoot your liver out of you, Georgie."

Baxter hastily straightened. "All right, kid! All right! You don't have to waste lead. You may need it later." Staring into the black ring of the automatic's unwavering muzzle, he showed his teeth in a grin that was meant to mollify.

Henslow went on, in that same low, deadly undertone: "It's up to you. If you say a word that forces my hand, you'll get everything. I mean it. So do what you're told."

"I will, kid—so help me!"

Now Henslow raised his voice. And he spoke loud enough to be heard in the living room. "Put on your coat, George. It's time for a little walk on the beach. What d' you say? Come on! It's beginning to turn cool."

"I say yes," was the answer. Baxter's voice carried to the front veranda.

Down came his hands. "Don't I fin-

ish dressing?" he inquired. And as Henslow nodded, the other man helped himself to a neatly folded shirt on the dresser. He got into it, buttoned it with fingers that shook a little, adjusted a string tie under the soft collar, and picked up his coat. His face was a sickly yellow.

Baxter's color was due to the look of mean determination on Henslow's face, and to the set of his jaws. Through half-closed lids, he fixed a stare of hatred upon Baxter. And Baxter knew he was up against "the killer" in a killing mood.

From the living room was still coming the bellowslike blow and squeak of Kellett's snores. On the veranda the hammock was softy whining in its lashing irons, like an animal in pain. Old Doctor Renard was being rocked to sleep by that servant who had just sped by outside.

"Give me a break," said Baxter, again speaking low. "You don't have to shoot me down—with a gun I brought for you."

"What you get is up to you," said the lips that barely moved. "You can have anything you want, and you can start it as soon as you like, too—in case you want it over with quick."

"No, kid, no!" The coat went on clumsily.

"Then don't tip off what's happening as we go out. Understand? And no fooling, George, if you don't want the big blow-off right on the front porch."

Baxter nodded. "No fooling," he agreed. He spoke thickly, his mouth was so dry. His forehead was dappled with small spots of moisture that shone. "Speak your mind, kid—what's my ticket?"

"We're going to the beach, as I said. You can make it alive, if you say so. We'll do a little talking there. Get me?"

"Sure I get you." Baxter nodded eagerly. He put on his helmet. Finding he had it on front side behind, he turned it about. Then he lifted from the dresser a ring with a large, carved setting, and pushed it along a finger. The greater part of his belongings were still in the suit case. He glanced toward the bed and his luggage. "Do I come back here?" he asked tremulously.

"Forget it," bade Henslow curtly.

The other shrugged. "All right. Let's have our little stroll before supper." He managed a shaky grin.

Henslow motioned him to the door. As Baxter, arms hanging by his sides, went out of his own room, Henslow followed, slipping his automatic into his right coat pocket, where he held it in his hand. The muzzle was pointing now at Baxter's broad back.

Captain Kellett, sprawled among the cushions of a sofa, started violently, and sat up, bringing both feet down hard upon the matting. "Hello, there!" he challenged. His eyes darted from Baxter to Henslow. "Am I late for supper—or what?"

Baxter laughed. "No, skipper. Plenty of time for another whirl at the shut-eye before we eat. We're taking a walk."

On the veranda, the hammock was suddenly still.

Kellett yawned noisily, covering his mouth with his left hand. "I'm sure gittin' ahead on sleep! And you two beat hell when it comes to walkin'! What's the matter with us all makin' a row for somethin' to drink? Alim!"

"Tuan," was the soft answer from outside the front door.

"The doctor's asleep," cautioned Henslow. "Go out easy, George. We don't want to disturb him."

Baxter moved ahead. Henslow followed a little behind his prisoner's shoulder. They passed out upon the veranda. As Baxter appeared, Alim was close beside the door, flattened against the woven wall. Doctor Renard was sitting up in the hammock, brows

drawn together, and a look of great intentness behind the pince-nez.

"Did I hear the skipper calling for a drink, gentlemen?" he asked.

"Yes, and then again, no." Kellett was framed in the doorway. "You and me, doc, havin' some sense in this climate, we'll stay out of the sun and take somethin' for the bellyache. This here pair of griffons, they'll take a trot by the sad sea waves."

"We're two drinks ahead of everybody else," declared Henslow, grinning.

Doctor Renard chuckled. "Alim, tell Cherdek to bring the bar."

"Atta boy!" cried Kellett. "Nobody's goin' to fob me off my bitters."

"If you don't mind, sir," put in Baxter, "I'll wait for mine till I come back. But Johnnie, here, of course, he can stay behind with you if——"

"A little later for me, too," said Henslow. "We've just finished our naps, and hanker for the fresh air. But we'll join you shortly—after I've shown George something about handling a native canoe."

"You're both excused." returned Renard. He stood. Alim slid, rather than walked, to a place by his side. "Be back in time for a game of cribbage before supper." Alim offered him a carved box containing cigarettes. He felt for one, and the servant struck the match.

"We won't be long, doctor," said Henslow. He moved forward, closer to Baxter. The latter was aware of Henslow's advance—and started for the steps.

"I'm in fine trim to win to-night," the skipper bragged. "Me and Doctor Renard'll clean you two up for a fare-you-well. It's goin' to cost you money to sit in the game this evening."

"Make the game poker," Henslow bantered back. "I'm loaded for bear myself—and I want action."

"He can play poker when he holds the aces, hey, skipper?" called Baxter, without turning his head. He was watching the steps as he went down.

"Oh, I know Henslow plays a canny game," was the captain's answer.

"I have to," Henslow laughed. "I'm up against a tough proposition in this crowd."

The two moved on down into the grove, one barely a foot in advance of the other, so that Baxter could feel, now and then, the hard ring-nose of Henslow's weapon through the cloth of his side pocket. Neither spoke until they were close to the beach. Then Baxter had something to say—in a voice that no longer seemed to be his.

"You think you can get away with the swag all by your lonesome, hey?"

"I didn't send for you, George," answered Henslow.

"All right, kid. You can have the pearls. I'll say they're coming to you—a man that can play me such a smooth game!"

Henslow did not reply to that.

"But you don't have to take me for a ride," pleaded the other, his voice slightly shaky. "Where'll you get off if you blow a couple of holes through me?"

"I'll do my own worrying."

"I'm worrying about myself, Johnnie. I know you. I expect to be dead before sundown. I suppose nothing I could say would change that. I've been a damned fool, that's all. Never figured you'd give me the double—with a gun I handed you myself."

"Thanks for this gun," returned Henslow dryly. "As I told you, I needed it."

"But there's something you seem to be overlooking," Baxter continued. "It's that letter of mine that the postal authorities in Sydney hold—for the police. When I don't show up——"

"I'll take my chances with the kangaroo bulls. They'll have to shoot fast and straight when they mix things with me."

"Yeah? Well, you're in for a stretch in an Australian pen. And you'll find they run pens on a different scale down that way than you're accustomed to, kid." Baxter shuddered, but not out of sympathy for Henslow. He was recalling Henslow's ruthless reputation as a "killer."

"Head for the boat beach."

Baxter headed. "Listen here, kid," he urged. "I'd be worth a lot more to you alive."

"You see that first big boat?" Henslow asked. "Push it into the water."

A shake of the head, and a sigh; then Baxter stooped to shove the light craft off the shingle. Presently, it floated, Baxter standing beside it in the water, which reached nearly to his knees. With the canoe between him and Henslow, he made bold to have a look at his captor. He received a smile that chilled him. His underlip loosened and seemed to hang down.

"Now climb in, facing the front there, and take that paddle."

Clumsily Baxter obeyed. "I suppose I'm to be drowned," he quavered over a shoulder. "Well, it's a new kind of a ride to take a pal on, kid." Waiting for Henslow to take his seat on the after thwart, Baxter's paddle picked at the water nervously.

Henslow waved an arm in the direction of the anchored *Fleetwing,* curtsying to them a quarter of a mile away. "Paddle me out to the schooner," he ordered.

"Johnnie!" There was hope in Baxter's voice, and even a trace of gratitude. "You're going to put me aboard her, hey? Tell me you won't drown me!"

"Get going—and keep going!" snapped Henslow.

Awkwardly, but with eager strokes now, Baxter sent the canoe on its course.

"You'd have a hell of a time explaining that gun, after the crew of the schooner see it, with you running me aboard this way," he pointed out.

"Don't be so cocksure about where you're going—all I want is to get the schooner between us and the bungalow. That's all."

Baxter almost dropped the paddle. "Oh, my God!" he exclaimed in terror. "I see now why you don't care what happens to me—you're ready to go back and shoot your way through 'em in the house! Here's where you cut loose with both automatics—just as you did with the three jewelry clerks!"

Henslow lifted a foot, straightened his leg, and gave Baxter a kick.

"Paddle, Georgie! You're done!"

CHAPTER IX.

READY FOR ACTION.

AND Henslow's coming back alone, is he?"

Standing between Doctor Renard and Alim, behind the screening vines of the front veranda, the skipper of the *Fleetwing* was marveling out loud to himself over the new turn of affairs.

"What do you make of that fact?" asked Renard.

"Don't know. There was some reason for the canoe going to the starboard side of the vessel, so they were both out of our sight."

Renard shook his head. "It *is* a puzzle."

"One thing sure—we've got to be good and ready for that young gent paddling ashore," declared the skipper.

Renard looked his disapproval. "Now, captain!" he chided gently. "Please remember what I said about jumping to conclusions."

Kellett laughed harshly. "I ain't goin' to do exactly that kind of jumpin' this time, doc," he answered. "I'm goin' to try a new brand."

The older man turned abruptly on his servant. "Alim," he said sharply, "this is what *you've* done—made Captain

Kellett believe Mr. Henslow was armed."

"Tuan!" The hunchback trembled with earnestness. "Truly I spoke when I said *Tuan* Henslow has a weapon since the other came here. I do not lie! His room was so dark that I could not see my own fingers when I passed through his door last night. Sleeping, he was yet all dressed—except that he wore no coat. Was that not strange, *tuan?"*

"I'll say it was strange as hell!" growled Kellett.

"My fingers felt the hardness of his pistol, *tuan!* Also, the trigger of it. How could I be wrong? I would have carried the thing away with me, but it was chained to his hand."

The doctor shook a troubled head. "Strange! Strange!" he admitted sorrowfully. "You must be right."

"Well, now we're gittin' somewhere, when you admit that!" stormed Captain Kellett. "Just what I expected you'd find out about this Henslow! Didn't I tell you Baxter brought him a gun? The same gun he had in his fist as he walked across this porch half an hour ago! Nice way to go for a walk on the beach—or out in a canoe!"

At that, Renard did not hide his doubting smile.

It was like the lash of a whip to Kellett—that smile. His face darkened wrathfully. He began to sputter.

"Hell a'mighty, doc! What's gone squeegee with you, anyhow? Ain't I told you—ain't Alim told you—didn't you see with your own eyes? Henslow had his right hand in his right coat pocket. You'll admit that much. Well, he was ready to shoot you on his own way out. But, curiously enough, it was Baxter who kept between you and Henslow's gat—must've thought the time wasn't right, or Baxter didn't want fireworks with Alim so near you. It was Baxter that saved you, doc! Yes, it was! He was maskin' you from Henslow every second they were on the veranda here, passin' out!"

"Captain," returned Doctor Renard solemnly, "what you say is simply unbelievable!"

"You have it your own way," declared Kellett. "But I ain't such a blamed fool that I don't know their game! I've been figurin' it out."

"Then what is their game?"

"They're fixin' to separate us. That's what was in Baxter's mind when he kept Henslow from shootin'. They'll git us apart if they can, doc. Now, you see if I ain't right! This high-toned copra gent, he's gone aboard the schooner, I'd say, ready to pop me through the lungs the second I step over the side."

"And when you're killed—I'm next, is that it?"

"They won't git me," promised the captain. "Don't you worry! I got better sense than to walk into *that* kind of a trap. Huh! But if I should go out to the *Fleetwing—pop!* And you and Alim'd get yours at the same time, from Henslow here. Oh, it's pretty slick as a game—but it won't work."

"He's paddling fast," pointed out the doctor. "Suppose we settle on just what we'd better do when he gets here."

"This is it: We must pretend we've got no suspicions anything's wrong," advised the captain. "You lay down on the sofa there, with the big shawl over you. Your gun'll be in your right hand. If you have to, you can blast him through the shawl."

Dutifully, Doctor Renard turned and entered the gloom of the living room, stretched himself, where Kellett wanted him to be, then allowed Alim to put a revolver in his hand. As he lay, the shawl covered him from his chin to his feet.

"Now, Alim," went on the skipper, "I'll be on one side of this door here, inside, and you'll be on the other. When our sea-goin' private secretary comes through the door, I'll stick right along-

side of him. And you close in on his back. If he moves a suspicious hand toward the doctor, or anybody else, make that kris of your'n fast between his shoulders."

Alim pulled his kris from his sleeve. "It will go deep, *Tuan* Captain," he said.

Through his glasses, Doctor Renard eyed the hunchback sternly. "But I warn you, Alim, do not be over eager. You must not strike without good reason!"

"Oh, we'll let the dear boy tell his little yarn," declared Kellett sarcastically. "He's goin' to have some tall explainin' to do, doc. I'm crazy to hear it, too."

"Where is he now?" the doctor inquired. His thin face, looking strangely young once more in that dim light, was almost as white as his hair.

"He's headin' up from the beach," Kellett reported. "And makin' good time, too." He took his stand inside the front door, his back against the wall, his face toward Renard.

Across from him, arms at his sides, was Alim. The right hand of the hunchback was hidden at his back. In it was his kris.

"I wouldn't be surprised if Baxter's everything you say about him," acknowledged the doctor, his look on the rectangle of light that was the open door. "As to Mr. Henslow, I'm convinced he was trying to mislead us about wanting to teach his friend how to use a canoe."

Kellett chuckled. "You're goin' to know just how right I am before you're much older, doc."

"If Henslow tries to have you go out to the schooner," Renard went on, "I'll —well, I'll be bound to admit his purpose is not to protect my interests."

"Say, doc, you're a wonder! When you like a man, you're sure brailed up in the friendship thing. But this particular man you've picked out for trustin'—I just naturally got to kill him in the next few minutes."

"Yes," said the doctor sadly. "If he draws his weapon, or tries to shoot through his pocket—you'll have to kill him. My judgment must be at fault, for I'm all at sea on this thing."

"I'll give him all the chance I can to clear up this mystery of takin' Baxter out beyond the schooner—and havin' a gun made fast to his hand while he sleeps. But—I'll not give him too much chance."

"Sh!" cautioned Renard. The crackle of Henslow's feet on the broken coral of the path could be plainly heard now.

A moment's wait, then Renard started. Henslow's hat came into view as he mounted the front steps.

Pausing for a moment, Henslow glanced toward the empty hammock on the veranda. He looked up and down outside, as if expecting to find the doctor on some of the benches, or at the reading table. And on the young man's face was that same look of determination which Baxter had seen.

Stepping through the open doorway, Henslow halted.

Coming from the strong light of outdoors, he was temporarily blinded. He looked toward the rear of the deep room, wrinkling his brows as he peered. His hands were empty. He kept snapping the fingers of his right hand nervously. He was unaware of the nearness of either Captain Kellett or Alim.

Then, of a sudden, Henslow made out the figure of Renard stretched on the sofa under the shawl.

"Doctor!" he called. "Doctor Renard!"

Henslow's voice was tense. He moved forward a couple of steps.

Captain Kellett fell in softly behind the young man, altering his former plan a trifle. With a gesture, the skipper beckoned to Alim to close in, but a little behind him.

The hunchback glided noiselessly over the matting, and got into position.

CHAPTER X.

THE SHOW-DOWN.

"I COULDN'T see you at first, doctor," said Henslow.

"Where's Mr. Baxter?"

"Out aboard the schooner, sir. Is Captain Kellett around? I'd like to see him for a minute."

"I'm right along with you," said the skipper dryly. He moved to Henslow's right side.

A little startled, Henslow swung round on Kellett. "Your serang," he began, "he asked me to say that he'd be glad, captain, if you'd go out to him at once."

The captain nodded. "Yeah, I been worryin' about him a little. He's a lonesome sort of cuss, that serang."

Henslow was instantly relieved. "You expect to sail before long, then?" he asked.

"Oh, I'm sailin' right away," Kellett drawled.

"I wish you'd wait until I can be aboard before you sail, skipper."

"Oh, I can fix you up on that, if you're aimin' to sail." Kellett's voice was crisply dry.

But Henslow did not seem to note the sarcasm. "It'll only take me a few minutes to get ready—I'll join you on the beach right away."

"A few minutes, more or less, don't matter to me," protested Kellett. "So I'll just wait here for you, Mr. Henslow. Maybe I can help carry your luggage."

"But before I go, I want to see the doctor alone," Henslow explained.

"I kind of thought you would. You got somethin' private to say?" the skipper queried, smiling into Henslow's eyes.

"A report—it must be private, yes."

"You can see the doc alone," agreed Kellett. "First, though"—the skipper swung his revolver into sight, holding it low down, and leveled at Henslow—"first though," repeated the skipper, "I want that little gat you've got in the hind pocket of your pants."

Henslow lifted both hands at sight of the weapon. "Help yourself," he invited.

"Alim!" Kellett did not move so much as an eyelash.

A bony brown hand shot forward against Henslow's white coat. It disappeared.

Kellett was grinning. "You know, mister," he said in mock concern, "you're a lot too young to be packin' a gun."

"Keep your advice to yourself," Henslow retorted.

Alim's hand was in sight again. It was empty.

"No pistol is in that pocket, *Tuan* Captain," he reported.

"Look him over—thorough," was the command.

Doctor Renard looked on all this while, without a word, a look of grave concern on his face.

Alim obeyed Kellett. Swiftly those bleached palms stroked Henslow. Then: "This *tuan* has no weapon," declared Alim, disappointed.

Down came Henslow's hands. "I'm not armed. I want my talk with Doctor Renard—by myself." He thrust out his chin at the captain.

Kellett thrust out his underlip. "You're so damned cheeky," he returned, "that I'm just goin' to stay and hear what you've got to say. Because—gun or no gun—I don't trust you. And for a Chinese brass nickel, I'd just——"

"Captain!" It was Renard. He was on his feet now. He had left his own revolver out of sight under the shawl.

"No, Captain Kellett's right, sir," said Henslow. "He's looking after your safety, and I'm glad of it. And he might just as well hear what I've got to tell you."

"Oh, thanks for the confidence,"

drawled Kellett, showing his teeth in a mirthless grin. "Anyhow, I didn't intend to move an inch while you stuck here."

Henslow turned to his employer. "Baxter's not coming ashore again, sir."

"He isn't!" The doctor stepped to the left of Henslow—and so far that the younger man was forced to half turn in order to face Renard.

"No, sir. Captain Kellett will find him aboard the schooner. And I want the captain to sail away with him—take me, too. I don't care where."

Across Henslow's shoulder, Kellett winked at the doctor. "Anywhere suits me," he declared humorously.

"But, Mr. Henslow," said Renard. "Why is Mr. Baxter going so soon? And why have you made up your mind to leave me? Your change in plans, because Mr. Baxter came here, is, it seems to me——"

"It's my own plan, sir." Henslow's face had flushed. "Because Baxter's a criminal. A dangerous criminal, doctor. Believe me, sir! I know what I'm talking about."

"Well! Well! That is amazing!" exclaimed Renard. He shot a triumphant glance back at Kellett in return for the wink.

"I've locked him up aboard the *Fleetwing,*" Henslow continued. "The serang's on guard—armed with my automatic pistol."

"Ho, ho, and ha, ha!" scoffed Kellett. He moved round to stand beside Renard.

"How did you come to bring Baxter to Marinda?" Henslow asked.

"I had his number, that's why I brought him," answered the skipper. "The doctor understands all about it."

"Put him in irons," said Henslow, "and keep him in irons."

"Don't you fret!" said Kellett. "But where's *his* gat?"

"In there under his bed, where I kicked it out of his reach."

"Fetch it, Alim!" It was the doctor's gentle voice.

The hunchback sped away.

"So he had a pair of guns on him, hey? I'll two-gun him on the way back to Sydney!" Kellett looked wrathful.

"Henslow," questioned Doctor Renard, "if this man is the dangerous criminal you say he is, why did you wait so long to tell us?"

"So's to protect you, doctor. Suppose I'd've told you who he was while he was armed? He might've killed somebody. I had to mislead him, get one gun, and make him think I'd help him rob."

Alim was back, Baxter's weapon in his hand. The skipper promptly took the automatic and pocketed it.

"While you're at it," said Renard, "put your own gun away, captain."

"Yes," Henslow added, "and Alim can put away his kris."

"Now, Henslow," continued Renard, "we're ready to hear the rest of your story."

"This Baxter knew me in prison," blurted out Henslow. For a moment he did not supplement the statement, waiting for comments from the others, or for exclamations of shock and surprise.

But neither Renard nor the skipper spoke. The doctor's look was kind and mild. The narrowed gaze of the other white man was steady, but not hard. Alim grinned.

"Like all the other convicts," Henslow continued, "Baxter thought I shot down three clerks in a jewelry holdup in Fifth Avenue, New York, in the spring of 1924. I was suspected of that robbery and murder, but it wasn't proved against me. Just the same, I served two years because the police found several automatics which had just been fired, in my taxicab—not to mention the loot."

He paused, but again no one spoke.

"I was in college at the time," Henslow went on. "Afternoons and nights,

I drove a taxi to pay my way. One Monday afternoon late—it was about closing time—two men hailed my cab. They were running, but I didn't think anything of that, because it was raining hard. They jumped in with their bags and told me to drive to the Pennsylvania Station. Said they barely had time to catch their train. I stepped on the gas.

"We'd speeded a few blocks. Then we were held up by the traffic lights. One of the men complained I was making slow progress. He pushed a couple of dollars through the window at me, jumped out and ran for a subway station. The other man followed. They left their bags—because they saw through the rear window that a motorcycle cop was closing in on us.

"A minute later, the police jumped me. They hauled me off the cab. The bags were full of jewelry. On the floor of the cab were the guns. I was taken to a police station and locked up.

"The rest I've told you. The murders were so cold-blooded and cruel, that everybody thought I was a ruthless devil, who'd shot two men in the back without warning, and another who tried to defend himself. During the trial, I got quite a reputation for being cool. Well, in prison, there was no use denying I was guilty—and I was made kind of a hero. I thought I'd be safer in prison if they thought I was the cold-blooded gunman they believed I was.

"Baxter was in the cell next to me. He always goes after big money, that bird! He always talked of our working together after we were out. My time was up several months ahead of him. Well, I made it my business to get as far away from that prison and Baxter as I could. My life was ruined, so far as the States were concerned. I thought I could make a new start down in this part of the world.

"But, somehow, Baxter traced me. You can see what chance I'd have back home, with hundreds of criminals from that prison always recognizing me, no matter how I might try to get away from my prison record. You see, not only the whole underworld, but the police, too, had me marked as an accomplished holdup man.

"Baxter figured that I was on the trail of rich loot. So he came with guns to help me do the job."

Doctor Renard was smiling. "Your story about yourself is not news to me," he said quietly.

Henslow stared. "You mean you've heard from the Australian police? But I didn't know they——"

"I've heard nothing from the Australian police," denied the doctor. "What I know, I got straight from your former warden."

Henslow's body drooped. "The warden!" he repeated. "That's the last man I ever expected would hurt my chances."

Renard shook his head. "In this last bunch of letters," he said, "was one from the prison that contained a newspaper clipping that absolutely clears you. They've captured the pair who rode in your taxi, Henslow."

There was a moment of silence. Then Henslow slowly straightened up, and a new look came into his face. He seemed to be a different man.

"That's some news, doctor!" he said huskily. "And, after the pearls are safe in Sydney, if you'll let me, I'd like to come back to Marinda."

"Yes!" Kellett stepped forward and put out a hand. "You come back, young feller," he said heartily, "and, by thunder, you stay here as long as the doc lives!"

The crippled body of Alim bent forward in assent. "May it happen so, *Tuan* Henslow," he said respectfully.

THE END.

Alone, Cold and Disheartened, He Battled the Storm—and Found Warmth and Love and Life in a Tiny, Remote Schoolhouse.

The MAN *from* BEAVERDAM

By Theodore Goodridge Roberts

THE man from Beaverdam could not see farther than a few yards, because of the density and insistence of the falling snow. There was no faintest breath of wind. The cold was intense; and the snow, in the air as on the ground, was dry as desert sand.

The small, white flakes poured down from the flickering gloom overhead, weaving close curtains of shivering obscurity about him and striking the invisible forest with tiny impacts which, multiplied by incalculable millions, filled the smothered air with a vast, enveloping, continuous rustling whisper.

"If I wasn't in a hurry, I'd dig in an' make a fire an' sit tight till she quits snowin'," said the man from Beaverdam. "If it wasn't for the weddin' an' the spree, an' this here silver cake dish I got for Prue, an' what I got all loaded in my right fist for Barney Green's snoot, I'd sure make camp an' wait a spell—for if I know where the hell I am, or which way I'm headin', the devil kin take the cake dish!"

But he continued to advance on what he hoped was the direct line to the Crutchers', advancing and hoping against his knowledge and judgment, so eager was he to reach the home of Martin Crutcher in time for Prue's wedding. When he saw Prue married, then he would believe it; and then he would hand over his wedding gifts—the fancy cake dish to the bride and that which he

nursed in his right fist to the groom. Then on with the dance!—for he was not one to sulk over upset milk pails. But if he did not arrive by sundown he might be too late to bestow his offerings on the happy couple, for they would be sure to start for Milltown, to catch the Montreal express, the minute the minister had finished his job.

The man from Beaverdam was young but not too young, muscular but not muscle-bound, and accustomed to exposure in all weathers; but after traveling two hours in that choking snowfall —three hours in all—he began to feel a few minor symptoms of fatigue.

The air was so full of snow and so charged with frost that there seemed to be a lack of it for breathing; and light and dry as the snow was, the swiftly increasing depth of it made heavy lifting for the wide webs.

But the traveler's most serious distress was caused by the realization that he was walking blindly, ignorant alike of his course and his whereabouts.

"If I had the sense of a smoked fish, which I ain't, I'd dig in an' sit tight till she blows over," he told himself.

But he kept a-going, stubbornly, against his better judgment. He breasted snow-filled underbrush. Every now and again a big tree, spruce or hemlock or fir, confronted him from the flickering obscurity, and he would pause and study it closely—and it would tell him nothing that he wanted to know.

But he stepped along, talking to himself, as solitary woodsmen sometimes do when uneasy in their minds, and naming himself for a stubborn fool; and the lift to each webbed foot became heavier and heavier. And at last a wind began to stir, to shake the invisible treetops and twirl the flickering curtains of down-pouring snow.

"Now this'll be a howlin', damnation blizzard!" exclaimed the lost traveler; and he was dead right. The wind swooped down from the unseen treetops and scooped up the dry snow from the forest floor and tried to smother the world with it. It all but succeeded in smothering the man from Beaverdam.

"Here's where I quit!" he gasped; and he crouched against a drifted clump of young firs, loosened one of his snowshoes to use as a shovel and began to dig.

The wind lulled for a moment; and in that lull, above the swish and rustle of settling snow, he heard the clanging of a cowbell. That was a strange thing to hear in the woods at that time of year. He ceased his digging and pushed his cap up from his ears, the better to hear; but the wind swooped again, wiping out all sound save its own.

He crouched, waiting; and in the next lull he heard the bell again, noted its position and judged it to be only two or three hundred yards away. He returned the snowshoe to its proper place and headed straight for the sound.

That was a great fight. Blinded, half choked, the man from Beaverdam fought the blizzard. Twice again in the half-hour struggle he heard a clang or two of the bell in momentary lulls in the raging of the storm. Five times was he flung off his feet. He fought forward with his eyes shut, through tangles of brush and eddying blasts of snow thicker than sea spray.

Suddenly he felt himself to be in a pocket of still air—close in the lee of some sort of substantial shelter. He stood straight, drew full breaths, advanced with one hand extended while with the other he wiped ice from his eyes and nose. The extended hand encountered something solid and familiar —a shingled wall, the wall of a house.

He fumbled along this wall until he came to a door; and even as he fumbled at the doorknob, the door opened and the cowbell clanged in his face. The bell struck the floor with a bounce and bang as he staggered across the threshold. He was reeling, and still trying to

free eyes and nostrils of ice. He felt soft arms about him, and a soft but somewhat hysterical voice cried in his ear: "I knew you would come!"

The man from Beaverdam did not know what to make of that unexpected reception; even upon recovering the use of his eyes and finding himself in what was obviously a schoolroom, to judge by its occupants, he lacked an explanation of the young woman's welcoming action and words. But when she released him from her tender embrace with a gesture of sharp distaste and a cry of consternation, he realized that she had made a mistake. He swayed, unsupported, then sank to the floor. Ten or more children stared at him with round eyes through the gray twilight of the room. He felt just about all in, but kept up a brave front. He sat up, with the pack on his shoulders against a wall, and grinned amiably.

"Howdy, kids," he said. "Bad weather."

He cleared his feet from the thongs of the wide snowshoes and eased the strap of his pack.

"Lucky to be indoors—weather like this. Where am I at?"

"At the new Kittle Crick schoolhouse, Kittle Crick, York County, New Brunswick, Canada," piped up a little girl in a red dress.

"Canada, hey? Not so worse! If ye'd said Mexico—or Asia—I'd sure feel kinder discouraged—seeing's I'm only aimin' for the Crutchers'."

No one smiled. Every one but the teacher continued to stare. The little girl in the red dress gave a consequential jounce in her seat and piped up again.

"Crutchers is in Canada, too, mister. You'd ought to took the train if you want to go to Mexico, which is beyond our great neighbor to the south of us and has dangerous revolutions. But Crutchers is in New Brunswick, too, and York County, too, and right on the nex' crick, mister—only nine miles away."

"Thanky, sister. Live an' l'arn—that's me."

The teacher returned slowly from the corner into which she had retired swiftly after her second look at the man from Beaverdam. Her cheeks were pink and her eyes veiled. She addressed the intruder.

"I thought you were—mistook you for—the light is very bad—somebody else—another gentleman entirely," she explained.

"That's me," he replied. "Somebody else. That's me, an' always has bin. The other gentleman entirely. Sure. That's me all over. The wrong party—that's my middle name. Who were you expectin', if I may make so bold as to ask?—ringin' the cowbell for?—and wantin' to see so bad?"

"That is neither here nor there," she returned, shooting one lightning glance into his eyes. "All the men and lads are away from the settlement, working in the lumber camps—all except one, and he is at the nearest farm. I supposed, naturally, that he had heard the bell. We can't go out in this blizzard—not even across the yard to the shed, for stove wood; and the last stick of wood is in the stove right now, and this place is cold as a barn."

The intruder nodded, slipped the pack strap from his shoulder and stood up, leaving the pack on the floor.

"I'm fine an' dandy—fully recovered—well, from my battle with the blizzard, anyhow. Point me the way to the shed, and I'll fetch enough wood to keep us warm till she blows herself out. When it comes to rustlin' stove wood, I bet a dollar the feller you wasn't lookin' for—the wrong party—is the better man. That's me. And as I was aimin' to bile a kittle an' eat a snack on my way to the Crutchers', but got myself lost instead, crossin' the height-of-land—an' ma put in a fresh bakin' of

cookies for to help out Mrs. Crutcher —I guess we can all of us stay the pangs of hunger once, anyhow."

The woodshed was directly opposite the door of the schoolhouse and not more than fifteen yards distant. The man from Beaverdam made the round trip four times, without misadventure, though the storm continued to rave with unabated fury. He was about to make a fifth dash for a last armful just for good measure, when the young woman stopped him.

"Please don't," she begged. "I think it's blowing harder. We have plenty now, surely, to last for hours, and you must be worn out—even you. It would be a wicked risk—now that we have enough wood to keep us from freezing."

"But even if I missed my way back, you wouldn't have to worry now," he assured her. "There's the stove full an' the woodbox full; an' there's my pack, with tea an' bread an' doughnuts an' what not, an' a whole bakin' of sugar cookies, an' there's my teakittle. You'd last out the storm all right, even if I did miss my way back."

"I was not thinking of myself, or the children," she said, in a strange, low voice.

He looked at her closely and saw tears on her lashes—but her lips were smiling. Now what was he to make of that?

The man from Beaverdam boiled the kettle on the top of the little stove, and made tea. The teacher and the children had their own cups, or tin mugs, for all had eaten their midday meal in school. That had been a long time ago, for it was now five o'clock. There were no lamps in the new schoolhouse, so the only light was from the open door of the stove. One of the benches was set out with the food from the pack, by that uncertain illumination. The children gathered around the bench, some sitting on the floor, some kneeling; and a small boy, who had been crying, stilled his sobs and dried his tears and laid hold of a large doughnut. The man from Beaverdam said funny things, like asking the girl in the red dress where he could buy a ticket for Mexico, as he edged around the bench and reached over the heads and shoulders of his guests, pouring tea into their cups and mugs; and soon every one but the teacher was laughing. Then he sat down beside the teacher.

"You don't seem to think I'm funny," he said to her.

"But I do," she answered. "If you hadn't happened along, the fire would have been out by now—for I'd have been afraid to go looking for the woodshed, in this storm—and we should all be shivering and crying by this time."

"Well, I'm glad I got lost. This is as good a spree as the one I cal'lated I was goin' to. But how far's the nearest house from here?"

"Less than a mile. About half a mile."

"An' where about's the gent you was kinder expectin'?"

"That's where. At Gallop's. Archie Gallop. He didn't go into the woods this winter—because he wanted to look after me—so he said." She paused, as if inviting comment; but the man from Beaverdam did not speak. She continued: "So he said—but I don't believe it now. Or else he's a coward—afraid to risk traveling half a mile in this storm, on a track he knows as well as the way to his own barn. Do you suppose that's it?"

The man sipped hot tea, discreetly.

"Do you know him?" she asked, whispering close to his ear. "Do you know Archie Gallop, of Kettle Creek?"

"I've heard the name," he admitted; "an' how he owns the best farm an' the best stock in twenty-five miles—or will own it, when his old man quits. But I never saw him. I'm from across the height-o'-land."

"He doesn't look like a coward," she continued, still whispering. "Nor he

doesn't sound like one. But why isn't he here?"

"You never can tell," he said. "All I know is, I'd bin here with bells on, at the first sign of storm, if I was him. That's straight! But I'm glad he wasn't. Now I'll tell you a funny story; and the worst you can do about it is laugh. Nothin' to get mad about, anyhow—an' no bones busted. I was on my way to a weddin' at the Crutchers' when I got myself lost in the storm—the weddin' of a girl I've bin hankerin' to marry myself for quite a spell—but now I want to laugh. I was all primed to step in an' give her a stylish weddin' present, an' hand the groom a sock on the jaw for takin' her away from me—but now I'd just as leave hand weddin' presents worth real money to the both of them—and my blessin' along with the cake dishes. That's what this here blizzard did to me—by chasin' me into this schoolhouse. Can you beat it?"

After a moment's hesitation, she said: "I don't believe a word you say."

"Now, listen to me," he whispered eagerly. "The girl's Prue Crutcher—but I guess she's Prue Green by now. And the man's Mr. Barney Green, from Milltown an' points west, with his pockets full of fancy pens, sellin' stocks an' shares an' what not. I didn't smack him first time we met, there at Crutchers', because Prue an' the old lady stuck round too close; nor I didn't smack him the second time, for the same reason. But I went all the way down to Milltown one day last November, on purpose to show him Prue was discardin' a real man for a vest pocketful of fancy pens an' a noseful of hot air—but I didn't find him in Milltown. The men I asked about him hadn't ever heared of him.

"So I wrote a letter to Prue, tellin' her he was a liar. I would've gone across to the Crutchers' an' told her so face to face, only I took sick an' ma kep' me in bed till two weeks back. I got the weddin' present here in my pack, right here beside me—a fancy, stylish, silver cake dish. I don't grudge Prue the price—but I'm glad I didn't get to the weddin'."

She did not say a word to all that.

He exhibited the dish by the wavering light of a torch of bark. It was passed from hand to hand and greatly admired.

When the food and tea were gone, the provider amused the children with funny stories until, in spite of their amusement, all were sound asleep about the warm stove.

"It's eight o'clock," said the teacher.

The man went to the door, opened it a crack, closed it securely again and returned to his place beside the young woman.

"She's easin' up," he told her. "Your friend will soon brave the storm now and save your life."

"When both wind and snow have ceased," she said quietly. "If he isn't here in half an hour, I'll know the truth about him."

"He's maybe mislaid his snowshoes. Then again, maybe he started long ago an' lost his way. That's what he'll say happened; and you'll believe him."

"Why do you say that? I'll believe him if he can prove it."

Half an hour passed in silence. Then the man went to the door again and took another look at the weather. He reported a marked improvement.

"I think I know the truth about Archie Gallop and all his fine words now," said the young woman. "He could not have missed his way, for it's a straight road and he knows every tree on both sides of it. He is a coward!—afraid to walk half a mile in a snowstorm!"

The man laughed gently.

"I don't know Gallop, only by hearsay," he said; "but I bet a dollar he'll tell a good story and you will swaller it down like cream. I know girls!"

"No, you don't—if you think they are all fools! Why do you speak to me like that—as if I was ready and eager to—to believe anything Archie Gallop tells me?"

"Well, you like him, don't you?"

"I—don't know. Of course, I *did* like him, or thought so, but if he was afraid to travel half a mile in that storm for my sake—well, I don't like cowards!"

"I guess you like him, and I'll bet this here cake dish you'll swaller every lie he tells you about to-night an' everything else."

"Why do you care if I do or don't believe Archie Gallop? You don't even know my name; and I don't know yours."

"That's so; but you guided me to shelter with your cowbell, an' I supplied you with stove wood and supper. You couldn't call us——"

He was interrupted by the opening of the door, and a clatter of snowshoes on the floor; and then a voice asked:

"Are you there, Mary?"

"Yes, I'm here," replied the young woman. "Where did you think I'd be? And we're all nice and warm, and we've had a good supper—thanks to a perfect stranger."

"A stranger? I'll tell you how it was, Mary. I started four times, and couldn't make it—and then I started again, and got lost. I have a lantern here, but I couldn't keep it lit in the wind. What's that you said about a stranger? Who was he, and where'd he go to?"

"He didn't go anywhere. He's right here."

The newcomer struck a match, lit the lantern and held it high and flashed it around the room—but there was no stranger. The man from Beaverdam was gone.

As Mary boarded at the Gallop place, and as there was no school for three days following the blizzard, because it took that long to open up roads and paths through the deep drifts, she had plenty of time in which to listen to Archie's explanations.

They were good, too, those explanations; and his parents vouched for the truth of his statement that he had left the house five times, made five distinct efforts to reach the school while the storm was at its height. They did not know—and how was Mary to learn?—that on four of those five occasions he had gone no farther than the stable?

On the sixth day following the blizzard, at eleven o'clock in the morning, the man who had entered the Kettle Creek schoolhouse so opportunely from the midst of that storm entered it for the second time. He was recognized instantly by all present. He leaned his snowshoes against the wall, dropped cap and mittens to the floor, unslung his pack and from it extracted that elegant silver cake dish which the teacher and her flock had already seen and admired. Smiling pleasantly, he advanced the length of the room and placed the dish on the teacher's desk.

"You win," he said.

The young woman's color was high, and her glance was cold, and the line of her bright lips was straight.

"If this is a joke, it is in doubtful taste," she said. "I have heard Mr. Gallop's explanations and believe every word of them."

"That's what I figgered on," he returned, his smile widening. "That's how you win the expensive cake dish."

"We won't argue," she said coldly. "But I have a question to ask you. As you seem to think that Archie Gallop's word is not to be trusted, and as you are so ready to tell me that he does not speak the truth, why didn't you stop and call him a liar to his face, when you had the chance right here in this room—instead of sneaking away before he had time to light his lantern?"

"The minute I heard his voice, I

cleared out so's to give him plenty of rope to hang himself with," replied the man. "Some people can't be hanged too dead to suit me."

"I don't understand you!" she exclaimed with heat. "And I don't want to. You are—impudent; and I don't even know your name, and don't want to! If it were not for the fact that you were—very kind to us that night—and a great comfort—and very generous—I'd order you out of this school—for a coward and a slanderer!"

"You'd be making a mistake if you did that," he replied pleasantly. "Not that I'd go. You'd have to throw me out. I came here this morning to tell you something special."

"I don't want to hear it. And as to throwing you out, Archie Gallop will do that. I'm expecting him any minute now. I hear him now."

"You don't say!" he exclaimed, glancing swiftly around, then moving swiftly to one side of the room.

"When he opens the door, you can grab your snowshoes and slip out before he sees you," she said bitterly. And after a moment's reflection, she added: "I tell you frankly that I'm disappointed in you."

Just then the door opened and in stepped a large man in a coonskin coat.

"Here I am!" he cried, and marched up the room.

"Yes, there you are," said the man from Beaverdam.

Mr. Gallop halted as if he had walked against a stone wall, and turned slowly as if by means of rusty machinery.

"And what of it?" continued the other, without moving from his place. "Here you are, or there you are, what does it matter to anybody but yerself? —or maybe Prue Crutcher. I got something to say to you. This young lady thinks she knows you. I know you, an' you know yerself, but *she* don't know you. Now I want you to make yerself known to her. Right now—an' right here. Tell her the truth about yerself—that you're a liar, a coward, and a skunk!"

Then, for half a minute, there was no sound in the little schoolroom except the whispering of the heat in the stove and the heavy breathing of a small boy with a cold in his round head. Some of the children gazed at the man from Beaverdam, and the rest of them gazed at Mr. Archibald Gallop. The teacher gazed at Gallop, and Gallop gazed at the floor.

"Speak up," prompted the stranger. "Speak your piece, like a little man. Say: 'Teacher, I'm a liar and a yellerbellied coward, and a dirty, tricky sneak.'"

Gallop made a strange sound, a queer sound, something like the sound of drinking out of a bottle mixed up with that of trying to talk with a mouthful of victuals. That, and the heavy breathing of the little boy with the cold, were the only sounds for a full minute.

"D'ye want to hear *him* say it?" asked the man from Beaverdam. "Or would you sooner I told you?"

"You tell me," said the young woman, speaking very slowly. "If I were to hear Archie say it, I wouldn't believe it —in spite of the evidence."

"That suits me," returned the stranger. "D'ye hear what she says, Mister Barney Green?"

Gallop turned around and walked slowly down the room and out of it, his head drooped, his tongue silent. He did not close the door behind him, because the man from Beaverdam was right on his heels.

It was the man from Beaverdam who shut the door—from the outside. Inside, teacher and children sat silent and motionless for ten minutes. At last they heard the jingle of Archie Gallop's sleigh bells; and then the door opened and the man from across the height-of-land reëntered, holding the knuckles of his right hand to his mouth. He shut

the door behind him, lowered his hand and smiled at the teacher.

"D'ye get it?" he asked. "I wasn't the only one that didn't get to Prue Crutcher's weddin'. Mister Barney Green didn't get there, neither—which must've upset Prue and the family considerable, but will prove a blessin' to all concerned in the long run, I guess. Can you beat it?"

The young woman left her seat of authority and walked down to the door and halted within a yard of him.

"His name *is* Gallop," she whispered.

"Sure, that's his name—but it was Green up to Crutchers'," he returned gently.

"Did you know? When did you know?"

"I didn't know, nor suspicion, till I heard his voice in this room, that night."

"How dared he! And what about that girl—that Prue?"

"She'll know better next time, I reckon."

"Now you can marry her."

"Have a heart, Mary! Didn't you rescue me from the blizzard—from bein' froze to death, like as not—fetch me right to this door with your bell? When you put your arms round me and cuddled up to me like you did, I said to myself, right then and there, 'Barney Green can marry all the other girls in the world, an' welcome!' That's what I said, Mary, honest to God! And I've bin sayin' it ever since."

"Are you crazy?"

"Crazy? I sure am. That's why I started in breedin' horses when I come home from the war, when everybody else quit breedin' them; an' I sell them in Montreal an' New York for saddle horses. Sure I'm crazy—about you, Mary. Who wouldn't be? What about it, Mary?"

"What about what?"

The man from Beaverdam laughed gently.

"Maybe I'm crazy, but not crazy enough to argue about what I'm thinkin' about. Leave it go at that till you know me better. All you know of me now's I'm that crazy about you I'd tear the sills out from under all this here Rollin' River country if anything was to come betwixt us. Leave it go at that till we're better acquainted, but if the weddin' was in June, I got to take a bunch of colts to Montreal about then, and that would be a good excuse for a reel humdinger of a weddin' tour, wouldn't it?"

"You are absolutely crazy! Why, you don't even know my name—except Mary—and I don't know yours."

"That's right, too—and all the more reason why you'd ought to change it to Ravenshaw at the earliest possible moment."

She lowered her gaze and saw blood trickling from the knuckles of his brown right hand. She gasped, paled, and raised the hand gently in both of hers.

"You are hurt! It must be washed with hot water."

"That's nothin'. But maybe washin' wouldn't do it any harm, considerin' whose teeth I cut it on."

She dismissed the children into a corner to eat their lunches, then heated water on the little stove and bathed and bandaged the man's hand.

"Did you love that Crutcher girl?" she whispered.

"If I didn't, it wasn't for want of tryin'," he replied. "She's a fine girl, Prue is—only too easy impressed by fancy pens an' neckties. No, I didn't love her, or I would've known what it felt like to love a girl, I reckon—which I never did before I come runnin' through the snowstorm to the ringin' of your bell, Mary."

"I am glad you heard it—but I'm sorry for Prue," she whispered, so faintly that he stooped lower and asked what she had said.

"Nothing," she told him.

The Squealing Hinge

By Frederic F. Van de Water

THE Hotel Lucerne, at Nassau, Bahama Islands, in the rowdy not so long ago, before the revenue fleet became an armada, before America learned to make domestic Scotch, was an uproarious snug harbor for schooner captains. These filled their craft with liquor, cleared for Halifax or Havana, and later found themselves, presumably by errors in seamanship, off the coast of Florida or anchored in Rum Row.

Returning, they held revelry in the dingy barroom of the Lucerne and there, one evening when the room swarmed with rum-filled rum runners and the gaudy, black policemen on Bay Street listened with justifiable apprehension to the swelling racket, I found a vacant seat in a far corner opposite a gaunt and unbelievable sallow stranger.

Tumult, centering about the bar, rolled through the smoky chamber—clash of voices, belching laughter, broken staves of song and, slashing through them as an inner door opened or closed, the screech of hinges.

My table mate flinched at the nerve-lacerating sound and drank with the unrelishful persistence of an invalid at a water cure. At length, on the heels of a long shriek from the door, he said suddenly and to no one:

"Damned chinks!"

His glass chattered momentarily against his teeth as he drained it.

"Squeal," he complained, "like rats an' pigs. That damned door. Like chinks, squealin' an' squealin'. Ain't human. Chinks ain't human."

He gulped loudly, seemed for the first time aware of my presence, rose, a gaunt, yellow scarecrow in soiled duck, and left the barroom with the cautiously balanced gait of the very drunk.

"I marked you lawst night, sir," Tommy, the bartender, said next afternoon, "settin' beside Cap'n Blank, you was."

"Queer duck," I hazarded.

"Queer is roight, sir. Some s'y one thing, some another. 'E 'ad 'is schooner in the rum tryde for a bit. Then, they s'y, 'e took to runnin' Chinamen—'Avana to Florida. They s'y 'e dumped seventeen of the blighters overboard once when a cutter was over'aulin' 'im. Knocked 'em on the 'ead, so they s'y, one by one as they come on deck, and pitched 'em over for an alibi, as you might say."

"Nonsense," I retorted.

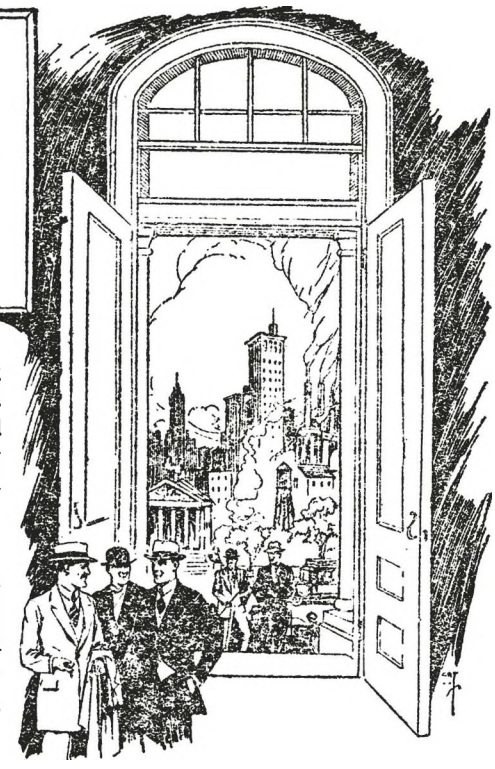
"Quite right, sir," Tommy acknowledged amiably. "You 'ear many a wild yarn in these islands, sir. What's yours?"

Some one entered the room to the wail of the creaky door.

"Sounds 'orrid, don't it?" Tommy commented at my wince. "I must ile the perishin' thing, so I must."

"I wish you would," I said fervently.

The POPULAR CLUB



Every reader of THE POPULAR MAGAZINE, man or woman, qualifies as a lover of good stories and as a good fellow, and is therefore automatically and entirely without obligation elected a member of THE POPULAR CLUB.

HERE, in the form of a nice letter from Mr. Bill Parker, of Cando, North Dakota, is a prompt reply to a recent plea we made to our readers for letters about THE POPULAR and themselves:

So you want letters from your readers? Well, here goes. I am a farmer, spend most of my leisure in reading, and can honestly say that I get more real satisfaction and enjoyment from THE POPULAR than any other magazine published. I do not have to ask that copies be saved for me, as I am a subscriber and think that is a sure way to get my copy.

THE POPULAR CLUB is a fine idea. I sure enjoy the writers' [illegible] of their lives and doings and hope that they will continue to do so. My favorite of all your writers was the late Ralph D. Paine, and "Four Bells" will, in my mind, hold the lead for a long time. However, "Red" was a fine story and your present serial, "Horse-Ketchum," is mighty good, too. I read everything—serials and all—and nothing suits me better than a rainy night and a brand-new POPULAR. Give us some detective stories for a change.

The Puritan hated bear-baiting, not because it gave pain to the bear, but because it gave pleasure to the spectators.

MACAULAY.

ROBERT CARSE.

The Author of "Roughneck," in This Issue, Tells Us a Few Things about Himself.

OLD enough to know better, but still the short side of thirty. Been in the writing business for four years, before that in the newspaper business, for three—two years on the New York *Times,* the other year split up between three other sheets, in Jersey, Florida, and somewhere else. Before that, my number of various and variant jobs—linesman with a surveyor's outfit; fifty-cents-an-hour man in an open-hearth foundry; pick-and-shovel guy; farm hand; clerk in an insurance office; pinch-hitting draftsman in a title and mortgage company; checker and rigger in a shipyard.

Additionally, three years on the sea and the Great Lakes. As a deck hand, then deck watchman, on the Lakes,

where service was put in on the big ore ships, and on a scrap ship carrying everything from safety pins to demoralized Fords and old building girders. As an ordinary seaman, then able-bodied, then quartermaster and master-at-arms, on a number of runs to a number of countries—the east and west coast of the United States, the west of England, north and south of France, and Spain, Italy, Portugal, Porto Rico, Cuba, Nicaragua, Hawaiian and Philippine Islands. And that's the life—or was.

Saw a number of typhoons, and could never get really frightened at them; saw a number of odd guys and fights, and got badly frightened there. Saw twelve ships sink in a night while hove-to ten miles off Corsica and Sardinia, and never will forget it.

Came ashore in '22, and went on the local staff of the *Times*. Spent first year as police district reporter. Stationed at Manhattan H. Q., Bronx H. Q.—even, for a bit, at Newark H. Q. Stationed at Bellevue Hospital for six months, covering all the gas-house territory, and tough onions they be, too. A few more months on the upper and lower West Sides, which took in the old Tenderloin, where the Gophers—Ownie Madden's mob—and Hudson Dusters still rally around to ventilate one another with hot lead.

Saw a number of good shootings, worked on a couple, learned to play pinochle—New York cop style, which is a style all its own—drink needle beer and still keep a good stomach. Got to know the cop on beat, the station-house bull, the taxi-hacker, the incipient and full-grown gunman. Who—the last-named—is, in most cases, a rather pathetic, dumb type of rat who hasn't the guts to get out of the corner-gang whirlpool before it becomes a racket, with dope, liquor, extortion and mayhem-from-behind mixed into it.

Knew "Little Augie" while he was little and mild, knew him later when he was getting fat, tough and "wise." Was out of town and on vacation when his "wiseness" ended and they buried him gladly and well.

In brief, it takes all kinds of guys to make up a town like New York, and it also takes all kinds of guys to make a fiction writer—be he bum, better or swell.

There is nothing so easy but that it becomes difficult when you do it with reluctance. TERENCE.

A Discontinued Subscription.

THE circulation department turned over to us the other day a letter from a reader who was discontinuing his subscription to THE POPULAR. Readers discontinue subscriptions to magazines for many reasons, and some of these reasons editors necessarily read of with many mixed emotions. But we read the letter which we print below, from the Reverend Harry W. Burton, D. D., of the National Soldiers' Home, at Johnson City, Tennessee, with just two emotions—sympathy for Doctor Burton in his trouble, and hope that he will soon again be able to enjoy THE POPULAR and everything else that helps to make life more pleasant for him. Doctor Burton's letter:

Under ordinary circumstances I should not deem an explanation necessary in discontinuing a subscription to a publication, but as I have been a reader of THE POPULAR almost from its beginning and have been so royally entertained by its clean, well-written stories, I feel an explanation due. Cataracts are developing so rapidly on my eyes that I can no longer read, and, as I have no one to read to me, I feel that I must drop the magazine, until, and if, an operation is possible that will make reading possible again. Wishing both the magazine and its contributors every success, I am——

A bad neighbor is as great a misfortune as a good one is a great blessing. HESIOD.

THE POPULAR in South America.

THE following interesting letter was mailed to us from Rio de Janeiro, by Mr. W. A. Phillips, of Rochester, New York:

I thought you might be interested in my POPULAR experience in South America, so I am supplementing my short note of early May mailed—I hope—from Cartagena, Columbia. As I mentioned then, it seemed a strange coincidence to start a story, "The Patio of Gonzalez," when I was en route to Colombia, and as I only had the first two parts of this very interesting story, I endeavored to secure the additional numbers of THE POPULAR to complete it. No success in Venezuela, Dutch West Indies, or Colombia, but in Panama I obtained the issue containing Part IV. of "The Patio."

Continuing down the west coast, I secured Part V., the last installment, at Valparaiso, Chile, and then, at Buenos Aires, I was able to complete the story by finding Part III. at a little English book store.

In the larger cities in South America one can get THE POPULAR if one makes it a point to be at the proper book and magazine store right after the mail ship comes in, because if one waits too long there just aren't any copies left. In other words, the demand seems to exceed the supply, showing that your magazine is appreciated by the English-reading people down here, too.

I was fortunate in getting all the installments of "Red," and that, to my mind, is one of the best, if not the best, story I have ever had the pleasure of reading. With a story like that, you want to get to the end to learn its outcome, and then when you have finished it you are sorry it's over—but the memory lingers on.

I am just about ready to "shove off," for New York and home now—probably on the same boat that will take this letter to you—and the thought of two weeks on the ocean is somewhat tempered by having four or five issues of THE POPULAR which I have been able to save up by denying myself the pleasure of reading them as purchased—with, of course, the exception of installments of "Red."

I left New York the middle of February this year, and so far I have been able to get every copy of THE POPULAR issued to date. Have just found issue of August 1st here at a street magazine stall—and that may indicate to you that your foreign field representative is on the job, if you have such a man in your organization.

More power to you and may THE POPULAR grow bigger and better, if it is possible to improve on "best."

Practice yourself, for Heaven's sake, in little things; and thence proceed to greater. EPICTETUS.

INTERESTED?!

IN praising a story by Will Beale, Mrs. Alfred H. Mills, of East Derby, New Hampshire, says that she doesn't know whether we, the editors, are interested in her preferences. You bet we are! And we are expecting to run another novel by Will Beale soon. Mrs. Mills' letter:

A purchaser of your periodical only since last April, I was made one of your regulars by a story in a March number which I picked up on the train and which contained what I thought an unusually good Western story by Will Beale, "The Unknown Trail." It seemed to me way out of the usual order of these stories, and I have been hoping since to find another of his.

You may not be particularly interested in my likes, but it seemed to me that you might like to know in what direction to place the credit for one new customer. I hope he writes other stories and that we may have another.

A Chat With You

LET'S have a little memory test. Can you identify some of these world-famous fiction characters? We'll just describe them in the act of doing something. Here goes:

A young, agile chap tosses aside his broad, flopping hat, shouts gayly and defiantly, leaps into a courtyard and attacks six expert swordsmen at once.

A tall, grave, angular, bewhiskered knight astride a bony nag rides doughtily against a villainous windmill.

A lanky boy in ragged clothes, smoking a corncob pipe, saunters down a country road, with a hickory fishing pole over one shoulder.

* * * *

DID you get them? Here are some more: A bearded, solitary man, clad in tattered goatskins and holding a makeshift umbrella against the sun, paces a tropical beach, staring at human footprints in the smooth, brown sand.

A tall, pompous, flashily dressed Englishman sits at an ornate Victorian table and writes an eloquently melancholy farewell note to a young writer named David, who has befriended him.

A haggard, bent old man, his white hair and beard all matted, stumbles down a mountainside, dragging a rusty gun, and enters a tiny village where children hoot at him and dogs yap at his heels.

* * * *

WE'LL give you their names a little later, in case you missed out on any of them. The main point of this, however, is not a memory test alone, but to show you how vividly these characters live in our minds—and hearts.

Books which contain people like these are the books that have always endured. They are the only books of fiction that will ever endure. After all the ponderous, impersonal novels presenting heavy psychological and sociological studies have grown green with mold and gray with dust, we'll all still be reading with delight the works of Dumas, Cervantes, Mark Twain, Defoe, Dickens, Washington Irving and others who had the same genius for creating eternally attractive or gripping human characters.

* * * *

WHEN we look into history, are we primarily interested in the wars and social systems and political tangles? No, we're not. We leave that for the historians and professors. For we are interested mostly in the people. History, for us, is a glittering pageant of personalities. Think of Rome. What comes into your mind instantly? Julius Cæsar. Think of Egypt—and Cleopatra's glowing barge drifts past in the light of a Nile moon. Think of France, and you have Napoleon; of America, and you have Washington and Lincoln.

* * * *

CHARACTERS—we are insatiably interested in characters, good or bad, comic or tragic, old or young, strong or weak, real or fictional—any kind, just so long as they be people who ensnare our imaginations.

If an author can draw out of that bright heaven of unwritten books some character like D'Artagnan, or Don Quixote, Huckleberry Finn, Robinson Crusoe, Mr. Micawber or Rip van Winkle, we welcome both the author and his creation with open arms. Incidentally, we've just given you the answers to the memory test.

UP in Canada there is an author who is as genial as the characters he writes about. You know him. You have known his work for years. Many of the people who have come from his brain, to walk and breathe in the pages of this magazine, have become bywords in your vocabulary.

Not long ago, with his pen poised and his eyes twinkling, he summoned a certain genial soul out of the mists of imagination. This amiable party has a habit of writing long, long narrative letters to the editor of an estimable periodical, the Potlatch *Pioneer*. Judging from your many communications, there are thousands of you whose sides still ache, as ours do, from reading the hilarious adventures of Mr. Jud Palmer.

The people who work in THE POPULAR office know whenever a manuscript by A. M. Chisholm is being read. There are gleeful chortlings and sudden guffaws—and for the time being all editorial dignity is suspended, as well as all other work.

In the next issue you will be vastly entertained once more by the loquacious Mr. Palmer, in a short but rollicking novel. It is called "Mr. Palmer Goes West," and in it he attends an Old Boys' Reunion in the East. If you miss this rare, absolutely rare, treat, don't ever forgive yourself!

THE POPULAR MAGAZINE

In the First November Number

A Minute With—— The Fun of the Fair	W. B. M. FERGUSON
Mr. Palmer Goes West A Short Novel	A. M. CHISHOLM
Signals Not Required	JAMES SAYRE PICKERING
Like Rushing Waters	ROBERT McBLAIR
Too Old To Fly	IVAN MARCH
The Cave Of Despair In Four Parts—Part II	FRED MacISAAC
The Throw-Down	JOHN RANDOLPH PHILLIPS
The Bad Man Of Black Brook	CLAY PERRY
Remarkably Courageous	WILL McMORROW
The Popular Club	
A Chat With You	THE EDITORS

And Other Interesting Features

If I Can't Give It to You....
I don't want your money

By Alois Merke

To Those Afflicted With Thinning Hair, Dandruff, Itchy Scalp

YOU want HAIR . . . plus quick relief from scalp troubles! And in seeking both these things you demand:

Reasonable assurance that you won't be fooled out of your money or take chances on injury to your scalp!

Oh, I know what you're up against. For years I've been in touch with thousands of scalp patients. They all said the same thing: "We don't want rosy promises; all we ask is reasonable assurance of scalp safety and new hair."

Now follow me closely! I give you *infinitely more* than reasonable assurance. I give you this iron-bound *guarantee*—

New Hair On Your Head in 30 Days . . . Or You Keep Your Money

And I give *you* this guarantee in writing! Besides, I positively assure safety to your scalp.

I leave it to your good judgment. **How could I make such a guarantee if I didn't have absolute confidence in my treatment? Why, I'd be out of business in a week! I'd lose my reputation. I'd ruin the professional standing of the Merke Institute, Fifth Avenue, New York, a scalp research bureau established 13 years ago, and known from Coast to Coast, but I can *safely* guarantee new hair . . . or no cost. For patient research showed me what others either purposely ignore or just *don't know.***

Falling Hair Cannot Be Stopped By Ordinary Surface Treatments!

Leading dermatologists agree with me on that. Years of investigation taught us all that scalp troubles originate *below the scalp!*

Simple as A . . B . . C

Modern habits rob the hair of normal nourishment. Dandruff appears, itching begins. Soon roots weaken and hair falls out. But in countless cases those roots, far from being dead, are only temporarily inactive. Ordinary surface treatments can't reach them.

But my scientific treatment wakes these sleeping roots to active life. I get down BELOW THE SCALP, stimulating little blood vessels, rushing nourishment to the roots themselves. That's why I can safely GUARANTEE NEW HAIR . . . OR NO COST!

Don't Buy a "Pig in a Bag!"

What a shame that so many dollars and hours are wasted on useless surface treatments. ***Not only that.*** Hair is actually removed and scalps injured by doubtful salves and tonics. If a man came up to you in the street and said, "Here's a tonic that'll grow hair!" . . . would you buy it? Of course not. You wouldn't know the maker, the ingredients, nor would you have any redress in case of injury.

In other words, when you buy ordinary "hair-growers," you buy "a pig in a bag." You GAMBLE! Not only with scalp health, but with *your* hard-earned money.

Thousands Know Me

My treatment is based on scientific facts . . . facts that you can check up with your family physician or medical reference books. My treatment is backed by years of research, and the gratitude of thousands who invested a mere few minutes a day in my effective treatment.

Very important, too, I have the Merke Institute behind me, an ethical institution known everywhere for its accomplishments in growing hair. And last of all, I say in the strongest way I can, I DON'T WANT A PENNY OF YOUR MONEY IF I FAIL TO GROW NEW HAIR. I assume the burden of proof, not you!

Before It's Too Late

Run your fingers through those thin spots on your head. Then reflect: What will happen if you let yourself become actually bald . . . changed appearance, lost prestige, years older looking. Is indifference worth it? No! Tear out the coupon and MAIL IT TODAY for my free booklet filled with complete details of my treatment, and scientific facts. Not theories—but convincing, guaranteed statements backed by leading dermatologists. Send for the booklet NOW! It's yours by return mail. Allied Merke Institutes, Inc., Dept. 424, 512 Fifth Avenue, New York City.

Allied Merke Institutes, Inc.,
Dept. 424, 512 Fifth Avenue, New York City

Please send me, without cost or obligation—in plain wrapper, copy of your book, "The New Way to Grow Hair," describing the Merke System

Name.....

Address.....

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

(My age is.....)

Good taste will always discover Camels