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THE ISLE OF MISSING MASTERS

BY

ROBERT H. ROHDE

AUGUST 7, 1925
VOL. LXXVII No. 2

THE POPULAR MAGAZINE

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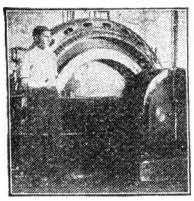

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Vol. LXXVII AUGUST 7, 1925 No. 2

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.
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From the door of our tent you look down over the dreaming blue of the little lake. Under the shade of the whispering poplars that march along the opposite shore, Larry lies back in his canoe reading aloud to Ruth, who lets one slim hand down into the clear, cool water. I watch them for a moment through the drifting haze of the smoke from my pipe and then turn again to the story that has held me from the first page. The blissful silence that is lord of this perfect afternoon is broken only by the far-off sound of Pete, the guide, chopping wood for the evening's fire.

When the supper things have been cleared away, we will get together round that fire and talk over the books we have been reading, will live again that colorful romantic life of the Great West that has been spread before us by the writers of fiction who have given us blessed release from the cares and worries of the everyday world.

It is when summer comes with its vacation time that we most appreciate fiction. The holidaying mind demands then recreation and entertainment. Larry and I have been camp mates under many moons and never do we start from the heat and noise of the great city without slipping into our bags four or five of the latest titles from the presses of Chelsea House. We know that the brand of Chelsea House on a book is our guarantee of the sort of reading we both delight in. And so we look through the Chelsea House list for the latest by A. M. Chisholm or David Manning or James Roberts or our other favorite authors, certain that in their books we can find new worlds to dream about, new adventures to thrill us.

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(Continued on 2nd page following.)

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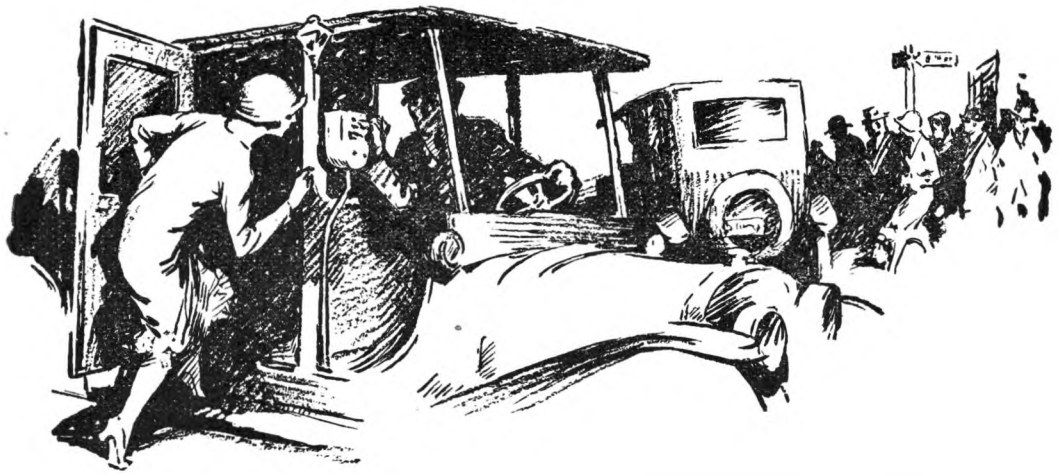

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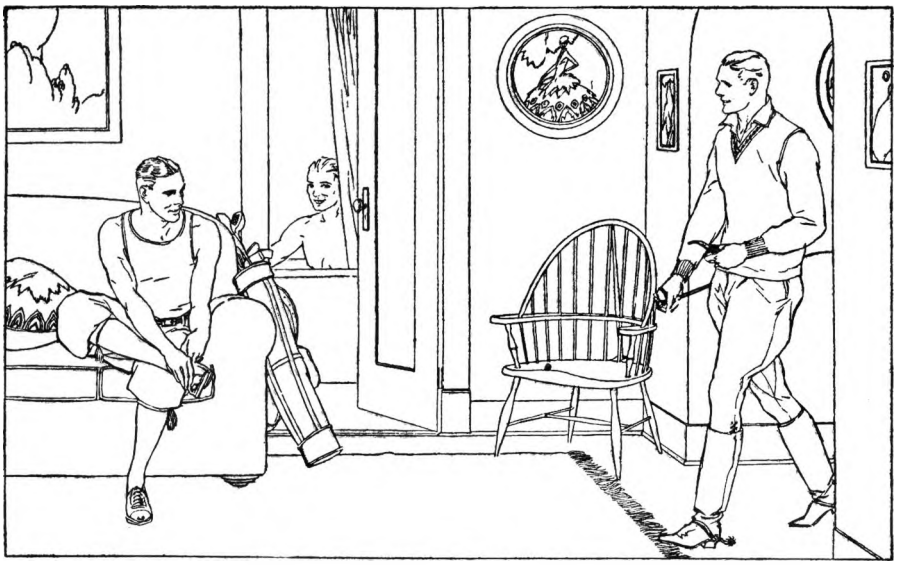

To week-ending males

THERE may be men who enjoy diving for soap in a tub like pickaninnies after an elusive penny; but the week-ending bather who desires to approach the office force on Monday morning with the clear and compelling glance of a Big Executive will prefer Ivory because it floats.

The matter of lather is also important. Unless derived from Ivory, lather may mean anything from thesquare-root of minus one bubble, to a collection of oleaginous material requiring a patent skin scraper for its removal.

If a week-end guest enters the breakfast room with a frown powerful enough to crack an empty coffee-cup at twenty paces, you may rightly suspect that he has found the wrong soap in his bathroom. An Ivory bath would have prevented the frown and protected the cup.

Indeed, it is coming to be acknowledged as a scientific fact that Ivory bathers are the most durable and pleasant-tempered week-enders in the world.

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TO week-end hostesses: Guest Ivory is not a guest cake merely, but when applied to guests, it is known to produce a gentle tolerance of ace-trumping.

THE POPULAR MAGAZINE

VOL. LXXVII. AUGUST 7, 1925. No. 2

The Isle of Missing Masters

By Robert H. Rohde

Author of "Providence Goes Wrong," "The Projection of Signor Penelli," Etc.

Probably every man who has ever been on a job with a group of associates who were more than mere coworkers—who were tried and trusted friends, in fact—has looked back and wished that he and they might have incorporated together in some independent enterprise and gone out to face the world and destiny shoulder to shoulder, all for one and one for all. Many a castle in Spain has been built around the conception of such a delightful association. But not many such daydreams have materialized. Still, the thing could be done. And it ought to work. In this story the thing is tried and it does work. The tale starts with a newspaper crew, a band of friends. Adversity smites them all with a single sweep of its bludgeon. And while they are still dizzy from the blow there comes one more friend upon whom Fortune has smiled and enlists them under the banner of enterprise and adventure. He is Bruce Vanteen. He has money, he has a yacht—and he has a problem. Together the friendly band set sail aboard the *Quest*, on a modern buccaneering cruise. And before they return they capture Romance and Success.

(A Complete Book-length Novel)

CHAPTER I.

THE "STAR" IS "INTERTWINED."

JAMES FRANCIS FOLEY, acting night editor of the *Morning Star*, rubbed the side of his majestic nose and pondered at length a late-rising question of policy.

He was a man with eyes calm as a tomcod's, even under stress; a man celebrated for the lucidity of his mental processes and for the soundness of his judgments. Habitually he was a man slow to speak. Emphatically he was not one to be rushed to a decision.

Eight stories below the curiously shaped desk at which Mr. Foley sat, with the "long-wait" crew hanging tense on his words, the final edition was being run off. The gaunt building that housed the *Star* shook to the rumble of great presses eagerly flinging out the news of another day gone glimmering to a public that, by all precedent, would rest very comfortably until breakfast time without it.

From the alley beyond the open windows the ardent August breeze brought in a pandemonium of distribution; blasphemous shouts of drivers demanding right of way, the flinty clatter of the hoofs of the light-delivery brigade, the grinding and the thunder of news-laden motor trucks skidding at the corner and straightening out for the long uptown race.

Directly abaft Mr. Foley's beam—which was by no means inconsiderable—an instrument which had in it a little of the typewriter, a little of the telegraph, and quite a great deal of the magpie chattered away with a nervous and vast irritability. A voice, evidently hurdling through the transom of a closed door to his right that showed a lighted square of panel, launched into a tirade opening: "Damned sick-looking sheet we've got this morning, Foley!"

From the rim of the big wooden horseshoe within which he slouched—this the copy desk, a shambles on which the brain children of countless young men of genius had been mutilated and massacred—the night editor might have felt himself the subject of inimical regard.

But James Francis Foley was not sensitive. With his problem before him, and all else cast out from consciousness, he sat tranquil in the seat of judgment. It was a personal problem, in truth; a problem hugged very close to the broad vest which he appeared to employ indifferently as a receptacle for lead pencils and a receiver for cigarette ashes. Over it he debated with a humming sound that echoed the strident song of the presses:

"A-moom-oom-m-m-m! A-moom-oom-m-m-m!"

It was Woody, the late-trick rewrite man, who, out of the three looking in upon Night Editor Foley, was moved to complaint. Woody was not directly the night editor's subordinate. Eddeson, copy reader of the dog watch, most certainly was; and young Barrett was so recently on from a cubhood in New Orleans that even Jimmy Irons, the *Star's* bald and classic copy boy, still was "sir" to him.

Yielding to impatience, Woody urged:

"Come on, Jim. It's after three. What's the word?"

The surface of Mr. Foley's highly polished spectacles showed a glint from the glacial blue behind them. Debate had passed; decision had come.

"I am of the opinion," said James Francis Foley, "absolutely and unalterably of the opinion that these cards which inscrutable Providence has favored me with make one more raise imperative!"

And then, dignity succumbing to jubilation:

"Blessings on your suspicious natures—and thanks much for your valuable patronage. Behold the Graces—Minnie, Maud, *and* Mabel! One caller for each bright queen makes the party even. Beat the women, buccaneers, and take the money!"

FOLEY turned the hand which contained three queens into the deck, and with it three other hands that had come to him face downward and ungently. The mound of red-and-white chips recently in dispute rattled into a drawer that held, besides numerous like disks, dozens of pencils, long and slender or short and stubby, for which James Francis had found no place in the ample waistcoat.

"I think," he mused, "it is the fourth time I have been honored and enriched by the ladies at the present sitting. Or is it the fifth, Woody?"

"By my own count," said the long-geared rewrite man, "it's the tenth." He spoke with a dry solemnity, as becomes the recognized craftsman in humor, and he fixed an ironic gaze on the night editor's scandalously naked scalp. *"You* and the ladies, Foley! Oh, you dizzy sheik!"

James Francis Foley, man of balance and discretion, stroked the gray-red stubble that flaunted his later misogyny. He set his torn eyeshade at a doggish angle and nodded toward a distant corner, inhabited by the only other visible occupant of the city room: this a woman of statuesque proportions and dowager mien, caparisoned as for the opera, who for hours past had been pecking away leisurely—altogether luxuriously—at a loose-jointed typewriter.

"What makes Helen Hubbard the greatest society editor of her time?" inquired Mr. Foley loftily. "Why is it she will not write by day, but must pass the long nights in the office? What inspiration does she find here, please tell me? Whom do her slavish eyes follow as he engages in the major operations of newspaper publishing—the skilled executive operations?"

Mr. Woody made reply in the privileged fashion of the elect, speaking, in the estimation of the outwardly impassive but secretly delighted Barrett, as god speaks to god.

"Slavish eyes?" he queried gently. "Do they look like that to you, astute employer? I've seen Helen looking at you a time or two—and 'venomous' would be my word. A fine figure of a man you may be, with your sweeping curves; but I don't think Miss Hubbard ever takes kindly to your comments on her overset.

"You mustn't forget, James, that she was grinding out upper-crust copy—and on that same old machine, I'll bet you!—when you were a gay lad covering the Battle of Shiloh."

Eddeson coughed apprehensively. To copy readers, until they have traveled far, the persons of night editors are sacred. After all, Tom Woody was just one gun of the rewrite battery, albeit a big one; and James Francis Foley, except for the owner of the complaining voice that continued to float sporadically over the transom, demanding no answer and expecting none, was ranking editor of the *Star*.

"My deal, I think," announced Eddeson, fondling his colorless mustache with one hand and with the other reaching for the cards. And then, directly and tactfully, he addressed himself to his assailed superior.

"You're sure having a phenomenal run of luck, boss. Not much good in two-bit limit—but maybe you couldn't have cleaned up with it in one of those Monte Carlo games we used to have when young Vanteen was on the staff!"

The night editor firmly withheld the deck. A reminiscent gleam suddenly had lighted his lenses.

"Oh, for Vanteen!" he chuckled. "Just wouldn't I like to have him sitting in among you profitless dried herring. He'd be an inspiration to bring out the best in me.

"You birds cramp my style of play, and that's a fact. What use the bold and dashing when I know that if I take you for more than three and a quarter apiece I'll have to lend the money back? Graceless improvidents, ye are, with your terrapin appetites and tripe pocketbooks. There's no zest or nourishment in holding hands against you.

"But Vanteen! M-m-m-m-m! You fire my imagination, Eddie. What more could the sporting heart desire than good cards—and Vanteen?"

Woody had been abstractedly counting over and rearranging his dwindled stack of chips. He paused in this melancholy operation to remark:

"It comes to mind, James, that for one so young in the business Vanteen had developed a fine sense for the appraisal of human nature. The present remorseless look in your eyes and the greed that trembles in your voice recalls what I've always felt to have been one of his ablest characterizations. He said, I believe, that you had much of the pirate in you, and that if you'd lived a couple of hundred years earlier——"

"As I remember," corrected Mr. James Francis Foley blandly, "Vanteen once said that we of the *Morning Star's* long wait were all pirates. He singled out no particular person, and he made not an exception. Neither did he qualify the term.

Of course, he was laboring at the moment under a misconception of journalistic ethics and ideals. Need I point out he outgrew that?"

"You're right, boss," corroborated the loyal Eddeson. "I was on that night. Vanteen couldn't understand that we had any business lifting news we'd missed out of the first editions of the other papers—didn't know the same thing goes on in every office in town."

Woody smiled and surrendered.

"If that's piracy," he conceded, "I'd have to swing from a thousand yardarms to pay up for my guilty past. Vanteen *was* funny. Looked as if he'd suddenly found himself in the den of the Forty Thieves when we began to cover up the fumbles of the day side."

"He never did get over the feeling that no news should go into a paper that hadn't been brought in by its own men or its own wires," recalled Eddeson. "Don't you remember what he said a week or so before he left the *Star?* 'If I ever go into the buccaneering business'—that was the way he put it—'I wouldn't look far for a crew. I'd just come back to the old shop and hire the long wait in a body!'"

"If he follows in his father's footsteps he won't need a ship to be a buccaneer," said Foley. "Old John B. Vanteen built a fine record for piracy, now did he not, without ever getting closer to the sea than Wall Street?"

"Nevertheless," objected the rewrite man, "no one could say that John B. went after the widow-and-orphan money. He got his from the other highbinders. I did a magazine interview with him years ago. He was *real*, I want to tell you."

MR. JAMES FRANCIS FOLEY lighted a fresh cigarette from the stub end of another.

"I don't think it's likely that Bruce Vanteen will ever hit Wall Street hard," he commented. "He hasn't the taste for that sort of thing. The instinct of the trader isn't in him. You all know that.

"What pickings he'd have made for one Foley this merry morning with the cards running as they've been! Think of this meek contest gone amuck, with the limit lifted up six miles over city-hall clock and the International Gas Pump Corporation supplying groceries and tobacco for James Francis forever and ever, amen! Now what'd I do with the booty, what'd I do with it?"

Eddeson interpolated a practical and wistful suggestion.

"If *I* had the luck and Vanteen was in the game, holding good hands against me, you'd see me out of here at the end of the week, and next week, or maybe next month, sitting pretty with a paper of my own. Out in the country, somewhere, near a good stream that hadn't been whipped to death by you once-a-year city fellers. Publish every Tuesday—and Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, God help the trout! Oh, boss, can't *you* see it?"

To judge from the brighter iridescence of his spectacles, Mr. Foley could. But he shook his head.

"I don't think I'd have the heart to do it, Eddie," he said. "Your picture has charms; I'm going to walk square into the middle of one just like it some day, and stay there. But I'd rather get the money out of the business office, and get it slow, than take Vanteen.

"He could afford it—sure. But damned if I'd bleed him. No one who knew him could. By Joseph, there was one young gentleman who came pretty close to winning me from the principle of the confiscatory inheritance tax!"

"A good egg," said Woody judicially. "No frills. One of the gang all the time. And couldn't he order a dinner? Remember those blow-outs he gave the staff at Reisenheim's, Jim? Must have set him back at least a thousand apiece. I tried to figure it out one night."

The night editor emitted a grumble from the lowest of his nether necks.

"Yes, I remember," he said. "And I remember things you don't know about. How do you s'pose Ernest Chatfield got hold of that farm up-State he retired to after his eyes went back on him? Think the *Star* bought that? Think the pension

fund fixed it up? Think Ernie was able to save for it on fifty a week with five kids kicking out shoes?

"A good boy Vanteen was; you said it, Woody. No, luck in or luck out, I—don't—think—I'd——"

"Nor any of us," put in the rewrite man quickly, and for the first time since the city room had been left to the custody of the long wait his voice was without the property dryness of the practicing cynic. "So that's how poor Chatfield came to land right side up, eh? I might have suspected. But Vanteen never dropped a hint.

"I like him better than ever now, Jim—and I liked him a lot from the first night he came over and borrowed the makin's. Wonder what's happened to him?"

James Francis Foley had been absently shuffling and reshuffling the cards, his mind drifting far afield from queens and profits and the potentialities of the draw.

"I wonder, too," he grunted. "Easy enough to find out." He raised his voice startlingly and bellowed across the room. "Miss Hubbard! Oh, Miss Hubbard! Can you stop that 'Outline of History' long enough to tell us what Bruce Vanteen is doing these days?"

A reply came immediately in a cool—almost too cool—contralto.

"Bruce Vanteen is somewhere on his yacht, *Mister* Foley. If you want to reach him, I'd advise the radio. And I'm not writing any 'Outline of History.' It's a skeleton of society I'm doing for the Sunday. Three columns when I ought to have six!"

"Take that, Skilled-Executive-Engaged-in-Major-Operations-of-Newspaper-Publishing!" murmured Woody. "For mine, I'll hang on to the old banjo and be Uncle Tom to the end of my days. Everybody likes me!"

YOUNG Barrett, of New Orleans, had been manifesting a rising interest in the conversation of the *Star's* older hands. It boiled over as Eddeson reached again for the idle deck.

"*Bruce* Vanteen!" he burst out. "The chap that got the croix de guerre for the work he did on the iron crosses. The sho-'nough eat-'em-alive kid millionaire! He worked on the *Star,* did he?"

"He did," said Woody sharply. "And did us a lot more good than some later acquisitions we've had. He could get news—and he could write it, young man. It was damn seldom at the last that the rewrite desk had to backstop him."

"Right," nodded Eddeson; "he got so I hardly had to put a pencil to his copy. I've never seen a new man make such progress in a year."

"He'd have developed into a topnotcher if he'd stuck," opined Foley. "I guess he wanted to, all right. But the family——"

He shrugged a round and beefy shoulder and broke off, reapplying himself to his endless and needless shuffling.

The Southern youth, blissful and beaming, intruded himself again upon the attention of his elders.

"So *that's* how come!" he cried.

"What's how come what?" demanded Woody. Raised himself in the sterner journalistic school of two decades gone by, he held by ethics which demanded that youngsters tend their knitting when journeymen talked shop.

A little taken aback by the crisp rebuke in the gilded one's voice, Barrett pressed on:

"Didn't mean to butt in, Mr. Woody. I was going to say I'd heard the name. Knew it was a rich Vanteen—but not that one. Anyhow, I heard that *some* Vanteen with all kinds of money was a great friend of Miss Durant's, and that she——"

"Oh, *can* it!" commanded the long artilleryman, so savagely that a flush arose in the cheeks of the boy from New Orleans, and a spark handed down by a fire-eating colonel of the Confederacy flared in his dark eyes. "That's rank gossip—cub gossip!"

THE fat night editor, who had a faculty for seeing many things in a single glance, slid with surprising grace into the breach.

"Nothing to it, Barrett," he said. "Absolutely nothing to it. I've heard stories

myself—and I can tell you they're all ridiculously wrong. Be obliged if you'd spread the word before things come to a point where the decentest and best little newspaper woman in town is going to be embarrassed.

"Bruce Vanteen quit the *Star* because of outside pressure from his people, and that's the truth of it. He was friendly with Anne Durant while he was here. Who isn't friendly with her? Bruce himself was a fine sort. Anne liked him. Naturally. They were about quite a lot together.

"But so far as Miss Durant is concerned, romance is something for the paper. And as for Vanteen——"

James Francis Foley was betraying a modicum of excitement in his exposition. His voice had lifted, carried, and his words occasioned now a contralto comment. The elegant Miss Hubbard had been listening, her pink and polished nails at rest against the keys they had belabored.

"Mr. Vanteen," she said, "is the latest prize of Lana Marshall's first season 'out.' I'm saving a hole in the Sunday layout for the hussy's picture. Engagement ought to be announced any minute."

"Uh-huh!" acknowledged Mr. Foley. "Thanks—Helen!" He became suddenly aware of the cessation of contest. "Come on, Eddeson! You're dealing!" he said testily, and shoved over the deck to his left.

Minutes passed. James Francis Foley lost two pots and won two. His expression showed him content with the average. The banging of a desk top and the subsequent quick blackening of the door panel through which light had shone stirred him to a show of professional activity. At intervals measured by the recurrent chirpings of the mechanical chatterbox at his elbow he had been glancing negligently over the typewritten lines issuing therefrom in endless screed. Now he gathered a couple of yards of "bureau copy" to him, detached it from the machine with a practiced yank, crumpled it, and consigned it to the littered floor.

AT the conclusion of this bit of journalistic endeavor the darkened door opened. A man who was gray from boot tops up—a man in a gray suit and a gray hat, with a gray mustache and gray, introspective eyes—came forth. He turned a key in the door of the private office, and, like one in the grip of habit, he shook the knob to make certain the lock was on duty.

For a moment the gray apparition stood at one of the ends of the giant horseshoe, peering over Foley's shoulder.

"What's doing?" he asked presently in a flat and disenchanted voice.

"Nothing," returned the night editor briefly, pausing in his deal. "Third-class suicide in a fourth-class suburb, and a two-alarm property-loss fire downtown without a living feature to redeem it. I spiked 'em both. Otherwise the town's a millpond, Mr. Caffrey."

The gray man nodded.

"All right. I'll be going. Guess there's nothing to keep me. Let things ride easy the rest of the way, Foley. I mean, don't replate for anything short of another World War. Play as late as you care to —of course."

"Of course!" echoed the night editor under his breath as the wraith called Caffrey glided away; and then, raising his tone a little on each word, he said meditatively, "I—don't—like—that!"

Woody's shaggy eyebrows were puckered.

"Notice that the M. E. smiled, James?" he asked. "Never saw him do that before."

With a painful effort that temporarily cost him one of his subnecks, Mr. Foley was endeavoring to follow his managing editor's retreat around the corner of an intervening pillar.

"He's up to something," he hazarded. "What's he doing now? Anybody see?"

"At the bulletin board," supplied Eddeson. "He's posting some sort of notice."

Woody grinned.

"That was a pretty good yarn I did last night on the Greaves murder," he said.

"Too bad the old man couldn't have spoken right out in meeting and said so. But, oh, well—a bonus is a bonus. I'd rather have the money than kind words!"

The gray voice of Caffrey came back to them:

"Good-by—and good luck!"

MR. FOLEY looked more extremely thoughtful.

"I'll promise you," he remarked darkly, "that's the first time 'Silent Smith' Caffrey ever wished anybody good luck. I don't like *that*, either."

"I thought the formula for his early-morning flood of conversation was 'Good night,' Jim," said Woody. "This time it was 'Good-by.' Get that? Do you suppose he's quitting—retired or something?"

"It'd be like him to walk out without a word to anybody," speculated Eddeson. "I've worked here fourteen blessed years, and the only time he ever spoke to me except on business was when he called me off to tell me that raises were made in heaven, and that the newspaper business was hell. Even that was nearly three months after I'd put in my bid for a boost."

Foley looked toward the door through which the departing managing editor had passed. He was silent until the elevator gate had clanged.

"Mr. Caffrey hasn't exactly had the life of Reilly, Eddie," he said then, slowly. "There's lots to being an M. E. that isn't as pleasant as the opening of the pay envelope and the wearing of the epaulets.

"I happen to know that the business office has been bearing down hard on the old man this last year. That's why my title remains *acting* night editor at the end of it. They're paying me only a small advance over the old head-of-the-copy-desk salary—and that's that, if it interests you. Money's tight. Tight! Whose deal? Hi, there, Barrett! Where away?"

The rising alumnus of the venerable *Picayune* was already halfway across the city room.

"Deal me out a couple of hands," he flung back. "Goin' to see what all's stirrin'."

In front of the bulletin board Barrett stood with his hands deep in his pockets. They came slowly out, at about that same absurdly languid rate at which the slow-motion camera delivers action on the screen—or at which the hair of the horrified rises.

"Gawd in heaven!" gasped the reader of office tidings. "Bring me air!"

Woody smiled at his obese vis-à-vis.

"Hope I guessed right. If any bonus award has done that to Barrett, it's a whopper."

"Didn't like it. Not any of it," reiterated Mr. James Francis Foley portentously, and lifted himself out of his chair.

Shoulder to shoulder, the three veterans of the *Star's* long wait crossed to the sufferer who called for oxygen. They found the notice left by the silent, gray Caffrey still wet with the paste that affixed it to the board:

TO THE STAFF

The *Morning Star* has been acquired by Mr. Hurley K. Mosher, and with the final editions of current date ceases independent publication. It is Mr. Mosher's intention to merge the *Star* with his *Daily Banner*. Personally, I thank the gentlemen of the *Star* for the loyal support they have given to me and extend to them best wishes for success in whatever fields the future may find them.

C. B. CAFFREY,
Managing Editor (*ex-officio*).

MR. JAMES FOLEY, having digested the typewriting on the wall with accustomed celerity, produced a deep and mournful whistle that might have come from one of the bass pipes of a cathedral organ.

"What does it mean?" gasped Eddeson.

"Taking a cue from the fateful sound of the last sentence," said Woody, "it means we're dished. At one swell foop we've been recruited into the army of the unemployed. The paper ceases to function—and so do we. Never again do we bid a bright 'Good morning' to the old cashier. How are your shoes, men?"

"We're out?" repeated Barrett incredulously. "First I spend seven blessed weeks

deviling city editors to get me a job in New York—and then I get *this?"*

The night editor was reading his superior's notice again. He'd made no mistake. The words were surely there, frosty and final. They chronicled one more tragedy of Newspaper Row. Another once-great daily had gone by the board, and those who had served it were jobless —men and women proverbially unthrifty, professionally unregardful of the morrow, thin days loomed for them.

James Francis Foley realized that the others awaited a word from him. There was sympathy in their eyes; hit hard themselves, they still could be sorry for a man whose loss was the greater by the further distance of his fall. But when Mr. Foley spoke it was from a cool and lofty height. He spoke in the voice of his vastest imperturbability, as if the notice which meant his swift descent to the ranks had concerned no larger matter than some one's lost fountain pen.

"Gentlemen," he said crisply, "permit me as editor in charge to remind you that the setting *Star* claims your services until four thirty a. m. And—ah—reverting, reverting—Woody, I trust you don't think I'm going to let you save another ante. I haven't forgotten that the next deal is yours!"

CHAPTER II.

ONE LAST SCOOP.

ALONG Newspaper Row Mr. James Francis Foley had enjoyed for years —had greatly enjoyed, had in cold truth, actually reveled in—a reputation as the most ruthless of poker players.

In the reputation Mr. Foley found profit. It engendered a sentiment of respect in opponents. Only the boldest souls—and the measure of these James Francis had taken well—would be found contesting pots in which he was pleased to display more than a passing interest. The timid shrank away lest, by obtruding themselves unpleasantly on the redoubtable Foley, they draw his attack to themselves.

This state of mind Mr. Foley recognized, appreciated, and encouraged. Finding luck between his knees, and himself in a wrangler's saddle, it was his habit to ride hard. And hard enough, during the earlier part of the last of the *Morning Star's* traditional pay-night diversions he had ridden. Politically and impersonally, scientifically and artfully, he had wrung the ultimate white chip from each who disputed him on the cloth of chance.

But as the contest continued, the insouciance of the players rendered only more elaborate and their repartee more scintillant by the blast from the bulletin board, fortune's mighty favorite underwent a change either of facility or of form or of heart.

The tide of white chips and red and blue that had flowed so steadily into the drawer of many pencils turned back toward the sea. And James Francis Foley placidly saw his winnings go.

At five minutes past four, which was precisely a quarter hour after the resumption of Armageddon, Mr. Foley lifted a large and commanding hand.

"Please don't raise me again, Eddeson," he said.

The dogwatch copy reader plucked nervously at his dispirited mustache and contemplated the sizable pile of chips between him and the man who in less than half an hour would cease to dominate him.

"I don't know, boss," he demurred. "It's a good pot—and you drew three cards."

"That I did," said Foley. "You drew one. It filled a hand for you. Your eyes told me that, Eddie, ye poor pollywog. Maybe you've got a straight; maybe a flush."

"Maybe," suggested Eddeson, with a dismal attempt at the Woody style, "maybe I drew to two pair. Want me to tell you what I did? That what you're fishing for, boss?"

"I'll tell you what I drew to—and consider the last bet called," scowled Mr. Foley. "I drew to a pair of aces, Eddeson. And I'll show you my catch: two nines and another ace! D'ye see? Can you top an ace full, Eddie? Of course not!"

James Francis Foley drew the chips to him, and then the cards. The latter he shuffled once; following which, with a quick wrench of his massive paws, he ripped the deck through its middle.

"Finis!" he cried. "The last card has been turned in the old shop, men. The pot I've taken puts me where I started in the morning. The rest of you are about even, which is well. We'll be needing—the whole lot of us—every dollar we can put our hands on. Money to gamble with is money a man can afford to lose."

WOODY yawned.

"Ah, well," he said philosophically, "to-morrow will take care of itself. Personally, I wouldn't object to dropping my stack and a couple more like it, regardless of the interesting little item of news tossed off by Grandfather Caffrey. But I do agree that the game's better over, James. Doesn't seem decent to be playing our tiddledywinks in the presence of so fresh a corpse as the *Morning Star.*"

Eddeson had been drawing broad-lined parallelograms on the top sheet of a block of copy paper. He regarded the comic of the rewrite desk with quick disfavor and turned his eyes to Foley.

"We'll be taken care of, surely," he said; but his voice was weak and his pronouncement at the very end took alarm and resolved itself into a question.

"Yes, we will!" said James Francis Foley promptly, but not at all reassuringly.

Woody, the irrepressible, chuckled.

"A change—even a little hardship—might do wonders for your figure, James," said he. "Won't hurt any of us to get out and about. The question before the house, I should say, is: Where do we go from here?"

Eddeson looked up again from his enterprise of cubic art.

"Hurley Mosher is bound to do something for us," he insisted hopefully. "He realizes there are a crowd of us who belong to the *Star* and who've got to go with it. He owes a duty to us."

"Duty, hell!" scoffed Mr. James Francis Foley. "Mr. Mosher isn't a slave dealer. He's a good, straightforward, hundred-per-cent business man. The *Star* had something he wanted, and that something is what he bought. That was an item of circulation and an item of advertising contracts and an item of news-service franchises.

"He doesn't give a damn about the plant and he doesn't give a damn about us. So far as he'll bother his head, we're scrapped along with the composing-room equipment and the steam tables and the presses."

"How about the horses and the trucks?" queried Woody. "Think Mosher'll feed 'em and keep the axles greased, James? That will be a problem for the frugal gentleman to lie awake with, eh?"

The artistic copy reader sniffed.

"Be serious for once, Woody," he entreated. "Can't you see the hole we're in if Mosher doesn't do the right thing? What's happened in these last three or four years? I mean about consolidations."

"To the best of my recollection," replied the rewrite man, "three morning newspapers have walked the plank, and a couple of evenings after 'em. All swallowed up by Mr. Mosher's *Morning* and *Evening Banners*—long may they wave!"

"Exactly," said Eddeson gloomily. "And every time a paper dropped out, a few good jobs and a lot of jobs that meant a living for somebody dropped out with it. I ran into Frank Findlay the other day. He was one of the gang that got caught when Mosher gobbled the *Sentinel.* More than a year ago, that was, and Findlay hasn't landed another newspaper berth yet. There's a damn good copy reader trying to get by as an insurance salesman. And fifty other able men are out and on their uppers. By Godfrey, the situation ought to be put up to Mosher, and put up hard!"

"Oh, come, Eddie," objected the tolerant Foley, "Hurley Mosher isn't to blame. I agree it's too bad that the newspaper business has got to be what it is—but Mosher didn't invite any of us into the game, re-

member. We walked in with our eyes wide open, knowing it for a pastime of snap the whip and devil take the hindmost."

"THERE'S one thing, James, we can all be thankful for," interjected Woody. "None of us has anybody to worry about but himself. I've got a few hundred dollars banked, and it ought to hold me until I've dashed off the great American novel. While the money lasts I'm not going to bother about hunting a new job. Me for the free-lance work."

Young Mr. Barrett spoke up.

"You can do fiction and get away with it, Woody," he said. "I've always figured you were wasting your time hammering out rewrite on a salary. I'll bet that inside a year you'll be looking back on this day of disaster as the luckiest day of your life. But it sure looks like the end of the metropolitan career for me. Guess I'll shoot off an S O S to the *Pic* and see if I can't get my old job back."

"Don't do it, my boy," counseled Foley. "You should take a solemn warning from this experience. Get out of the game, and stay out. You're young. There's plenty of time for you to get in some other business and work up from the bottom. Then you'll be safe. You'll be able to lead a normal life, knowing exactly where you stand. You can marry, raise kids—*live!*

"Maybe you'll miss something. Maybe it'll take a while to get used to having each day patterned like every other one; maybe you'll find yourself longing for the tang of the news hunt and the spur of the deadline. But you'll never find yourself in a boat like poor old Boss Caffrey's.

"The old man's through. His pedestal has been shot from under him, and he won't live to climb another. Managing editors of sixty aren't in brisk demand. It's the copy desk that yawns for Caffrey—the graveyard of lost hopes. He's had his day, and fifty a week will be his finish."

"You don't think he's going over to the *Banner?*" asked Eddeson.

Foley shook his head.

"Not he. I've been about as close to the old man as any one in the shop, and I know him. He doesn't have a lot to say, but there never was an M. E. who stood solider behind his men.

"If Mr. Caffrey wasn't out himself that notice wouldn't read the way it does. He'd put up a fight for us; at least, he'd see that the old hands of the *Star* were looked out for, and you can bet there'd have been a couple of weeks' salary for the people the *Banner* couldn't absorb."

Woody's eyes sought the corner where the dowager, vastly at peace, continued her deft and steady tapping of typewriter keys.

"Shame to let all that energy go to waste," he murmured, and then he sang out: "Better write 'thirty' and knock off, Miss Hubbard!"

The society editor looked up from her labors.

"What's the hurry?" she demanded. "Don't tell me they've moved the Sunday deadline ahead to Friday morning!"

"Isn't any hurry," replied Woody. "That's just it. The *Star* won't be publishing Sunday. Go take a look at the bulletin board!"

"And prepare yourself for a shock, Helen," supplemented Mr. Foley cheerfully.

The telephone at his side jingled, and he glanced quickly up at the clock as he lifted the receiver from the hook.

"*Star* night desk," he announced briskly. "Yes, Anne, I got your sweet voice. What the devil you doing out at four twenty P X? Oh, I see. Yes, yes! Regular riot, was it? Good girl, Anne! You bet we'll replate for *that!* Just a second, now. I'll let you talk to Woody."

MR. JAMES FRANCIS FOLEY covered the transmitter with his hand and tersely addressed himself to the rewrite man.

"It's Miss Durant. She's at the cover artists' *bal masque*. Couple of our leading illustrators tangled over a lady not the wife of either and nearly wrecked the Hotel Sidenham's blue room.

"Get the yarn quick as you can and let me have a lively half column in single-paragraph takes. Snap it up please, Woody. The old ship's sinking, but we'll founder with one last beat nailed to the mast."

The night editor picked up another telephone and called the pressroom.

"Hullo, Ferguson. Hold the run. Replate coming on page one!"

With an all-but-incredible agility Mr. Foley swung himself out of his chair in the "slot" and fled up the iron stairs spiraling to the composing room.

"Let her come up take by take, Eddeson," he called down over his shoulder. "Give me a ninety-six-point line with fireworks in it, and a number-one drop. It's the last bump we'll ever give the *Banner*—and, man, she's a wow! Barrett, you get the names of the principals from Woody and see if we've got cuts of 'em in the morgue."

Foley vanished through the composing-room hatch. When he reappeared on the stairs exactly twelve minutes had elapsed —and the *Morning Star's* last scoop was in type. Down below, the briefly silenced presses had resumed their rumbling.

"Good yarn, Woody," said Foley. "And a peach of a head, Eddeson. Good catch on pictures, too, Barrett. That story's bound to make 'em sit up and take notice. Ought to add twenty thousand to stand sales—for all the benefit the poor old *Star* will get out of it!"

Helen Hubbard, having perused the notice of sale and suspension, had walked over from the bulletin board to the copy desk. She eyed Mr. Foley blankly.

"Is it a joke?" she asked.

"Of course it is," replied the night editor. "A fine little joke on us. Mr. Hurley Mosher must have his fun every so often."

"Sold down the river," lamented Woody. "No more toil with the shovel and the hoe. Our happy family's busted up."

Miss Hubbard summed up her reactions in the classic observation of her sex.

"It's so—so *sudden!*" said she. "I never heard of such a thing. I can't believe it."

"The truth will gradually grow on you," predicted Mr. Foley sagely. He lifted his head suddenly. "Hullo! Fine hour for visitors."

Out in the corridor leading to the *Star's* city room the elevator gate had clanged once more.

"Maybe," suggested Woody, "it's the undertaker."

And then his voice broke into a glad shout.

"Look who's here, James!"

Mr. Foley bounced from his chair and emitted a welcoming bellow.

"Ho, there, somebody!" he cried. "Kill a calf! The prodigal returns!"

Eddeson seized up the long shears which were the chief tools of his trade.

"Lead the sanctified animal to me and I'll prepare the feast," he invited.

Young Barrett stood staring at his suddenly lunatic confrères. Even Miss Hubbard had succumbed to the pervading excitement. She was frankly aflutter.

"What's it all about?" demanded the Orleanean, giving another glance to the newcomer. "Who is he?"

"Our gold-plated Prince Charming himself," said Woody.

Mr. Foley, escaped from the grip of the encircling horseshoe, dug two fat sets of knuckles into his eyes.

"Bruce Vanteen!" he roared. "Speak of the devil——"

"Speak of angels, rather," amended the rewrite man softly. "Wait till he hears what's happened, James. Maybe he'll see a way to snatch the poor old *Star* from the talons of Hurley Mosher!"

CHAPTER III.

A PIRATE PICNIC.

THERE was, indeed, a warm glow surrounding the person of the "gold-plated" Vanteen. A cord of gold decorated the front of his jauntily tilted yachting cap; double rows of buttons facing his square-cut coat of sea-cloth blue threw back yellow gleams toward the

lights above the horseshoe desk, and a golden tone captured from the sun itself lay on his healthily fat tanned cheeks.

Woody, joyously surveying this resplendent visitor to the quarter-deck of the foundering *Star,* became increasingly aware that he had chosen once more the happy adjective.

"Aren't you the lad to break a geisha's heart!" he cried. "It's *Pinkerton,* James —*Pinkerton,* playing hookey from an early-morning rehearsal of 'Madame Butterfly!'"

Mr. James Francis Foley undulated his necks in a slow and solemn negation.

"No," said he, "the build isn't right. Operatic tenors don't come in six-foot lengths. Their center of balance is always dead amidships—they don't wear their chests so high up on the frame. If this bird says he's *Pinkerton* I can tell you right now he's an impostor."

Vanteen's duck-clad legs and canvas-shod feet had carried him well into the circle of light surrounding the copy desk. Perceiving the society editor, he bowed low over the gold-trimmed cap, displaying a head of close-cropped light hair which the sun also had touched here and there with a golden glint.

"The 'Duchess!'" he ejaculated. "Who'd have thought to find *you* here at such an hour?"

"It's the jazz age," explained Woody. "The society editor stands watch now from midnight until noon."

"Thanks," murmured the yachtsman. "You're always helpful, Tom. This looks like a gathering of the clan. I really was afraid I'd not find anybody around the old sweatshop."

"And you almost didn't find anybody," said Woody. "It would have been tragic. This was absolutely your last chance."

Mr. James Francis Foley cleared his magnificently upholstered throat in such a manner as to divert the rewrite man's attention to himself. He caused an eyelid to flutter covertly.

"Come in looking for your old job back, did you, Bruce?" he wanted to know.

"Do I look like an applicant for long-shore employment?" countered Vanteen cheerfully.

"Seen 'em come in wearing weirder make-ups. I thought ye might have got tired of playing the gentleman of leisure —begun to thirst for a little excitement after a few months with the idle rich."

Vanteen's smile displayed teeth that were strong and even and as white as his pipe-clayed Oxfords.

"There's always work for idle hands—if a man isn't particular about who gives him his assignments," he said. "Just now, thank you, I'm lining up all the excitement I can handle on my own. Journalism's really too respectable for me—too quiet. There's not enough hazard in it."

"No-o-o?" queried Mr. Foley in a voice both measured and grim. "No-o-o? Hazard is missing in newspaper work, is it? Come with me, my boy. I want you to read something."

He grasped Vanteen's blue arm, wheeled him around, and marched him off across the disordered big room. The others, exchanging glances amused and expectant, followed at a little distance.

In front of the bulletin board Foley halted his captive.

"If you have tears, prepare to shed them now," he directed, and tapped the newest of the notices with an imperative fat forefinger.

The eyes of the quondam millionaire reporter—in their blueness was again an implication of the sea—went wide as they took in the significance of Ex-Officio Managing Editor Caffrey's final bulletin.

"Sufferin' snakes!" gasped Vanteen. "What a way for the old *Star* to finish!"

"It's getting to be the usual way, isn't it?" asked Woody. "No, he hasn't exactly put his finger on the real element of surprise."

Vanteen looked with quick concern from one to another of his one-time comrades in harness.

"Of course, you've all hooked onto other jobs as good as those you've had with the *Star?* That ought to go without saying. Why, there isn't a sheet in

town that wouldn't be tickled to death to grab the lot of you!"

James Francis Foley grinned cynically.

"You're rating the average of editorial intelligence a little high, me boy. Maybe you're right—but we haven't looked around. Haven't had a chance to."

"You mean this came——"

"Out of the blue. It hit us just as it's hit you, only perhaps a little closer to the solar plexus. I just wanted to demonstrate that there's still an element of excitement—and was it 'hazard' you said?—left in the life of Newspaper Row. That bulletin was posted within the last hour, it happens; and it happens also that until it appeared in its present place of honor there wasn't one of us who knew how close he stood to the bread line."

VANTEEN'S lean face became notably less pleasant. A sudden, resentful flare lighted the dazed blue blankness of his eyes.

"They can't turn you fellows out like that!" he protested. "Aside from the fact that you've been the backbone of the *Star*—aside from any question of your value as newspaper men, it's shameful!"

"It *is* shameful, Vanteen," echoed dolorous Eddeson.

"But, oh! can't they do it?" said the saturnine rewrite man. "Just can't they turn us out? And *they'll* never miss a wink of sleep—or a meal!"

Vanteen's gaze, warm with solicitude, swept again the circle of familiar and friendly faces. His eyes came to rest on the one face he hadn't seen before. He put out a hand and spoke his name.

"Considering that the distinguished Helen Hubbard is the author of a standard work on etiquette," he grinned, "the long wait of the *Star* is frightfully short of manners. They'd never think of introducing anybody under the grade of telegraph editor, old man."

The youth from the *Picayune* took the proffered hand in a quick, hard grip.

"My name's Lee Barrett," he said. "I've heard about you, Vanteen—in a lot of ways."

Something in his tone brought a small frown to Woody's brow, but Vanteen was again reading the terse and chilly notice of the *Star's* demise. A new sort of trouble came into his eyes.

He began a speech, stammered over the very first word of it, and paused to marshal his phrases. A tinge of red became apparent under the tan of his cheeks. He seemed suddenly ill at ease.

"Got the makin's, Woody?" he demanded; and when he had constructed an inexpert but practical homemade cigarette, operating rather after the fashion of the mariner than the vaquero, his inexplicable embarrassment had visibly increased.

"Now, I say, you fellows," he began awkwardly. "And you, Miss Hubbard. I—well, you all know that I've never tried to——"

Vanteen broke off, took a deep draw at his plebeian cigarette, and, flushing yet more vividly, pressed on:

"This is damn hard to say, and it's going to sound rotten. But, look here, Jim Foley, I want you to tell me right now whether I'm still one of the gang or not—whether I belong."

"You bet you belong, Bruce!" cried Foley. "You always did. But——"

"Never mind adding anything," Vanteen interrupted. "You've said enough to make me feel I have the privilege of speaking out. I guess you all know that I'm not the kind to go pushing into anybody's private affairs, but I want to say I'd feel a lot better about the *Star* blinking out if I knew none of the old crowd was going to be up against it.

"Now, I don't need to tell you I've got more money than any decent citizen has a right to have—lots more than a man with a natural leaning toward the newspaper business ought to be bothered with. I don't want any of you to jump at the first connection that turns up. I want you to take your time, to wait until a job comes along that's the right size for you. Understand? I mean, you've simply got to let me——"

Woody jingled a handful of silver in

his trousers pocket, and under cover of the diversion thus fittingly created got in a word.

"Oh, shut up, Bruce!" he pleaded. "We know the old heart's wide open to us, and the pocketbook, too. But we're all set, honestly. We're all bachelors, anyhow, and none of us has any lease on a Park Avenue duplex apartment to worry about. The little we've got'll go a long way."

"It will that," agreed Foley. "As for myself, I'll welcome a vacation. For a couple of weeks or three I'll do nothing but consider my luck in having no job. I'll loaf and invite me soul."

"That," said Eddeson, "is the way I'm beginning to feel about it, now that the first shock is wearing off."

BRUCE VANTEEN had seated himself on the copy desk, his long legs dangling. All that hinted consternation and regret vanished from his eyes. A slow grin widened his firm mouth, and through the grin came a chuckle.

"The situation's built to order, isn't it?" he murmured. "Oh, for a platoon of husky crimps!"

"Crimps?" questioned Woody. "They're something you put in your hair, aren't they, Helen?"

"Bad things to have in your hair—or on your neck—if you're in love with life ashore," said Vanteen. "By Christopher, I wonder if I couldn't arrange to shanghai the complete crew of you!"

The dowager of the society department found the gorgeous visitor with her lorgnon.

"That might be an informal invitation to a yachting party," she remarked.

"Maybe it is," smiled Vanteen. "See here, folks, can any of you guess what brought me up to the *Star* office this morning?"

"The smell of tragedy," hazarded Woody. "Although I wouldn't say you recognized it."

"Nothing of the sort," denied Vanteen. "I was looking for company—for company aboard the *Quest*. And I had a sudden hunch that I'd find what I wanted here. It came after I'd turned in; came so strongly that it woke me up. I couldn't get back to sleep. Finally I dressed and came ashore. And, lo!—*company!* A goodly ship's company, forsooth!"

"It has the sound of the thing," sighed Woody, "that the sea dog tells the marine. Did you anticipate, Bruce, that faithful slaves of the lamp such as you see assembled here could calmly walk out without giving due and adequate notice to their——"

"Not at all," said Vanteen. "But it did occur to me that this was the middle of the vacation season on the Row and the end of a week. I saw a chance that I might catch one of you on the threshold of a holiday, and persuade him to spend it afloat. I had adventure to offer—a sea trip thrown in for good measure."

"Adventure?" queried Foley, brightening. "Something in the nature of rum running? Oh, I've heard how you wealthy lawbreakers keep your cellars filled!"

"The *Quest*," replied her owner primly, "isn't that kind of vessel. The project afoot is no mere minor infraction of a sumptuary law, but genuine old-line piracy. Didn't I say I'd laid out a little excitement for myself? Well, that's the truth, hands. What I came here after, this morning, was some one to buck me up if things looked hopeless—and to back me up if they got too thick.

"One man was really all I hoped to get. But, Lord bless you, didn't I once remark that a modern pirate could find a crew ready-made for him in the long wait of the *Morning Star?* And I'm Kid Kidd the second.

"Why can't the whole crowd come, things being as they are? They have guest stars in the theater and the opera; why not guest pirates on a yacht? It may be a week, it maybe a month——"

"And it may be for-eh-eh-ver," chimed in Mr. Foley melodiously. "But who cares? Are you on, castaways?"

Barrett hesitated. "Am I invited?" he drawled.

"You're as welcome as any of us," said

Moody. "Where's the *Quest,* Bruce—and when do we start?"

The copy ready of the dogwatch was dubious.

"What's this pirate idea, Vanteen?" he wanted to know. "After buried treasure?"

The beaming yachtsman lifted a finger to his lips.

"Sh-h-h! Once aboard the lugger, I'll tell you what the game is. Not before." He turned to Woody. "Our good ship lies snugly in the Hudson, Tom. We'll start the minute I've got a working crew aboard—plain hired hands, you know."

"What's that about a working crew?" demanded Mr. Foley, bristling.

"Got to get a new one," replied Vanteen. "The old one wore out at New London night before last—began drinking some rare old Connecticut varnish, and on the skipper's advice I marooned 'em. Cowley and I brought the *Quest* on here by ourselves, with Mr. Bruce Vanteen obliging at the engines in person."

"And a fine mess you probably left 'em in!" snorted Foley. "What style of engines are they, Bruce?"

"Gas."

"Sure they are. You haven't the look of a man who's stoked his way from New London. But what make, what power?"

"They're Burkhalters. A pair of 'em—the *Quest* is twin screw. Two hundred horse each. Why? What do you know about engines, Jim?"

Mr. James Francis Foley rubbed his hands ecstatically and lifted his eyes.

"Burkhalters!" he whispered reverently. "Boy, do ye realize what prizes you have? What don't I know about them! Marine engines were my first love, and they'll be my last. Burkhalters! Bring a swab of a know-nothing flivver-driving yacht mechanic aboard, and I quit the ship! Your engineer shall be named James Foley!"

WOODY caught Vanteen's eye and nodded vigorously.

"Why not, Bruce? I give you my word that Jim's a demon around a power plant. I've been out with him in his own boat often enough to subscribe to that proposition of his. You ought to hear the way the party fishermen at Sheepshead refer to him when he talks engines—and to see some of the contraptions he's got to run after the experts gave up."

Mr. Foley, glowing with appreciation, offered a return of compliment.

"And if you were figuring on needing a hired wireless operator, Bruce," said he, "there's another to cross off the list. Woody's a pest with his eternal talk of radio and audio frequency, but he's the boy to make the ether sit up and splutter." He turned to the Southerner. "What can you do, Barrett, to make yourself useful on the bounding main?"

"*Ensign* Barrett, if you please!" came the prompt and cool correction. "I'm supposed to be a navigator, but I sure had to take the full course in deck-handing before I got that way. Reckon I never thought to mention what I did in the Great War, gentlemen. Sat it out, I did, with the shaker salts at Lake Bluff—the Great Lakes Naval Training School, you know."

Vanteen's eyes were dancing as he transferred them from the diffident ensign to the society editor.

"You'll certainly be a valuable man, Mr. Barrett," he said. "Never's a bad thing to have two navigators along on a deep-sea cruise—and I don't know how reliable Cowley is, anyhow, on mathematics beyond long division. About all we've got to worry about now is a cook. Come on, Miss Hubbard, speak up! No obligation to work your passage, of course, but if you——"

The dowager shook her head.

"I'll stay home," she said. "I don't like the water. Frankly, Mr. Vanteen, I wouldn't go sailing on a yacht if anybody'd make me a present of the thing. And with such a crew! Even if you are all in fun, it makes me shudder to think what a sight that boat would be!"

Eddeson had started to speak. He checked himself to inquire:

"*Is* it a josh, Vanteen?"

"Not a bit of it," the owner of the

Quest assured him. "Never more serious in my life."

"Well, then," said the copy reader, "I'll disclose the great secret of *my* life. I can cook. Yes, sir; I can cook in every modern language, including the Scandinavian. Cooking's my passion and my pride.

"For years I've been rifling the best restaurants of their finest recipes and trying 'em over on my kitchenette. Just supply somebody with good sea legs to hold me steady to my duty, Vanteen, and you'll want me for your galley slave for life!"

Bruce Vanteen leaped from the copy desk and threw himself upon the noble façade of Mr. James Francis Foley.

"My hero!" he jubilated. "And heroes all! You mean it? You're game?"

An expression of great determination sat upon Mr. Foley's face; a rising purple tone coming into it suggested he might have found himself bereft of breath wherewith to reply.

"We're with you, Bruce," cried Woody, "to a man!"

"Then," said Vanteen, deftly disentangling himself from the toils of Mr. Foley's mighty watch chain, "then the crew is shipped and the books are closed. Under command of the gallant Cowley, we five take the *Quest* away on the high seas of romance. No others need apply!"

FROM no farther away than around the big pillar which flanked the copy desk of the *Morning Star* a new voice made itself heard.

"I like *that!*"

It was a haughty and a dissenting voice, and conspicuously there was hauteur in the posture of the speaker as she swept from behind the pillar and drew herself up so utterly before the astonished master of the *Quest* as to bring the top of her snug-fitting little hat to a level with his shoulder.

"Anne!" cried Vanteen joyfully, and reached for her hand. But the girl had turned to Foley, and the hand which the transmuted reporter sought was extended toward the night editor. It held in gloved embrace what seemed to be a curled sheet of crinkly paper.

"What brought you downtown, Miss Durant?" demanded Mr. Foley severely. "Haven't you a home? What's this?"

"Photo of the fair casus belli at the covert artists' ball," replied the girl. "I hunted up the camera man who'd been getting pictures of the striking costumes. But I suppose you won't bother to use this—now?"

"It's late," said Foley. "Too late in the morning, at any rate—and too late in the life of the *Star,* to boot. Have you heard the news, Anne?"

The contributor of the *Morning Star's* last beat nodded.

"I stopped by the bulletin board to get my breath after the walk upstairs."

"Poor girl," commiserated the night editor. "Of course, you wouldn't know the elevator runs after four—if you can find the business-office porter. And you read the documentary evidence of our desuetude?"

"Five minutes ago. I could have walked out with a typewriter under each arm if I'd had the strength—and if there hadn't been such interesting talk to listen to.

"What about this yachting trip, Bruce Why need no others apply? Isn't a poor working girl without any work entitled to just a tiny bit of consideration?"

Vanteen hesitated.

"I'll tell you, Anne," he said after a little, "it isn't to be exactly a pleasure trip. I'd love to have you along—we'd all love to. But you wouldn't be comfortable. I know you wouldn't. As soon as I'm back from this cruise there's nothing I'd rather do than fix up a party aboard the *Quest* with yourself as guest of honor."

"No," objected the girl, "that wouldn't be the same. I prefer to make my voyages on the spur of the minute. The unexpected invitation and immediate acceptance, you know. I like to be swept from my feet. Besides, I heard you speak of romance—and I'm incorrigibly romantic."

Something of mockery, something of challenge, and something of downright

flagrant coquetry were in the brown eyes that Miss Anne Durant lifted to Vanteen's. James Francis Foley caught their expression and grinned.

"Careful, Bruce!" he warned. "That's the please-do-help-me look that Miss Durant's built her success on."

"Please, Anne," begged Vanteen. "It wouldn't be—quite right."

"Why not? Why can't I go?"

"There'll be only men aboard the *Quest*. You wouldn't feel——"

"How do you know how I'd feel?" demanded Miss Durant, with just the faintest trace of asperity. "What difference does it make if I'm the only woman? How many dozens of out-of-town assignments have I been on with no one but men? Haven't I always been reckoned a man among them? Haven't I made it a rule to get my own news and buy my own lunches—and mind my own business? You're acting like a—like a horrid old *thing,* Bruce Vanteen."

MISS HUBBARD had started for her distant desk and paused midway to the opus that was to die in manuscript. Now she returned.

"Do have a little sense, Anne," she urged. "Mr. Vanteen has absolutely the proper point of view. How would it look for you to be off alone on the ocean with a yachtful of men? What harum-scarum scheme they're up to I don't know, but I do know——"

Mr. James Francis Foley looked hard at the dowager, cleared his throat portentously, and stepped boldly upon the scales beside the outweighed Anne Durant.

"I am of the opinion," said he, "absolutely and unalterably of the opinion that this quibbling is a disgrace to the ghost of the *Star*. Miss Durant has a right not only to be considered by us a sister, but, if it is her preference, a *brother*. Am I right in assuming that any vessel which requires a pair of two-hundred-horse Burkhalters to propel her has a private stateroom or two among her accommodations, Bruce?"

Vanteen had been unable to wrest his eyes from the girl's.

"The *Quest* has four staterooms," he admitted with the air of one who casts discretion to the winds. "A private bath is connected with my own room—and Miss Durant, of course, could have that if she's insane enough to-morrow to wish to——"

The strangely forward young woman to whom James Francis Foley had extended privileges as a brother of men smiled up into the crimsoning face of the yachtsman.

"If you could realize how funny that sounds!" said she. "It might have been an invitation to sleep in the bathtub, Bruce. Are you sure it won't make you too awfully miserable to be turned out of your quarters?"

Another sort of warmth than they had showed before came into the blue eyes of the immaculate Mr. Vanteen.

"Anne," he burst out, "it'll be *bully* to have you along. I'd be happy to retire to the fo'c's'le to make it possible."

"So'd all of us, I suspect," grunted Mr. Foley. "Where are you figuring on picking up your new crew, Bruce, and when?"

Vanteen considered briefly.

"Do you people think you can sleep and pack and turn up at two this afternoon? Then suppose we all meet at the Halifax Line pier? I'll be on hand to ferry you out to the *Quest.*"

Vanteen felt himself scrutinized by the genius of the *Morning Star's* crumbled society column, and he shuddered before her regard. She appeared about to speak; she did speak—coldly:

"Where, if you please, Mr. Vanteen, is the Halifax Line pier?"

The smile which the yachtsman host turned upon her was forced and feeble.

"Shall we look for a bon-voyage basket?" he queried.

"No," said the dowager masterfully. "Being a brother to nobody in this wicked wide world, I claim a woman's right to reconsider. You can look for Helen Hubbard!"

CHAPTER IV.

DON O' DOUBLOONS.

OFF the port beam of the seagoing power yacht of Mr. Bruce Vanteen, the *Quest,* rose the spires and minarets of a magic city. The sun played dazzlingly on walls of many colors, at whose very feet a sea of a blue to shame them all tatted a fragile and ever-changing line of whitest lace.

From the enchanted shore, lying on the velvet of the languorous land breeze, floated gemlike strains of music from the throats of a thousand organs; came, too, the Lorelei call of venders in the bazaars and the happy hubbub of what even at distance revealed itself as a singularly carefree populace.

Here, surely, one might have thought, must have been a port of call on any voyage avowedly romantic. And yet the *Quest* continued placidly to breast the azure swells, varying out of her direct coastwise course by not so much as the breadth of a compass needle; and Mr. Thomas Woody, writing person unattached, looked shoreward with no discernible amazement or regret as the elfin metropolis slipped astern.

Mr. Woody occupied a broad wicker chair aft and wore a costume purchased on the day of his election to an only moderately exclusive golf club, near in, and alleged by the well-informed salesman to be vogue for all outdoor sports. Of which latter the flaunter of plus fours had confidently reasoned, yachting was certainly one. Over Mr. Woody's head was a gently swaying awning, at his side a safe-moored table bearing items of glass and ice, beyond the table the owner of the *Quest.*

From a door far along the port deck a round, red face protruded—a face in which lines scored by the chisels of responsibility and authority were just now melting under the glow of a simple yet prodigious smile.

The backs of the after-deck loungers were toward him, but for the two the *Quest's* new chief engineer had no eyes. His gaze remained unwinkingly on the wide figure of the yacht's sailing master, who stood with an arm wrapped around a near-by stanchion while young Barrett demonstrated his maritime mettle at the helm.

Few would have found beauty in Cowley's blue-jowled countenance; many might have called it forbidding. Yet the man appeared to have an uncanny fascination for Mr. James Francis Foley. On coming aboard the yacht he had stared at the skipper long and embarrassingly. Since then, whenever opportunity presented, he had been subjecting Cowley to scrutiny quite as intensive, if a bit more circumspect.

And Cowley, for his part, had kept as wary and speculative an eye on Mr. Foley at moments when it was possible to study the "chief" unobserved. It seemed as if that strife which is as old as steam—the eternal, inescapable clash of bridge and engine room—had rekindled automatically at the meeting of these two men.

Distrustfully, overtly, each in his turn appraised the other. About them hung an atmosphere of armed and unsubstantial truce that promised imminent and unexpected complications in Vanteen's pirate voyage.

The sailing master, turning swiftly, discovered James Francis Foley engrossed in innocent contemplation of the sea. He frowned, and when Mr. Foley toiled down his ladder a moment later eyes as thoughtful as his own had been following him into the heat shimmer below.

Aft, in the shade of the awning, the golfer guest sipped long at a tall glass. As he replaced it on the table he nodded back at the fantastic sky line of the dream city by the sea.

"I breathe again, Bruce," he said, "now that we're safely past the Iron Steamboat pier. That's been the end of all my ocean trips—Coney Island!"

Vanteen smiled.

"We're heading for an island, right enough," said he, "but it's one a long way from Coney Island."

Woody, still with his gaze on the spires,

and a prodigious distaste in it, sniffed thrice.

"Thank God!" he said devoutly. "Even off here, I swear I can smell the popcorn —and the crowds. They used to have a habit of sending me to Coney on broiling Sundays to write two and a half columns about the sweating city flying to the sea. It was tough enough the first time. After that—horrible!"

Woody rose, faced his chair around, and sat again.

"The sight of the place brings back unhappy memories," he said. "If it's the same to you, I'll look out toward the innocent horizon." And then he complained: "Those damn women have been below an hour, seems to me. Didn't they promise they wouldn't be more than five minutes?"

"Oh," returned Vanteen handsomely, "give 'em time. They're getting settled in their new diggings—and Mother Hubbard has a whole trunkload of stuff to strew around, you know."

Another gentleman who had been of the *Morning Star* in his day and its, a person now so thoroughly transformed by flannels and a canvas cap as scarcely to be recognizable as the long-waiting, copy-reading Eddeson, came gingerly along the sloping after deck.

"How about those sealed orders, Vanteen?" he demanded.

"We're waiting for the ladies," said the harborer of mystery.

"And they," added Woody, "are down below with their heads together. Bruce says they're sprucing up their stateroom. *I* say they're devoting themselves to the pastime of chin-chin."

Wherein, truth to tell, the cynic of a rewrite desk no longer functioning was closer to fact than most rewrite men customarily are. In the snug little mahogany-walled room into which such diversified exigencies as chance and willfulness and a flair for conventions had cast them as companions, two ladies late of the *Star* were holding earnest consultation—had, in fact, been holding consultation for a half hour past.

THE elder of the two had initiated the conversation, and she had been directing it along an artfully mapped-out course with all the skill which one might expect of the author of a highly praised handbook on common communion.

During the half hour there had been talk of shop, of days when the *Star* burned steadily to light the way of each, of professional achievements past, of plans and hopes for the future. It had been impersonal talk—and on one side at least noncommittal. Miss Anne Durant, so far as her vis-à-vis had been able to elicit, had no aim but to live in the moment while aboard the *Quest* and to seek employment similar to that perforce relinquished when the yacht should come again to harbor. She seemed to have no regard for the circumstance that she must change with the years; that, though she might continue long to be a reporter, those called girl reporters are creatures who succeed one another in swift generations.

"I," said Miss Helen Hubbard, "was a girl reporter once upon a time." She drew a deep breath that was a sigh and another that was a preparation, and flew bravely at her hurdle. "It was good of Mr. Vanteen to invite us."

"Perfectly charming, I'm sure," murmured Miss Durant, with a queer, tight little drawing down of the corners of her small mouth.

"I grew *so* fond of him while he was with the *Star*," continued the dulcet dowager.

"So did I," said Miss Durant instantly. "Terribly fond of him. He's a dear!"

Miss Hubbard seemed startled. Enthusiasm in the circumstances might have been not quite the proper thing.

"I see so much in Bruce of his positively fascinating uncle—Forrest Vanteen, you know. He was the great cotillion leader of the day when I came to the *Star*. There was just a breath of scandal —nothing serious, but nevertheless unpleasant. Women, of course. Poor Forrest simply couldn't seem to side-step affairs. But I suppose you don't remember, child?"

"I do not," replied Miss Anne Durant coolly. "Nor do I trace any resemblance between Bruce Vanteen and his dear Uncle Juan. I've seen a picture of Forrest Vanteen somewhere. He's an ugly old thing, with puffy eyes and a goatee. Needs his face lifted."

Miss Hubbard sighed once more.

"Ah, well, let us hope that our own Vanteen profits by an experience that has left its little pile of rags and bones in a corner of the family closet." And then quite irrelevantly she asked: "Have you met Lana Marshall, by the way?"

"I haven't—but I'm sure I wouldn't find her interesting if I did meet her." Miss Durant was positive; so positive, indeed, that she seemed to feel a necessity to explain. "It was only for the good of the service that I cut my own hair, Helen. Never could get to the office on time before.

"Flappers as such bore me to extinction—and flappers who keep flapping themselves into the papers so persistently are positively unendurable. I dare say that, tomboy and cut-up though she is, the girl basically is decent; perhaps she even has points that are fine, but——"

For a third time the ample bosom of the commentator and mentor of the social swirl rose on the impulse of a sigh.

"My dear," she said, "I, too, share your feelings in regard to the modern type. Yet I am quite sure that the one trouble with Lana Marshall is that she has too much money and has been permitted too often to have her own way. Marriage should steady her."

Anne Durant looked up with a quick interest.

"What a peach of a story for a Sunday magazine section that idea suggests, Helen! A can-the-leopard-change-his-spots thing, bringing in the only-girl-polo-player business and the Marathon-dance escapade and all the rest. I wouldn't mind writing it a bit—at twelve dollars a column, with full space for pictures. Is it a dream of yours, or is the Marshall person actually engaged?"

"Not precisely engaged," said Miss Hubbard softly. "That is, there hasn't been an announcement. But I have it definitely that an understanding exists between Miss Marshall and Bruce Vanteen. Why!"—by their position the fingers that had charted manners for the masses expressed a sudden yet well-bred astonishment—"why, Anne, do you mean he hasn't hinted as much to you? Hasn't *told* you?"

MISS DURANT had ceased to be casual. She drew in so much of her lower lip as, perhaps, one small tooth might pin and regarded her friend and sister with a singular, even a sinister, fixity.

"I suppose, Helen," she said, when the tiny watch at her wrist had filled what was otherwise a silence with a score of resounding ticks, "I suppose I should thank you. But, dearest woman, there isn't a reason in the world why Bruce should suspect me of an interest in his heart affairs. Of course he hasn't told me—and he isn't the hinting sort!"

Miss Helen Hubbard strove at once to analyze her smile and to preserve the exact demeanor—something, she evidently thought, compounded of credulity and relief—which the moment demanded. Anne Durant rescued her from the problem of the right word.

"Helen mine," she entreated, "don't try to tell me! I know how things must have looked—to you. But you forget how different a newspaper woman is from—from other women.

"Bruce and I chased around just as if we'd been a couple of boys on the same staff. I found him heaps of fun to be about with, and he didn't have to bother to say he enjoyed being about with me. There are a million things we think about in just the same way. Our loves and hates run along hand in hand. If I were truly a man, forty years from now would probably see us sitting in the same club window, with the same papers on our knees and the same toddy at our elbows—loving and hating the old world all over again!"

Miss Durant—indubitably she was that Miss Durant whom Newspaper Row had been extolling for several summers past as the apotheosis of composure—was a little breathless at the finish of her peroration. And yet, before there could be an interruption, she spoke again.

"So far as *that's* concerned, you see, Helen, Bruce may tell me and again he may not." To which she added, sedately and wholly illogically: *"But I'm not going to believe it until he does!"*

MISS DURANT, having had her say, seemed to consider the subject closed. She rose from the springy berth on whose edge she had been sitting, drew aside the curtain at the brass-bound porthole, and stood staring silently out over the sleek and empty sea. So she remained until urgent knuckles thumped the stateroom door.

"Oh, come on, people!" called Woody's voice from the corridor. "You're holding up the show. Vanteen's going to unfold the old cap'n's chart and tell about the buried pieces of eight. Better hustle while he's in the mood!"

In the after cabin of the *Quest,* the nephew of the philandering Forrest Vanteen awaited the assembling of his volunteer crew; and if his eyes lingered on Anne Durant's as she came in from the deck with an arm linked through Woody's it was not by reason, most assuredly, of any perceptible change in the brother-girl's expression. As well might the confidance of the closed stateroom not have been made. Miss Durant's was the selfsame, steady, friendly gaze that all the *Star* staff knew of old—and one that held no question.

At Vanteen's side stood a slim young fellow in the uniform of a naval officer, and upon him Miss Hubbard leveled her inseparable lorgnon as upon a stranger.

"Gracious!" she exclaimed. "It's Mr. Barrett!"

"At your service," smiled the Orleanean. "I couldn't help toggin' up for the occasion—having the ol' uniform at the hotel and nothing else fit for salt-water wear. Been swellin' on the bridge ever since we got out of sight of the harbor police."

Vanteen glanced toward Eddeson, who had slid into one of the swivel chairs flanking the long table.

"How about the black gang, Eddie?" he asked. "Does the infatuated chief think the engines won't run without him?"

"Devil a bit he does!" came a voice from the deck. "They'll turn with no eye on them at all, those babies!"

Mr. James Francis Foley was in overalls, yet he clung to his eyeshade and his vest. The pencils had gone; but on the waistcoat's illimitable front, despite the denim apron that protected it in part, still were evidences in plenty that the wearer was a user of the cigarette.

Vanteen waved the prideful attendant of two Burkhalters to the chair beside Miss Durant's, and stood at the head of the table rapping with bronzed knuckles for an attention already wholly his.

"Ladies and gentlemen—not to say my hearties!" he declaimed. "For two long, weary hours we've been roving the ocean blue, and now at last the time has come to tell you whither we go and why.

"In the office of the revered and lamented *Star* some one suggested this morning that I might be off for treasure. I am—and for stolen treasure!"

"Pipe up 'Long John' for a pannikin of rum all round!" boomed Mr. Foley, and Woody spoke up disputatiously: "Can't be done, Bruce, unless we put about and buy a parrot!"

The practical Eddeson glared at the interrupters.

"If I were Vanteen," he said, "I'd have you two in irons. Can't you see when a man's serious?"

And indeed Vanteen's smile had narrowed away to nothing.

"Like all proper treasures," he continued, ignoring alike the persiflage and the stern recommendation it had prompted, "this one I am after is to be found on an island. Or so, at any rate, I believe.

"For that island we are heading now. As you will have observed from our

course, it is no island of the Spanish Main. It lies off our own New England coast. Geographically it is a speck, politically it is a part of the United States, practically it lies outside all law.

"The owner of the island is an American. He is a man with whom I've had certain dealings in the past. These, at your pleasure, I'll keep to myself. I am no prouder of them than I am of the island's lord as a fellow citizen. Presently I'll mention the man's name; I promise you'll all recognize it. But first I shall let you know the nature of the treasure that I seek."

VANTEEN opened a drawer of the desk built into the paneled wall behind him, and tossed a folded paper before Foley.

"It's no ancient document, as you can see," he said, "but something I knocked out on my typewriter this noon. I sort of thought we ought to have something in the nature of 'papers' to make the adventure official. You've got a good clear voice, Jim. Read it, please."

Mr. James Francis Foley removed his glasses, erased a smudge of oil with a handkerchief that obviously had been somewhere in the neighborhood of active machinery, and cleared a throat or two. Impressively he read:

"DON O' DOUBLOONS

"This famous canvas, known until a century ago as 'Portrait of a Miser,' and acknowledged the peer of two other examples of the same brush and period now hanging in the Louvre, was painted by Hans Holbein—called Holbein the Younger—while the guest of ill-starred Sir Thomas More in England, probably in the year 1527.

"For nearly three centuries, during which the canvas passed through the possession of as many noble English families, little was known of it save what was apparent—that it was a genuine and most brilliant example of Holbein. In 1829 heirs of the Earl of Lumford came upon a document revealing the sitter for the portrait to have been one Don Sebastiano Cosano, a great Spanish merchant of the sixteenth century and famous for his philanthropies. The pieces of gold which Holbein showed the good don counting over were thus not a miser's gold, but a tithe for benefactions.

"The painting was acquired in 1909 from the present Earl of Lumford by John B. Vanteen of New York City, and by him was bequeathed to his son, Bruce Vanteen.

"Three months ago it was stolen from the town house of Bruce Vanteen in East Sixty-seventh Street, New York——

"And Bruce Vanteen, having something more than a sneaking suspicion where it is, is—

"CERTAINLY GOING AFTER IT!"

To the lines which had been given to him to read Mr. James Francis Foley supplied an explosive tag of his own.

"Well—I'll—be—damned!"

"Don o' Doubloons!" gasped Eddeson. "I'm familiar enough with old masters, Vanteen, to know about the Don. The picture's worth a fortune—but I don't remember any story of the theft."

"There wasn't any printed. Nor did I make any report to the police. Seemed the wiser course to set a private detective agency to work. So that's what I did."

"What about the theft itself?" asked Barrett, with the young reporter's native quick curiosity. "Inside job, I suppose—one of the servants?"

"No," said Vanteen, "plain burglary. A man who knew his business and the layout of the house paid us a visit one night. He jimmied a window, picked the lock on the door of the room that was dad's study and cut the Don out of his frame. Not another thing was disturbed."

"Can't understand that, Vanteen," mused Eddeson. "A canvas so well known couldn't very well have been sold or—hypothecated. Every person who'd possibly be interested in it would certainly be aware of its history and its ownership."

"Of course," nodded the owner of the *Quest*. "That's why I thought it useless to bother with the police. Their routine of searching pawnshops would have got us nowhere. Don o' Doubloons, it seemed to me, must have been stolen to the order of some cracked or crooked collector who saw no better way of getting his hands on the painting.

"And that's the way the plot actually shapes up. The man whom we believe to hold the canvas possesses the means to have bought the Don a dozen times over. But he's not spending his money

that way, if information that has cost me several thousands of dollars is worth a nickel. Once upon a time he did, and regarded his expenditures as an investment in 'plant,' as one might say.

"Since retiring from the gainful occupation in which art played so large a part, though, it's been a case of art for art's sake with him. He still collects paintings which please him—or that's the agency's theory, anyhow—but he has ceased to bid for them in the open market. On the island we're heading for I wouldn't be surprised to find at least a half dozen famous old masters that have gone the way of Don o' Doubloons in recent years."

Woody yawned elaborately.

"Oh, shucks!" he lamented. "I withdraw the demand for a parrot. All you need is a policeman, Bruce. This is a hell of a milk-and-water expedition for a crew that shipped to play pirate."

"Hold on!" exclaimed Vanteen. "Just you put your cutlass back between your teeth, Tom, and listen to me. I haven't finished.

"A while ago I told you that the island our nose is pointing at is an island beyond the law. Well, that's as fortunate a circumstance for me as for the man who has chosen to be a law unto himself.

"The fact is that it would probably cost me the full value of the Don in lawyers' fees to win him back in anything like a regular way. Our man, you see, is fortified with a legal hold on the painting. Morally it may not be worth a cent—but this is a case, so I'm advised, where possession counts for a lot.

"So far as the Vanteens are concerned, there's no cloud on our title to the Don. But the Earls of Lumford—I *do* hope you won't repeat this, Miss Hubbard!—have been a shiftless lot. The father of the present earl was a glorious borrower, and on one certain little series of notes he pledged Don o' Doubloons.

"All but the last two of these notes had been taken up at the time of Lumford's death. And the new earl, what with this and that, quite forgot the surviving lien when he sold the Don to dad.

"The Lumford notes, I must tell you, carry with them a forfeiture clause so involved that I found one of the shrewdest lawyers in New York with his hands in the air over the situation after a week's study. He advised me that it was distinctly possible the courts wouldn't hand the Don back to me—that I might come out of an expensive course of litigation with no better souvenir than an uncollectable judgment against the bankrupt earl. As for taking criminal action, either here or abroad, he was adamant against the thought.

"'If you think you know where the painting is—do what your father would have done!' he said.

"What dad would have done I know. He'd have waded through a lake of boiling pitch to recover the Don. He had nothing in the world he prized so highly as his precious Holbein. He wanted it to stay in the family—and it's going to stay, by Jove, if I've got to run up the Jolly Roger and take Sabre Island by storm!"

Vanteen stepped quickly back from the table, jabbed a fist at the saloon wall and slid back the long mahogany panel to starboard. Lights played along the barrels of a half dozen businesslike rifles slung in a hidden case.

A GASP having such volume behind it as to verge upon a scream escaped Miss Hubbard.

Vanteen smiled sheepishly down upon her.

"So much," he said, "for heroics. I owed you all a thrill—and I tried to pay up. If it came to a question of shooting, as a matter of fact, I'd probably turn around and head for New York like any other well-raised, law-abiding, self-valuing boy.

"But I'm not expecting people to have to rely upon force. I understand there may be a few of his plug-uglies keeping watch and ward over the pirated treasures of Sabre Island; but while we lay at New London I got a reliable report that our man himself was on his way West. With him out of the run——"

"Enough!" roared Mr. James Francis Foley, banging the table with a soiled and hairy fist. "Who *is* the villain of the piece, Bruce? Who is this that once bought art and now steals it, who——"

Vanteen raised an appealing brown hand.

"Those are questions, James," said he, "that I'm not prepared to answer in the exact form in which they're put. Not after having had you pound the law of libel into me for a year and a day.

"I don't say the man has Don o' Doubloons. I merely *think* he has, on information and belief. What I know is that less than a year ago he was thinking about the Don, for he paid two thousand cash dollars for a pair of moth-eaten notes signed by a dead earl—went and deliberately hunted 'em up.

"The man's name? You're all listening, fellow freebooters? Then softly, softly—it's Jerome Harger! Ah, you know him, folks?"

"Know him!" cried Foley. "The old blackguard! Was there ever a crook of a gambler got as big a play in the old town's memory?"

"I'd been in his place a dozen times before he shut down," reminisced Woody. "Art straight through from cellar to garret—art and wiles."

"I've been in it, too," said Vanteen without enthusiasm. He was looking at Anne Durant. "How about you, Anne? Harger a friend of *yours* as well?"

The girl shuddered.

"Ugh! I covered his divorce trial—his last one. Had to sit there day after day and feel his eyes on me. It was—was just as if—well, I can't describe the sensation. Stuffy as it was in the courtroom, I never took off my suit coat after the first session.

"And he had the face, with all that testimony going into my notes, to sneak a flattering little *billet-doux* over to the press table for me. Somehow he'd found out my name. Said I was the type he admired most—wanted me to go to luncheon with him."

"Ha!" exclaimed Woody. "And you treasure the note among the archives of the dizzy past, Anne?"

"No," replied Miss Durant. "I turned it over to Mrs. Harger's lawyers—and spent a half hour washing my hands."

Vanteen's eyes still were on the girl.

"I'd like to have been present, Anne," he said thoughtfully, "when you got that note. But that's past, and can be put aside. Just now I'm in the grip of the deepest possible emotion—hungrier than the first Captain Kidd ever thought of being, I'll bet anything but a doughnut. Eddeson, let me escort you to the galley, and you can oblige us with a demonstration of the highest art of all!"

And so, with a copy reader at the Chipmate range, a night editor in the engine room, a rewrite man of consequence absorbed in the mastering of a deep-sea radio and a rising but interrupted young emigre journalist spelling the skipper at the wheel, the guest crew of the bonny ship *Quest* fell avidly to.

EACH in his way, the Vanteen volunteers proved themselves. Under the ministrations of James Francis Foley the big docile engines ran on without a note of complaint. Young Barrett showed himself the most reliable of helmsmen, on the word of the swart Captain Cowley. Eddeson's dinner won him six full courses of praise and a call for a curtain speech. And even Woody found opportunity, before the day was done, to distinguish himself in the wireless room. Somewhere in the ether he found a message for the *Quest* pulsating. He recorded it with credit, delivered it, and into the ether sent an answer sparking back.

Quite professionally, too, he repelled all importunities of the curious; what Mr. Vanteen's aërial correspondence had been, he said, Mr. Vanteen could reveal in person if Mr. Vanteen so wished. The wireless was inviolate. Upon all its practitioners was the seal of the confessional.

But in the excitement attendant upon his press of professional duties, Mr. Woody neglected properly to weigh down his copy of the sole incoming radiogram

and the original of the answer. A vagrant gust lifted them from the hook in the wireless room and deposited them on deck.

There they were found by one who under the starlight walked alone. Woody found both on his table in the morning, held quiescent by a heavy tobacco jar; and was troubled by no memory that he had not left them so.

The one who had found them, indeed, had not ready the errant radiograms. But it would have been quite impossible, considering the liberal Woody longhand, that she should not have caught a name that was the signature of one and in the address of the other. So enough for that.

At ten o'clock on this first night of the voyage of the *Quest,* passing on, Miss Helen Hubbard found Miss Anne Durant solitary in the forepeak.

"Here?" she exclaimed. "Heavens, child, we've been searching high and low for you. Don't you agree it's a good bed time?"

"No," said Miss Durant, "I do not. You toddle on, Helen. I want—to think."

CHAPTER V.

A BREEZE AND A BLOW.

THROUGH the afternoon and the early watches of the night the *Quest* had been boring on into the east with a soft breeze pursuing her and never quite catching up.

The sea to which Anne Durant gave back her attention when Miss Hubbard left her lay luminous and tranquil under the summer starshine, stripped of mystery in its slumber and of menace—as mild a highway to travel as some magical, illimitable Khorassan. The spring it gave to the yacht's clean heels was that of a deep-piled and fresh-swept rug. There seemed scarcely a sufficient lift in the water to sway a cradle.

With the passing of half an hour Anne was conscious of a subtle change. It was not the sky that was darker, but the blue beneath. The stars looked as many as ever; only in the sea they were fewer.

The breeze, discouraged with the result of the long and unprofitable stern chase, had found a swifter road beyond the horizon and came charging out of the northeast to head off the fugitive *Quest.* It became a wind, and Anne was grateful for the first damp splash of it.

Her thoughts had not been of a sort for which she could have found words were ever so bright a penny offered. Bruce Vanteen and the Marshall girl had been in them—and now and again, though she fought against inclusion, herself. It was only when she felt the new coolness and found how eagerly she welcomed it that she realized her cheeks had been burning.

The staccato striking of the yacht's bell came forward to her, thinned and sharpened by the struggle up the wind. There had been three of the brisk *tang-tangs.* It was eleven o'clock.

In its later phase the rousing ocean seemed rather to repel than to invite communion. Anne turned from it. As she made her way aft a swift lurch of the little vessel all but whipped her off her feet; after that she kept a steadying hand on the rail.

Half the dancing deck remained to be traversed when the girl became aware of a shapeless bulk moving toward her—a figure swathed in oilskins and topped by a flopping sou'wester. It was only by his voice that she knew Vanteen.

"Hullo!" he shouted. "What's the matter, Anne? Couldn't you sleep?"

"I haven't tried," said Miss Durant. "The night was too perfect—until just now."

Vanteen squinted aloft.

"What's happened to the stars?"

"They've been taking them in. I've been watching. It's been like—like the clearing of some jeweler's window in the Avenue at closing time."

"Not a bad figure, Anne. I'm almost tempted to add to it. Something about the 'vault,' you know. But I'm afraid I'm not equal to it. I'm still more than half asleep. Seen anything of Barrett?"

"Haven't seen any one—except Captain Cowley in the pilot house. *He* was nice

company for me. You'd think he hated the world, the way he stands stiff there at the wheel and scowls straight ahead at nothing."

"That's the best thing a man can see ahead at sea—nothing. Cowley's dog tired. But that's more or less his own fault. I wasn't in such a rush myself. Intended to make a port each night.

"The skipper himself pointed out that we had hands enough aboard to make Sabre Island without a stop. Barrett relieves him at the wheel at eight bells—midnight—and at the same time I'm going to separate Jim Foley from the engines. We night watchmen have each been catching us a couple of hours' sleep."

Vanteen glanced again at the sky.

"Looks too muggy for comfort," he remarked. "We may get a bit of a shaking up before the night's over. But don't worry about the *Quest,* Anne. She was built to weather the worst the Atlantic has, and no blow at this time of year is likely to last long or to amount to much while it does last."

WHEN he said good night to the girl at the head of the companionway, Vanteen was smiling; but it was a perturbed young yachtsman who took over from Mr. James Francis Foley the midnight nursing of the well-behaved Burkhalter twins.

"I was a damned fool to listen to Cowley, James," he said. "The night's turned as black as the lead in that pencil you used to wreck my copy with, and the glass is falling like a basso profundo's voice in one of those 'Down, down, down' ditties. With women aboard, I don't like it at all. I've got all kinds of faith in the *Quest*—but we'd be a lot better off in a harbor these next few hours."

It was one of those fierce, sudden, hard-hitting summer squalls through whose like he had driven the yacht a dozen times that Vanteen was expecting, but at the end of his engine-room watch no squall had struck. The rise of wind and waves had been gradual and steady, and the *Quest* was pitching steeply over seas which her ninety-foot length no longer bridged. When he had resigned his engines to the prompt and pleased Foley, Vanteen felt no desire for sleep.

"Don't think I'll turn in for a couple of hours yet," he remarked. "I'm going to stay up and enjoy the storm—out in the open. There's nothing I get quite so much of a kick out of, Jim, as heavy weather at sea."

Mr. Foley rubbed his overalled prominence amidships.

"Kick, is it?" said he. "Ask me if it isn't the truth? There wasn't a single piece of furniture in your miscalled saloon that didn't rise and wallop me while I was making me way to me post of duty. A conveyance that takes as many curves as this one of yours should have straps like a subway train for a man to hand himself along on."

Vanteen, halfway up the narrow steel ladder leading to the deck, turned to regard his relief with eyes suddenly anxious. Mr. Foley, he thought, was a little pale.

"If the motion's too much for you—if you think you'd like to lie down again—don't hesitate to call me," he urged. "I'll look in on you after a while, to make sure you're all right, anyhow."

A valiantly indignant shout pursued the retiring engineer through the door.

"Come back to my engine room and I'll lift ye out with a spanner! Don't you think I've a decent sea stomach after newspaper jobs have been rocking under me these twenty-five years?"

Vanteen closed the door on the further comments of Foley. Immediately he had cause to be glad he had sealed the engine room so promptly—and to congratulate himself for pulling on his sea boots and struggling into his oilskins before setting foot on the jouncing ladder.

The last of the stars had vanished, leaving the sky as black as the sea and a black and bitter wind screaming at the back of scud and spray.

With furious fingers the gale ripped at the yellow skirts of Vanteen's waterproof as he stood clinging to the rail. It scooped

up the brim of his sou'wester, driving it back flat against the crown, and the spume struck his face in a solid sheet.

The dwarfed and struggling *Quest,* with her nose lifted to a breathless angle, tottered over one huge sea and dived into another. A shudder went through her at the impact, and Vanteen found himself waist-deep in a raging torrent that swept aft from her bow.

In an instant his feet had been rushed from under him; only his grip on the rail kept him with the yacht. The passing of the sea left him nerveless, less by reason of his own close call than by realization of what might have happened if he had lingered even a second or two longer with Foley.

There flashed on his mind a picture of those tons of water snatching the door from his grasp and flooding the motors; of the Quest, with steerageway gone, whipped around broadside on to the seas and sent somersaulting before their lethal onslaught. One of the worst minutes he had known in the air came back to him magically—a time when, swooping over the German lines, his battleplane had been slapped by a bullet and with controls jammed had gone into a tailspin.

He had been frightened then, certainly; but he had not known the chill and helpless fear which rode him at this moment. For one thing, the front lines hadn't been a place where one carried women passengers. For another, regained mastery of his ship meant safety.

Here, though the engine drove on and the steering gear stood against the terrific wrenching, a promise of disaster rode every wave. There was this difference between the air and the sea: one element recognized the human equation, the other did not. So long as the *Quest* could not take wing, she must remain the victim of the ocean's caprice; trained seamanship, skilled pilotship, would avail nothing.

Vanteen braced himself in a protecting angle of the deck house and contrived, with the waste of no more than a half dozen matches, to light his pipe. The achievement in the teeth of the wind had the effect, somehow, of dissipating his apprehensions.

If a small and feeble flame could survive the gale, he asked himself, why shouldn't a yacht that had been designed to take the bad weather with the good and fabricated without regard to cost? So long as everything was battened down, of course she'd ride this storm out as she had ridden many another.

But was everything tight?

VANTEEN'S teeth clenched the pipe bit as swift new misgivings arose. How about the forward hatch, leading to the quarters usually occupied by the crew? It hadn't been secured, he knew. At any moment the bucking of the *Quest* might shoot it open, and then—good night!

The yacht surmounted one more crest and dipped. With the lifting of her stern, Vanteen started forward, half running, half sliding, along the sloshing deck. Groping in the inky darkness, he found the hatch and shot the outer bolts.

Above him the pilot house presented a faint splotch of light, the glow of the binnacle. Spray streaming down the heavy plate window hid the helmsman from him. In the hollow between seas he missed the slam of the wind; it was whooping now through the antenna stretched between the yacht's masts, and Vanteen marveled that the wires had not been torn from their anchorings.

The *Quest* reached the end of the watery toboggan, shook herself, and started again to climb. Vanteen felt himself catapulted aloft like a child at the end of a high-trestled seesaw. The pilot house came to a level with his smarting eyes; then he was looking down at it. He hugged a stanchion, gulped in a deep breath and swung around to face what would lie beyond the new crest.

Something more than blackness was there. Vanteen's startled eyes made out the running lights of another vessel bearing down out of the east before the *Quest* had finished her ascent. At once her bulk lifted before him. She was no more than a dozen lengths away, and lunging in her

flight before the storm on a course that in a space of seconds would put her across the *Quest's* bow.

The gale snatched Vanteen's shout of warning from his lips and hurled it aft with a shriek of laughter of its own in which the human cry was lost.

For a breath the strange craft, borne up by a tremendous sea, seemed about to come crashing down on the *Quest's* deck. Vanteen saw her lights swooping toward him. The two bows raced together in a furious and fateful charge.

And then the stranger yawed.

Her bow fell off sharply and she slid along quartering on the sea. She flew past in the night with her rail so close to the *Quest's* that Vanteen was sure that he could have leaped from one vessel to the other.

Straining his eyes, he could make out some of the uncomfortable neighbor's detail. She was about the size of his own craft, he judged, and she had a yachty look. Her people were up; at any rate a row of blurred lights marked the line of her deck-house ports.

Suddenly these lights were snuffed out. Vanteen knew that a wall of water had lifted behind her; he saw her no more.

It was only a minute or two after the stranger's passing when another light challenged Vanteen's attention. This was a light aboard the *Quest,* and one for which her owner was at loss to account. It flickered for a moment through a porthole down the starboard deck—the porthole Vanteen was sure, of that very stateroom into which he had transferred after giving up his own quarters to his guests.

Here was a mystery. Woody and Foley shared a stateroom and Barrett was bunking in with Eddeson. Vanteen had no roommate to be stirring at such an hour; and his door, moreover, had a spring lock.

He waited a little, staring—and laughed at himself. What he had seen, of course, was a reflection of the phosphorescence which now and again flared in the boiling sea.

The light showed again. It was a moving light; its beam spread across the glistening deck, broadening to the rail. So, certainly, it was a light from within.

Vanteen made his way aft and entered the saloon. His eyes had become accustomed to the outer darkness, but in the cabin he could see nothing. His fingers found the wall switch set into the bulkhead, and he snapped it on. Still it was dark. Something had gone wrong with the lighting system.

Feeling his way along the table, Vanteen moved forward through the saloon and into the corridor off which his stateroom opened. A lurch of the *Quest* threw him against its door. Before his weight the door gave way.

There *had* been a light behind the door. Bruce knew that for certain, although it vanished at the instant of his unceremonious entrance. His arms, instinctively outstretched to save himself a fall, encountered a moving something.

He felt himself embraced by other arms. Fingers dug into the back of his neck, and something harder than a hand crashed against the base of his skull above them.

Vanteen's investigation of the mysterious moving light in Stateroom B ended abruptly. He felt no pain from the blow, but rather a great weariness. It was a comfort to find himself stretched on the floor, and the slamming of the door was a pleasant sound.

He didn't want to be disturbed; curiosity was a stupid thing after all. What matter who the prowler had been, or what his purpose, when a man could rest and forget?

CHAPTER VI.

MR. FOLEY'S CAMERA EYE.

WITH Vanteen forgetfulness lasted over hours. When he awoke and ran exploring fingers over the back of his head to discover the reason of the throbbing, dawn was graying the porthole. It was a bleak and sunless dawn; the storm had not abated.

Vanteen's mind was enveloped in fog. He could not at once determine why he had slept on the floor instead of piling into

his comfortable berth. His head felt as it had that morning after his first-class reunion—but certainly there had not been wassail aboard the *Quest*. What, then?

A dormant brain lobe began to function. Memory came, and with it came a question. How much of that brief and one-sided struggle in the dark had been imagination? Could he merely have bumped into something less yielding than his skull and dreamed the rest?

He climbed painfully to his feet, bracing himself against the pitch of the yacht, and found the switch. The lights over the berth flashed on when he snapped it. Did that meant anything—or didn't it?

Vanteen's hazy mind balked the problem. Maybe there had been a light; and that might have meant some one had got into the wrong stateroom and discovered his mistake with a flash lamp. Maybe he had been attacked—but that must have been because he'd been mistaken for another.

Possibly some long-standing feud was hidden beneath the surface amiability of his guests. But certainly they were well-wishers of his, one and all. He arrived at a magnificent compromise, and with it dismissed the incident. He'd say nothing, but he'd keep his eyes open; and if he should discover any portion of his crew at odds he'd lay down the law to the belligerents like an old-fashioned pirate uncle.

The stuffiness below engendered a feeling of faintness. The ache in his head became sharper, and Vanteen decided that nothing would be so soothing as the whip of the wind. Pulling himself together, he made his way precariously through the deserted saloon and out onto the deck.

As he rounded the deck house, Bruce perceived that he was not the only person aboard with a predilection for storms at sea. Forward of the pilot house he glimpsed a slim, raincoated figure huddled at the rail.

"The little idiot!" he cried, and for the first time since the moment of their meeting in the *Morning Star* office he felt himself thoroughly angry at Anne Durant. As swiftly as the vagaries of the *Quest's* dancing deck permitted he got to her side.

"You get below!" he said savagely. "Haven't you sense enough to know it's worth your life to be out here?"

Miss Durant turned a wet and joyous face toward him.

"Good morning," said she calmly. "Isn't this perfectly gorgeous, Bruce?"

"It's perfectly dangerous," snapped Vanteen. "How long have you been out here?"

"Only a couple of minutes. I'm not the least bit afraid. Why should I be?"

He pointed to the white water lashing along the *Quest's* side as she leaped a comber.

"Some of 'em come aboard," he said grimly. "It's not a good idea to be in their way. Go below—*please!*"

She threw him a smile.

"I couldn't quite understand you at first," she said. "Now I do. If it will please you, I'll go."

Vanteen would have caught her arm, but already she had turned and was on her way aft.

"Get over by the rail! Hang onto it!" he shouted after her. "One may——"

THE sea gave him swift corroboration. "One" did. It came piling over behind him as his eyes followed Anne Durant, and had swept him a dozen yards along the inundated deck before his flailing arms found a stanchion. Just beyond him Anne Durant floundered in the flood with a hand gripping the rail.

Down went the yacht's nose again, and Vanteen felt the pound of another sea on her bow. It came piling aft in a wicked waist-high lather, submerging the rail. Bruce caught a glimpse of the girl's frightened face before the water had choked her scream.

How he negotiated the distance that separated them Vanteen never knew. The loosening of his hold on the stanchion was not a matter of volition. The cataract sent him tumbling on.

He was conscious only of an object,

had no thought of means. Flyerlike, knowing the strength in that one slender hand would never last against the fresh onslaught, he shut off his mind and put his faith in instinct.

One arm went around the girl as she lost her hold on the rail; and the other, when the torrent had tumbled them aft to the very stern, got in some miraculous way around the last stanchion of all. The final tug of the boarding sea all but wrenched the arm from its socket, but Vanteen hung doggedly on through the eternity of its passing.

It was a moment, that when the *Quest* rose free again, for vital speech. But what these two had to say to each other, the rescued and the rescuer, was said with their eyes. All Vanteen was capable of vocally was:

"Now! Didn't I tell you?"

And Miss Durant, even less poetic, rested on a purely feminine and absolutely preposterous banality:

"I'm—*drenched!*"

IT is true that when Vanteen had got her below, Anne attempted a speech that was longer and framed in words better suited to an occasion bordering on the heroic, but Vanteen would not let her continue.

"Nonsense!" he cried, pink to his ears. "If it's taught you a lesson I'm damn glad it's happened. Now you pile into your berth and stay there until you're good and warm. Sleep if you can. That'd be good medicine for you."

Anne regarded him with wide eyes in which docility had displaced challenge.

"Aye, aye, sir," she acquiesced weakly. "I'll turn in at once—and if it's orders I'll sleep, sir!"

Sleep she did—which in the circumstances surely speaks well for the newspaper training—and when she awoke the forenoon was half gone. Opening her eyes, Anne found herself with an invalid for a traveling companion.

"Breakfast?" groaned the suffering Miss Hubbard. "If you mention that horrible institution again I'll disown you. Oh, why couldn't we have gone pirating somewhere up the Hudson? The motion of the river boats never has bothered me a bit!"

Bruce Vanteen was taking stimulation from an acrobatic coffee cup in the little main saloon when Anne emerged from the sickroom.

"Good sailor!" he congratulated. "Did you get any rest?"

"Plenty. And the shaking has done wonders for my appetite. I'm ravenous. Is that ham I smell?"

"I hope it isn't Eddeson," grinned Vanteen. "He's fallen onto the stove twice this morning. But I can't speak too highly of his agility. It saved his skin, for a fact. He wasn't even scorched. How about Miss Hubbard?"

"She admits she's not feeling her best. I brought a message for her. If you know where any smoother water is to be found, she'd prefer——"

"There's none within a hundred miles," said Vanteen ruefully. "We *could* head for Portland, and put into Casco Bay—but we'd wallow all the way. This motion is nothing to what we were getting in the trough.

"I've been trying to figure out a next best. Here's Cowley now. Stick around for the council of war, Anne, and we'll see what's what."

The skipper, dripping and dour, had appeared in the saloon door. He pulled from beneath the shimmering oilskin coat that incased his squat figure a long roll of heavy paper marked on the outside with a figure penciled in blue.

"Here y'are, Mr. Vanteen," he announced. "This'll show you the lay of all of 'em."

"Is there any kind of harbor at Sabre Island?" asked Vanteen.

"Nope. Just a lee. It don't look good to me—not to-day."

The owner of the buffeted *Quest* spread out the chart on the swaying table.

"Take a look, Anne," he invited.

Miss Durant braced herself with one hand on the back of a swivel chair and the other on the table edge and leaned for-

ward. She puckered her brow over the chart.

"It seems to be some kind of a diagram," she said, "but you'll have to draw a simpler one for me. I suppose those four queer-shaped things are supposed to be islands—and the rest is all ocean?"

"Right."

"And will you please mark a cross on the ocean to indicate the *Quest?* For Helen's sake I'd like to know how far we are from land."

Vanteen smiled up at her.

"Our chart doesn't show enough sea for that," he said. "It gives us a section of the Atlantic off the Maine coast that's still some hours ahead. That longest island—the second one to the east—is Sabre. Get the shape of it, Anne? That explains its name."

"Looks more like a broken saw to me," remarked Miss Durant seriously. "What's the nearest island, Bruce—the one you've got your finger on?"

"It's called Truth Island."

"Lovely! Couldn't we stop there? It would be such a fitting place for the *Star* staff to pay a visit! Is it inhabited?"

"Not just now, I think. It ought to make as good a base for buccaneers as Fort Royal ever was. Before you turned out, Anne, I was wondering——"

Vanteen turned to his sailing master.

"How about calling at Truth Island, Cowley? See this indentation here? I happen to know it's a right little, tight little harbor with plenty of water."

"Wrong side," grunted the skipper.

"You know the place?"

"Well—not exactly. But it'll be piling on the bar pretty heavy with this wind. No use o' taking chances. Give a look at that curve to leeward, though. That's good shelter, and she's marked a good holding bottom. We'd lie snug enough there."

"Good enough," said Vanteen. "Then that's the place. We'll get to it as quickly as we can. Excuse me for a minute please, Anne. I'll go forward and see if Foley can't coax another couple of knots out of the engines."

THERE was, indeed, a reserve of power in the two Burkhalters. Mr. James Francis Foley cheerfully admitted it, explaining he had been hoarding it against time of stressful need; and, on being informed that such a time had come, he as cheerfully proved it. Yet even so it was in the middle of the murky and still-thickening afternoon when a haze that Vanteen's binoculars identified as rock rose over the bow of the battered yacht.

The news, sped by courier to the stateroom where the dowager Miss Hubbard had been breathing her last since early morning, brought about a most hopeful change in the patient's condition. Announcing a resolve to see the precious thing called land through her own lorgnon, she rose and, arraying herself perhaps a trifle less formidably than was her wont, accepted assistance to a sheltered spot on the after deck.

"Just the sight of shore is a tonic," she averred; and in substantiation of her words a color which she had not troubled to apply before leaving the stateroom began to show faintly in her invalid cheeks.

"We're getting some advantage out of Truth Island already," Bruce Vanteen told her. "The *Quest* has made its lee. Don't you notice we're in a great deal smoother water than we were?"

Miss Hubbard subjected a lifting comber to severely disapproving inspection.

"If the ocean ever is more rowdy than I see it now," said she, "I shall ask you to leave me on the island, Mr. Vanteen. I have suffered enough. If ever I return to the mainland it will be because some one has been good enough to call for me in a balloon."

But within an hour, completely recovered from her mal de mer, the dowager was so well reconciled to life afloat as to debate joining the shore party proposed by her host. The Burkhalters had ceased throbbing then, and their presiding genius, liberally splattered with grease and sprinkled with ashes not only as to waistcoat but as to overalls, had come on deck. The *Quest* lay in water as smooth as a mill

pond, a short cable length off the cliffs of Truth Island, and her power yawl lay snuggling alongside.

"I don't mind the yacht when she behaves like this, really I don't," protested Miss Hubbard. "In fact, it seems foolhardy to exchange into that absurd little boat of yours, Mr. Vanteen."

It was Cowley who decided her. He studied the leaden sky and shook his head.

"There's a humdinger of an air due," he asserted. "We haven't had no more than a breath of it yet. The seas we come through to-day ain't nothing to what the Atlantic is capable of up in this direction. And if the wind shifts there won't be nothing to do but face 'em."

Miss Hubbard found the skipper's face solemn and his eyes unwavering.

"In that case, Mr. Vanteen," she said with dignity, "I think I'll go ashore. That is, if Miss Durant——"

But the girl who had brought the *Star* its death-bed beat already had slipped down the accommodation ladder and seated herself in the yawl.

MR. JAMES FOLEY, having come up for air at the moment of his fellow pirates' departure, watched the shoreward progress of the yawl from the top of the engine-room ladder. His eyes, after a little, went back to Cowley.

"Oh, cap'n," he called in a voice that was almost affectionate. "Oh, cap'n!"

The solemn-faced skipper, who had been leisurely untangling the boat tackle at the davits, turned quickly.

"That's me," he said shortly. "What's on your mind?"

Foley scrambled onto the deck and advanced with a benevolent smile.

"Captain Cowley," he said, "I'm a man who's used to speaking when he has anything on his mind. You've done a wonderful piece of seamanship in bringing us through that blow, all safe and sound.

"You ought to have a medal, and that's the truth. But I haven't a medal about me. With your permission, though, I'd like to shake your hand."

Cowley's face—if such a thing were possible—softened a little. His hand went slowly out.

"I haven't lost a ship yet," said he with satisfaction. And with equal satisfaction remarked Mr. Foley: "No, ye scum, but you've lost a *finger!*"

Mr. Foley's own right hand was at his side, doubled into a fist. With his left he pointed to the paw which the skipper had extended—and on which the second finger ended at the knuckle.

"So I have," commented Cowley as if this were news to him. He stared at the crippled hand.

"And you've lost a job, too!" roared James Francis Foley. "Mark that. When I tell Vanteen what sort of a second-story seaman he has for his skipper, you'll be through—*through!*

"Cowley you may call yourself aboard the *Quest,* but I know another name for ye. I seldom forget a face, but I wanted to have a look at your right hand before I spoke. Up till now you've managed to keep it out of me sight—maybe by accident, maybe by design.

"Having seen the hand at last, I can safely claim to know ye. You're Henry Bailey—aren't ye? Spit it out, Bailey, before I choke the truth out of you?"

The sailing master glared at his accuser, and substituted a question for the answer demanded.

"Bailey, am I? What gives you that idea?"

"A memory second to none on Newspaper Row," said Mr. James Francis Foley, speaking less violently but nevertheless with conviction. "It'll be fifteen years since I was covering the Federal courts, but well I recall your mix-up and your record and your ugly face, Bailey.

"You used one yacht you were master of for smuggling, you sank another on a frame-up with the owner for the sake of the insurance—and you were caught red-handed going ashore from the *Thespis* with Mrs. Carter Humboldt's necklace. *That's* what I know about ye, my man."

"Then it's time," said the sailing master slowly, "that we got better acquainted."

He had withdrawn the four-fingered

hand and plunged it into a pocket of his pilot coat. Now it flashed into view again, and Mr. Foley found himself looking into the muzzle of a blue-barreled revolver.

"I didn't like your looks when you came aboard," said the skipper, more deeply enveloped in his ominous calm. "You get back in that engine room and stay there, you—you bloated barnacle! In just one minute and a half I'll be down to attend to *your* case!"

CHAPTER VII.

MAROONED!

MR. JAMES FRANCIS FOLEY'S tragedy-tinged melodrama entitled "I Knew You When" was played to an audience consisting solely of sea gulls. During its progress a few turns of her light engine carried the yawl across the narrow strip of water intervening between the *Quest* and terra firma, and drove her nose high up on the shelving beach.

Miss Helen Hubbard, last to enter the small boat, was the first to leave it; and crass though the word must appear when applied to an action of one so justly celebrated for poise, it could be said that she scrambled out. In the impetuosity of her landing a certain discrepancy of attire was revealed to one other present, at least. Anne Durant found opportunity later to inform her that, due doubtless to excitement inspired by the "Land ho!" call, she had drawn on one stocking of fluffy wool and another of sheerest silk.

With dry land once more under her feet —or, at the worst, land drizzle damp— Miss Hubbard instituted a count of noses. It revealed to her that not all the yacht's company had come ashore.

"Where is Mr. Foley?" she demanded sharply. "Surely we are not going to leave him out there to perish!"

"He insisted on having his own reckless way," deplored Bruce Vanteen. "Said the engines needed a little overhauling after all their hard work, and refused to leave 'em until the last bolt had been tightened and the last drop of oil wiped away. I never suspected James of such a capacity for tenderness."

"He's coming in later, then?"

"When his job's finished Cowley'll row him to shore in the other boat. But the skipper himself insists on staying aboard. For a man who's never sailed any craft but yachts, and who's been required to double in brass as chauffeur on most of his engagements at that, he's certainly showing the sea-dog spirit.

" 'No shore leave for me,' he said, 'until I've brought the *Quest* safely back from her cruise.' There was something rather magnificent in the way he thumped his chest when he spoke. Didn't you think so, Anne?"

A splash of rain found its way around Miss Hubbard's hat brim to her cheek.

"Good heavens!" she exclaimed. "Here we are with a shower starting and no one thought to bring an umbrella, as usual."

"And it probably wouldn't be any use hunting a subway entrance," said Woody. "Don't believe the tube has been extended this far up in the Bronx."

"Zut!" commented the dowager. (This an expression—see "Journeying with Gentlefolk," by Helen Hubbard; King, Sloman Company, $2 net—which ladies of the Continent employ to denote impatience.) *"Zut!* Don't you think, Mr. Vanteen, that you men should gather wood somewhere and build a fire? And isn't there a tent on the yacht? Or, very much better, aren't there *two* tents?"

"Truth Island," returned the later Kidd, "ought to afford better shelter than canvas. Come on, people. Let's explore!"

BARRETT winked at Woody.

"I say, Vanteen," he objected, "it's against all navy rules—and against pirate precedent, too, I reckon—for a landing party to attempt any exploration unarmed."

Vanteen tapped his coat pocket.

"I brought along an automatic for luck —and for looks," he said. "Trust me to sell our lives dearly if we find ourselves assailed."

"You relieve me," remarked Woody. "The oysters up this way are noted for their ferocity. You should have seen the

mean look I got from one when we landed."

"*Zut!*" said Miss Hubbard once more. "I really feel better to know that Mr. Vanteen has a pistol. Who can say what one might encounter in a God-forsaken spot like this? A wild man, perhaps."

"Or, worse, a wild woman," amended Vanteen. "But I'm quite sure we needn't fear an encounter with either. So, forward, hearties!"

It was no more than a miniature cliff which Truth Island presented to the sea, and the path which climbed its face from the sandy beach was so wide and made the ascent in stages so comfortable that Miss Helen Hubbard scorned the assisting hands offered to her by Woody and Barrett. When she had reached the summit she professed herself astonished by the vista.

"Trees!" she exclaimed. "Why, this turns out to be a perfectly delightful spot!"

"I thought you'd find it so," said Vanteen. "Now suppose we see what lies beyond the trees. There may be still another surprise."

There was. The grove, which was perhaps three quarters of a mile from the beach on which the yawl had landed and proved to be in the approximate center of the island, sheltered a spacious bungalow, inclosed in broad verandas.

Vanteen pointed a dramatic finger.

"Lo!" he cried. "Man has been here before—civilized man. And he has built him a hut."

"*Some* hut!" ejaculated Woody, and Anne Durant murmured: "But isn't it a duck of a place, Bruce?"

"A good place to duck into out of the rain," said Vanteen.

Miss Hubbard stiffened.

"The shutters are up," she pointed out. "I don't like getting wet any more than the rest of you, but some things are done and some are not. We have no right to enter this house in the absence of the owners. Of course, it would be permissible to occupy the veranda until the weather has cleared, but——"

"Oh, come, Helen," urged Vanteen. "Aren't we pirates? Play the game, then."

He vaulted the veranda rail, and tried the weather-beaten door.

"Locked," he reported.

"The shutters don't look as if they were built of heavy stuff," counseled Woody. "Smash one."

It seemed that Vanteen intended to act on the suggestion, for he was standing off from the window to the right of the door and crouching as if to hurl his weight against it. He sprang, but there came no thud of hard shoulders on wood. Instead, his toes found the lower sill and his fingers gripped the top of the window frame. In an instant he had dropped back lightly to the veranda. He held a rusted bit of metal triumphantly aloft.

"Of all the places to cache an extra key!" he exulted. "Look what I've found! We won't have to turn housebreakers after all. This lends dignity to our visit, don't you think, Miss Hubbard? Couldn't we almost call ourselves guests?"

VANTEEN threw open the bungalow door, revealing to his crowding buccaneers a vast room that, for all the gloom imposed by the shuttered windows and the dank air of disuse, held a notable promise of cheer.

"In five minutes I'll have the biggest fireplace in seventeen States going for you," he promised. "And if anything else is needed to make you comfortable, Miss Hubbard, I'll confess that I'm very well acquainted with the owner of the bungalow and the island. We're absolutely welcome to make ourselves at home and to use what we want."

Eddeson, who had thus far been silent, moodily trailing along whither Vanteen led, surveyed the big room appreciatively.

"This is something like," he said. "Have they got any kind of kitchen, Vanteen? I haven't had a fair chance yet, you know. I'm really anxious to show the crowd what I can do on a range that stands still."

"The kitchen," said Bruce, "was put in

for the use and to the order of an eminent chef of France. You won't find it lacking, Eddie. And as for grub, there's nothing ever sealed in glass or in tin, from caviar to chicken, that won't come to hand when you look about. Knowing that, I didn't bring supplies in from the *Quest*."

Miss Hubbard sighed gently and without melancholy.

"Oh," said she, "you plan to make something of a stay here?"

Vanteen nodded.

"Why not? Sabre Island remains the expedition's objective, but Truth Island makes a better base of operations than the yacht. Unless we want to blink at all maritime regulations, the *Quest* can't move at night without being lit up like a Tuxedo Park garden fête.

"Lights on these lonely waters are bound to attract attention—and attention is something we want to avoid. My present thought is to assault Sabre Island in the yawl."

"That cockleshell we came ashore in?" gasped the dowager.

"The same. It'll be no trick at all to make the run in her, given anything like recent weather. It's only nine miles to Sabre. If the day had been clear I'd have pointed out the neighbor island to you from the veranda. There's a clear view through the trees.

"All we need the *Quest* for from now on, as a matter of fact, is to ferry us back to the mainland. The yawl's scarcely equal to such a voyage as that."

The trees surrounding the bungalow broke the gale so effectually that those indoors, once logs brought from the half cellar under the east veranda were roaring in the fireplace, scarcely realized that the storm was increasing in violence. But Vanteen, going to secure the small boat with bow and stern lines against exigencies of weather, found himself scarcely able to keep his feet at the brow of the cliff.

IN his absence Miss Hubbard, roaming the house to estimate and apportion its accommodations, made two discoveries. The first—a highly pleasing one—was that the bungalow of Truth Island boasted a sufficient number of guest chambers to go round with no such doubling as there had been aboard the yacht, and that there was available a plentiful supply of excellent linen and warm blankets.

The second discovery was announced by the dowager in a whisper to Miss Durant, and with some indirection.

"Child," she said, "I don't believe you heard half what I told you last night. You seemed to be dreaming while I talked."

"Possibly I was," Anne admitted with a frankness altogether admirable. "You're not always interesting, Helen dear. Nor always correct in your surmises."

Miss Hubbard shook her head as a boxer sometimes will when a glove has found it.

"Don't you think," she inquired sweetly, "it would be safe to assume that Mr. Vanteen was something more than an acquaintance of the owner of Truth Island? He knew exactly where to find the key to the bungalow, didn't he? Wouldn't that imply—well, intimacy?"

"It might. But I can't see that as any of our concern."

"I'm not saying it's *your* concern, Anne. Nevertheless, I've been a working society editor recently enough to see an interesting significance in the ownership of this roof over our heads. I've come upon a dozen monograms that reveal the identity of our absent host. Isn't your curiosity aroused now? Tell the truth!"

"Not in the slightest degree," replied the imperturbable Miss Durant. "But you make it plain you're dying to tell me. Go ahead."

"I shall," said the dowager. "Where I said 'host' I should have used the term 'hostess.' Truth Island belongs to Lana Marshall!"

Anne Durant looked out at the waving trees, seen mistily through a window whose shutter the useful Barrett had lately removed.

"Thank you so much, dear," she murmured after a little. "I'll bear that in

mind, too. Shan't I help you get the rooms ready?"

Vanteen, returning a moment or two later, brought news that Foley had refused to answer a hail from shore.

"He seems to have got his back up as high as Cowley's," he said. "The captain says he's developed a theory that it's as much a chief engineer's part to stand by his machinery as it is a skipper's to stand by his bridge."

"He'll starve," complained Miss Hubbard. "In the office Mr. Foley and I have had differences of years' growth—in matters of space and spelling and the like, you know—but every man needs warm, substantial food. Particularly a rugged man."

"Fear not," said Vanteen. "James ought to be able to subsist for a solid month on his own peculiar style of ruggedness. But Cowley is handy around the galley. He'll shake up something to-night—and I'll make it a point to be up before breakfast for once and page James again in the morning."

AND, true to his considerate plan, Vanteen was astir before seven on the third day of the cruise of the freebooting *Quest*. The storm, which during the night had risen to hurricane height, had blown itself out. The same mild breeze which had urged the yacht into the east stirred the leaves of the island trees, and the sun poured dazzlingly into the clearing.

As he stood in the door of the bungalow, drinking in greedy gulps of the gale-scoured sea air, Vanteen sensed a presence at his elbow. Ann Durant—a feather in her small, rubber-soled ties—had joined him.

"I heard some one moving about and thought it was you," she said. "You're going after Jim Foley, aren't you, Bruce? I'll go along. It's a wonderful morning for a walk—for not too many!"

They walked through the trees, and halfway across the open to the cliff, in silence. Then Vanteen spoke—abruptly.

"Anne, there's something I should tell you."

Miss Durant drew a sharp breath. She said nothing.

"It's something I've decided not to let the others know just yet," pursued Vanteen, "but I think you at least should know."

The girl found a voice.

"About Truth Island, Bruce?"

Vanteen stared at her.

"What makes you think that? But let me tell it in my own way, Anne. The fact is that a double mission brought me up into these waters."

"Yes?" Miss Durant's query was weak—no more than a whisper.

Vanteen did not notice her sudden pallor.

"A year ago," he went on, "I did an extremely foolish thing. In effect I made a promise—committed myself in writing—which I'd give an arm to be free from now."

Miss Durant turned her head and regarded her companion steadily, curiously, intently. What she saw in his face appeared to please her. She brightened perceptibly.

"Then *that's* all right," said she. "No woman worth the powder to take the shine off her nose would hold a man to a promise he didn't want to keep. Certainly not a man like you, Bruce."

"Woman!" cried Vanteen. "Who said anything about a woman, sillykins? I was going to tell you that I put my name to a flock of notes that didn't mean a penny in my pocket but which threaten now to take all the joy out of life for me.

"I did that thing for the sake of a man who roomed with me at prep school and college—a man who was white enough to blow the top of his head off when he saw no way of pulling me out of the hole he'd got me into. Ted lied to me. I thought the cash he raised on my name was going into his business.

"But it was this same swindling Mr. Harger who got the notes, Anne. He got them by fraud, beyond a question, and he still has them. If I have to make good I'll be flat broke for the next fifteen years. My income will be absolutely swallowed

—and by the time I have means again I'll be middle-aged. Think of that! And Harger has no more moral right to the notes than he has to Don o' Doubloons."

One would have thought that Miss Durant had failed to comprehend her friend's words or to appreciate the extreme gravity of his tone. Her cheerfulness had continued to increase.

"Couldn't you deny the signature?"

"I've thought of that," said Vanteen slowly. "My lawyers, between us, have made certain representations along that line. I've talked with Harger several times myself—not committing myself, you understand, but pointing out that he might have difficulty in proving that the indorsements on the notes weren't forgeries.

"I'd have jumped at any suggestion of compromise, and I think that one eventually will come. My attorneys have a well-defined hunch that Harger will settle for a small fraction of the amount I'm legally hooked for—for *he* knows that Ted was fleeced. But the man is holding off. The more he lets me worry, he apparently reasons, the better the deal I'll agree to."

Anne nodded.

"Worrying other people is his specialty. Don't you remember that great mass of trumped-up evidence he threatened his wife with? She'd been absolutely straight with him, poor thing, and yet he was ready with a dozen witnesses to swear——"

"I know," said Vanteen. "Harger saved himself a fortune in alimony with his perjurers. Against such a beast all methods are fair. I've heard he has the notes up here on Sabre Island for safe-keeping. If there's a chance I'm going to get them, too. And one of these bright days I'm planning to call on Mr. Harger and tear 'em up under his nose!"

"More power to you, Bruce!" said Miss Durant. And then, more softly, she asked: "That was all you had to tell me?"

"Isn't it enough?" demanded Vanteen. "Haven't I confessed myself a real pirate? Now mind, Anne! Not a word before the rest. That end of the expedition is my private party."

They were coming to the brow of the cliff, and Vanteen raised his voice in a mighty shout.

"Aboard the *Quest!*" he called. "Ahoy, James Foley!"

He surmounted the crest of the rock, stood staring out over the sea for an instant, and then looked blankly down at Anne.

"Lord above!" he cried. "The yacht's gone!"

CHAPTER VIII.

VISITORS BETWEEN DAYS.

THE sturdy clinker-built yawl rode lightly between her shore line and the anchor that Vanteen had put out from her stern, but otherwise it was an empty sea upon which the two looked down from the brow of the cliff—and a sea that still heaved hazardously under the backlash of the storm.

Where the *Quest* had lain a speck of white bobbed on the nervous water. Anne's incredulous eyes swept the semicircle of the horizon, and came back to Vanteen's distrait.

"What can have happened?" She caught her breath. "If the wind veered around in the night——"

Anne glanced shuddering toward the rocky point which jutted out to the south, and Vanteen instantly divined her thought. He spoke reassuringly.

"No; the *Quest* hasn't piled up. We can be sure of that."

The girl's gaze searched his face.

"Don't try to hide anything from me, Bruce—what you really think."

"I've said only what I think, and what, thank the Lord, I can be certain of."

"How can you know?"

His hand touched her shoulder in a fleeting caress.

"Please don't worry. Wherever she may be, the yacht is safe. At any rate, there is evidence she got away in good order."

He pointed to the curtsying dot of white. "Don't you see, Anne? Apparently they had to slip the cable, but they weren't in such straits they couldn't take time to buoy it. If it got too hot for

them, they still managed to get off in seamanlike fashion."

"But—where can they be?"

"On the other side of the island, at a guess. The wind has gone back into the southwest, and Cowley probably found his way into the Truth Island harbor. It's a wonderful haven once you're past the bar. We'd have made it yesterday if it hadn't been for the weather."

Miss Durant turned away.

"Come," she urged, "I won't feel easy until I've seen the *Quest* with my own eyes. Oh, I'm not worrying about being marooned here—there's food enough in the bungalow to last us all for weeks, and I couldn't ask better company to Crusoe with. But poor Jim Foley, and the captain! Wouldn't it be horrible, Bruce, if they——"

Vanteen caught her arm.

"Do be sensible," he pleaded. "They're absolutely all right, I tell you. Even if they had to run for it in the open sea, they've got a doughty little ship under them.

"I promise you, Anne, that the *Quest* can ride out anything. Her designer told me she'd take me safely around the world if I chose to go—and Renfree isn't a man given to boasting."

"Come!" she repeated. "Can't we cut straight across the island?"

"We could," said Vanteen. "But if you're in such a hurry there's a better way. Can you stand another little siege of bouncing? Good! Then we'll make the trip in the yawl."

He scrambled down the path, waded out to the little craft, got in the stern anchor, and, watching a favorable chance, lifted Anne aboard dry-shod.

"That," he announced breathlessly, after staving the yawl off a jagged, half-submerged rock and getting her engine into action with a single brisk and practiced jerk at the flywheel, "that is boatmanship. Cowley may handle the *Quest* better than I do, but when it comes to boats the size of this you've got to hand it to young Mr. Bruce Vanteen.

"I was raised in 'em, Anne. Had one the summer I wore my first knickers. And did I ever tell you about that grand lark on the Grand Canal, when I fitted myself out with a lot of operatic duds and spent a solid week playing gondolier? Fact—I was the fanciest hackman in Venice while I lasted!"

THE yawl was riding the surge like a swan; and Vanteen, who had been talking to allay any uneasiness which the girl might have felt in so small a craft rather than because of any strong inner urge to conversation, was pleased to observe that she was as much at home here as she had been aboard the yacht.

"It's the buoy they left that we're rounding now," he said presently, throwing over the yawl's gay little brass-spoked wheel. "Can't you see the cable? Later in the day we'll come around and pick up the buoy and weigh the big anchor."

They had rounded the promontory, and Vanteen's eyes eagerly swept the sea beyond. It held no *Quest,* nor stick, nor sail.

A vicious sea was running on the shoal where the island's westerly point made out, and Vanteen stood well offshore. Reached in again, he was dismayed to see a double line of breakers crashing on the bar at the harbor mouth. No rift was visible, and before he had come abreast of the little bay he had ceased to hope that the yacht would be there.

She wasn't, nor did he sight her in a run to the east.

Before Vanteen turned back he had cleared a headland reaching out beyond the bungalow site, and had given Anne Durant a view of Sabre Island, rising bleak and forbidding to the northeast.

"The domain of King Jerome!" said he. "Looks like as hard a nut to crack as Gibraltar itself, doesn't it?"

"Why, a person could swim from island to island!" the girl exclaimed. "I'm sure *I* could, anyhow. The distance can't be more than a mile, Bruce. You must have been mistaken—must have misread the chart."

Vanteen smiled grimly.

"If I hadn't been sure of my figures," he said, "you can bet I wouldn't have brought the yawl to this side of Truth Island in the daytime. Even with ordinary glasses they couldn't make us out.

"We're nine absolutely official miles away from 'em. Sabre Island—that's what has you fooled—is three or four times as big as Truth. The rock at this end must be well over a hundred feet high. It juts over the horizon a long way off, I promise you."

On the eastward run Vanteen had discovered a breach between the lines of breakers at the harbor mouth. Beyond the smooth water he sighted a familiar barrel buoy, and with the way thus blazed he sped up the yawl's engine and raced in for apparent destruction.

There was one tense moment on the bar, when a walloping big sea let the little boat down with a jolt and another lifted, curling and crackling, over her open stern. Vanteen whipped the wheel hard over, then spun it as swiftly in the opposite direction; and, zigzagging like a sub-threatened merchantman, the yawl shot safely into shelter to the accompaniment of a single cry from Anne.

Vanteen turned to find her with both small hands still gripping the gunwale and her face gone pale.

"I *was* scared then," she confessed with a nervous little laugh. "I—I guess I was more shaken by yesterday's experience than I've realized. But what I surely have realized, and more deeply with each passing hour, Bruce, is that you risked your life to——"

The ex-gondolier became suddenly absorbed in the science of navigation.

"Please stow that, Anne," he mumbled. "You wouldn't have let me go overboard, would you, if you could have saved me by stretching out a hand? That's all there was to it—honestly. Nothing to make a fuss over. If I ever did anything to deserve a medal I'd be the first one, believe me, to bring the little matter to the attention of Congress."

"*A* medal!" cried the girl. "Why, Bruce Vanteen, you know you've got——"

Vanteen scowled over his shoulder at her and cut in unhappily:

"You don't understand the psychology of the war decoration, young woman. They hand a fellow one whenever they see he's on the verge of striking for leave. You'd be surprised and grieved to know how much money the Parisian restaurants lost that way.

"As for our recent trip over the bar—well, I've negotiated it before. The *Quest* couldn't have come in this way, but there was plenty of water for us. We might have shipped a bucketful or two if we hadn't been lucky, but nothing worse could have happened."

He leaned forward and pulled out the switch, and the engine died.

"Grab onto the dock with that boat hook, won't you, Anne? That's the girl. Now we'll just tie up here, all snug and tidy, and then we'll give our dear friends at the bungalow the shock of their lives."

FROM the Truth Island dock a hard-surfaced road wound up toward the grove. Before they had traversed half the distance to the bungalow the circumnavigators came upon another and a surprising pair of pedestrians—a trim young naval officer and a golfing person, sans clubs, whose appearance could have been immeasurably brightened by the ministrations of a barber.

"Oh, Vanteen," sang out the ensign, as the two hove into view around a clump of brush. "What do you know about it? The yacht's gone!"

"I made that discovery some time ago," said Bruce cheerfully.

"Barrett said there was some kind of harbor she might have slipped into," offered the seedy golfer. "We came out to look for it."

"No use looking," Vanteen told him. "We've just come from there. What's more, the *Quest's* nowhere in sight. I've been clear around the island, and I know."

"We're marooned," said Anne.

Woody, looking his solemnest, sank to his knees.

"There's one character in 'Treasure

Island' I've always wanted to play—and now's my chance," he said, and raised his voice in a parody of supplication: "Has any one a bit of cheese in his pocket for old Ben Gunn? Poor Ben Gunn!"

Barrett looked down on him unsmilingly, and then lifted his grave eyes to Vanteen's.

"This isn't so good," he said slowly. "Does any explanation occur to you, Vanteen?"

"I suppose," said Bruce, "that a shift of the wind made a lee shore into a weather shore, and Cowley and Jim pulled out."

"Where to?"

Vanteen shrugged.

"Search me. Probably they ran along with the storm. Once they'd started they'd probably have thought a second time about heading up. It would have been inviting disaster to put her into the trough."

"But they ought to have worked back before this time," objected Barrett. "There hasn't been sea enough to bother them for hours now. The *Quest's* as able as any craft of her size afloat."

He eyed Vanteen curiously, and after a moment of silence asked:

"How long have you had this man Cowley?"

"Only a couple of months," said Vanteen, adding quickly: "But he's absolutely competent—and trustworthy."

Woody abandoned the rôle of old Ben Gunn.

"Sure of that?" he queried.

"It's something I've taken as a matter of course," said Vanteen. "Why do you ask, Tom?"

"I think James Francis had his doubts of Cowley," replied Vanteen.

"And I *know* he did," put in Barrett quickly.

"Another thing," said Woody. "It didn't seem worth while mentioning until now, but the inquiry's in order. Were any of you people fussing around the *Quest's* wireless?"

"No!" answered Miss Durant and Vanteen in a breath. Lee Barrett looked hard at the questioner, and shook his dark head.

"Nor I!"

Woody kicked at a pebble.

"Well," said he, "somebody was—during the storm."

Anne colored.

"I was in the wireless room for a moment," she said. "But certainly I didn't touch the apparatus."

She would have gone on, but the dean of the deceased *Star's* rewrite desk interrupted.

"You're out, Anne. It was a man who tried his hand at radio, and I can give the man's name. Cowley!"

"What's all this?" demanded Vanteen crisply.

"Just let me tell you," said Woody. "In the first place, you know, I closed up shop directly after I'd sent off your answer to Miss——" He caught himself, shot a concerned glance toward Anne Durant, and smothered the rest of his sentence in a cough. "I know exactly how I left things," he resumed hurriedly, "when I called it a night—and they weren't that way yesterday morning. Some one who wasn't a practical wireless man had been tinkering at the instrument, I could have sworn. But it didn't seem worth mentioning at the time."

"Why do you say it was Cowley?" persisted Vanteen.

"Because it wasn't Barrett."

Bruce stared at him, and then at the Orleanean.

"Shorten up the riddle, Tom. What's the answer?"

Woody grinned.

"Absurdly simple, my dear Watson. "There was a strange cigarette butt on the floor, and I was curious enough to pick it up and subject it to the well-known reading test so frequently employed by us deduction experts. At a glance I'd seen, of course, that the pill hadn't been a Woody hand-made special. Another glance told me it used to be a Carolina Bright.

"Only two men aboard the yacht, I discovered, were addicted to that infamous

brand—Barrett and Cowley. We've heard from Barrett, and he says 'No.' Therefore I say our man is Cowley. Q. E. D."

Vanteen thoughtfully regarded Barrett, who was looking out absently over the water.

"Maybe you're right," he conceded, "but somehow you fail to get a rise out of me, Tom. I don't see what your mystery of the wireless room has to do with the price of persimmons—or the present whereabouts of the *Quest*.

"I'm banking on Cowley to keep her afloat and bring her back to Truth Island. Bet you a sack of Bull Mixture against a book of papers that she turns up before noon."

For Vanteen it was a wager lost. Noon came with no *Quest* in sight, and the afternoon dragged through to evening leaving the long-wait pirates still without a ship other than the yawl.

IT was past midnight when Bruce turned in, after a last troubled search around a sea that showed no lights. Off the cool Maine coast it was a night for blankets and sound sleep, and his speculations concerning the vanished yacht and her—ah, Foley!—skeleton crew tapered swiftly into oblivion.

For three hours or four Vanteen slept on. He awoke with all his senses on the alert; found himself upright in bed, listening. He had heard a sound below, and certainly it was not time for any of his crew to be stirring. A single star set in a sable sky threw a glimmering beam through his window—and the sable sky was the eastern sky. Dawn must be a good way off, he knew.

The sound was repeated—a scraping and a faint thump.

VANTEEN'S feet found the floor. He tiptoed across the room and with his head in the hallway listened. Downstairs some one else was tiptoeing, some one with shoes that squeaked.

Vanteen started down the hall, thought better of conducting an investigation unarmed, and returned. He had slept with his pistol under his pillow. Gripping it, he sallied forth once more.

Noiselessly Bruce made his way along the corridor and down the stairs which ended beside the huge fireplace in the living room. The last step but one cracked beneath his tread like a pine knot, and a whispering that had been going on somewhere in the back of the bungalow suddenly ceased.

More keenly than ever before Vanteen appreciated the wonderful convenience of electric lights. He yearned for a switch to turn—for instantaneous illumination. That wasn't to be had. The lamps with which the bungalow was equipped were more brilliant than Mazdas, once they were going, but it took persuasion to start them.

Tubes must be heated with a great burning of matches and fingers; gas must be generated. Bruce was forced to content himself with the reflection that darkness gave him the same advantage which it gave to the prowlers.

Quitting the step that creaked, he started in the direction of the hushed whispers—and bumped a chair. The crash of its overturning set loose a variety of noises. There was a shout, a rush of feet, the slamming of a door, and a banging on the stairs leading from the kitchen porch.

Vanteen reached the porch in time to see three dim figures darting into the cover of the trees. Two of them carried large, square arm loads.

"Stand!" thundered Vanteen.

A new star, far down, twinkled briefly. There was a sharp report, and something that whined as it traveled spatted into the door frame at his side.

Bruce, though he no longer had a target, jerked twice at the trigger of his pistol. From the trees came another stab of fire. There was a responsive crash at Vanteen's right and splinters of glass from a shattered window rained upon him.

He dropped from the porch, took shelter behind a water butt, and let go again. A yell both of surprise and pain came from the woods; a fusillade followed it.

Behind and above him, Bruce heard the commotion of a household rudely awakened, an excited calling back and forth. Wood's voice rose above the din.

"What's all the shootin' about? Vanteen—oh, Vanteen!"

An inspiration gripped Bruce.

"Bring those elephant guns, you fellows!" he shouted back. "We'll show 'em!"

It seemed the marauders were properly impressed. A final bullet ripped along the flooring of the kitchen porch, and then came sounds as of precipitate retreat. Vanteen, bursting into a solo cheer, began a pursuit. When he had taken a dozen steps he gave up the idea. Truth Island was a bit rough on bare feet.

Woody, with Barrett and Eddeson at his back, came running around the corner of the bungalow.

"Ho, Bruce!" he cried. "Hurt? You weren't making all that racket by yourself, were you?"

"No," said Vanteen, "I've been entertaining a few guests." And briefly he narrated the sequence of events since his awakening.

"My stars!" complained Woody. "Isn't there any honor among pirates these days? Doesn't it mean anything to these fellows that the place is already in the hands of gentlemen of fortune? We'll have to look 'em up and demand an apology!"

Lee Barrett snatched up an ax with which, the night before, he had split an armful of kindling for the fireplace.

"Come on!" he blared. "Let's follow them!"

Vanteen lifted a hand.

"Listen!" he commanded. "No use following now. We're rid of 'em."

The distant put-put of a marine engine came throbbing through the night. It grew faint, very quickly died away altogether.

"They've gone—down the wind," said Barrett. "And that, if the information's interesting, is toward Sabre Island."

"It is interesting," yawned Vanteen. "But I can't say I'm either surprised they came or sorry they've gone. I've heard that Harger keeps a choice collection of cutthroats over on Sabre to discourage inquisitive visitors. The wonder of it all is that they haven't ransacked the bungalow before this.

"It must have been a shock to them to find Truth Island populated so late in August. After the little reception I gave 'em we can be fairly sure they won't come back. What say if we climb back into our cribs, children? I've got a lot more sleeping to do, for one."

The others—perhaps because their nerves had not been case-hardened by air service over two or three fighting fronts—agreed after a brief discussion among themselves that the rest of the night would be spent better in watchful waiting.

But Bruce Vanteen slept again almost at the moment his head returned to the pillow. The last thing he heard was the murmur of Woody's voice in the hall as the rewrite man, bolstering and adorning his facts as one of the craft must needs, gave a spirited account of the invasion and sortie to the Misses Durant and Hubbard.

It was after eight when Vanteen opened his eyes. In ten minutes, glowing after a cold bath and vigorous rub, he trotted downstairs sniffing hungrily.

"Eddeson!" he cried. "A man can't fight all night without working up an appetite. Look round and see if there aren't a couple of preserved porterhouses among the canned goods, won't you?"

The copy-reading chef appeared at the door to his laboratory.

"I'm sorry, Vanteen," said he, "but you'll have to tighten your belt and scale down your order. Last night's callers came damn close to cleaning out the larder. Unless the *Quest* comes back pronto I'll have to put everybody on short rations—in which case we'll be able to stick it out for a day or two."

Barrett, fresh and cool, came in from the veranda.

"Hate to hand you any more bad news before breakfast, Vanteen," he said. "But the last thing your guests did before shov-

ing off from Truth Island was to empty the yawl's gasoline tank. It does begin to look like we had something to think about!"

CHAPTER IX.

OUT OF THE FRYING PAN.

WHILE Bruce Vanteen breakfasted frugally on wheat cakes and coffee, Eddeson submitted a detailed report in the matter of the tragic sacking of the storeroom.

There had been more than a score of cases of tinned foods on hand the evening before, averred the master of the pirate cuisine. All but two of these boxes had been carried off, together with divers important items such as sides of bacon and hams.

Beyond odds and ends of flour, sugar, coffee, and the like distributed among jars and cans on the pantry shelves, the Truth Island sojourners had been reduced at a stroke to that precise diet prescribed for his mount by the tuneful Captain Jinks of Horse Marines fame. There had been left for them, that is to say, one case of corn and another of beans.

"And beyond question it was the crowd from Sabre that got away with the grub," mused Vanteen. "Well, Eddie, they couldn't have hit us harder if they'd known who we were and what we'd come up into these waters for—what?"

"Don't you s'pose there's a chance they did know?" asked Woody, who had drifted in to wheedle an extra cup of coffee out of Eddeson.

"I don't," replied Vanteen. "The possibility did occur to me, but I've dismissed it. What they took was undoubtedly exactly what they came after. I don't imagine Harger feeds 'em on the fat of the land—and variety would have a strong appeal."

"I'm not so sure there hasn't been a tip-off," said Barrett. "Seems queer to me that they bothered to put the yawl out of business. It wasn't because they needed or wanted the gas. All they did was to open a petcock and let it drain into the bilge."

Vanteen shook his head.

"My guess is that they simply didn't want us after them—and somebody had a brilliant thought. That call of mine for elephant guns may not have been so grand an inspiration after all."

Woody drained his cup and rolled an emaciated smoke.

"Trying to stretch out the 'baccy until the *Quest* gets back," he remarked. "We'd better all do some tall praying to-day, men."

"And if prayer doesn't bring her," said Bruce briskly, "we'll just up and pay the Sabre Island gang a return call. It wouldn't be the first time that buccaneers had to reply on the jolly-boat."

"And jolly well we can rely on ours, can't we?" snorted the knickered one. "No use hoping for anything better than the worst in that direction. The last drop of gasoline had run out of the tank before Barrett——"

"Don't look so glum, Tom," Vanteen interrupted. "The yawl makes better than five miles to the gallon, so just a couple of gallons will get us to Sabre. Certainly there'll be that much around here."

"There isn't," said Barrett positively. "It'd be as easy to scrape up a couple of barrels. We found three drums in that bricked-up place under the kitchen, and they didn't yield a cupful of gas among 'em."

Bruce looked up at him seriously.

"Be careful of the cupful; don't let it evaporate," said he. "We may need it before we're through." And then, dismissing the fuel question with a wave of his pipe, he demanded: "What's become of the women? Have they been told about the food situation?"

Woody nodded.

"Anne took it like a major, and Miss Hubbard didn't seem to be worried. But then she's too damn cut up over Foley to trouble her mind with anything else. You'd think he'd been the apple of her eye all these years, instead of the bane of her existence, the way she's taking on."

"You would," agreed Barrett. "She found a telescope somewhere, and she's

been tryin' to spy out the *Quest* ever since. Every time I go near her she wants me to tell her how dead sure I am the yacht hasn't foundered or been wrecked."

IN the course of the next half hour Vanteen located and climbed the hill on which Miss Helen Hubbard had posted herself with her telescope. She had seen nothing but what, from her fantastic description, he took to have been a three-masted schooner, hull down.

Bruce himself, more worried than he dared confess to the women, had no better luck with the glass, although he returned to the Hubbard coign many times during the day. Shadows were sweeping across the sea when he closed the telescope with a final and decisive snap.

"For the time being," said he, "we'll here to eliminate the yacht from our calculations. To-night we push on over to Sabre in the yawl, and see what we see. That's got to be done while the water's calm. To-morrow it might blow up again, and then maybe we couldn't get away until after——"

Woody, who for a couple of hours past had been his shadow, looked sadly at the distant island.

"Nice row," he remarked.

"But we're not going to row," grinned Bruce. "Not, anyhow, until my cautious brain advises me it's time to start the engine. There's one long oar in the yawl. I'll scull with it for the last mile or so, and give you a look at my gondoliering form. As for gas—I'll show you a trick shortly."

Vanteen strode off toward the bungalow. The women followed at a more leisurely pace and entered the great beamed living room as Bruce clattered down the stairs with a lamp in either hand.

"Here," said he, "is where we get our power. There are fourteen of these contraptions in the house. If you people will fetch 'em here——"

"But kerosene won't run the motor!" protested Anne Durant.

"These aren't kerosene lamps. Their founts hold, on the average, a quart each of the purest and peppiest gasoline. And that, as you can figure out for yourself, means they'll yield us three and a half gallons of gas. Bring out a couple of buckets, Eddie, and I'll prove up my arithmetic."

THERE had been only a trifling error in Vanteen's estimate, and that on the side of conservatism. When the buccaneers set off on their mission of reconnoissance and reprisal, after drawing up to a meal served by Eddeson with many a sigh, four gallons of fuel were sloshing about in the yawl's tank.

This was again a starless night, and since the Sabre Islanders had not been considerate enough to set a beacon, Bruce laid his course by compass. In no more than an hour a deeper blackness ahead announced the nearness of the Sabre; Vanteen threw the switch then, and the yawl, under the impulse of the lone star, crept slowly inshore.

Lee Barrett, who had stationed himself in the bow, called back softly after a little: "Bear a bit more to starboard. I see something that looks like a dock."

A dock it was; and behind its T end rode a snubby and deserted launch. At sight of the craft Vanteen chuckled.

"Here's where we begin collecting reparations," he whispered. "You stand by the yawl, Barrett, and while we're gone you might amuse yourself by transferring the gas from this other fellow's tank into ours. You'll find a pail in the locker aft."

"Aye, aye, sir!" said the Orleanean briskly, and he was already at work when Vanteen gathered the rest of his crew about him at the dock head.

"Now, my gallant sea rovers," spoke Bruce, "now for the great cutting-out expedition. Harger's house—unless the sketch of the terrain with which my detectives have provided me is way off—can't be more than a mile from where we stand. Trust me to find it."

"Finding it," remarked Woody, "doesn't strike me as the hardest number on the program. What happens then?"

"I'm not so sure," confessed Vanteen.

"Just now I'm scheming out a little game of bluff. That's why I want you people to come along. In the darkness you'll look like an army, and the moral effect of having you at my back ought to help a lot.

"It's an army without a general we march against, you see. The fact of Harger's absence should make all the difference in the world—considering, for the moment that I'm unlucky enough to arouse his watchmen. A voice of authority and a display of force will go far. You can depend on that. If there's any trouble at all, it won't be serious. Don't suppose any one's nervous?"

"Not I, certainly," denied Anne Durand. "I'm terribly thrilled—but I wouldn't miss it for anything. It's wonderful to be permitted to take part in a burglary, especially when the boss burglar is actuated by such a high purpose."

"We take," said Vanteen loftily, "only what is ours. Barrett can be relied on to right our wrongs in the matter of the gasoline. And if I fail to reclaim the Don and the groceries, my name's Butterfinger. Are you ready, troops? Then—*forward!*"

Bruce set off along a bumpy road lined with dwarf trees, whistling under his breath and with the grip of the pistol lying cool against his palm. When he spoke once more it was to voice a warning:

"No more talking, please. And finish up that cigarette, Woody, and step on it. The enemy sleeps on his arms just ahead."

Another couple of minutes of walking brought the silenced group to the edge of an open space in whose center rose the square and gloomy bulk of a house that showed not a light.

"So far, so good," whispered Vanteen. "Harger's roughs sleep in an outbuilding over to the north, and since we've got here without having them on our necks, the rest should be simple. Apparently they never dreamed we'd be so punctilious about the social obligation they put upon us last night. You folks stand by while I have a look about."

He glided away into the darkness, elate. And yet, before half the distance to the house had been covered, he was conscious of a rising disquietude. There was something altogether ominous in the calm of Sabre Island. He had a sense of the inimical lurking in the shadows—of danger directly ahead.

AND no sooner had Vanteen's uneasiness taken definite form than calm and shadows were simultaneously rent. His feet had caught in what seemed to be some creeping vine, but which immediately he knew to have been a wire.

Within the house a bell jangled discordantly, and at once a searchlight mounted on the roof of Jerome Harger's island retreat flared into life. Its shaft swept inexorably around the clearing, and as Vanteen was caught up in it there came a double report. He heard one bullet droning over his head; another plopped into the ground at his feet and sprayed him with sand.

In the brief second during which he remained a fair target a third and a fourth shot missed him by uncomfortably narrowing margins, and then the beam from the searchlight moved on. Vanteen had made the shelter of the trees by the time it played again on the spot where he had stood.

"Thank God you're safe!" gasped Helen Hubbard as Bruce appeared at her side out of the underbrush.

"That's not a word to describe the condition of any of us," he said breathlessly. "Make for the yawl, all of you. I'll guard the rear."

For the sake of its possible persuasive value, he sent a bullet crashing into the house, and there was an answering crash to tell him it had found a window.

"Glass for glass!" he said grimly. "One small part of the score evened, anyhow." And he fired again.

A figure that had appeared beside the building darted back to cover. Other figures massed elsewhere for a sally in a moment; and Vanteen, letting fly at them, turned and fled in the wake of his companions.

Behind him there was a pounding of

running feet on the road. Twice, where trees of sufficient girth to shelter him were encountered, he stopped and made a stand that scattered the pursuit.

Finally, reloading as he raced along, he overtook the others. They were then so close to the dock that shouts ahead could plainly be heard. And with them came the excited coughing of an engine which Bruce was sure from the quality of the sound was the yawl's.

"We're cut off!" he panted. "Barrett's had to get away. That being *that*, we can take it easier. The other side of the island's the place for us until morning, anyhow.

"I want to say now, though, that I've got you in trouble enough. To-morrow I'll patch up some sort of truce that'll ——" He broke off suddenly. "Great Scott! What's become of Anne?"

"That's what I've been wondering for some minutes back," said Woody. "We all got separated. Last I saw of her she was up ahead with Miss Hubbard."

"She left me," contributed the dowager in a voice of exhaustion. "I think she must be with Mr. Barrett in the boat. She called back that she was going to hurry on and help him untie the ropes, or something."

"Anne's better off in the yawl," said Vanteen, infinitely relieved. "Barrett has the bearings, and there's no question of his being able to get over to Truth Island again. When the *Quest* shows up he'll have sense enough to wireless for help—if skilled diplomacy and free-handed bribery fail and we still are in sore need of it.

"Come along, unfortunates. At least I can promise you a roof over your heads."

He led away again at a brisk walk which soon put the shouts of the chase behind, and in the course of a half hour was prying up the window of a tumble-down shack on the north shore of the island.

"This," explained Vanteen, "was the residence of the rather shiftless person from whom Harger acquired his kingdom in the sea. He has long since gone over to the mainland, and there's small danger that you'll be disturbed.

"Can you negotiate the window sill, Miss Hubbard? Give her a hand, Eddie. Ah—steady—*right!*"

When the others had climbed into the cabin, Bruce pressed his pistol on Woody.

"Take this, Tom," said he. "And here are four extra clips of cartridges. I won't say my ardor isn't just the least bit dampened—but still I'm not through scouting for the night. For one thing, I won't be able to rest until I know that Anne's all right.

"You three hold the fort here until I get back. That ought to be within an hour or two."

"Don't be a fool, Bruce!" protested Woody. "Anne's safe. You heard what Miss Hubbard said."

"If you're bound to go," said Eddeson, perceiving that Vanteen's jaw had hardened, "at any rate take the gun. You're more likely to need it than we are."

Bruce shook his head.

"So far as I'm concerned," he replied, "I guess the shootin's over. Gold will be my weapon from now on. If I do fall afoul of Harger's huskies, I dare say I'll do just as well unarmed."

He threw a leg over the sill, pulled the other one after it and melted into the dark background of the rocks.

IT was for the little dock that Vanteen headed now, walking warily and swiftly. A while since, on the journey across the island, his sharp ears had caught a sound which the others had apparently missed and to which he had thought best not to direct their attention—the spluttering of a second motor boat.

Obviously Barrett had not had time to empty the gas tank of the Sabre Island launch, and the *Quest's* yawl hadn't been built or engined for speed. If she were overtaken and her crew captured, Bruce was resolved to say a word. Certainly with Anne Durant in their irreverent hands, negotiations with the captors would better be begun at once.

Stars here and there were pushing

through the sky when Vanteen came to the southern shore. He struck it at a point a few hundred yards to the west of the dock, and as he cautiously approached could make out that neither of the power boats lay by it.

Coming nearer, he descried the outlines of a squat sentinel figure on the T-end. The man was gazing off over the murky sea, and Vanteen managed to reach the dock and crawl under it without being observed.

The sentry, after a time, began a pacing that brought him well over the shore. Again and again Bruce heard his feet thumping the boards directly above his head; and at last he came to a halt near by.

Peering up through a wide crack, Vanteen saw the man searching his pockets. He struck a match, and swore softly as the wind swept under his cupped hands and extinguished it. Its flame lived just long enough to photograph on Bruce's brain the picture of a heavy, stubbly jaw and of a cigarette held between thin lips.

Another match flared briefly, and Vanteen's heart gave a leap. Now the whole face of the watcher above was illuminated.

Even at his unfamiliar angle of vision Bruce knew that square and weather-beaten countenance. Here was one who held the answer to a mystery—and who also might be expected to hold the solution of a problem momentarily increasing in delicacy.

Vanteen moved noiselessly along under the narrow dock until he was again beneath the smoker. Then, subduing an incipient laugh, he reached up a hand and fastened it firmly about a thick ankle of Cowley, master of the missing *Quest*.

CHAPTER X.

CAPTAIN COWLEY UNMASKS.

COWLEY, with a startled shout, kicked himself free.

"Who th'——" he began; and then, as Bruce vaulted up beside him, his jaw sagged and his eyes popped. "Mr. Vanteen!"

"No other," said his employer, with more of cheer in his voice than it had held for some time past. "And devilish glad to see you, cap'n. I hope you'll tell me that the *Quest* isn't far away."

"She—she isn't," stammered the skipper.

He spoke with such effort that Vanteen, suddenly and vaguely alarmed, caught him up.

"What's the trouble? You look as if you'd seen a ghost—or *were* one. Has anything happened? Come, out with it!"

Cowley moistened his lips and nodded.

"What?" insisted Bruce.

"She's gone. Lost."

"Wrecked, you mean?"

The sailing master, still staring at his owner with fascinated eyes, nodded again.

"That's it," he said after a little hesitation. "Wrecked. It wasn't my fault, Mr. Vanteen."

"I don't care whose fault it was—not just now, anyway," snapped Bruce. "Where's Mr. Foley?"

"It was him that failed," said Cowley. "He didn't know as much about the engines as he let on. When they bucked on him in a strong seaway he couldn't manage——"

"Let that go. What's become of him? That's what I want to hear."

Once more Vanteen was conscious that the skipper hesitated; it flashed on his mind that the man had bad news and was loath to divulge it. He put a hand on Cowley's arm.

"Tell me!" he commanded.

The captain moved his shoulders distressedly and looked out over the water.

"He's gone too," he blurted. "Drownded. Oh, I can tell you that for certain if you're bound to know. Didn't I see a whopper of a sea lift him over the rail? Swell chance there was for me to go after him. Maybe you'll say I should have, but you nor nobody else, Mr. Vanteen——"

"Steady down, Cowley," urged Bruce. "This isn't an inquest, and I'm not a coroner. If Foley's gone I've lost one of the best friends I've ever known on this earth, but I'm more interested in getting facts than fixing responsibility.

"Since you got ashore, don't you suppose there's a chance that he did? Pull yourself together, man, and let me have the straight of it!"

COWLEY flipped his cigarette into the water and faced his questioner. His tone betrayed an irritation which Vanteen decided came from overwrought nerves.

"This ain't the time or place for any Admiralty report, and I ain't in any shape to make one. The yacht's gone and Foley's gone, and I can tell you how that came about in precious few words.

"In the first place, the wind come banging around into the southwest while we laid there against Truth Island and it was a case of get away or come in onto the beach. I roused your friend Foley and got him at the engines. He started 'em, all right, while I was hookin' a buoy onto the cable and gettin' free.

"By that time we had plenty of breeze, and it was all the *Quest* could do to get around the point. I sort of calculated on makin' a lee on the other shore and maybe puttin' into the harbor when things quieted down, but we hadn't no more than cleared the point when the power plant begun cuttin' up.

"It was a grand poundin' we had to take, with steerageway gone and the yacht floppin' around as aimless as a biscuit box. I'd 'a' felt a lot better, I want to tell you, Mr. Vanteen, if I'd had a deep-water man down in the engine room.

"Your friend got scared. First thing I know he comes into the pilot house.

"'The motors won't turn, and there ain't another thing I can do to make 'em,' he says, and after a while he begins to hint we might be better off to let the *Quest* go on her way and take to the gig.

"That was something, of course, I wouldn't hear of. I kept tryin' to argue him to do some more work on the engines, and all the time we're being pushed farther over toward Sabre. At last, with a weather shore right under our nose, he starts below.

"That's when the sea gets him. I see him hangin' to the rail for a second; but he's got too much heft for the strength of his hands, and away he goes. Of course he couldn't swim, and——"

"How do you know he couldn't swim?" Vanteen demanded.

"Why—he told me so himself," replied the sailing master, regarding him curiously.

"That's funny. But it's not important now. Go on with your story."

COWLEY still seemed inclined to debate the point. He blinked thoughtfully and then resumed:

"Oh, well, I guess it doesn't matter. Anyhow, there wasn't a chance of anybody swimmin' in such a sea. And if he *had* got into the beach by a miracle he'd 'a' had the life pounded out of him in the surf. No, he's gone—rest him. And the *Quest* with him.

"It was a sweep of current that saved me. It put us around that point yonder to the east, and the yacht piled on a reef where she didn't get nothin' like the full brunt of it. There wasn't anything for me to do but stay aboard. The worst of the storm was past then, and when the *Quest* begun to break up the sea had gone down enough for me to take a chance on the gig."

"And the gig's still sound?" asked Vanteen quickly.

Once more there was a pause, and Cowley shook his head.

"She was stove pretty bad when I come in. You know what the shore is on Sabre, Mr. Vanteen."

"I do," said Bruce. "And now there's something else I want you to tell me, cap'n. Why didn't you find some way of letting me know what had happened?"

"Didn't I just tell you about the gig?"

"And am I not right in assuming you've introduced yourself to the people over here?"

Cowley's gaze again turned seaward; now a slow and labored creaking of oars could be heard.

"Sure I did. And they don't know exactly what to make of me. You might say I was a kind of prisoner. Of course,

I never blabbed a word of what the *Quest* came up here after."

"I hope you didn't, Cowley. What did you tell him? Did you mention Truth Island?"

"No; I said I'd left my party on one of the islands east and was running back to Boston with a short crew when I got in trouble. You see now why I couldn't get over to Truth. I've been playin' 'em along—gettin' in with 'em. You ought to know I'd be workin' in the interest of my boss wherever I was."

"I've never distrusted you," said Bruce shortly. "What's the population of Sabre Island, cap'n? How many of these fellows did Harger leave up here?"

"About half a dozen."

"That's not so bad. And how about you—are you armed?"

"I ain't. Are you?"

"Not at the moment. But I know where I can put my hand on a pistol and a fair supply of ammunition at short notice." Vanteen shrugged. "But one gun against six——"

Cowley appeared relieved.

"I don't think you need even one gun," he said earnestly. "These fellers ain't such a bad lot. I've been soundin' them out, as you might say. I think if you was to be square with 'em—offer 'em a little money—they'd sell out Sabre Island to you as quick as the Injuns give up the deeds to Manhattan." His eyes narrowed. "I s'pose it was you that started all the excitement around here to-night, Mr. Vanteen?"

"Guilty!" grinned Bruce. "Were you around when things began to pop?"

"Why, I—well, I'd just got to sleep. They've been having me bunk in with 'em, you see."

"What did they think it was all about?"

"I dunno."

"But they seemed to be expecting visitors, Cowley. They were certainly ready. How do you explain that?"

"I think," said the yachtless skipper slowly, "I sorta think these fellers do a little rum runnin' on the side. That is to say, I've caught a hint or two that they get a few cases dropped off onto Sabre once in a while and run it over in small lots. Now, I wouldn't be sure, understand; but I wouldn't be surprised, either, if they'd been lookin' for gov'ment men to pay a call."

"You didn't hear of any raid they'd made on Truth Island—last night?"

"Nope," replied Cowley instantly, adding as an afterthought: "But some of 'em did go off somewhere. I guessed they'd put in to the mainland, maybe with a bottle or two of somethin' that's allus been a good seller in Maine."

He listened again to the creaking of the oars, now closer in.

"Seems like you played a low-down trick on 'em to-night, Mr. Vanteen. Of course, I didn't know what it was all about—didn't even suspicion. But nat'rally I trailed along when the shooting started. I got here to the dock just in time to see a boat that looked like the *Quest's* yawl shovin' off."

"Could you see who was aboard her?" demanded Bruce eagerly. "Was Miss Durant——"

"Couldn't see nothing but the boat," interrupted Cowley. "What I was goin' to say was that the Sabre Island crowd run out of gas a sight sooner than they expected to after they begun to chase the yawl. They wasn't more than a mile offshore when their engine went dead, and their voices come driftin' in as plain as if they was here on the dock.

"It wasn't until they'd tinkered a while at the motor and batteries that some one thought to give a look in the gas tank. And then you should 'a' heard the cussin'. It was a education to me, and I've been goin' to sea for more'n twenty years.

"Seemed to be the conscienshus of opinion that ten gallons of that good Sabre Island gas had been took; and they didn't have nothin' but a light pair of oars and a still lighter breeze to bring 'em in."

Vanteen, peering over his sailing master's wide shoulder, could see the launch drawing slowly to the head of the dock.

"Then they probably won't be glowing with good nature when they land," he

said, lowering his voice. "I'd better skip out now. In the morning maybe they'll feel——"

Cowley grasped his arm.

"No; wait! Do just what I say, and you'll be all right. I've told you they wasn't such bad fellers, and I know what I'm talkin' about. You stand by, Mr. Vanteen, and see if it ain't so."

The grip on his arm had tightened, and for the first time Bruce had a good look into the man's eyes. What he saw there delivered a swift and fatal blow to his faith. He wrenched free and took a step backward.

"Cowley!" he said softly. "By Joseph, I can see clear through you now! You've —sold—out!"

A HUGE fist came sailing at him. Vanteen, who had seen it telegraphed before ever it started on its way, ducked his head to the right and the clenched paw flew harmlessly past his ear.

His own some time highly respected left shot out in automatic reply and his right fist crashed through afterward. This second blow connected with Cowley's massive chin, and the dock boards groaned under him as he rocked back on his heels.

In an instant the sailor had recovered. He charged with flailing arms, shouting:

"Greavy! Johnson! C'mon! I got him for yuh—the main squeeze himself!"

Bruce landed a short jab that gave to his renegade skipper's outcry a sudden and marked nasal quality. Then his right lashed out again viciously. He felt teeth cracking under its impact and Cowley's coherence was at an end.

The sailing master's impetus had carried him within Vanteen's guard; and with his body straining against the younger man's he transferred his reliance from the weight of his fists to the strength of his arms. Bruce, caught in a rib-cracking clinch, discovered that blows rained on the leathery neck were without effect.

Answering shouts were coming from the end of the dock. The crippled launch had warped in, and men were tumbling out of her. They came hurling along the planks.

Bruce had counted four of them when he found his elbow between his chest and Cowley's head. He bent the head back, and chopped down on the exposed jaw. Cowley went down, rolled over and splashed into the shallow water below.

With a swing started with no attempt at precision, Vanteen sent another following the sailor. Something gleamed in a hand of one of the three who remained on the dock. Bruce caught the flash of it swooping toward him, from behind. He dodged—but too late.

The thing that gleamed was hard. Vanteen knew that, and also that the force behind it was mighty. Then for a space this and all else he knew went glimmering.

When intelligence began to creep back into his numbed brain, Bruce for a little thought himself back aboard the *Quest*. He was conscious of a swinging motion not unlike the yacht's.

It came to him then that he was being carried; one man held him beneath the shoulders and another supported his feet. Opening his eyes briefly, he recognized the road of the dwarf trees along which he had traveled to his Waterloo the night before. And he recognized also the face of Cowley, battered and bloody and grim, moving along at his side.

"What Old Man Harger won't do to this bird!" he heard a voice say.

A second voice made a remark that began confusedly and ended in a tumultuous buzzing. Through the slit between his eyelids Vanteen, the while, was absorbed in a curious study of the distorted face. It grew larger and larger until at last it had transcended the finite and was —nothing.

CHAPTER XI.

UP FROM THE DEEP.

THERE were more voices. It seemed to Bruce Vanteen that many people were talking. Then he suspected there were not so many; and at last, without opening his eyes, he knew there were two.

In the beginning the voices were far away, yet Vanteen could distinguish their qualities if not their words. One was muddled, the other roughly censorious. Even when they were close there was this difference. The first sequence of which he made sense was the critical one's:

"Better lay off the redeye, Jerry. You're all corned up now. If you ain't pretty straight when the big guy gets back you'll hear somethin'."

There was a faint plop and a gurgle.

"Only drink keep 'wake," announced the thicker voice. "Can't stan' late hours. Have one y'u'self."

"Just a swaller. And I'll hang onta th' bottle. You got to watch your step, Jerry. One eye's shuttin' on you already. You'll be gettin' th' gate sure."

"Gate? Me? G'wan! This'll be a life job fer ev'body when we get rid of the gink there. You know it's well's I do, Greavy."

From the other came a prolonged warning, "Sh-h-h-h!" and the voices sank to undertones.

Vanteen felt a mild and impersonal sympathy for the gink who was to be got rid of. He wondered idly who the king might be. Not Woody, certainly. No, Woody was a chap who was in the habit of alluding to other people as ginks. Foley, then? Foley? Good Lord, no! Foley was——

Abruptly his speculations ceased to be disjointed; they established as positive a connection as beads have on a string. Memory came flooding back as it had come on that morning when he had awakened, with just such a headache as he suffered now, on the floor of his stateroom aboard the *Quest*.

The gink of whom these men talked was Bruce Vanteen, and Bruce Vanteen on the eve of being "got rid of" was lying on a hard couch in a room that was strange to him but which unfortunately beyond question formed some part of the Sabre Island properties of Mr. Jerome Harger. And this big guy who frowned on drink—could this be Harger himself? Had some miracle brought the overlord of Sabre back to his lonely and lawless duchy?

Words he seemed to have heard somewhere in the remote past drifted into Vanteen's mind: *"What Old Man Harger won't do to this bird!"*

Just what had that meant? Was Old Man Harger here now, or were his henchmen merely expecting him? One way or the other, it made a difference—a big difference. Which way was it?

One of the voices answered the question as Bruce pondered it.

"Wonder what th' hell ails Harger?" It was the corned-up Jerry, and he spoke with a faint note of indignation. "If anybody else is on the island they can't get off unless they swim better'n I do. Why couldn't he 'a' waited until daylight and hunted 'em out reg'lar?"

Before Vanteen could fight against the groan that this evoked it was out. There was an immediate stirring, and he felt eyes upon him.

"Yuh hear that, Greavy? Is he comin' to?"

"Not him," grunted the censor. "There's a lot that wouldn't never come to if they'd had the wallop he got. I told the boss there wasn't no need worryin' about *him*. He'd stay right where he is this night with nobody to watch. Yes; and I wouldn't want to say he'll ever come out of it. Rube cert'inly give it to him good. I could hear the crack down where I was in the water. *Pow-ee!*"

There was a pause and then the same voice resumed:

"If you want my guess why the old man's so set on the all-night promenayde, Jerry, it's on account o' that gal. He's went and fell for her like a balloon jumper with a busted parachute. Say, she's out on the hunt with him now—and I'd like to bet they ain't any too close to th' crowd."

A drunken guffaw greeted the remark.

"You don't know what I know," boasted the bibulous one. "It wasn't only Harger that fell, believe me. I heard the two of 'em talkin' sweetie-sweet inside a half hour after Johnson and Rube brung the

gal in. She give the boss a frost at first —but damn if he ain't the cuss t' get around wimmin."

"Four times he's been married, ain't it? And he ain't exactly what you'd call the marryin' kind, either. Is it just on the strength of his dough that he gets away with it? What kind of a line did he hand her, Jerry?"

"I didn't get the firs' of it, but it seems like the old man seen her before somewheres. She was a stenog or somethin' in a court where he had to go.

"Well, they talked along a little while like that, and I could see Harger wasn't gettin' nowhere with the gal. She was just in from Iceland.

"But all the time the boss has his eye on her, watchin' for th' time to open up. And when he does he's a knock-out, Greavy.

"Soft and sad is his lay. The way he pipes, you can just sorta see little trustin' birds perchin' on his kind old shoulders and eatin' out of his dear old hands. Even knowin' all I do about him, I could 'a' cried.

"It was like somethin' you'd hear in the theayter—how poor Jerome Harger's always been misunderstood and gettin' a black name account o' unscroop'lush wimmin that he tried to help."

Greavy laughed suddenly.

"Here's the bottle, Jerry. You got a drink due you all right. Some helper the old man is around wimmin. Hey—easy! A gen'leman's drink is what I meant."

THERE was a smacking of lips not difficult to trace to a source, and the rewarded observer continued:

"All the time they was talkin' Harger never took his eyes off of hers. Maybe that was how he charmed her. I dunno. Anyhow, it was a treat to watch her comin' south out o' th' Hudson Bay country.

"She begun by sayin' she *had* got a bad impression of the old man, but maybe because she was simple enough to take people's word for things instead of waitin' to find 'em out for herself. Meetin' him this way, she says, he's different. She can tell he's a perfect gent."

"Yeh?" spoke the sage voice of the censor. "Was she workin' up to a get-away, maybe?"

Another liquid gurgling preceded the reply.

"Not! Say, listen, Greavy. It was a ripe peach that dropped onto the boss' boozum. The gal was cravin' sympathy herself. Seems that her and our pal with the cracked dome was splittin' up. She said she'd learned he wasn't on the square, and she wasn't playin' in his yard any more—never, never.

"Get-away, nothin'. You should 'a' heard her beg the old man not to turn her back to the other gang. All she wants is for Harger to take her back to New Yawk an' pertect her. Git *that,* Greavy?"

Vanteen ceased to listen. He felt himself incapable of formulating a question of his own, and Greavy's began to run behind his eyelids on an endless tape. He could no more doubt they had been talking about Anne than he could understand her acceptance of Harger. Always he had known her as forthright, fearless, unequivocal.

Was the man Jerry romancing, then? If he had been dealing in facts was the Greavy person's surmise correct? Had Anne, finding herself a prisoner, seen an advantage to be gained through playing a part?

A remark of the loquacious Jerry's came back to Bruce: "Harger never took his eyes off of hers." Weren't men of Harger's type sometimes asserted to exercise a mesmeric control over women?

IT was this thought whirling through his splitting head that eventually roused Vanteen from his lethargy. Previously his eyes had opened only once, and then for the smallest fraction of a second—just long enough for him to perceive that the room in which he lay was an unfamiliar one. He had felt himself inanimate, helpless, bereft of the last ounce of his strength, condemned to await and accept his fate without a struggle.

Now, experimentally and with infinite caution, he tried moving an arm. It obeyed the order of his brain, and he realized with a stirring of hope that his captors had not troubled to bind him.

By moving his head no more than an inch, Vanteen brought the gossipers within his range of vision. They were seated at a rough table. A bottle stood between them.

The man nearest the couch was coatless. He was a puffy-faced fellow with hamlike shoulders. A cartridge belt surrounded his wide waist and a holstered pistol rested on his thigh.

The man beyond the table, blinking with bloodshot eyes at the bottle, was similarly armed. For a chap with a broken head, Vanteen decided, the situation wasn't a promising one.

He rested his eyes again and systematically tested one muscle after another. His arms, his hands, his legs—they were all right. Nothing had been cracked up except his head; and the damages there, patently, were confined to the outside. Inwardly the head functioned. It was clearing at an amazing rate.

For all its soreness, the head was beginning to estimate chances. How far away was that dangling, tempting potent gun? Vanteen's eyes opened at the corners to calculate the distance.

It was more than arm's length—much more. He'd have to get up and walk to it. The impulse to do that was one to be smothered down and held under.

The puffy-faced man consulted a watch which he wore, surprisingly, on his wrist.

"After four," he said. "They ought to be back any minute now."

This, the voice told Vanteen, was the man called Greavy. The other reached for the bottle and tilted it.

"This stuff ain't's good as th' last lot," he complained, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand. "Takes a good man t' handle it. Lightnin'.

"Well, all I hope is the old man puts off passin' sentence on th' gink until I've had m' rest. Ain't in fit shape t' stand around for any early-mornin' services."

Greavy's grin uncovered a scattered line of broken and yellowed teeth.

"Know what th' boss' motter is, don't yuh, Jerry? 'Do it now!' He knows what he can get away with and what he can't. Jever know we got the deepest water anywhere along the coast right off Baldy Point? One little hole in it ain't ever goin' to show."

Greavy came forward suddenly in his tilted back chair.

"Listen! Is that them now? You're lucky, Jerry, to be gettin' rid of your patient so quick. Don't worry about any passin' of sentence. It's all over but the splash. I *know!*"

There was an agonized moment of listening for Vanteen. He heard nothing. His eyes closed tight as the confident Greavy turned toward him, and when after the passage of minutes he ventured another peep the man beyond the table was nodding.

Greavy reached over and slapped the drowsy one's face resoundingly.

"Hey, wake up! Y'hear me, Jerry? G'wan, douse some cold water on your bean. Mind what I said. Th' old man won't stand no layin' down on him."

Slap, suggestion and warning failed alike of their purpose. The stuff that wasn't as good as the last lot had proved its mettle. Jerry replied with a mumble which turned into a snort. His head fell farther forward, and his arms folded on the table to receive it. An elbow upset the bottle and it crashed to the floor.

A season of ineffective first aid to the alcoholically submerged ensued. The dormant Jerry stoically withstood the rigors of his companion's ministrations. These, ending with an intensive chiropractic kneading and pounding of the vertebræ, sent the baffled practitioner puffing to his chair.

One who had thus toiled in a friend's behalf might well consider himself deserving of a rest, but Greavy had no more than seated himself when there came another demand on his attention.

The man on the couch had groaned—moved.

Greavy turned and stared.

"Gawd!" he hiccuped. "Imagine that!"

His eyes hadn't deceived him. There was another movement. An arm slipped from the couch and fell limply alongside it with the bloodless hand touching the floor.

Slowly Greavy rose.

"Say, you!" he called tentatively. "Want me to get you anythin'?"

The answer was another groan. Greavy stood irresolute. His eyes traveled to his sleeping partner and back to the one he had been set to ward. There was further stirring which demanded investigation. Greavy walked to the couch and leaned over it.

"Cancha talk?" he asked plaintively.

He bent over farther, then stood up very straight and backed away. The impossible had happened, and Mr. Greavy had imbibed sufficiently of the puissant "new lot" so that it took him a moment to comprehend.

IT was the hand on the floor that had done the trick. Now it held the pistol that a few seconds since had reposed in the Greavy holster, and the amazing invalid was sitting up. His face was white, but his eyes and even his hand were steady.

"Yes, I can talk," he said softly. "And the first thing I want to say is that any little noise out of you is going to be followed directly by a bigger one. And that, watchman of the night, will be the last noise you'll ever hear!"

Greavy, not yet out of his daze, nodded stupidly.

"Nothing like a frank understanding," said Vanteen. "So let me impress upon you also that a failure to obey orders will be just as unhealthy as an attempt to attract attention. Is that clear?

"Very well, I'll try you out. First I want you to climb out of that cartridge belt. That's the ticket, Greavy. Now see if you can't make it a bit smaller. There you are—that's about right."

With his one free hand Bruce awkwardly fastened the belt about his own waist. Then he walked around the table and possessed himself of the second pistol.

Jerry slept blissfully on; nor did he stir when Greavy, at Vanteen's direction, removed his belt. This belt Bruce slung over his shoulder after the fashion of a bandolier.

"Now, Greavy," said he, "I'm going to lift the ban of silence. I'm going to ask an occasional question, and I want the answers in the gentlest possible voice. Mr. Harger takes quite an interest in paintings, doesn't he?"

"Seems to."

"He has quite a number about?"

"A few."

"Ever pay any attention to 'em yourself?"

"Not much."

"That's fine. I admire both truth and terseness, Greavy. Perhaps you've noticed, though, a picture of an old gentleman in out-of-date clothes pleasantly engaged in the counting of money?"

"Yeh."

"It's in the house here?"

"Yeh."

"Then I'm going to ask you to lead me to it—at once. I think we can safely leave your chum in the custody of my noble ally, Mr. Barleycorn. Eh? Come, come, man! Don't stand there making faces at me. Step out lively!"

Thus admonished, the captive Greavy moved his rooted feet. Vanteen followed him down a flight of dark stairs and into a yet darker room opening off a corridor at their foot.

"Is this the Don's present counting room?" he queried. "Then be good enough to strike a match, Greavy. No, we'll dispense with electric lights. I don't want to signal our whereabouts over the whole island."

In the half minute before the match obediently lighted by Greavy fell to the floor, Vanteen had located and moved to a shadow box which held what he recognized at a single triumphant glance as the successively bartered and stolen treasure of the improvident Earls of Lumford.

"I begin to think of you more kindly,

Greavy," he said. "Do you happen to have a knife on your person? Good! I'm glad of that. If you'll pass over the matches, I'll undertake to supply proper illumination while you do a little job for me. It's a very pretty frame, I know, but all I care for just now is the canvas. Cut just as close to the edge as is humanly possible, won't you?"

When four matches had flickered out, one after another, Holbein the Younger's Don o' Doubloons once more was possessed by the rightful and only heir of John B. Vanteen, of New York, Newport, and the International Gas Pump Corporation.

"I don't want to distress you, Greavy, by letting you think you've been accessory to a crime," said Bruce, tucking the precious little roll of canvas under his arm. "As a matter of fact, this painting is mine.

"Indeed, I have other property hereabouts, but that I'm afraid I'll be forced to reclaim in kind. If you'll lead me to the pantry I'll point out a few things I can use."

IN the Harger storeroom Vanteen made a swift selection. Within five minutes after the recapture of the valued Don, he drove forth into the dawn-glow at pistol muzzle a Greavy who was festooned with smoked meats and burdened with a box piled high with comestibles chosen for their concentrated nutritive content.

"Now, slave," he announced, "I want you to lead me by the least-traveled route to the home of the last lord of the manor —to old Finucane's shack, that is to say. And bear this well in mind: I'm an extremely shy person. I don't want to meet any one on the way. If I do, and there's any trouble, you're going to be the very first one to get it in the neck. Understand?"

Not only did the groaning Greavy prove that he understood, but also that he knew trails across the island which were not of the Harger highway system. In their hour of travel Vanteen, though he once heard unfamiliar voices hailing one another to the south, saw none of the enemy.

Rounding at last a turn in a ravine, Bruce's eyes were gladdened by a glimpse of the hut in which he had left his harassed and hungry crew; and he was infinitely relieved to distinguish on guard before it a figure that could be only Tom Woody's. He saw Woody run to the window, and when he arrived at the shack Miss Hubbard and Eddeson also had come forth.

"Oh, you're hurt!" cried the drawn dowager. "Mr. Vanteen, what has happened to you?"

"It's been a hard night," grinned Vanteen, "but hardly a bad one. I've got grub, and a Man Friday, and a couple of extra guns—not to mention something still more important.

"Explanations of my new wealth will have to wait, though. Right now we'd better clear out of here. I've got a place in mind where we can be all safe and comfy as long as the food lasts—and if we hurry we can get to it in time for breakfast. Fall in!"

Prodding his porter prize before him Vanteen marched into the north over a half-hidden trail which gave onto a beach on which the surf splashed lazily. Helen Hubbard came to his side at the trail's end, where he had signaled Greavy he might rest.

"Did you learn anything of Anne?" she demanded breathlessly. "Or Mr. Foley?"

The light of victory died suddenly in Bruce's eyes. In his kaleidoscopic turning of tables and his schemings with a mind still muddled by shock, he had momentarily forgotten his losses.

"Jim," he said, "well, poor Jim—oh, not now, Miss Hubbard, please. I've had a whack on the head. I—I can't think straight yet. Later I'll——"

There was something in the dowager's eyes he wanted to escape, and his own sought the sea. He rubbed them, clutched spasmodically at a silken arm.

"Helen!" he shouted. "Am I seeing things?"

Such a Neptune as artist never had visioned was rising from the water—struggling manfully up the shelving beach.

It was a Neptune without beard or trident, a Neptune of most extravagant girth, wearing a gayly canted eye shade and a streaky suit of overalls which lacked one shoulder strap.

Specifically, it was James Francis Foley in all the flesh—Mr. Foley for the first time in history without one suspicion of ash upon his vest!

CHAPTER XII.

A FLAG OF TRUCE.

MR. JAMES FRANCIS FOLEY was another, obviously, who suspected himself of "seeing things." Still mechanically wringing away at his water-soaked overalls, he stared at the figure stumbling toward him over the slippery rocks.

"Is it you, Bruce?" he called. "Am I dreaming?"

"One of us is," said Vanteen, reaching out a trembling hand. "You look alive—seem to have substance. If there was ever a miracle, this is one. Why, you—you must have been in the water more than forty-eight hours!"

"If you said forty-eight years I'd believe you. I feel that way."

"After this, *I'd* believe anything," asserted Bruce. "I've seen Cowley—got to tell you about that. He fetched up on a reef after you'd been carried overboard, and made some sort of deal with——"

Foley's salt-crusted eyelids lifted.

"What's this? *Carried* overboard, was I?"

"Cowley told me about it. A sea got you while the *Quest* was being pushed onto——"

"The sea that got me was one I dived into," interrupted Mr. Foley, staring harder. "As for the yacht hitting a reef, that's news to me. It's not been a half hour since I had a look at her, and she was all right then."

"Are you telling me she wasn't wrecked?" cried Vanteen.

"Not so badly that she can't be put shipshape by a few hours' work. I'm not saying the saloon looked pretty when they'd finished their wild party, but there didn't seem to be any great harm done."

"Then Cowley lied—all the way through!"

"Whatever he's told you wouldn't have been anywhere near the truth. He's a bad lot, Bruce, a murdering bad lot. Ye'll not believe——"

He broke off, for now the others of the *Quest's* company had found their way down the beach and surrounded him with a clamor of demands for news of himself and of the yacht. Eddeson had herded Greavy along before him and at sight of the captive stranger and of the pistol in the hand of the embattled copy reader James Francis Foley burst into a bellow of astonishment.

"What have we here?"

Vanteen shook his cobwebby head and straightened.

"A reminder," said he, "that this is hardly the proper place to stop and exchange experiences—unless we're anxious for more of 'em right away. We've got a mile of hard going ahead of us that must be covered before we can breathe freely, let alone talk. Push on with the prisoner, Eddie—straight along the shore."

Sometimes scouting far ahead, again falling well to the rear or lost altogether to view as he reconnoitered the broken terrain flanking the beach, Vanteen shepherded his pirate flock to Sabre's western tip and scrambled up the hill facing the invisible Maine coast.

"Here we'll have a chance to gather our wits, at least," he pointed out. "A regiment couldn't budge us until we were ready to move. You may lay down your burden now, Greavy, and rest.

"Keep an eye on him, Eddie, please. And if you'll mount guard at the top of the trail we've just negotiated, Woody, Jim and I'll swap yarns."

Vanteen would have yielded priority to Foley, but that obstinate gentleman shook his head.

"You first, Bruce, my boy," he insisted. "And I'll top the story or buy the cigars."

Briefly then, and with a willful avoiding of high light and shadow that stirred his audience more than once to indignant protest, Vanteen gave an account of his

adventures since recognizing Cowley on the Sabre Island dock. Reaching the point where tables had turned, he grinned cheerfully at Greavy.

"If I'm wrong," he invited, "you're welcome to correct me."

The man scowled and averted his eyes.

"You ain't off the island yet," he muttered. "The next trick you pull'll have to be a better one."

James Francis Foley grunted.

"D'ye mean to say, Bruce, that you made yourself master of Harger's house and then forgot what you'd come to get? That you were satisfied to retreat with a mere box of groceries? Couldn't you have looked about, and maybe spied out——"

Vanteen's moment of triumph had been purposefully postponed. On coming into view of Finucane's shanty he had slipped the roll of ancient canvas under his coat, and he had contrived to keep it hidden since. Now, with a sudden movement that had the effect of bringing Foley's tirade to a mid-sentence termination, he drew it forth.

"Were you thinking of—this?"

There was a chorus of gasps as Bruce spread out the canvas. The rays of the lifting sun struck fire in a mound of Samaritan gold that had survived centuries intact and threw into startlingly vivid relief the face that a master's brush had immortalized.

"Don o' Doubloons!" cried Eddeson, his eyes bulging.

"Old Sebastiano Cosano himself," said Vanteen.

"Why the picture is—is actually *alive!*" burbled Helen Hubbard.

ONLY Mr. Foley was unimpressed by the artistic excellence of the retrieved Don.

"I expected the painting'd be as big as the side of a barn," said he. "Don't see that a few square feet of brush work could be worth much money, no matter how old. But no matter, Bruce. This is what you wanted, and you got it."

He settled himself comfortably on a rock overlooking the narrow and precipitous path up which the party had struggled and begged from Woody two essential and reluctantly surrendered components which he proceeded to assemble into the shape of a cigarette.

"The story I have to tell," he began, as a preliminary fleck of ash rolled down the easy incline of his damp waistcoat, "doesn't hold a candle to Vanteen's. Even before I start I'll admit that the smokes are on me. As soon as the first cigar store heaves into sight, Tom, I'll thank ye to call my attention to it.

"Now, first, maybe, it would be well to reveal why I wouldn't come ashore from the *Quest*. It's true I wanted to clean up the engines, but more than that I wanted to keep an eye on Cowley. I didn't trust him, and before the lot of you were ashore I'd made sure he was the crook I thought him.

"If I had it to do over again, I think I'd use a little more diplomacy. But I went after him rough—and rough he came back.

"To shorten the story, he pulled a gun on me and chased me down into the engine room. I was waiting for him with a spanner when he came below; subsequent proceedings I'll pass with the observation that a pistol makes the better weapon.

"Cowley knows how to shoot. The spanner went flying from me hand and the pistol came down upon me head, and the next thing the man had me corded up like a roast of beef. For hours he kept me so. I heard him shouting to some one on shore, and a while after that he came down and started the engines.

"How he got the anchor up I can't tell ye. But he did; and playing engineer and deck hand and pilot all at the same time he put off to sea with the yacht.

"The weather was as vile as when we came to Truth Island, but Cowley knew there was nothing for him to do but clear out. I'd promised him, Bruce, ye see, to tell you what I knew about him."

And here Foley diverged to give the details of his prior knowledge of the *Quest's* skipper dating back to Federal court days.

"We must have been an hour under way," he resumed, "with me flat on me back there in the engine room. Then we came into smoother water, and by and by I heard Cowley letting go an anchor again. All by himself he got the gig off her davits and rowed ashore, but it wasn't long before he was back with company.

"There was high jinks in the main saloon, and the voices were so high that I could hear most of what was said. They talked of things to open my ears—and your eyes, Bruce.

"A sweet lad was your sailing master, and no mistake. He'd been working against ye from the minute he knew of your plan to visit Sabre Island. With Harger he'd had some dealings before, it seems; and he saw more money to be made for himself out of Harger than out of you.

"You intended to head up for Sabre from New London, didn't ye? Of course. You don't need to tell me. I heard all that with the liquor putting volume to their voices.

COWLEY had got word to Harger, and the orders had come back to keep you away for a while at least. For Harger did have business in the West and he wanted to get it over with.

"You should have heard Cowley boasting how he worked the New London trick. He it was that brought the hard stuff aboard the *Quest* there and fed it to the crew. It was nothing but straight grain alcohol somewhere around a hundred and ninety proof and colored up with burned sugar.

"Precious few drinks of that kind of grog will turn the mildest man into a raving maniac. But you know that already, Bruce. You saw its effect on your assassinated salts, and when Cowley proposed firing them you didn't interfere. There wasn't one of 'em able to speak a word that'd tip you off, or give you a hint as to the way affairs were shaping.

"Then your enterprising skipper suggested that New York'd be a better place to pick up a new crew, didn't he? That got you still farther away from Sabre Island, and Cowley was sure he could pile one delay on another until he heard that Harger was back on his island and ready for ye.

"But you fooled him by coming to the *Star* office and signing on the long wait. Before we came up under Truth Island with the yacht, it seems, Cowley managed to get to the wireless and flash a warning ahead—for there's a private radio station on Sabre.

"The news went on to Harger and he came home in a hurry. He's here on the island now."

"I know it," nodded Bruce. "And I knew that Cowley had sold out to him, of course. But I never dreamed that his story about you going overboard and the *Quest* piling up wasn't true. Things were happening so fast and my head was so muddled that I didn't have a chance to think matters out, much less act. And Anne——"

He groaned and hesitated. "I'll tell you about Anne later. Finish your yarn, Jim. How did you get free of them? And when?"

JAMES FRANCIS FOLEY lit his cigarette, which had burned out while still possessed of a precious inch of solace.

"Maybe it was five or six hours ago that I slipped overboard," he said. "I can't be sure of the time, for a man tied up like I was couldn't keep his watch wound even if he didn't have more important things to think about. Mine had run down before Cowley decided to let me get up and stretch my legs.

"He asked me if I could swim, and on general principles I told him I couldn't. What he had in mind I didn't stop to think, but I was all through being frank and open with him. This was some time during the evening of the first day over here on Sabre, and the cold meal Cowley shook up was breakfast for me.

"'You behave yourself and lie low,' said he, 'and maybe you won't come off so badly. But cut up a fuss, and you'll make a banquet for the fishes. See?'

"I told him I'd be the last one in the world to look for any trouble from, and I guess I made him believe it. For a fact, it did look as if the best thing I could do would be to bide my time and keep my ears open.

"But I didn't hear much. There were more booze parties aft, but I was locked in the fo'c's'le most of the time.

"It wasn't until last night that I could be fairly sure I was alone on the boat. After the gig had pulled away, you see, I hadn't heard a sound aboard.

"I called out a few times, intending to ask for water if anybody came. But there was never an answer, and presently I took a chance on busting through the hatch. With my shoulders against it, it didn't hold long.

"I went aft to the main saloon, thinking I might break out those rifles and hold the ship with 'em. The place was in a frightful mess, with broken glasses and empty bottles and cigar butts strewed over the floor and a couple of the swivel chairs busted; but that, as I've said, is something that will be quickly put to rights by a cleaner and a carpenter.

"For the life of me I couldn't find the spring that releases the panel with the armrack behind it; and while I was hunting for it I heard somebody rowing out from shore. That meant it was time to go. I was up on deck in a jiffy and slipped overboard on the offshore side of the yacht, not taking time to discard so much as me eye shade.

"I swam out to sea a way, thinking that was the safest direction to take, and then swung and began paralleling the beach. Behind me I could hear 'em yelling aboard the *Quest,* and I knew that James Francis Foley was missed. In a little while a terrific shooting starts up, and I wondered whether they'd got to fighting among themselves or were firing at shadows."

Vanteen grinned.

"Neither, probably," said he. "That must have been when the rest of us walked into the trap at the house. And the crowd making headquarters on the yacht cut across to the dock and scared Barrett off."

"Maybe so, Bruce. At any rate, you may be sure I was at no pains to investigate. I kept on going, and didn't head in for shore until I'd swum at least a couple of miles along the beach.

"Where I landed was on that point just below where we met. There were boulders to give me shelter, and it looked to be a good place to stay until daylight; although certainly it was moist with seas splashing in over me every now and then.

"Never in me long and dissolute night-working life have I known daylight to be so slow in arriving. But it had to come; and when it did I took one last look at the *Quest* way down below and started in around the west side of the point. There wasn't a fair foothold among the rocks, but a couple of hundred yards of swimming was all I had to do before my toes touched bottom and I waded into your arms."

Woody momentarily abandoned his watch over the trail to grin back over his shoulder.

"Never mind the cigars, James," he said. *"I'll* buy 'em. Nothing's happened to me, aside from being shot at a few times. If it'll just keep on that way, it'd be a pleasure to buy and buy and buy.

"But what did you expect to do ashore? Hide in the grass and live on beach berries?"

"Not that!" snorted Mr. Foley. "I had a plan, I'll tell ye. Harger I've known. It was my thought to meet him face to face and threaten him with the thunder of an outraged public press if he didn't lend a hand in recapturing the *Quest.*

"I'd have held my knowledge of his double-dealing with Cowley and the like for a trump card, ye see. To talk to Cowley in such terms would have been useless. But Harger not only has much to lose, but he knows full well what the newspapers can do to him."

Vanteen, who had been making a swift circuit of the hilltop, returned smiling.

"It's just as I figured it," he announced. "The only way they can come at us is from the front. The cliffs behind are so steep that a monkey couldn't climb 'em.

"All we've got to do is amuse ourselves until Barrett has had time to get busy. He knows what we're up against, and we can be sure he'll find a way of communicating with the mainland. Whether there's law on Sabre Island now or not, there damn soon will be!"

Bruce spoke with confidence, and yet they were troubled thoughts that were masked by his words and his smile. So far as their strategic position was concerned, their arms and their ammunition, his party could laugh at assaults against their rocky stronghold. But what shape were they in for a siege?

Food they had—enough, at a pinch, for days. But what about water? That was something he'd forgotten. On the hill there was no water; probably not anywhere at this end of the island. Presently the sun would be high, broiling them all, and there would be no escape from it. Heat would generate thirst—and then what?

Again, what reliance could be placed in Barrett? Taking his willingness to help for granted, what could the Southern youth actually do?

If the weather continued fair, the yawl might take him in to the coast—but would he have the gas to take him there, the nerve to make the attempt? Might he not wait on Truth Island, trusting that the rest would find their way back by themselves, or hoping for the *Quest* to turn up? Wouldn't good judgment, in any circumstances, dictate that he wait for the yacht?

A low hail from Woody interrupted Vanteen's unhappy reflections.

"Oh, Bruce! C'm'ere!"

THE ex-rewrite man was crouching behind the boulder on which a moment before he had been sitting. Vanteen, following the line of a pointing finger, saw two roughly dressed men standing on the shore not more than a hundred and fifty yards to the east.

Before he could duck from sight, Bruce had been observed. He knew it. The men below were pointing, too. Others appeared behind them, and a confusion of excited voices arose.

"There they are! On the hill!"

One of the rifles was raised. A bullet came whistling up the trail and glanced off the very boulder which Woody had converted hurriedly into a breastwork. These were people who meant business; and of that they offered further proof immediately by starting at a run across the sandy stretch at the hill's foot.

There were seven in the party. An eighth man dropped behind a rock and opened up with a rifle barrage over the heads of his charging companions.

Vanteen permitted them to come within easy pistol range before he fired. He aimed wide, with a purpose of discouragement rather than of damage, and had the satisfaction of seeing the stormers falter, scatter and take shelter as his bullets chipped the rocks about them.

Beside him knelt Woody, his jaws squared, his eyes sparking behind their horn-rimmed spectacles.

"I'll sit tight while you reload, Bruce," he said. "But they'd better not start up again until you do—for *I* won't be so kind to 'em!"

Over his shoulder Vanteen caught a glimpse of Eddeson's excited face.

"Go back, Eddie!" he commanded curtly. "Leave this end of the game to Tom and me. Watch your man! Where is he—ah, look out!"

Greavy, sobered by fresh air and heavy hauling, had taken advantage of the brief delinquency of his guardian and was making a run for freedom.

"Stop, you!" cried Bruce, and sent a warning bullet whizzing past the man's ear. "If you take another jump down the hill, by Cæsar you'll *roll* down and stay there!"

Apparently Greavy had learned to respect Vanteen as a man of his word. Those below had recognized him and were shouting at him to continue his flight, but he stopped dead in his tracks. At another command from Bruce, reënforced by a second bullet, he turned and clambered back calling:

"Don't shoot! Can't you see I'm comin' as quick as I can?"

The recapture of Greavy, it seemed, called a truce in the bloodless battle. Although they were careful now not to expose themselves, Vanteen was aware that the men who had started so confidently to take the height were drawing off; and they took themselves not only out of range but, so far as he could judge, out of the vicinity.

Two hours had passed before there came another call from Woody. Bruce, who had been seeking counsel of the unalarmed and judicial Mr. Foley, hurried to the outpost rock. Now two men were crossing the sand plain.

Neither appeared to be armed, and in further evidence of their pacific intentions one held aloft a handkerchief which in some parts at least was white.

"What do you s'pose they're up to?" asked Woody. "A laundry could make that thing into a flag of truce."

"Must be what it's intended to be," said Vanteen. He raised his voice and shouted: "Hullo! What do you want?"

The two had halted a dozen rods or more from the foot of the hill. An answering shout came faintly to Vanteen:

"Wanta talk. Come down."

Bruce hesitated. Foley, at his side, shook his head.

"Don't do it," he advised. "Probably a trap."

But Vanteen's mind had clicked to a decision.

"Then they're in a sort of one, too," he said. "Keep 'em covered, and if there's any funny business—use your judgment. I'm going!"

CHAPTER XIII.

THE WAY OF WOMAN.

THE two who waited in the scorching sand were not persons, Vanteen decided as he approached them, whom he would have been pleased to meet unexpectedly on a dark night in a lonely way. But with the sun blazing overhead and armed assistance at his call, and the whole situation moreover as dubious as it was, he strode to the parley with a readiness not bulwarked in the smallest measure by bravado.

If there were terms to be made, then it was vastly better that overtures toward them should come from the other side; and on the trip down the hillside he resolved to take the upper hand with these enemy emissaries. Addressing them, he spoke brusquely:

"I suppose you fellows realize you've stored up trouble for yourselves with your promiscuous shooting?"

The man who had borne the soiled flag of truce put forward a truculent jaw.

"I s'pose that means we showed we wasn't good shots, hey? Well, we ain't finished showin' our stuff, maybe."

"If you haven't," said Vanteen pointedly, "why do you come? We're within our rights in defending ourselves, you know, but if the law were to step in you wouldn't have a leg to stand on. I guess you know that, though."

"We know what our rights is, mister," grunted the second envoy, a hulking fellow with a deep and jagged scar showing through the stubble on his cheek. "This island's private property and posted against trespass. Mr. Harger is the owner and we take orders from him."

"Then," said Bruce calmly, "I'd suggest you bring the gentleman here. I'm sure he'll recognize me, and will be more than willing to apologize for the treatment that my friends and I have had. The facts in the case are that our yacht——"

"We ain't here to talk about no yachts," said the scarred one, "and this ain't Mr. Harger's business we come on, either—not this time."

Vanteen lifted his eyebrows.

"What, then?"

"You've got a friend of ours up on the hill, ain't you?"

"There's a man up there who isn't a member of our party—but who seems to *belong* to it just now."

"Greavy!"

"I believe that's the man's name. What about him?"

"We want him."

"So do I. He's a useful sort of person. I found him a great help earlier today. Had a lot of carting to do, you see.

"In the future I expect to find him still more valuable. That is to say, I thought I might be able to trade him off in some kind of——"

The long-jawed bearer of the truce flag spat.

"Now you're talkin' so's I can understand you," he said with gusto. "A trade is what we're willing to make."

"I'll listen. What's your proposition?"

Vanteen's heart gave a bound as the man replied:

"Well, you ain't got all the folks you come ashore with, have yuh? We got a lady visitin' up to the house that maybe you'd like to have back with you.

"What our proposition is don't take many words to get out. You give up Greavy, and we give up the gal. That's the whole of it.

"We ain't askin' you to come down off of the hill. Whether you stay there or whether you don't, that's Mr. Harger's affair. But Greavy's ours. He's our pal, see?"

Bruce strove to conceal his sudden exaltation. It took him a moment to steady himself.

"Do I understand that Harger has consented to such an exchange?" he asked quietly.

"It wasn't a question o' consentin', if you want the truth of it," replied the man with the scar. "It's Mr. Harger that pays us; but Greavy's our real boss, just the same. We just talked things over when we see where Greavy was, an' told Mr. Harger then what we decided on among us.

"He's took a shine to the gal, all right, and what we said didn't sound good to him. But he could see we was bound to have our way—and that's all there was to it. Harger says 'yes.' He's gotta. Of course, if you ain't partic'lar what happens to th' lady, why then maybe we been wastin' our thinkin' and our time."

VANTEEN in the next few seconds did a deal of calculating. When he spoke it was to demand, still with exterior calm:

"How am I to know you'll keep your end of the bargain? How and when do you propose the exchange shall take place?"

"We'll bring her right here where we're standin'. That'll be in less than an hour, if you say. We can come around in the boat and save time."

It was the flag-of-truce man who spoke, and his scarred companion added earnestly:

"On the square, mister, we ain't strong for havin' the gal in the house. We don't pick no fight with wimmin and we ain't lookin' for no harm to come to 'em—and, well, you say you know the boss."

Bruce, made thoroughly apprehensive by this speech, eyed the scarred one shrewdly.

"I'm going to take a chance on you," he announced after a moment, during which it occurred to him not only that Greavy was more of an embarrassment than a prize in his present estate but also that a show of confidence in the two envoys would work out advantageously. "I'm sure that you're as anxious to protect Miss Durant as I am. So I'll put you on honor to live up to your promise. Greavy can go with you now."

Vanteen started away and then, struck by an afterthought, retraced his steps.

"What I've said goes, but I'd like to find out just how this situation stands," he suggested. "What does Harger plan to do?"

The long-jawed man shrugged.

"That ain't our business, see?"

"Don't you think it would be the proper course to send for the authorities—some one to represent the law?"

"We ain't paid to think."

"Didn't Harger send some message by you?"

"Nary word."

"Do I understand we're free to leave Sabre Island if we choose to."

The man grinned crookedly.

"Might try—an' see."

"But we can't very well try without

something to carry us. You've seen a yacht called the *Quest,* I imagine. I believe she's anchored off the north side of the island, somewhere near Harger's house."

"Mebbe I seen her. What about her?"

"I own her."

"Couldn't prove it by me."

"Well, I do—and there's proof aboard her that I do. If some one would bring her down here I'd be willing to pay well for the trouble. Now listen, my friend. Would you like to earn a thousand dollars—in cash?"

The two looked at each other. Neither replied.

Vanteen's tone became yet more conciliatory.

"Of course, that was a question addressed to both of you. And you can take it that I meant a thousand dollars apiece."

Bruce waited expectantly, and still there was no answer.

"Tell me, then," he urged, "what you think the job ought to be worth. I'm not disposed to be cheap. And when I leave you can take my word for it that I'll never set foot on Sabre Island again; so you see you'd be doing well by Harger as well as by yourselves."

The two exchanged glances again.

"Slick, ain't he?" said one, and the other laughed.

"Sure is, Charley. But he might 'a' been slicker if he hadn't told us how wrong we was in a while ago. Now he wants to hire us to let him go in an' complain against us. How long'd we have the money?"

"Me, I ain't goin' to have it even a second. Don't want to look at it. I'm stickin' to Mr. Harger."

"So'm I, Charley. You bet. Then if we're in trouble we know who to look to. Ain't as if we hadn't never been before. We're all right with th' boss as long as we stand by, hey?"

VANTEEN, studying the two faces, perceived instantly that further argument would be futile. He reverted to the earlier proposition.

"Suit yourselves," he said. "I'll get the yacht in some other way soon enough and save money. You still want Greavy, though, I presume?"

"We do," nodded the man with the scarred cheek, and "Charley" chimed in with:

"And you get the gal. That you can stand by just like we're standin' by Mr. Harger. It's one thing we won't take his orders on, once we've give our word."

"Very well, then," said Bruce, turning away. "Your friend will be with you in two minutes."

When he had freed Greavy and had watched him out of sight along the shore, Vanteen fell to pacing the hilltop while James Francis Foley indulged in a distant tête-à-tête with Miss Hubbard and Eddeson sat with Woody on the rock commanding the approach to the stronghold.

The minutes dragged and Bruce as he walked alone began to feel as one does who has misplayed his ace in a game for staggering stakes. An ace this man Greavy had been, and he had suffered him to walk away out of captivity on no more than the word of men who, by their looks, had known the insides of prisons in their day—on that, and on a wisp of a hope.

WHEN an hour had passed, Vanteen was in a desperate mood. He'd give them a few minutes more to make good, he resolved; and then, if the promise were not kept, he'd march to Harger's house with his pistol in his hand or die on the way.

A shout from Eddeson ended his somber patrol.

"Boat coming along the north shore, Bruce!"

Stumbling in his haste, Vanteen made for a high rock. The boat that Eddeson had seen was still the better part of a mile away. She looked to be the same craft that had lain at the Sabre Island dock. She was coming under power, and she carried two passengers.

Vanteen's first thought was that Anne for some reason of her own was wearing a man's coat over her light, trim jacket;

for both figures in the boat were bulky. Later he descried with a sinking heart that both passengers were indeed men. When they had landed and came toward the hill he recognized them as the two who had come under the flag of truce.

Bruce, with a word to Woody and Eddeson, fairly ran forward to meet them.

"Where's Miss Durant?" he demanded. "What sort of game is this?"

"It ain't a game," protested the man with the scar. "We done our best, mister."

"That isn't enough. The agreement was definite. I did all you asked—more."

"Easy, now. There ain't no use gettin' excited. We didn't figger on any trouble at the other end except from Mr. Harger —and *that* we said we'd take care of."

"Miss Durant is still in the house?"

"Yep. And just to show you that we're on the square we've brung you a letter from her. Know her writin', do yuh? Is this it?"

Bruce glanced at the grimy envelope which the man Charley offered him, and perceived that it bore in the upper right-hand corner the name of Jerome Harger and a New York business address on lower Broadway.

"It's Miss Durant's handwriting," he admitted, and with fingers that trembled he brought out the letter. "And so is this."

The two waited for a little while, Vanteen, his face first clouding with bewilderment and at last darkening with despair, read the message they had brought.

"Any answer?" asked the scarred-cheeked man.

"No," said Vanteen dully. "No answer for you to take."

On his way up the hill Bruce stopped again to read, telling himself that his eyes must have lied to him. But the writing he knew could not be a forgery, and the words he had seen below were still there to stab at him:

MY DEAR MR. VANTEEN: I want to assure you that I was not a party to the arrangement I understand you entered into in regard to myself, and also that I am under no duress. Mr. Harger has been pleased to be kind to me—and I prefer to stay where I am. *Doubtless you will understand why.* ANNE DURANT.

The underscored sentence was singing crazily in Vanteen's brain as he climbed. Doubtless he would understand why, doubtless he would understand why! But *why?* Unless it were a sentence formed in a subject mind—why?

Foley was facing him, talking. Where was Anne Durant? When was she coming?

"She isn't coming," said Bruce.

A hand reached for the note. Vanteen snatched it back and tore it into tiny squares. His voice became a sob. His broken head was acting up again. He felt very weak, and dizzy.

"She says—says she doesn't *want* to come!"

Miss Hubbard caught that. Vanteen could hear her words though she whispered them:

"Oh, the poor thing! She must have taken it more to heart than I guessed. Lana Marshall, you know——"

Abruptly Vanteen turned his back on them all. He wanted to be alone to think. He *had* had one bad knock that day, after all—and now another. At the western end of the little plateau he stood staring out toward the coastline that only the most powerful of glasses could raise.

Thinking, he found, was beyond him. He couldn't concentrate. A speck that seemed just above the horizon danced before his eyes.

The speck grew larger, but not so rapidly as Cowley's face had grown on that jolting journey from the dock. The buzzing became louder. He wondered if he were going to faint again—fought desperately against giving way.

And then, suddenly, he knew what the speck was and his mind was clear.

"Oh, people!" he called. "Look! An airplane!"

In a minute they were clustered about him, chattering, all else forgotten.

"Is it coming this way?"

"Not so you could notice it. See it's moving to the south!"

"You're wrong, Tom. It's getting bigger."

"Think he'll pass close enough for us to signal him?"

"Maybe he's heading for Sabre—going to light here!"

"Bootlegger, perhaps. They use planes a great deal, you know."

Alone among them Vanteen was silent. He watched the speck grow into a shape, followed its lazy circlings over the island, saw it settling gracefully onto the water at its eastern end.

Foley's broad hand thumped his back.

"Bruce, me boy, we're saved!"

"Or—*lost!*" said Vanteen.

CHAPTER XIV.

SURRENDER.

AFTER the manner of knights of the road, the pirates of the *Quest* sat about a tiny fire on their hilltop that evening of the coming of the seaplane and took dinner direct from the can.

It was an unwontedly silent meal, perhaps because all knew that the last drops of rain water from the little pool discovered by Eddeson were being used to wash it down—or by reason of a contretemps which had shadowed its beginning.

Vanteen, heavy of heart and aching of head, had set himself to rally the spirits of his crew; had contrived a pleasantry which, though just a bit labored, had been innocent of barb or sting. This he had addressed to Miss Hubbard, who of them all seemed most cast down. And he had received from Miss Hubbard that cut direct which, as a certain widely distributed treatise on the amenities points out, may be dealt as effectively through the ear as through the eye.

There was absolute quiet at the moment, but the dowager made no acknowledgment of having heard. For an instant she gazed icily at some object directly over Vanteen's head and to others invisible. Then, turning to James Francis Foley, at her right, she spoke serenely of the sky colorings in the west and the prospect for a continued clemency.

So it happened that conversation languished, and that subsequent speculation concerning the mysterious plane ran a short course.

In expectation of a surprise attack during the night, Vanteen proposed a doubling of the guard at the trail head. He and Woody stood the last watch. At its end, when the sun had toiled clear of the sea and nothing had occurred, he found himself infinitely more uneasy than he would have been had another attempt been made to storm the hill. A stand-up fight was one thing; to be left to roast and thirst quite another.

Was the haven which he had sought to become a prison? Hadn't he played still farther into Harger's ruthless hands by occupying the hill? Certainly Harger's men could not come up—but wasn't it just as true that he and the picnic pirates he had led into this scrape couldn't get down?

Putting the question to a test, Vanteen showed himself at the brow. Promptly a rifle cracked below, and he jumped back to cover.

What a mess! Here were all his forebodings justified. The only question left now was the one of how far Harger would care to carry on the cruel game; and Harger he knew to be a man of fanatic, almost insane hatreds.

His hired gunmen at least had some elements of humanity. That had been proved by their loyalty to Greavy, by the innate punctilio shown in their return with that inexplicable note of Anne Durant's. But Harger's course, at least here in this remote and lawless retreat, was no more to be calculated than that of some jungle beast. The man's policy of keeping to the background in itself was ominous. It argued a preconceived and surely unpleasant plan of dealing with the trespassers on Sabre Island.

STANDING watch while the rest sat at their unappetizing breakfast, Vanteen heard again the sonorous roll of the seaplane engine. Then the ship appeared above the trees to the east, spiraled to an

altitude of a few hundred feet and made a gull-like swoop westward.

Over the hill the plane passed. It circled, came lower and passed again; and now something that seemed no bigger than a baseball was falling out of the fuselage. Bruce followed its descent with fascinated eyes, his mind flashing back with swift horror to those nights when the Germans had bombed the hangars. Could Harger in his madness——

The missile from the air dropped almost at Vanteen's feet and burst. Instinctively he threw up an arm to protect his face.

There was no detonation. The seaplane bomb hadn't been of the war variety, but a cloth bag filled with sand and gravel. To it was attached a stout Manila envelope. Bruce ripped it open and drew out a typewritten sheet. The others were crowding around him, pale of face, and he read the message aloud.

"To Whom It Does Concern: You have come without my permission on property posted against trespass. You continue to occupy a portion of that property and have used firearms against my keepers in maintaining illegal possession of it.

"Unless you disarm and offer an account of yourselves within thirty minutes I shall take drastic action. I will ask my employees to expose themselves no further in discharge of their duties, but will have riflemen shoot from the air above you.

"I think you will understand that in directing such measures I shall be thoroughly within my rights.

"At the end of the time indicated I shall find means of receiving your decision.

"J. Harger."

James Francis Foley was stroking his rough chin when Vanteen concluded.

"It's a bluff, Bruce—a typical Harger four-flush," said he. "You stand pat, and let me carry out my original plan. I'll go to Harger and let him know where he gets off. D'ye think for a minute he'll go to the length of murder? Not on your faded daguerrotype, me boy!"

Miss Hubbard caught his arm.

"Oh, don't!" she wailed. "Don't—*Jimmy!*"

"Hold your tongue, Helen!" directed Mr. Foley curtly. "All I need is a few words with Harger to have him eating out of me hand."

Vanteen shook his head slowly.

"I appreciate the offer, James," said he, "more than I can tell you. But this, after all, is my party. I've led you all into it, and it's up to me and to no one else to get you out.

"Up here on Sabre I think you'd find Harger's respect for the press considerably less than it is in New York. There's no Associated Press wire up here, you know, and not even a country correspondent within thirty miles.

"We're in a jam, and we might as well face the fact. I was a damned fool and —well, anything but a model host—to dream of resorting to medieval tactics in the matter of the Don. I made a big mistake when I brought the crowd to Sabre, a bigger one in the course I took after we were surprised at Harger's house.

"If I'd showed the brains of a child then I'd have got rid of my pistol instead of using it. The sensible procedure would have been to sing out to them to cease firing, give my name and demand to see Harger.

"I didn't know he was on the island then, to be sure, but nevertheless I'd have been in a position where the explaining would be up to the other side. And whatever happened——"

Woody put a hand on Vanteen's arm.

"Oh, pipe down, Bruce," he begged. "What's happened *has* happened. That's that—and nobody's kicking. We'll come out topside yet. And you bet we won't any of us be able to say you didn't make good on your promise. Adventure was what we came up here for, and we've certainly had that.

"Do what Jim says. Sit tight. And if you say the word I'll go along to Harger with Foley. I'm sure the old boy'll recognize me—and he can't help thinking the whole of Park Row has war correspondents on Sabre Island. Bluff? You watch us!"

Again Vanteen shook his head.

"Your kind of bluff won't go in a brace

game, Tom," he said. "There's no use deluding ourselves. Harger's dealing now from a crooked box. He can snap his fingers at newspapers, and he knows it. Or at any rate he thinks he can, and that's as bad."

"D'ye mean to say," exploded Mr. Foley, "that you're going to surrender the painting after ye've been through so much to lay hold of it?"

Vanteen's jaw hardened.

"Not yet. I'll die before I let go of Don o' Doubloons. During the night I found a hiding place for the canvas here on the hill. It's where it can't be damaged by weather—and where Harger couldn't find it in a hundred years. There it'll stay until it rots, or until I can get back to reclaim it."

Woody grinned.

"Now you're talking, Bruce!" he exclaimed. "What you've been saying about giving in didn't sound like you, somehow. Methinks I begin to see a method in your weakness."

"There is a method," said Vanteen. "And Harger's bluff *will* be met by another. But I want you fellows to let me make it—alone. If I'd only had a few minutes more in the house, I'd——"

A raucous hail from below cut short the sentence.

"Well, what say you there?"

Vanteen appeared at the head of the trail.

"We say 'Quits!'" he shouted back, and sotto voce he added to Woody: "Until the next hand's dealt!"

CHAPTER XV.

BLUFFED OUT.

LARGER islands than Sabre could not have afforded a better breakfast than that which Miss Anne Durant had just finished. Food, service and setting had each been perfect; the melon chilled through and yet not tough with frost, the omelette and the biscuits alike in their lightness, the Japanese butler an adept in the art of anticipation, the outlook from the cool veranda an inspiration to dreams.

Beyond a little formal garden were trees nodding to the salute of the gentlest of breezes, beyond the trees a vast spread of gold-flecked blue in whose foreground a trim white yacht swung lazily to her anchor.

So absorbed was Miss Durant in reverie that she did not turn at the sound of a light footfall.

"Nothing more, thank you, Muto," she murmured. "It has all been——"

"I am glad you are pleased," said a voice that was soft and deferential and yet was not the Jap's. "All the resources of the island, fair lady, are yours to command. May I join you for a little?"

"Oh—Mr. Harger! I thought you had gone——"

A student of smiles would have said there was as much pleasure as surprise in this particular smile with which Anne greeted the day's first appearance of her jailer turned host. Her eyes rested fleetingly and with a warmth of invitation on the chair across the table from her, but it was on the veranda rail that Harger seated himself with one flanneled leg swinging free.

He might deliberately have selected his position for the sake of the shadows thrown by the trellis against which he leaned. So, Anne had observed, he had contrived to keep his face shadowed through most of their moments together. When they had been in the open he had worn his bright-banded Panama with the brim drawn low; indoors, unobtrusively and always, he had stood or sat with his back to the light.

Harger must, she knew, be long past middle life; the "morgue" in the *Morning Star* office, whose data she had taken occasion to consult during the last and most lurid of his domestic litigations, had showed him a man of bad reputation years before she was born; clippings affording a glimpse of him in his heyday were yellowed and brittle with age. And yet he had been able to establish and maintain with her an illusion of uncannily surviving youth.

Long since Anne had ceased to wonder

at stories that once had seemed to her preposterous. Jerome Harger, for all his years, for all that had been said or could be said of him, had a virtuoso's way with women. He had been pleased to accept her as an acquaintance of other days, had recognized her instantly when the scarred ruffian into whose arms she had stumbled in her flight toward the dock had brought her to him.

"It is my good fortune, and it may prove the greater good fortune of some others, that you have found your way here," he had told her then. "I can assure you that you are better off with me than with your friends. They have intruded, at their own risk, where they have no right and are not wanted. If I show any leniency whatsoever in dealing with them it will be because of you."

Almost before she had begun her vague and halting attempt to explain the night invasion of Sabre Island, Harger had showed her not only that he knew who the others of her party were but had more than a suspicion of why they had come.

"Vanteen!" he had exclaimed. "Yes, I know him." And then he had asked a quick question: "Is it possible that you are——"

"I have recently learned something in regard to Mr. Vanteen," Anne had said slowly, "which has—well, which makes me rather pleased by the thought of an exchange of hosts. You could do me no greater favor, Mr. Harger, than see me safely started on my way back to New York—alone."

If Harger reserved doubts concerning his pretty guest's attitude toward Bruce Vanteen, they had evaporated altogether when, seated at the desk before him, she had written her refusal to return to the castaway crew of the *Quest*. It was then that he showed her for the first time the empty frame in his library.

"Vanteen's work," he had told her. "He'll pay for it. This has become a criminal matter, instead of a mere private affair between us. I'll run over to the mainland to-night and bring back the sheriff and a few deputies to rout him out. Look for me at noon to-morrow. In the meantime, you'll be as safe as if I were here."

Now, settled in his accustomed shadows on the veranda rail, the lord of the island manor waved off the girl's surprise with a hand among whose dry wrinkles veins stood out in an intricate tracery of blue.

"I DIDN'T go," he said. "The situation has changed. It isn't necessary to call on outside aid. We'll smoke 'em off the hill ourselves.

"A friend of mine came visiting Sabre last night in a flying boat—plane, you know. That'll make hill life unhealthy. At any minute now I'm expecting——"

A rifle shot sounded in the distance, then a second and a third.

Anne Durant rose, suddenly pale.

"Oh!" she cried. "You promised——"

Jerome Harger met her consternation with a smile.

"It's no fight, just a signal," he said. "It means that Vanteen is down from his hill and his high horse. He's acknowledged the validity of certain representations which have been made to him, and he's on his way to eat crow.

"He should be here shortly, for they'll be coming in the launch. I think it would be as well if you went to your room—unless you wish to see him?"

Harger's smile was wider.

"No," said Anne. "I don't. Not—not now."

A MOMENT after she had gone, followed by eyes speculative and narrowed, her host encountered the retrieved Greavy at the front of the house.

"Don't forget," he said, "what I told you about Vanteen. The others don't matter—but the young man knows too much. Just now he'll require careful handling. After that, there'll be no need to worry."

Harger stood facing the dock road, his hands deep in his pockets, a cigarette drooping from a corner of his flaccid mouth, until he saw figures rounding the turn. Then he vanished into the house

and it was from his desk in the library that his voice icily responded to a hail.

"Bring them here, please—all of 'em!"

There was a trampling in the corridor, and the door opened to admit Charley of the scarred cheek.

"We've brung the people that's been shootin' us up," said he. "They look like a hard lot, boss. Some of them rum runners maybe."

Bruce Vanteen had entered at the head of his bedraggled crew. He took a position between them and the desk. For a moment his eyes met Harger's and held them unwaveringly.

"I hardly suppose I need to introduce myself?"

"You don't," conceded Jerome Harger dryly.

"Then it seems to be a time for mutual explanations."

"Mutual? What is there for *me* to explain?"

"Plenty!" spoke up Mr. James Francis Foley. "And I'm another that'll need no introduction to ye, Harger. Maybe ye mind the time——"

A quick glance from Vanteen cut him short.

"Please, Jim! Let me have the floor." He faced Harger again. "What you might tell us in the first place is why, without warning, my friends and I were fired upon when——"

"You chose an unfortunate hour for your visit—an unsocial hour," said Harger coolly. "And a man dwelling in such isolation as I must be careful. If I were in your place, Vanteen, I think I'd consider myself lucky that I'd escaped with a whole skin. And I might also consider, before I questioned the actions of others, that I'd come to Sabre Island armed and prepared for mischief."

"I was prepared," amended Vanteen, "only to demand the return of property which I felt sure I could convince you was rightfully mine."

Harger burst into a laugh.

"Don't tell me you expected to find me at home!"

"Had you planned to be elsewhere?"

"You know I had."

"Thank you, Mr. Harger. That assertion brings us quite naturally to the matter of Cowley—and the *Quest*."

"Cowley? Don't think I know him. As for the *Quest*, a yacht with a name of the sort took shelter off Sabre during the last storm. Maybe the man who brought her was the Cowley you're talking about. No way of telling now. He went to the mainland yesterday, didn't he, Charley?

"Well, that seems to be that. The yacht's still here, anyhow. She's not mine and I lay no claim to her."

There was an interval of silence, during which Harger drummed the desk with the tips of his bony fingers.

"I wasn't anticipating," said Vanteen gently, at length, "that you would step forth as Cowley's boyhood chum. I merely brought up the subject in a manner of listing a count in a possible Federal indictment. And rum running, Harger—that's Federal too, isn't it?"

Jerome Harger drew back his chair.

"That's something we can just laugh off between us. You're talking nonsense and we all know it."

Vanteen's eyes dwelt for an instant on the scarred Charley.

"I think a mere report of the presence of all these speckled beauties of yours on Sabre Island would start a heavy iron ball rolling in your direction, Harger. I'm sure you're not using 'em for road improvements. Are they signed on as gardeners, perhaps?"

"Would you stop to think, Vanteen, that you won't be in a position to command much attention from the authorities when I've turned you over? No, you're in Dutch enough right now."

Vanteen smiled.

"Dutch!" he echoed. "Thanks again! You're forever giving me a lead. That brings the late Mr. Holbein to mind. Would you mind telling me how Holbein's Don o' Doubloons happened into your possession?"

Harger's eyes went to the despoiled frame.

"The picture's still on the island—and

so are you!" he snapped. "Those are facts that neither of us ought to lose sight of."

"I presume you would set up a legal claim to the canvas?" asked Vanteen.

Harger's cheeks grew purple, and he brought a gnarled fist slamming down on the desk.

"Who has a better right to it?" he demanded. "You tell me that!"

Vanteen stepped nearer to him.

"Very good, Harger! We'll forget the Don for a moment, and pass the question of how the painting came to Sabre Island. What I'd like to hear now is how the Rubens 'Miserere' got here—and the Gainsborough 'Lassie in Lavender' and the Franz Hals——"

Harger's chair crashed to the floor behind him as he sprang up. He was looking now not at Vanteen, but past him, and his face was livid.

"Greavy!" he shouted furiously. "You triple-damned fool! Why didn't you tell me he'd got into——"

The late hostage spoke up defensively from the doorway.

"Listen, Mr. Harger, what I'm tellin' again is that he didn't get nowheres in the house outside of the room we had him in upstairs and the library here. He couldn't 'a'——"

BRUCE VANTEEN swept the room with a grin of which he gave Harger, at the last, full benefit.

"When a man's a tinhorn at heart," he observed, "it's bound to come out. How you ever managed to put Broadway over the hurdles, Harger, is beyond me. You might have been holding the top hand just now—but you've laid it down. You started a game of bluff, and you've been bluffed out!"

"What's—what's——"

Harger had righted his chair and dropped back into it. He passed the palm of his hand across his deep-lined forehead; it came away glistening.

"In justice to your invaluable Mr. Greavy," Vanteen resumed with a chuckle, "I must confess the truth of his assertion. Unfortunately, I was in so great a hurry on the occasion of my last visit that I overlooked possible advantages to be gained by rummaging about.

"But that's not important now, Mr. Harger, since you've been so frank to admit being possessed of these other paintings which were stolen in quite the same offhand way as Don o' Dubloons—paintings which, I assure you, I only guessed had found their way to Sabre Island. I wonder if now you wouldn't care to say a word about the 'Lassie in Lavender' and the——"

Harger's gaze, grown extraordinarily thoughtful as he won back to composure, had rested for a moment on the beaming Mr. Foley and then had passed on to Woody, who had produced a sheaf of paper from his pocket and held a pencil poised over it.

"We get our best interviews in the queerest ways—and places," he remarked soberly. "I'm simply mad to put down what you'll have to say next. It's bound to be wonderful. Of course you remember me—Thomas Woody, of the New York *Morning Star* and elsewhere?"

Harger drew a cigarette from his case and tapped it deliberately on a thumb nail.

"This," he said, "is interesting—interesting. Your talk about bluffing me, Vanteen, is asinine. I've lived and gambled too many years to be bluffed by a precocious boy. Now I have a little surprise for you—a bit of a disappointment, too, I think."

He turned to the retainer of the scar.

"Charley, did you bring along the daub that belongs in the frame here?"

"N-o-o, Mr. Harger. They'd got it under cover somewheres, and we thought we'd better not waste no——"

"Never mind." Harger's eyes traveled back to Vanteen's. "As a matter of fact, my boy, you're welcome to the canvas—such as it is. I resign all claim to it in your favor. What I paid for it was exactly fifty dollars, and that isn't too much to lay out on a present for a friend.

"It's a copy, of course—a rather decent

bit of work, but perhaps lacking a little of the fire of Holbein's genius."

HE paused, flecked an ash onto the rug and swept an amused glance toward Foley and Tom Woody.

"Sabre Island," he resumed, "holds no secret from any man who comes here in a legitimate way. We're always open for inspection. I have quite a number of paintings which should make the trip worth while. If there is any question of my ownership, I can prove title by bills of sale.

"These paintings are originals. Some of them hung for years in my place of business in New York. In mere copies I'm not interested, as a rule.

"The fact is that I've invested in that sort of thing only once in my life, and then it was a sort of job lot I took over. One happened to be after Holbein's Don o' Doubloons—and Mr. Vanteen has mentioned by title three of the four others. There was also a copy of Corot's 'Spring Song.'

"You see, I'm being frank with you, gentlemen."

"Frank like a fox," said Mr. Foley in a far-carrying whisper.

"Would it surprise you, Mr. Harger," asked Woody, "if the paintings you say are copies turned out to be originals?"

Harger smiled again, crookedly.

"It would. But it's out of the question, my dear fellow. All five canvases cost me only three hundred dollars. Old masters aren't selling at such figures, you know."

"But didn't it strike you as odd," persisted Woody, "that these were all copies of paintings that had been stolen? You must read the newspapers."

"Sometimes I do. I read and forget. But, quite aside from that, I'd be glad to have an expert decide the question, if any.

"My own judgment is that the canvases are copies. But if any one has doubts, they'll find a welcome on Sabre Island. I hope you won't omit to publish that invitation—if you publish anything."

Mr. James Francis Foley walked to the desk, laid two heavy fists upon it and leaned forward confidentially.

"The alibi leaks like a sieve, but 'twill serve for the moment," said he. "However, just between you and me, Harger, I think you're a damned——"

There was a sound of rapid steps in the hall, and a voice called:

"Another yacht's dropped anchor below, Mr. Harger. "There's some people come ashore from her—a lady and a couple men. They're walkin' up."

In the press of new interest the library session summarily took recess. There was a crowding onto the veranda, onto which a dark-haired and cool-eyed young woman in yachting costume was leading two lagging escorts. Bruce Vanteen had eyes only for the girl.

"Lana!" he jubilated. "Glory be, gang! Here's Lana Marshall!"

He wheeled on Jerome Harger, grinning expansively, and snapped him a wide-elbowed Civil War salute.

"Sir," he proclaimed, "the marines have landed! What price court-martial now?"

CHAPTER XVI.

MR. HARGAR SCORES.

TO Miss Lana Marshall, as she demonstrated at once after the straightforward fashion of her unfettered generation, the presence of so large a gallery meant nothing. She threw her firm, tanned arms about Vanteen, embraced him with vigor and pressed an emphatic kiss upon his lips. Then, drawing off, she regarded him with a dark and paradoxical disapproval.

"See what you get for leaving me out!"

"Somehow or other," said Bruce, "you seem to have declared yourself in—and you can consider yourself showered with thanks. The angels must have led you here, Lana. I was sure my radiogram would——"

"But I'm not taking orders from you just yet," interposed the bob-haired one calmly. "I dropped your old radiogram in the wastebasket and bought a ticket for Maine. The *Constance* was lying at Truth

Island, and I got some fishermen to bring me out to her from Pudding Harbor in the midst of a perfect duck of a storm.

"I insisted on starting down to meet the *Quest*, but we just managed to miss you."

"So that Flying Dutchman of the storm was the *Constance*, eh? By Jove, Lana, there was a bad minute when I didn't believe you could possibly miss us. It looked as if you were coming right aboard."

"I didn't know until morning that we'd passed you; and then the gale has hustled us along so far that I expected to see Bermuda ahead at any moment. When we got back to Truth Island finally I found your Mr. Lee Barrett there, and—but, Bruce, is it possible you don't remember Mr. Barrett? Why don't you say 'Hello' at least? And I'd like to have you meet Captain Jack Thompson of the *Constance*."

The young ensign of Miss Marshall's escort favored the Harger contingent with a belligerent stare and wrung Vanteen's hand.

"I was just going to start for the mainland when the *Constance* came along," said he. "Didn't have enough gas for the trip, so I'd stepped a jury mast in the yawl and made a sail out of bedspreads. S'pose you understand why I didn't hang around over here?"

"You bet I do, old man."

Barrett's gaze circled the party again.

"Where's Miss Durant?"

Bruce hesitated and glanced at Harger.

"She's here—and perfectly happy," said the master of Sabre Island, with a sly and significant grin.

YET at that moment Anne Durant, in the privacy of the luxurious chamber which Harger had assigned to her, would have presented a picture of anything but happiness. From her window she had observed the meeting of Bruce Vanteen and the girl whom the newspapers had crowned "Queen of Flapperdom." She had heard the first few words that passed between the two, and then had flung herself face downward upon the bed. Now the pillow in which she had buried her head was damp. "It's true—oh, it's true!" she was whispering.

Below, Jerome Harger eyed the newer feminine visitor to Sabre Island with a deal of interest and appreciation. The velvet had come back into his voice when he addressed her.

"Perhaps my name is familiar to you, Miss Marshall? At any rate, I have numbered your brothers among my—ah—clients."

There was reproach in the girl's regard.

"You can blame it on your own exclusiveness and your silly old doorkeeper that we haven't met before," said she. "I'm just wild about roulette, and I never could understand why they wouldn't let me in!"

Harger waved a wrinkled hand.

"All enterprises must have their regulations," he said. "And it's hardly fair to hold me responsible for your disappointment. My name is still used by former associates for what it may be worth, but I've had no active connections in uptown New York for years."

Miss Marshall smiled almost too sweetly.

"Be that," said she, "as it may. Let's talk of other things, Mr. Harger. May I ask what you intend——"

"I was just," interjected Harger hastily, "about to outline briefly the situation in which you find us. It has all been most unusual and—ah—distressing. This island, to which I am of course charmed to welcome *you*, belongs to me.

"Quite recently we had a midnight alarm. A party of strangers, whom we naturally believed meant us no good, came to the house here under cover of darkness. I was fortunate enough not to have retired, and to have an employee or two near me. There was an exchange of shots and the intruders were driven off.

"Later two of them were encountered by my men. One of them, a young lady in whom I was astonished to discover an acquaintance, was pleased to accept my hospitality. The other got the better of a drowsy guard and committed certain

criminal depredations before leaving the house. This was Mr. Vanteen.

"It was not until this morning that I found a way of bringing the trespassers to terms. In the meantime they had calmly occupied a portion of the island and had fired upon my employees when they chanced to expose themselves.

"As to my intentions, I scarcely know what to say, Miss Marshall. The case is such an extraordinary one that you find me rather at a loss.

"If the trespassers were commonplace poachers or thieves, I should naturally have them sent to the mainland and in due course would appear against them there. But I learn, amazingly, that it was no less a person than Mr. Vanteen who led the invasion of my property.

"I am in a position—and indeed I feel in a way that it is my duty—to press charges of felonious assault and robbery against him. Why should his prominence and wealth command any more consideration than would be given to some poor devil whom circumstances had forced to crime?"

A challenging sparkle glinted in the girl's dark eyes.

"Strong words should be handled with caution, Mr. Harger," said she. "Don't forget that the arrival of the *Constance* changes things quite a little. In other words, you can't expect to have it all your own way any longer.

"You know Mr. Vanteen, and know where to find him whenever he's wanted. I propose that you permit his party to leave Sabre Island on my yacht—*now!*"

"I don't think," said Harger softly, "that it will be necessary for you to provide these people with transportation. There already is a yacht here which Mr. Vanteen gives me to understand is his. I had half made up my mind that, whatever my decision in regard to Vanteen himself, I would permit his friends to embark; for I can't believe they wittingly put themselves outside the law.

"That, I tell you now, I am willing to do. They can take the yacht and start for China, if they wish."

"And Mr. Vanteen?" demanded the girl. "You don't imagine we'll consent to leave him behind?"

Harger stroked his close-cropped mustache.

"On that score," he said, "I think that it might be possible for Mr. Vanteen and me to reach a private and amicable arrangement. If you'll pardon us for a moment——"

HE nodded to Bruce, walked into the library and carefully closed the door behind them.

"Now, Vanteen," he rasped, "we come to a real show-down."

"Good enough," acquiesced Bruce. "What have you got?"

"You!"

"How?"

"You can't leave Sabre Island unless I say the word. I suppose you understand that? I now inform you that you are under arrest. You have broken the law in more ways than one, and it is my privilege as a citizen to hold you and deliver you to the authorities."

"But I don't suspect for a minute that you'll do anything of the sort, Harger. You're too wise a man not to count on the trouble you'd be stepping into yourself."

"That's something I'll take care of when it comes up. Anyhow, I have a right to keep you here until it's convenient for me to take you to the mainland—and I have the force to keep you. Come, you'll admit that!"

"What of it?"

"If I were in your place, I'd rather be anywhere else than on Sabre Island. These are rough fellows I have working for me here, and I can't always hold them in hand. They've taken a dislike to you, as no doubt you can believe. No telling what they might take into their heads.

"As a matter of fact, I'm afraid there may be trouble any time. I won't breathe freely until every one's off the island except those who belong here."

"Then suppose we all start? What's the use of further talk?"

"The others can start when they please —and the sooner the better, Vanteen. That's a warning straight from the shoulder. You don't know these chaps as I do. They are hired, if you must know, simply to protect me.

"I know many things and I have many enemies; so I live here on Sabre and I surround myself with people of a certain sort. They are not of the type to weigh consequences, but creatures of impulse. It would make no difference to them whether you were Bruce Vanteen or John Rockefeller or John Doe, once they——"

Vanteen seated himself on a corner of the desk.

"No need to go farther, Harger," he cut in. "I get your point. Sabre Island isn't a nice place for me to stay, and yet you can hold me here—unless I want to start another fracas with a crowd of women in the thick of it. I'll waive further preliminaries. What do you want?"

The sly smile returned to Harger's lips.

"Miss Durant is interested in you," said he.

"We'll leave Miss Durant out of the discussion," snapped Vanteen.

"But we won't," Harger insisted. "For I'm interested in *her!* I lead a lonely life here. It's not more than two or three times a year that I leave Sabre Island. With these men you see about me, of course, I have absolutely nothing in common.

"To Miss Durant I feel myself strongly drawn. It is no momentary attraction she has for me. I have seen her before and admired her. For many months her face has——"

VANTEEN sprang up and crossed to Harger.

"That's enough!" he cried. "One more word on *that* subject and I'll——"

Harger retreated a pace.

"I don't think you understand," he said placatingly. "For Miss Durant I have the greatest respect and toward her I have only the most honorable of intentions. I have reason to believe that if one certain obstacle were removed, I could win her consent to become my wife."

Bruce stared at him.

"Honorable!" he gasped. "Why, you —you whited sepulcher! You've been married four times already and lived a very devil's life to boot, and still you have the effrontery to suggest——"

"Hold on, Vanteen! If either of us has a clear conscience in regard to the girl, it's I—and *you* villify me! Stop and think. It's a way out of two dilemmas I'm offering you. I know the direction your eyes are wandering in—and I can't say that I don't respect your taste.

"This is a matter that we ought to face together like men of the world. You'd be a fool to get tangled up outside your own caste, and you know it.

"Miss Durant, I think, has put a wrong construction on the attentions you've paid to her. She can't believe—although I can tell you she must have heard a great deal —that you haven't been entirely serious. You still stand as a shadow between the girl and me.

"With the shadow removed, I don't doubt my eventual success with her. I know women, Vanteen—know lots more about them than you ever will. I can please her, open a new world to her."

Bruce controlled himself with an effort.

"What do you want me to do?" he asked quietly. "Let's hear the proposition, Harger."

The sere master of Sabre Island blew twin clouds of cigarette smoke from the corners of his mouth.

"Miss Durant has placed herself under my protection—voluntarily," said he. "I want you to leave her here, and I want you to write a note which I shall see is delivered to her.

"I want you to explain to her, just as delicately as you wish, that you don't consider her bound to you and that she's not to consider you as standing in my way. It's got to be final. I don't ask any eulogy of myself. There's no need for any. The girl already leans toward me. I've seen it."

Harger walked to the desk, took a block

of paper from the drawer and removed the cap from his fountain pen.

"What say, Vanteen?" he demanded curtly. "It's only a fool who won't take hold of a life line."

The wave of hot anger sweeping over Bruce Vanteen was lost in a sudden welling of his sense of the ludicrous. He laughed.

"One of us is crazy," he said. "Doubtless you'll think it's I—for I'd stay on Sabre Island forever before I'd annoy Miss Durant with any such nonsense. Let's call our madhouse conference off and see the people on their way. Don't worry about any trouble. I'll tell 'em I'm remaining of my own sweet wayward will!"

CHAPTER XVII.

MONEY TALKS.

ENGINES and horses, averred Mr. James Francis Foley, were much alike —the finer the breed, the more they'd need attention, daily grooming, systematic exercise. Here were his Burkhalters, engines a man could swear by if they were given anything like proper care, frozen solid on their shafts after less than half a week of neglect.

Coming off a bad second in a debate with Bruce Vanteen wherein he had essayed to maintain the proposition that where one stayed all should stay, Mr. Foley had descended reluctantly into the engine room of the warped-in *Quest* to meet there another defeat.

What had been motors were mules. Fifteen minutes after he had begun his effort to turn them over, their baffled and stricken Cerberus thrust a very red face through the hatch and announced that it might be hours before the yacht could put to sea.

Hours, in fact, it was; and for Vanteen they were hours that dragged like years. Over and again he pleaded with Foley to abandon the *Quest* and leave Sabre Island aboard the Marshall yacht, but always he was answered by renewed and indignant hammerings.

Tom Woody had been alarmed, too, by evidences that Harger's men were getting out of hand.

"They're hitting up the booze—and it doesn't seem to be that happy kind from contented stills," he told Bruce. "A while ago I got to thinking I'd better look for that spring that Foley couldn't find. I found it, but I've got only more grief to report.

"Apparently Cowley knew where the rifles were. They're gone. I don't like the idea of your staying on, old boy. Why can't you just sort of evaporate before we cast off, and then make a dash for it? They don't seem to be watching you any too closely."

"And leave Anne Durant here alone?" queried Vanteen softly. "Never for a minute, Tom!"

It was just after word had come that the *Quest's* engines at last were running when Lana Marshall found opportunity for a private word with Vanteen.

"To-morrow will be a better day," she promised. "Remember that, and also that we won't be farther away than Truth Island. I'll stay there aboard the *Quest*, and Captain Thompson will go on in to Pudding Harbor with the *Constance*.

"He's acquainted there, and in the morning he'll come to Sabre with the sheriff and the local justice of the peace and a lawyer to represent you. Then the rest of us will naturally happen back as witnesses for the defense, and we'll show Jerome Harger how wise he isn't."

SO the prospect, altogether, seemed encouraging enough; yet Bruce, as he watched the lights of the two yachts dimming with their swift retreat into the southwest, was a prey to new forebodings.

These concerned not so much himself as Anne. In the rôle of suitor Harger appeared infinitely more formidable than in that of satyr. What he had termed his "honorable intentions" formed safe cover from which to build upon that strange ascendancy he had gained over the girl in the face of her freely expressed dislike and fear. Regardless of the manner in which her assent might be won, his offer

of marriage would hold him above reproach.

What if, on the morrow, Anne still was stubborn? What if she insisted it was her preference not to quit Sabre Island? How could she be taken away then, with Harger manifesting a willingness that she continue on as his guest? And if she had succumbed so far to his influence as to turn her back on those whom she had better reason to trust, how long would it be before her will power had crumbled entirely—how long before she had dazedly agreed to become the fourth, or fifth or sixth, Mrs. Jerome Harger?

The horror of the girl's awakening to find herself tied to this vampirish creature who advanced his cause with an old man's patience and cunning, and yet who in outward seeming had not lived out the lighter years of middle age, sent a chill to Vanteen's heart. This fate, of all women's, to be Anne's! He groaned aloud.

For twenty-seven years Bruce Vanteen had lived a life that called seldom for self-analysis. The world for him had held three broad and simple divisions of humanity; there were people whom he liked, people of whom he was extraordinarily fond—and others.

Anne Durant, at their first meeting, he recognized as one destined to fall into the second and smallest class. So he had accepted her into his scheme of things, and so he had been accepted into hers. There had been no sentimentalizing on either side; each had been content to live in the day.

Now, pacing Harger's veranda under the stars, watched by one of Harger's men who lounged in a tilted-back reed chair and by another who paced the path below, Vanteen sought for the first time to define the emotion on which his long friendship with Anne rested. At once, and with such an amazing clarity that he wondered he had never before been conscious of the truth, the answer presented itself.

Anne Durant meant more to him than all other women in the world—more than the world itself. What he meant to her made no difference. Harger's insinuations concerning her state of mind in regard to him had made no impression; the man had been playing a game in the gambler's crafty way.

No matter how inaccurately he had guessed the girl's heart, Vanteen's feelings stood as he had discovered them—stood as, deep down, they must always have been. At all cost Anne must be delivered out of Harger's hands, and immediately. But how? A prompt answer to that question came, too, and Vanteen halted beside the reed chair.

"Greavy," he said, "I'd like a word with Mr. Harger."

The man's hand, at Bruce's approach, had fallen to the grip of his pistol. He looked up with suspicious eyes.

"Guess he's still in the lib'ry," he said grudgingly, and waved a hand toward the screen door. "You first, mister. There ain't going to be any more tricks played on yours truly!"

Harger's voice replied alertly to the rap on the inner door.

"Can I speak to you—alone?" Vanteen asked, with a side glance toward his escort.

Grinning, Harger lifted a revolver from a drawer and laid it upon the desk.

"Pleasure's all mine," he said. "Just make yourself at home in the hall, Greavy. When I want you, I'll call you."

Vanteen dropped into a chair when the man had gone and sat for a moment staring into Harger's curious eyes.

I'M going to make a proposition to you —a liberal one," he said at length.

"Not another *bluff*, I hope," murmured Harger, and grinned again.

Bruce shook his head.

"No; call it an exchange of favors."

"If it's in regard to the copy of the Holbein, I warn you I'm not interested."

"Copy?" queried Vanteen coolly. "Oh, well, there's nothing like sticking to a story, Harger, no matter how transparent. I dare say this one may yet save your skin.

"But you've seen the Don for the last time, I don't mind saying. *He* doesn't enter into the transaction. What I intended to discuss with you were certain notes

which have my name on them and are in your possession."

Harger's face remained a mask, but his eyes suddenly lighted.

"I haven't forgotten the notes," said he. "What of them?"

"I wonder what value you set on them."

Harger's lips twisted into a smile that was half a sneer.

"The name of Vanteen, I've heard, gives absolute face value to all paper on which it appears. Wasn't it a boast of your fa——"

"My father," interrupted Bruce peremptorily, "would as soon have signed a compact with the devil as to put his signature on anything that possibly could find its way to hands such as yours. But mind you, Harger, I haven't said it was my *signature* on these notes you hold; merely my name."

"I've heard that before."

"And I think you've been advised that with the maker dead and the signature of the indorser in dispute, the notes are virtually uncollectible?"

"What I've been advised is no business of yours, my dear fellow. I'm satisfied to let the courts say how much I have coming from you—and satisfied to let the law collect."

Bruce slipped a cigarette from the package which Barrett had given to him.

"I suppose you've stopped to consider, Harger," he queried through a drift of smoke, "that you may be called on to answer embarrassing questions once you've gone to law? There will be an inquiry, certainly, as to the manner in which the indorser profited; and it's possible for me to assure you, and still admit nothing, that there wasn't a penny in the transaction for me. There's one stumblingblock you'll be coming against, but there's a second one that you may not be able to get over at all.

"The court will want to know how *you* got the notes—what the consideration was. And your case won't gain much in strength by the revelation that they represent gambling losses, do you think?"

Harger regarded him stonily.

"Without the indorsement," he said, "I wouldn't have staked a dollar against the notes, and you know it. By refusing to pay up you show yourself as worse than a welsher. It's a downright swindle."

"I'm not deeply concerned in the moral aspect of the thing," remarked Bruce lightly. "For there might be yet another question, you see, as to the fairness and honesty of all parties to the game in which the notes changed hands."

Harger's knuckles rapped the desk top impatiently.

"Seems to me we've been through all this before, Vanteen," he growled. "What's the use of covering the same ground again?"

"Because I want to impress on you the fact that these notes, as is, are practically worthless."

"Then what?"

Vanteen drew a deep breath.

"Suppose, Harger, that I were to draw up a little memorandum confirming the indorsement signatures as mine, and confessing a consideration to the indorser? How'd things stand then? There'd hardly be any need of court action, would there? I mean to say, you'd have so clear and complete a claim that——"

Harger was sitting up very straight; he lowered his lids to conceal the warm gleam he knew had appeared in his eyes.

"You wouldn't do anything like that, Vanteen," he said, fighting to keep his voice casual and not quite succeeding. "I don't know how much you're worth, of course, but—no, you're trying to string me! What's the idea?"

BRUCE leaned forward.

"I'm worth enough to make good on the notes," he said, earnestly, "regardless of the legitimacy of your claim on me. Settlement in full, I don't mind saying, would come pretty close to cleaning me out—but I *can* settle."

Harger's eyes, once more expressionless, searched Vanteen's face.

"I am the least bit interested," he admitted. "At least you're hinting there's a way in which I can keep money out of

the lawyers' pockets—and I'm damned sick of shelling out to them at every halt and turn. What am I expected to do to merit this great kindness on your part?"

"Merely to release Miss Durant."

"Eh?" cried Harger, staring. "Isn't she as free as the air now?"

"Not while she remains on Sabre Island—no. I want to see her clear of here."

"But she doesn't want to leave. Did she tell you that she——"

"As you know, I haven't seen her since you—since she became your guest. She has told me nothing."

"You had a note from her?"

"Yes. She said in it that she was under no restraint. That's not to be considered. A while ago you asked me to discuss her as one man of the world to another. It's in such a way I'm addressing you now, Harger.

"I'll concede that you've seen something admirable in Miss Durant—as have others. But, knowing only a little of your life, I'd hardly believe you've come to regard her as the *only* woman."

Harger examined his glistening finger nails.

"She suits me—beautifully," said he. "I told you no more than the truth when I spoke of my intentions. I like her fire. Oh, she has that! And she could be absolutely stunning, once she'd been brought to the proper modiste and hairdresser. You—you're asking a great deal."

"And offering a great deal, Harger. Don't lose sight of that. You're not so well off, I happen to know, that a settlement in full on the notes wouldn't make a mighty difference in your circumstances."

"It would be," murmured the gambler, "a consideration, as you say." He sighed. "But to give her up, Vanteen, now that she and I have begun to get along so famously! It's hard even to think of it, devilish hard. And how do I know she'd consent to go?"

"That's something I must have from herself. Somehow, Harger, I have a feeling that she'll do as you suggest. But I want to hear her say the word, understand. All I ask you to do is to run her over to Truth Island in your launch. The *Quest* will be lying there to-night and to-morrow, I believe, and I want Miss Durant put aboard the yacht.

"For that service, or concession, or whatever you choose to call it, I'm willing to sign such a memorandum as I've suggested. And, mind, I add no stipulation in regard to myself or to Don o' Doubloons. Matters there are to remain in status quo."

Harger spent a moment in thought, then raised his voice.

"Greavy!" he called. "Ask Miss Durant to come down to the library."

BRUCE, his die cast, heard the gunman's booted feet thumping the hall, ascending the stairs. He turned to find Harger shrewdly studying him. The gambler smiled and clasped his wrinkled hands in mild self-congratulation.

"By gad, Vanteen," he crooned, "you astonish me. I really thought your fancy was for the lady of the yacht—and a rare fine gal *she* is, too. So this is it, eh? Not thirty, are you? Young, and better looking than ordinary, and wealthy and in the 'Social Register'—and eating your heart out with jealousy of a poor old fellow like Jerome Harger, what?

"This cheers me more than I can say. I've been feeling old lately, been afraid that I'd passed my day. It's going to be extremely interesting to see how Miss Durant takes this proposition of yours."

"All I'm concerned with," remarked Bruce, "is how you take it. My hunch is that she'll do as you——"

He broke off abruptly. The door had opened, and Anne stood beside him. He sprang up with a cry of greeting, but the girl's eyes were on Harger.

"You wanted me?" she asked.

The master of Sabre Island had risen. He bowed her to a chair.

"Mr. Vanteen has suggested that you might wish to rejoin your friends aboard the yacht. I wondered how you'd feel about it, Miss Durant?"

"Don't you know?" the girl asked slowly.

Harger looked at Vanteen and grinned.

"You mean you'd rather stay where you are?"

"I mean that."

"But, Anne——" Bruce burst out.

She glanced toward him for the first time, and there was no trace of the old friendliness in her eyes.

"Please let Mr. Harger talk," she said.

The gambler fondled his brilliantly black and close-cropped mustache.

"Suppose, Miss Durant," he said, "suppose I thought it would be better for you to go."

Anne lifted her head sharply, and a bitterness came into her voice.

"You're turning me out? After promising——"

"No, no," Harger interposed hastily. "That isn't the idea. You know you're welcome here. But Mr. Vanteen seems to feel that in the circumstances—there being no chaperon, you know, and all that sort of thing—that Sabre Island is no place for you."

"I cannot see," said the girl coldly, "that it's any of Mr. Vanteen's business whether I go or stay. I haven't asked him for advice, and there isn't the faintest reason why he should assume the functions of a guardian."

During the silence that fell then Harger's eyes traveled ceaselessly between the two of them. It was a comedy, this, which he could appreciate; and he enjoyed the situation no less because of the note of tragedy underlying it.

"But, dear girl," he said presently, "what if I have come to be of the same mind with Vanteen? While your friends remained on the island, things were in a way different. But now they've gone; and really I think you should follow them.

"The yacht is lying at Truth Island, I understand. It would take no more than an hour to run you over there in the launch."

"To-night!" cried Anne.

Harger nodded.

"It's a fine evening," he said. "There's no breeze at all—scarcely a ripple on the water."

Again Miss Durant cast a swift glance toward Bruce; but it escaped him.

"No!" she protested. "I'm afraid on the water at night. In the morning, if you're still of the same mind, I'll go. It—it won't mean I'm not to see you again, Mr. Harger?"

"Let us hope not! I don't think that Vanteen meant his suggestion to embrace any ban on a renewal of our acquaintance."

"I shall consider that you have fulfilled your share of the bargain," said Bruce stiffly, "when Miss Durant agrees to leave the island and a time for her departure has been set."

"The morning will be time enough, then?" asked Harger.

"It will."

Eyes regretful but firm were lifted to Miss Durant's.

"Then morning it is," murmured her host. "Believe me it is better so."

He walked with her to the door, bowed her into the hall and returned briskly to the desk.

"Shan't we get that small item of business out of the way before we retire?" he asked. "And you won't mind if I have Greavy and one or two others in as witnesses?"

"Call in the whole damned rogue's gallery, if you wish," invited Vanteen. "I never blink at a price, Harger, when I'm getting my money's worth—and this is one time I get it!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE AIR ROUTE.

So it's up the rope I go,
Up I go,
It's up the rope I go,
Up I go,
It's up the rope I go
While you navvies 'ere below,
You say, "Jack—we—told—you—so!"
Blast your eyes!

IN the long outhouse in which Jerome Harger stabled his unprepossessing employees the men of Sabre Island were reveling in the manner of the mining camp. Latterly the festivities had turned

from fisticuffs to music. A bull voice had been bellowing the interminable verses of a bloodcurdling ballad which Bruce Vanteen had known during college days—and in suitably expurgated variation—as "The Penance of Jack Hall."

Now, the singing having ended on a proper and artistic note of strangulation, a wheezy accordion took up the burden of island entertainment. Periodically gales of drunken laughter drowned its lament.

To Vanteen, sitting in the dark window of a room on the upper floor of the bungalow, it seemed clear enough that Harger had been truthful when he said he could not always hold his people in hand. Certainly they were out of hand this night.

That there would be a guard below his window and another patrolling the front of the house, Bruce had been warned as the key was turned in the lock of the bedroom door. But at least he had the room to himself; there was to be no bedside watch as on the first night he had spent under the Harger roof.

If the temper of the crew should turn ugly, at least he would have a gantlet-runner's chance. His window opened on the roof of the veranda, the drop to the ground was not a hazardous one, and Sabre Island hadn't shrunk any. Failing to wing him in his flight, Harger's men could scarcely expect to dig him out from cover before morning—and by morning, with the *Quest* back and Lana Marshall's yacht arrived from the mainland with her official passengers, he'd surely be as safe in showing himself here as on the Avenue in town.

More than once Vanteen was tempted to climb out and have a look about, but recent experiences had taught him the value of discretion. The wise thing was to wait for developments. Why attempt escape and risk a bullet before he knew beyond question that he wasn't as well off in his detention room as he'd find himself elsewhere?

Musing thus, Bruce sat suddenly erect. Some one was moving beneath his window. He heard a voice, and identified it as Greavy's:

"Hey, Charley! Charley! What's matter? Don't you go sleepin' on the job!"

Another voice mumbled a protest.

"Ain't sleepin'. I was just restin' me eyes."

"Well, you keep 'em open, see? How 'bout the gink upstairs?"

"His light's been out a couple hours. *He's* sleepin', I guess."

"Can yuh beat it?" marveled Greavy. "Ain't he got no nerves or no sense—which is it? Wonder if he'd rest so peaceful if he knowed the way some of the gang was talkin'.

"Bill Larkin swears he's goin' to get 'em before the night's over. It was him shot Bill over on the other island, I guess. Anyhow, Bill he's made up his mind to it. Soon's he's tired o' sousin' and singin' there'll be somethin' doing, sure."

"Yeh?" growled the other voice. "And what am I supposed to do?"

"What's your orders?"

"Just t' see this Van Somebody guy don't make no get-away. Not out this way, anyhow."

"Well, that's all you got to do, Charley. And you watch yourself, too. 'Big Fritz' is stretched out on the dock dead to th' world. If our bird gets that far there wouldn't be nothing to keep him from beatin' it in th' launch. Fritz is ossified, I tell ye. Don't know whether he's sleepin' on Sabre or in th' gutter on South Street."

"You ain't told me what about Bill Larkin," complained the other.

There was a scornful grunt from Greavy.

"I ain't takin' nobody else's troubles on myself, Charley. You use your judgment. Maybe you and me is different, but I know *I* wouldn't go buttin' in on other people's battles. If a pal o' mine has it in for a guy—well, he's my pal, ain't he?"

The gravel crunched again, and Greavy was gone. A new gust of song burst from the bunk house, an attempt at close harmony by many rusty-throated basses and a lone but indomitable soarer in the higher register who gave his all in the uneven struggle.

THE revel had arrived at a distinct new stage. Solo diversions were ended; the inevitable "Adeline" had been introduced and thenceforth offerings would be choral. Vanteen, instinctively recognizing one kinship in conviviality between these cutthroats at their "new lot" and students with their beer, was surprised to find himself able to smile at the thought.

Under his window there was silence now. He waited a little longer, slipped off his shoes and crept out on the veranda roof. Peeping over the edge he discovered the long figure of the scarred Charley slumping on a box propped against the side of the steps. The man was motionless, breathing heavily and regularly.

"This seems," said Bruce under his breath, "to be the exit cue for young Mr. Vanteen."

Then, reconsidering the abandonment of his shoes, he tiptoed back to the window. He had slung one leg over the sill when a sound within sent a chill through him.

The key was being turned, slowly, cautiously. A draft told him the door had opened. The panicky thought struck him that this would be the perforated Larkin on his errand of revenge. Framed in the window he knew what a target he must make, and yet he was incapable of flight. A whisper came to him:

"Bruce!"

Soft though the call, Vanteen recognized it instantly as Anne's. He slipped over the sill and found her in the darkness, standing by the door. Her small hand gripped his arm.

"Oh, I was frightened—afraid you'd gone!" she breathed. "Quick! Follow me, Bruce. We haven't a second to spare."

Drawing him into the hall, she locked the door again and slipped down the stairs. They passed along a corridor into which a narrow line of light spilled from the library, through a dark room that Vanteen had not been in before and out a side door onto the lawn. Before Vanteen could formulate words they had gained the shelter of the trees. He caught at Anne's hand.

"You're taking the wrong direction," he whispered. "We must get to the dock. The launch——"

She halted and faced him.

"That's the way they expect you to go."

"Expect me to go?" Bruce repeated. "What do you mean?"

"There's no time to explain now. I heard them talking—early this morning and again this afternoon. They had it all schemed out. You were to see a way open to escape, and then they'd shoot you down.

"They'd planned to let you reach the dock and get into the launch before they opened fire. Don't you understand? It wouldn't be murder in that case—not technically. Harger is a fiend. There's a streak of madness in him. I've seen it."

"Lucky thing," murmured Vanteen, "that you did—in time."

Anne was running now—whither he didn't know nor stop to question. He followed, oblivious to the sharp stones stabbing at his unshod feet.

At length they were in the open again. The dim starlit sea stretched away before them. Near by loomed the bulk of a shed. Vanteen discerned a familiar shape protruding from its seaward side.

"The plane!" he cried. "The flying boat!"

Anne pressed her hand to his lips.

"Quiet! I hoped—does it make any difference, Bruce, that it's not a land machine?"

"If she's got gas in her, and oil, and we can get her into the water," promised Vanteen, "I'll fly her. You're the master mind, Anne! I'd never have thought of the boat myself."

The plane stood at the top of a short runway, and after a little struggle their united strength threw its center of balance onto the incline. With a rush the boat slid down into the water.

"Bravo!" exclaimed Vanteen. "Now if her power behaves better than the *Quest's*——"

He leaped into the machine, and when another moment or two had passed the staccato explosions of her engine shivered through the night air. These became

slower and finally ceased altogether as Bruce lifted Anne Durant into the boat hull.

"Damn!" he ejaculated, and then stood listening.

At the house, not more than a quarter of a mile away, tumult had arisen. Men were shouting. A voice that was much like Greavy's came plainly to Vanteen's ears.

"No! Come back! Hell with th' dock! He's got over to the hangar!"

Bruce worked furiously as the noise drew nearer. The engine turned again, gasped and stopped. Throwing a glance over his shoulder he saw the beach suddenly populated and thanked his stars that the breeze had been driving the boat offshore.

A pistol banged, then another. A bullet pinged against a wire, and it sang with a ukulele whine.

"Don't trust to shootin'!" some one yelled. "There's a skiff below!"

ANNE DURANT, peering toward the beach, saw the boat putting off a moment later. Then the roar of the air engine broke again on her ears and Vanteen was in the seat beside her, snatching at controls.

A sharp rush of wind smote her face and she saw with dismay that the plane was scooting in to shore. It swerved, narrowly missing the skiff, and dashed off over the sea with walls of white water lifting on either side of her.

Another moment, and these walls had subsided. The wind was harder on her cheeks, and the water churned no more. They were up—and then, suddenly, they were down again. The plane came gently back onto the bosom of the sea and again was heading shoreward.

Anne put her lips close to Vanteen's ear.

"Has something gone wrong? Can't you manage it?" Her voice was a sob, hardly perceptible.

The stars gave enough light for her to see that they were close in to the beach as the engine died—and to see that Vanteen was smiling. The high rock that he had likened to Gibraltar lifted above them.

"Sit tight," said Bruce, "and don't worry. She'll carry us as long as the fuel holds out."

She saw him climbing over the side, wading ashore. Minutes passed, and then he was back, dripping from the waist down and holding high a roll of ragged-edged canvas.

"Now," he panted, "I really don't care if I never see Sabre Island again. A while ago I had my work cut out for me—and here, dear child, it is!"

The warmed engine of the flying boat balked no more. When another minute had passed they were up again, circling higher and higher. Before he straightened out on his course into the southwest, Bruce pointed out to Anne a string of distant lights below.

"They're aboard the *Quest*," he shouted. "Considerate of them to stay up and provide us with a beacon. But then it's scarcely midnight, is it?"

The girl shrank back from the gunwale with a sudden nausea, for this was her first time in the air. When next she saw the lights that marked Truth Island fifteen minutes had elapsed. They were close at hand then and the flying boat, just having returned to the water, was splashing swiftly toward them.

Over the yacht's rail a voice that could belong to no one but James Francis Foley hailed the plane's crew in all the belligerency of Mr. Foley's recent night-editor days.

"Stand off, d'ye hear! I've a shotgun in me hands, and ye'll get both barrels of it if ye don't keep clear!"

The threat, at Vanteen's reply, became a roar of amazement and joy.

"Look, will ye, everybody! It's the boy himself dropped out of the sky. And Anne!"

Vanteen had tooled his ship close alongside the *Quest*. He helped Anne Durant out over a wing that touched the yacht's brass-bound boarding ladder, and when with a few swift wrenches at wires and gas lines he had put the flying boat's en-

gine out of the immediate running he scrambled after her.

A hundred breathless questions bombarded him, but he waved them off.

"It's more important that you hear something else before you hear me," he cried. "Listen!"

Out over the water, still miles away, a motor boat was spluttering excitedly.

"That," elucidated Bruce, "is Harger, Greavy and Company, coming to call again. If you'll tune up the engines, James, and you'll take the wheel, Barrett, I'll take care of the anchor. Something tells me we'd better be on our way."

He smiled quizzically at wide-eyed Lana Marshall, and turned to Woody.

"See if you can't raise the *Constance* by wireless, Tom. If you get hold of 'em tell Thompson to forget his sheriff and his lawyer and meet at the Statue of Liberty!"

CHAPTER XIX.

THREE PAIRS AND A JOKER.

FROM the after deck of the homeward-bound *Quest* a silent and thrilled young woman and a silent and serious young man watched the sky line of Truth Island melt into the shadows of the night. Far astern the thumping of a boat engine grew fainter until at last its beat was one with the purl of the light surf on the island shore.

"They're giving up the chase," said the young man, with a lack of enthusiasm which his companions might have considered singular had she not been immersed in thoughts more concerned with happiness ahead than hazards behind. "We're through with them—except for the eventual settlement we must make with the fiddler."

The girl took a final puff at her cigarette, expelled the smoke dreamily and sent a spark fluttering toward the phosphorescence of the yacht's wake.

"It's been glorious," she sighed, and suddenly she reached out and patted the larger hand resting on the rail. "I want you to be the first to know, Bruce. I—I'm giving up my freedom!"

Vanteen turned swiftly and looked down at her.

"*You*—engaged!" he stammered. "It is some one——"

"It's Lee Barrett." The girl laughed softly. "But I don't think it could be called an engagement just yet. I'm quite sure Mr. Barrett doesn't appreciate my intentions in regard to him."

Vanteen stared at her harder.

"What damn nonsense is this you're talking, Lana?"

"No nonsense at all. I know what I want when I see it, and I'm used to having it. I'm going to marry Lee. As for being engaged, I don't believe there'll be any engagement at all. Why should there be when the whole thing can be accomplished in a few hours?"

Bruce Vanteen leaned back against a stanchion and raised his hands.

"Champagne," he began sternly, "is very——"

Miss Marshall, smiling, shook her bobbed head.

"I've given up champagne and cocktails as well. I know Mr. Barrett doesn't approve," she said primly.

"You mean to tell me," gasped Vanteen, "that you've planned a future for two and haven't taken the party of the second part into your confidence?"

"No one's in my confidence but father—and now you. Of course, everything must be arranged in detail before I let Lee know. Southerners are the very devil for pride, and the fact that he hasn't money and I have might ruin it all if I allowed him the smallest chance for escape."

Bruce fanned himself with a brown palm.

"Lana, my child, what next? So you've told your dad, eh?"

"Oh, yes. I thought I might as well play the part of dutiful daughter for once—particularly since I was coming to the most serious moment of my life. I wirelessed him from the *Constance*, and father should certainly be too grateful for the handsome gesture to think of objecting."

"But, Lana, how long have you known Barrett?"

"Forever, it seems—oh, since long before there was a civilization in Egypt. That's the way I feel, anyhow. You mustn't think I'm an impetuous scatterbrain, Bruce. Actually it was weeks ago that I met Lee. He came out to the Forshays for the *Morning Star* while I was visiting there, and my heart's been skipping beats ever since.

"When I found him again on Truth Island I knew it was Fate. He'd been thinking of me, too. Didn't have to tell me that. The look in his eyes was enough."

"Suppose," said Vanteen weakly, "suppose it turned out that Barrett was married?"

"He isn't. I had that information out of him—and without exhibiting any unmaidenly forwardness, I hope—before ever he came aboard the *Constance*."

"Suppose, then, that his hot Southern pride doesn't brook the idea, in spite of everything?"

"It's the chivalry of his breed I'm counting on, stupid. That's why I'm going ahead with preparations on my own. He'd be too much of a gentleman to stand in the way of my happiness. Ah, trust me, Bruce. I've never seen the man I couldn't handle!"

Vanteen gazed off over the glowing wake.

"Somehow," he said after a little, "the thing doesn't seem on reflection as preposterous as it sounds. You do have a faculty for getting your own way, Lana. And Barrett's as decent a chap as could be found. No reason why money should be permitted to stand between you—or pride.

"Honestly, I don't think I'm premature in offering my congratulations." He spoke dryly and wound up with a rueful chuckle: "Wish I had as good ground for congratulating myself."

The enterprising Miss Marshall eyed him sharply.

"Why, whatever's gone wrong, Bruce? You've got your painting, and you've come away with a whole skin. Besides, look at the perfectly gorgeous adventures you've been through!"

Vanteen grinned.

"Oh, the adventures have been all I could have expected. I've had enough of 'em to last me out for an honest burgher lifetime. But the worst has yet to be told, child.

"If I could only have foreseen the way things were going to turn out to-night I'd be the most cheerful man on the broad Atlantic at this moment—not excluding the Americans in the smoking rooms of foreign ships. As it is, I played into Harger's hands in the finals, and I'm coming away from Sabre Island broke—stony broke!"

A GASP of dismay escaped Lana Marshall, and she came closer to him and laid a hand on his arm.

"Tell me, Bruce," she urged, and when Vanteen had briefly set forth the circumstances of notes and the memorandum validating them she burst out: "But surely you won't stand on dignity with me! You're not going to be fussy and refuse to let me help out!"

"I'm not worrying about myself," Vanteen told her. "It won't kill me to make a living during the lean years when the income's signed away. Before I left the *Star* no less an authority than Jim Foley told me I could hold a reporter's job on any paper.

"But Jim himself—and Woody, and Edeson—they're all out. I had a scheme to put them on their feet; more, to establish them in what any newspaper man would consider a heaven on earth. The cost would be comparatively little, but now——"

"Tell me the plan!" commanded Miss Marshall.

For five minutes the glow of cigarette tips betrayed to an observant eye forward that two heads were bending close together on the after deck. Then both glows vanished. A match was struck and held behind cupped hands and a single spark succeeded. Lana Marshall had risen.

"I'm glad you look at it sensibly, Bruce," said she. "Of course, I'll have to call on father, but he won't mind a bit since he'll know that I'm really making a sound investment."

"It is that—absolutely sound," said Vanteen soberly. "Otherwise I wouldn't hear of your taking it on. But please don't go talking now. Leave the announcement for me to make to every one at the same time."

"The announcement I'm going to make inside of one minute from now," smiled the girl over her shoulder, "will be interesting enough to your Miss Hubbard. And to Miss Durant, too, I think."

A moment after she had gone Woody strolled aft from the wireless room.

"Noticed you had company," he remarked, "or I'd have wandered back before."

"You missed hearing some news by staying away," Vanteen told him. "How's the ether holding up? Did you get in touch with the *Constance?*"

"You bet. Thompson will be coming along after us in a half hour. They relayed over a message for Miss Marshall. Where's she gone?"

"Down to visit Miss Hubbard and Anne. I guess the message will wait until Eddeson's got his grand reunion dinner served up, won't it?"

"I guess," replied Woody briefly. He threw himself into one of the wicker chairs. "Tell me about the hairbreadth 'scape, Bruce. How did you two pull it off?"

Vanteen laughed.

"I'm going to tell my end of the yarn just once—to the whole crew forgathered—and be done with it. As for the really important end, which is Anne's, I haven't heard it yet myself.

"Conversation's a lost art in the air, you know; it's as hard to hear a shout in a plane as a whisper in the subway. And you know what chance I've had to talk with Anne since we came aboard the *Quest.*"

"I noticed the way Mother Hubbard swooped her away from you," grinned Woody. "A wing lifted and—bingo! Anne was under it. S'pose you've observed you're not the fair-haired boy you once were with Helen. Realize yet why that is? Well, I'll——"

From forward came an interrupting clamor, the violent banging of pan against pan. Succeeding this disturbance arose the voice of Eddeson:

"All ha-a-a-nds to grub! The gu-lorious pig roast is served! Ladees and gentlemen, get your napkins in your necks!"

VANTEEN, stepping below for the first time since returning to the *Quest,* saw that the housewifely Eddeson had found time to restore the saloon to a semblance of order. Miss Hubbard already was seated, with Anne to her right and Lana Marshall to her left. There was a peculiar quality in the gaze with which she greeted him, Bruce thought—a warmth as of triumph. And when they went from him he noticed that the dowager's eyes were warmer still.

Mr. James Francis Foley, red faced from a struggle with a recalcitrant coat, had entered the saloon from the forward end. Miss Hubbard proclaimed the informality of the occasion with a gracious wave.

"Don't bother with the coat, Jim," she said. "You're hot from working over the engines, and besides you're ripping the sleeve lining. I'll fix it for you after dinner."

Eddeson appeared in the pantry door.

"Everybody ready?"

"Let's wait a bit before we start," said Vanteen. "Come in and sit down, Eddie. I want to say a few words—and when they've been spoken I know we'll all turn to with a better appetite."

Standing at the head of the table as he had done eons ago to disclose to his corsairs the object of their cruise, Bruce fleetingly caught Anne Durant's eyes. They held an expression strange to them, and seemed to be brimming with troubled thought.

Miss Marshall had just received from Woody the radiogram passed on from the

Constance. It lay unopened before her, and her gaze was demurely downcast.

VANTEEN, swinging around his chair and balancing on its arm, discovered that his throat had suddenly gone husky.

"I was going to try for a fancy speech," he blurted, "but I guess I'm not up to it. All I can say is that—well, hang it, this crowd doesn't have to break up when we get back to New York. And I don't want it to!"

"Bravo!" vociferated Mr. Foley. "I'd ask nothing better than to round out my career with the Burkhalters. What's the next voyage?"

"There isn't going to be any," said Bruce. "I've sailed my last with the *Quest.* It's a continuance of our alliance ashore that I'm figuring on. But first I want to know whether you people have been making any plans for the future since we started east. Are you tired of the newspaper business? Tell me that!"

Foley looked at him aghast.

"The idea! What is there in life besides news—and engines?"

"If *I'm* tired of anything," drawled Woody, "it's of being a wage slave. However——"

"Thanks," interjected Vanteen, "for expressing the nub of my notion." He turned to James Francis Foley. "What do you know about the New Hampton *Argus,* Jim?"

The eyes of the night-editor-engineer lighted.

"One of the finest little plants in the country—mechanically. I've heard a lot about the shop, Bruce. Nothing's lacking there but—brains.

"The *Argus* was Sid Hatfield's paper and a mighty productive property until a few years ago. But Sid's son isn't the old man by a long shot. He's coiled a lot of long-haired ideas around the sheet, and he'll strangle it to death before he's through."

"Young Hatfield," said Vanteen, leaning forward, "*is* through. It isn't generally known, but the paper's on the market. Less than a month ago an effort was made to interest me in it, but my mind was full of the Don then. I wanted time to think the proposition over, and said so.

"I didn't exactly take an option; however, I know that no action will be taken until Fred Farstock, who is Hatfield's business manager and happens to have been my classmate at college, hears definitely from me."

Eddeson had been twisting excitedly at the other end of the table.

"I'm going to faint," he assured Bruce. "Unless you hurry up and say what all this means. I spent my vacation near New Hampton a couple of summers ago. In the hills back of town there are streams fairly alive with——"

"I know 'em," said Vanteen. "A man would have to travel a thousand miles for better fishing. And yet New Hampton is close enough to New York for a fellow to run in over a week-end if he wants to. Just far enough away so that the *Argus,* instead of being a mere suburban gossip sheet, classifies as a distinctive city daily.

"My thought is that if the group of us were to take over the paper on a sort of coöperative basis—each holding an ownership interest in the plant to be paid for out of profits, that is to say—we could produce the best daily of its size in the country."

Tom Woody slapped his hand on the table.

"Could we?" he cried. "I wouldn't want to work under a better managing editor than James Francis Foley. Hell with the great American novel! That can wait until the *Argus* doesn't need me."

"On a paper that size," murmured the rapt Eddeson, "I could handle all the telegraph copy myself. It's the sitting around between dead lines in a big shop that gets my goat."

Miss Hubbard's eyes were almost forgiving.

"If *I'm* included," said she, "I could not only give New Hampton the first really high-class society column ever seen outside New York, but take over supervision of the whole woman's page. All

I've ever asked of the gods was a little more space."

A mist had gathered on Mr. Foley's spectacles.

"D'ye mean to say, Bruce," he roared, blinking behind them, "that you've decided to dig into your jeans and——"

Vanteen's smile faded.

"I *had* decided to," said he, "but circumstances make that impossible. Harger took a heavy fall out of me before he was through. I don't want to go into detail—but the fact is the old man cleaned me.

"For a period of years to come my income will be gobbled up. I'll have a living to make; and here and now, Mr. Foley, I ask you to consider my application for a job as reporter on the New Hampton *Argus*."

James Francis Foley removed his glasses and wiped them surreptitiously on the edge of Eddeson's snowy tablecloth.

"You begin with a fairy tale and end with a riddle," he complained. "How did Harger clean ye? And if he did——"

"Fortunately," said Vanteen, "my own small personal misadventure doesn't mean the downfall of my plan. At the price quoted by Farstock, the *Argus* represents an extraordinarily good investment. Miss Marshall—and this is on a strictly business basis, mind—has agreed to finance the venture and turn over the property to us for better or worse. The money she advances, of course, is to be returned to her out of profits."

Lana Marshall found herself suddenly with all eyes upon her. She flushed.

"It's just as Bruce says—a business proposition," she protested. "Up to this time I've just spent. Now I'm readjusting my life to new conditions, and it's better to invest.

"Oh, I've spent wildly in the past; as a matter of fact I'm a couple of years overdrawn on my income from grandfather's estate. But that needn't mean a thing. When I've explained to dad—well, I've got his blessing here now. I want you to know what a peach he is. I'll read it to you."

Vanteen caught a flash of Tom Woody's face. It had lengthened perceptibly, and yet a grim little smile played about his lips as Miss Marshall ripped open the envelope of the paternal radiogram.

There was a breathless moment during which those at the long table looked questioningly at one another. The girl was reading the message not aloud, but to herself. Her brows were knitted over it, and she had gone pale. After a moment she tore the blue-bordered blank into tiny squares and let them filter to the floor.

"I guess," she said unsteadily, "that I've never really known father. For the first time since I can remember he's forbidden me what I want. But I'm bound to have it—and the words I've just read mean I can ask him for nothing.

"If I'm to finance the *Argus* we'll all have to wait until I've overtaken my private income. I'm sorry to the point of tears, but my own plan is dearer to my heart than any other in the world—and I'm going through with it."

She laughed hysterically and reached a hand toward Miss Hubbard's.

"Oh," she whispered, "but he'll have to have me now!"

AT the end of the dismalest dinner party of his life, Bruce Vanteen leaned over the rail of the *Quest* gazing into a sea no blacker than his mood. In his sudden and complete self-abasement it had stung him only the more to feel the sympathy of his bitterly disappointed crew flooding out to him.

If anything they had taken the let down too gamely after the lifting of their hopes. He had been a newspaper man long enough himself to know what the prospect briefly opened to them had meant.

It would have been easier for him to have accepted recriminations, he felt, than their efforts to cheer him. Understanding people they were—as their work had made them. They knew, all of them, that Don o' Doubloons would fetch a price that would pay for the *Argus* twice over. And yet it hadn't been necessary to explain and apologize for his sentiments.

They knew that the recovered Don would not be sold if he were reduced to living alone with the painting in a hall bedroom—not if he actually came to starvation during those years when other hands would be snatching away his rightful revenues. It had been tacitly accepted that Bruce Vanteen, though possessed of a fortune on canvas, was broke; for the time being, at least, the poorest man of the lot.

After that one unanswered question by Foley they hadn't even asked him to tell of the disastrous transaction with Harger. They merely—and Helen Hubbard herself with them—had united to comfort him as a good friend down on his luck. In fair weather or foul, they had wanted him to know he would always be one of them—an old *Morning Star* man!

BEHIND him Vanteen heard steps that met the deck lightly. He didn't turn; hoped that whoever it was wouldn't stop.

Some one stood beside him. An arm slipped through his.

"Oh, Bruce, I'm weeping for you!" whispered a voice that trembled over the words.

Vanteen looked into eyes that glistened in the darkness, and knew there were tears in them. He clumsily caressed the slender shoulder that nestled to his.

"Tears are something I won't tolerate, Anne!" he said gently. "Why should I be afraid of the world? At the worst, I have a better consolation than most men of my age. Poverty can't last forever with me. I know I won't *die* poor, anyhow!"

"I didn't mean about the money," breathed the girl. "But Lana! She—she's treated you scandalously. Why, Lee Barrett can never be the man——"

Vanteen turned slowly. He gripped Anne Durant's arm, held her away from him, looked wonderingly into her eyes. In them he saw what they had never betrayed to him before.

"You blessed angel!" he exulted. "Do you suppose there's ever been another girl? Oh, long, long ago I made up my mind I'd rather have you for a brother—that seeming to be your preferred relationship—than any one else for——"

Bruce, bending down, forgot to finish his sentence; the lips of Miss Anne Durant were very close. Eminently they were not a brother's lips—nor quite a sister's.

She drew free from him after a moment.

"I *would* like to talk business if you'd only give me a chance, Bruce. Perhaps you noticed how abstracted I was during dinner? I was wondering—wondering what new hold Harger could have got on you?"

"It's nothing—so long as he's lost his hold on you."

"His hold on me?" repeated the girl. "Really, dear, that's scarcely a compliment. I flattered myself the situation stood the other way round. But you haven't answered my question. What was this new transaction?"

"Why, I simply thought it—ah—expedient to give him a memorandum confirming my signature on those damned notes I think I mentioned to you."

"Yes, dear," murmured Miss Durant. "You did mention them. And this memorandum?"

"It's legally binding, I'm afraid. This time my signature was properly witnessed. To pay up I'll have to throw my affairs into the hands of the Shylocks. But I'd rather do that and pay the price than have Harger take a judgment. Better to be rid of him at once than——"

"Oh, you were hasty!" cried the girl. "Why must you have given him the new note?"

"But it wasn't a new note. Merely a memorandum confessing that the indorsements on the old ones were mine. With the maker dead it had to be that way to avoid complications, you see."

"And if these old notes didn't exist?" demanded Anne Durant, her voice suddenly sharp.

"Then," said Vanteen, "I could tell Harger to go to the devil. In itself the memorandum has no significance. But before you speak, Anne, I want to say that I

wouldn't turn back to Sabre Island for ten times——"

A strange collision between a laugh and a sob occurred on the lips of Miss Durant.

"Please tell me," she asked softly, "what you think I saw about Jerome Harger to interest me? What, dear, but the notes you'd been worrying about—the notes you shouldn't have rightfully been called on to settle for? Eventually the dear old gentleman showed them to me; wanted me to see what sort you were."

"Yes?" cried Vanteen.

"Oh, I did see them. And I saw where Harger hid them. He seemed to feel somehow that he couldn't trust them to his safe."

Bruce seized the girl's arm again.

"Don't torture me!" he groaned. "Are you telling me you——"

"I'm telling you," said Miss Durant calmly, "that before I came to you tonight I saw the notes in ashes on Jerome Harger's hearth. And just to be sure they'd make no more trouble for any one I cared about, I scattered the ashes!"

ALL in all it cannot be written that Bruce Vanteen ever in his life was guilty of an act of simon-pure selfishness; yet on this night he hugged his good fortune to him—hugged it as closely as James Francis Foley ever hugged a card.

Five minutes had passed after the announcement of reprieve before he was capable of the thought that the world held more than two.

"Listen, Anne, we're not acting just right," he said, suddenly penitent. "All life's ahead of us for—for this sort of thing. Don't you think we ought to pass on the word to the owners and staff of the New Hampton *Argus?*"

Hand in hand they went forward.

In the pilot house the light seemed not so bright as on other nights. Anne tiptoed up the companionway, and immediately was down again.

"Lana is there—with Lee Barrett," she whispered. "Tell me, dear, is it safe to steer a yacht with one hand?"

"Safe," grinned Vanteen, "but not seamanlike. I'd rather hold back the news a while than embarrass so splendid a sailor. Where's Jim Foley, do you think?"

Anne pointed to the forward deck.

"Can't you see him there with Helen? She's brushing his vest, it looks like. And —merciful heavens! Come, dear, let's slip back astern and talk about ourselves—until the moon hides behind another cloud!"

The book-length novel in the next issue will be "Deep Water," by William Morton Ferguson.

THE ACT WENT OVER BIG

SENATOR JOHN SHARP WILLIAMS of Mississippi, once saw in a tent at a country fair a vaudeville act that "went over big." The way it registered on the mind of an old colored woman convinced him of the correctness of his own opinion that it was a "knock-out."

The performer was a magician who, so far as the spectators could see, worked miracles. The more he worked, the better he got. Finally, he covered a newspaper with a heavy flannel cloth and, through the cloth and a bandage over his eyes, read what was printed there. At that, the old woman's eyes bulged. Then he doubled the cloth and redoubled it and through the heavy folds read some more. Right there came the blow-off.

"I'm goin' home!" exclaimed the old woman, edging toward the exit. "Dis hyuh ain't no place for a lady in a thin calico dress!"

This is the Woods!

By Holman Day

Author of "The Barony of Whiskeag," "As Tested by Timmett Breed," Etc.

There are two kinds of law—the law of Nature, and the law of Man. And each is good in its own place.

ALF ZANNICK, the head guide, rolled out of his blanket on the duff under a pine tree, awaking promptly on the tick of two in the morning, with the sureness of one who has been called by an alarm clock.

It was the hour of the woods dog-watch. A trained guide times his first stretch of slumber till that hour of two—he sets a nerve alarm to buzz somehow in his inner consciousness.

Zannick walked up the slope of the ridge to where the tents of the city folks had been pitched—the quarters were mere slanting canvas shelters; the expedition was out from the big hotel for only a night's stay in the forest.

The fire which was the hub of the half circle of the tents had burned down to coals; the guide cross-piled on more wood and torched off the fuel with a few handfuls of birch bark. The blaze wheeched sibilantly through the mass, frizzling the sap of the wood.

The sound, and the radiance flinging its patches on the slow swaying boughs of the blackgrowth, caused the slumberers to stir. Somebody drowsily asked the time and Zannick gave it. His voice brought the men up sitting.

"Aha!" said Jameson Powers, knowing something about woods habits after various seasons of fishing. "Dogwatch, eh?"

He was the first one from the shadows of the shelters. He wanted to parade his familiarity with forest customs. He scuffed heavily, a burly figure, toward the fire in his unlaced high boots, filling his pipe. "Come on, you sleepy heads! This isn't New York. Up, men, for a drag at the pipe! Up, women, for a sup of tea!"

He was answered by grunts and murmurs, sounds which registered protest. Somebody grouchily called him a "devilish rooster."

"Most city folks have a tough job of it—getting into the spirit of the big sticks, Alf," jeeringly averred Powers after he

had begun to puff on his pipe. He cried out for all to hear. "But this gang is going to follow the custom of the woods dogwatch, even if I have to drag 'em out. Hi, Lillie!" Powers was hailing his wife. "I'll begin the derrick job with you, unless you're here in sixty seconds. And poke up Mrs. Demorest!"

THERE was a mumble of sleepy conversation under the slope of canvas where the two women were ensconced.

In the other shelters blankets were heaved and men yawned audibly.

Leslie Manson appeared first. He was swathed in an embroidered lounging robe and Powers made fun of the young man's sybaritism, following up some gibing of the evening before.

"Confound it, this is the woods, Manson! You ain't getting the good out of the life, togging up like that, peeling off your other clothes. If you had only shucked out of your boots and cap, like I did, you'd have got a kick out of the thing. You're lugging too much of New York along with you."

"That's a really wise plan for a city man when he comes into the woods—do as Manson has done," drawled another voice. The speaker was Doctor Forsyth, tall, scrawny, deliberate and cynical. He stood beside the fire, his coat over his shoulders, cape style.

Partly satirical, he said: "As a psychoanalyst I argue against repressions, but by the nature of things a city man in his town life has surrendered himself to conventions and man-made laws and he has no business reverting in any decided way to the primitive when he is in the woods. It may make matters complex and dangerous."

"For cripes' sake, doc, don't get started again on that stuff of yours!" protested Powers, with mock horror. "You put me to sleep with it last night—I want to finish this pipe before snoozing off a second time."

The women of the party appeared, in negligee—Mrs. Powers and Mrs. Demorest.

Leslie Manson hurried from the fire and gave his arm to Mrs. Powers to help her across the uneven ground; he did not display the same solicitude in behalf of Mrs. Demorest, a plain little dowdy who painted on canvas for a living instead of on her face for adornment.

Doctor Forsyth had been taking note of the everlasting gibing indulged in by Powers, where Manson was concerned. It was now suggested that there was more than the animus of humor behind the nagging persiflage.

Powers narrowed his eyes, looking at the couple, and remarked in an undertone to the doctor, "That devilish peacock of a Manson struts too much in front of the women. It makes fools of 'em."

"Manson has picked up Continental manners while living abroad."

"Well, he ought to have laid 'em down where he picked 'em up! This is the United States and husbands don't want to have their wives all flattered up and kotowed to. It makes wives expect it from husbands—and that's what puts the husbands in wrong!"

"Aren't jealous, are you, Powers?" probed the psychoanalyst rather maliciously.

Powers swore volubly, made highly indignant by such a suggestion.

But the doctor did not quail. "Your slogan to Manson just now was, 'This is the woods!' Take it to yourself, man!"

"Now I don't know what in blazes you do mean."

"That's because you went to sleep while I was talking last evening. My point was that man is only an animal who has given himself over to the restrictions of the law for his own good and because it protects him to have other men assuming the same limitations in their natural desires. Men in the primeval woods killed other men and stole from them, even grabbed away women, because it was every one for himself. We have tamed ourselves enough in these times to adopt a more convenient code. But I'm boring you again."

The women and Manson had reached the fire. Doctor Forsyth strolled away.

Powers followed him. "Seeing as how you're now making me a text, I'm interested. But I'm not jealous."

"You don't think you are, but now that you have been sleeping in the open, like an animal of the woods, you have unconsciously peeled off a few layers of the conventional. It happens more naturally in your case because you have been so much more in the woods beforetimes. In the city you think it mighty fine to have a nice young fellow like Manson do the peacock stuff with your wife at the dances. Up here in the woods you instinctively feel it's offensive rivalry. Don't allow yourself to become too primitive, Brother Powers!

"I have studied the ways of the woods in my time," the doctor went on, "and I have come into a state of mind where I can pardon many of the things that are done to each other by the men of the woods, the real natives. They just have to employ a different code up here where a man cannot lift the telephone and call a cop.

"They see the everlasting struggle going on among the animals of the woods—the devil-take-the-hindmost stuff—and the men fall into those similar ways without realizing how much they are reverting to the primal instincts. Yes, I make a lot of allowances for men of the woods."

"Cursed if that isn't a new idea where I'm concerned," blurted Powers. "Why, do you know I was almost hating Manson a few minutes ago. And no more reason for doing it, either, than I have for punching you in the jaw for calling me jealous."

"That dressing gown was half the trouble," returned the psychiatrist, chuckling. "Too brilliant plumage on the other bird! I didn't notice the hair on the back of your head. But maybe it bristled when that something torched up in you which you didn't understand.

"Men of the city should never bring their differences into the woods. If they are nursing enmities they should stay where the thumb of accepted law is always on them, where the normal man goes only to the statute law for redress—never thinks of doing anything else, no matter how mad he may feel."

He stopped talking and the two walked on together down a trail.

Powers was having a thought tussle with what he had hailed as a new idea. Doctor Forsyth puffed at his pipe, having gone as far as he cared with a man of Powers' rather obtuse understanding of mental intricacies.

THEY came to the edge of a small clearing and stopped suddenly in the shadow of the hemming trees.

Two men were occupying the clearing. They were fighting silently but frantically, lunging at each other, dodging, running about, leaping in attack.

It was not a fist fight; the moonlight flashed from the blades of shuttling knives.

"Gawd!" growled Powers. "Here's the real thing."

"Again your slogan: 'This is the woods.' It's plain they haven't hired lawyers to do their fighting for 'em!"

Powers marched promptly into the clearing, yelping a curt command. He was brawny, he was inclined to be pugnacious, he was naturally peremptory with understrappers, having been a tyrannical foreman before he had made his fortune as a contractor.

He recognized the fighters as the two guides under Zannick.

"What th' 'ell are you two coots up to?"

When he came close, brandishing his fist, one of the men muttered in a surly tone, "What we do, that's ours to do as we like."

"I want to know! Let me tell you that this trip is my party. I'm paying you wages and you'll hang up on your carving business till we're back at the hotel. Hand over those knives!" He snapped his fingers. "I'll have 'em honed up all sharp and give 'em to you to use on each other after you've finished your job with me," he promised grimly.

When they hesitated he grabbed the weapons away. "What's the fight about, anyway?"

One of the men was Thibeault, a French Canadian.

The other was Paul Olamon, an Indian.

Olamon walked away, silent, saturnine.

The Frenchman shrugged his shoulders.

Powers continued to hammer in questions to the latter about the cause of the squabble, as he termed it.

"It is no squab-bel, what you call him, m'sieu'. It don't come too queeck! It's beeznass of long time!"

"If it's business go to law with it."

The Indian, at a little distance, halted and turned. In staccato he cursed the law and all its works.

"Not much use he got for law," said Thibeault, grinning evilly. "He come so new from the prison of the State."

Then Thibeault ran away swiftly and was hidden by the trees.

"Here, you!" Powers called to the Indian. "If you're a jailbird I don't want you in my outfit. Come here and get your pay—then you beat it!"

Olamon returned slowly and faced the employer. He was now in control of the rage which had burst out so violently. He had resumed the natural and stoical dignity of his race.

Powers, understanding better the white man's style of violence in retort, was visibly disquieted by the Indian's unwavering stare. To cover confusion Powers dredged with his hand in his trousers pocket and brought forth a handful of bank notes. "Anything to say why I shouldn't fire you?" hedged the employer.

"Anything I say does me no good. What I said to the law, it was no help for me. They put me in prison for what I did not do."

"What was the charge?"

Olamon disregarded the blunt question. "So you go on like all the rest to hurt me more. No matter! I don't expect much else." He held out his hand to receive the money.

But Powers had a keen sense in regard to men, because his business had been to deal in and with men. He instinctively felt that he had distinguished the quality of simple honesty in this man who claimed that he had been wronged.

Powers withdrew the hand that was about to place the money in the other's palm. "What was the charge against you?"

The Indian did not answer; he kept his hand extended.

"Did that Canuck swear you into prison? Was that it? Were you fighting it out?" It was a shrewd stab by an employee expert who was called upon often to dig into the matter of grudges.

Olamon maintained his silence.

Powers rammed the bills back into his pocket. "If you've had a lot of dirt done to you I won't pile on more—not just now! We'll let the thing ride!"

Powers was not splitting hairs in the matter of his keen curiosity and his sense of justice; he merely realized that both motives were influencing him. He wanted to know more about Olamon's case—to find out whether his hasty conclusion, as a judge of men, was justifiable.

The Indian turned and walked away without a word.

"Well, doc, stick your old psychic needle into that case and see what you make of it," urged Powers when he was alone with Forsyth.

"Again your slogan, Jamesy! 'This is the woods.' The duel was an appeal to the laws of the woods, after the laws of the city had contrived only injustice."

"But I'm for the statute law."

"So am I, of course. But human beings make their mistakes, even in the courts. The Indian has been a victim."

"Say, you've sized him the same as I have—ain't that so? He told the truth."

"Yes, he told the truth," was the assurance by the psychoanalyst. "He prefaced that truth with an explosion that ripped open his soul. Indians don't do that in the way of mere acting. His cursing of the law told a big story."

"Perhaps that's what made a hit with me," said Powers, psychoanalyzing his own soul in his fumbling fashion. "I've just been licked by lying blackmailers in a personal-injury case."

He inspected the knives and tucked them away in his hip pocket. "We don't tell the folks at the fire anything about this, of course?"

"Certainly not, Jamesy! The women would have a fit and hear murder if a hoot owl calls." He listened and added, "And Manson seems to be putting them into a mood of peace and romance."

Faint and far on the still night air sounded the thrumming of a mandolin and they heard Manson singing a ballad in pianissimo tone.

WHEN Powers and the doctor appeared again in the firelight the troubador kept on singing.

The two newcomers gave each other side glances, finding considerable of a kick in this transit from tragedy to the trifles of the conventional.

"This is the woods," grunted Powers.

His wife drawled a question about his absence in the company of the doctor.

"Stretching our legs, dear!"

"But I thought I heard you shout."

"Yapped at a fox to see how fast he'd run." Powers and the doctor took their pannikins of tea from the attentive head guide.

The ladies sipped and Mrs. Demorest had something to say about the utter peacefulness of the night woods.

"I thought I was going to be dreadfully frightened," confided Lillian Powers. "I really hoped I would be. I do so love a thrill! The city life gets to be so tame."

Manson laid down his mandolin and drank his cooled tea. "But all the excitement is in the city these days," he observed sagely. "The forest seems to be the truly tame place. Why, we've even got a real Indian for a guide—and he's as stolid as a steer."

There was a silence; they were all busy with tea and biscuits.

A shrill agonized wail rose from the valley at the foot of the slope. Mrs. Powers echoed it with a scream.

Then, from far away, a prolonged, dolorous "Ah-loo-ro-o-o-o!" floated on the air like the cry of a lost spirit.

"For mercy's sake, what is happening?" squeaked Mrs. Demorest.

Zannick's prompt chuckle and his grin which was revealed by the firelight indicated to Mrs. Powers that he would be a consoling informant and she appealed to him.

"It's only a little of the workings of the woods, ma'am—that noise you heard first. An owl was getting his meal o' vittles—he landed on a rabbit."

"Wicked!" gasped the lady.

"So is the first crack of getting your filet mignon for you—if you want to look at it that way," stated the blunt Mr. Powers. "The owl firsthands it and gets the squeal along with the meat—that's all the difference."

The wife nervously shifted the subject by asking the guide what the other sound signified.

"Oh, that was all right, ma'am, no matter how solemn it seemed. Only a loon singing his little ditty."

"Quite as good as Manson was doing," blurted Powers, unable to keep off the strain of gibing; then he caught the quizzical glance of Doctor Forsyth and muttered something and walked away and sat down.

"Hungry creatures must eat, and I suppose it's God's plan how they get their food," affirmed Mrs. Powers reverently, excusing herself as well as the animals.

Doctor Forsyth knocked the dottle out of his pipe against a boulder. "As your husband says so wisely, Mrs. Powers, 'This is the woods!'"

Powers grunted from his obscurity; there was no telling whether he signified approbation of the sentiment or was registering resentment at this everlasting quotation.

"And, I suppose, no matter how much different the folks must live and conduct themselves in the cities," prodded Mrs. Powers, "the woods creatures must handle things according to their natures."

"According as Nature teaches, yes! As your husband put it, it's firsthand stuff up here. The creatures don't call in intermediaries—they attend to personal mat-

ters themselves. So it comes down to perpetual conflict.

"Nature is teacher, as I have said. The big trees grow up and kill off the little trees. The large fish eat the small ones. And men who live always in the woods become psychologically impressed by what they see going on all the time around them and copy the wild creatures almost unconsciously, not bothering to think much about the laws which dominate the folks in the cities."

Powers yawned audibly with brutal emphasis. "There you go again, doc! As boss of the camp I declare the dogwatch ended. And if anybody hears anything else before morning it'll be only a screech owl psych-kicking about a mouse he's gobbled. Keep right on sleeping!"

Men and women, they returned to their shelters and covered themselves with blankets.

Zannick made sure that the dying fire was securely hemmed by the rocks at the edge of the pit.

He trudged down the slope of the ridge, questing his own blanket and duff couch.

He found his under guides sitting bolt upright at a distance of some ten paces from each other. Their mien was that of animals, on guard, challenging attack, awaiting in silence a hostile move.

"Look a' here, you two! I wouldn't have hired you for this trip if you hadn't sworn you'd buried that grudge. Now it looks to me as if you lied so you could get out here together in the woods where you could take a crack at each other."

They remained mute and motionless.

"You ought to be good friends," pursued the head guide, "even if that ain't looked for in most famblies!" He chuckled over his own satire. "Speaking for myself, Thibeault, I wouldn't care much to be married to a Injun girl like you are, even if her father is the head of the tribe. Not but what Paul's sister makes you a good wife.

"And you ought to overlook any little smirch that was put on Paul by his being sent down to the jug. Prob'ly there's two stories about it—and one of 'em to his credit, if the whole truth was told," he chatted on while he wrapped himself in his blanket. "Now, turn in, you two—and no more grouching at each other for the rest of the trip. I'm all hell for pleasantness in a party!"

The two men went silently to their blankets.

II.

"WE'RE in no hurry about breaking camp, Alf," Powers informed the head guide after breakfast. "So long's we get back to the hotel before dark, that's all."

"It'll be an easy trudge, sir, if we take the short cut past Hell's Pudding. The ladies want to see it."

"Alf has been telling us the old Indian legends about the place, Jamesy," declared Mrs. Powers, still avid for her thrills. "Of course we want to see it."

"Rotten taste in the way of scenery, I'll say!" retorted Powers, wrinkling his nose. "A pot of cursed muck smelling to the high heavens. No wonder there are stories about it."

"But there have been ever so many tragedies there."

"Oh, we'll go that way because it's shortest," the husband said impatiently. "But I don't come into the woods looking for any tragedies."

As if that statement served as a cue for thoughts and action, he marched away down the slope of the hill toward a brook.

Thibeault and Olamon were there, at a little distance from each other, washing up the ware on which breakfast had been served. On the Indian had been thrust the greasy skillets as his share of the work.

Mrs. Demorest was sketching.

Manson was endeavoring to interest Mrs. Powers by reading aloud from a book of poems.

Therefore, unhampered by any claim on his society, Doctor Forsyth sat on a knoll and observed Powers, who was off to satisfy his curiosity, get the truth and

straighten things out, so he had curtly informed the doctor, passing the latter.

THE conference at the brook seemed to resolve itself into a stump speech delivered by Powers, who gesticulated violently, rumbled indistinguishable words and even clamped his hand on bowed shoulders and shook the men who kneeled beside the water.

Zannick strolled down that way and took part in the affair. But neither of the overlords got results, according to the doctor's observation. The toilers kept on scrubbing.

Powers and Zannick gave up at last and came together up the slope, talking.

Powers sat down beside Doctor Forsyth on the knoll; the head guide stood.

"Talk about your fresh-water clams!" snarled Powers, indicating the two men at the brook with a flourish of his hand. "Damned if I could open 'em!"

"As a tactful father confessor you're a good contractor," said the doctor dryly. "Your steam shovel has its limitations, you see!"

Powers swore. "Look here, doc! Alf will tell you how I went at the thing in just the right hammer-and-tongs way."

"I was watching you!" confessed the doctor amiably. "There was only one thing you omitted to do—and such an oversight rather surprised me; you didn't knock their heads together. It isn't too late to go down and try it now."

Powers' indignation would not allow him to sit in neighborly contact with this sarcasm; he jumped to his feet. "I suppose you could stick in that little psycho-kicket needle of yours and drain it all out of 'em, eh?"

"Certainly!" stated the doctor with composure. "Your attack simply riveted their repressions."

"Oh, hell!" blazed Powers, always cocksure in his management of men, now thoroughly angry in his defeat. He started away. Halting for a moment, he growled over his shoulder, "I'll bet you a hundred you can't spin a thread with either of those men!"

"I never make bets, Jamesy, and I'd make a poor worker in the textile art."

"There you said it! But a little practical common sense would help even a psychoanalyst," was the contractor's parting shot.

A few minutes later Powers and Zannick became absorbed in a game of "pitchpede," dealing their cards on a blanket folded across their knees.

With nobody in the party paying any attention to him, Doctor Forsyth walked away into the woods. He had seen Olamon, after finishing his work on the skillets, trudge off into the brush, deserting the hateful companionship of Thibeault.

Quite in a casual manner, circling, the doctor came face to face with the Indian.

"Wait a moment, Olamon! I want you to understand that I have a great deal of sympathy for any man who is or has been in a prison. In the case of a man like you, wonted to the freedom of the woods, it must have been dreadful punishment. And I heard you say last night that you were innocent!"

It was quick, calculated, effective lancing. Doctor Forsyth had gone to the core of a rankling, festered hurt which had been sealed under the stolidity of the sufferer.

Olamon's sullen eyes lighted. "You understand, sir!"

"I am a doctor, my friend, who tries to soothe hurts in the mind; and sometimes I'm able to cure the hurts. Come! Walk along with me under the trees. Tell me what your prison life was like. You suffered much, I'm sure!"

The selfishly curious, arrogant methods of Powers had made the Indian ready for just such treatment as this, tactfully undertaken by the doctor. Here was a kindly person who understood! Who offered to listen to the story of a man's torture! This new friend did not pry into a man's reason for seeking to kill another man—this questioner offered himself merely as a sympathetic receptacle for bitter troubles!

Olamon was no longer stoical or laconic; Indians have the power of true

eloquence when they are moved to speech. All that he had dammed back now flowed from him. This listener was wise; maybe he could cure those hurts, as he had hinted!

IT was like a bird of the forest that had been caged and had suffered and now, miraculously given the power of human speech, could describe its agonies. His confinement had not been merely prisoning of his body—it had been infinite torture of a being wonted to the free life of the woods, the spread of the skies overhead, the tang of the open air, the consciousness that all the outdoors of the east, the west, the north and the south mutely invited wanderings in whatever direction whim or occasion might lie.

"The others there—the bad men—did not suffer so much, sir. All the long evenings they could read their books—live somewhere else, in their minds. But I don't understand books; I had to live alone in the little dark cell—and only—*think!*" Into the last word he put a pathos that told more than another man might be able to achieve by piling word on word in a description of prison rigors.

They walked on in a few moments of silence. A side glance informed the doctor that the poor fellow was having hard work in mastering his emotions. Suddenly Olamon turned from the path and embraced and kissed a tree. And in that impulsive act, the psychoanalyst again found a more vivid expression of gratitude for new freedom than could have been contrived by language.

Doctor Forsyth sat down and lighted his pipe, carefully avoiding any appearance of espionage. The Indian stood beside the tree, his arm about the trunk.

"My good Paul," said the doctor after a little while, "I'm quite sure it would mean your death if you were sent to prison again."

"The good God keep me from it! Yes! I would die, sir!"

Doctor Forsyth turned his head slowly and engaged the Indian's frenzied stare. Significantly the adviser said, "Then you should be very careful to do nothing from now on which might send you to prison."

Paul slumped slowly to his knees, crouching at the foot of the tree. "It's what you saw in the night, sir! That's what you mean!"

"Yes, that's what I mean."

The doctor looked away into the vistas of the forest, light-dappled, soothing, inviting. Paul stared that way, too.

A doe and her fawn, made confident by the long months of the summer close time, strolled casually across the end of a vista, cropping at herbage.

"Folks of the woods have a happy life, Paul, when wicked folks let them alone."

"You have spoken the true word, sir." Then, after a time, in faint, pleading, quavering tones, Olamon went on. "I'm afraid, sir. It's what I keep inside myself so long."

"You may talk out to me if you feel it will help, my friend," said Doctor Forsyth quietly, his even tones betraying no especial interest.

The Indian did not lead up to his confession with the patter of paltering excuses such as a white man might have indulged in. This patient, calm listener inspired confidence. Besides, he had seen the affair in the night!

Lacking the resources of ready speech, in his fear now lest natural caution might lose him the chance of freeing his mind of a burden which he could no longer carry alone, Olamon had made up his mind to speak "The Big Word" first.

"I put myself in the way to be hired after Zannick had taken François Thibeault. I came with Thibeault into the woods so I could stir him to fight—so I could kill him."

Doctor Forsyth nodded his head, puffed his pipe and was silent. He wore the demeanor of one who expected to hear just what the other had stated.

"He put me in prison by his lies, sir. He wanted me out of the way. He is married to my sister. He beat her—he got me sent to prison because I was protecting her. And now he wants to kill

me because he's afraid of what I may do to him.

"He does not care for my poor sister, sir. He is ashamed because she is an Indian. He married her because much money comes to our tribe from rents the log companies pay for use of our shores along the river—their booms are at our island. And Thibeault beat my sister to make her give him all her part of the money."

"You should have turned him over to the law."

Olamon choked back retort. He shuddered. Then, getting control of his emotions, he said mildly and plaintively, "I am only an Indian against a white man, sir. And the Indians have grown to be afraid of asking help from the law against the white men—that feeling has come down to me from my fathers. I have seen only one way of doing with François Thibeault—the way of the woods."

"I understand how you feel," agreed the doctor. He said it with convincing candor, remembering how he had discoursed on that matter to an indifferent audience only a few hours before. "Your people had their ways and their laws before the white men came, and it's hard for a race to give up their own beliefs when new ones are forced on them."

OLAMON rose to his feet. He folded his arms across his breast, instinctively assuming the attitude of his forefathers, standing there in the avatar of chieftainship. "My father, sir, is Orono Olamon, the head of our tribe. It is not much in these days to be the chief of a few scattered, poor Indians. But he comes down from sachems who were proud and had power and he cannot forget what those before him have been.

"He is only a feeble old man, and François Thibeault and his brother, who have married girls of the tribe for the sake of money, make fun of him as chief—and his arms are too weak to keep my sister from blows. It is only I who can do that."

In the stress of his emotions some of the eloquence of his ancestors came to his lips. "But the case of my poor sister is not all the trouble, sir. Thibeault brags how he will bring in more French Canadians to marry the other girls of the tribe. Yes, he will be boss of all the tribe, he says. He will handle the money and will make the Indians beg for what they get.

"But understand me, sir. I am not thinking just of the money. I am not planning only to get even with François Thibeault because he lied me into prison. There is a bigger thing!

"Perhaps you may laugh at it. I know all the world would laugh, if it could hear me now. But our poor little tribe is all that's left of the Abnakis who were so mighty in the old days. And a swaggering Canuck comes and he brings others to fool our girls who are proud to be noticed by white men. I am the son of sachems. It is my work to protect my own.

"But above all else, sir, is pride on account of my fathers. Is that something to laugh about?"

Doctor Forsyth shook his head. "Paul, that is the most sacred thing a man can hold in his heart for the good of his soul."

"Shall I stand by and see our race die out in nothingness—a tribe of despised half-breeds? We are going fast, sir, the real Abnakis. I ask of the Great Manitou who set us on this earth that we may be allowed to go into our graves and be known no more—but remembered as true Indians—people of the great race the white men found here."

Here was no voicing of petty resentment or personal grudge!

This protagonist was a zealot who had taken on a duty that, to him, seemed a sacred task.

With understanding on such a subject more acute than that of the ordinary listener, the psychoanalyst had keen realization of the fact that he was sitting in on a peculiarly interesting revelation of mental workings.

This was truly a flash from the black embers of a burned-out race! In the soul of this last defender of the pride of sachems there was lighted the fury of the

fathers against the white tide of relentless encroachment—mingling blood and seeking booty.

This pathetically lone figure was making the last hopeless stand.

Doctor Forsyth stood up and looked into the Indian's glowing eyes. This was a dangerous monomaniac. He embodied threat to others and peril to himself.

But the grim tenseness of the situation appealed to the doctor too strongly at that moment to allow him to deal in the banalities of practical advice. "Olamon, we'll talk this matter over a little later, when I've given it some thought. As I'm feeling right now, after what you have told me, I'm afraid my counsel would get you into more trouble."

He put out his hand and the Indian grasped it.

"I think this grip is sign language that we both understand, Friend Paul."

Then the doctor went on his way, back to the camp.

HE walked slowly, still under the spell of tragedy. The case bore that aspect for him. Outwardly it was pitifully small, perhaps, but to his mind, sounding deep into the wellsprings of human emotions. this affair, so realistically in and of the forest, was great in its stark drama.

Once again, coming away from the shadow of tragedy, he found himself meeting up with the puerilities of folks from the cities.

Manson was singing one of the poems in the book, improvising a tune and managing the accompaniment on his mandolin.

Mrs. Demorest insisted on the doctor examining her sketch.

He turned from his praises of it and walked to meet Powers, who was coming up the hill.

The host of the party was jubilantly jeering. "Well, doc, while you've been mooning around among the trees, probably psychoanalyzing woodchucks, I've been doing business. Thibeault has come across to me! The steam shovel is a handy tool, no matter what you may think."

"Congratulations, Jamesy!" The doctor was blandly innocent and genial.

"No curiosity? No questions, eh?"

"Having given this party, I think you're generous enough to give out all that goes with it." Forsyth's smile was ingratiating.

Powers whirled on his heel and shouted to Zannick at the foot of the slope in the company of Thibeault. Olamon was now in sight, sitting at the edge of the clearing.

"Pack duffel, Alf! We'll be moving as soon as you're ready."

The head guide flourished an assenting gesture.

"Walk over here with me, doc! You and I are going to be the only ones in on it. Thibeault says that damnation Injun is out to get him, and his only chance is to get the Injun first.

"I get fooled in men once in a while. I fell for that Injun last night. I was all wet in the thing! After hearing the Canuck's story, I advised him to go ahead. The poor cuss doesn't dare to go to sleep, as the case stands!

"You can't have a killer put under bonds to keep the peace, up in these woods, the same as you can in the city. It's animal against animal, just about as you said!"

"This is the woods, Jamesy!"

This time Powers did not resent the phrase. He looked gratified. He evidently laid claim to the sentiment as his own, an original thought. "It means a lot when the right twist is put into it, doc."

"And are you sure you're putting the right twist in the situation when you advise Thibeault to get his man?"

"I'm for a white man against an Injun. That's first! Second, the white man did what you and I would do—he went to the law about the Injun, all regular. The thing has only been made worse.

"The Injun is out of prison again and is going to settle according to the way of the woods. The Injun has no respect for the law—our law. He's going on his own. He and his father, so Thibeault tells me, have some old treaties in a leather bag, and

those writings give the Indians the right to hunt and fish forever and at all times of the year."

"As I understand it, they merely reserved their means of livelihood when they were forced to give up the lands."

"Curse it, these are new times and our laws have the say-so over those old, moth-eaten treaties! Olamon was killing deer in close time and slaughtering cow moose on which there is never an open time, so Thibeault says. He told the wardens.

"I don't know how true that is—about the game killing," admitted Powers. "The Canuck twisted himself up in that part of the story to me. But he had to get Olamon out of the way because the Injun was making a lot of trouble in Thibeault's family. I say, you've got to fight Injuns the same as they fight you—using all the tricks that are laid down in the back of the 'Old Farmer's Almanac!'" He grinned at his metaphor.

"Probably!" agreed the doctor mildly. "That's the way it has been done in these woods ever since King Philip ruled the Tarratines."

"I hope you're not putting up any argument against my advice to a white man!" suggested Powers acridly.

"Certainly not, Jamesy! Argument over the Indian question in this country has never got anybody anywhere."

"Damrat it, doc, you don't show a mite of interest in this thing!" urged Powers. "It's pepping up the trip like thunder for me!" Excitement glowed in the city man's eyes. "And Thibeault did the square thing—he confided in me."

"Every man to his taste in the way of amusement, Jamesy. It's your party." Doctor Forsyth strolled away to the shelter to pick up his personal belongings.

Powers followed to do the same, growling complaints about a man who allowed himself to get in such a psychoanalysis state of mind that he couldn't get a good kick out of the real stuff in life.

Olamon came to fold the shelters.

Doctor Forsyth, knowing that Powers was observing watchfully, had only the fleeting opportunity to murmur, not glancing at the Indian, "Look out for yourself this day, Olamon!"

Zannick, it was now evident, had been discreetly excluded by Powers from knowledge of the atrocious hint given to Thibeault.

After Olamon had started away with his burden, and when the Frenchman hurried to load himself, the head guide interfered with any prompt pursuit; he ordered Thibeault to kill the camp fire thoroughly. It was apparently dead but Zannick was a fire warden as a sideline and took no chances. He told the subaltern to bring more water and to be sure by grubbing that no roots were smoldering in the duff.

With a fine assumption of bland innocence, Doctor Forsyth started off on the trail taken by Olamon.

"What's your rush, doc?" called Powers. There was a bit of sly malice in his interference.

"I'm in no special rush. But it's a sort of go-as-you-please party, as I understand it, and I didn't think my company would be missed."

"It sure will be! The under guides will take the low road because they're loaded and it's along the level. Alf is going to lead us by the ridge trail past Hell's Pudding. Better scenery, you know!" He gave Forsyth a wink when the doctor turned obediently to join the others.

III.

BOTH the low road and the high road converged at the sinister quagmire known as Hell's Pudding.

A ridge trail circled on each side around the top of the cliffs that cupped the small morass completely except for deep cañons admitting to the bog on two sides, affording entrance and exit if one ventured to risk the dangers of the treacherous surface.

Wayfarers coming along the low road were obliged to climb by a zigzag trail to the summit of either ridge, in order to circumambulate the noisome pit.

The scenery, vaunted by Powers to the doctor with a jeer in the praise, proved

to be more of an attraction to Mrs. Demorest than Powers expected or relished. She kept halting the party to point out that and this perspective, this hue and that coloring.

As host, Powers was obliged to hang up and listen; also, he was delegated by his wife to serve as escort of the artist. He was not able to frame any special sort of remonstrance when Doctor Forsyth strolled on ahead and was lost to sight on the winding trail.

Powers was obliged to be content with the thought that he had kept the doctor out of interference on the low road. The host was not exactly suspicious of the other's intentions to put a trig under the affair; Forsyth had displayed an entire lack of interest, one way or the other. But it was Powers' crass purpose to let the thing work itself out according to that "way of the woods" on which he had dwelt.

He was not bloodthirsty in the business, so he told himself; he was conscious of some qualms. But that Indian had been contemptuously reticent and, thinking about it, Powers, who was used to deference from understrappers, felt the sting of something like an insult. On the other hand, the wily guide had sniveled himself into Powers' full sympathy.

"This is the woods!" he grunted, forgetting entirely the presence of Mrs. Demorest.

"Yes, the woods!" she agreed rapturously. "Fairly sanctified by peace. The honest old trees seem to talk to folks, putting evil thoughts out of the mind."

"Yes, indeed!" said Powers, looking over the tops of the trees, peering down into the valley, wondering if he could catch a glimpse of a certain couple of woods wayfarers getting their counsel from the placatory forest.

WHEN he was out of sight of the others Doctor Forsyth strode on with haste.

He had not allowed himself to arraign Powers for his brutal attitude. He knew how vain any argument would be. His sympathies were with Olamon for reasons which he despaired of making such a man as Powers understand.

He hurried, hoping to postpone a tragedy at any rate, though he had faint hope that the zealot could be restrained permanently from what he believed to be his sacred duty.

At last, he was certain, he had reached a point where he was looking down on the place of the evil name.

It seemed innocent enough from the height on the cliff.

A flat medallion set in the circlet of the hills! It was ridged slightly and curiously with furrows between which gleamed narrow threads of water. It was not an interesting place, he felt, except for the stories of how it had entrapped animals and men who had been beguiled by its appearance of solidity.

The ridge on which he stood was little more than a knife edge. He looked over on the side away from the Pudding and beheld something which interested him much more than did the blank surface of the quagmire.

At the same time he heard in the distance the bold tones of Powers raised in argument about something.

A fox in the hollow, where Forsyth was looking, heard the sound, too. The animal halted suddenly in its trot and immediately began to back track, stepping carefully as if trying to keep in the footprints it had just made. When it had retreated for a considerable space, it leaped in a broad jump to the top of a boulder, sprang to other rocks and disappeared in the brush.

It was the familiar ruse of the woods animal. It had left a trail which apparently ended abruptly where the creature began to back track.

"Good work!" commended Doctor Forsyth aloud.

Then he suddenly looked the other way, into the pit of the bog, attracted by a movement.

He saw Olamon.

For an instant the doctor was minded to step forth and show himself boldly in order that his presence on the cliff might

cause Thibeault to take thought of prudence in case the Frenchman were following closely.

The next moment the observer concealed himself behind a shoulder of the cliff; Olamon was plainly doing something of importance to himself; he was following the way of the woods; the doctor allowed to him the same considerate forbearance he had just given the fox in its movements.

THE Indian, loaded with his pack, stepped out upon the surface of the morass. The crust supported him except for a slight sinking of his feet.

He advanced toward the center. Then to right and left bulged up small swellings of the soil. Forsyth perceived that the place must be a pot of hidden iniquity—of hideous menace if that crust gave way.

Reaching the extent of safety, the Indian began to retrace his steps just as cautiously as he had adventured forth. Without turning, he back tracked, setting his feet in the indentations he had previously made.

Again Doctor Forsyth was looking on the true animal of the forest, resorting to the tricks of its nature.

The fox had merely taken precautions to save its own skin, if possible.

What the Indian was aiming to bring about was not patent, at first, to a man trained in city ways.

Olamon reached the solid ground and promptly disappeared at one side of the trail.

Forsyth held to his covert behind the shoulder of the cliff. He could hear the voices of the party plainly; they were coming along.

Then, emerging from the mouth of the low-road trail, came Thibeault. In spite of his load he was trotting. In a determination which the observer understood, the man was risking fatigue in order to overtake his foe.

Doctor Forsyth's gorge rose at sight of the malevolent haste.

To be sure, it might be a fair fight, if the two met. But, after what Powers had revealed, this man who stopped and peered at the trail, slatting sweat from his forehead and eyes, seemed only a killer tracking prey.

The doctor's emotions were in considerable of a tumult just then. Powers had adopted the cause of the white man; it really seemed as though it would be right for the doctor to take the side of the Indian. But Forsyth did not consciously do so. On the other hand, he did not call out to Thibeault, warning him what Olamon had done in the way of those tracks at which the pursuer was peering.

The Frenchman set the edge of his palm against his forehead and stared at the row of footprints extending across the bog. He shook his head. In the silence his mutterings of mingled doubt and determination could be heard. He looked up at the cliffs on either side as if trying to figure how much time a detour would cost him.

Trails to the ridges branched to both right and left. Then he studied the tracks again and glanced to both sides to see whether there had been a retracing of footprints.

Doctor Forsyth set his teeth. It was man against man. One was determined to kill, if Powers could be believed. The other—well, reflected the doctor, the Indian's animus against the white man arose from something deeper and truer than selfishness, money hankering and the seeking of opportunity to bring more woe on helpless humans.

Doctor Forsyth held his palm under his chin so that he might not open his mouth. He was resolved to let this affair work itself out according to the way of the woods. It was a matter of allowing that man down there to follow the bent of his murderous inclinations—to use his own judgment.

Manifestly, the pursuer decided that the way up the cliffs was too hard—the turning aside from the direct route would use too much time. The tracks which went forth and did not return seemed sufficient proof that one man had crossed and that what one man had done another could do.

Thibeault shrugged his pack into easy position and tramped out onto the bog. His halt had made him impatient; he had recovered his breath and his vigor. He made all haste, was not careful about easing his weight as he plunged along.

Doctor Forsyth looked no longer; he stepped farther down the cliff.

IN a few moments he heard the raucous, horrified yelling of Zannick. The party had come within sight of the bog.

The head guide was mingling oaths with frenzied orders; he cursed Thibeault's folly and tried to tell him how to get out of the mess. But the head guide interlarded profanity and commands with the oft-repeated, dolorous declaration: "He can't git out. It ain't never been done before."

Doctor Forsyth could pretend obliviousness no longer; he scrambled into sight of the party.

"My Gawd, man!" barked Powers. He went on stuttering: "You—you—have been here—you didn't yell to that cussed fool not to cross that bog—and you've heard us telling about what a rotten hole it is!"

"I was over there on the other side, watching a fox," returned the .doctor. "What's happened?"

Then he was obliged to give his attention to the man in the bog.

Thibeault was down to his waist; his uncertain movements were causing the muck to writhe in a circle about him with an uncanny similitude to a living organism.

To Doctor Forsyth, trained in physiology, the mass of the bog took on the appearance of a huge, grotesque stomach stimulated into digestive activity by the intrusion of a morsel of food.

The victim in the process of engulfing began to bleat his calls for help.

The women screamed and ran back into the shelter of the trees which horrently made a mane for the ridge; Manson went with them.

"Something has got to be done for that man!" yelled Powers, stamping around on the ledge. He beat the head guide on the back with his fist.

"I don't know anything that can be done, sir!" quavered Zannick. "What the hell made him run any such resks I can't understand!"

Again Powers turned to Forsyth. With perfect equanimity the latter met the suspicious squint of his host.

"Doc, that fox must have been devilish interesting to take up all your attention just when this thing was starting down there."

"The man probably rushed out of the woods in very much of a hurry, making it all happen suddenly," remarked the doctor, still engaging Powers' eyes. Zannick was a listener; the doctor was discreet, but he said something to close Powers' mouth for all time.

"Thibeault may have had something on his mind which made him too reckless to take ordinary precautions. There's no telling, of course, what kind of a brad was urging him, but he must have been in a great hurry, as I said before."

Powers flushed and paled.

The psychiatrist's discernment perceived in Powers' demeanor the guilty emotions of an accomplice who now realized the responsibility.

On his own part, the doctor in that moment of tragic consummation felt acutely that he, too, was an accomplice in the dreadful affair.

He hated himself, just as he hated Powers in that crisis. Two men of the city, they had meddled unwarrantably in a conflict which belonged wholly to the forest.

"I can't look!" muttered Powers; he went into the fringe of trees.

Doctor Forsyth dropped back down over the lift of ledge and set his gaze on the spot where the fox had made his shrewd sortie.

Zannick alone stuck to the place of observation. He became the Greek chorus of the developments; he groaned and lamented, he eased his feelings by bitter oaths; he revealed by his words the stages of the dread deglutition of a living man.

The wails from the pit rose to shrieks —and then the shrieks blubbered into silence.

ONCE more only the lilting wood thrushes broke the stillness of the forest.

"It's all over!" mourned Zannick. "Come along, ladies and gentlemen! For Gawd's sake, let's be gitting away from here!"

They followed him in single file around the brim of the Pudding, out of which came the stench of nitrogen gas, liberated by the breaking of the crust and wafted aloft by the moribund struggles of the victim.

A mile on their way they came upon Paul Olamon, sitting beside the trail, resting.

"You've lost your brother-in-law," brutally and bluntly reported Zannick, having little regard for the feelings of an Indian. The head guide kept his emotions hidden under his coarse brusqueness. "The damn fool tried to cut across Hell's Pudding!"

Under the scrutiny of all those eyes Olamon's expression did not change. He was serene, stolid. He picked up his pack and stood respectfully at one side until the file of persons passed him.

"You can't expect a redskin to show any human feelings," said Zannick with scorn.

Doctor Forsyth walked on, just ahead of the Indian.

Between that place and the hotel the doctor had plenty of opportunities to reveal to Olamon that the trick had been observed; but the self-acknowledged accomplice said no word to Olamon either then or later.

The doctor wondered in just what he had been an accomplice—in a murder or a rightful vengeance?

He never did make up his mind on the problem.

"The Hawk of Holeb," another story by Mr. Day in the next issue.

A MINER WHO'S A MAJOR

JOHN HAYS HAMMOND, the mining engineer, has been around the world underground. He earned his first fee by proving that a California gold mine had been "salted" after older expert engineers had pronounced it a paying proposition. From California he went to Mexico and Central and South America, winning much fame and money. He next came to the surface in South Africa as engineer for the Barnato gold mines.

Then Cecil Rhodes gave him a blank contract and asked him to write his own salary into it. Later, at Rhodes' suggestion, he led an expedition up the east coast of Africa in search of King Solomon's mines, found them and reported them as workable properties. After the fluke Jameson raid, he and several Englishmen were tried by the Boers and sentenced to be hanged, winning their reprieves at the last moment by the payment of enormous fines.

Hammond then returned to the United States with the reputation of being the ablest and highest-paid mining engineer in the world. Shortly before the Great War, at the czar's request, he inspected and reported on the mining wealth of a tremendous area in Russia.

The Pearl of Tia Juana

By Jack O'Donnell

Author of "Salvaged," "When Winter Came," Etc.

A story of turf and race-horses at Mexico's internationally famous track, wherein the kindness of "Old Doc" Doane wins Pearl Mareno over to the side of virtue.

THE "Feed-box Kid" was in the depths of pessimistic philosophy. He questioned whether honesty was the best policy. He had grave doubts about patience being a virtue. And as for turning the other cheek—well, just let some guy smite him on *one* and see what happened!

In short, he had abandoned all hope of seeing virtue triumph over the crooked bookmakers and unscrupulous horse owners at Tia Juana race track. For two months he had watched these gypsies of the turf reap a golden harvest while doing their utmost to ruin his friend and patron, "Old Doc" Doane, the squarest, fairest owner that ever saddled a thoroughbred.

"If the old man would just listen to reason, me and you could wise him up to a hundred tricks which'd have these bandits dizzy inside a month," he complained to "Louisville Johnny" Daniels, his freckle-faced, keen-eyed friend and fellow hustler as they sat in the grand stand one morning watching horses being exercised on the track below. "Last night I advised him to pull some trick stuff—anything to win a heat—and what does he say? He says, 'Son, there's an old Danish proverb to the effect that an honest man does not make himself a dog for the sake of a bone.' Now, what do you make outta that?"

"Pass me!" replied Johnny. "You know the old man better than I do. You've been his friend, guardian and guide ever since he came to the jungles from that trick college back East where they objected to him closin' his classes on pay days so's he could go to the nearest race track and flirt with Lady Luck. If you don't know what he means when he mixes dogs and bones with race hosses how you expect me to guess?

"Mebbe if I had some groceries under my belt I might be able to figure it out.

But I ain't poked my nose in the feed bag since yesterday noon. Tough pickin's, this Mexico, huh, Kid?"

"Never saw a place where meals come so far apart!" declared the Kid. "But this bad luck can't last forever. Old Doc Doane's gonna get a break one of these days and when he does me and you'll be back in the ham-and-egg class again."

"He'd better get right pretty soon or he's gonna be eatin' rhubarb with the rest of us!"

"And that ain't all," supplemented the Kid. "If he don't win a purse pretty quick they's gonna be a nice, dignified old man applyin' for reinstatement at that Eastern brain fact'ry about the time the leaves begin to fall."

"Bad as 'at, Kid?"

"He's just a stride in front of the wolf. I know, 'cause a coupla nights ago I sent a telegram for him. It was to a lawyer guy back in Connecticut tellin' him to sell a piece of the old man's property and wire the money pronto.

"Know what that means, don't you? Means that Old Doc Doane's bank roll's as thin as butter on a circus sandwich. He's taken many a hard crack on the bean since 'Dapper Dan' McCoy, 'Silent Sam' Boyd and these other bandits swore to get him because he had 'Handsome Harry' Kearns ruled off the turf."

"McCoy's the brains of the gyps, Kid, but I can't figure out how he gets away with all this murderous stuff."

"By workin' with all the crooked owners, bookmakers and jockeys around the track, that's how he gets away with it. He's smart enough to make everything look jake to the stewards, too. They'd be tickled pink to get his license revoked, but so far he's fooled 'em.

"The stuff him and his gang's pullin' is gettin' rawer every day, too. Look at what they done to Doane's hoss, Carpet Sweeper, yesterday. Almost made Jockey 'Midget' Murray jump the fence with him when the boy tried to go through on the rail. They'll kill that boy yet if he don't look out. The old man lost quite a gob on that race, too."

"They's only one way Doane can keep these birds from herdin' his hosses, Kid, and that's to have one which can get away from the ribbon wingin' and has speed enough to keep in front all the way. Then they couldn't herd him!"

"Joan Mallow is just that kinda hoss. Johnny, and she's the old man's ace in the hole. He's pointin' her for the Golden Gate Purse, and she'll win it, too, if Dapper Dan don't get in some of his dirty work."

The boys were deep in a discussion of Joan Mallow's chances of winning the season's biggest and richest feature when Old Doc Doane emerged from his tack room and started across the infield. Even at a distance one could not mistake his tall, gaunt figure and dignified bearing as he strode through the warm Mexican sunlight with only a skullcap on his white-crowned head and the tails of his professorial coat flapping gently in the morning breeze.

THERE was a troubled look in his pale-blue eyes, and his long, benevolent face looked haggard. He was deep in thought and would have passed the boys without seeing them had he not been hailed by the Feed-box Kid.

"Mornin', doctor! Headin' for the groceries?" queried the Kid, trying to hide his concern under a bantering tone.

Old Doc Doane looked up and smiled his pleasure at seeing his two young friends.

"I'm going to eat, if that's what you mean, son. Won't you and Johnny come along and have a bite?" he invited.

Louisville Johnny was on the point of accepting when the Feed-box Kid stepped on his foot. Then the Kid answered for both. "No, thanks, doctor. Me and Johnny just had a big breakfast and are just about ready to bust. Some other time. Thanks!"

"Sorry," said the old man, continuing on his way.

The boys looked at each other. "I could eat the paint off this grand stand, Johnny, and I know your stomach thinks your

throat's on a strike, but we gotta scratch the old man in the Free Meal Handicap. He's runnin' too light financially to be stakin' us to the groceries at this stage of the game."

"Oh, well," said Johnny philosophically, "this ain't the first time I've been fifteen-twenty hours late for a meal. And if two smart boys like us can't hustle fast enough to earn grocery money we'd oughtta quit tryin' to find disciples to bet on hosses which we figure is gonna win, and go to toutin' where the money is surer."

"Right-o, Johnny! And that reminds me that I've gotta get busy. If there's any information runnin' loose at this track I'm goin' out and put a halter on it.

"I gotta date with a guy which ain't had a winner this week. He says if I can give him one that is sure to bow to the judges he'll bet a yard for me. And hundred-dollar bets bein' scarce these days, I'm on my way. S'long."

Old Doc Doane was still at breakfast when he received word there was a money order for him at the local telegraph office. The telegraph office at Tia Juana, like those in every town where a race meeting is on, was filled with the flotsam and jetsam of the turf—ex-owners, ex-trainers, ex-jockeys, together with touts and other questionable followers of the Sport o' Kings—men who fattened on the credulous by sending them alleged information about horses which were "sure to win" in the current day's racing.

ONE of these hangers-on was "The Ferret," a gimlet-eyed, long-nosed youth with a twisted mouth and a glib tongue. He had neither friends nor honor. Even touts avoided him. He was so low-down, to borrow an expression from the Feed-box Kid, that he'd have to reach up to touch bottom.

Seeing a possibility of gathering valuable information, The Ferret edged up to the money-order counter and stood close enough to see Old Doc Doane receive two thousand dollars that had been wired to him by the Connecticut attorney. He also managed to read the message which occompanied the money. It said: "All I could get in quick sale of property." Then he saw the old man place the money carefully in a large wallet and shove it into his hip pocket.

Half an hour later The Ferret was in Dapper Dan McCoy's tack room telling that worthy, and Silent Sam Boyd, what he had seen at the telegraph office.

"You say he put the wallet in his hip pocket, eh?"

"Right-hand hip pocket, yes."

"And the message said something about the two thousand dollars being all that could be raised on the property, huh?"

"Right!" said The Ferret.

The first speaker was Dapper Dan McCoy, known as "King of the Gypsies." McCoy was the leading spirit in a small but highly efficient band of crooked horse owners, sure-thing gamblers and money-hungry jockeys who were determined to break Old Doc Doane because that amiable and honest old man had caused one of their number to be ruled off the turf for cheating.

McCoy had the innocent expression of an altar boy. His round, smooth-shaven face, blond hair and blue eyes gave him the appearance of a man of thirty, but he was older than that by at least fifteen sinful seasons. His fondness for the latest and most extreme modes in tailoring explained the sobriquet which had been wished on him early in his sporting career.

The third member of the party was Silent Sam Boyd, a poker-faced, thin-lipped fellow without conscience. Boyd was a patient listener and a monosyllabic conversationalist except when money was the subject. Besides operating the "big book" at Tia Juana he was a silent partner in McCoy's stable and shared in the profits of all McCoy's crooked deals.

"The telegram means that Doane is up against it," said McCoy. "He's selling his property to keep going. Now's the time to make him take the gate. Get that money and he'll have to holler 'Uncle.' And I know how it can be done. Tonight——"

He stopped short, looked at The Ferret and said: "You've done a good job, Ferret. From now on keep your eyes on Doane and report to me regular. You can go now."

McCoy waited until he heard the door close behind The Ferret. Then he resumed the plan he had started to unfold when he remembered the tout's presence. "To-night," he whispered to Boyd, "the old man will eat at the Sagebrush Casino as usual. After that he'll go to the roulette room to watch the play. That's his custom.

"I'll be there, and so will my girl, Pearl. She's a slicker. I've taught her how to remove a wallet from a sucker's pocket without usin' a blackjack. I'll sick her on Doane.

"He'll wake up a pauper and then I guess he'll be damn glad to go back to teachin' school. That's where I want to see him. He's got to learn not to meddle with other people's business."

"Right," agreed Boyd.

With that they adjourned to a near-by bar.

As McCoy predicted, Old Doc Doane made his way straight from the dining room to the roulette tables. The room was already comfortably filled with players and spectators. Men and women in evening clothes, their cheeks flushed with excitement, occupied stools in front of the tables or stood watching the play of others.

PEARL MARENO stood near the main entrance, a cigarette between her scarlet lips. Her made-up black eyes lighted as Old Doc Doane sauntered in. Her lithe, graceful body moved with the ease and silence of a leopard as she followed the old horse owner to a table at the far end of the room. A gorgeous Spanish shawl, worn carelessly over her bare shoulders, only partly concealed the curve of her full bosom, but it served to completely hide her long smooth arms and shapely hands.

At the edge of the crowd which stood in a semicircle before the roulette table Old Doc Doane halted. From the advantage of six feet two he experienced little difficulty seeing all he wished over the heads of those nearer the table.

He had been standing there several minutes when he detected the odor of a delicate perfume. It was the only intimation he had that a woman was near him. Casually he wondered if she were one of the women of Tia Juana's underworld come to the Casino to wring a new thrill from life. Then his thoughts centered on the game. That was as Pearl Mareno would have it.

More spectators came and crowded close to the old man and the girl. Among them was Dapper Dan McCoy. He had been there but a moment when he elbowed the man next to him hard against Doane, crying, "Keep off my feet, you fool!"

Instantly, there was a commotion. Old Doc Doane found himself in the midst of a dozen milling men and women. Pearl Mareno's deft fingers, whose touch was as light as a babe's caress, worked swiftly. In a trice she had removed the wallet from Old Doc Doane's pocket.

The excitement incident to McCoy's rude treatment of the man he said had stepped on his feet, died quickly. The woman smiled triumphantly and was placing the purse in her bosom when a hand closed over her wrist and held it in a firm grip.

"Not to-night, Antoinette, not to-night!"

It was the voice of the Feed-box Kid.

Old Doc Doane turned to find Pearl Mareno and his young friend, the Feed-box Kid, struggling for possession of his wallet.

"This female dip pinched your poke!" the Kid explained, still attempting to wrest the wallet from the girl's hands.

"You lie!" cried Pearl. "I found it on the floor!"

"On the floor of Doctor Doane's pocket!" chimed in Louisville Johnny. "Me and the Kid was watchin' you."

At this point two of the town police elbowed their way through the crowd that surged around the struggling man and woman. With one jerk they separated the Kid and the woman, but the former held

on to the purse. He handed it quickly to Old Doc Doane.

Many tried to tell the police what had happened, but no two stories agreed. Finally, the officers took the girl, Louisville Johnny and the Kid to the office of the Casino.

Old Doc Doane and Dapper Dan McCoy followed them. Quietly, the old man explained that the wallet was his property and that he would vouch for the two boys. The girl clung to her story that she had found the purse on the floor. The officers, however, believed Johnny and the Kid.

"Will you come to the station with us and prefer charges against this woman?" one of the officers asked Old Doc Doane.

"No!" said the old man. "I don't believe this girl is the real offender. She was urged to rob me by some one who knew I had that money on me," and he looked around the room until his blue eyes, now stern, rested on Dapper Dan. That worthy did not meet his gaze.

"You would be doing us a favor by having her arrested," spoke up the manager of the Casino. "We are anxious to rid this place of all undesirable characters. We've got to protect our patrons from pickpockets and other thieves. This girl has been suspected of other things of this sort."

"I have suffered no loss," replied the old horse owner, "and I have no feeling other than pity for this girl."

For a moment the girl seemed unable to understand that she was free to go. She stood gazing defiantly at her accusers and at Old Doc Doane. Then, at a sign from McCoy, she wrapped her shawl about her shoulders, shot a contemptuous glance at the two boys, and swept out of the room, her head held high.

"You're pretty easy, Mr. Doane," said one of the officers. "She's a tough baby!"

"She's merely putty in the hands of an evil sculptor," said Old Doc Doane. "It's too bad, too, because I'm sure she's basically good. If she isn't, I'm no judge of human nature."

"You are a good judge of horseflesh, doctor," the Feed-box Kid told the old man before leaving him at the Doane stable late that night, "but I think you're all wrong about that dame. I'll bet my shirt you'll hear from her again."

"I shouldn't be surprised," replied Old Doc Doane.

THE next ten days were busy ones for Old Doc Doane, and he had little time to think about Pearl Mareno or the incident at the Sagebrush Casino. He was devoting all his time and knowledge of horses to the task of getting Joan Mallow in shape to win the rich Golden Gate Purse.

None knew better than he how much depended upon his mare winning this event. His fortunes were badly in need of repair. He was well aware of the crooked combination aligned against him and realized that they would stop at nothing to bring him to his knees. He spent most of his time with Joan Mallow, leaving her only when absolutely necessary.

Two days before the race his little jockey, "Midget" Murray, gave him further cause for anxiety. Murray had come into the tack room where Old Doc Doane and the Feed-box Kid were chatting and told them about a visit Chalk Hall, the negro swipe employed by Doane, had made to Dapper Dan McCoy's stable the preceding night.

"When the dinge saw me as he came out of McCoy's tack room he got kinda yaller," said the jockey. "Then he told me he had been in there shootin' craps with other culled boys. But you know, doctor, no owner's gonna let a lot of coons shoot craps in his tack room."

"We've got to be mighty careful from now until the time of the race," replied Old Doc Doane gravely. "I'm pinning all my hopes on Joan Mallow. If she should lose I'd have to give up the racing game. The mare's in excellent condition now and if nothing happens to her I'm sure she'll win the Golden Gate Purse.

"McCoy and his crowd have made several efforts to disable the mare this last week. I haven't said anything about it to you boys, not wanting to worry you. But

we've got to be careful. I'm betting my last dollar on the mare day after to-morrow."

"She'll just gallop to win," prophesied the Kid. "McCoy knows Joan Mallow can beat his hoss, So High, and he's got his heart set on winnin' this purse. It's the biggest honor and the richest prize in Western racin'. He'd cut your throat if that'd help him win."

"You-all mustn't figure So High ain't a hoss," said Murray. "He's one of the best in trainin' out this way. Slow beginner, but once he gets in his stride he runs like he likes it. And McCoy has him at the top of his form right now."

IT was the night before the fifth running of the Golden Gate Purse. The balmy Mexican air was without movement. From different stables on the far side of the track came the twang of banjos, and the melodious voices of dark-skinned singers.

Here and there a light flashed as trainers made their charges comfortable for the night. The unmistakable sounds of a crap game drifted out on the still air from the Dixie Star Stable. The world seemed at peace.

In Dapper Dan McCoy's tack room, in the last row of stables near the fence, the King of the Gypsies, Silent Sam Boyd, and Pearl Mareno were engaged in a low-toned conversation under the light of a solitary lantern.

McCoy was irritable. As long as he had been in the racing game he had wanted more than anything else to win the Golden Gate Purse. Twice his horses had finished second in that Western classic, and he had felt this was his year until Old Doc Doane's mare, Joan Mallow, came into the picture. On form, which is the thing by which race horses are judged, he knew Joan Mallow was a better thoroughbred than his own horse, So High. But if he couldn't win by fair means he had not the least scruple about winning by foul.

"We've got to make sure that Old Doc Doane leaves his stable at noon to-morrow so's 'Race-horse Charley' will have a chance to work on Joan Mallow," he was saying. "I've got everything fixed with Doane's swipe, Chalk Hall. He will leave the stable when Charley comes with the sponges.

"So, it's up to you, Pearl, to see Doane to-night and tell him that you want to repay him for not having you arrested the other night. Tell him you'll have valuable information for him if he'll meet you in the private dining room at the Sagebrush Casino at noon to-morrow.

"Play the grateful penitent and you'll get away with it. You muffed the chance to break him before, so don't make a mess of it this time. Everything depends on how well you do your stuff."

"Don't worry about me," said the girl. "I'll get Doane away from the stable all right. I'll play the penitent Maggie so well the old fogy will think I've been dyin' of gratitude for what he done after I tried to pinch his wad. Leave it to me. I'll do my stuff all right!"

"You'd better!" declared McCoy, a threat in his voice. "If you boot this chance——" He did not finish, but the girl knew what he meant. "Meet me at the Casino after you leave him!"

Leaving her companions the girl stole along in the shadow of the stables, moving noiselessly, until she came to Old Doc Doane's barn. Peering through a crack in the door she saw the old horse owner was alone. She hesitated a second then rapped gently on the door.

"Who's there?" asked Old Doc Doane.

"A friend! Pearl Mareno," the girl answered.

Old Doc Doane smiled as he rose and threw open the door. "Come right in," he said. "I sort of expected you."

"I've wanted to come ever since that night at the Casino," said the girl, "but I was afraid. May I sit down?"

Old Doc Doane placed a chair for her and said kindly: "Now what have you on your mind?"

The girl and the old man talked for a long time, and when she walked out into the moon-flooded night again there was a

smile of triumph on her scarlet lips. "Well, I did my stuff—did it right!" she muttered to herself.

A FEW minutes before noon next day Old Doc Doane left his stable and walked slowly through the warm sunlight toward the Sagebrush Casino.

No sooner had he disappeared than Race-horse Charley came sauntering along the roadway between stables, stopping frequently to talk with owners, trainers, jockeys and exercise boys. There was nothing about the colored man's actions to indicate that he was bent upon the most despicable mission it falls to the lot of a race-track vandal to perform—the stuffing of sponges up a thoroughbred's nose so that they will impair its breathing when it attempts to run.

When Charley came to Old Doc Doane's stable he stopped to chat with Chalk Hall, who was sitting on a bale of hay just inside the feed room. Hall invited Charley to join him. They chatted earnestly for a few minutes after which Hall left Charley and walked to the soft-drink stand at the end of the row of stables, purchased a package of cigarettes and a bottle of pop, chatted for a few minutes with the owner of the stand, then slowly made his way back to where he had left Race-horse Charley.

As he reëntered the feed room the yellow-skinned Charley emerged from Joan Mallow's box stall. A knowing look passed between the pair, and Charley nodded his head affirmatively. Then he departed, as casually as he had come.

As Old Doc Doane neared the Sagebrush Casino, Dapper Dan McCoy and Pearl Mareno watched him from a room on the second floor.

"Well, he fell for your line, Pearl," said McCoy gloatingly. "They never get so old they won't fall for a pretty woman. And the old fool will wonder why you didn't keep your date. He'll think you weakened when the moment came.

"He can go back to his stable now if he wants to. By this time Race-horse Charley has the sponges up Joan Mallow's nose. This is the finish of that meddlin' old fool!"

The girl said nothing, but there was a grim smile on her painted lips as she watched the old horse owner approach the Casino.

When Old Doc Doane did not find Pearl Mareno in the private dining room he seemed puzzled and disappointed. He waited several minutes, then walked to the bar. Later, The Ferret, who had watched every move the old man made that day reported to McCoy:

"When he went to the bar he ordered vichy. He looked at it a long time as if figurin' out what to do. Then he went to a table in the corner and told the waiter to bring him a bottle of gin. I stood across the room and watched him. I never seen him look so down on his luck.

"It seemed to me he took regular tumblers of that stuff. He'd punished about half the bottle when he called the waiter and said for him to send over to his stable and have Chalk Hall—that's his swipe—come to the bar right away. When Hall comes I sneak up close enough to hear the old guy tell him to bring Joan Mallow to the paddock in time for the fourth race and that he'll be there to saddle her.

"When the dark boy leaves, the old boy resumes friendly relations with the bottle. He's still there and it's almost time for the third race. Thought I'd better come and tell you what's goin' on."

The news was music to Dapper Dan's ears. Slipping a bill to The Ferret he told him he had done a good job and advised the tout to get a bet down on So High. "The old codger's worried sick and is tryin' to find comfort in that bottle. He'll be sick two ways after the Golden Gate Purse—sick from losin' and sick from drinkin'."

While Old Doc Doane was in the barroom of the Sagebrush Casino his young friend, the Feed-box Kid, was having his troubles. Learning from one of the numerous underground sources, which are the stock in trade of a race-track hustler, that Race-horse Charley was on a "snow party"—sniffing cocaine—and that he was

boasting that Joan Mallow would be "nowhere" in the fourth race, the boy became alarmed. He knew that Charley was often employed by crooked bookmakers to tamper with horses which were big favorites in the betting, and he figured that the negro had in some way done an injury to Old Doc Doane's mare.

THE second race was over when the Kid heard of Charley's boast. He lost no time going in search of his friend and patron. Not finding the old man in the betting ring or in the infield where he generally went to watch the races, the Kid hotfooted it to the Doane barn.

"Where's Doctor Doane?" he inquired of Chalk Hall.

"Search me!" said the negro.

The Kid thought he detected something peculiar about the swipe's behavior. Recalling what Midget Murray had told Old Doc Doane about Hall coming from the McCoy stable a few nights before he jumped at the conclusion that Hall was in some way connected with whatever injury had been done Joan Mallow. Being rather impetuous he looked the negro in the eye and said: "You and Race-horse Charley have been tamperin' with that mare in there! What have you done to her?"

The Kid was standing with his back to the tack-room door. He didn't hear the approach of Race-horse Charley, but sensed danger when he saw Hall's glance go to the door. That was all. Before he could turn he was struck from behind and fell unconscious.

When he regained consciousness a wiry little man with a stubby mustache was bathing his face with water. "You're all right, now, boy," he was saying. "And if you want to see the running of the Golden Gate Purse you'll have to hurry. The hosses are in the paddock now!"

The Kid had a hundred questions he wanted to ask, but he knew that the most important thing for him to do right then was to find Old Doc Doane and warn him against betting on Joan Mallow. Hastily thanking the little old man, he made for the paddock as fast as his shaky legs would carry him.

"Where's Old Doc Doane?" he asked almost breathlessly of Jockey Midget Murray, who was seated on Joan Mallow's back waiting the call to the post.

"He was just here, Kid," replied Murray. "Saddled the mare and beat it quick. And that nigger, Hall, beat it a few minutes later." Then leaning close to the Kid's ear, he asked: "Kid, did you ever see the old man take a drink?"

"No. Why?" said the Kid, startled.

"Nothin'! Only I thought he acted kinda queer when——"

The Kid waited for no more. As he fled, however, the thought flashed through his mind that Joan Mallow looked fit enough for anything as she stood there in the paddock.

He had just reached the edge of the betting ring when the bugle sounded, calling the entries in the Golden Gate Purse to the post. Peering everywhere for the familiar figure of Old Doc Doane, the Kid elbowed his way through the crowd, his disheveled clothes and blood-smeared face causing many to wonder what had happened to the young hustler.

In front of Silent Sam Boyd's book he ran into the arms of Louisville Johnny. "What hit you?" asked Johnny.

"Where's Old Doc Doane? Quick! Where is he?" asked the Kid, ignoring Johnny's personal query.

"He was here a minute ago," replied Johnny, realizing there was something important happening. "I guess he's in the infield."

"Hurry and help me find him. They's dirty work goin' on at this track," said the Kid, moving off toward the infield, Johnny at his heels.

"What was he doin' at Boyd's book?" the Kid asked as the pair searched for Doane.

"He wanted to bet some dough on Joan Mallow and the funny part of it was Boyd and Dapper Dan, who was with him, was more'n anxious to bet with him. But Old Doc Doane got the idea somehow that they was something wrong with the odds. Joan

Mallow had opened at four to five, but when he come along they was thirteen to five.

"Him and Boyd got to gassin' about the price, Doane sayin' it looked kinda like the bettin' public didn't fancy his hoss. McCoy starts in kiddin' the old man kinda rough, tellin' him that he shouldn't get scared about odds; if he had a real hoss he'd oughtta have nerve enough to bet on him, and all that.

"But the old man's a bargain hunter, I'll tell you. He allowed he'd stick around until they got to five to one. Fina'ly Boyd offers him that price, but still he don't bet. Then I notice something queer about the doctor. If I didn't know him so well I'd swear he was drinkin'. His skullcap is settin' kinda cockeyed, but he's still got his dignity under wraps.

"Well, fin'ly McCoy and Boyd get him mad. McCoy tells him that his skate—meanin' Joan Mallow—ain't got a chance with a hoss like So High. Doane tells McCoy it ain't So High he's afraid of, but it is the racin' luck he's been havin'. 'If it was just a case of beating So High I'd bet you all I've got,' he tells Dapper Dan. That was what Dan wanted. He says, 'Well, old socks, I'll just lay you six to one that my hoss beats yours. Are you on?' "

"Did Doane fall for that trap?" asked the Kid.

"Trap? It looked like takin' money from the church plate! Of course, Doane bet him! Two thousand big iron men!"

The Kid groaned.

"What's the matter with you?" asked Johnny.

"It's a long story—too long to tell now. Let's go and find the old man before it's too late!"

The next instant they bumped into the old horse owner. He was leaning against the fence in front of the judges' stand, gazing up at the blue sky as if he didn't have a worry in the world.

THE Kid buttonholed him, drawing his head down so that he could whisper: "Doctor, they got to the mare! They've doped her or something, sure! I'm tellin' you straight. You can't hedge on your bet, but you can make a holler to the judges and get them to have Joan Mallow examined!"

Then, as rapidly as he could, he told what had happened and what he had heard. As he rattled the tale into Old Doc Doane's ear the seven thoroughbreds that would compete over the mile route for the rich Golden Gate Purse, came prancing before the stands, the colors of the various owners flashing gayly in the brilliant afternoon sun.

"You've still got time to act!" said the Kid. "You've got a minute or two!"

Then to the Kid's amazement the old man patted him kindly on the head and said: "Don't worry, son. I haven't been asleep and I am not worrying about Joan Mallow. There isn't time to tell you all about it now, because——"

A great roar went up from the stands. It was the cry that has sent the blood tingling through millions of veins in every land where, as the sport writers say, horse is king—"They're off!"

"She got away to her toes," said Old Doc Doane quietly, as he turned and saw his mare, Joan Mallow, going into the first turn hugging the rail and leading the rest of the field. "They'll never catch her to-day!"

A few feet away Dapper Dan McCoy made a different prediction. "Joan Mallow always gets away in front. Ordinarily she'd stay there, but not to-day! Those sponges will get in their work before she gets to the three-quarter pole. She'll stop and kiss the half!"

His companion, Silent Sam Boyd, made no comment. He was wearing his poker face, feeling confident of the result. Although too old at the racing game to believe in sure things, he felt confident that he and McCoy would make a big killing on this race.

They had bet heavily on So High away from the track and had taken every bet offered on Joan Mallow. That there were plenty of people in the crowd who liked the Doane entry was evidenced by the cries

of encouragement that were being sent after the flying Joan Mallow at that moment.

BUT Doane's mare did not fold up at the three-quarter pole. At that point she was running easily, two lengths in front of Gadfly, her nearest competitor. So High, always a slow beginner, was in the ruck, but moved up steadily on the back stretch.

"She hasn't quit yet!" said Boyd as Joan Mallow passed the three eighths.

"Something's wrong!" said Dapper Dan hoarsely. "Could that boy have double crossed us? I'll kill him if he did!"

Rounding the turn into the stretch So High began mowing down the horses between him and Joan Mallow. He had passed them all at the head of the stretch and was creeping up on the Doane mare.

Looking back under his arm, Midget Murray, on Joan Mallow, saw that Burns, on So High, was making his move. Then he began to ride.

"Go along outta here, Joan, ol' baby!" he cried. "We're still quite a ways from home. They don't pay off here, baby, they pay off down yonder. Get along outta here!" and he brought his open hand down on the mare's flank.

The mare responded with a spurt, and as the two leaders came thundering down the home stretch bedlam broke loose in the stands.

"Come on, you Joan hoss!"

"Go after her, So High! Go after her!"

But Old Doc Doane, standing by the judges' stand, knew that So High would never close the gap between him and Joan Mallow. The little mare never weakened, but held her two-length lead right to the wire.

"Now, doctor, for the love of Moses tell us what happened!" begged the Feedbox Kid as he sat in an easy-chair in Old Doc Doane's tack room an hour later. "He and John's burnin' up, we're that curious! I've told you how I got socked on the bean and how I hear you're lappin' up booze. Now you tell one!"

"I hardly know where to begin," said the old man. "Maybe you'd better ask me questions."

"Well, first of all, what did they do to Joan Mallow?" asked the Kid.

"Race-horse Charley stuffed sponges up her nose while I was over at the Sagebrush Casino drinking water and pouring gin in the cuspidor."

"But how'd you get 'em out? You never went back to the barn and you couldn't have done it in the paddock without everybody seein' you."

"I didn't remove them, son. I engaged a veterinary to do that," the old man explained.

"When? How? He couldn't have got in the barn without Chalk Hall seeing him, and when Chalk left the stable to go somewhere at noon he locked the door, didn't he?"

"I know that, son, but while Hall was over talking to me the veterinary, who had been hiding in the hayloft since the night before, came down, removed the sponges and then went back to his hiding place. He was the little old man who brought you back to consciousness."

"Now, just one more question," said the Kid, "and then all will be clear. How in the name of Lucifer did you know in the first place that Dapper Dan and Silent Sam had hired Race-horse Charley to stuff sponges up the mare's nose? Can you answer that one?"

"I can and will, son, but I must ask you two boys to keep my confidence. It was this way: You may remember that I refused to have a young lady arrested for picking my pocket at the Casino one night about two weeks ago. Well, I thought at the time that that young lady wasn't as bad as the police said she was.

"She was grateful to me for letting her go, and when she found out that Dapper Dan and Silent Sam were going to have sponges stuffed up Joan Mallow's nose she decided to show me she was grateful. Last night she came to my tack room and told me the whole plot.

"They wanted her to tell me to meet her at the Casino at noon. That would

give Race-horse Charley a chance to work. So, after she left I went out and engaged the veterinary and had him hide in the loft. When I went to the Casino, Charley, aided by Chalk Hall, got in his work. Then, in order to give the veterinary a chance to undo Charley's work, I sent for Hall. While he was at the Casino the sponges were removed, the veterinary got back in his hole and The Ferret reported that I was drowning my troubles in gin.

"I went to all this trouble to make McCoy and Boyd think their plan was a success, so that the betting public, myself included, would get a good price on Joan Mallow. They were caught in their own net.

"I'm very grateful to the lady, of course, for she saved the day for us. And you won't see her around here again. Part of the money I won is on its way to her now. To-night she leaves for her home in Mexico. Her name is Pearl, and she's a real pearl, too, boys!"

"I'll tell the cockeyed universe she is!" said Johnny.

"The Pearl of Tia Juana!" added the Feed-box Kid.

Another story by Mr. O'Donnell in the next issue.

HAIR NETS? YES, BUT WAIT——

WHAT does any one care about hair nets? Men, especially. Well, if you feel so sure on that score, maybe you will be surprised to hear that the manufacturers of hair nets are mostly men. That is, they do the business—and a big one it is, too—while the Chinese people do the actual making of the things.

How can it be a big business, you may scoff, when all the ladies are having their hair bobbed? That would be true of hairpins—we hear that the hairpin manufacturers have gone bankrupt or committed suicide—but it is not true of hair nets.

Making hair nets is a most amazing industry. If you do not believe this, let us call in the United States department of commerce to prove it. According to their statistics for 1923, the American girls used 180,143,136 hair nets, all manufactured by Chinese hands in the province of Shantung. Their value was between three and four million dollars. Compare this with ten years previous, when about 30,000 hair nets were imported from China, at an approximate cost of $719!

Hair nets cannot be made by machine. The texture is too fine and the strands too short. Therefore, they are fashioned by hand. And their fashioning supports a large Chinese population in comfort. Whole families are engaged in the work, from grandpa to little San Toy, the baby. The training required for the knitting of hair nets is long and tedious.

Strangely enough, most of the hair used in the making of the nets comes from their own heads. That is, the long black combings of Chinese women are bought for a few cents a bundle, shipped to this country where the hair is sterilized and dyed, and then sent back for weaving.

Europe, especially Austria, used to supply the world with hair nets before the Great War, but the industry went to China during that holocaust, and there it has remained ever since. The missionaries taught the natives the art of net making, and it is said that the desire to learn it caused many of the Chinese to embrace Christianity!

So, you see, hair nets have romance, commerce, history and religion woven in their meshes.

The House on the Bluff

By Frederick Niven

Author of "Man to Man," "The Faith Cure," Etc.

Two real-estate swindlers meet poetic justice. A modern ghost story.

THAT house on the bluff would never have existed if it had not been for the Salish Valley Agricultural Land Company. And what a story it had before it stood empty there, with every window broken in and the floor corners banked with sand, and seed of the yellow sagebrush.

This was the way of it:

Salish Valley had been eaten out. Too many cattlemen had come in from the plains. Some drove their stock on elsewhere. Those who remained sold their stock and looked around for other means of support. For you must realize that when stock eat out a country it is no mere figure of speech—they eat it out. Even if the valley had been left to recuperating nature it would not have been fit for ranging cattle for another generation.

Hence the Salish Valley Agricultural Land Company, floated by the remaining old tenants of the valley for the sake of their bank balances; and hence the house on the bluff—bluff is an appropriate word—built by one of the most priceless believers in the world, a fine man, a man of honor, his word his bond.

He thought every one was like that. Though up in years he had not learned differently. Even when appearances might indicate otherwise he liked to give the benefit of the doubt.

Hooked like a minnow by the Salish Valley Agricultural Land Company's "literature"—as they called their boosting papers—he sank all his capital in the building of that house and the buying of land round it.

The building gave work to people in the valley, and it cost all of thirty thousand dollars. He was very happy while it was being constructed, watching the progress. Here would he live with his wife and the boy in the tranquil last years of his life. He had only a smattering knowledge of ranching, but his dream, and his

wife's, had been some day to live on their own land, sit in the shade of their own prospering, remunerative orchard trees.

His simplicity was the opportunity of others; and there are, to be sure, those who consider that such simple persons deserve what they get—even when they get it in the neck! "The fellow should have known better," they say, which is an admission that the fellow's ignorance was necessary to the transaction. A hard school, this world, in some ways, as well as, in other ways, a kind one!

When the house was finished the Salish Land Company photographed it to show the sort of settlement they were. The "sucker" on the bluff used to go and watch the progress of the irrigation flumes that eventually were—according to the boosts —to make that valley the Land of Promise, the Land overflowing with Milk and Honey. And when work was shut down upon them, as it was frequently, he would go, ever so courteously, to the land office to inquire when they hoped to resume operations because: "By Jove, don't you know, I'm getting rather worried. I sank everything I had in the property and I would like to get water on the place and make a real start."

HE soon found he had to go pretty cannily. The bills accumulated, for he could no longer pay cash. He tried to get work for wages in the valley, but others were ahead of him. The old residents, of course, had first chance of what work was going; the other suckers—that is those who had not "gone while the going was good," while they had yet traveling expenses, or otherwise "beat it" as soon as they saw what percentage of the bogus was in the scheme that had lured them thither—were also ahead of him and had rustled whatever little jobs could be rustled to eke things out.

Eventually he could not sleep at night, used to get up and light his candle and sneak down quietly through the big, beautiful house that he had built, wander to and fro through it, restless, trying to think of some way out, some way to make a dollar, desperate. His wife mentioned that he was doing this, to one of those she thought was a friend; and those who were friends, or even near friends, began to say: "Well, the poor old fellow sank a bit of money here. Wonder if we couldn't do anything for him?"

They did not, however, talk it over quickly enough to any active end. Not seeing him for some time they went up to the house, wondering if at long last he had done as some of the others—"lit out."

They chuckled over that thought. "Wouldn't blame him if he has," they said. He had in truth "lit out"—but not that way. The fellow had gone crazy, shot his wife, the boy, and himself, and left a note apologizing to his creditors but containing no statement of his opinion of the Agricultural Land Company—"gentleman" to the last.

Wife and child had known nothing of what was coming. They were lying in their beds, and he on the floor, stiff, beside a candlestick in which was half a candle. He had obviously blown it out before putting out his own light, perhaps lest the house on the bluff might be ignited and transformed into their funeral pyre.

"Why, dang it," said Bill Grafton, "why didn't he come and tell us the fix he was in and we'd have helped him out!"

Perhaps he meant it. Perhaps he was only trying to salve his conscience, for he was one of those who had floated the Salish Valley Agricultural Land Company and he had done a great deal of the boosting.

People couldn't forget that tragic affair. Indeed there was reason for them not being able to forget it apart from simple human regret.

Something began to happen at the tenantless house on the bluff. One saw it and said nothing. Another saw it and said nothing, silent lest they might be laughed at. Then at last somebody did mention what he had seen, to the relief of the others who had also seen it when passing on the road opposite the house.

Lots of persons had seen it, it seemed, and all spoke then. What they had seen,

driving toward the house at night on the road opposite, just before the bend, was a light, of lamp or candle, spring aglow in the top bedroom, then appear at the next window, then at the window of the staircase, then flicker its radiance along all the windows of the big living room. They remembered that the man's wife had told of those sleepless nights when he rose, lit his candle, passed downstairs, and padded to and fro in his slippers, wondering what to do.

They had left the place unvisited after the inquest and the miserable funeral. Nobody seemed in any haste to do anything about that house on the bluff. But this light that passed in the vacant dwelling became, once broached, a subject of conversation.

"Well, I'd be scared, I guess, to stay a night in that house," said Tom Bremner.

Abe Gurney stared at him.

"Scared nothing!" he declared. "I ain't afraid of ghosts!"

"N-no!" said young Percy Liscard.

That put Bremner upon his mettle. He perked up his head.

"I dare you to do it!" said he. "Both of you!"

"What are you daring them to do?" asked Bill Grafton, who entered in time to hear that remark, Frank Fairmont at his heels in the doorway.

So up they went to the house.

Bremner, Grafton and Gurney, as a matter of fact, went armed, a proceeding which Bremner could justify for himself, for had he not said that he would be scared? Fairmont provided a stable lantern, and young Liscard had the forethought to put a couple of packs of cards in his pocket.

It struck him that it might be a little bit eerie—sitting in a house waiting for something that probably wouldn't come. He thought the ghost—if there was a ghost—might not walk, with five human beings all on the alert. Gurney joshed Fairmont about that stable lantern.

"Well, there's only a little bit of a moon and she ain't up long—and ain't up early either," said Fairmont.

Tommy Knight of the livery stable drove them out to the sagebrush flats, promised to come back for them in the morning, said good night to them with great hilarity as he turned the rig, and away they went plowing through the sand.

It is a fact that there was something a little—well, queer about that house when they approached it. Gurney and Grafton, who were not men particularly sensitive to manifestations of nature, to such subtle things as the drifted light of the last of the sunset, a sort of drizzle of light at the day's end on a gable, may have felt the house a wee bit queer because of guilty conscience more or less. For these two were certainly either the hardest liars or the most appalling optimists about the possibilities of the Salish Valley Agricultural Land Company.

TOM BREMNER thought, but he kept his thought private, that the house looked "lonesome." As if a house could look lonesome! Percy Liscard played the giddy goat when they drew near the door.

"Hullo, hullo!" he hailed. "Anybody around?"

"Body around?" came an echo from under one of the eaves.

Right there, before the adventure had begun, Tom Bremner felt a little shiver up and down his back, but kept that private also, of course. It was a silly thing, he thought, to hail an empty house in that way. They opened the door and went in, all clustering in the portico.

"What's this?" said Fairmont.

"What's what?" asked Bremner brusquely.

"Kicked something soft. Oh! Oh, it's a hassock," said Fairmont. He had stooped and felt.

"Oh, yes," said Bremner. "She used to have a hassock under her feet when she sat there. Little bit of a woman."

"Gee, I ain't got any matches," said Fairmont. "Who's got a match?"

There was a sound of all fumbling in pockets.

"It's awful dark inside here," Percy Liscard unnecessarily stated. "He

oughtn't to have built the darn house with such wide verandas. The roof shuts out all the light that's going. It must have made the rooms kind of dismal even by day."

Toward the rear of the portico there was a sound just as Percy lit a match. At the flicker of light all looked startled toward the back of the entrance hall. There was a face regarding them. But it was Grafton's. He had groped his way back there, hands stretched out before him.

"They used to keep a candle in one of them brass candlesticks here," he explained. "I was just feeling for it."

Fairmont opened his lamp, Liscard lit it, and then Fairmont sprung it shut and led the way into the sitting room. The lamp being set on the end of the long center table they drew chairs and sat down in a semicircle beside a round table over to one side.

"Well, here we are," said Gurney.

THEY looked at the open door into the hallway, at the open door into the dining room—a broad double door, that. Bremner and Liscard, at their end of the semicircle, could even see, beyond the dimly lit dining room, the profound black of half of the doorway—the door open—into the kitchen, or into a corridor leading to the kitchen end of the house.

Bremner found that he had to look away from that. He knew that nothing would, or could, come out of it and look at him, even though he was the man who had said he would be scared to spend a night in the house. But he had been honest about how he felt. He had enough imagination to know that he might start imagining things; and if he sat there long, where he could see that little bit of black further doorway, he would begin to imagine he could see some one looking at him out of it.

That was how he felt. So he turned his chair round slightly and drew forth a cigar and fumbled for a match in one pocket after another and then produced one from his vest.

"Us coming in hasn't disturbed the ghost any," remarked Fairmont. "Wonder if he'll sniff your tobacco and be running along to ask for a cigar."

Liscard, at that, turned his chair slightly round so that he should not see that bit of the door through the dining room; and as he did so Bremner looked at him with understanding, then examined his cigar end.

"Well, gentlemen," said Liscard, "I brought a couple of packs of cards with me in case you might care to have a game?"

"Fine, boy!" old Gurney congratulated him.

Five hundred was the great game at this time in Salish Valley—that is, among the old residents; for most of the suckers played bridge. Grafton took one of the packs from Liscard and they all sat watching him flicking out the cards not wanted for that game. Flip, flip, flip they went on the table.

Suddenly all raised their heads. Each had heard a sound, a sound like a small cough. The man of honor had had a small cough, a little nervous cough, toward the end, and they all remembered it. None of them said: "What was that?" but Gurney said: "That's nothing!" answering the unasked question.

"There's liable to be some little sound even in an empty house," remarked Grafton. "Maybe a pack rat got in."

"There's no pack rat here, not within six or seven miles," said Fairmont.

Liscard giggled foolishly.

"Perhaps it's the spook," he suggested, and then called out: "Do you want to ta-ta-take a hand, mister?"

"Quit your fooling!" said Gurney. "You'll be scaring these fellows."

"You four gentlemen play," said Liscard. "I'll have a mosey around."

He said that to put himself right in their estimation, lest any of them thought his stammer—though none had remarked on it—was of funk. He rose and strolled into the dining room, strolled over to the kitchen door.

But when he got that length there was

something over his loins like a trickle of cold water, there and gone. Grafton was dealing the cards back in the sitting room, and he heard them going flip-flip evenly round in a circle. And then there was the little cough again.

The coldness that had run over the young man's loins immediately ran violently up and down his spine. He turned and strolled slowly back into the living room, and drawing a chair to the center table began to spread the other deck of cards for some obscure game of solitaire.

The quartet sat quiet, intent on the play, keen card players all; but, anon, as they played, a board creaked at one end of the house, and a creaking went the whole length—creak, creak, creak along the front.

Percy Liscard, at the end of the table by himself, felt very much alone then. The four card players paused. They did not raise their heads. They merely remained fixed, their heads bent toward the table but their eyes up, waiting.

It was as if they expected some one to come walking in, candlestick in hand, who would not come if they stirred. But nothing happened—then.

"There's a man out on the veranda," said Bremner.

"By gosh!" exclaimed Grafton. "Some of the boys may have got up a game to come around and try to throw a scare into us."

Creak, creak, creak went another plank, overhead that time.

"That wasn't on the veranda," said Liscard. "Was it?"

"Aw, go on with the game," said Gurney. "It is only change of atmosphere with the night getting on. Some of the boards are cooling off. That's all.

"Go on, you, Percy, and take a peek out and see if there's any one sneaking round on the veranda. But I guess it's only the atmosphere."

Percy did not feel ardently desirous to go, because of the creaking overhead, but he had only been asked to look out at the veranda, and that was an easier errand. Any one on the veranda might more possibly be real, alive, some josher who had followed them from "town" to see if he could have them rattled. He stepped into the hallway—with a sidelong glance at the black beginning of the staircase—and opened the front door abruptly.

"I see you, you son of a gun!" he said.

The card players stopped behind him. He shut the outer door and looked in at them, grinning.

"It's all right," he said. "I only thought if there was anybody there I'd let him think I'd seen him. But I guess there's nobody."

"Aw!" growled old Gurney.

Even as Liscard stood there in the doorway looking foolish before Gurney's snarl of disgust, snap went another board. But that time there did not follow the same even series of cracks. It had been a sound louder than the earlier ones, and it came solitary.

No, not solitary! As they listened there followed, at a longer interval—that was all—a muffled crack and then another, very slight. It was as if some one, alarmed at the loudness of the first creak of a plank underfoot, was walking stealthily, stealthily, overhead.

LISCARD was afraid that they might tell him to go upstairs and have a look there, so:

"That's what it is," he said. "It's just the boards creaking with the temperature lowering at night," and he hastened back to his spread cards.

Crack, crack went boards all through the house. There might have been many invisible persons wandering to and fro. Percy sat down to occupy himself over his solitaire again, while the game of five hundred continued.

And then the cough. Twice, that time, as though the first had not cleared the throat sufficiently. The man of honor, who thought all men were honorable as he, used to do that; sometimes—two little coughs.

Grafton put down his cards.

"Now what in hell was that?" he said.

Nobody spoke. Tom Bremner sat back

in his chair, an elbow on its arm and, biting on his thumb, meditatively looked from one to the other of the three faces of his fellow players.

"It sounded to me like a co-cough," said Liscard.

"Yes, it certainly sounded like a cough," said Gurney, and putting his hand of cards on the table face down before him, he sat back, linked his fingers, and laid them on his paunch. "And, by gosh, it was just the kind of a cough that he——"

"Aw, go on!" said Grafton. "'Tain't nothing. It's all imagination."

Liscard, feeling that his stammer had been remarked that time—he did stammer now and then, but that night it was more definite—so as to put all right again rose with a nonchalant air and looked into the stove. There was paper in it and some wood too. He fumbled for a match.

"Got a match, any of you?" he asked.

Bill Grafton handed him a box. He lit one of the matches, dropped it into the stove, and then called out: "Come on down where it's warm."

Bremner most certainly did not like him behaving that way.

And there was a reply too—the cough.

"Aw, it's only something flapping when there's a bit of a breeze," said Gurney peremptorily. "Come on with the game. It's your play, Fairmont." He took up his cards.

"Turn up the lamp," said Bremner. "She's going down."

Percy put out his hand, did as requested, and the game went on. But very soon again the cards were again dim to their sight and once more Percy stretched out and turned up the light. Then he lifted the lamp and gave it a gentle shake.

"It's near empty," he said.

"Well, I thought there was enough in her," said Fairmont. "I filled her last night. She certainly does eat the oil, that lamp."

Again the light dwindled. At his end of the table Percy had not enough illumination for his game of solitaire. He began to walk up and down slowly, then went over and stood beside the stove, hands behind back, and suddenly arrested them all with a hoarse:

"Look!"

He was gazing tensely into the dining room behind them. They turned their heads just in time to see a light—there and gone.

"You saw it, did you?" he said.

"Now what was that?" asked Fairmont slowly.

"Well, it was a light," said Percy.

"Yes, I know, but——" began Fairmont, and paused.

"It's a cinch," said Bremner, "you can't explain away a light by saying it's something flapping in a wind!"

Gurney rose and heavily peered into the dining room.

"I believe it was the glow of a cigar in the glass they got inset on the top of that buffet thing," he said.

"Who's ci-cigar?" asked Percy.

Gurney turned back, and as he turned the room slowly darkened. The lamp went out. And then came twice that pathetic, dry little cough.

Gurney felt for matches.

"They must have taken out all the lamps into the kitchen to clean," he said after he had found a match and lit it. "I'll go and see if I can get one."

"Rather you than me," said Bremner.

"Why, you're not scared, are you?" old Gurney rumbled at him.

"Sure!" said Bremner. "Scared stiff! Told you before I came that I would be."

"Better not let *him* hear you say that," advised Percy in that silly way of his. All this talk in the dark with only one match, and that going away from them, made him feel creepy.

"Aw, quit!" said Gurney over his shoulder, passing through the murk into the dining room.

He struck another match there, and holding it in a cupped palm walked slowly away. They heard him pass heavily, pausing now and again; and when he paused they could even hear the little spurt of a new match ignited on the failing one. There they waited in the darkness.

"When are you coming with the lamp?"

shouted Bremner at last, worried that he heard no sound.

No answer.

"When are you coming with the lamp?" he called again.

NO answer. There was no answer for the reason, presumably, that Gurney, out beyond that dark doorway, had heard again the cough and was trying to ascertain its whereabouts but did not wish to divulge, to the cougher, where he was. He was, by then, firmly convinced, no doubt, there was somebody or some—well, ghost—in the house; but he refused to allow himself to be scared.

In the living room the waiting men grew worried.

"Wonder what's taken him?" said Bremner.

"Here, I'll go——" said Grafton.

"Let's all go! Come on, Percy. Where are you, Percy? Come on over here and let's all go together," said Fairmont.

As they stepped, stumbling against each other, across the dining room, they heard a faint: "Sssh!" They whispered among themselves.

"I don't like this," said Bremner.

"No more do I," said Fairmont.

Their eyes, by then, had become accustomed to the dark. The night outside, although the moon was not yet up, was bright in contrast with the room. The gable window in the big living room, the front window, the window of the dining room all showed a dim radiance, that phosphorescent-looking glow of a night of stars.

Meantime, out in the kitchen, Gurney was holding breath, listening for the cough.

"Here, half a minute," whispered Grafton to the others. "I'm going round the front way, through the sitting room here. There's a door into the kitchen off the entrance hall too. If there's anybody—anything—in there, we'll get him between us."

He had the courage of the automatic in his pocket, though what good would an automatic be before a disembodied cough? The three saw him steal away against the dim, uncertain sheen of night in the window space in the living room.

HE had been gone a moment when there came two crashes of shots fired almost simultaneously, so near to simultaneous that the sound was somewhat in the manner of a slurred note in music.

"What's happened? What's happened, gentlemen?" jabbered Percy.

Bremner, who had admitted he'd be scared, and who was scared, was then very grim.

"Well, we've got to get this settled," he said sharply. "Ghosts don't shoot, anyhow. Come on."

He turned and stumbled back through the big room, Liscard and Fairmont following close at his heels; and they all passed, with no great difficulty—not only because their eyes were acquainted with the dark there, but because the moon had risen—out into the hallway.

"Where are you, Grafton? Where are you, Gurney?" Bremner called.

No answer.

"Here, we've got to see!" he ejaculated as they moved on. "Who's got a match?"

Just then over their heads came the dry cough and they looked up in the direction of the sound. As they did so they realized what it was.

Above the door was a ventilator for airing the house in winter time when windows were shut. It was covered by a metal plate, but this plate was unfastened. A puff of wind, running in the night outside, blew it up and down.

At once they realized what it was, because, as they looked up, they saw a series of small lozenges of light equally spaced, in the wall, the moon sheen through the ventilator. They showed a moment and then were obliterated; and at the same instant there was a pat of air against the door by which they stood.

Yes; it was only a light wind fanning the valley, only that and nothing more. So one mystery was settled.

The discovery of how little a thing had

seemed so mysterious a thing helped to steady them. Bremner struck his match and in the upheld glow they all peered.

There, just inside the kitchen, lay Grafton on his face. Bremner held the match till, dwindling, it burned his fingers, and he was hardly aware.

"Gurney! Abe Gurney! Are you there? Come out, man! You've shot him," he called. "Come round this way."

There was no reply.

But suddenly came fresh terror, for the frosted-glass panel of the front door was lit up, a radiance passed across it and then into the kitchen. The terror was only momentary, for they heard the rapid drumming of a motor car passing on the road on the bluff opposite.

There was a curve there, coming toward the opposite bluff, and therefore the light did not just flash and pass, but shone into the house, however oscillatingly, for quite an appreciable length of time, long enough at least for Bremner to step across the fallen man and pass into the kitchen, taking advantage of that light. Then it flickered out.

But he had seen—seen Gurney on the floor beside the table, seen, also, the glint of glass on the table.

"Give me a match," he said to Fairmont and Percy who had followed him.

A groping hand gave a box to him and he lit a match, then stepped to the table. Yes, a lamp. He took off the glass, turned up the wick, carefully lit it, carefully replaced the globe.

"Here!" he said. "See here! Help to turn him over and see——" He said no more as he stooped over Gurney.

Gurney, president of the Salish Valley Agricultural Land Company, was as definitely dead as the man who, in trusting hope for a quiet autumn to his life, had built that house.

They stood there in the cold chamber —and very cold it seemed—looking from one to the other in the wan radiance of that little lamp. Perhaps the same thought came to all three at once—that Gurney and Grafton, who had just shot each other, were the prime movers in the Land Company, had met no ghost, but a terrible judgment.

The lighting up of the glass panel in the front door had abruptly cleared up for them another mystery, even as the mystery of the cough; the mystery of the light that people saw move through the house. How simple when one knew! It was the reflection of their motor headlights or their buggy lights in the windows as they drove by, just the reflection passing in the windows of the house.

It shows no more now, because of the inevitable window breaking of deserted houses by roaming boys, a practice common to the Salish Valley kids as to others. The blown seeds of the yellow sage flutter in, with dust and sand, and have already taken root in a corner of two. The panes are all broken, the rooms gutted; the birds fly in and out of the window spaces of the House on the Bluff.

More of Mr. Niven's work in future issues of THE POPULAR.

A LEGISLATIVE LUXURY

A WESTERN member of Congress who frankly tells his cronies that he is in politics for what he can get out of the game was showing a man from back home the sights of the national capital.

"Congressman," said the constituent, "some of us have noticed that you don't make the long, fine speeches you used to deliver. We miss all that oratory you used to get off, all the resounding phrases, appeals to patriotism and pronouncements on the state of the Union generally."

"That's right," the lawmaker admitted. "The fact is that, since I've discovered what my constituents want, I can afford to be as brief and clear in my remarks as I please."

By
EDGAR WALLACE

The Squealer

CHAPTER I.

IN THE HOUSE OF THE DAMNED.

Over the grim stone archway were carved the words:

PARCERE SUBJECTIS.

In cold weather, and employing the argot of his companions, Johnny Gray translated this as "Parky Subjects"—it certainly had no significance as "Spare the Vanquished," for he had been neither vanquished nor spared.

Day by day, harnessed to the shafts, he and Lal Morgon had pulled a heavy hand cart up the steep slope, and day by day had watched absently the red-bearded gate warder put his key in the big polished lock and snap open the gates. And then the little party had passed through, an armed guard leading, an armed guard behind, and the gate had closed.

And at four o'clock he had walked back under the archway and halted while the gate was unlocked and the hand cart admitted.

Every building was hideously familiar. The gaunt "halls," pitch painted against the Dartmoor storms, the low-roofed office, the gas house, the big, barnlike laundry, the ancient bakery, the exercise yard with its broken asphalt, the ugly church, garishly decorated, the long, scrubbed benches with the raised seats for the guards—and the graveyard where the happily released lifers rested from their labors.

One morning in spring, he went out of the gate with a working party. They were building a shed, and he had taken the style and responsibility of bricklayer's laborer. He liked the work because you can talk more freely on a job like that, and he wanted to hear all that Lal Morgon had to say about the "Big Printer."

"Not so much talking to-day," said the guard in charge, seating himself on a sack-covered brick heap.

"No, sir," said Lal.

He was a wizened man of fifty and a lifer, and he had one ambition, which was to live long enough to get another sentence.

"But not burglary, Gray," he said as he leisurely set a brick in its place; "and not shootin', like old Legge got his packet. And not faking Spider King, like you got yours."

"I didn't get mine for faking Spider

Author of
"The Missing Millions,"
"The Valley of Ghosts," Etc.

A Mystery Romance in Four Parts—Part I.

King," said Johnny calmly. "I didn't know that Spider King had been rung in when I took him on the course, and was another horse altogether. They framed up Spider King to catch me. I am not complaining."

"I know you're innocent—everybody is," said Lal soothingly. "I'm the only guilty man in prison. That's what the governor says. 'Morgon,' he says, 'it does my heart good to meet a guilty man that ain't the victim of circumstantiality."

Johnny did not pursue the subject. There was no reason why he should. This fact was beyond dispute.

He had known all about the big race-course swindles that were being worked, and had been an associate of men who backed the "rung-in" horses. He accepted the sentence of three years' penal servitude that had been passed without appeal or complaint. Not because he was guilty of the act for which he was charged—there was another excellent reason.

"If they lumbered you with the crime, it was because you was a mug," said old Lal complacently. "That's what mugs are for—to be lumbered. What did old Kane say?"

"I didn't see Mr. Kane," said Johnny shortly.

"He'd think you was a mug too," said Lal with satisfaction. "Hand me a brick, Gray, and shut up! That nosey screw's coming over."

The "nosey screw" was no more inquisitive than any other guard. He strolled across, the handle of his truncheon showing from his pocket, the well-worn strap dangling.

"Not so much talking," he said mechanically.

"I was asking for a brick, sir," said Lal humbly. "These bricks ain't so good as the last lot."

"I've noticed that," said the warder, examining a half brick with a professional and disapproving eye.

"Trust you to notice that, sir," said the sycophant with the right blend of admiration and awe. And, when the warder had passed:

"That boss-eyed perisher don't know a brick from a gas stove," said Lal without heat. "He's the bloke that old Legge got straightened when he was in here—used to have private letters brought in every other day.

"But then, old Legge's got money. Him and Peter Kane smashed the strong room of the *Orsonic* and got away with a million dollars. They never caught Peter, but Legge was easy. He shot a copper and got life."

Johnny had heard Legge's biography a hundred times, but Lal Morgon had reached the stage of life when every story he told was new.

"That's why he hates Peter," said the garrulous bricklayer. "That's why young Legge and him are going to get Peter. And young Legge's hot! Thirty years of age by all accounts, and the biggest printer of slush in the world!

"And it's not ord'nary slush. Experts get all mixed up when they see young Legge's notes—can't tell 'em from real Bank of England stuff. And the police *and* the secret service after him for years —and then never got him!"

THE day was warm, and Lal stripped off his red-and-blue-striped working jacket. He wore, as did the rest of the party, the stained yellow breeches faintly stamped with the broad arrow. Around his calves were buttoned yellow garters. His shirt was of stout cotton, white with narrow blue stripes, and on his head was a cap adorned with mystic letters of the alphabet to indicate the dates of his convictions.

A week later, when the letters were abolished, Lal Morgon had a grievance. He felt as a soldier might feel when he was deprived of his decorations.

"You've never met young Jeff?" stated rather than asked Lal, smoothing a dab of mortar with a leisurely touch.

"I've seen him—I have not met him," said Johnny grimly, and something in his tone made the old convict look up.

"He 'shopped' me," said Johnny, and Lal indicated his surprise with an inclination of his head that was ridiculously like a bow.

"I don't know why, but I do know that he 'shopped' me," said Johnny. "He was the man who fixed up the fake, got me persuaded to bring the horse on to the course, and then squeaked. Until then I did not know that the alleged Spider King was in reality Boy Saunders cleverly camouflaged."

"Squealing's hidjus," said the shocked Lal, and he seemed troubled. "And Emanuel Legge's boy too! Why did he do it—did you catch him over money?"

Johnny shook his head.

"I don't know. If it's true that he hates Peter Kane he may have done it out of revenge, knowing that I'm fond of Peter, and—well, I'm fond of Peter. He warned me about mixing with the crowd I ran with——"

"Stop that talking, will you!"

They worked for some time in silence. Then:

"That guard will get somebody hung one of these days," said Lal in a tone of quiet despair. "He's the feller that little Lew Morse got a bashing for—over clouting him with a spanner in the blacksmith's shop. He was nearly killed. What a pity! Lew wasn't much account, an' he's often said he'd as soon be dead as sober."

AT four o'clock the working party fell in and marched or shuffled down the narrow road to the prison gates.

PARCERE SUBJECTIS.

Johnny looked up and winked at the grim jest, and he had the illusion that the archway winked back at him. At half past four he turned into the deep-recessed doorway of his cell, and the yellow door closed on him with a metallic snap of the lock.

It was a big, vaulted cell, and the color of the folded blanket ends gave it a rakish touch of gayety. On a shelf in one corner was a photograph of a fox terrier, a pretty head turned inquiringly toward him.

He poured out a mugful of water and drank it, looking up at the barred window. Presently his tea would come, and then the lock would be put on for eighteen and a half hours.

For eighteen and a half hours he must amuse himself as best he could. He could

read while the light held—a volume of travel was on the ledge that served as a table. Or he could write on his slate, or draw horses and dogs, or work out interminable problems in mathematics, or write poetry—or think!

That was the worst exercise of all. He crossed the cell and took down the photograph. The mount had worn limp with much handling, and he looked with a half smile into the big eyes of the terrier.

"It is a pity you can't write, old Spot," he said.

Other people could write, and did, he thought as he replaced the photograph. But Peter Kane never once mentioned Marney, and Marney had not written since—a long time.

It was ominous, informative, in some ways decisive. A brief reference, "Marney is well," or "Marney thanks you for your inquiry," and that was all.

The whole story was clearly written in those curt phrases, the story of Peter's love of the girl, and his determination that she should not marry a man with the prison taint. Peter's adoration of his daughter was almost a mania—her happiness and her future came first, always.

Peter loved him—Johnny had sensed that. He had given him the affection that a man might give his grown son. If this tragic folly of his had not led to the entanglement which brought him to a convict prison, Peter would have given Marney to him, as she was willing to give herself.

"That's that," said Johnny in his rôle of philosopher.

And then came tea and the final lock up, and silence—and thoughts again.

Why did young Legge trap him? He had only seen the man once; they had never even met. It was only by chance that he had ever seen this young printer of forged notes.

He could not guess that he was known to the man he "shopped," for Jeff Legge was an illusive person. One never met him in the usual rendezvous where the half underworld forgather to boast and plot or drink and love.

A key rattled in the lock, and Johnny got up. He forgot that it was the evening when the chaplain visited him.

"Sit down, Gray." The door closed on the clergyman, and he seated himself on Johnny's bed.

It was curious that he should take up the thread of Johnny's interrupted thoughts.

"I want to get your mind straight about this man Legge—the son, I mean. It is pretty bad to brood on grievances, real or fancied, and you are nearing the end of your term of imprisonment, when your resentment will have a chance of expressing itself. And, Gray, I don't want to see you here again."

Johnny Gray smiled.

"You won't see me *here!*" he emphasized the word. "As to Jeff Legge, I know little about him, though I've done some fairly fluent guessing and I've heard a lot."

The chaplain shook his head thoughtfully.

"I have heard a little; he's the man they call the Big Printer, isn't he? Of course, I know all about the flooding of Europe with spurious notes, and that the police had failed to catch the man who was putting them into circulation. Is that Jeff Legge?"

Johnny did not answer, and the chaplain smiled a little sadly.

" 'Thou shalt not squeal'—the eleventh commandment, isn't it?" he asked goodhumoredly. "I am afraid I have been indiscreet. When does your sentence end?"

"In six months," replied Johnny, "and I'll not be sorry."

"What are you going to do? Have you any money?"

The convict's lips twitched.

"Yes, I have three thousand a year," he said quietly. "That is a fact which did not come out at the trial, for certain reasons.

"No, padre, money isn't my difficulty. I suppose I shall travel. I certainly shall not attempt to live down my grisly past."

"That means you're not going to change your name," said the chaplain with a twin-

kle in his eye. "Well, with three thousand a year, I can't see you coming here again."

Suddenly he remembered. Putting his hand in his pocket, he took out a letter. "The deputy gave me this, and I'd nearly forgotten. It arrived this morning."

The letter was opened, as were all letters that came to convicts, and Johnny glanced carelessly at the envelope. It was not, as he had expected, a letter from his lawyer.

The bold handwriting was Peter Kane's —the first letter he had written for six months. He waited until the door had closed upon the visitor, and then he took the letter from the envelope. There were only a few lines of writing:

DEAR JOHNNY: I hope you are not going to be very much upset by the news I am telling you. Marney is marrying Major Floyd, of Toronto, and I know that you're big enough and fine enough to wish her luck. The man she is marrying is a real good fellow who will make her happy.

Johnny put down the letter on to the ledge, and for ten minutes paced the narrow length of his cell, his hands clasped behind him. Marney to be married! His face was white, tense, his eyes dark with gloom. He stopped and poured out a mugful of water with a hand that shook, then raised the glass to the barred window that looked eastward.

"Good luck to you, Marney!" he said huskily, and drank the mug empty.

CHAPTER II.

THE STRANGE CALLERS.

TWO days later, Johnny Gray was summoned to the warden's office and heard the momentous news.

"Gray, I have good news for you. You are to be released immediately. I have just had the authority."

Johnny inclined his head.

"Thank you, sir," he said.

A guard took him to a bathroom, where he stripped, and, with a blanket about him, came out to a cubicle, where his civilian clothes were waiting. He dressed with a queer air of unfamiliarity, and went back to his cell. The warder brought him a looking-glass and a safety razor, and he completed his toilet.

The rest of the day was his own. He was a privileged man, and could wander about the prison in his strangely feeling attire, the envy of men whom he had come to know and to loathe; the half madmen who for a year had been whispering their futilities into the ear.

As he stood there in the hall at a loose end, the door was flung open violently, and a group of men staggered in. In the midst of them was a howling, shrieking thing that was neither man nor beast, his face bloody, his wild arms gripped by struggling guards.

He watched the tragic group as it made its way to the punishment cells.

"Fenner," said somebody under his breath. "He coshed a guard, but they can't give him another bashing."

"Isn't Fenner that twelve-year man that's doing his full time?" asked Johnny, remembering the convict. "And he's going out to-morrow too!"

"That's him," said his informant, one of the hall sweepers. "He'd have got out with nine, but old Legge reported him. Game to the last, eh? They can't bash him after to-morrow, and the visiting justices won't be here for a week."

Johnny remembered the case. Legge had been witness to a brutal assault on the man by one of the warders, who had since been discharged from the service. In desperation the unfortunate Fenner had hit back, and had been tried.

Legge's evidence might have saved him from the flogging which followed, but Legge was too good a friend of the guards —or they were too good friends of his— to betray a "screw." So Fenner had gone to the triangle, as he would not go again.

He could not sleep the last night in the cell. His mind was on Marney. He did not reproach her for a second. Nor did he feel bitter toward her father. It was only right and proper that Peter Kane should do what was best for his girl.

The old man's ever-present fear for his daughter's future was almost an obsession.

Johnny guessed that when this presentable Canadian had come along, Peter had done all in his power to further the match.

JOHNNY GRAY walked up the steep slope for the last time. A key turned in the big lock, and he stood outside the gates, a free man. The red-bearded head guard put out his hand.

"Good luck to you," he said gruffly. "Don't you come over the Alps again."

"I've given up mountain climbing," said Johnny.

He had taken his farewell of the warden, and now the only thing to remind him of his association with the grim prison he had left, was the guard who walked by his side to the station. He had some time to wait, and Johnny tried to get some information from another angle.

"No, I don't know Jeff Legge," said the guard, shaking his head. "I knew the old man: he was here until twelve months ago —you were here too, weren't you, Gray?"

Johnny nodded.

"Mr. Jeff Legge has never been over the Alps, then?" he asked sardonically.

"No, not in this prison, and he wasn't in Parkhurst or Portland, so far as I can remember. I've been at both places. I've heard the men talking about him.

"They say he's clever, which means that he'll be putting out his tins one morning. Good-by, Gray, and be good!"

Johnny gripped the outstretched hand of the man, and, when he was in the carriage, took out his silk handkerchief and wiped his hand of the last prison contact.

His servant was waiting for him at Paddington when he arrived that afternoon, and with him, straining at a leash, a small, lop-eared fox terrier, who howled his greeting long before Johnny had seen the group. In another second the dog was struggling in his arms, licking his face, his ears, his hair, and whining his joy at the reunion. There were tears in Johnny's eyes when he put the dog down on the platform.

"There are a number of letters for you, sir. Will you dine at home?"

The excellent Parker might have been welcoming his master from a short sojourn at Monte Carlo, so very unemotional was he.

"Yes, I'll dine at home," said Johnny. He stepped into the taxicab that Parker had hired, and Spot leaped after him.

"There is no baggage, sir?" asked Parker gravely, speaking through the open window.

"There is no baggage," said Johnny as gravely. "You had better ride back with me, Parker."

The man hesitated.

"It would be a very great liberty, sir," he said.

"Not so great a liberty as I have had taken with me during the past year and nine months," said Johnny.

As the cab came out into dismal Chapel Street, the greatly daring Parker asked:

"I hope you have not had too bad a time, sir?"

Johnny laughed.

"It has not been pleasant, Parker. Prisons seldom are."

"I suppose not, sir," agreed Parker, and added unnecessarily: "I have never been in prison, sir."

Johnny's flat was in Queen's Gate, and at the sight of the peaceful luxury of his study he caught his breath.

"You're a fool," he said aloud to himself.

"Yes, sir," said the obliging Parker.

That night many men came furtively to the flat in Queen's Gate, and Johnny, after admitting the first of these, called Parker into his small dining room.

"Parker, I am told that during my absence in the country, even staid men have acquired the habit of attending cinema performances?"

"Well, sir, I like the pictures myself," admitted Parker.

"Then go and find one that lasts until eleven o'clock," said Johnny.

"You mean, sir——"

"I mean I don't want you here tonight."

Parker's face fell, but he was a good servant.

"Very good, sir," he said, and went

out, wondering sorrowfully what desperate plans his master was hatching.

At half past ten the last of the visitors took his leave.

"I'll see Peter to-morrow," said Johnny, tossing the end of his cigarette into the hall fireplace. "You know nothing of this wedding, when it is to take place?"

"No, captain. I only know Peter slightly."

"Who is the bridegroom?"

"A swell, by all accounts—Peter is a plausible chap, and he'd pull in the right kind. A major in the Canadian army, I've heard, and a very nice man. Peter can catch mugs easier than some people can catch flies."

"Peter was never a mug catcher," said John Gray sharply.

"I don't know," said the other. "There's one born every minute."

"But they take a long time to grow up, and the women get first pluck," said Johnny good-humoredly.

Parker, returning at eleven fifteen, found his master sitting before a fireplace which was choked with burned paper.

JOHNNY reached Horsham the next afternoon soon after lunch, and none who saw the athletic figure striding up the Horsham Road would guess that less than two days before he had been the inmate of a convict cell.

He had come to make his last desperate fight for happiness. How it would end, what argument to employ, he did not know. There was one, and one only, but that he could not use.

As he turned into Down Road, he saw two big limousines standing one behind the other, and wondered what social event was in progress.

Manor Hill stood aloof from its suburban neighbors, a sedate, red-brick house, its walls gay with clematis. Johnny avoided the front gates and passed down a side path which, as he knew, led to the big lawn behind, where Peter loved to sun himself at this hour.

He paused as he emerged into the open. A pretty parlor maid was talking to an elderly man, who wore without distinction the livery of a butler. His lined face was puckered uncomfortably, and his head was bent in a listening attitude, though it was next to impossible for a man not totally deaf to miss hearing all that she said.

"I don't know what sort of houses you've been in, and what sort of people you've been working for, but I can tell you that if I find you in my room again, looking in my boxes, I shall tell Mr. Kane. I won't have it, Mr. Ford!"

"No, miss," said the butler huskily.

It was not, as Johnny knew, emotion which produced the huskiness. Barney Ford had been husky from his youth—probably had squawked huskily in his cradle.

"If you are a burglar and trying to keep your hand in, I understand it," the girl continued hotly, "but you're supposed to be a respectable man! I won't have this underhand prying and sneaking. Understand that, I won't have it!"

"No, miss," said the hoarse Barney.

John Gray surveyed the scene with amusement. Barney he knew very well. He had quitted the shadier walks of life when Peter Kane had found it expedient to retire from his hazardous calling.

Ex-convict, ex-burglar and ex-prize fighter, his seamy past was in some degree redeemed by his affection for the man whose bread he ate and in whose service he pretended to be, though a worse butler had never put on uniform than Barney.

The girl was pretty, with hair of dull gold and a figure that was both straight and supple. Now her face was flushed with annoyance, and the dark eyes were ablaze.

Barney certainly had prying habits, the heritage of his unregenerate days. Other servants had left the house for the same reason, and Peter had cursed and threatened without wholly reforming his servitor.

The girl did not see him as she turned and flounced into the house, leaving the old man to stare after her.

"You've made her cross," said John, coming up behind him.

Barney Ford spun round and stared. Then his jaw dropped.

"Good Lord, Johnny, when did *you* come down from college?"

The visitor laughed softly.

"Term ended yesterday," he said. "How is Peter?"

Before he replied, the servant blew his nose violently, all the time keeping his eye upon the newcomer.

"How long have you bin here?" he asked at length.

"I arrived at the tail end of your conversation," said Johnny, amused. "Barney, you haven't reformed!"

Barney Ford screwed up his face into an expression of scorn.

"They think you're a crook even if you ain't one," he said. "What does she know about life? You ain't seen Peter? He's in the house; I'll tell him in a minute. *He's* all right. All beans and bacon about the girl. That fellow adores the ground she walks on. It's not natural being fond of your kids like that. I never was."

He shook his head despairingly. "There's too much lovey-dovey and not enough strap nowadays. Spare the rod and spoil the child, as the old poet says."

John Gray turned his head at the sound of a foot upon a stone step. It was Peter, Peter radiant yet troubled. Straight as a ramrod for all his sixty years and white hair. He was wearing a morning coat and pearl-gray waistcoat—an innovation. For a second he hesitated, the smile struck from his face, frowning, and then he came quickly, his hand outstretched.

"Well, Johnny boy, had a rotten time?"

His hand fell on the young man's shoulder, his voice had the old measure of pride and affection.

"Fairly rotten," said Johnny, "but any sympathy with me is wasted. Personally, I prefer Dartmoor to Parkhurst—it is more robust, and there are fewer imbeciles."

PETER took his arm and led him to a chair beneath the Japanese umbrella planted on the lawn. There was something in his manner, a certain awkwardness which the newcomer could not understand.

"Did you meet anybody—there—that I know, Johnny boy?"

"Legge," said the other laconically, his eyes on Peter's face.

"That's the man I'm thinking of. How is he?"

The tone was careless, but Johnny was not deceived. Peter was intensely interested.

"He's been out six months—didn't you know?"

The other's face clouded.

"Out six months? Are you sure?"

Johnny nodded.

"I didn't know."

"I should have thought you would have heard from him," said John quietly. "He doesn't love you!"

Peter's slow smile broadened.

"I know he doesn't: did you get a chance of talking with him?"

"Plenty of chances. He was in the laundry, and he straightened a couple of screws so that he could do what he liked.

"He hates you, Peter. He says you shopped him."

"He's a liar," said Peter calmly. "I wouldn't shop my worst enemy. He shopped himself. Johnny, the police get a reputation for smartness, but the truth is, every other criminal arrests himself. Criminals aren't clever. They wear gloves to hide their finger prints, and then write their names in the visitors' book.

"Legge and I smashed the strong room of the *Orsonic* and got away with six hundred thousand dollars in American currency—it was the last job I did.

"It was dead easy getting away, but Emanuel started boasting what a clever fellow he was; and he drank a bit. An honest man can drink and wake up in his own bed. But a crook who drinks says good morning to the jailer."

He dropped the subject abruptly, and again his hand fell on the younger man's shoulder.

"Johnny, you're not feeling sore, are you?"

Johnny did not answer.

"Are you?"

And now the fight was to begin. John Gray steeled himself for the forlorn hope.

"About Marney? No, only——"

"Old boy, I had to do it." Peter's voice was urgent, pleading. "You know what she is to me. I liked you well enough to take a chance, but after they dragged you, I did some hard thinking.

"It would have smashed me, Johnny, if she'd been your wife then. I couldn't bear to see her cry even when she was quite a little baby. Think what it would have meant to her. It was bad enough as it was.

"And then this fellow came along—a good, straight, clean, cheery fellow—a gentleman. And—well, I'll tell you the truth—I helped him. You'll like him. He's the sort of man anybody would like. And she loves him, Johnny."

There was a silence.

"I don't bear him any ill will. It would be absurd if I did. Only, Peter, before she marries I want to say——"

"Before she marries?" Peter Kane's voice shook. "John, didn't Barney tell you? She was married this morning."

CHAPTER III.

THE VENDETTA.

"MARRIED?"

Johnny repeated the word dully.

Marney married! It was incredible, impossible to comprehend. For a moment the stays and supports of existence dissolved into dust, and the fabric of life fell into chaos.

"Married this morning, Johnny. You'll like him. He isn't one of us, old boy. He's as straight as—well, you understand, Johnny boy? I've worked for her and planned for her all these years; I'd have been rotten if I took a chance with her future."

Peter Kane was pleading, his big hand on the other's shoulder, his fine face clouded with anxiety and the fear that he had hurt this man beyond remedy.

"I should have wired——"

"It would have made no difference," said Peter Kane almost doggedly. "Nothing could have been changed, Johnny, nothing. It had to be.

"If you had been convicted innocently—I don't say you weren't—I couldn't have the memory of your imprisonment hanging over her; I couldn't have endured the uncertainty myself. Johnny, I've been a crook all my life—up to fifteen years ago. I take a broader view than most men because I am, what I am. But she doesn't know that. Craig's here to-day——"

"Craig—the Scotland Yard man?"

Peter nodded, a look of faint amusement in his eyes.

"We're good friends; we have been for years; and do you know what he said this morning? He said: 'Peter, you've done well to marry that girl into the straight way,' and I know he's right."

Johnny stretched back in the deep cane chair, his hand shading his eyes, as though he found the light too strong for him.

"I'm not going to be sorry for myself," he said with a smile, and, stretching out his hand, gripped Kane's arm. "You'll not have another vendetta on your hands, Peter. I have an idea that Emanuel Legge will keep you busy——"

He stopped suddenly. The ill-fitted butler had made a stealthy appearance.

"Peter," he began in his husky whisper, "he's come—do you want to see him?"

"Who?"

"Emanuel Legge—uglier than ever."

Peter Kane's face set, masklike.

"Where is Miss Marney—Mrs. Floyd?"

"She's gettin' into her weddin' things and folderols for the photographer," said Barney. "She had 'em off once, but the photographer's just come and he's puttin' up his things in the front garden. I sez to Marney——"

"You're a talkative old gentleman," said Peter grimly. "Send Emanuel through. Do you want to see him, Johnny?"

John Gray rose.

"No," he said. "I'll wander through your alleged rosery. I want nothing to remind me of 'The Awful Place,' thank you."

Johnny had disappeared through an

opening of the box hedge at the lower end of the lawn when Barney returned with the visitor.

Mr. Emanuel Legge was a man below middle height, thin of body and face, gray and a little bald. On his nose perched a pair of horn-rimmed spectacles. He stood for a second or two surveying the scene, his chin lifted, his thin lips drawn in between his teeth.

His attire was shabby, a steel chain served as a watch guard, and, as if to emphasize the rustiness of his wrinkled suit, he wore boots that were patently new and vividly yellow. Hat in hand, he waited, his eyes slowly sweeping the domain of his enemy, until at last they came to rest upon his host.

It was Peter Kane who broke the deadly silence.

"Well, Emanuel? Come over and sit down."

Legge moved slowly toward his host.

"Quite a swell place, Peter. Everything of the best, eh? Trust you! Still got old Barney, I see. Has he reformed too? That's the word, ain't it—'reformed?'"

His voice was thin and complaining. His pale-blue eyes blinked coldly at the other.

"He doesn't go thieving any more, if that is what you mean," said Peter shortly. and a look of pain distorted the visitor's face.

"Don't use that word, it's low."

"Let me take your hat." Peter held out his hand, but the man drew his away.

"No, thanks. I promised a young friend of mine that I wouldn't lose anything while I was here. How long have you been at this place, Peter?"

"About fourteen years."

PETER sat down, and the unwelcome guest followed his example pulling his chair round so that he faced the other squarely.

"Ah!" he said thoughtfully. "Living very comfortable, plenty to eat, go out and come in when you like.

"Good way of spending fourteen years. Better than having the key on you four o'clock in the afternoon. Princetown's the same old place—oh, I forgot you'd never been there."

"I've motored through," said Peter coolly, deliberately, and knew that he had touched a raw place before the lips of the man curled back in a snarl.

"Oh, you've motored through!" he sneered. "I wish I'd known, I'd have hung my flags out! They ought to of decorated Princetown that day, Peter. You drove through!" he almost spat the words.

"Have a cigar!"

Emanuel Legge waved aside the invitation.

"No, thanks. I've got out of the habit —you do in fifteen years. You can get into some too. Fifteen years is a long time out of a life."

So Emanuel had come to make trouble, and had chosen his day well. Peter took up the challenge.

"The man you shot would have been glad of a few—he died two years after," he said curtly, and all the pent fury of his sometime comrade flamed in his eyes.

"I hope he's in hell," he hissed, "the dirty flattie!" With an effort he mastered himself. "You've had a real good time, Peter? Nice house, that wasn't bought for nothing. Servants and what not *and* motoring through the moor! You're clever!"

"I admit it."

The little man's hands were trembling, his thin lips twitched convulsively.

"Leave your pal in the lurch and get away yourself, eh? Every man for himself—well, that's the law of nature, ain't it? And if you think he's going to squeal, send a line to the busies in charge of the case and drop a few hundred to 'em and there you are!"

He paused, but no reply came. "That's how it's done, ain't it, Peter?"

Kane shrugged his shoulders indifferently.

"I don't know—I'm never too old to learn."

"But that's the way it's done?" insisted

the man, showing his teeth again. "That's the way you keep out of prison, ain't it?"

Peter looked at his tormentor.

"I won't argue with you," he said.

"You can't," said the other. "I'm logical." He gazed around. "This house cost a bit of money. What's half of two hundred thousand? I'm a bad counter!" Peter did not accept the opening. "It's a hundred thousand, ain't it? I got sixty thousand—you owe me forty."

"We got less than one hundred and twenty thousand pounds, if you're talking about the ship job. You got sixty thousand, which was more than your share. I paid it into your bank the day you went down."

Legge smiled skeptically. "The newspapers said a million dollars," he murmured.

"You don't believe what you read in the newspapers, do you? Emanuel, you're getting childish." Then, suddenly: "Are you trying to put the black on me?"

"Blackmail?" Emanuel was shocked. "There's honor among—friends, surely, Peter. I only want what's right and fair."

Peter laughed softly, amusedly.

"Comic, is it? You can afford to laugh at a poor old fellow who's been in stir for fifteen years."

The master of Manor Hill snapped round on him.

"If you'd been in hell for fifty, I should still laugh."

Emanuel was sorry for himself. That was ever a weakness of his; he said as much.

"You wouldn't be, would you? You've got a daughter, haven't you? Young? Married to-day, wasn't she?"

"Yes."

"Married money—a swell?"

"Yes. She married a good man."

"He doesn't know what you are, Peter?" Emanuel asked the question carelessly, and his host fixed him with a steely glance.

"No. What's the idea? Do you think you'll get forty thousand pounds that way?"

"I've got a boy. You've never sat in a damp cell with the mists of the moor hanging on the walls, and thought and thought till your heart ached?

"You can get people through their children." He paused. "I could get you that way."

IN a second Peter Kane was towering above him, an ominous figure.

"The day my heart ached," he said slowly, "yours would not beat! You're an old man and you're afraid of death! I can see it in your eyes. I am afraid of nothing. I'd kill you!"

Legge shrank farther into his chair.

"What's all this talk about killing? I only want what's fair. Fond of her, ain't you, Peter? I'll bet you are.

"Is she pretty? I don't suppose she takes after you. Young Johnny Gray was sweet on her too. Peter, I'll get you through her——"

So far he got, and then a hand like a steel clamp fell on his neck, and he was jerked from his chair.

Peter spoke no word, but, dragging the squirming figure behind him, as if it had neither weight nor resistance, he strode up the narrow pathway by the side of the house, across the strip of garden, through the gate and into the road. A jerk of his arm, and Emanuel Legge was floundering in the dusty road.

"Don't come back, Emanuel," he said, and did not stop to listen to the reply.

John Gray passed out of sight and hearing of the two men, being neither curious to know Legge's business nor anxious to renew a prison acquaintance.

Below the box hedge were three broad terraces, blazing with color, blanketed with the subtle fragrance of flowers. Beyond that, a sloping meadow leading to a little river.

Peter had bought his property wisely. A great cedar of Lebanon stood at the garden's edge; to the right, massed bushes were patched with purple and heliotrope blooms.

He sat down on a marble seat, glad of the solitude which he shared only with a noisy thrush and a lark invisible in the blue above him.

Marney was married. That was the beginning and the end of him. But happy. He recognized his very human vanity in the instant doubt that she could be happy with anybody but him.

How dear she was! And then a voice came to him, a shrill, hateful voice. It was Legge's—he was threatening the girl, and Johnny's blood went cold. Here was the vulnerable point in Peter Kane's armor; the crevice through which he could be hurt.

He started to his feet and went up the broad steps of the terrace three at a time. The garden was empty, save for Barney setting a table. Kane and his guest had disappeared.

He was crossing the lawn when he saw something white shining in the gloom beyond the open French windows of a room. Something that took glorious shape. A girl in bridal white, and her hands were outstretched to him. So ethereal, so unearthly was her beauty, that at first he did not recognize her.

"Johnny!"

A soldierly figure was at her side, Peter Kane was behind her, but he had no eyes for any but Marney.

She came flying toward him, both his hands were clasped in her warm palms.

"Oh, Johnny—Johnny!"

Then he looked up into the smiling face of the bridegroom, that fine, straight man to whom Peter had intrusted his beloved girl.

For a second their eyes met, the debonair Major Floyd and his. Not by a flicker of eyelash did Johnny Gray betray himself.

The husband of the woman he loved was Jeff Legge, forger and traitor, the man sworn with his father to break the heart of Peter Kane.

CHAPTER IV.

THE MEETING.

HAD he betrayed himself, he wondered? All his will power was exercised to prevent such a betrayal. Though a tornado of fury swept through and through him, though he saw the face of the man distorted and blurred, and brute instinct urged his limbs to savage action, he remained outwardly unmoved.

It was impossible for the beholder to be sure whether he had paled, for the sun and wind of Dartmoor had tanned his lean face the color of mahogany. For a while so terrific was the shock that he was incapable of speech or movement.

"Major Floyd" was Jeff Legge! In a flash he realized the horrible plot. This was Emanuel's revenge—to marry his crook son to the cherished daughter of Peter Kane.

Jeff was watching him narrowly, but by no sign did Johnny betray his recognition. It was all over in a fraction of a second.

He brought his eyes back to the girl, smiling mechanically. She seemed oblivious to his surroundings. That her new husband stood by, watching her with a gleam of amusement in his eyes, that Peter was frowning anxiously, and that even old Barney was staring open-mouthed, meant nothing.

"Johnny, poor Johnny! You aren't hating me, are you?"

John smiled and patted the hand that lay in his.

"Are you happy?" he asked in a low voice.

"Yes, oh, yes, I'm happily married—that's what you mean, isn't it? I'm very happy——

"Johnny, was it terrible? I haven't stopped thinking about you, I haven't. Though I didn't write—after—— Don't you think I was a beast? I know I was. Johnny, didn't it hurt you, old boy?"

He shook his head.

"There's one thing you mustn't be in Dartmoor—sorry for yourself. Are you happy?"

She did not meet his eyes.

"That is twice you've asked in a minute! Isn't it disloyal to say that I am? Don't you want to meet Jeffrey?"

"Why, of course I want to meet Jeffrey."

He crossed to the man, and Jeff Legge watched him.

"I want you to meet Captain Gray, very old friend of mine," she said, with a catch in her voice.

Jeffrey Legge's cold hand gripped his.

"I'm glad to meet you, Captain Gray."

Had he been recognized? Apparently not, for the face turned to him was puckered in an embarrassed smile.

"You've just come back from East Africa, haven't you? Get any shooting?"

"No, I didn't do any shooting," said Johnny.

"Lots of lions, aren't there?" said Jeff.

The lips of the ex-convict twitched.

"In that part of the country where I was living, the lions are singularly tame," he said dryly.

"Marney, darling, you're glad to see Gray on your wedding day, aren't you?—it was good of you to come, Gray. Mrs. Floyd has often spoken about you."

He put his arm about the girl, his eyes never leaving Johnny's face. He designed to hurt—to hurt them both.

She stood rigidly, neither yielding nor resisting, tense, breathless, pale. She knew!

The realization came to John Gray like a blow. She knew that this man was a liar and a villain. She knew the trick that had been played upon her father!

"Happy, darling?"

"Very—oh, very."

There was a flutter in her voice, and now Johnny was hurt, and the fight to hold himself in became terrific. It was Peter who for the moment saved the situation.

"Johnny, I want you to know this boy. The best in the world. And I want you to think with me that he's the best husband in the world for Marney."

Jeff Legge laughed softly.

"Mr. Kane, you embarrass me terribly. I'm not half good enough for her—I'm just an awkward brute that doesn't deserve my good luck."

He bent and kissed the white-faced girl. Johnny did not take his eyes from the man.

"Happy, eh? I'll bet you're happy, you rascal," chuckled Kane.

Marney pulled herself away from the encircling arm.

"Daddy, I don't think this is altogether amusing Johnny." Her voice shook. The man from Dartmoor knew that she was on the verge of tears.

"It takes a lot to bore me." John Gray found his voice. "Indeed, the happiness of young people—I feel very old just now—is a joy. You're a Canadian, Major Floyd?"

"Yes—a French Canadian, though you wouldn't guess that from my name. My people were habitant and went West in the sixties—to Alberta and Saskatchewan, long before the railway came. You ought to go to Canada; you'd like it better than the place you've been to."

"I'm sure I should."

PETER had strolled away, the girl's arm in his.

"No lions in Canada, tame or wild," said Jeff, regarding him from under his drooped eyelids.

Gray had lit a cigarette. He was steady now, steady of nerve and hand.

"I should feel lonely without lions," he said coolly, and then: "If you will forgive my impertinence, Major Floyd, you have married a very nice girl."

"The very, very best."

"I would go a long way to serve her—a long way. Even back to the lions."

Their eyes met. In the bridegroom's was a challenge; in Johnny Gray's cold murder. Jeff Legge's eyes fell and he shivered.

"I suppose you like—hunting?" he said. "Oh, no, you said you didn't. I wonder why a man of your—er—character went abroad?"

"I was sent," said Johnny, and he emphasized every word. "Somebody had a reason for sending me abroad—they wanted me out of the way. I should have gone anyhow, but this man hurried the process."

"Do you know who it was?"

The East African pretense had been tacitly dropped, Jeff might do so safely, for he would know that the cause of John

Gray's retirement from the world was no secret.

"I don't know the man. He was a stranger to me. Very few people know him personally. In his set—our set—not half a dozen people could identify him. Only one man in the police force knows him——"

"Who is that?" interrupted the other quickly.

"A man named Reeder. I heard that in prison—of course you knew I had come from Dartmoor?"

Jeff nodded with a smile.

"That is the fellow who is called 'The Great Unknown,'" he said, striving to thin the contempt from his voice. "I've heard about him in the club. He is a very stupid person of middle age, who lives in Peckham. So he isn't as much unknown as *your* mystery man!"

"It is very likely," said the other. "Convicts invest their heroes and enemies with extraordinary gifts and qualities. I only know what I have been told. At Dartmoor they say Reeder knows everything. The government gave him carte blanche to find the Big Printer."

"And has he found him?" asked Jeff Legge innocently.

"He'll find him," said Johnny. "Sooner or later there will be a squeal."

"May I be there to hear it," said Jeff Legge, and showed his white teeth in a mirthless smile.

CHAPTER V.

THE WOMAN LILA.

JOHNNY was alone in the lower garden, huddled up on a corner of the marble bench, out of sight but not out of hearing of the guests who were assembling on the lawn. He had to think, and think quickly. Marney knew! But Marney had not told, and Johnny guessed why.

When had Jeff Legge told her? On the way back from the church, perhaps. She would not let Peter know—Peter, who believed her future assured, her happiness beyond question.

What had Jeff said? Not much, Johnny guessed. He had given her just a hint that the charming Major Floyd she had known was not the Major Floyd with whom she was to live.

Johnny was cool now—icy cold was a better description. He must be sure, absolutely sure, beyond any question of doubt. There might be some resemblance between Jeff Legge and this Major Floyd. He had only seen the crook once, and that at a distance.

He heard the rustle of skirts and looked round quickly. It was the maid he had seen quarreling with Barney.

"Mr. Kane says, would you care to be in the group that is being photographed, Captain Gray?" she asked.

He did not immediately reply. His eyes were scanning her with a new interest.

"Tell him I'd rather not, and come back."

"Come back, sir?" she repeated in astonishment.

"Yes, I want to talk to you," said Johnny with a smile. "Have mercy on a disgruntled guest, who can find nobody to entertain him."

She stood, hesitating. He could see the indecision in her face.

"I don't know if Mr. Kane would like that," she said, and a smile trembled at the corner of her mouth. "Very well, I'll come back."

It was not till ten minutes later, when he judged the photograph had been taken and the guests had gone again to the house, that she appeared, demure but curious.

"Sit down," said Johnny. He threw away his cigarette and moved to the end of the stone bench.

"Don't stop smoking for me, Captain Gray," she said.

"How long have you been here?" he asked.

"With Mr. Kane? About six months," she said.

"Pretty good job?" he asked carelessly.

"Oh, yes, sir, very."

"What is your name?"

"My name is Lila. Why do you ask?"

"I think you and I ought to get better

acquainted, Lila," he said, and took her unresisting hand.

Secretly she was amused; on the surface she showed some sign of being shocked.

"I didn't know you were that type of flirting man, Mr. Gray—you're a captain though, aren't you?"

"'Captain' is a purely honorary title, Lila," said Johnny. "I suppose you'll miss your lady?"

"Yes, I shall miss her," said Lila.

"A nice girl, eh?" bantered Johnny.

"And a very nice husband," she said tartly.

"Do you think so?"

"Yes, I suppose he is a nice fellow. I don't know much about him."

"Good looking?" suggested Johnny

The woman shrugged her shoulders.

"I suppose he is."

"And very much in love with Miss Kane. That fellow adores her," said Johnny. "In fact, I don't know that I've ever seen a man so much in love with a woman."

She suppressed a sigh.

"Oh, yes, I suppose he is," she said impatiently. "Do you want me any more, Captain Gray, because I've a lot of work to do?"

"Don't run away," said Johnny in his most gentle voice. "Weddings always make me romantic."

He took up the thread where it was interrupted: "I don't expect the major will have eyes for any other girl for years," he said. "He's head over heels in love, and why shouldn't he be? I suppose," he said reminiscently, avoiding her eyes, "he is the sort of man who would have had many love affairs in the past."

He shrugged his shoulders. "With the kind of girls that one picks up and puts down at pleasure."

Now a flush, deep and even, had come to her face, and her eyes held a peculiar brightness.

"I don't know anything about Major Floyd," she said shortly, and was rising, but his hand fell upon her arm.

"Don't run away, Lila."

"I'm not going to stay," she said with sudden vehemence. "I don't want to discuss Major Floyd or anybody else. If you want me to talk to you——"

"I want to talk to you about the honeymoon. Can't you picture them, say, on Lake Como, in a bower of roses? Can't you imagine him forgetting all that's past, all the old follies, all the old girls——"

She wrenched her arm from his grip and stood up, and her face was deadly white.

"What are you getting at, Gray?" she asked, all the deference, all the demureness gone from her voice.

"I'm getting at you, Miss Lila Sain," he said, "and if you attempt to get away from me, I'll throttle you!"

SHE stared at him, her breath coming quickly.

"You're supposed to be a gentleman too," she said.

"I'm supposed to be Johnny Gray from Dartmoor. Sit down. What's the graft, Lila?"

"I don't understand what you're talking about."

"What's the graft?" asked Johnny with deadly calm. "Jeff Legge put you here to nose the house for him, and keep him wise as to what was going on."

"I don't know Jeff Legge," she faltered.

"You're a liar," said Johnny ungently. "I know you, Lila. You run with Legge. I've seen you a dozen times. Who is Major Floyd?"

"Go and ask him," she said defiantly.

"Who is Major Floyd?"

The grip on her arm tightened.

"You know," she said sullenly. "It's Jeff Legge."

"Now listen, Lila. Come here." He had released her, and now he crooked his finger. "Go and blow to Jeff, and I'll squeak on you both—you understand that? I'll put Jeff just where I want him to be—there's a vacant cell at Dartmoor anyway.

"That gives you a twinge, doesn't it? You're keen on Jeff?"

She did not reply.

"I'll put him where I want him to be," he repeated slowly and deliberately, "unless you do as I tell you."

"You're going to put the 'black' on him?" she said, her lips curling.

"'Black' doesn't mean anything in my young life," said Johnny. "But I tell you this, that I'll find Reeder and squeak a whole pageful unless I have my way."

"What do you want?" she asked.

"I want to know where they're going, and where they're staying. I want to know their plans for the future. Are you married to him, by any chance?"

A glance at her face gave him the answer.

"You're not? Well, you may be yet, Lila. Aren't you tired of doing his dirty work?"

"Perhaps I am and perhaps I'm not," she replied defiantly. "You can do nothing to him now, anyway, Johnny Gray. He's got your girl, and if you squeaked like a garden of birds you couldn't undo what that old God man did this morning! Jeff's too clever for you. He'll get you, Gray."

"If he knows," said Johnny quietly. "But if he knows, Reeder knows too. Do you get that?"

"What are you going to do?" she asked after a silence.

"I'm having one of my little jokes," said Johnny between his teeth. "A real good joke! It is starting now. I can't tell Peter because he'd kill your young man, and I have a particular objection to Peter going to the drop. And *you* can't tell Jeff, because there'd be a case for a jury, and when Jeff came out, you'd be an old woman.

"That's not a good prospect, eh? Now tell me all you've got to tell, and speak slowly, because I don't write shorthand."

He whipped a small notebook from his pocket, and as she spoke, reluctantly, sulkily, yet fearfully, he wrote rapidly. When he had finished:

"You can go now, my gentle child," he said, and she stood up, her eyes blazing with rage.

"If you squeal, Johnny Gray, I'll kill you. I never was keen on this marriage business—naturally. I knew old Legge wanted him to marry Peter's daughter, because Legge wanted to get one back on him.

"But Jeff's been good to me; and the day the busies come for Legge, I'll come for you, and I'll shoot you stone dead, Johnny, as God's my judge!"

"Beat it!" said Johnny tersely.

He waited till she was gone through one of the openings in the box hedge, then passed along to the other and stopped. Peter Kane was standing in the open, shielded from view by the thin box bush, and Peter's face was inscrutable.

CHAPTER VI.

AT THE BREAKFAST.

"HULLO, Johnny! Running for the compensation stakes?"

Johnny laughed.

"You mean the maid? She is rather pretty, isn't she?"

"Very," said the other.

Had he heard? That was a question and a fear in Johnny's mind. The marble bench was less than six feet from the bush where Peter Kane stood. If he had been there any time——

"Been waiting long for me, Peter?" he asked.

"No, I just saw you take a farewell of Lila—very nice girl that, Johnny; an extraordinarily nice girl. I don't know when I've met a nicer. What did you find to talk about?"

"The weather, dicky birds and the course of true love," said Johnny, as Kane took his arm and led him across the lawn.

"Everything variable and flighty, eh?" said Peter with a little smile. "Come and eat, Johnny. These people are going away soon. Marney is changing now. What do you think of my new son-in-law, eh?"

His old jovial manner held. When they came into the big reception room and Peter Kane's arm went round his son-in-law's shoulder, Johnny breathed a sigh of relief. Thank God he did not know! He had sweated in his fear of discovery.

Thirty-six people sat down in the dining room, and, contrary to convention, Marney, who sat at the head of the table, was wearing her going-away dress. John shot a quick glance at her as he came in, but she averted her eyes. Her father sat on her left; next to him was the clergyman who had performed the ceremony. Next came a girl friend, and then a man by whose side Johnny sat.

He recognized the leathery features instantly.

"Been away, Johnny?" Detective Superintendent Craig asked the question in a voice so carefully pitched that it did not reach any farther than the man to whom he spoke.

THE chatter and buzz of conversation, the ripples of laughter that ran up and down the table, did something to make the privacy of their talk assured.

As old Barney bent over to serve a dish, Craig gave a sidelong glance at his companion.

"Peter's got old Barney still. Keeping honest, Barney?"

"I'm naturally that way," said Barney, sotto voce. "It's not meeting policemen that keeps me straight."

The hard features of the detective relaxed.

"There are lots of other people who could say that Barney," he said, and when the man had passed to the next guest: "He's all right. Barney never was a bad man. I think he only did one stretch—he wouldn't have done that if he'd had Peter's imagination, Johnny."

"Peter's imagination?"

"I'm not referring to his present imagination, but the gift he had fourteen-fifteen years ago. Peter was the cleverest of them all. The brilliant way his attack was planned, the masterly line of retreat, the wonderful alibis, so beautifully dovetailed into one another that, if we had pinched him, he'd not only have been discharged, but he would have got something from the poor box!

"It used to be the life ambition of every young officer to catch him, to find some error of judgment, some flaw in his plan. But it was police proof and fool proof."

"He'd blush to hear you," said the other dryly.

"But it's true, Johnny! The clever letters he used to write, all to fool us. He did a lot of work with letters—getting people together, luring 'em to the place he wanted 'em and where their presence served him best.

"I remember how he got my chief to be at Charing Cross under the clock at ten past nine, and showed up himself and made him prove his alibi!" He laughed gently.

"I suppose," said Gray, "people would think it remarkable that you and he are such good friends?"

"They wouldn't say it was remarkable; they'd say it was damned suspicious!" growled the other.

"Having a drink?" he said suddenly, and pulled a wine bottle across the table.

"No, thanks—I seldom drink. We have to keep a very clear head in our business. We can't afford to dream."

"We can't afford anything else," said Craig. "Why 'our business,' old man? You're out of that?"

Johnny saw the girl look toward him. It was only a glance—but in that brief flash he saw all that he feared to see, the terror, the bewilderment, the helplessness. He set his teeth and turned abruptly to the detective.

"How is *your* business?" he asked.

"Quiet."

"I'm sorry to hear that," said John Gray with mock concern. "But trade's bad everywhere, isn't it?"

"What sort of time did you have—in the country?" asked Craig.

"Wonderful! My bedroom wanted papering, but the service was quite good."

Craig sighed.

"Ah, well, we live and learn," he said heavily. "I was sorry about it, Johnny, very sorry. It's a misfortune, but there's no use grieving about it. You were one of the unlucky ones. If all the people who deserved prison were *in* prison—why, there wouldn't be any housing problems.

"I hear there were quite a lot of stars there," Craig went on. "Harry Becker, and young Lew Storing. Why, old Legge must have been there in your time. And another fellow—now, what's his name? The slush man—ah, Carper, that's it. Ever see him?"

"Yes, he and I were once harnessed to the same cart."

"Ah!" said Craig encouragingly. "I'll bet you heard a few things. He'd talk to you."

"He did."

Craig bent toward him, lowering his voice.

"Suppose I told you a certain party coppered you, and suppose I said I've reason to believe that your copper is the man I want. Now couldn't we exchange confidences?" he asked.

"Yes, we might squeal together, and it would sound like one of those syncopated orchestras. But we won't. Honestly, Craig, I can't tell you about the Big Printer. Reeder ought to know all about him!"

"Reeder!" said the other scornfully. "An amateur! All this folderol about secret-service men gets my goat! If they'd left the matter to the police, we'd have had the Big Printer. Ever seen him, Johnny?"

"No," said Johnny untruthfully.

"Reeder, eh?" said the thoughtful detective. "They used to have an office man named Golder once, an old fellow that thought he could catch slushers by sitting in an office and thinking hard. Reeder isn't much better by all accounts. I saw him once, a soft fellow on the edge of senile decay!"

Craig sighed deeply, looked up and down the happy board with a bleak and grudging glance, and then:

"Just for a little heart-to-heart talk, I know where you could get an easy five hundred pounds, Johnny," he said softly.

Johnny did not smile.

"We're both men of the world," added the detective imploringly.

"Yes," said Johnny Gray, "but not the same world, Craig."

One last despairing effort the detective made, though he knew that, in angling for a squeal, he might as well have tried Peter himself.

"The Bank of England will pay a thousand pounds for the information I want."

"And who can afford it better?" said Johnny heartily. "Now, shut up, Craig, somebody's going to make a speech."

IT was a mild and beatific oration delivered by the officiating clergyman. When it came to its machine-made peroration, Craig, who was intensely interested in the sonorous platitudes, looked round and saw that his companion had gone from his side—later he saw him leaning over Peter's chair and Peter was nodding vigorously. Then Johnny passed through the door.

Somebody else was watching him. The bridegroom, twiddling the stem of his wineglass between his fingers, saw him go and was more than ordinarily interested. He was sufficiently curious, at any rate, to catch the eye of the pretty maid, and look significantly at the door.

At that signal, Lila followed Johnny Gray. He was not in the hall and she went out into the road, but here saw no sign of the man she sought. There was, however, somebody else and she obeyed his call to her.

"Tell Jeff I want him before he starts on that honeymoon of his," snarled Emanuel Legge, glaring at her through the glasses. "He's been talking to that girl—I saw her face. What did he say?"

"How do I know?" she snapped back. "You and your Jeff! I wish to the Lord I'd never come into this job. What's the graft anyway? That flash crook knows all about it, Legge."

"Who—Johnny Gray? Is he here? He did come, then?"

She nodded.

"What do you mean—'he knows?'"

"He knows Jeff—recognized him first pop," said the girl inelegantly, and Emanuel Legge whistled.

"Have you told Jeff that he has been recognized?"

The harsh features of Emanuel Legge were drawn and tense.

"What is the use of asking me? I haven't had a word with him. He's so taken up with this girl——"

"Forget it," said Legge with a gesture. "Tell me what this Johnny Gray says."

"I'll tell you one thing that amused me," said the girl grimly. "He said he'd throttle me if I squealed! And he's got a fascinating pair of hands. I shouldn't like to play rough with that fellow—there's no use in tut-tutting me, Emanuel. I've told you all he said. He knows Jeff; he must have seen him before he went over the Alps."

The old man was thinking, his brow furrowed, his lips pursed.

"It's pretty bad if he guesses, because he's sweet on the girl and there's going to be trouble. Get Jeff out quick!"

"If you stay here, Peter will see you," she warned him. "Go down the lane and turn into the private path. I'll send Jeff to you in the lower garden."

Nodding, he hurried away. It took her some time to find an opportunity, but presently she signaled the man with her eyes and he followed her to the lawn.

"The old man's waiting down in the lower garden," she said in a low voice. "Hurry."

"What is wrong?" he asked quickly, sensing trouble.

"He'll tell you."

With a glance round, Jeff hurried on to the terrace just as his father reached the rendezvous.

"Jeff—Gray knows."

The man drew a quick breath.

"Me?" he said incredulously. "He didn't so much as bat a lid when I met him."

Emanuel nodded.

"That fellow's hell cool—the most dangerous crook in the world. I was in The Awful Place with him, and I know his reputation. There's nothing he's afraid of.

"If he tells Peter—shoot first! Peter won't be carrying a gun, but he's sure to have one within traveling distance—and Peter is a quick mover. I'll cover you, I've got two boys handy that 'mind' me, and Johnny—well, he'll get what's coming!"

"What am I to do?"

Jeff Legge was biting his nails thoughtfully.

"Get the girl away—you're due to leave by car, ain't you? Get her to the Charlton Hotel. You're supposed to stay there a week—make it a day. Clear to Switzerland to-morrow and stop her writing. I'll fix Peter. He'll pay."

"For what?"

"To get his girl back; forty thousand, maybe more."

Jeff Legge whistled.

"I didn't see that side of the graft before. It's a new variety of 'black.'"

"It's what I choose to call it!" hissed his father. "You're in fifty-fifty. You can have the lot so far as I care. You make that girl eat dirt, d'ye hear? Put her right down to earth, Jeff. Peter will pay."

"I promised Lila——" began the other, hesitant.

"Promise your Aunt Rebecca Jane!" Emanuel almost screamed. "Lila! That trash, and you, the big man too—what are ye running? A girl's refuge society? Get!"

"What about Gray?"

"I'll fix Gray!"

CHAPTER VII.

SWORD PLAY.

THE old man made his way back to the road and passed quickly along until he came to the main highway. Two men were seated in the shade of a bush, eating bread and cheese. They came quickly enough when he whistled to them, tall, broad-shouldered men whose heavy jowls had not felt a lather brush for days.

"Either of you boys know Johnny Gray?" he asked.

"I was on the moor with him," said one gruffly, "if he's the fellow that went down for ringing in horses?"

Emanuel nodded.

"He's in the house, and it's likely he'll

walk to the station, and likely enough, take the short cut across the fields. That'll be easy for you. He's got to be coshed—you understand?

"Get him good, even if you have to do it in the open. If there's anybody with him, get him in London. But get him."

Emanuel came back to his observation post as the first of the cars went into the drive. Jeff was moving quickly—and there was need.

Presently the car came out. Emanuel caught a glimpse of Jeff and the frightened face of the girl and rubbed his hands in an ecstasy of satisfaction. Peter was standing in the middle of the road, watching the car. If he knew?

The smile vanished from the old man's face. Peter did not know; he had not been told—why? Johnny would not let her go, knowing. Perhaps Lila was lying. You can never trust women of that kind; they love sensation.

"Johnny—dangerous." The two words left one impression. And there was Johnny, standing, one hand in pocket, the other waving at the car as it came into brief view on the Shoreham road. As unconcerned as though he were the least interested.

A second car went in and came out. Some guests were leaving. Now, if Johnny had sense, he would be driven to London with a party.

But Johnny hadn't sense. He was just a poor sucker, like all cheap crooks are. He came out alone, crossed the road and went down the narrow passage that led to the field path.

Emanuel looked backward. His bulldogs had seen and were moving parallel to the unconscious Gray.

From the road, two paths led to the field, forming a Y where they met. Johnny had passed the fork when he heard the footsteps behind him.

Glancing back, he saw a familiar face and did some shrewd guessing. He could run and easily outdistance these clumsy men. He preferred to face them, and turned, holding his Malacca cane in both hands.

" 'Lo, Gray," said the bigger of the men. "Where'n thunder are you going in such a hurry? I want to talk with you, you dirty squealer! You're the fellow that told the deputy I was getting tobacco in through a guard!"

It was a crude invention, but good enough to justify the rough-house that was booked to follow. They carried sticks in their hands, pliable canes, shotted at the end.

The blow missed Johnny as he stepped back, and then something long and bright glittered in the afternoon sun. The scabbard of the sword cane he held defensively before him, the sword, thin and deadly, was pointed to the nearer of his enemies. They stopped, Saxonlike, appalled by the sight of steel.

"Bad boy!" said Johnny reproachfully.

The razor-pointed rapier flickered from face to face, and the men stumbled back, getting into one another's way. One of the men felt something wet on his cheek, and put up his hand. When it came down it was wet and red.

"Beast, you have my brand," said Johnny with deadly pleasantry. "Come when I call you."

He clicked the sword back in its wooden sheath and strode away. His indifference, his immense superiority, was almost as tremendously impressive as his cold toleration.

"He's ice, that fellow," said the man with the cut cheek. A sob of rage softened the rasp of his voice. "I'll kill him for that!"

But he made no attempt to follow, and his companion was glad.

JOHN GRAY increased his pace and emerged into the outskirts of the town. Here he found a Ford cab and reached the station in time to see the train pull out. He had made a mistake; the timetable had been changed that day, but in half an hour there was a fast train from Brighton that stopped only at Horsham.

He crossed the station yard to a hotel and was in the telephone booth for a quar-

ter of an hour before he emerged, his collar limp, perspiration streaming down his face.

There was no sign of a familiar face when he came back to the platform. He expected to see Emanuel eventually, and here he was not disappointed, for Emanuel arrived a few minutes before the Brighton train came in.

Officially, it was their first meeting since they had been members of the same farm gang at Dartmoor, and Legge's expression of surprise was therefore appropriate.

"Why, if it isn't Gray! Well, fancy meeting you, old man! Well, this is a surprise! When did you come out?"

"Cease your friendly badinage," said Johnny shortly. "If we can get an empty compartment, I've got a few words to say to you, Emanuel."

"Been down to the wedding?" asked the old man, slyly. "Nice girl, eh? Done well for herself? They tell me he's a Canadian millionaire.

"Ain't that Peter's luck! That fellow would fall off rock and drop in feathers, he's that lucky."

Johnny made no answer. When the train stopped, and he found himself opposite a first-class carriage, he opened the door and Emanuel hopped in.

"If you're short of money——" began Legge.

"I'm not," said the other curtly. "I'm short of nothing except bad company. Now listen, Emanuel"—the train was puffing slowly from the station when he spoke again—"I'm going to give you a chance."

The wide-eyed astonishment of Emanuel Legge was very convincing, but Johnny was not open to conviction at the moment.

"I don't get you, Johnny," he said. "What's all this talk about giving me a chance? Have you been drinking?"

Johnny had seated himself opposite the man and now he leaned forward and placed his hand upon the other's knee.

"Emanuel," he said gently, "call off that boy, and there'll be no squeak. Take that wounded-fawn look from your face, because I haven't any time for fooling.

"You call off Jeff and send the girl back home to-night, or I squeal. Do you understand that?"

"I understand your words, Johnny Gray, but what they mean is a mystery to me." Emanuel Legge shook his head. "What boy are you talking about? I've only got one boy and he's at college."

"You're a paltry old liar. I'm talking about Jeff Legge, who married Peter's daughter to-day. I've tumbled to your scheme, Emanuel. You're getting even with Peter. Well, get even with him, but try some other way."

"She's married him of her own free will——" began the man. "There's no law against that, is there, Johnny? Fell in love with him right on the spot! That's what I like to see, Johnny—young people in love."

If he hoped to rattle his companion, he was disappointed.

"Now he can unmarry of his own free will," said Johnny calmly. "Listen to me, Emanuel Legge. When you arrive in London, you'll go straightway to the Charlton Hotel and talk very plainly to your son. He, being a sensible man, will carry out your instructions."

"*Your* instructions," corrected Emanuel, his mouth twisted in a permanent smile. "And what happens if I don't, Johnny?"

"I squeal," said Johnny and the smile broadened.

"They are married, old man. You can't divorce 'em. You can turn a brown horse into a black un, but you can't turn Mrs. Jeffrey Legge into Miss Marney Kane, clever as you are."

JOHNNY leaned forward.

"I can turn Mr. Jeffrey Legge into Dartmoor Prison," he said unpleasantly, "and that's what I propose to do."

"On what charge?" Emanuel raised his eyebrows. "Give us a little rehearsal of this squeal of yours, Gray."

"He's the Big Printer," said Johnny, and the smile slowly dissolved. "The government has spent thousands to catch him;

they've employed the best secret-service men in the world to pull him down, and I can give them just the information they want.

"I know where his stuff is planted. I know where it is printed; I know at least four of his agents. You think Jeff's secret is his own and yours, but you're mistaken, Emanuel. Craig knows he's the Big Printer; he told me so at lunch.

"All he wants is evidence, and the evidence I can give him. Old Reeder knows —you think he's a fool, but he knows. I could give him a squeak that would make him the cleverest lad in the world."

Emanuel Legge licked his dry lips.

"Going in for the con business, Johnny?" he asked banteringly. There was no amusement in his voice. "What a confidence man you'd make! You look like a gentleman and talk like one. Why, they'd fall for you and never think twice! But that confidence stuff doesn't mean anything to me, Johnny. I'm too old and too wise to be bluffed——"

"There's no bluff here," interrupted Johnny. "I have got your boy like that!" He held out his hand and slowly clenched it.

For fully five minutes Emanuel Legge sat, huddled in a corner of the compartment, staring out upon the flying scenery.

"You've got him like that, have you, Johnny boy?" he said gently. "Well, there's no use deceiving you, I can see. Slush is funny stuff—they call it 'phony' in America. Did you know that? I guess you would, because you're well educated. But it's good slush, Johnny. Look at this, here's a note. Is it good or bad?"

His fingers had gone into his waistcoat pocket and withdrew a thin pad of paper an inch square. Fold by fold he opened it out and showed a five-pound note. He caressed the paper with finger and thumb. The eyes behind the powerful glasses gleamed, the thin-lined face softened with pride.

"Is it good or bad, Johnny?"

Though the day was bright and hot, and not a cloud was in the sky, the four electric lamps in the carriage lit up suddenly. In the powerful light of day they seemed pale ghosts of flame, queerly dim. As the sunshine fell upon them their shadows were cast upon the white cornice of the carriage.

"There's a tunnel coming," said Emanuel. "It will give you a chance of seeing them at their best—feel 'em, Johnny! The real paper—bankers have fallen for 'em."

With a roar the train plunged into the blackness of the tunnel. Emanuel stood with his back to the carriage door, the note held taut between his hands.

"There's only one flaw—the watermark. I'm giving away secrets, eh? Look!"

He stretched his arms up until he held the note against one of the bracket lamps. To see, John Gray had to come behind him and peer over his shoulder. The thunder of the train in the narrow tunnel was almost deafening.

"Look at the 'F,'" shouted Emanuel. "See—that 'F' in 'Five.' It's printed too shallow."

As Johnny bent forward, the old man thrust at him with his shoulder, and behind that lurch of his was all the weight and strength of his body.

Taken by surprise, John Gray was thrown from his balance. He staggered back against the carriage door, felt it give, and tried to recover his equilibrium. But the thrust was too well timed.

The door flew open and he dropped into the black void, clutching, as he did so, the window ledge. For a second he swayed with the in-and-out swinging of the door. Then Legge's clenched fist hammered down on his fingers, and he dropped.

CHAPTER VIII.

OUT OF THE TUNNEL.

HE struck a thick layer of sand and turned a complete somersault. The wall of the tunnel caught and almost dislocated his arm, and he rebounded toward the whirling wheels.

One wheel flicked him back against the wall and he slid, his arms covering his face, the flint ballast of the road ripping his sleeves to ribbons.

He was alive. The train had passed. He saw the red tail lights closing to one another. Gingerly he moved first one leg and then the other; then he rolled over toward the wall and lay on his back without further movement.

His heart was pounding furiously; he felt a soreness working through the numb overlay of shock. Shock—shock sometimes killed men. His heart was going faster yet; he experienced a horrible nausea, and he found himself trembling violently.

The proper thing to do was to inject a solution of gum acacia into his veins—his thoughts were curiously well ordered. Doctors did that; he remembered the doctor telling him at Dartmoor. But there was no gum acacia to be had.

Ten minutes later he lifted his body on his elbow and struggled to a sitting position. His head swam, but it did not ache; his arms—he felt them carefully. They were very sore, but no bones were broken.

A roadman at the exit of the tunnel nearly dropped with amazement as a grimy young man whose clothes were in rags, emerged, limping.

"I fell out," said Johnny. "Can you tell me if there is anywhere I can hire a car?"

The roadman was going off duty and was willing to act as guide. Johnny hobbled up the steep slopes of the railway cutting, and with the assistance of the interested workman, traversed a wide field to the road. And then came a blessed sportsman on his way back from Gatwick races, and he was alone in his car.

At first he looked suspicious at the bruised and ragged figure that had held him up. In the end he flung open the door by his side.

"Step up," he said.

To the railway worker, Johnny had a few words to say.

"Here's five," he said. "Two for your help, and three to stop you talking. I don't want this business to be reported, you understand? The truth is, I had been looking on the wine when it was red and gaveth its color aright."

Johnny had evidently touched a sympathetic chord.

"You mean you was boozed?" said the man. "You can trust me."

THE angel who drove him to London was not a talkative angel. Beyond expressing the wish that something drastic had happened to *him* before he went racing, and the advancement of his view that all racing was crooked and all jockeys thieves, he contributed little to the entertainment of his passenger, and the passenger was glad.

At the first cab rank they struck Johnny insisted upon alighting.

"I'll take you home if you like," said his gloomy benefactor.

Gently the other declined.

"My name is Lawford," said the motorist in a sudden outburst of confidence. "I've got an idea I know your face. Haven't I seen you on the track?"

"Not for some time," said Johnny.

"Rather like a fellow I once met—was introduced to—fellow named Gay or Gray—regular rascal. He got time."

"Thanks," said Johnny, "that was I!" and the hitherto reticent Mr. Lawford became conversational in his apologies.

The young man finished the journey in a taxi and reached Queen's Gate late in the afternoon.

Parker, who opened the door to him, asked no questions.

"I have laid out another suit for you, sir," he returned to the study to say—the only oblique reference he made to his employer's disorder.

As he lay in a hot bath, soaking the stiffness out of his limbs, Johnny examined his injuries. They were more or less superficial, but he had had a terribly narrow escape from death, and he was not wholly recovered from the violence of it.

Emanuel had intended his destruction. The attempt did not surprise him. Men of Legge's type worked that way. He had met them in Dartmoor. They would go to a killing without fire of rage or frenzy of despair.

Once he had seen a convict select with

deliberation and care a large, jagged stone and drop it upon the head of a man working in the quarry below. Fortunately, a warder had seen the act, and his shout saved the intended victim from mutilation. The assailant had only one excuse. The man he had attacked had slighted him in some way.

In the hearts of these men lived a cold beast. Johnny often pictured it, an obscene shape with pale, lidless eyes and a straight slit of a mouth. He had seen the beast staring at him from a hundred distorted faces, had heard its voice, had seen its hatefulness expressed in actions that he shivered to recall. Something of the beast had seeped into his own soul.

When he came from his bath, the masseur whom Parker had summoned was waiting, and for half an hour he groaned under the kneading hands.

The evening newspaper that Parker procured contained no news of the "accident" —Emanuel was hardly likely to report the matter, even for his own protection. There were explanations he could offer—Johnny thought of several.

Free from the hands of the masseur, he rested in his dressing gown.

"Has anybody called?" he asked.

"A Mr. Reeder, sir."

Johnny frowned.

"Mr. Reeder?" he repeated. "What did he want?"

"I don't know, sir. He merely asked for you. A middle-aged man, with rather a sad face," said Parker. "I told him you were not at home, and that I would take any message for you, but he gave none."

His employer made no reply. For some reason the call of the mysterious Mr. Reeder worried him more than the memory of the tragic happening of that afternoon, more for the moment, than the marriage of Marney Kane.

CHAPTER IX.

JEFFREY LEGGE MEETS A CHAMBERMAID.

MARNEY made her journey to London that afternoon in almost complete silence. She sat in a corner of the limousine, and felt herself separated from the man she had married by a distance which was becoming immeasurable.

Once or twice she stole a timid glance at him, but he was so preoccupied with his thoughts that he did not even notice. They were not pleasant thoughts, to judge by his unchanging scowl. All the way up he nibbled at his nails; a wrinkle between his eyes.

It was not until the big car was bowling across one of the river bridges that the strain was relieved, and he turned his head, regarding her coldly.

"We're going abroad to-morrow," he said, and her heart sank.

"I thought you were staying in town for a week, Jeff," she asked, trouble in her eyes. "I told father——"

"Does it matter?" he said roughly, and then she found courage to ask him a question that had been in her mind during that dreary ride.

"Jeff, what did you mean this morning, on the way back from the church? You frightened me."

Jeff Legge chuckled softly.

"I frightened you, did I?" he sneered. "Well, if that's all that's going to happen to you, you're a lucky girl!"

"But you're so changed." She was bewildered. "I—I didn't want to marry you. I thought you wanted—and father was so very anxious——"

"Your father was very anxious that you should marry a man in good society with plenty of money," he said, emphasizing every word. "Well, you've married him, haven't you? When I told you this morning that I'd got your father like that"—he put out his thumb suggestively—"I meant it. I suppose you know your father's a crook?"

The beautiful face flushed and went pale again.

"How dare you say that?" she asked, her voice trembling with anger. "You know it isn't true. You know!"

Jeffrey Legge closed his eyes wearily.

"There's a whole lot of revelations coming to you, my good girl," he said, "but I guess we'd better wait till we reach the hotel."

Silence followed, until the car drew up before the awning of the Charlton, and then Jeff became his smiling, courteous self, and so remained until the door of their sitting room closed upon them.

"Now, you've got to know something, and you can't know it too soon," he said, throwing his hat upon a settee. "My name isn't Floyd at all. I'm Jeffrey Legge. My father was a convict until six months ago. He was put in prison by Peter Kane."

She listened, open-mouthed, stricken dumb with amazement and fear.

"Peter Kane is a bank robber—or he was till fifteen years ago, when he did a job with my father, got away with a million dollars, and squealed on his pal."

"Squealed?" she said, bewildered.

"Your father betrayed him," said Jeffrey patiently. "I'm surprised that Peter hasn't made you acquainted with the technical terms of the business. He squealed on his pal, and my father went down for twenty years."

"It is not true," she said indignantly. "You are inventing this story. My father was a broker. He never did a dishonest thing in his life. And if he had, he would never have betrayed his friend!"

The answer seemed to amuse Legge.

"Broker, was he? I suppose that means he's a man who's broken into strong rooms? That's the best joke I've heard for a long time!

"Your father's a crook! Johnny knows he's a crook. Craig knows he's a crook. Why in hell do you think a broker should be a pal of a 'busy?' And take that look off your face—a 'busy' is a detective. Peter has certainly neglected your education!"

"Johnny knows?" she said, horror-stricken. "Johnny knows father is—— I don't believe it! All you have told me is lies. If it were so, why should you want to marry me?"

Suddenly she realized the truth, and stood, frozen with horror, staring back at the smiling man.

"You've guessed, eh? We've been waiting to get under Peter's skin for years. And I guess we've got there.

"And now, if you like, you can tell him. There's a telephone; call him up. Tell him I'm Jeff Legge, and that all the wonderful dreams he has had of seeing you happy and comfortable are gone!

"Phone him! Tell him you never wanted to marry me, and it was only to make him happy that you did—you've got to break his heart, anyway. You might as well start now."

"He'd kill you," she breathed.

"Maybe he would. And that'd be a fine idea too. We'd have Peter on the trap. It would be worth dying for.

"But I guess he wouldn't kill me. At the sight of a gun in his hands I'd shoot him like a dog. But don't let that stop you telling him, Marney darling."

HE stretched out his hand, but she recoiled from him in horror and loathing.

"You planned it all! This was your revenge?"

He nodded.

"But Johnny—Johnny doesn't know."

She saw the change in the man's face, that suave assurance of his vanish.

"He does know." She pointed an accusing finger at him. "He knows!"

"He knows, but he let you go, honey," said Jeff. "He's one of us, and we never squeal. One of us!" He repeated the words mechanically.

She sat down and covered her face with her hands, and Jeffrey, watching her, thought at first that she was crying. When she raised her face, her eyes were dry. And, more extraordinary to him, the fear that he had seen was no longer there.

"Johnny will kill you," she said simply. "He wouldn't let me go—like that—if he knew. It isn't reasonable to suppose that he would, is it?"

It was Jeff Legge's turn to be uncomfortable. Not at the menace of Johnny's vengeance, but at her utter calmness. She might have been discussing the matter impartially with a third person.

For a moment he lost his grip of the situation. All that she said was so obviously, so patently logical; and instinctively he looked round as though he expected to find Johnny Gray at his elbow. The ab-

surdity of the situation struck him, and he chuckled nervously.

"Johnny!" he sneered. "What do you expect Johnny to do, eh? He's just out of 'bird'—that's prison; it is sometimes called 'boob.' I see there's a whole lot of stuff you've got to learn before you get right into the family ways."

He lounged toward her and dropped his hands on her shoulders.

"Now, old girl," he said, "there are two things you can do. You can call up Peter and put him wise, or you can make the best of a bad job."

"I'll call father," she said, springing up. Before she could reach the telephone he had swung her back.

"You'll call nothing," he said. "There's no alternative, my little girl. You're Mrs. Legge, and I lowered myself to marry the daughter of such a squealing old hound!

"Marney, give me a kiss. You've not been very free with your tokens of affection, and I haven't pressed you, for fear of scaring you off. Always the considerate gentleman—that's Jeff Legge."

Suddenly she was in his arms, struggling desperately. He tried to reach her lips, but she buried her face in his coat, until, with a savage jerk that almost dislocated her shoulder, he had flung her at arm's distance. She looked up at his face and shuddered.

"I've got you, Marney." His voice was hoarse with triumph. "I've got you properly—legally. You're my wife! You realize that? No man can come between you and me."

He pulled her toward him, caught her pale face between his hands and turned it up to his. With all the strength of utter horror and loathing, she tore herself free, fled to the door, flung it open, and stood back, wide-eyed with amazement.

In the doorway stood a tall, broad woman, with vividly red hair and a broad, good-humored face. From her costume she was evidently one of the chambermaids of the hotel. From her voice she was most obviously Welsh.

"What are you doing here?" demanded Jeff. "Get out, damn you!"

"Why do you talk so at me now, look you? I will not have this bad language. The maid of this suite I am!"

Marney saw her chance of escaping, and, running into the room, slammed the door and locked it.

To be continued in the next issue of THE POPULAR, *on the news stands August 20th.*

THE WILD WILD WEST

THOMAS S. BUTLER, the Quaker congressman from Pennsylvania, is known as the most popular lawmaker in Washington. Incidentally, he is the father of General Smedley Butler of the marine corps, a fact which makes him extremely popular with himself. Being at peace and in love with the world as he usually is, Mr. Butler one evening recently strolled into a movie theater to see a "wild-West cowboy drama," and got his eyes full of wildness. He saw six two-gun men, a three-gun fellow, spurs with rowels a foot long, "chaps" with fur on them like the skin of a polar bear, saddles like rowboats, window lights shot out, men shot down and saloons shot up.

Next day at the capitol he was talking about it to Senator Ralph Cameron of Arizona. "It was the wildest stuff I ever saw," said Butler. "I was astonished to see that our American cowboys are like that."

"Yes," agreed Cameron, with a laugh; "but your astonishment is nothing compared to how astonished real cowboys would be to know that they are like that."

Abe's Naddan

By Benjamin Richard Sher

Author of "When Greek Meets Greek," "Abe's Card," Etc.

Mr. Samuel Pepperman was sharp in money matters, but Mr. David Blumfeld was something else again.

BEGARBED as he was, Smolansky's presence in the crowded Bronx subway express commanded attention. His precise, long, black broadcloth Prince Albert, faced with newly inserted satin lapels was a contrast to the general dishevelment of his fellow passengers. A spotless white slip of a tie tucked under a freshly laundered low collar was only discernible when the venerable old man raised his head and necessarily his long white beard.

This he did, nervously and repeatedly, as he apparently reflected over some problem that taxed his preoccupied mind. A member of the Congregation of the Free Sons of Kurland seated opposite wondered at the holiday attire of the stationery peddler and searched his memory lest he had overlooked some feast, fast, or holy day.

No! It was a plain, matter-of-fact, everyday, workaday Monday. Whatever the festivity or the solemnity warranting such embellishing attirement it must needs be of a private and personal nature to the wearer.

To all eyes Smolansky was oblivious. On his cherry-wood cane, striped and marked to imitate snakewood, he leaned heavily. Occasionally he muttered to himself.

His great mental agitation was evident to all who were attracted by his festive garb. His kind, pious face bore no signs of chronic mental strain. On the contrary, in moments of relaxation the wrinkles around the eyes and a half-opened mouth with its expression of wonderment gave to his onlookers the impression of being in the presence of a beatific nature.

He passed the Fourteenth Street stop, his usual getting-off place, to the further wonderment of his fellow passenger. Reaching the Brooklyn Bridge station he alighted, seemingly with reluctance. Using his cane as a staff he mounted the

stairs slowly, as if dreading to reach his destination.

When he reached the street the sunshine of a warm summer's day seemed to exhilarate him. Too, the varicolored flowers in the round, iron-grated inclosure of City Hall Park momentarily buoyed his depression.

With quickened step he found his way out into Chambers Street and into the large white stone building facing the old brown city courthouse. Locating room 532 he stopped and paused before the foggy ground glass to make out the lettering:

DAVID BLUMFELD. LOANS—
INSURANCE—MERCHANTS
FINANCED.

Before entering he cleared his throat and wiped away all imaginary obtrusions from his thin, firm lips. Timidly, he turned the doorknob and entered.

Behind a railing which ran the length of the small room sat a girl idly engaged in running a comb through her wavy Titianed hair. In answer to her look he asked, in correct English, very slowly the phrase he had perfected through mental rehearsals: "Is Mr. Blumfeld in?"

Laying down the comb and brushing aside a heavy curl that impaired her vision, she replied: "I'll see. What is the name, please?"

"Mr. Yonkel Smolansky," he muttered faintly, as if speaking were an ordeal for him.

The girl came through the gate in the oak inclosure, and beckoning Smolansky the freedom of the two chairs that stood against the yellow wainscoted wall she entered a door lettered "Private."

Before the visitor had a chance to avail himself of the proffered seat he was greeted by the tall, bony, pale-faced Blumfeld, who appeared in the door behind the stenographer.

"Goot *morgen, Mister* Smolansky," he declaimed magniloquently as if desiring to put in his voice all the respect due his visitor. "It is certainly a pleasure to see you down here. Come right in."

Impressively he extended his hand and ushered Smolansky into his private office. "How is your health?"

"It couldn't be better, thank God. I was to Doctor Baronoff yesterday about a little cold and he said I was so strong as a young man forty."

"You don't look much older."

"You want to make me feel good, Mr. Blumfeld. I will be next March fifty-nine years old, if God lets me live."

IN an atmosphere of suspicion and a business where wariness was essential, it was a waft of sweet perfume to receive one as naïve as Yonkel Smolansky. His visits heretofore had been made at the home of the money lender. In the fifteen years they had known each other this was the stationery peddler's first invasion into the mercantile stronghold of his friend.

Instead of his usual softness and cordiality Blumfeld detected in Smolansky's manner a restraint characteristic of those borrowers who came with inadequate or worthless security. This would have been apparent to one even less gifted with insight into human motive than was the astute Blumfeld. However he put any intimation of a "touch" out of his mind—perhaps his overzealousness in his business was warping his judgment, causing him to see all in one light.

"You are all dressed up in your *Shabbes* clothes," the money lender remarked, covering his caller with an admiring eye. "I hope God forbid it ain't a funeral you're going to." As he spoke he drew the best chair closer to his visitor and bade him be seated.

"God forbid," echoed Smolansky in stilted speech as he sank into the armchair.

"Then what? Maybe a wedding?" pressed Blumfeld flippantly.

"Yes—a wedding, maybe. I hope so. Maybe my daughter—maybe sometimes."

The incoherent, rambling answer delivered in a disconsolate tone caused the money lender to query further.

"Your daughter? I never knew it. She's such a young girl yet. Not twenty, is she?"

"That's enough old when a girl has not a mother to look after her," muttered the pious old man, shaking his head.

"And who could be the lucky fellow?"

"It is not so quick as you think yet, Mr. Blumfeld."

"No? Then what already?" demanded Blumfeld bending eagerly over his friend.

"The fellow, if it would be at all, is—Abe Pepperman."

The name seemed to affect the tall, stoop-shouldered money lender perceptibly. In spite of his effort to hide his interest he craned his long neck forward and looked intently at the visitor. He thrust his hands in his pockets and he spoke as if his mind was wandering.

"If I had a daughter no one finer would I want for a son-in-law than that boy, even if his father is a first-class low life."

"You know his father well?" the visitor queried faintly.

"I wish I didn't."

"But the boy is a fine boy. Is it not?"

"Oh, yes, and he will be a big lawyer some day, too. Honest and fine all the way through."

"That I can say too. He is a fine gentleman."

Here a commercial curiosity conquered Blumfeld, and off guard he said: "I'll bet a feller like Abe Pepperman could get plenty of 'naddan.'" He referred to the customary dowry demanded by eligible young men in their set.

Uneasiness was already wearing away the nerves of Smolansky, and this opening he felt was as good as any that would present itself. In fact, the opening had all the earmarks of coming at that over-advertised "psychological moment."

"Naddan," he repeated woefully, shaking his head limply. "That's what I came to see you about, Mr. Blumfeld. Naddan. Naddan for my Rosie."

Now the commercial banker realized why his visitor was begarbed in his Sabbath finery. To make a front—inadequate security. Alert, now that the visit was assuming a business aspect, he proceeded to give it the necessary atmosphere.

First he set his features to register an indifference that no "movie" actor could emulate, then realizing that it was Mr. Smolansky with whom he was dealing he permitted them to soften somewhat. He did not wish to offend the only man whom he really revered. Shrugging his shoulders he muttered "Yes" in a most matter-of-fact tone, as if the incident interested him but slightly.

This sudden change in demeanor did not tend to ease the timorous Smolansky. Not being sophisticated and not having learned that to show weakness in such matters was to lend strength to the opposition, he said. "A *gemmillischesed* is what I came up to see you about."

The term *"gemmillischesed,"* which virtually meant a loan without security, intuitively and openly soured the money lender's countenance perceptibly. Seeing this Smolansky added hastily: "Of course I don't ask you to *give* me the money. You always told me, Mr. Blumfeld, if ever you could be any help to me I shouldn't hesitate to come to you."

THE younger man, taking the statement as a thrust and imputation that he was reneging upon a promise, straightened up suddenly.

"Of course I am glad you came. There is nobody I would rather help than a fine high-class gentleman such as you."

The inference that he was loose with his promises, coming from any other source would have made no impression upon Blumfeld, but coming from Smolansky it scorched, but did not burn intensely enough for him to abandon all caution where money was at stake.

By hard work, thrift and self-denial had he accumulated his stock of worldly goods. Rising from a bottle washer in a drug store he had advanced to be a life-insurance agent, a side line he still maintained. Then he had progressed to become a purchaser of merchandise stocks, and finally he had risen to his present position of commercial banker, as he termed himself.

Money lending to him meant the maximum return for the minimum risk. Col-

lateral! Adequate collateral, there must be. "Four for one," as he characterized it when pacing the floor in a pseudo reverie he would lay down the terms to some particularly despised borrower. But if there was any man in the wide universe for whom he might stretch a point and accept three for one, it was his esteemed friend, Mr. Smolansky.

The desire to help him was sincere. This charitable, almost celestial figure touched Blumfeld and reached the deeply rooted kindness that was inherent. But caution was predominate.

There Smolansky sat, cringing, an abject figure. He was a living personification of: "He who goes a-borrowing goes a-sorrowing." The genuineness of his servility Blumfeld readily recognized.

He had seen such attitudes affected—thickly assumed—too thickly put on, for the purpose of eliciting sympathy. But here on the contrary the benign peddler was trying to hide his misery when his subjugation was practically his substitute for collaternal.

Never before had Smolansky asked any one for aid or succor for himself. He had always earned enough to satisfy the needs of his daughter and himself. All of his requests were for deserving others.

Even now he was asking, not for himself, or technically for even his daughter, but for his prospective son-in-law; and even now he was not seeking charity but a loan—a loan at interest, giving what he considered the best possible security—his promise, a promise that had never been broken.

He would gladly pay usurious interest if necessary, but he had to have the money. Did not the Talmud say: "He who leads his daughter the right way and marries her at the right time, of him it is said, 'Thou mayest be sure that peace will dwell in thy tent.'"

This he quoted to Blumfeld.

YES, I agree with you, Mr. Smolansky," Blumfeld nodded, truly affected. "With people like us a girl don't improve with age." Gradually he seemed to soften, and putting himself to the task inquired: "And how much money does Abe Pepperman want?"

"God forbid," Smolansky intoned, moving his head from side to side. "Don't think the boy asked me for money."

"Then what?"

"Last night he hinted to my Rosie that his father is trying to match him up with Gordon's daughter, the rich delicatessen man on Madison Avenue. He said his father wants him to marry into a family that has got money."

"Since when is Sam Pepperman such a wonderful man that his son should marry a rich girl?" There was bitterness in tone. Pepperman and he were avowed business enemies. They took a delight in outwitting each other. In the auction rooms they frequented there was no secret about their enmity. They would bid a stock into prohibitive figures when bidding against one another.

"What you say might be so, Mr. Blumfeld, but just the same he's got the boy and I got the girl and something I got to give him."

"I know Sam Pepperman plenty. When he's got the upper hand in a deal that feller Shylock is a charitable institution compared to him. A pound of flesh is nothing. A coop of chickens wouldn't satisfy him even.

"No matter what you will give him he will want more. How much did you expect to give the boy?" As he put the question his entire demeanor changed. He seemed unduly amused and elated about something.

"A few thousand dollars, that's the least you could give a lawyer, isn't it?"

"A few thousand dollars? You don't call that money. Do you?"

"That's as much as I could ever pay back."

"You don't know Abe Pepperman's father like I know him. If you offered him two thousand dollars he would want three and if you offered him five he would want ten. So much as you offer him always he will want more, And he will never be satisfied until he is got your last cent. So

you might just as well give him all right away."

"All? And that's nothing." Smolansky shrugged his shoulders and smiled as liberally as his present dilemma would permit. "All I got is three hundred dollars in cash. My little stock of stationery is not worth two hundred dollars, and besides that I got nothing. Maybe a little furniture and some books.

"I thought if you could lend me a couple of thousand dollars I could pay back now twenty-five dollars a month and when Rosie gets married fifty dollars a month, maybe even yet more then."

Blumfeld straightened up in his chair. His interest was stimulated as the man before him began to name actual figures, for figures were his forte.

"You are sure you could pay fifty dollars a month after Rosie gets married, Mr. Smolansky?" Visions of actualities.

"Positive. And I never promise what I couldn't do, Mr. Blumfeld."

"Your word is as good as a Liberty Bond, first issue. That I know, and that's why I think I will be able to work this out for you with my good friend, Abe Pepperman's father."

"Are you so friendly with him?"

"Friendly enough he should do me a dirty turn when I ain't looking. Who could be a real friend with such a *gonoph*. The only thing any good about Pepperman is his son, and believe me there ain't a *schatchen* in town that ain't got that boy listed, so money hungry is his father. I know him plenty. He would sell the boy like he was a slave to the one who's got the most money; the girl and her family would count for nothing, maybe even less. And what makes it worse, the boy, I understand, is a model young man and a very obedient son."

"Then Rosie ain't got a chance?" Smolansky put in pitifully.

"That I didn't say. It's simply a business proposition. I want to tell you that so that you will not be insulted if I act too businesslike.

"God forbid."

"Then I want to tell first, Mr. Smolansky, that where thousands of dollars is involved that friendship is only an introduction and could never take the place of security. You understand when a feller says to you, like a good feller: 'If ever you want anything come up to me,' he means really that if ever you're starving and need the price of a meal he'll send you to a place where he thinks you can get it.

"You understand, Mr. Smolansky, if you came up to me and asked me for ten dollars, or twenty-five dollars, or maybe yet even fifty dollars already, I wouldn't hesitate even a minute—I wouldn't even ask you when you could pay me back. Right away I would give it to you. But for a deal like this I got to ask you a couple of questions at least."

Smolansky nodded majestically and assured Blumfeld that any imputation against his motives was unintended.

"You say you could pay back a certain amount a month, Mr. Smolansky. My experience is that the more honest a man is the more quicker he likes to pay back and for that reason sometimes he really promises more than he really should. Now tell me, about how much do you make a month?"

"A living."

"A living!" repeated Blumfeld, his voice raised in protest. "A living could be anything. A feller who says he makes a living could maybe be three months behind in his rent and owe everybody. A living, that don't mean anything to a banker. Even a squirrel in the park makes a living. I mean how much money do you make a month?"

"You know I got a little stationery business. I keep a little stock in the house. I got my regular customers and I make about the same every month."

BLUMFELD knew about that business. It was safe from any competition. Smolansky did not even need to canvass his trade. As an appreciation for his services to the Bronx Congregation the many members bestowed upon him their small stationery patronage. However, the exact

income of the business was unknown to the money lender.

"Tell me in dollars and cents, Mr. Smolansky, how much do you make a month?"

"About a hundred and fifty dollars profit."

"Good!" Bending over a pad on his desk Blumfeld jotted down the figures. "And how much does it cost you to live?"

"We got two rooms on Jennings Street for which we pay, since I been raised, twenty-two dollars a month rent; and for food and clothing it costs us maybe eighty dollars a month, sometimes a hundred dollars a month. My biggest expense, you understand, is the girl's clothing. A girl that imagines she is keeping company is got to dress and that's what costs. You know she don't go to work but she keeps the house."

"So then if Rosie gets married I see you could easily pay fifty dollars a month."

"At least," interrupted the anxious father. "Because then I wouldn't need such a big place."

Convinced that the amount would be forthcoming monthly Blumfeld struck the desk with the flat of his pencil.

"Now if you only do what I tell you, Mr. Smolansky, Abe Pepperman would propose to your daughter—maybe to-night yet."

In spite of the assurance that Blumfeld put into his voice Smolansky was not wholly convinced. He moved forward in his chair and there came into his eyes a look of hoping, but not fully believing. He had explicit confidence in the ability of the money lender but this seemed beyond human prowess.

"Could you stand the shock of a wedding right away?" Blumfeld spoke in dead earnest.

"You're laughing from me."

"You'll see. All I want is a little protection for what I'm doing for you."

Smolansky parted his lips and stared, awed, fearful that the condition to be imposed might be one that he could not meet.

"You know what I could do, Mr. Blumfeld. I told you how much I make. You can have everything."

"I know that. Too, I know that so long as you live you would keep your word; but, if God forbid, something should happen to you, then of course you couldn't keep your promise, my dear friend. You know we are all only human and life ain't guaranteed."

"Then what?"

"You understand," the commercial banker continued apologetically, "that when there is so many thousands involved a man is got to protect himself so much as possible. And that protection I want from you. Then am I right or not?" He pressed a querulous finger against his breast.

"Positive. I'll do anything, Mr. Blumfeld. Only I hope the expense shouldn't be more than I could pay back."

"You could leave that to me," the money lender answered quickly and began to pace the floor, his eyes fired with a gloating satisfaction at the anticipation of his purpose. "You could be sure," he declared, stopping suddenly, "that Rose and Abe will be married."

The benefactor looked to Smolansky for further approval, but that personage was too bewildered by the rapid pace at which Blumfeld was progressing to even comment intelligently. Therefore the quality and quantity of the appreciation was below the expectation.

"YOU talk like already they was under the *Chupa* and the ceremony was over," he answered as if unconvinced. "I should be so sure of living a hundred and twenty years as I am that Abe Pepperman will marry Rosie Smolansky." Then setting himself firmly he thrust his hands deep into his pockets and declared dramatically: "And what's more, Abe shall get ten thousand dollars."

"From who?" shouted Smolansky, almost jumping out of his chair, then composing himself added pathetically: "Mr. Blumfeld, you're laughing from me. Even if you would be good enough to lend it to me I couldn't pay that much back."

"I am not only doing it for you, but for Abe Pepperman's father. For a fel-

ler like him I would do much. And Mr. Smolansky, all it will cost you will be"—he poised his pencil mid-air, thought a moment, then did some rapid figuring upon the desk pad and concluded—"forty-nine dollars and twenty-two cents a month."

"You mean so much it is going to cost me to protect you?"

"That's what it's going to cost you altogether—to give Abe ten thousand dollars and for my protection."

"How could you do it, Mr. Blumfeld?" He was perplexed, bewildered, helpless.

"And how? That you mustn't ask me. If you go to a doctor and he gives you a prescription you don't ask him what's in the prescription and why he gives it to you. You simply take the medicine. All you want is results." Again Blumfeld craned his long neck forward and sought appreciation.

A querulous "Yes?" was all he could elicit.

"Well, in this case let me be the doctor. All you got to do is like I tell you and Abe Pepperman and Rosie will be married, I will be happy, you will be happy, they will be happy, and Abe will get ten thousand dollars. Now then, what more would you want?"

But Smolansky did not look happy. In fact, he was anything but joyful. Like all things that come without effort, it was unappreciated.

"You must excuse me," he finally found courage to say, "but it is too good it should be true. It must be a catch some place. Tell me already what must I do. Tell me so I should know the worst already."

He did not stop for a reply, but continued, his voice now in panicky harangue. "It must be a catch some place. It's too good to believe. Tell me what I must do. Don't make me feel good and then ask me to do something I couldn't do or wouldn't do. I never promised to do a thing in my life that I didn't do. Even if the girl should, God forbid, be an old maid all her life, I wouldn't promise Abe the money if I couldn't give it to him."

"Shhh," crooned Blumfeld, stemming the tirade. "I will satisfy you." And detaching a sheet from the pad he began to write slowly, reading as he did so:

In consideration of Yonkel Smolansky paying to me the sum of forty-nine dollars and twenty-two cents, monthly, during his lifetime, I agree to pay to Abe Pepperman ten thousand dollars in a manner hereinafter to be agreed.

THEN affixing his signature to the paper, he majestically put it into the hands of the astonished Smolansky, with a: "Now, does that satisfy you?"

"You're an angel from heaven, Mr. Blumfeld." The show of enthusiasm was welcome to the money lender, who looked beamingly upon the old man as he carefully buttoned the paper in his vest pocket.

Seeing that Smolansky was finally pleased and appreciative Blumfeld turned censurer.

"I can't understand you. You come for a favor. I'm sure you must expect to get it or you wouldn't come, and when you get it you don't believe it till I write it down for you. Honest, it's a positive insult to me."

"Now I am sure you are laughing from me, Mr. Blumfeld. You have my blessing."

"Only one thing I ask, like before, and that is that you should do everything like I tell you. I have satisfied you that the money will be paid to Abe. Now you got to let me arrange everything else."

Seeing that Smolansky was appeased and agreeable, he proceeded to unfold as little or as much of his plan as it would be safe to do without arousing the old man's condemnation to the procedure. As an ease to his conscience he asked rather carelessly: "You know, Mr. Smolansky, don't you, that Abe really loves Rosie and if it wasn't for his father he wouldn't think of asking for any money."

"Abe himself? Certainly not."

"Sure; all the boy wants to do is to satisfy his father, for which you couldn't blame a son even if the father is a no-good like Sam Pepperman."

"Positive."

"Then you agree with me that it's Sam Pepperman we got to satisfy, not Abe."

"Positive."

"Then it ain't any question we're doing the right thing."

A knock upon the door interrupted the discussion. "Mr. Greenstein is here to see you," the girl announced after being bade to enter.

"Tell him to come in, Minnie," Blumfeld ordered, then, turning to Smolansky, extended his hand patronizingly, indicating that he wished the interview to come to an end. "Please meet me in Doctor Baronoff's office at six o'clock to-night and we will arrange everything for the wedding," he said with a smile. Then upon noting a look of anxiety creep upon the features of his friend he added seriously: "Don't worry. Everything will be all right."

"Thank you. Thanks. I will be there six o'clock. Such a man! Such a man! Thank you. Such a man! Such a man!" He kept muttering and shaking his head in approval and gratitude even when he had passed out into the hall.

STRETCHED full length upon the overabundantly upholstered gray couch, one of a three-piece set that adorned the parlor of their Lenox Avenue flat, Abraham L. Pepperman lay in meditative and painful silence. Over his bushy, black, unruly eyebrows he watched the lighted gilt chandelier, counting abstractedly the links in the chain that supported the inverted dome.

Occasionally he would take out of his vest pocket his watch, and snapping open the case his beaming brown eyes would rest pensively upon the likeness of Rosie Smolansky inserted therein. That picture of her he loved best. It was one he had snapped of a Sunday afternoon in Claremont Park; the irresistible Rose held a tennis racket, poised aloft, and her head tilting at a most captivating angle. Her eyes sparkled with that girlish exuberance characteristic to a love-inspired maiden.

The thrilled Abe was so enraptured and overcome with emotion that he almost forgot his promise to his austere, overambitious parent. As much as he loved Rose, Abe dreaded a further scene with his misguided father, whose only objection to the girl was that she was living in a small flat in the Bronx, and was presumably of poor parentage, and would bring to Abe nothing more than an overwhelming amount of responsibility, and eventually, in addition, an aged dependant father.

Just at this time, with his father so intent upon having his own way, was not the opportune moment for him to assert himself. Abe decided to allow matters to drag along.

Hearing his father approaching through the long hall, he softly, and with a hasty kiss, shut the watchcase and returned it to his pocket.

"It ain't no use talkink, Abe," observed the diminutive, red-haired parent as he entered the room stroking a long, untrimmed mustache, the color of very weak tea. "The more you squeeze the more juice you get. It's only a question in what direction the juice would squirt."

Seating himself pompously, he fixed his cunning, beady, slate-colored eyes upon his son, who betrayed but slight interest. "And who do you think is gonna give you some law business to-night, Abe?"

"Father! This is the third time you have asked me that selfsame question. You asked me that before supper, during the meal and again now. And again I must answer: 'I don't know.'"

"But guess," insisted the senior Pepperman.

"This time I'll guess Mr. Semnel, the rich ready-to-wear man."

"No, Abe. Guess again."

"Mr. Levy, the landlord of these premises."

"Guess again."

"Mr. Valenstein."

"No."

"Then I must surrender."

"Abe! Who is the man I am always fighting the hardest, always squeezing the most?"

"Not Dave Blumfeld?" The boy manifested real interest.

"Nobody else but him."

"No!"

"Yes. Sure!" the parent declared, slapping his knee triumphantly.

"He must be looking for peace father," the youth observed, removing his black horn-rimmed spectacles from under his wiry hair and adjusting them upon his liberally developed nose.

"I should worry, Abe, what he's lookink for. I didn't promise him nottink. The only way to bring them kind of fellers to terms is to fight them—fight them all the time.

"Listen good, Abe. About two o'clock to-day Blumfeld calls me up on the telephone and he says to me that a friend of his came up to him for some advice and that the feller is an old man and wants a will drawn up. He says to me: 'I might just as well give your Abe a show as any other lawyer. After all, I got nottink against the boy, even if his father is a philanthropist and is all the time bidding up merchandise twice the value so that the poor auctioneers could get rich. That's got nottink to do with a nice young feller like Abe. If I could help a young lawyer starting out, especially one of our own, why shouldn't I?'

"What answer could I give him, Abe, hey? When a feller talks like that and is willing to bury the hatchet you ain't got the right to be too particular how he does it. Am I right or not?"

The senior did not wait for a reply, but clapped his hands in glee. "'I'll stick you yet,' he always used to holler at me in the auction rooms. I guess he found out when you try to stick a feller you got to get your own hand sticky too. So he must have found out that if a feller is got to use sticky stuff it's best to use honey."

"You men should get together," said the youth austerely, running his hands impressionally along the sides of his elongated jawbone. "You could buy stocks much cheaper by not vying with one another. Besides, there is enough for all."

"Abe, it don't pay to be too soft-hearted. That's what's got you mixed up with that girl in the Bronx—soft-heartedness."

"I thought we had ended that, father. I promised you to-night that without your consent I would not go there."

"You're a fine boy, Abe. Your heart belongs on Riverside Drive, not in the Bronx—and yet on Jennings Street."

Further discussion was interrupted by the doorbell.

"You better go to the door, Abe. He'll be more glad to see you than me."

If animosity existed between the two men it required more than the naked eye to discern it as they greeted each other when Abe ushered Blumfeld into his father.

"It's a pleasure you should come to my house, Blumfeld." Sam Pepperman shook the hands of his guest and offered the rocker, the seat of honor.

"It's for Abe I'm doing this, not for you," returned Blumfeld, good-naturedly.

"What's the difference? So long you're here, it's a pleasure."

"Look, look! He's wise crackink already."

"Father is not as bad as you paint him, Mr. Blumfeld."

"I'll admit, Abe, there's worse than him."

"And how is Mrs. Blumfeld?" patronizingly inquired the senior Pepperman.

"As well as any woman could be who spends six hours a day in moving-picture shows. She's getting now so that it's hard for her to see in the daylight."

THERE was an awkward pause, then Blumfeld inquired: "And how is the law business, Abe?"

"I cannot complain, Mr. Blumfeld. I am doing very nicely for a beginner."

"Look! Look!" cried the father, outraged. "He calls himself a beginner when he's practicing two years already and before that he worked in Judge Segal's office for three years."

"Say, Pepperman, it don't hurt the boy to tell the truth, even if he is a lawyer." Then turning to the son the visitor asked solicitously: "Tell me, Abe, do you know much about drawing up wills?"

"Such a question!" interjected the father, shaking his head from side to side

at a merry pace, as if the question was ridiculous beyond mention.

"Yes, Mr. Blumfeld," returned the barrister in a very dignified manner.

"That's fine. I suppose your papa told you that I have a friend who don't know much about business and he comes to me this morning——"

"Wait! Wait! What's the use of talkink business in here. Let's go in the den," Pepperman interrupted parting the blue velvet portières and beckoning attorney and client into the small adjoining room termed a den because it had a pipe rack and the picture of a fencing girl upon the wall. "Sit down here," he ordered, drawing two chairs before the mission desk. "Shall I go out? Maybe it's private," he queried in a tone that invited a negative answer.

"No. Why should you go out? I'm sure you don't know this man. It's all right; you could stay here," Blumfeld replied indifferently. "Now then," he continued, and extracted with deliberation a few papers from his pocket and began perusing them as if their contents were vague to him, "this will is for a very good friend of mine. A very fine, honest and religious man. It's only because I suggested it that he's making this will altogether.

"Believe me, when he came down to my office this morning it was about an altogether different thing. But when I found out that he didn't have a will with all the money he is going to leave I told him he must make a will, and I insisted until he said, 'Yes.' Would you believe it, the man hardly knew what a will was. Not that he's dumb or anything like that—just the opposite. In the Talmud he is wonderfully learned.

"To make a long story short I advised him to make this will and he's taking my advice. It's a very short will, Abe. He leaves everything he's got to two people, maybe to one."

At this point he feigned intense interest in the paper but allowed it to fold over his finger so that he might study his audience without arousing a suspicion. He continued, speaking slowly and watching them out of the corner of his eye: "The man's name is Yonkel Smolansky." He proceeded to spell it. Y-O-N-K——" drawling the letters; but he did not get a chance to complete the name.

"Yonkel Smolansky? You know him?" exclaimed Sam Pepperman.

"You know him too?" asked Blumfeld, feigning an even greater surprise.

"Residing in Jennings Street?" gasped Abe.

LOOKING squarely, opened eyed, at one another, they all nodded in unison.

"How does a high-class man like that come to you, Blumfeld?"

"He only came to me on a business proposition; and a man like that I would help with advice—even with money, if it should be necessary; but thank God, he don't need my money." Here Blumfeld drew his chair closer, as if he desired matters sped. "But listen, it ain't for fellers like us to even talk about a man like Mr. Smolansky. He is to us like angels to devils."

"And even then we are flatterink ourselves a whole lot," agreed the head of the Pepperman household.

As if the coincidence of the Peppermans' acquaintance with the pious man was only an incident that had already taken up too much time, Blumfeld proceeded again to consult the memorandum in his hands, as if he were relying entirely upon the data therein contained.

"Mr. Smolansky leaves everything to two people," he repeated matter-of-factly. "He leaves ten thousand dollars in cash to the man his daughter marries, and everything else to his daughter. His daughter's name is——" Here again he shuffled the sheets of paper as if he were searching for the girl's name.

"I know his daughter's name," volunteered Abe earnestly. "It is Rose." He spoke the name very softly, as if it were poetry.

"You know his daughter?" Blumfeld drew back again, exhibiting marked surprise. "A fine young lady. I wish I had

a son. Even if her father did not have as much as Smolansky I would be glad of such a match. Where did you meet his daughter, Abe?"

"At a concert in the Y. M. H. A."

"I didn't know Smolansky was such a rich man," was all the bewildered father could say.

"How should you know?" Blumfeld rebuked. "How should you know what a man like Mr. Smolansky has? He certainly ain't a loud mouth or a man who goes around throwing a bluff. He is a man that minds his business. Believe me, up to to-day I too didn't have no idee either what he had."

"It's just like her," muttered the youthful Abe softly, barely audible, his head bowed in momentary meditation. "Testing me!"

"Listen, gentlemen," lied Blumfeld, toying with his quarry, "when I came up here this evening I had no idee that you knew the family so well. You know a will is something private. Maybe I should better go to another lawyer."

"What do you mean, Blumfeld?" declared Sam Pepperman, affecting indignation. "That my son Abe can't keep a secret that he gets professionally?"

"No, only——"

"Only nottink. Don't worry, Dave." It was the first time in many years that he had addressed Blumfeld by his first name. "Everything here is like if it was in the lodge room."

"Remember! No talking to anybody," warned the emissary.

"You could depend on us, Dave." Satisfied that the caller was appeased, Pepperman proceeded toward another point, which now that the girl from the Bronx was to become an heiress, he deemed it very necessary to establish. "Blumfeld, when you came up here to-night you had no idee that we knew the Smolanskys, did you?"

Fearful that he had contradicted himself unwittingly, Blumfeld merely nodded his head awaiting further evidence or accusation.

"Didn't you say that? Answer me," cross-examined the attorney's father, aiming for a more positive response than a mere nod of the head. Evidently he considered the issue important.

"Yes. Then what?" the perplexed money lender admitted.

"Remember that—that's all. You might find out later. Now let's go on with the will."

FEELING that it would be unwise to lay stress upon the question by further insistence for an explanation from his host, Blumfeld proceeded in the most matter-of-fact business tone to address the young man. "Well, that's all then, Abe. Draw me up the will like I told you, Abe. Ten thousand dollars cash to the girl's husband, and if the girl should not be married——"

"Why shouldn't such a nice girl get married?"

"Hush up Pepperman—and if the girl should not be married when her father dies then this ten thousand dollars should go to her."

"Are the remainder of Mr. Smolansky's possessions to be enumerated in the will, Mr. Blumfeld?"

"Is it necessary, Abe?" He knew the reply but nevertheless asked the question naïvely.

"No, it is not necessary. It just facilitates matters."

"Then never mind. We should worry about a little thing like facilitates. Just draw it up like I told you. Because, believe me, I don't want to bother the old man any more than absolutely necessary. I had to beg him; absolutely *beg* him, he should make the will."

"You never could tell in this world who is got money." That Pepperman kept muttering with the monotony of a punished child repeating multiplication tables.

"To hear you talk, Sam Pepperman, somebody would think that you was a regular Dunn's or Bradstreet's. Why are you so surprised that you didn't know that a man who lives in the Bronx—the other side of the world, practically—has money? I could bring you a thousand people that

live maybe in the next block that have money and you don't know it."

"But such an honest man like Smolansky. Such a good man."

"That's a fine remark for you to make. Because a man is honest he ain't got license to have money by him? Shame on you for such a remark, Sam Pepperman —and in front of your son, too."

"I didn't mean nottink. It's only such a big surprise."

"Well, that's neither here nor there. Come on, let's get finished. There's only one other thing you got to put in the will, Abe—I am to be the executor until the girl marries, and then her husband is to become the executor."

"H'mmm," mumbled the business rival.

"I comprehend," said the son, still speaking as if in a trance.

"Well, then you could draw me up the will and send it up to my office to-morrow and I could have Mr. Smolansky sign it. Oh! Another thing. I almost forgot." He spoke as if the matter were but an afterthought. "Here is a letter which says I am to give the heir ten thousand dollars. The letter is really nothing more than a receipt for the security I got for the ten thousand dollars. This letter you will please pin on to the will, Abe."

"I don't quite understand, Mr. Blumfeld."

"Neit'er me too," complained the attorney's father.

"You see the security I got, gentlemen, ain't cash. When Smolansky dies I got to turn the security into cash and pay it to whoever gets it."

"But in the letter," broke in Pepperman, "you promise to pay ten thousand dollars. What if the security you got don't bring ten thousand dollars, Dave?"

"Don't worry. The security I got is like the Bank of England."

"I guess I could leave that to you, Dave," Sam Pepperman opined. "It must be a A-number-one security if you will agree to pay ten thousand dollars for it, just like that—regardless of nottink."

"You could leave that to me."

"I know you ain't gonna make such a promise—and yet in writing—unless you got security at least five for one, maybe yet more."

"I didn't come here to be insulted, Pepperman." Indignation of an outraged variety was registered by the clever Blumfeld.

"Uh, foolish. I'm only complimenting you on your business judgment." Appeasing his guest with a friendly shake on the shoulder he continued. "I suppose, Dave, if the girl marries, you will turn over the security to the son-in-law right away. Then am I right or not?"

Again Blumfeld called into play a display of ire. "Say! Who is the lawyer here? You or Abe? Are you begrudging me holding the security? Maybe you never heard the wise crack—'live and let live.'"

HE appealed to Abe. "Look, I bring a case to his son; instead him thanking me for it, he's worrying what benefits I'm getting."

"Foolish," said the father. "I'm only trying to make it plain so Abe should know what to do. You see, he's got a legal mind and we got business heads, and that's the way we could help him."

"Just now you said he's got plenty of experience, and now you're acting like Abe was a baby eating hot soup." Then, turning to the counselor, he queried very solicitously: "Is everything plain, Abe?"

"Yes, but if you will pardon my saying so, Mr. Blumfeld, father's question as to whether or not you would turn over the security to a new executor in lieu of the return of your receipt is very relevant."

"Then why not? Sure! So soon as I get my letter back. I wouldn't make a nickel on a man like Mr. Smolansky."

"Fine!" interposed the father."

"All right then, Abe. Everything is settled. Draw me up the will and send it to me so soon you can. Now no more business, gentlemen."

Blumfeld arose and reëntered the parlor, followed by his conferees. He paced the floor with an exaggerated display of restlessness, casting a flattering look of ap-

preciation at "Fleeing from the Storm" hung in a shadow box upon the gilt-papered wall. Then he ran his hand patronizingly over a bronzette reproduction of "At the Fountain."

"A beautiful place, Pepperman."

"Yes, it's pretty comfortable," agreed the owner of the apartment, abstractedly. His thoughts were upon Smolansky, his Abe, the security, and not upon any casual comment Blumfeld was making.

"Fine view here, too," the money lender continued, looking out of the window. "You could see all the automobiles pass from a Hundred and Tenth Street, from St. Nicholas Avenue, from the park—from all over. Where do all the people get all the money from?"

The last observation was in line with Pepperman's thoughts. "Where? There you got it. Everybody, it looks like, is got money. Who would ever think it that a man like old Smolansky—who lives in the Bronx, in Jennings Street—is got so much money."

"There he goes again. That's enough already."

"Maybe you want a glass of tea with strawberry juice?" invited the host, taking the reproach gracefully.

Blumfeld seized upon the invitation as an excuse for an exit. "That reminds me, thanks, that my Sarah is waiting for me." He consulted his watch and emitted a shrill: "Vee, so late already!" And proceeded to the hall.

"I hope that you two have buried the hatchet," said Abe graciously, as, accompanied by his father, he escorted the visitor to the door.

"*I* done my best, Abe, my son."

"So far as *I* am concerned, I hope it's buried good," Blumfeld concluded as he closed the door.

Pepperman maintained his silence as they walked through the long corridor back into the parlor, where they would be free from any possible eavesdropping. Once there the parent opened up with a gusto.

"Did you hear what that burglar said, Abe? He wouldn't make a nickel on a man like Smolansky. Oh, no. God forbid! He wouldn't make no more on Smolansky than the Germans would have on the French if they would have won the war.

"Abe! I'll betch you that the security that Blumfeld is got is worth at least—even in panicky times—forty or fifty thousand dollars."

"You know Mr. Blumfeld better than I do," was all the reply the youth made as he looked wistfully at his father.

"Whatch you look like that for, Abe?" Pepperman gently shook the boy out of his mood. "You know what all this means, Abe?"

"What does it mean, father?"

"It means, Abe, that you are practically a rich man, soon."

"That's far-fetched."

"Don't say that, Abe. I know them kind of men like Smolansky. They live and save. Everything is for their children." Then rambling off, he asked: "Let me see that letter of Blumfeld's that's gonna be pinned to the will."

Pepperman read the letter aloud, very slowly. "'For value received upon the death of Yonkel Smolansky I promise to pay to his son-in-law the sum of ten thousand dollars. Should his daughter not marry I will pay the money to her. Signed, David L. Blumfeld.'

"Now you don't mean to tell me, Abe," declared the father, returning the letter, "that a usurer like Blumfeld would write a letter like that if he didn't have plenty of security." He studied the youth a moment, then asked: "There ain't no way out for him, is there, Abe?"

"None at all that I can see. The letter may be crudely phrased, but the obligation is binding. In view of what Mr. Blumfeld has stated to us, not even bankruptcy would wipe out the obligation. It is of a fiduciary nature."

"You got a good head, Abe. But who would think it, Abe, that Smolansky had so much money? I tell you, in New York you can't tell nottink. In Riverside Drive live people who maybe can't pay their rent, and in the Bronx people live in two rooms

who could buy the property they live in many times over. Am I right or not?"

THE boy's response, a casual nod of the head, lacked enthusiasm.

"Look! Ain't I a selfish father?" exclaimed Pepperman, noting that his speculations were falling upon unappreciative ears. "I'm keeping you here and I'll betch you you wanna go to Rosie."

The youth bowed his head in the affirmative.

"If I was you, Abe, I wouldn't fight with Rosie. Take my advice; make believe you don't know nottink."

"I wouldn't think of saying a word to her, father. The information imparted to us to-night is what is legally termed privileged communication—between client and attorney. I would suggest, father, that you discuss it with no one."

"Like as if it was in a lodge, it is by me, Abe."

As the boy proceeded out of the room, to the door, the father called. "Abe, it wouldn't hurt if you should give my regards to Rosie and her father."

HAVING carried out his program with apparent success, Blumfeld was content to wait developments.

Entering his office a few days after his visit to the Peppermans, he found the doting father of the barrister waiting. It was as he had expected.

"The last man in the world I expected to see this morning," fabricated the money broker. "What brings you down here so early?"

"What? He asks like he don't know."

"Come in the office."

Both seated comfortably, the duel started.

"You don't mean to tell me, Blumfeld, that you don't know what happened last night?"

"No," Blumfeld lied infamously. If Pepperman wanted to drag the incident out, he was willing.

"First, Dave Blumfeld, I want to bring something to your mind."

"Nu?"

"The other night when you was up to my house I asked you if you knew that we knew the Smolanskys. And you said that you didn't."

That incident had puzzled Blumfeld, and now that it appeared that the matter was to be cleared he was interested. "I remember something like that. What of it?"

"Only this—that you ain't entitled to no brokerage for bringing them together."

Blumfeld could not help smiling at his visitor's precautions, but still he was able to manifest sufficient surprise to impress Pepperman. "Bringing who together, did you say?"

"You don't mean to tell me that you didn't hear?"

"Hear what?"

"That my Abe and Rosie Smolansky was married last night."

"You don't tell me. *Mazzeltoff.*" Blumfeld extended his hand in hearty congratulation.

"Now you see what I mean. You ain't entitled to brokerage, Blumfeld, for bringing them together. They been keeping company a long time and they would 'a' got married anyway. We didn't wanna let on the other night that we knowed them. Hah! Ain't it a good joke on you!"

So that was the purpose of Pepperman's question—to stave off any possible demand for the customary brokerage that *schatchens* charge for bringing about marriages.

"Whether I am entitled to commission or not, I know a man like you ain't going to send me away without a cent." Blumfeld watched his victim as he played with him.

"Not a penny. You ain't entitled to it. I been begging my Abe to marry that girl for years."

"All right. Now what else could I do for you?"

Pepperman extracted from the inside pocket of his coat an impressive-looking document. "About the will. It's all drawn up and Abe's name is in as executor. If you will give me the collateral you

hold for the ten thousand dollars I will give you back your letter."

"Sure. Why not?" Blumfeld opened the draw of his desk and produced an oblong-shaped packet, which without comment he handed over to the father-in-law of Rosie.

"That's the collateral?" queried the caller perfunctorily.

Blumfeld nodded impressively.

EXTRACTING the contents of a long envelope he read aloud from the cover of the document:

"The Eternal Life Insurance Company
Ansonia
Conn.
Number 347919
Yonkel Smolansky
Age 59
Amount—$10,000
Annual Premium
$590.64
Payable October 4th."

Pepperman read no further. "That's Smolansky's life-insurance policy," he protested, as if not interested.

"And that's the collateral, too." Blumfeld permitted a flicker of a smile to adorn his features.

"Whatch you talkink about, it's the collateral! That's a life-insurance policy."

"It's both."

"Come on, now. No monkey business, Blumfeld. What do you mean?"

"As long as you are so dumb, I guess I got to tell you plain what I mean." And the man who was responsible for the happy union proceeded to unfold the ruse, narrating with gusto the details of Smolansky's visit to the office.

"And would you believe it," he declared, toying with his prey, "when I took Smolansky to be examined the doctor said he was as strong as a man of forty. Smolansky could live maybe fifty years more."

Pepperman could only gaze in bewildered astonishment—stunned.

Assuming a softer tone, Blumfeld declared solemnly: "I promise you that Smolansky don't know what I did. He thinks that the policy is only for my protection and that I gave Abe ten thousand dollars.

"I will show you what a good friend I am to you—I won't tell any one. Tell Abe that I should remain the beneficiary and when the old man pays me the forty-nine dollars and twenty-two cents a month I will pay the company the premiums, and should maybe he not be able to pay you could pay it and I wouldn't tell anybody."

"Robber! Burglar! No-good crook!" flared Pepperman. "That's what you call burying the hatchet."

"Stop! That's enough, Pepperman." This time the indignation was genuine, and as such it was quickly recognized by the visitor, who cowered under the infuriated gaze of the tall, bony Blumfeld. "You said too much already. It's for Mr. Smolansky and Rosie and Abe that I did this. They are all happy. You should be ashamed of yourself."

With bowed head Pepperman sheepishly backed his way out of the room and into the hall. As he turned the corridor he heard Blumfeld call.

"Say, Pepperman! With my share of the brokerage buy yourself a silver hatchet as a souvenir. And say, Pepperman—remember, everything is like as if it was in a lodge."

"When you squeeze you got to be careful where the juice squirts," the disappointed father muttered to himself.

EVER so many people are going to Europe this summer because they say that living is cheaper there than here. Perhaps it is—but in 1923 American tourists in France—there were one hundred and thirty-five thousand of them—spent two hundred million dollars. That was an average of fifteen hundred dollars per tourist—not so little when you consider that many of them made only short stays.

In the First Degree

By William S. Dutton

There are some things a man can't help wishing for, even while shame counsels him to pray that his wishing may not come true.

DEBONAIR Herb James, young man about town, got up from the draw game at Slattery's two thousand loser. He yawned, glanced boredly over the smoke-fogged room with its heavy plush draperies, baize-covered tables and lights in midafternoon, searching each intent face speculatively and noting each player's accumulation of chips.

"Ah!" he exclaimed softly, and his narrowing gray eyes lighted, upon sighting the silk-clad shoulders of Dick Lester, a kindred soul and a friend—of sorts. Herb lighted a cigarette in a long amber holder and sauntered toward the other.

"Dick, old topper," he whispered, "you're winning big. Could you?—well, fifty will do. Let's say until to-morrow?"

Dick Lester drew to a pair of queens, raised, and failed to look up from his cards.

"I say!" chided Herb, lifting his brows in reproach. "Oh, well," he drawled, when Lester continued to ignore him, "if that's the way you feel, old dear, go to!"

Herb was engaged to marry Polly Thayer; Dick Lester, to his own deep chagrin and envy, was not. So Herb shrugged tolerantly at the snub and strolled over to the cigar stand where "Doc" Slattery, master gambler, was making a firsthand audit of receipts.

Slattery did not look the gaming-house man; rather, when on the street in his characteristically somber garb, he might have been mistaken for an eminent and pious divine pondering the mutiple ills of the world. His head was invariably down, his hands locked behind his back, and he moved with a ponderous deliberation and exactness of step. Herb, though, was undeceived by appearances; he knew that beneath the gambler's outward benignity he was flint hard.

"By the way, Doc," he opened casually, a certain familiar suggestiveness that implied the need of a loan in his tone, "as per usual Miss Luck and I are——"

Slattery looked up slowly. "That check you gave me yesterday was no good.

When are you going to straighten yourself out?"

"Let's say next week, Doc?"

"Your 'next weeks' never come."

"Ah, but eventually," insisted Herb, "eventually they will." He readjusted the carnation in his satin lapel, dusted his cigarette. "Every old boulevard leads somewhere, you know. My esteemed uncle, unfortunately, cannot live forever. It just isn't done."

"Look here, James"—the gaming-house man scowled—"in six months I've spotted you twenty thousand on bum checks to keep you covered up. Such things have a limit."

"Right-o, old topper." Herb grinned. "At last you've come to my viewpoint. My ship can't drift forever. Some day, when it comes blithely into port, drops anchor and——"

Slattery hunched nearer over the glass-topped counter and his black eyes became steel points. "That 'ship' of yours is due within a month—understand? One month is your limit! I'm going to call you, Herb, a month from to-day—and you'd better not be playing a bluff."

"But I say, Doc, you wouldn't do that?"

BY an infinitesimal mite the color of Herb's good-looking, devil-may-care face faded. Slattery's keen eyes detected. For some time the gaming-house man had suspected that under his smooth, affable exterior young James was worried. Now that his suspicion was confirmed, Slattery snapped down on the other with the finality of a sprung steel trap.

"You've got to come through," he growled, "and big. Those bum checks you've been handing me, which I've been cashing to save your pretty face—you can have them back a month from to-day—for forty thousand cash. Get it? Cash! Every damn cent of it—cash! If you don't——" The gambler's voice trailed off significantly.

"Oh, go to the devil!" retorted Herb, a trifle sharply.

"I mean it, kid. Cash! Double what you owe—and not a copper less!"

Slattery did mean it! Herb chilled as if an icy, dead hand had been laid on the small of his back. He knew the gambler had him, had him tight. With the checks Slattery had in his possession he could go straight to old Winship James, and, almost beyond a feather of doubt, cut Herb off from every dollar of his banker uncle's millions.

Uncle Winship detested gambling; throughout his long life he had fought it bitterly, and with cause. His brother—Herb's dead father—had ruined himself with the pasteboards, as had his father before him. Barring old Winship alone, the lure of chance, the fever of high stakes, was in the James blood. If Winship dreamed that his favorite nephew and heir had so much as touched a card——

"Doc," said Herb, and his gray eyes narrowed, "you tricked me into this, encouraged me to use those checks. I'm not welshing on it. I'm just telling you. You're a downright, cold-blooded fish."

"I am!" agreed Slattery.

"Furthermore," went on Herb, "I should punch your head with a crowbar and cremate you. But since that would get me nowhere—for the present—I'll try to keep in mind your few kind words. Let's see, old fish, to-day is——"

"October 25th, and"—grimly Slattery produced his watch—"the hour is four thirty-two. Better make a note of it."

"Oh, no need, old fish. Ta-ta."

Herb had regained his sang-froid. He flipped his cigarette away, lighted another, and with long amber holder cocked high, leisurely made his way out of the plush-clad, smoke-grayed cardroom to a short narrow hall. At a word, an attendant led the way through several side rooms into a second hallway, at the end of which he unbolted a heavy iron-plated door.

Herb slipped through, waved his amber holder airily, and the door swung shut behind him with a click of its sturdy catch. He was now on a concrete fire landing, four stories up, and directly opposite him was a second iron door like unto that at his back. Iron railings and an airshaft of considerable width intervened.

Herb's long legs expertly vaulted him across the airshaft. A moment he paused to straighten his cravat, to make sure of his boutonnière, and to listen.

Everything seemed satisfactory. He opened the big door cautiously, peered into the corridor beyond, and spying nobody who might question his entrance, stepped in. In so doing he underwent an invisible, but none the less actual, transformation.

II.

NO physical change took place in the tall, good-looking young man. In appearance he remained as before, the debonair, well-groomed, devil-may-care gentleman of town. The change was purely in the sphere of the psychological, in the dropping of one rôle, a secret rôle, and in the assuming of his regularly allotted status in life.

Herb was now within the palatial precincts of the exclusive La Guardia, an apartment hotel in which a dollar meant nothing, but a million dollars much. No longer was he mere Herb James, a youth with a passion for the ponies and draw poker. By stepping into the wide, soft-carpeted, softly lighted corridor he became "the" Herbert James, nephew and heir of the wealthy banker; a dabbler in letters, a patron of the arts, a polo player and athlete of note, the affianced husband of Polly Thayer—the same Polly Thayer whose charming likeness so often graced the big city's Sunday supplements.

Herb walked lightly out the corridor, his polished shoes sinking noiselessly into the heavy carpet. His gray eyes were alert, for there were servants in the La Guardia and others who knew of Doc Slattery and his house of chance.

Now that he was alone, back in his regular haunts, now that the fever of high play had abated, he admitted being more than a trifle shaken by the gaming-house man's demand of forty thousand cash, or exposure. His pockets were almost empty, and he wanted to get to his room without meeting any one, especially any one whom he knew.

The La Guardia was in the shape of an "L," and the James suite of ten rooms and four baths occupied the outside, fourth-floor corner. It was, in fact, a combination of two five-room suites, one of which was occupied by old Winship and the second by Herb himself.

The servants of the house occupied common quarters on another floor where they were constantly subject to call. Only one, Timothy, an old retainer of the James family, resided at all times with old Mr. James.

Unobserved, Herb gained the entrance to his uncle's part of the suite and absently inserted his key in the door. Not until he was partially inside the inner hall did he recall that at this period of the afternoon his Uncle Winship usually enjoyed a nap.

"By Jove——" he started, and stepped back into the corridor. There would be the deuce to pay if old Winship was disturbed, and anyway Herb could more safely gain his own rooms by the second entrance door just around the angle of the corridor.

Intent on closing his uncle's door without arousing him, Herb jumped as if caught at thievery at the ejaculation of his name by a feminine voice behind him. He spun about, face to face with Polly Thayer, the last person he at that moment desired to meet.

"Why, Polly! By Jove!" he stammered, utterly taken aback both by the unexpectedness of her appearance and by her manner. The Thayer apartment was on the floor above; still, only something disturbing could have brought Polly down to see him.

And plainly, too, Polly was exasperated. Her curly blond head under a saucy, mannish straw hat of blue black, was tilted back imperiously; her blue eyes were wide with resentment; the curve of her pretty lips was accusing—and hurt. She was dressed for horse and bridle path and carried a quirt which she rapped impatiently on the leg of her riding boot.

"Where have you been?" she demanded. "It was my understanding that you were to meet me at three."

Herb, in a rush of distress, remembered his promise to accompany Polly for a ride. The hour was now nearing five.

"Switch me for a blighter!" he groaned. "Plague it, Polly, I'm sorry. I stretched out in the old easy-chair for a wink, and told Timothy explicitly to call me. I dozed off completely, never woke up until——"

"Don't fib about it, Herb," she interjected coldly. "If this were the first time you had disappointed me—and blamed Timothy—I might pass it by; but it isn't. You've been gambling."

"Not so loud, Polly! S-sh-h! Uncle Win is——" The door to old Winship's rooms, momentarily forgotten, had swung ajar. Hastily Herb sprang to shut it, chilly at the thought that Uncle Winship might have heard. "I wasn't gambling, Polly. I swear——"

"Don't! It's no use, Herb. Timothy told me you went out at two. He said you had told him he could take the afternoon off. Besides, Dick Lester talked with me by phone. He told me you were at Slattery's."

"But Polly!" frantically protested Herb. "Old Timothy is a fraud. And Lester—why, the blighter! He himself is at Slattery's this minute. He——"

"So you admit it, Herb?" Polly Thayer's lips quivered. "I'm through, Herb. You've broken your promises to me; I must withdraw the one I made you. I'm sorry"—her voice caught—"but here is your ring. We may still be friends, mayn't we? We——"

"Oh, Polly!" Herb groaned and seized her hand. "Please believe me, darling. I'll never touch a card again; I'll never lay a bet——"

She drew away. "No, Herb," she said tonelessly. "You've had your chance. No, no!"

Herb's heart was in his shoes. He felt rather than saw her go slowly out the corridor. She did not look back. With a dismal finality the elevator doors closed upon her, and Herb's only consolation was that in returning him his ring Polly's eyes had been wet.

"I'm hoodooed," he commiserated, and hung his head. Bitterly he made his way into his rooms.

II

HE dropped into a chair by one of the windows. Moments he sat there utterly motionless, staring out at the traffic-jammed street. He loved Polly; now he had lost her, he loved her more.

Anger swelled in him at himself, at his fathers who had saddled him with their weakness, at the jealous Dick Lester. Thinking of Lester, his thoughts drove on to Slattery and to his threat.

Here was danger, a problem. Herb lighted a cigarette and walked the floor, his brow knotted. Uncle Winship, as he reasoned it, would be obdurate to any plea for forgiveness. At the best, he was a forlorn chance—and yet a chance! They were close enough, in a way; at that, the old codger might turn out to have a heart. It was a slim chance——

"Oh, the dickens!" Herb muttered. The idea of confessing the mess he was in to his uncle and risking almost certain disinheritance was not a pleasant one.

He covered the room with long, nervous strides. He was in a pickle, all right. Forty thousand, even twenty, was no acorn to pick up on the street. He had exhausted his personal resources, gone in debt to friends. An occasional winning at the track—and Slattery's—alone had kept him going of late. Now, should the old banker die opportunely—in poor health, aged, recently even melancholy, his death was far from a remote possibility—why—why——

Herb shook off the tantalizing thought. He didn't want old Winship to die, but—plague take it! he could not help but concede that his uncle's death before the month's end would be deucedly convenient, a deucedly decent thing for the old gentleman to do. Uncle Win had lived his life; he was ailing and——

"Rats!" exploded Herb. He brought up short, genuinely ashamed of what he had been thinking. He was suddenly conscious—he had only vaguely noted it before—of the unbroken, almost ominous silence all about him in the apartment.

A stillness, an air of heaviness, a funereal suspense choked the suite. Herb found himself standing tense, straining his ears for a sound that would indicate that his uncle was up and stirring in the adjoining rooms. Something seemed changed about the place, a subtle change his eye could not detect, and yet which weighted his already troubled mood and brought an uneasy, perplexed frown to his forehead.

"Uncle Win!" he called.

The door which connected his own with his uncle's suite was locked, and the old banker made no answer.

"Hum-m! He must have gone out."

But it was usual for his uncle to be out at that hour; it was decidedly unusual for the door to be locked. Old Winship was regular in his habits. Invariably, about two, he showed up at the La Guardia apartment, read the papers a while, then slept until five or later.

Herb consulted his watch; it was after six. He started at the grate of a key in his own door.

"That's Timothy," he decided, listening.

A second voice told him that Wiley Potter, his uncle's secretary, accompanied the servant. Perhaps Potter could solve the riddle—he had been the banker's secretary for years, held his implicit confidence, was in truth more a partner than a secretary. Herb hastened out to greet him.

III.

THE secretary was a middle-aged, large and stoutish man, bald, and with pale sad eyes and sorrowful, troubled expression. In some ways he reminded Herb of Doc Slattery; the two might have been born brothers. As with the gambler, the sorrow of Potter's mien, a fixed characteristic, often struck Herb with a strange uncomfortableness. It was so when he shook the secretary's hand.

"Why, no, Herbert," said Potter, "I don't believe your uncle is out. He asked me to see him here at six. And if he isn't in his study—— Have you looked?"

"No-o," hesitated Herb, "but——"

"Well, suppose we look," Potter suggested. "You have a key to the outside door, I believe? Well, then——"

He led the way into the corridor.

The door gave to Herb's key. He entered his uncle's suite, fearful of he did not know what. Potter pressed at his heels, while old Timothy creaked in the rear.

"Uncle Winship!" Herb repeated.

The air of the place didn't feel right. His uneasiness grew.

Without, the evening skies had become suddenly black with the threat of early storm. Thunder rumbled, but to Herb's ears came no response from his uncle.

A gloom was upon the rooms, thick and nightlike. He switched on the lights. The living room, the library, were empty.

"The study!" reminded Potter sharply.

Winship James was not in his study. His private desk was open, however, and Herb knew he had not gone out. In spite of him his voice shook:

"He may be asleep in his bedroom. If he isn't——"

Almost afraid to look, he followed Potter out to the hall. A chill darted through him; the bedroom and the one next it were empty.

Paling, Herb stared at the secretary. Potter's eyes met his questioningly.

"The—the bathroom!" quavered Timothy. "The door is——"

"Good God!" Herb gasped.

The bathroom door was closed. An ugly mark of blackish red straggled from beneath it out over the hardwood floor!

Herb tried the knob. He flung himself into the door, crying his uncle's name.

"Easy, Herbert," cautioned Potter, now cool. "Better let me call Gleason, the manager."

"But it's locked!" screamed Herb. "Bolted on the inside! For God's sake! Potter, Timothy—help me! He may be alive! He——"

Potter tried to reason: "That's blood on the floor, Herbert. This seems to be a case for the police. Gleason will get here in three seconds and——"

Unheeding, Herb hurled his shoulder against a panel. Timothy pattered up with a chair. Again and again Herb crashed the chair into the door. The wood splintered; the panel gave at its base and Herb reached through and unloosed the bolt.

Winship James was prostrate on the tiles. A pistol—his pistol!—was beside him. A glance told that he was dead, dead for an hour or more—shot through the mouth.

The secretary, white, turned away. "Suicide!" he muttered. "I'd better call Gleason."

"Call him," gulped Herb. "Go—go! Only let me be!"

He sank down beside the old banker. A lump choked his throat. Within the hour he had wished his uncle dead. His wanton wish had come true.

"Why did you do it, Uncle Win?" he choked. "Why, oh, why, did you do it?" All at once he writhed under the memory prods of past deceits.

Dazedly he got to his feet. Rain struck the window, wind-driven gusts of it that seemed seeking to batter it through. Herb's gaze wandered there; the window, as the door had been, was locked.

The pistol? He picked it up, turned it over in his hand, mechanically examined the magazine and chamber. There was no doubt: it was his uncle's pistol, the automatic .38 he had kept in his study desk; but one shot had been fired.

"Oh, Uncle Win!" moaned Herb again. "Why did you do it!"

FAINT with the shock of it, he wanted to be alone to gather his scattered senses. Like an old man he stumbled through the splintered door and went unseeingly out the hall.

His foot struck something—something that rolled on the floor with a metallic sound. Timothy, whom he had forgotten, stooped and with a pitying word put the little object in his hand. "Thanks," mumbled Herb, and went on to his uncle's study. There he closed the door.

Presently he heard Gleason, the La Guardia manager, arrive, and Joe Tyson, the slow, kindly old house detective. Their voices with that of Potter faded out the hall. The bell rang, imperatively, and Herb knew that this time his visitors were the representatives of the police. He stiffened and grew calmer; the first blow over and its sting passing, he became dully composed, able to think.

And as if a curtain had rung down on an act that was done, and had raised again on an act that was new, an unbidden devil began a dance in Herb's head. The gambler in his blood exulted, fired his veins with a tingling, a mad thrill.

His uncle was dead—and he was his dead uncle's heir! Two millions, perhaps more, were his—money that would square him. Instead of facing loss of everything, humiliation and disgrace, he—he faced a fortune—and owned it!

Then angrily he sought to fight that dancing devil off. But he was only human—back it came again! Caught between joy, and agony at his joy, he clenched his nails into his palms. One hand, as if fated to hide it forever, closed upon the little metal object that Timothy had picked up in the hall. Herb frowned at the thing; he started and paled. What he held in his hand was the exploded shell of a 38-caliber pistol.

"Ugh!" he shuddered, and flung this reminder of tragedy across the room. The shell struck a bookcase and bounded out of sight.

Suddenly he frowned again. That shell had been picked up in the hall. Winship James had been shot in the bathroom, *behind a locked door!* Then—then how had the exploded shell, ejected from the pistol, got into the hall, a dozen feet from the bathroom door?

If the door had been locked when the shot was fired, the discharged shell would have been inside the bathroom.

"Great ghosts!" Herb quavered. "The door must have been open! That means that——"

Frantically he began a search for the shell he had thrown from him. He crawled about the study floor, hunting in the darkened corner where it had bounded.

He felt behind the bookcase, along the baseboard, under the upright radiator.

Trembling, his fingers came upon it hidden behind one of the steam pipes. He turned at a sound. The study door opened with a jerk. A man, unquestionably a detective, stood in the aperture smiling grimly.

IV.

DETECTIVE KROUT, of police headquarters, was a hard-boiled though thoroughly conscientious and painstaking individual. Short and wiry of build, sharp of features and of quick, shrewd eye, details were his hobby. A pencil shaving, a cigar ash, a broken toothpick, were not overlooked as possible clews when Krout was on a case. Nothing was too small to be important, nothing too big to be overly obvious to the headquarters man.

At first Krout had believed, upon failing to find the ejected shell which had killed Winship James, that he had been incomplete in his search for it. All signs indicated suicide, but he took no chance.

He went over the bathroom again. Convinced finally that the shell was not there he made inquiries, thinking that some one might have picked it up. Very quickly he learned from Timothy of the shell found in the hall.

Krout was perplexed. It was mountain plain that the bathroom door had been locked on the inside, and, according to the police physician who accompanied him, James had died almost instantly. The old man's early death booted the theory that he might have shot himself first and locked the door afterward.

Next Krout took a shell from his own pistol and tried to slip it under the door, keeping in mind that a shell might roll. The crack was too small to admit the shell through.

This intelligence caused Krout's perplexity to deepen. His face became grim as he cogitated. *If* the door had been closed, physical law would have kept the exploded shell in the bathroom. But the shell had been found in the hall! Therefore the bathroom door must have been closed and locked, *after* James was shot. The banker had been murdered by somebody who had sought to give the crime every aspect of suicide.

Krout moved swiftly. After puzzling for five minutes over the problem of how that bathroom door had been bolted on the inside, by a person manifestly on the opposite side, he dismissed that detail temporarily for more important things. Tyson, the house detective, was a help. Within twenty minutes he had rounded up the maid of an adjoining apartment, who had seen Winship James' nephew and heir emerging furtively—so she said—from his uncle's half of the James suite, at approximately quarter to five o'clock. It was now six thirty. The murder had taken place within two hours.

"There's this, too," volunteered old Tyson. "It's talked about that James has been gambling, losing big over at Doc Slattery's. His father, you know——"

"I know," snapped Krout. "Get Slattery. Get that Thayer girl the maid saw James meet in the corridor. That old servant, Timothy, admits young James gave him the afternoon off, which was unusual. I've a thing or two to say to Mr. Herbert James."

Detective Krout was in possession of damning facts when he confronted Herb from the study door. More than a suspision, a conviction had settled itself in his mind.

Herb was on his knees. The empty shell which he had just recovered from under the radiator was poised between his thumb and forefinger. The abruptness of the detective's entrance had surprised him; he had all the appearance of having been caught trying to hide the shell.

Krout's eyes missed no detail; they were hard. "You will oblige me," he said tersely, "by handing me that shell."

Confused, startled by the detective's sharp tone, Herb obeyed. "It—it was found in the hall," he said in a low tone. "I believe it has a bearing on the manner of my uncle's death. I—dropped it a moment ago, accidentally."

"Dropped it, eh?" Krout sneered. "It's no use, James. Your bluff won't go. You planned a pretty killing, but this little shell was your slip."

Incredulously Herb stared at the other. "You don't think——" he faltered at length. "Great Heaven! You can't think that I know anything of Uncle Win's death?"

Krout's teeth clicked. "You are clever, James, but not quite clever enough. I warn you; don't try anything funny on me. You're under arrest."

Herb grasped the back of a chair. "Under arrest?" he repeated thickly. "Are you crazy?"

The study suddenly spun before his eyes. Beyond the detectives, assembled in the living room, a tense and accusing group, he saw Potter, his sad face stern; the thin, dark visage of Manager Gleason; old Tyson, and Timothy with head bowed; a white-faced maid, Slattery, and—and Polly Thayer!

A hand of steel seemed to tear at Herb's heart. Even Polly thought him guilty; she was regarding him with wide, horror-struck, mortally wounded eyes.

Then something snapped, like a released spring, in Herb's head. The blood pounded in his temples. His muscles tightened in a burst of fury at circumstance.

HE saw the facts—his losses, at Slattery's, the gambler's threat; the fact that he had sent Timothy away, his own suspicious manner in the meeting with Polly before his uncle's door in the corridor; and last, his negligence in not reporting at once Timothy's discovery of the shell.

"Take your time," invited Detective Krout with irony. "Look the folks over. I guess you've met 'em, all but the maid. Well, she was cleaning in the apartment across the hall when you sneaked out of these rooms about four forty-five."

Herb didn't heed. He scarcely heard. The charge against him would be murder, deliberate and preconceived murder.

There was no bail for such a charge. He would stay in a cell while the police worked up their case to convict him. The newspapers, the public, would damn him in the face of the evidence Krout had.

Already, Herb saw, the detective was reaching for the handcuffs, his eyes hard, menacing slits. Next would come the reporters and photographers, police court, gaping crowds of curious, and then—jail! Days of being shut up, days of being fed behind bars like a vicious animal in a cage! Every part of him revolted, shrank from that. As a visitor he had seen the inside of prisons, and hated them.

"Stick out your wrists!" Krout commanded and, dangling the handcuffs, he strode nearer.

Herb's thoughts raced. He was innocent. By gad! he'd prove that innocence! He wouldn't be dependent upon lawyers, upon the aid of friends who even now seemed to doubt. He—he wouldn't go to jail if he could help it! They had no right to put him in jail! He had done nothing.

"Stick 'em out!" ordered the detective again. "Or must I help you?"

Potter shoved forward. "Is that necessary, Mr. Krout? I'm sure Mr. James will go quietly and——"

The detective turned his head, scowled at the interruption. At the same instant Herb leaped; his fist took Krout flush on the jaw, hurling him back over the study desk. Herb jumped by Potter, sent the amazed Tyson sprawling. The maid shrieked as he dashed by for the door and the corridor.

"After him! Grab him!" sputtered Krout.

Herb sprinted for the elevators. One of the cages slid into sight. "Down!" he shouted, loud enough to be heard a block.

The operator, alert, jammed back his lever, and the cage stopped. "Never mind! Go ahead!" panted Herb.

"What the——" growled the operator, and slammed his gates in anger. "Well, of all the nuts!"

The cage was on its way down again as Herb darted into the winding stairway. He laughed when above he heard his pursuers ringing the elevator emergency bell.

The chase was in his blood now, more exciting than polo. Never had he thought so clearly before. On the third-floor stair landing he paused to catch wind and to listen.

"Where'd he go?" he heard Krout bellow.

A copper waste receptacle stood in a corner of the landing. Herb grabbed it up and gave it a rolling start down the stairs. He flung his handkerchief after it, to make it appear that it had been dropped in flight, then darted into the third-floor corridor. Full tilt, he collided with a huge negro porter.

"Beg pardon, sah!" stammered the negro.

"Run! Fire! Dynamite!" panted Herb.

The negro's jaw dropped; his eyes popped. "What's dat, sah?"

Herb spun him face about. "The fire escape!" he gasped. "Make for the fire escape! Dynamite—in elevator! Hurry!"

The brass receptacle banged in the stairway. "Down the stairs—quick!" shrilled Krout's voice.

"My Gawd!" the negro choked. Like a charging steer he tore out the corridor and raced madly toward the fire escape at the far end.

Herb followed. The receptacle and handkerchief trick would not fool the detectives long; any second he knew they would back track after him. Just ahead he spied the servants' stairway and the wall box containing the floor light switches.

He raced for the box, jammed the levers to "Out." A second later Krout lurched into view behind, outlined against the light glow of the main stair shaft. The negro gained the fire door and ripped it open. In the darkness the detective's pistol spat twice.

HERB didn't linger. He was certain the negro had got safely to the fire escape outside; the shots would only increase his speed. Minutes would elapse in that rainy night before Krout would discover that he was chasing the wrong man. But then the hunt would be on again!

Calmly as he could, Herb slipped up the servants' stairway, back into the corridor of the fourth floor from where a moment before he had fled. The last place in the whole La Guardia the detectives would think of his hiding, would be in his own rooms of the James suite. The job was to get there without being seen or intercepted by any one.

Herb thought of switching out the lights as he had on the floor below, and making a run for it; but at once he discarded the plan—the act would betray where he was. He did not dare go back to the third floor and retrace his course because of Tyson. His one chance was a silent dash the length of the long corridor in the hope that he could get by his uncle's door without being seen by those who might have stayed behind in that half of the suite.

The corridor for the moment was empty. It was the La Guardia dinner hour; besides, the excitement was on the floor below. Herb gulped a deep breath and ran for it on his toes. He could see as he neared it that his uncle's door was open. He thought that he might make it by undetected—the chase seemed to have drawn every one away.

Then, not five yards away, Polly Thayer stepped into full view in the corridor. Simultaneously she saw him.

Herb went cold. Polly's lips parted, but she suppressed the scream that trembled there. An instant they faced one another, the girl's face frozen in doubt and fright. Herb could say nothing; others were probably in the suite and would hear. All he could do was pray that Polly would have a shred of faith left and keep silent, that she would understand he wanted to pass.

Suddenly he thought she might read his lips. "Let—me—by!" he mouthed without sound.

His heart almost stopped its beat as she hesitated. Then it pounded wildly. Polly stepped back, closed the door softly and beckoned him to pass. He dared to press her hand, to breathe in gratitude:

"You're a brick, Polly! I didn't kill Uncle Win! I'll prove that I didn't!"

"Hurry!" she bade in a frightened whisper. "Potter is inside!"

Noiselessly Herb slipped through his own door around the corner. A large clothes closet was in one of the bedrooms, filled with his clothes. He tiptoed into this, and to make it appear a most unlikely hiding place, left the closet door a few inches ajar. He concealed himself behind the tiers of overcoats and suits.

It was stuffy in the closet, black dark. Yet Herb's heart sang. Polly, by her aid, had signified her faith in him!

V.

AN hour passed. Herb's legs ached with standing and he sat on his haunches. Having eaten nothing since morning he was hungry and dry. Dripping water in one of the baths taunted his thirst. He could hear nothing else—the La Guardia boasted of its sound-proof apartments and no sounds penetrated the heavy door connecting the two parts of the James suite. Herb decided to take a chance and get a drink.

Halfway through the closet door he brought up tense, and in a flash darted back into his corner behind the clothes. Somebody was entering the rooms, unlocking the door from his uncle's side. He heard the click of the light switch, Gleason's voice:

"Young James occupied this wing of the suite. In fact, as I told you, Mr. Krout, it is a combination of two suites."

Krout's voice came in a grumble. "There's nothing here, I guess; but just to be safe I'll take a look around."

The two went on toward the living room and library. Presently they came back. Herb held his breath when the detective came into the bedroom and snapped the lights there. The closet door was jerked back. Krout grunted at sight of the surfeit of clothes.

"Suit for every day in the week," he sneered. "That's the way with these rich cubs. They're too damned pampered."

Herb clung to the wall. His lungs seemed ready to burst. To prolong the agony Tyson joined the pair. The house detective sank wearily onto the bed.

"Well, he ain't in the La Guardia," he said. "We've looked from roof to basement. Nobody saw him get out, but he must've got out somehow while we were chasing that porter."

Krout pawed among the clothes, so close that his hand brushed Herb's sleeve.

"Don't worry; he won't get far," he growled. "We've got men on the lookout at every road and station. And just to make sure, Tyson, I'm leaving Smith and Fuller to help you keep an eye out here.

"Watch that Thayer girl. Get a tap on her telephone. I think she cooked up that yarn about seeing Who's-it at the old man's door before young James got there. You can't trust a woman in love; I've half a hunch she was in on this."

"I don't know," murmured old Tyson. "Polly Thayer ain't the kind to——"

"You can't trust 'em!" snorted the other.

To Herb's vast relief the detective turned away from the closet. Herb's heart was thumping like a trip hammer. Momentarily he felt that the headquarters man would hear it. He went dizzy when one of the bones in his tired joints cracked protestingly.

"What was that?" demanded Krout. "Did you hear anything?"

They listened.

"Guess it was the water in the bathroom," Krout opined. "We might as well lock up and get out. I'm hungry. Later we'll have to try and figure out how——"

Their voices became indistinct as they extinguished the lights and filed out. Herb heard them lock the outer door. He drew his first real breath of fifteen minutes. He was nearly suffocated, and reeled out of the closet to the bed.

"Now," he muttered, "who in the deuce is this 'Who's-it' Polly saw?"

He realized that if he was to prove his innocence he would have to work fast. The La Guardia, the entire city, were un-

der surveillance. Any moment his term of freedom might be cut short.

It was imperative that somehow he see Polly, get from her the facts she had given Krout. First of all he wanted that long-denied drink, and food.

Cautiously he slipped from the bedroom, found a pocket flash light, and made a survey of the suite. His recent callers had left the door into his uncle's quarters unlocked, and he satisfied himself that nobody was lurking there. The study desk was still open, its neat array of papers undisturbed; the blood was still on the bathroom floor, but his uncle's body had been moved, probably to the morgue of an undertaker.

THINKING of the events of the day Herb could not help but shudder. Outside the rain had ceased; a full moon cast a ghostly radiance into the rooms, where a dismal silence once more had settled. With the disturbing vividness of reality he pictured the crime: the mysterious "Who's-it" gaining entrance to the apartment, the short swift struggle in which the feeble old banker was overpowered and dragged into the bathroom, his own pistol jammed mercilessly into his mouth, the shot! The sound-proof walls would have deadened all.

Every move must have been planned, no part of it left to chance and opportunity. Evidently no finger prints had been found, nothing to contradict a seeming suicide except the detail of the ejected shell, the one thing the murderer had overlooked. And there was the mystery of the door locked on the inside, and that of the killer's motive, to be explained.

"I'll have to see Polly," Herb decided.

Careful to shield his flash light from the windows, through which its rays might be seen by a watcher on the street, he made his way into the kitchen, completely equipped but seldom used during the occupancy of the suite by the Jameses. It had occurred to him that the apple and milk which his uncle had always taken before retiring might be in the ice box. He was infernally hungry.

But Herb did not get as far as opening the ice box to find out. The ice box was situated in the butler's pantry, and directly next it Herb's flash light fell upon the dumb-waiter shaft which extended from the La Guardia's basement to the topmost floor, opening upon each apartment en route.

The Thayer apartment was directly above the James suite. The dumb-waiter might prove the means of reaching Polly.

Herb looked at his watch. It was half after eight. There was a chance, a bare chance, that Polly might be alone; or if not alone, that her conversation might betray what Herb so eagerly desired to know —the identity of the man who had preceded him at his uncle's door. Foot by foot, so as to make no sound, he manipulated the rope which controlled the raising and lowering of the dumb-waiter.

"Here goes!" he breathed, and clambered onto the top of the carriage.

Slowly, though with little physical effort, Herb propelled his makeshift elevator upward. A slit of light gave him the location of the door which opened into the Thayer pantry. The door was slightly ajar. From deep in the apartment came the indistinct murmur of voices.

Intently Herb listened. No servant seemed to be near, so he pushed the door open wider. Still he could not make out what was being said, though he recognized the voices as those of Mr. and Mrs. Thayer and Polly, and random words convinced him they were talking of the crime.

Quickly he unlaced his shoes, removed them and placed them on the dumb-waiter. Then he crawled from the shaft into the pantry. Setting each step with meticulous care he passed on into the kitchen, into the dining room beyond.

Crouched behind the draperies of the living-room door he paused to listen again. The Thayers were in the library.

"If Mr. James lost money in a crooked stock," Polly was saying heatedly, "that man was back of it. Mr. James was about to expose everything through his lawyer, and he was killed to stop the exposure. I know Herb had nothing to do with it."

"But, Polly, dear," protested Mrs. Thayer, in so low a tone that Herb had to bend closer to hear, "if Herbert were innocent he would not have struck the detective and run. By running he virtually confessed that he did it."

Mr. Thayer's deeper voice chimed in impatiently: "You keep out of this, Polly. Young James killed his uncle, and that settles it. He has proved himself a downright scoundrel. I want to hear nothing more of your ridiculous suspicions.

"As to old James' losses through Rawn & Co.: the urge to gamble was in the blood, and he gambled with stocks. He was advised against what he did by Potter, but in spite of good advice he——"

Herb's every nerve was tingling. Forgetting caution in his amazement at what he heard, he did not realize that he had been pressing against a small taboret on the opposite side of the drapery which concealed him. The taboret tilted; a glass flower vase fell to the floor with a crash like a thousand thunders in Herb's ears. Mrs. Thayer screamed.

"Who's there?" gasped Mr. Thayer.

Herb waited for no more.

With lightning strides he darted back to the pantry and leaped to the sill of the dumb-waiter door. At what he saw he almost toppled into the shaft. During his absence another tenant had pulled the dumb-waiter away!

"Somebody is in here!" came Mr. Thayer's excited cry.

And Polly's: "There isn't, papa! It was the wind from that open window!"

"I'm going to look anyway," declared Thayer, and his steps advanced toward the kitchen.

Herb jumped for the carriage ropes. Hand over hand he started down, every second expecting Thayer's head to bob into the shaft above him. A shadow fell across the open door of the Thayer pantry. The blond head of Polly appeared, a bare instant and was withdrawn.

"I told you, papa," Herb heard, "it was the wind. Nobody is here."

The shaft door closed. With his feet Herb pawed for the door which would let him into his own suite. He was blessing the quick wit of Polly Thayer.

Winded, he squatted on the floor of his own pantry. The cold tiling reminded him that he was in his stocking feet, that —that he had left his shoes on the top of the dumb-waiter! If those shoes were discovered——

"Great Cæsar!" he groaned, and peered in vain up and down the dark shaft. The carriage was not in sight. He pulled at the controlling rope. It moved an inch, there was a jolt far below, and the rope stuck. The janitor had anchored the dumb-waiter in the basement!

Herb's head swam. Then he reasoned, after a moment, that after all the shoes might not be detected, and even should they be that the janitor might take for granted they were to be thrown out, and say nothing. Polly could be depended upon to quiet Mr. Thayer—and whatever the consequence, Herb had come into the possession of important facts.

It was plain, however, that he dared not remain much longer in the La Guardia. Those missing shoes, the suspicions of Mr. Thayer——

THE ice box prompted his hunger; his stomach demanded that milk and apple, so he ate. While doing so he tried to fasten his mind upon a course of action.

From Mr. Thayer he had gathered that his uncle had suffered losses, losses which old Winship had questioned. There was Polly's theory that the stock speculations had disguised fraud, which in turn had supplied the motive for the murder; and the name of Rawn & Co. had been mentioned.

Great ghosts! Herb pondered; had it been Sol Rawn whom Polly had seen in the corridor? Rawn was the head of the brokerage concern, an oily, secretive, whispering sort of a man, a man not in the best of repute. It wasn't like Winship James to have had dealings with Sol Rawn. And yet, Herb recalled, he had seen Rawn several times in Potter's office, presumably awaiting audience with the old banker.

But Rawn did not strike Herb as one with nerve enough to resort to a pistol. He was clever enough to have conceived the murder, but—well, he didn't fit in with its execution. Perhaps, at that, Polly was mistaken; maybe, as Krout had opined, she had deliberately fibbed. But no! That theory didn't fit Polly; she must have seen somebody.

A clock striking nine reminded Herb that time was flying. It was dark, black in the apartment now; clouds had blotted out the moon. Herb decided to make a try forthwith at solving the puzzle of the locked bathroom door. That was the particular kink in the mystery which suggested the brain of Rawn; if cleared up it might furnish him a lead.

The flash light Herb had left by the dumb-waiter. He found it at once and, thinking of his shoes, flashed the light to the bottom of the shaft. The carriage was there, but—a chill like trickling ice water ran down his spine—the shoes had vanished!

Still, the chance was left that the janitor would think nothing unusual of his find—a chance Herb had to take, for once he had left the La Guardia he knew it would be dangerous business to return. Shoeless, he repaired to the bathroom in which Winship James had been killed.

The door was of solid wood, without transom. Its bolt was of a kind common to hotels and many offices, strictly an inside bolt, steel incased in the door, and worked by a small egg-shaped knob of gun-metal finish.

No damage, Herb found, had been done the mechanism in the earlier forcing of the door; the bolt still shot into place with an amazing ease at a turn of the knob to the left. Down on his knees, aided by the flash light, he examined the little knob more closely. On its left, top surface was a scar, an almost imperceptible scar such as might have been cut by a small diamond file. The bolt itself was freshly oiled.

"By Jove!" Herb muttered, and ran his finger tips thoughtfully over the mark. The door key, in place on the inside, precluded the possibility that the knob might have been flipped over by a wire thrust through the keyhole; besides, the scar was a cut, not an accidental scratch.

It puzzled him. Long moments elapsed before he had an inkling of what purpose it could have served.

Then, suddenly, he had it. A stout thread might have been tied about the knob, run down and under the door, and, by a tug at the thread, the knob turned and the bolt thrown—by a person in the hall.

The tiny scar would have kept the thread from slipping off the smooth, rounded surface of the knob until sufficient pull had been exerted to turn it downward. Then the thread would have fallen off the inverted knob, and all evidence but the scar itself removed.

The simplicity, and yet the ingenuity of the idea, caused Herb to smile. Palpably the trick had been rehearsed; no doubt, on some other door in the city, was a similar bolt with a similar file scar on its egg-shaped knob. If he could find that scarred knob!

Herb never finished that thought. Somebody was coming into the apartment by the door in the corridor!

VI.

A SPLIT second Herb was in panic. So softly had the outer door been unlocked, so quietly had the unknown visitor slipped through, that he was in the hall of the suite itself before Herb's ears caught the warning, a sound like that of a coat sleeve brushed against wood.

His first wild guess was that Krout or Tyson had learned of the shoes on the dumb-waiter, had identified them somehow and were hoping to take him by surprise. He thanked his stars that his flash light had been out when the other entered.

In the bathroom Herb dared not move; even a loud breath might betray him. And the visitor, too, seemed to be listening—a full moment he listened and did not stir in his tracks. Then the ray of an electric torch darted like a searching arm out the

hall. Herb braced himself to spring; he wasn't going to be taken without a fight, not after he had gone so far.

But the light ray receded. A board creaked under a heavy foot in the living room. Came the rolling whisk of window shades being drawn down, and the faint squeak of a door hinge. A light button was snapped in the direction of the study, followed by a faint, hurried rustle of papers, the opening of a desk drawer.

Herb straightened from his cramped posture, edged from the bathroom into the hall. The visitor was alone, evidently thought himself alone in the apartment; it was probably Detective Krout come back to examine the contents of Winship James' private desk. But—Herb frowned—if Krout, why the detective's furtive air, his caution in prowling about with a flash light?

Some vague seventh sense warned Herb that all was not right, and he crept out the hall toward the living room with the disconcerting sensation that he might be walking into a trap. The utter darkness, while it shielded him, was an unknown quantity, therefore ominous. He kept close to the wall, uneasily guarding against attack from all sides. Instinct and curiosity demanded that he determine for a certainty who was in the study, while sober judgment warned him to hold back, to get out of that place of imminent danger.

Curiosity won. Herb gained the living room's arched doorway and ventured a step into the room itself. Twenty feet from him was the study door; a streak of light which framed it was evidence that it was all but closed and that the desk light was burning.

The man in the study, from the sounds, was making a hasty search through the papers of the desk, stopping at intervals of seconds to listen. Suddenly he uttered a guttural ejaculation and the light in the study was switched out. Once more the study door creaked and the bulk of a man was outlined against one of the living-room windows.

In consternation, Herb could only stare. Had some sound betrayed him, or had the other found the paper that he sought and was thus abruptly departing?

Plainly the man was not Krout; nor was he Tyson. That figure against the window was huge—more like the gambler Slattery's. Was Slattery leagued with Rawn? Was it he whom Polly had seen? If so, and this was Slattery——

There was a grimness, a threat in that figure, in the hunch of the head on stooped shoulders. The man advanced, fumbling with his flash light. Herb on trembling limbs backed into the hall.

His one chance, he thought wildly, was a quick, silent run for the library. Should that fail——

His blood froze. His hands, groping behind him, came into contact with the corridor door. That door was being opened! Through the aperture was thrust the muzzle of a pistol!

THE door itself, swinging to admit the newcomer, caused Herb to jump. He jumped aside instinctively as at the touch of a snake, jumped with a harsh, choked gasp! A pistol flash stabbed the darkness of the living room. The man who had just entered from the corridor crumpled up and pitched face down on the floor.

In an instant it happened; that instant Herb stood as stunned. The light streamed in from the corridor. In its path Herb saw Krout sprawled in a heap on the inner hall floor. The detective's head was bleeding; he did not stir.

Next Herb knew that other in the apartment, the big man who had shot, was gliding forward. His pistol was held ready. Though only an arm's length away, he seemingly did not see Herb, nor could Herb make out his face. The big man stooped swiftly over Krout, his back to Herb.

"Alive, eh?" he snarled. He raised his clubbed pistol.

Like an unseen bobcat from a limb, Herb sprang.

Down went the two. Krout groaned when they crashed into him. Herb's right

hand gripped the big man's pistol wrist, his left arm encircled the other's neck.

They rolled, the big man straining to free his pistol, Herb holding the weapon off and tightening his arm about that throat. Herb knew he was at grips with the murderer of his uncle; he knew that the fellow would kill.

In vain Herb tried to break the hold of that iron chin which crushed into his arm and pinioned it. The big man's strength seemed unnatural, his blood fired by a drug. With his free left fist he pummeled Herb's exposed face.

Suddenly he heaved up his bulk, blowing like a whale; he lurched back again, viciously, with all his weight. Herb's head banged the floor; the pistol was ripped from his grasp.

"Now!" snarled the big man, rising. "You'll——"

Raised upon his elbow, Krout shot.

In a blaze of sudden light Herb saw that, saw the blurred figures of men crowding into the room, and beside him, half pinning him down, the writhing body of his uncle's secretary, Wiley Potter! Tyson strode forward, his pistol leveled.

"Don't shoot!" groaned Potter. "I'm done! I—give up!"

"Potter!" gasped Herb.

Then the room went black.

HERB opened his eyes. He was upon his own bed, in his own half of the suite, and his ears buzzed like a hive of bees. Wet cloths swathed his head, on the back of which was a lump that seemed the size of an apple. Doctor Marion, the James family physician, stood by his bedside and near the door hovered House Detective Tyson, and Gleason, the La Guardia manager.

"What happened?" demanded Herb and tried to rise. He was still dizzy and confused, but excepting that bump on his head he appeared uninjured.

"Easy, Herbert," cautioned Doctor Marion. "You got a bad blow and it knocked you out a while. Drink this and be quiet. Tyson can tell you all about things in the morning."

Herb pushed aside the glass of medicine which Doctor Marion offered. He clenched his teeth and sat up. He remembered now—the encounter in the dark, the shooting, that blow which had put him out.

"What happened?" he insisted again. "Where's Krout—and Mr. Potter?"

Doctor Marion shrugged resignedly. "Since he must know, Tyson, I suppose you had better tell him the high spots. It will help clear his head and then maybe he will sleep." The doctor turned to Herb. "We're proud of you, my boy. You did a real night's work."

Old Tyson came forward, fumbling his hat. "All charges have been withdrawn against you, Mr. James. Potter confessed before he died. He killed your uncle. An' Mr. Krout wants to thank you for savin' his life."

"So it *was* Potter!" Herb ejaculated. "And he is dead?"

"Dead, which is no more than his deserts," replied old Tyson. "He killed your uncle. He'd've killed you and Krout too if he could've. He'd been taking dope, sir, for five or six years. Evidence of that was in records in your uncle's desk—hospital reports an' the like which showed old Mr. James had tried to have him cured.

"When we found that your uncle had been murdered, sir, that he hadn't killed himself like Potter had tried to make it appear, Potter got afraid that them records in the desk might turn suspicion on him. He came in to-night to get 'em when he thought the apartment was empty."

"And it was your shoes, my boy," interjected Doctor Marion, "that probably saved you from Potter."

"My shoes?" echoed Herb vaguely.

"Yep," Tyson went on. "The janitor found 'em on top of the dumb-waiter and notified us. Krout, bein' a pretty sharp observer, recognized the shoes as yourn and concluded you must be hidin' in the apartment. He came up to get you, and Potter got him—almost."

"Then Krout is all right?"

"He will be in a week or two," answered

the doctor. "Potter's bullet pierced his shoulder, a painful but not serious wound. The detective is mighty grateful to you, Herbert."

"And I to him," said Herb heartily. He frowned in thought, piecing together the incidents of the hectic evening. The Thayers, he recalled, had said something about stocks; and why had Potter murdered his Uncle Winship?

Herb put his questions to old Tyson.

"Your uncle trusted Potter," the house detective explained. "He believed Potter was cured of the dope habit, an' for a year or more—he not bein' well—he let Potter run his affairs for him. Potter entered stock orders with Rawn & Co. in your uncle's name. Rawn, who was in on the swindle, 'bucketed' the orders.

"The scheme was for Potter to rob old Mr. James an' account for the shortage by pointing to the Rawn books, which would've made it look as if your uncle had lost in speculation. Of course, Rawn himself was to disappear until things blew over—which he did."

"I see," and Herb nodded. "The Rawn transactions, of which my uncle knew nothing, were nevertheless down on Rawn's books, but put in my uncle's name."

"That's it, Mr. James, exactly; but a day or two ago your uncle found out that Potter was dealing with Rawn & Co. and became suspicious. He went to his lawyer for advice about it, and Potter discovered this.

"Then, to prevent exposure, Potter killed your uncle in a way he felt sure would bring a verdict of suicide, all of which fitted into the original plot. Don't you see, sir, it'd be perfectly logical for your uncle to take his life because of his supposed stock losses. At that, Rawn an' Potter would've got away with it, likely, if Potter hadn't forgot that an automatic pistol throws its shell."

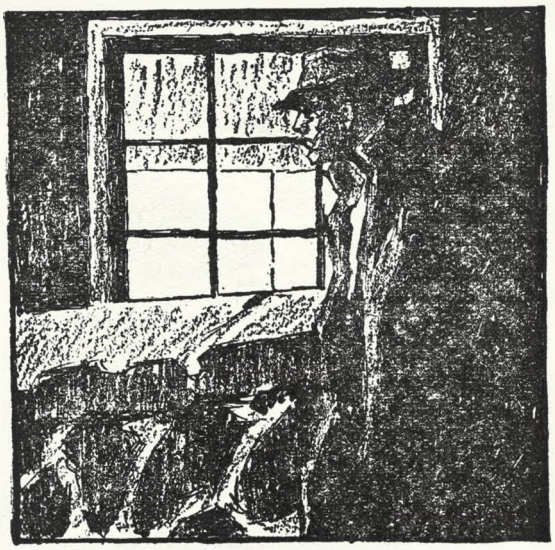
"I'll be switched!" exclaimed Herb.

It was Potter then, he pondered, whom Polly had seen in the corridor; Potter was the mysterious "Who's-it" whom Polly had suspected all along. Suddenly, at the thought of Polly's loyalty, he glowed: she had never lost faith in him, she had fought for him when he had needed her. As for himself——

Herb's estimate of himself began to dwindle, to shrink. There was no use longer to dodge facts: he had been a cad in the way he had treated Polly, a cad in the way he had deceived his dead uncle. Something inside of him began to hurt, to hurt with a pain sharper by far than the pain in the back of his head.

"Doctor Marion," he said huskily, "would you and Mr. Tyson mind stepping from the room a moment? I—I'd like to telephone Miss Thayer."

CHECKING up claims for workmen's compensation for injuries doesn't at first glance seem an especially cheerful sort of job, but employees of the New York State Labor Department who handle these applications get a laugh out of them now and then. For example, there was this hard-luck story: "I was putting waste in bag with feet and bag tore away from part that it was fastened to in the floor, when the bag was three quarters full, bag gave way and went from main floor to cellar. I was in the bag." Another man, who wanted to be accurate, wrote: "Fell seventeen feet, no inches, approximately." Still another, in describing the extent of his injuries, surprised his readers by informing them that "Cap came off my knee and let the water run out." But perhaps the oddest accident of all befell the New York longshoreman who "fell off the bull works."



Plotluck

By Theodore Seixas Solomons

Author of "H'almar the Horse," "The Shoe Clue," Etc.

If you haven't what you need, some one else may have. Two short story writers discover the truth.

AS he looked over the garden wall and gazed into the well-lit study, Fletcher Barrett, hungry, shivering, began to mutter—a thing he had never done before his mind fell prey to the despair of the down-and-outer.

"Observe him at his desk, his surroundings sumptuous!" Even in soliloquy Barrett's English was irreproachable. "The fat, sleek rascal! Books, papers, swivel-chair—everything. Ah, and leisure—confound him!"

Not that Barrett knew the occupant of the study who, in a velvet smoking jacket, his hair immaculate, seemed somewhat under thirty. The shabby man in the tattered overcoat standing in the side street obviously was venting his spleen against a type, or a class, not an individual. He might have been a Red—if he were not just then so blue!

Small wonder, for the early evening of that December night was perishing cold. Sleet lay on the pavement. Fletcher Barrett stood like a crane, on one foot. Only he changed feet frequently.

He had been a good-natured fellow, and his scowling outburst brought some of this back to him now. "Rather nice face, however—come to think of it," he hastened to amend. And with this thought a bold project entered his mind, hunger born.

"Nobody with him, and an outside entrance to his study. Dash him, he ought to!"

He considered his approach to the little side entrance. He might climb over the wall at the rear end, or go around to the front of the house on the brilliantly lighted avenue and boldly enter the garden instead of mounting the broad, stone steps to the front door.

He decided upon the former route, retreated down the dim side street to the back of the premises and painfully vaulted the wall, dropping into the soft earth of a

flower bed on the inside. He walked quickly to the side entrance, noiselessly ascended to the door—and paused.

If he knocked, the sleek-haired young man within would naturally come to the door, open it, and subject his visitor to a careful inspection. Fatal! On the other hand, should the door be unlocked, Barrett might enter, approach, speak—and his chance was better for the loan he proposed to suggest. It was wretched form, of course, but——

He turned the knob, the door opened, he stepped within and closed the door as he glanced past many bookshelves and a long, magazine-littered center table to the desk at the room's end. The swivel chair was vacant! Evidently the young man had decided to leave at the very time when Barrett had decided to enter.

The intruder shrugged his shoulders indifferently. The young man had gone for a drink, perhaps, or to answer some sort of summons, and would probably return shortly. In the meantime—— "Gracious, this is comfortable!" muttered Fletcher Barrett, as he turned his back to the ruddy glow of an open hearth.

Waiting, he observed that the appointments of the library were sumptuous indeed. Not only was it a perfect workroom for an intellectual, but a delight to the eye of an artist, being adorned with many rare and beautiful objects. The rug must have cost—Barrett placed the tips of four thin fingers to his forehead at the thought.

THE minutes passed. He could hear no sound. Was the man coming back? It was extremely doubtful. Temptation assailed the hungry, desperate man. He would surely be taken for a burglar, anyhow. Why not have the game—a little, at least; for a few meals, a pair of whole shoes—as well as the name?

Temporizing, he approached the desk, looked it over—papers, writings, cigarette ends innumerable in a large receptacle, boxes of unsmoked ones close at hand. On the right an immense dictionary on a stand of its own; on the left a little carved table.

Gingerly, his heart beating, Barrett opened a drawer. Papers, documents—whatever they were. He hesitated, loath to go on with this, and glanced again at the objects upon the desk. Conveniently placed were several books between bookends of costly design. A thesaurus, a book of quotations, something on photo plays and—Barrett's eyes dilated—"How to Write Salable Fiction."

Footsteps in a hallway leading to the study froze the intruder with horror just as his brow had darkened at the sight of a book that strongly suggested the occupant's vocation—or avocation.

"Curse him!" Barrett muttered—but whether for coming back at an inopportune moment or for writing fiction, who could say? The mood was a decisive one, however. He jerked out the contents of the drawer, thrust them into his overcoat pockets and fled the study precipitately, goaded by fear of detection.

A moment he crouched in the shadows in the rear of the garden. Then he sprang over the wall and walked rapidly down the side street, turning into Fourth Avenue and joining the throng—safe!

A dozen blocks south, and he halted in front of a cheap coffee stand. He took off his hat and felt in its lining for a dime hidden there against a time of dire emergency. This was the time! Excitement and self-disgust had united with the cravings of hunger to make him sick with weakness. Coffee was what he wanted—two cups of it, if that could be arranged. He entered and put his proposition to the greasy counterman who presided—no doughnuts or other food accompaniment to a cup of coffee, but another cup, instead.

He won his point, took the first cup of the beverage—it was just *that* rather than coffee—in much-restrained sips, and avidly gulped the second. Then he resumed his long way down, across, and down again to his lodgings, and up and up to the small cubical space that was his room.

He lighted the gas, bolted the door—though it was only conscience that created

the necessity—and withdrew the spoils of his first burglarious raid from the overcoat pockets. He did not remove the overcoat. For two weeks he had not removed it, indoors, until ready to go to bed.

Sitting down at a small wooden table, he pawed over the loot, hoping, yet fearing, to find valuables. These emotions were defeated—papers, only papers, and of a strictly non-negotiable kind. Some letters, some copied-out quotations, many notes—and a manuscript of a story, neatly typewritten, the first few lines showing corrections.

Fletcher Barrett threw back his frowzy head and laughed until his sides ached. "Not," he gurgled, "grand larceny, at least. Petty, only. Exceedingly petty, or I miss my guess!"

Contemptuously he felt the thickness of the clipped manuscript. "Six or seven thousand words of it, at least," he decided. "Words, words!" He buried his face in his hands.

Again he laughed—raucously, this time, with a very ringing of derision. "Imagine it! My first stooping to crime. And *this!*"

He seized the thing, ready to fling it on the floor. He remembered how often in the past, when he read manuscript for a stipend, he had refrained from flinging them into a waste-paper basket—he had such a thing, then—only because the writers, poor fools, valued them. But, as he held the absurd thing aloft, he suddenly remembered the book—*his* book—"How to Write Salable Fiction," and he laughed again and put the manuscript on the table in front of him.

"I wonder," he mused, "whether it would be possible to detect the influence of this masterpiece of mine." Iodine, or aniline or something of that sort, he remembered, would color appreciably a million, or ten or twenty million times its volume of water—or some other fluid. Could it be possible that in these six or eight thousand words his own "Hows" had produced appreciable coloration?

He doubted it. He knew that during three years of effort to apply those "Hows," he himself had not been able to impress any editor of standing with any such conviction. But he was a theorist, alas! He had form, technique, a skill in mere words. He was substanceless, empty. He was, himself, no living proof of the uselessness of his book. This other chap, whose den he had burglarized, might——

He began to read the manuscript, and knew by his wanting his pipe that he intended to read on. Not that the fellow could write—not in the least. He wrote grammatically—that was all. But something was going to happen. You knew that right from the beginning. Even the rambling start could not conceal the fact that an interesting man was going to meet an interesting situation and do something strange, gripping.

"By Jove!" said the mutterer. "What's this, anyhow?

He read on, starting to turn a page before he reached the bottom of it. His pipe went out, but he did not know it. Feelingly, he cursed the writer for thwarting, by his clumsiness and circumlocution, the desire, indeed the very lust of the reader, to get on—and on—and find out what was to be next in this most singular, most absorbing plot.

BARRETT felt like one wading through a wheat bin for gold pieces scattered through it. No, not wheat—chaff. But the gold! It was worth the wading.

Toward the end he had a vague sense that what he was really doing was eliminating and reconstructing as he read—thrusting aside the noxious phrases and substituting pith and point and felicity, weaving a suitable vehicle for the splendid thing that the writer—calling him a writer!—had conceived.

And then the end—the marvelous end! He did not anticipate it. How could he—or any one? And yet it was the *only* ending—logical, inevitable, just as it was unpredictable and dumfounding.

"Gosh!" almost shouted Fletcher Barrett. He sat back in his rickety chair, enjoying the miraculous story that had been

buried in the mess—enjoying it too much, as yet, for thought of anything else.

When he came to, as it were, his first reaction was against himself.

"If," he averred solemnly, "'The Barrett Hows' are in the least responsible for the annihilation of this great story my sleek young plutocrat has written, I ought to be burned in effigy by every editorial office in the country."

It was clear, however, that even if his book had not depraved this piece of fiction, it certainly had not leavened it; and Barrett decided that the colorative power of "The Barrett Hows," as his college classes had called it, was something well under that of aniline or iodine—or whatever the substance was.

The amateur burglar had slept part of the day—in lieu of dining. He was anything but sleepy. Zeal—the old zeal for this work that he had thought flickered out long ago—seized him. He got out paper, found an old-fashioned pen—his fountain pen had been pawned a week before—and attacked the manuscript, recasting it as he proceeded.

It was a labor of love. He had no thought of doing anything with the pilfered piece of property practically—which is our common term for remuneratively. It was just that here was this fairy princess of a plot, imprisoned in the formless monstrosity that the young man had thought to be a story, crying to Barrett to be let out that she might shine upon him effulgently.

Food? What was food? Warmth? Who needed it? Or, rather, this princess was both food and warmth to the artist, the visionary, the ex-medallist of belles-lettres, sunk through an obstinate impracticality to the bottom of the pit of poverty and want.

He was, or had been, a genius, many had said, marveling at his elegance, his style, his superficial craftsmanship. No editor had said it, however; for he could not plot. He had no ingenuity, no fancy. He could shape, he could not create.

What the fiction editors had said—in regretful notes, for he rarely had received a straight rejection slip—was that it seemed too bad to waste so exceptional a talent for expression upon plot material that was not worth being expressed! He might have done hack work—but not Fletcher Barrett! He much preferred dishwashing. He was not a good dishwasher, however. Any active young negro could wash dishes all around him.

Here was a plot that was a superpippin! To it Fletcher Barrett applied all of his old cunning and much that was new, sprung by magic into being at the siren call of the enchanted princess. He toiled, he sweated—but whistled at the toil.

Day dawned, and still he toiled—lovingly, over the ending, the marvelous, undreamed-of ending, a fit exemplar for a new "Hows," or a new "How," rather—"How to End a Story!" With the last words penned, he rose, reeled to his bed, tucked himself under the blankets and fell asleep.

Shortly after noon, he arose and sought a friend only less needy than himself, a young Italian who was too much a musician to make a good dishwasher. With him, now that he felt himself possessed of a potential asset—for practicality had come with sleep and the reassertion of the hunger pangs—he was willing to dine. He refused dessert, out of consideration for his friend's purse, but took a second cup of coffee. Then he returned to his lodging and reread the story.

IT was excellent—the telling, that is. The story itself defied adjectives, of course. And Barrett now, for the first time, glanced at the name and address typed at the head of the first page and at the bottom of the last. The address was that of the house he had burglarized. The author's name was Waldo Franklin Edgeworth.

It was only at this moment that Fletcher Barrett became conscious of the nature and gravity of the dilemma in which his theft had placed him. How could he publish the story? There was no question of its acceptability to any one of a dozen editors of America's greatest magazines.

But under what name could it be published?

Hardly a phrase remained of the original story, but Waldo Franklin Edgeworth would recognize the tale as his own the moment his eyes fell upon it. It was likely that he would not read the magazine in which it might appear, but some friend would.

Barrett knew these amateur writers. They possessed, each of them, a comfortable complement of victims to whom they read their work. No, it was a cinch that sooner or later—probably sooner—the sleek-haired aspirant for literary honors would confront the theft, or the plagiarism, to put it more mildly.

Then what? Why, recourse to the editor, naturally. And the editor would look up Mr. Fletcher Barrett—or have a minion of the law attend to it!

Besides, Fletcher Barrett already had bitterly repented his one lapse from honesty. He had been the victim, in a sense, of a peculiarly malign series of circumstances—a concatenation of them he might have called it but for his passion for the simple words of the true stylist. Never again! But he could as easily have vaulted the Woolworth Tower from the bottom of a coal hole in the sidewalk as renounced the chance to spring that wonderful piece of fiction upon the editorial and reading public.

He *must* publish it, but he could not take the money—not all of it, certainly. Nor the credit. Or, again, not all of it.

Yet to divide either with the rightful owner of the original tale seemed equally impossible. His very hair tangled at the complications the idea suggested.

He evolved, finally, what he felt to be the only solution of the problem. He would send the story to the very high-class and liberally paying magazine, which he knew it fitted, in the name of the original writer—Waldo Edgeworth. But he would write the accompanying letter as though he were an agent of Edgeworth. Of course he would use a fictitious name and an evasive address.

Edgeworth should have the fame. He, Barrett, should have the money. It was more than a fifty-fifty division, for Barrett was in dire need of both money and fame, while Edgeworth, obviously, was only in need of fame. He was quite sure that if he were to put the question to that wealthy young dilettante, Edgeworth would give up twice or thrice the price that any magazine would pay, for the sake of securing for himself the authorship of the story.

He borrowed a typewriter and next day sent the story to the magazine he had selected. His note named, in curt politeness, a specific price for the manuscript—seven hundred and fifty dollars. He signed himself as James L. Marsh, and gave the address of his young Italian friend.

Fletcher Barrett was an excellent judge of literary values and knew it. He was quite sure of what would happen.

THE reason why Waldo Edgeworth left his study for fifteen minutes, during which an amateur burglar occupied it, was that his sister, Millie, wanted him to see how she and Elaine looked before the two of them and two young men left the house to attend a wedding party.

Elaine was their third cousin who lived with them when she was not living with her maiden aunt or doing stunts around the world. Elaine *did* things, and did not like people who did not, or could not—except Waldo. Of course she liked Waldo. In the first place it was the natural thing to like Waldo, for he was not only harmless but charming. In the next place—well, she liked him anyhow.

But there was a fly in the ointment of her marked esteem. He did not *do* things. He was not inclined to stunts, though he traveled, retiredly, as it were. Elaine had not the slightest objection to literature, if one was minded that way. Provided one *did* something in it.

Waldo was quite sure that his sane and efficient management of the Edgeworth properties was warrant enough for Elaine to risk marrying him, and that whether he became a celebrity in current literature or not, marry him she would, eventually, provided some other man did not

heave-to in the offing of the young lady's regard with a bunch of stunts to his credit. It was that risky it kept Waldo plugging away at his fiction.

He knew his weakness—just as Fletcher Barrett knew his. Only Fletcher Barrett had not needed to be told that he had nothing to offer in the way of plots. But Waldo Edgeworth would have imagined that his form and style were excellent, his technique faultless, and only his plots ridiculous and futile if sundry amiable editors had not explained to him, by letter and in personal talks, that his difficulties were the other way round.

So, more to please them than because he thought they were right, he studied and studied and studied books on the art of the thing. Barrett's had had its turn—at and just prior to the date of the burglary. Waldo agreed with everything Barrett, and his numerous predecessors between the book-ends on the desk, had said about the art. Who could disagree with them? It was all so plain!

Waldo Franklin Edgeworth returned to his "work" in fifteen minutes, after assuring both girls that their regalia was a knock-out. He was somewhat knocked out himself when he found his study door ajar and a drawer of his desk open—and rifled.

He could not remember what was in the drawer, exactly. He had that in common with the literary artist, that he was no martinet about having things in their places and just so. But he had intended, in a few minutes, to go on with the final revision of "The Loved and Lost," and he had a vague impression that he had thrust the manuscript in that drawer.

Frantically, he made search of the other drawers and found he was right. The fool burglar, surprised by his return, had had time only to clean out that drawer, leaving real valuables—that is, things valuable to the burglar—elsewhere in the desk.

The reason why Waldo would have preferred the loss of these other things—yes, and the mahogany desk and the rug and the walls and ceiling of the room, also—to the loss of the manuscript was because, while he did not care for the plot so much, he believed that now, at last; he had done a good piece of writing—form, structure, unity, suspense, climax—the whole complement of qualities necessary to dress up a story to go out and win an editor. He was torrid!

His first impulse was to ring up the police. Indeed, he had already grasped the desk phone and fingered the receiver when he reflected that if the culprit were found—though that was unlikely—a policeman, a desk sergeant, an inspector, and a dozen reporters would finger "The Loved and Lost," and——

Heavens! "The Loved and Lost!" That's what they would say of it. It was Mr. Waldo Franklin Edgeworth's loved-and-last attempt at a short story. They might even go so far as to recall that it is the nondescript cur that the small boy loves and weeps for—when it is lost—and not the thoroughbred. He gritted his teeth and resolved to forget it—and especially to say nothing of the occurrence either to his mother or his sister or Elaine.

ONCE or twice, during the next few months, he attempted to rewrite from memory the story of "The Loved and Lost." But each time he threw the first pages into his wastebasket, where, he supposed—or in some equivalent of one—the burglar, too, had thrown the story. Then, one day, while he was "working" on a novelette, in upon him burst Millie.

Her hands were behind her. On her face was a stern expression falsified by twittering eyes.

"You're a *splendid* specimen!" she began caustically. "Think you're clever, don't you? Mean, contemptible thing!"

Waldo carefully drew two small, upright, parallel lines on the sheet before him, indicating that his villain had ceased hissing, and turned a calm face upon his irate sister.

"Rather scathing of you, Miss Edgeworth. What's it all about?"

"Innocent! What I want to know is how long you intended keeping it from the family?"

"Well," answered Waldo consideringly, "murder will out, you know. Why confess until it *is* out? Eh, may I ask again what it is you have up your sleeve, or rather, I should say, behind your back?"

"This!" she almost shouted at him, waving aloft the current issue of one of *the* magazines. "If Elaine hadn't looked it over idly in a hotel lobby this morning—and seen your name—mother and I would have had the humiliation of being rung up by some friend or other and made to seem fools!"

Millie could maintain her dignity no longer. "Oh, *Waldo,* you dear, sweet thing!"

Waldo Franklin Edgeworth, uninterested in stunts, was nevertheless a sport. The magic of Elaine's name on his sister's lips galvanized him. He was stunned, bewildered—but self-possessed. One of his comrades had a favorite expression. Waldo had made a note of it, for fictional use, only. But he remembered it now—and acted on it: "When in doubt, keep your trap closed!"

"Lemme see, sis," he requested casually, though his brain reeled.

He tried to handle the infernal thing with unshaking hands. On the first page of magazine matter—page one sixty-five of the "book"—was the feature story, "By Waldo Franklin Edgeworth." The story was called "The Painted Fang!"

He had glanced over the first half column before he saw that "The Loved and Lost" was found. It seemed to have suffered a stroke of amnesia, but this was it. Waldo turned away, to lay the magazine down on his desk—and hide his face while he did some lightning brain work.

"As I said, murder will out," he remarked to his sister.

"Give it to me!" she shrieked. "I want to show it to mother. None of us have read it, yet—even Elaine hasn't more than glanced over it." She looked up at him proudly. "Well, you *might* let me kiss you!"

Waldo obligingly turned his cheek. He felt as if it were "the other one!" Then Millie escorted him—half dragging the modest fellow—into the hallway and upstairs.

His explanation was something like this: "Well, you know, I've emitted quite a bit of smoke, but no fire. You've all conceded that I had some promise, but mighty little performance. At least that's what you were too kind—too infernally kind—to say right out. I got rather tired of showing you encouraging letters. Come now, wasn't this the best way?"

"Very likely," replied Elaine, speaking for herself. "Congratulations, of course."

His mother and sister went part of the way with her. But they stopped at the acceptance. When the story was accepted it was sheer cruelty of him not to tell them—not to have shown them the check—the real money that was said to be the test, always. And, by the way, what *was* the check?

The check, explained Waldo—well, you know, that depended on the magazine, the repute of the author—many things. Waldo discoursed on this point until his mother, who was an exceedingly sympathetic woman, intimated that it *was* rather hard on a young writer to force him to divulge the amount of a first check; whereupon Waldo smiled wryly and assured them that while he had reasons, of dignity and otherwise, for not caring to mention the precise sum, he would at least say that the amount of it would probably surprise them when he told them what it was—some day.

"All I want to know is," said Elaine, "that you didn't pay *them* anything, or at least, let them have it for nothing. You didn't, did you, Waldo?"

"I certainly did *not,"* was the indignant reply. And this *most* embarrassing feature of the conversation disposed of, comments and felicitations were general.

WALDO EDGEWORTH, escaping at last, flew out of the house to the news stand, returning presently—by his private study entrance—with a copy of "The Painted Fang." He had the rest of the magazine with it, of course, but he was not interested in anything but *his* story—

except its illustrations. These were excellent, of course.

He read it, at first with pain. The plot was there, with practically no change. But the handling of the plot—the writing of the story—well, he felt strongly the foreign note.

Later on he got used to this foreign note and rather liked it.

He exhaled a long breath, lit a cigarette and cogitated. He felt like a castaway who had had a crown thrust upon him by a bunch of cannibals. It was up to him to go on playing the part or be eaten alive. *Could* he go on playing it? Could he deliver the goods—more goods?

The genesis of this luck, or ill luck, whichever it was to prove, was plain to him. The burglar had shown the manuscript to some comparatively intelligent friend who had told him what it was and suggested that he take it to a professional and get his advice.

Of course the burglar, when he went to the professional, had told him—no, no, it must have been the intelligent friend who went on behalf of the burglar. And he told the professional that here was a story he had written—palming himself off on the writer as Waldo Franklin Edgeworth, of course—and would the professional kindly look it over and say what to do with it.

The writer, or some other writer, who knew the trick of the entrée—the selling technique—rewrote the story, sold it, and presumably divvied up with the burglar or his friend.

It was plainly a case for letting sleeping dogs lie. The burglar or his friend would never go back to that writer again, and the magazine editor knew, professionally, only Waldo Franklin Edgeworth. He must have thought mighty well of the revamped work or he wouldn't have featured it.

Waldo threw out his chest. Here was a good beginning—somewhat meretricious, but distinctly encouraging. And, whether he wanted to or not, he'd have to take advantage of this delectable burglar's adventure in literature, and come along with another story—and another. It was do or die!

He looked up old notes of the story and managed to piece out a fairly accurate redraft of it. He then made an intensive comparative study of the two. It was clearly up to him to eat humble pie on the question of style and form. The professional writer's version had sold, and sold well. *His*, he knew, would have elicited the melancholy tribute of a rejection slip.

He thought he had got the combination when he finished this exhaustive analysis. And he proceeded to apply what he had learned in the rewriting of his most promising story. He took great pains with it, even coming as near as he dared to plagiarizing upon himself, as it were.

He sent out the story to the same magazine and walked his study floor for six days. Then the story came back—with labored apologies and regrets. The editor would be delighted to see some *recent* work of Mr. Edgeworth's!

Waldo cursed feelingly, thrust out his jaw and tackled another. But the first he sent out again to another magazine, just to see what would happen. What happened was a rejection slip.

The new story, worked over and over, went out to the magazine that had published gladly "The Painted Fang." It came back with more regrets. But the letter was shorter this time and a trifle more formal.

They were asking him—in the house, the three women—how he was getting on with his newer work. And he had told them, with cheerful mendacity, that things were going swimmingly. Any more acceptances? Oh, no. You see it doesn't do to try a story at all—he'd found that out—until it was *right!* They approved this course. "The Painted Fang" had been *right.*

WALDO saw the handwriting on the wall. On the wall of the royal cannibal hut! So he decided to take his pride in his hands—and advertise.

The text of his "personal" was guarded.

"Would the writer who lately revised a story for an amateur very successfully kindly communicate with advertiser and thereby learn something greatly to his advantage?"

He would have liked to be more specific. But Elaine and others idled over newspapers as well as magazines in hotel lobbies and elsewhere. To make up for the indefiniteness of the ad, however, he published it in every paper in Greater New York as a standing advertisement—until withdrawn.

It took two weeks. Then he received an answer through the roundabout means he had devised for the purpose. The writer, signing himself James L. Marsh, confessed that he had been the poor instrument through which Mr. Edgeworth's splendid piece of fiction had been published. He would await with interest anything further that Mr. Edgeworth cared to suggest in the matter.

Mr. Edgeworth replied that he knew just what he meant—of course. He understood that Mr. Marsh had been imposed upon by some one who had pretended to be Waldo Franklin Edgeworth. This other person, who had stolen his work, might go to Hades for all Edgeworth cared. Forget him! Mr. Edgeworth would be pleased to see Mr. Marsh at the earliest possible moment.

Marsh rang him up and made an appointment. He agreed to call on Waldo in half an hour. That would be ten o'clock in the morning. His mother and the girls were out.

It was a rather different-looking man—thanks to the potentialities of seven hundred and fifty dollars—whom Waldo ushered into his sanctum than the tattered, shivering figure that had entered it, unushered and without invitation, some months before.

Fletcher Barrett listened to his host with interest. The latter's proposition was a frank one.

"I won't say what *I* think, Mr. Marsh," he began. "But I'll say that certain magazine editors take the position that my work lacks the—eh, technical finish, the peculiar requirements as to form and style, that they require. They usually say they like the plot."

"Gosh! I should think they would," interjected the visitor.

"I will say that your style seems eminently suited to—eh, their needs. How are you as a plotter?"

"Rotten," replied "Mr. Marsh" concisely. It was only on the subject of his plotting that he ever condescended to the use of slang.

"Let's collaborate!" suggested Waldo without further preface. "While I still need you, you may have *all* the money, since you, presumably, sell in spite of your—eh, rotten plots." Seeing his visitor's hesitation—and mistaking its cause—he added:

"Money, you see, is not the prime object; and if you have any counter proposition to make as to compensation, I'll consent to it in advance. The fact is I have a—there is a young lady in whom I am much interested who rather looks to me to sell more stories. I have not bothered her with the details of the sale of 'The Loved and Lost'—pardon me, I mean 'The Painted Fang.' Be a sport and help me out."

BARRETT liked the young man tremendously. He felt safe; yet shame lent caution to his reply.

"The pecuniary feature of your offer is entirely satisfactory. Too generous, in fact. I'm thinking of the burglar."

"Don't," requested Edgeworth, waving a generous hand. "Except that if you ever meet him again tell him I want to see him. I want to shake hands with him and present him with a bottle of very fine old port."

"I don't drink, myself," returned Barrett, "but I'd be glad to shake hands with you—if you're still willing!"

"You! You're a—you took that story? And you rewrote it?"

"Both," confessed Fletcher Barrett, and he told him the tale. He added, smiling bitterly, that he had been called a good fiction-writing coach both before and

since his instructorship days in a great university.

"Do you smoke?" asked Edgeworth, proffering him a cigar. "When do we start?"

"Whenever you have a plot?"

"I've invented dozens of them."

"That's good. I'm responsible for only one!"

"We'll use it," offered Waldo graciously.

"We will *not!*" asserted Barrett with profound conviction. "If we did you'd have to look for another girl!"

NEVER LOAN YOUR GUN

By N. Howard Thorp

A PUNCHER came in from a line camp,
  Full thirty-five miles away:
Been held up by a man who'd taken his horse,
  And he'd hoofed it in, in a day:
Thirty-five miles for a puncher,
  A-walking in high-heel boots!
Said he cussed the holdup, every step that he took
  And I guess that he told the truth.

Said he'd left his camp, headed in for the ranch,
  And he hadn't gone over a mile,
When he met with a man who'd been walking ahead,
  Who greeted him with a smile;
"'Good morning,' said he, 'it's a mighty fine day;
  You're a-riding a bang-up hoss;
You've a crackajack saddle and bran'-new gun,
  Now what might have been its cost?'

"So I handed it to him that he might see:
  'Twas a Bisley Colt's thirty-eight,
When he poked my own gun into my ribs
  And says he, 'Now, kid, vacate;
I'll borrow your outfit a little while
  For I've pressin' business to-day.'
As he lit in the saddle and struck a high lope
  Seems to me that I heard him say:

"'I'm a toad when I walk, I'm a fox when I ride:
  I'm hard to catch when I run:
When you've been through the mill, and I'm sure that you will,
  Never loan a plumb stranger your gun.
Hit the trail, hit it straight: I can see by your gait
  That you'll not be long on the way;
Say you met "Texas Ben" who's jest broke from the pen
  Up North at old Santa Fe.'"

A Chat With You

THE question of serials as opposed to long complete novels is still cropping up in our correspondence. Stephen G. Broadwell has this to say:

"Once, when I thought that the existence of the complete novel in THE POPULAR was threatened, I wrote you arguing not only for the continuance but the strengthening of this feature. Now I am writing to you regarding the serials.

"It is a matter of wonderment to me why certain magazine readers profess an aversion to serials. Would they refuse to read a book running four or five hundred pages? To my mind a good story that increases in, or even sustains, interest can never be too long. Were you to discontinue printing serials by what other method could you offer the very long novels? Assuredly not in complete novel form unless the stories were slashed of good material.

"The longest complete novels THE POPULAR has ever given us ran something over a hundred magazine pages. Short stories offer fifteen to twenty minutes of reading matter when one's time is limited and thus they earn a place in the magazine. But how many readers can recall the names of past short stories while forgetting such vivid serials as "The House of the Whispering Pines," one hundred and twenty-nine pages; "813," one hundred and seventy-nine pages; "The Penfold Adventure," one hundred and fifty pages; "The Tempting of Tavernake," one hundred and forty-three pages——"

But here we will stop quoting from the letter for a moment. Mr. Broadwell goes on and gives the lengths of half a dozen more extra-long serials. And we must say for him that he is correct in every instance. He knows a lot about THE POPULAR and what has gone into it in the past. It is a pleasure to us to think that he has honored the magazine with such a careful study and that he remembers it so well.

* * * *

CAN any reader in fairness," continues Mr. Broadwell, "ask that such stories be discontinued or be weakened by paring them down to sixty or eighty pages and running them as complete novels? In the case of the foregoing serials, fifty to sixty per cent of each story would be eliminated.

"As I view the situation, the ideal magazine would consist of a complete novel running to seventy-five pages minimum, two serials of twenty-five pages each for an installment. This leaves room for five or six short stories.

"I want to say also that my file of THE POPULAR, "The Fashion Book of Fiction," is not quite complete and I want to make it so. I am willing to pay fifty cents a piece for back issues of January 1, 1910, and March 15, 1911. I am anxious to buy these numbers."

* * * *

WE hope some reader who has the two numbers and can use a dollar to buy four new POPULARS will drop a line to Mr. Broadwell. The coming numbers will go up in price just as the old ones have. Save your POPULARS. They are like War Savings Stamps. They accumulate interest with the years. Some exceptional numbers command unusual prices. We ourselves cannot supply magazines published earlier than 1924 except in a few cases. Anyway, as a rule, old numbers of the magazine command a premium.

SETTING all this aside and getting back to the subject of novels complete in one issue as opposed to serials, there is a lot in what Mr. Broadwell has to say—and yet there is another way of looking at it. A book-length novel means a tale long enough and strong enough to fit in between nice cloth covers and to be sold in thousands at two dollars a copy. For us, too, it means that it must be worth the two dollars. Yes, the novel we try to give you for two bits must be worth two dollars. It is not altogether a question of length. "The Prisoner of Zenda," for instance, is not nearly as long as "Vanity Fair"—but they are both book-length novels and we could ill spare either one of them from the bookshelf. Both have their place. A novel is a novel and it depends for its value on its impact on the attention and emotion and the breadth of the life panorama it affords. "Carmen," for instance, is a book just as much as "The Three Musketeers" and yet it is not half as long. The long story has its place and value just as well as the shorter more compact novel. Mr. Broadwell is quite right in this. That is why we run one serial in the magazine. There are so many stories of great value that would not stand cutting and that you could not afford to miss.

* * * *

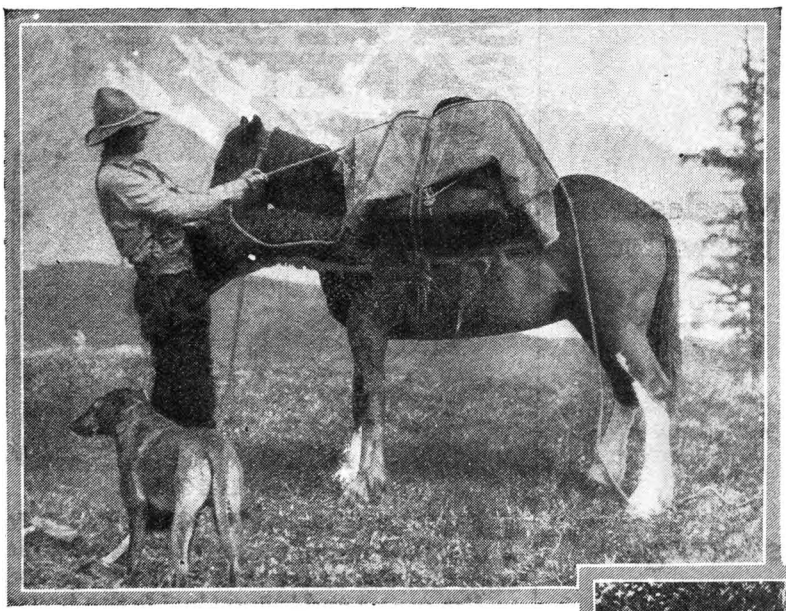
BUT two serials? We doubt the advisability. Our main object is to give you the most and the best fiction for the money that can be crowded between the covers of a magazine. We want room for the complete novel. And if we had two serials there would not be so much room. We want room also for a collection of the best short stories of the month. The real reason that we publish serials is that some stories are too long to go complete in one number and too good and strong by far to remain unpublished. So that's that.

* * * *

THE complete novel in the next issue is a story of adventure and romance, "Deep Water," by William Morton Ferguson. It is a genuine, authentic two-dollar novel. It will come out in cloth covers and people will buy it for two dollars. Two dollars' worth for two bits is our slogan just at present. We are playing that game wide open. It is up to you as an individual to show whether you like it or not. Tell us what you think—and tell other people if you like the magazine.

* * * *

THE next issue of the magazine will contain a big and absorbing installment of the new serial by Edgar Wallace. Also there will be a collection of the best short stories to be had anywhere. The authors are Robert McBlair, Holman Day, H. R. Marshall, Jack O'Donnell, C. S. Montanye and Robert H. Rohde. But don't forget the complete novel. Other magazines may try to imitate us, but we started this game first and we are the only people in a position to sell two-dollar books for twenty-five cents.



"A YEAR AGO two friends and myself stayed nine weeks prospecting in an isolated arid region—living on the crude supplies the country afforded—and hope. My stomach was weak from abuse. My bonanza was a coarse, irritated skin—a breaking-out all over my body. I used a horde of 'positive cures' and then, discouraged, tried Fleischmann's Yeast. In two months I was as I am today. My skin was better than 'back to normal' and I was ready for every 'let's go'."

V. C. SPIES, Barrett, Cal.

Now they are *really* well

Vital, joyous, certain once more of their power, thousands have found the way to glorious health through one simple food

NOT a "cure-all," not a medicine in any sense—Fleischmann's Yeast is simply a remarkable fresh food.

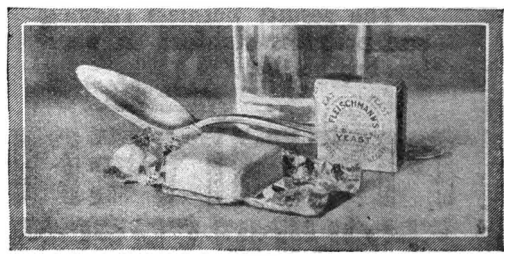
The millions of tiny active yeast plants in every cake invigorate the whole system. They aid digestion—clear the skin—banish the poisons of constipation. Where cathartics give only temporary relief, yeast strengthens the intestinal muscles and makes them healthy and active. And day by day it releases new stores of energy.

All grocers have Fleischmann's Yeast. Start eating it today! And let us send you a free copy of our latest booklet on Yeast for Health. Health Research Dept. Z-19, The Fleischmann Company, 701 Washington Street, New York.

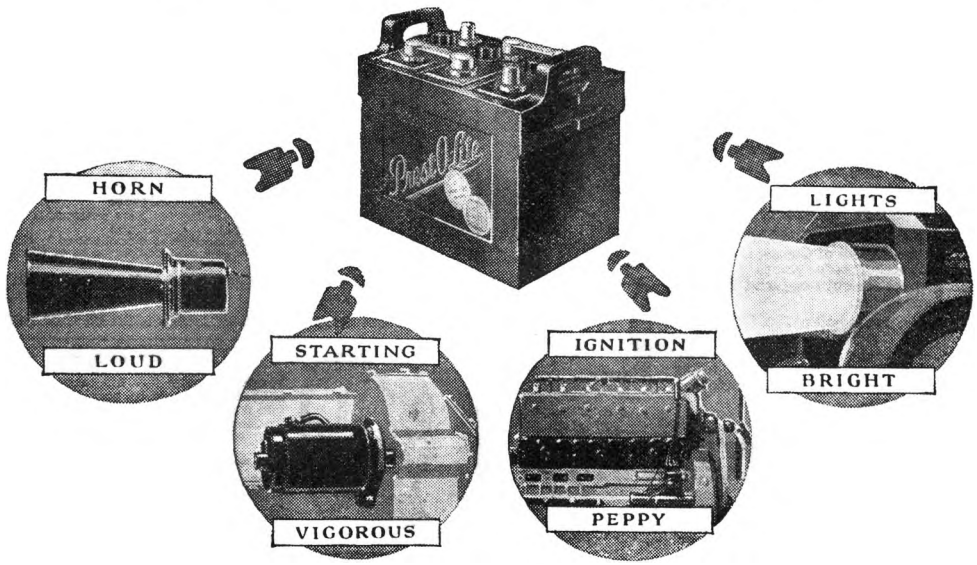
EAT 2 OR 3 CAKES regularly every day before meals: on crackers—in fruit juices or milk—or just plain. *For constipation especially, dissolve one cake in hot water (not scalding) before breakfast and at bedtime.* Buy several cakes at a time—they will keep fresh in a cool dry place for two or three days.

"FOR SIX YEARS I was ailing, nervous and depressed, interested in nothing, accomplishing nothing, rarely for twenty-four consecutive hours free from pain—all caused I know by intestinal putrefaction. At last I began eating three cakes of Fleischmann's Yeast daily. Relief from constipation and pain followed. I continued to take it as a tonic and food, regaining strength and energy and the long-discontinued compliments on my complexion. Today I am vigorously well, praise be to Fleischmann's Yeast."

KATE D. MEARES, College Place, S. C.



Prest-O-Lite



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CORNS
Bunions
Callouses

For Corns

In one minute—or less—the pain is gone. The soothing medication in Dr. Scholl's Zino-pads produces this magic result, and at the same time starts to heal the deeper tissues. This thin, antiseptic pad, made in three sizes, removes the *cause* of Corns, Bunions, Callouses, and Tender Spots—by preventing the shoe rubbing and irritating the sore part.

The *very idea* is scientific. Simple to apply—unfailing in action—cost but a trifle. Get them at your druggist or shoe dealer. For free sample, address The Scholl Mfg. Co., 213 West Schiller Street, Chicago.

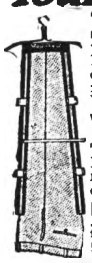
For Callouses

For Bunions

Dr Scholl's Zino-pads

"Put one on—the pain is gone"

Make $2.50 an Hour
Your Profit in Advance



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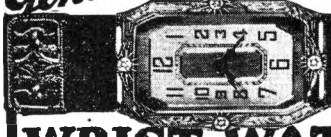

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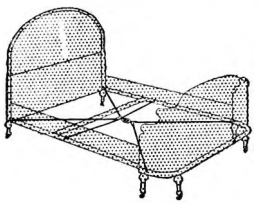

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What I have done for others I can do for YOU, whatever your condition now. I GUARANTEE it, if you will follow my simple directions for a few months. My way is Nature's way, and **Nature never fails.**

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..Thinness	..Short Wind	..Manhood	..Lung Troubles
..Rupture	..Flat Feet	Restored	..Stoop Shoulders
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