No. 6, Vol. 42 TWICE-A-MONTH 15 CENTS

The Popular Magazine

PUBLISHED DEC. 7, 1916

COVER DESIGN
H. REUTERDAHL

THE PHANTOM U-BOAT

BY ROY NORTON

The Statesman's Choice—"PIPER"

Nothing helps mental concentration and clear judgment like a companionable chew of "PIPER." Men whose occupations demand careful deliberation and reflection naturally acquire the helpful habit of using plug tobacco—and experience leads them to the highest type of chewing tobacco made—

PIPER Heidsieck

CHEWING TOBACCO

The famous flavor of "PIPER," blended through the ripeness and mellowness of the finest tobacco leaf grown, affords the most appetizing, relishful, enjoyable chew in the world. The carefully selected, thoroughly matured white Burley leaf in "PIPER" retains this pleasing taste, and insures lasting satisfaction. There is no other tobacco like "PIPER"—as a trial will quickly demonstrate.

5c and 10c cuts, foil-wrapped, in slide boxes. Also 10c cuts, foil-wrapped, in metal boxes. Sold everywhere

THE AMERICAN TOBACCO COMPANY

CLASSIFIED ADVERTISING

Agents and Help Wanted

MEN OF IDEAS and inventive ability. New list of "Needed Inventions," "Patent Buyers," and "How to Get Your Patent and Your Money." Randolph & Co., Dept. 63, Wash., D.C.

MAKE LARGE ANNUAL INCOME with a small Mail Order business. Send for our free booklet. Tells how. Niagara, Box 717, Lockport, New York.

GOVERNMENT positions pay big money. Get prepared for "exams" by former U. S. Civil Service Examiner. Free booklet. Patterson Civil Service School, Box Y, Rochester, N. Y.

BE AN AUTOMOBILE EXPERT IN SIX WEEKS. Our big book tells you how. Rahe's Automobile School, 522 E. 11th Street, Kansas City, Mo.

AGENTS—SELL "ZANOL" CONCENTRATED EXTRACTS for making liquors at home. A few minutes does the work. Saves over 50%. Guaranteed strictly legitimate. Small package. Enormous demand. sells fast; coins you money. Send postal today—ask for free sample. Universal Import Co., 5345 3rd St., Cincinnati, O.

AGENTS, to Travel by Automobile, to introduce our 250 fast-selling popular-priced household necessities. The greatest line on earth. Make $10 a day. Complete outfit and automobile furnished free to workers. Write today for exclusive territory. American Products Co., 9842 Third Street, Cincinnati, O.

AGENTS—500% profit; gold and silver sign letters for store and office windows; anyone can put on; free sample. Metallic Letter Co., 426 N. Clark St., Chicago.

Government Railway Mail Clerk Examinations soon. $75 month start. Vacations. Questions free. Franklin Institute, Dep't R 6, Rochester, N. Y.

Firearms and Antiques

BUY, sell and exchange all sorts old time and modern firearms. Stephen Van Rensselaer, Antiques, 805 Madison Avenue, New York City.

Song Poems

SONG WRITERS "Key to Success" Sent Free! We compose and facilitate free publication or outright sale. Submit Poems. Knickerbocker Studios, 106 Gaiety Bldg., New York.

Business Opportunities

IS HE CRAZY? The owner of a plantation in Mississippi is giving away a few five-acre tracts. The only condition is that figs be planted. The owner wants enough figs raised to supply a canning factory. You can secure five acres and an interest in the factory by writing Eubank Farms Company, 1087 Keystone, Pittsburg, Pa. They will plant and care for your trees for $6 per month. Your profit should be $1,000 per year. Some think this man is crazy for giving away such valuable land, but there may be method in his madness.

BUILD A $5,000 BUSINESS in two years. Let us start you in the collection business. No capital needed; big field. We teach secrets of collecting money; refer business to you. Write today for Free Pointers and new plan. American Collection Service, 19 State Street, Detroit, Mich.

Patents and Lawyers

Patents Secured or Fee returned. Actual search free. Send sketch. 1916 Edition, 90-page book free. G. P. Kimmel, 249 Barrister Bldg., Wash., D. C.

PATENTS—Write for How To Obtain a Patent. List of Patent Buyers and Inventions Wanted. $1,000,000 in prizes offered for inventions. Send sketch for free opinion as to patentability. Our 4 books sent free upon request. Patents advertised free. We assist inventors to sell their inventions. Victor J. Evans & Co., Patent Attys., 767 Ninth, Washington, D. C.

PATENTS THAT PROTECT AND PAY. Advice and books free. Highest references. Best results. Promptness assured. Send sketch or model for search. Watson E. Coleman, Patent Lawyer, 624 F Street, Washington, D. C.

IDEAS WANTED—Manufacturers are writing for patents procured through me. Three books with list hundreds of inventions wanted sent free. I help you market your invention. Advice free. R. B. Owen, 39 Owen Bldg., Washington, D. C.

Motion Picture Plays

WE accept scripts in any form; correct Free; sell on Commission. Big Rewards! Make Money. Write us. Writer's Service, Box 14, Auburn, N.Y.

WRITE Photoplays, Stories, Poems. $100 each; no correspondence course; start writing & selling at once, details free. Atlas Pub. Co., 313, Cincinnati.

WRITE Photoplays: $10—$500 each paid. Experience unnecessary: details Free to beginners. Producers League, 355, St. Louis.

$50—$100 weekly writing Moving Picture Plays. Get free book; valuable information; prize offer. Photo Playwright College, Box 278 P20, Chicago.

Scenario-itis—The "Movie" Malady! Don't quarantine your idea (picture producers pay $50 to $1000). Studio list from world's film capital, 25c. Paul, 1735 N. Normandie, Los Angeles.

Games & Entertainment

PLAYS, Vaudeville Sketches, Monologues, Dialogues, Speakers, Minstrel Material, Jokes, Recitations, Tableaux, Drills, Entertainments, Make up goods. Large catalog free. T. S. Denison & Co., Dept. 19, Chicago.

Art School

LEARN TO DRAW! Big demand for illustrators, cartoonists, designers. Many of our students secure positions before completing course. Personal instruction, correspondence or local. Artist's Outfit Free. Send for illustrated book. Washington School of Art, 961 F Street, N. W., Washington, D. C.

Typewriters

TYPEWRITERS, all makes factory rebuilt by famous "Young Process." As good as new, looks like new, wear like new, guaranteed like new. Our big business Permits lowest cash prices. $10 and up. Also, machines rented—or sold on time. No matter what your needs are we can best serve you. Write and see now. Young Typewriter Co., Dept. 1093, Chicago.

DYKE'S FREE BOOKLET ON MOTORING

explains how we assist YOU in the Auto Business as Repairman, Chauffeur, Salesman or Auto Mechanician with **DYKE'S NEW IDEA WORKING MODEL SYSTEM** of teaching by mail and our new idea **EMPLOYMENT PLAN.** Let us tell you the names of some of our students and the salaries they are drawing. Don't miss it—**SEND FOR BOOKLET NOW.**

Simplified Course covers everything from repairing and diagnosing troubles—to valve timing and electric starters—also 6, 8, 12 cylinder engines.

DYKE'S SCHOOL OF MOTORING, Box 86, Roe Bldg., St. Louis, Mo.

A Department or Firm; A. L. Dyke, Publisher and Importer. Original and only system of its kind. Endorsed by leading motor authorities of the world.

GOV'T POSITIONS NEW BOOK FREE!

Earn $75 to $150 monthly *at once.* Rapid promotion. Easy work. Short hours. 15 and 30 day vacations, full pay. Lifetime positions. No strikes, no "layoffs," no "straw bosses," no pull needed. Ordinary education sufficient. American citizens 18 or over eligible no matter where you live.

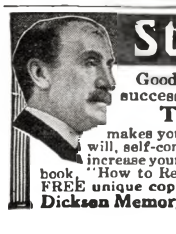
NEW BOOK FREE Tells about Railway Mail, Post Office, Panama Canal, Custom House and many other Gov't positions. Tells how to prepare for Examinations under supervision of former U. S. Civil Service Sec'y-Examiner. Write today—postal will do. Address **PATTERSON CIVIL SERVICE SCHOOL, 312 News Building, Rochester, N. Y.**

DO YOU LIKE TO DRAW?

Cartoonists are well paid

We will not give you any grand prize if you answer this ad. Nor will we claim to make you rich in a week. But if you are anxious to develop your talent with a successful cartoonist, so you can make money, send a copy of this picture, with 6c. in stamps for portfolio of cartoons and sample lesson plate, and let us explain.

THE W. L. EVANS SCHOOL OF CARTOONING
835 Leader Building, Cleveland, Ohio



Stop Forgetting!

Good memory is absolutely essential to success, for *memory is power.*

The Dickson Method

makes you *"Forget Proof,"* develops concentration, will, self-confidence, quick thought, ready speech. Will increase your earning capacity. Write today for my free book, "How to Remember"—faces, names, studies, also my FREE unique copyrighted Memory Test. Address

Dickson Memory School, 960 Hearst Bldg., Chicago

Our next number will be the Christmas issue. For it we have rounded-up Davis, Norton, Sinclair, Coolidge, Stringer, Knibbs, Witwer, Ritchie and Stacpoole!!

VOLUME XLII NUMBER 6

TWICE-A-MONTH

The Popular Magazine

CONTENTS

DECEMBER 7, 1916

Twice-a-Month Publication Issued by STREET & SMITH, 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York. ORMOND G. SMITH and GEORGE C. SMITH, Proprietors. Entered at New York Post Office as Second-class Matter, under Act of Congress of March 3, 1879. Canadian Subscription, $4.52 Foreign, $5.24

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

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

YEARLY SUBSCRIPTION $3.80 SINGLE COPIES 15 Cents

NEXT POPULAR ON SALE DECEMBER 20th

THE POPULAR MAGAZINE

VOL. XLII. DECEMBER 7, 1916. No. 6.

Take What You Want!

By William R. and Louis Duryea Lighton

Among the sheepmen of Wyoming. Buck Sterner was the sheep king of the Guernsey country, his flocks numbered by the tens of thousands, his range an empire. He was a man who took what he wanted and asked odds of nobody. Tom Southwall was another master of herds, but he did not grab and claim square miles of territory that rightly belonged to the government. But both men come to a pass when they wanted the same thing. A mighty tug-of-war was the result, not only physical but spiritual, and the striking thing about it was that both men emerged triumphant! It is pleasant, too, that the genial and sterling Billy Fortune plays his part in the drama of range and sheep. And Billy strikes the keynote of this fine tale when he says in a philosophic mood: "Say, Tommy, which is the meanest way of fightin'—gougin' or bitin'? They're both sort of mean, mebbe; but then, fightin's a mean business. If you take all the meanness out of fightin', there's nothin' left of it. A fight's a fight."

(*A Complete Novel*)

CHAPTER I.

THE brilliant summer day seemed to be in an altogether tranquil frame of mind, willing to take things just as they came. The warm wind was easy-going, moving in slow, fitful starts and lapses, free of any obligation; under the warm glow of unclouded sunlight the wide plain stretched and blinked drowsily in the full luxury of lazy leisure. For all the day's robustness, there was in it a subtle pledge that nothing would happen to violate its complete repose.

Little Betty Stanchfield was not in that mood. Betty was expectant. Since midmorning, from door and window and veranda of the sprawling ranch house she had been covertly watching the line of the Cottonwood Gap Trail that stretched away and away across the yellow plain into the sunlit distance. Sitting at his desk, strewn with an untidy litter of books and papers and letters, old Carl Stanchfield had been covertly watching Betty. A grim sort of amusement possessed his mind. No doubt the girl fancied herself safely secretive in her quiet movements, yet it was all so obvious!

By and by, when the afternoon was half gone and when for the twentieth

time, Betty paused at the open, vine-shaded door, old Carl spoke:

"Which one of 'em is it you're lookin' for this time, daughter?"

She turned quickly, with a syllable of low laughter. Her denial came readily—maybe just a degree too readily to be quite convincing.

"I'm not looking for anybody in particular," she said.

Stanchfield rose from his place and crossed the room to the girl's side, standing at indolent ease in the doorway. A smile of whimsical raillery was upon his lips, but his eyes were graver as he steadily regarded the bright face upturned to his.

"Not expecting anybody," he echoed. "Not anybody in particular! Well, then, which one of 'em have you been hopin' might show up? You needn't tell me you haven't been havin' your hopes."

"Nonsense, dad!" she parried. "I'm glad to have any of our friends come to the house. So are you."

He brushed aside her trifling sophistry. "Yes, so I am. But I'm not a marriageable girl, waiting for the right man to come along. That makes a difference. It ain't humanly possible for a girl like you to feel just the same way toward both of two men that are as different as Southwall and Sterner. You can't tell me that."

"No," she agreed, "I can't. But I like what's likable in both of them, even if they're ever so different."

Carl was not content, but he did not quite know how to push his point. In silence he lounged against the door-frame, observing the girl with intent earnestness.

Father and daughter were startlingly alike, yet curiously they showed an even more startling contrast. Big-boned, heavy-limbed, powerfully masculine, old Carl appeared as if put together in rough, hit-or-miss fashion, without much attention to detail. No one in his sober senses would have thought of calling Carl a handsome man, with his thick shock of grizzled hair, his fearless gray eyes, his square, firm chin, his air of uncompromising strength. Age had not eaten into his fiber, but it had played him some unsightly tricks, accenting his best points until they were fairly formidable. Keenness, boldness, forcefulness stood out upon him in rugged relief. His Creator might have said of him: "Who cares how he looks? At least I've made a man!"

Undeniably, little Betty was flesh of Carl's flesh, spirit of his spirit. Line for line in feature, the likeness was almost uncanny. But in the fashioning of Betty the Master Hand had taken exquisite care, as if obedient to an impulse of the Master Mind: "Now, let us see if there may not be beauty hidden in that rude model." Little Betty was daintily beautiful. There was something of the miraculous in it, seeing them side by side and seeing that not a jot of Carl's character had been lost in the accomplishment of Betty's beauty. As a man, Carl could stand unashamed; as a girl, Betty stood just a little bit of all right.

The father's eyes dwelt upon the daughter's face, taking full account of its charm. When he spoke again, it was in clumsy return to his theme.

"You'll be pickin' out a man to marry one of these days," he said directly. "Honest, now, I wouldn't be a mite sorry if you'd happen to pick either one of those two. They're men, both of 'em. Tom Southwall won't ever get as far ahead in the world as Sterner has got already. But mebbe a body oughtn't to hold that against Tom. Mebbe he could if he wanted to. He's just never set his mind on it—on gettin' richer than he needs to be. Sterner could buy him and sell him forty times over. I swear I don't know which is the wisest man these days—the man that wants to get hold of everything in sight, or the

one that's willin' to be satisfied with plenty. I reckon there's quite a few queens in the world that don't have as much as you could have if you was Sterner's wife. That's somethin'. But it ain't everything—is it? No, it ain't! You'd have to love him before I'd be suited to have you take him."

Betty's pretty eyes, kindling with new light, were bent upon the trail. Old Carl's glance followed her gaze, then he chuckled.

Two miles away, where the trail spread diverging arms east and west, two horsemen were coming on. They would meet soon at the union of the ways. In the distance they appeared as mere dots upon the yellow plain; but Carl's chuckle was as comprehending as Betty's blush.

"Both of 'em!" he made comment. "And you look pleased." He laughed outright, with a note that carried an undertone not unlike relief. "If you're satisfied to have 'em both come at once, instead of just one at a time, I reckon the case ain't in its last stages. Well, that's all right with me. Don't get in a rush."

The riders drew on abreast. When they urged their horses, it was upon common impulse. Side by side, by and by they turned from the trail into the ranch lane; together they came to the hitching rack at the yard gate and dismounted; then together they walked up the pathway to the veranda where little Betty and old Carl stood awaiting them to give them welcome.

If any girl would be puzzled over the question of picking her knight from that pair, that would not be because there was little to choose between them. They were totally unlike.

Sterner would be noticed first by a stranger. He was much the more obvious of the two at first sight—larger in build, stronger in feature, more aggressive in bearing. He was one who had not lived by subtlety or by any indirection of behavior. He was one of the sort known as "result getters;" plainly he had gotten his results by the decisive method of going after them on straight lines. For him, the shortest line between two points would be his chosen pathway, rather than the sinuous line of least resistance. Dominating—that was the word for him. Good looks he had, in his fine, upstanding strength; but his good looks were of the virile, intensely human order, wholly minus the godlike quality. Blond, solid, energetic, taking to action as to his native element, he was one of those who are most at home upon the frontiers of the world, where working and fighting may go forward without the hampering restraints of rules and conventions. Yes, he was very human.

Tom Southwall was not much like that. You might have told at once that Southwall would never be a result getter for the mere results' sake. To him, that seemed ridiculously commonplace in a world which was so crowding full of living interests. His matter-of-fact neighbors in the Guernsey country of Wyoming would say of him that he was missing a lot of chances in his sheep business—a capital shortcoming in their eyes, in a land teeming with chances. Rather slack-minded, the neighbors called him. They would own that his modest ranch was well managed and profitable enough to satisfy modest wants; but they could not understand why Tom didn't build bigger.

Nothing in life had ever absorbed his whole interest. He was a sheepman, without being dominated by mutton and wool. He allowed himself plenty of leisure for the enjoyment of books and music, without being either bookworm or musician. He had a sense of humor without being a humorist; he had a touch of philosophy without being a philosopher.

Tom Southwall's disposition, like his

name, had a sunny exposure. His good temper made for him an atmosphere. Had your judgment been hurried, you would have called Sterner the better looking; it did not take long to perceive his good looks. But with time to consider, you would have had your doubts. Though he bulked less, Southwall was no weakling; aquiline, athletic, sinewy, dark-skinned; sure of himself, too, though in a fashion less aggressive than Sterner's.

It was Southwall who first encountered little Betty face to face and hand to hand with a hasty greeting aside to old Carl. Sterner had thought to be first; but at the critical moment Tom was ahead of him, baring his head in the sunlight and letting his warm-lighted eyes rest upon the girl's face with frankly unmasked approval. He was in no haste to speak. Speech waited till Sterner had had his welcome, too. There were no verbal niceties in Sterner's greeting; it was straightforward, rather blunt.

"You're looking mighty well," he said. The words were wholly sincere, but even his sincerity could hardly make the plain saying exciting. Anybody might have told her something less transparently true; it would have needed little effort. Betty had to make allowance for Sterner's habit of indulging no flights—had to take her consolation in knowing that he meant exactly what he said.

"And you're looking mighty warm," she laughed. "Come inside." And that, too, was rather matter of fact.

Somehow it was Southwall who found the place nearest Betty in the wide, airy living room, with full leisure for what he would say. There was no whispered secrecy in it; all ears might hear, and welcome.

"Have you ever been told that you're a most surprising person?" he questioned.

She gave him a look, expectant, curious. That was a way of Southwall's, to pay his compliments in installments, with a first bit to whet appetite for the rest. "Surprising?" she echoed.

"One may think he knows you well," he said, "and yet every time he sees you you're a brand-new disclosure. You don't do it by being changeable, either. That's the best part of the surprise. You just give a fresh revelation of the very sort of charm one has learned to like best in you. You seem to have a very treasure house of charm."

Maybe that was a little flamboyant, yet its note was genuine. Betty flushed with pleasure she was at no pains to hide.

"It's nice, too," she retorted, "to have a friend whose tongue knows the trick of saying surprising things."

"Trick?" Tom caught her up. "That's not the word to give me for reward. As if I'd thought out my speech and then warmed it up for you! I didn't!"

Old Carl, fumbling with his pipe, laughed outright at the passage. Sterner did not laugh; he merely smiled grimly. Badinage was not in his line; he held it in poor opinion; it struck him as nothing more than glittering counterfeit; he was puzzled at seeing it pass current so easily.

"Very well," Southwall said. "Discount my words, if you will; but there's no discount on the gift I've brought you. I got for you some of Field's 'Nocturnes.'"

No, there was no trifling with the gift. Betty's love of music went too deep for that. She took the sheets from his hand with a gentle exclamation. After a little time, when he asked it, she went to her piano, with Tom standing at her side.

Sterner's glance followed, a trifle lowering; but under the protection of the first singing chords he turned abruptly to old Carl, drawing his chair

closer and bending over to speak quietly.

"Have you any news?" he asked.

Stanchfield's voice, too, dropped to the low tones of confidence between man and man.

"Depends on what you call news," he said tersely. "Plenty of rumor—the air's full of it. No facts to speak of—only one. Had a letter from Manny at Washington a couple of days ago. He says it ain't the land-office agents we've got to watch out for. They're the same old bunch. But the secretary of the interior has some new men under his own private orders. Nobody knows what they'll be up to. Maybe they won't be bothering us, but Manny just gave me the hunch."

Sterner considered. "I'd heard something of that," he said presently. "Nothing definite—just enough to be disquieting. My information was that the secretary's men would be going after some of the big timber and coal cases, instead of the grazing lands. That's the spectacular end of the business."

Old Carl brooded upon his pipe for a little time, peering now and then at Sterner, making up his mind.

"Buck," he said at last, "I'm not easy scared. Nothin' has ever thrown a real scare into me. But there's goin' to be a blow-up one of these times. We'll have somethin' to fight, sure. Me, I've made up my mind not to make any more new land entries for a while."

Sterner's posture stiffened, and his strong face set in a scowl.

"Quitting?" he demanded. "Then you are afraid!" He laughed unpleasantly.

"No," old Carl deprecated dryly. "It ain't that exactly. I ain't afraid. But I ain't foolhardy, either. There's times when the best way to play even a good hand is to let the bettin' go past you. I'm passin' right now."

Again there fell a brief interval of silence. Then——

"What have you done with the letters and papers in the Sink Hole matter?" Sterner asked. The question seemed quite casual, but old Carl's eyes narrowed ever so slightly.

"Done with 'em?" he echoed. "I ain't done anything with 'em. What would I be doin' with 'em but keep 'em?"

"I wish you'd let me have them," Sterner said bluntly. "That's more my affair than yours, the way it's turned out. The papers ought to be in my hands."

"Yes?" old Carl returned. "Well, you won't get 'em. I'm keepin' 'em—see? That's one of my rules. The crookeder a deal is, the more I want to keep a hold on the proofs."

"Crooked?" Sterner spoke the word as if he meant to resent it, but he let it pass. "It's more my deal now than yours," he said again. "You ought to be willing to trust the papers to me."

"Oh—trust!" Carl chuckled. "I trust you, Buck—sure! But I trust myself more. I know myself better." He scanned Sterner's bold face keenly, a little coldly. "Listen, Buck," he said. "I'm older than you are, and mebbe a little foxier. That Sink Hole business was crooked. No crookeder than most of the rest of our land deals with the government, but we left a plainer trail. It would be right easy to cinch us on that, if the government had those papers. They haven't got 'em. I told you before I'd had Manny steal the copies out of the files in the land office. There's nothin' down there—nothin' on paper but what I've got in my own desk yonder. We're safe enough, far as that goes. But I was aimin' to tell you somethin'. You wanted to get hot when I said somethin' about crooked work. But you know it was crooked. That's what I'm workin' round to. I've found out that the safest way, when a man's

pullin' off a deal like that, is not to try to make himself believe he's actin' on the square. The safest way's to keep sayin' over to himself: 'This is crooked, and I've got to be careful to hide my tracks if I don't want to get caught up with.' You're young yet, but that's one of the things you're goin' to learn if you keep on with the crooked work as long as I have."

Sterner scowled heavily. "You're not mincing words," he said.

"No, I ain't," old Carl agreed. "What's the use? When I'm talkin' about black, it's better to say it's black. The white'll show for itself." He made a broad gesture of dismissing the theme. "That's all. I ain't distrustful of you. I'm just usin' common sense. You and me are tarred with the same stick in that Sink Hole proposition, but I'm keepin' the tar stick myself so I'll know right where it is."

Sterner did not urge him further. He seemed willing to drop the argument, turning from the old man to glance at the pair at the piano. The glance held something of ironic amusement. Little Betty was playing; and betweenwhiles one or the other spoke in appreciation of the beauties of the music. Though Southwall was attentive, bearing himself with an air of friendly intimacy, Sterner felt no pangs. It did not occur to him to be jealous—so lightly did he regard Southwall's ways with a woman. That free-and-easy give and take of words, however sympathetic, did not strike Sterner as love-making. To his understanding, love-making was a matter of simple terms, of a single aspect.

His own chance came by and by, when the afternoon was waning. Then, without apology, he drew the girl out of doors and away from the house, making no pretense of talk for mere talk's sake but biding his time till he might speak outright.

Little Betty, too, was silent, with something of constraint. She knew what was coming. There was a sort of iron inevitableness in the manner of Sterner's wooing. Though no woman might have doubted its sincerity, it left but little to the imagination.

"Girl," Sterner said directly, "I can't come here and go away again without a word from you, even if it's only the word you've already given me. Your feeling hasn't changed, has it? I needn't ask that. I can see for myself. You'd have another look on your face if you were ready to tell me you loved me. I'd know the look when I saw it. I've thought about it often enough."

Steadily she raised her eyes to his, without a word, letting her gaze speak for her. Hers were honest eyes, clear and warm. Though the man searched their depths, he did not find what he sought. He gave a short, mirthless laugh.

"I'm not urging you," he said. "I can wait. Maybe I'd be impatient if it weren't so well worth waiting for. There's always the next time to hope for." That, too, was said honestly, without affectation. "I'll know when you're ready to love me. You won't say so till it's true. All I want now is to tell you again that I love you. That's not for fear you'll forget, but I get good out of it for myself every time I say it. Can you understand that? It doesn't distress you to have me tell you over again?"

"No," she said simply, "it doesn't distress me."

"Well, then, I love you!" The words were blunt. If they lacked passionate ardor, at least they carried conviction. Impulsively the girl offered her hand, and he took it and held it in a firm clasp. Then suddenly the hand was withdrawn and she stood back from him with a stifled exclamation.

"Oh!" she breathed. "It's Jacky! He startled me."

They had stood together in a sheltered spot among clustering, quaking aspens at the edge of the house garden, fancying themselves free from oversight. Another figure stood motionless in the pathway at the entrance to the grove—an odd, dwarfish, misshapen figure with grotesquely long arms dangling loose and head turned awry. His stature was that of a boy half grown; but his face was age old, with an appearance of apish solemnity. Mental deficiency and physical pain had wrought together in making that unlovely effect—Jacky. He stood in stolid silence, looking on at what was passing, till Betty's light cry roused him. Then he spoke. What he said was inarticulate gibberish, unintelligible to ears not trained to his straining, toneless voice. Betty interpreted to Sterner.

"He says supper is ready. Shall we go in?" She drew closer to Sterner's side, as if moved by aversion for the dwarf who shuffled ahead of them toward the house. She tried to laugh in deprecation of her feelings, but the laugh was a failure.

"I can't become used to him," she said. "It's very foolish, but I can't help it. He makes me afraid. He makes me think of him as something evil. That's wicked, because he isn't that. I have to compel myself to remember that he saved my father's life and made himself what he is in doing it. Just the same, I can't help wishing that dad wouldn't keep him at the house. I can't get over that feeling. But that's one thing dad won't do for me—send him away."

Sterner spoke tactlessly: "It's always struck me that Jacky's fond of you."

The girl shuddered, then caught her lip between her teeth as though to check reply. At the house the dwarf turned out of the path and went to the kitchen entrance.

Supper was a gay meal, with Stanchfield and little Betty and their guests at table. There was but one element of constraint—and none but little Betty felt that: The dwarf, Jacky, served at table, shuffling back and forth between dining room and kitchen. For all his handicap, he made a good servant, doing his work in silence and without orders, standing betweenwhiles in the doorway, dangling his uncouth arms and keeping his clouded eyes fixed upon the girl. To her he showed an animal devotion in his instant readiness to her needs. Not once did she speak to him; there was no need. Though she did her best to hide her feeling, the dwarf's hovering presence oppressed her. By and by she appealed to her father.

"Dad—please!" she said quietly. Old Carl understood. True to custom established long ago, he turned in his chair and beckoned the hunchback to his side.

"Good boy, Jacky!" he said heartily, and laughed with curious gentleness as the dulled eyes woke for a moment in fitful response to the word of approval. "I couldn't keep house without you, Jacky. But that's all for this time. Go get your own supper now." His eyes followed the misshapen figure till the kitchen door closed upon it; then he spoke bluntly, in response to what he knew was in the others' minds: "No, he ain't pretty. I know it. But he wasn't so bad lookin' once—and, by 'Mighty! I ain't goin' to let anybody's prejudice make me overlook what I owe him. Nobody'd take care of him right, only me." He glanced at his daughter with something of resentment. "You ain't reasonable, Betty. You used to like him well enough when you were kids together, before he got hurt."

Little Betty bent her head. "I know, dad," she said softly. "But—let's not talk about it—not now!"

Southwall relieved the threatened tension, begging permission of Betty to

light a cigarette; and then the talk turned back into channels of smoother current. It was late when the visitors left, going, as they had come, in company. At parting, Southwall's speech was no more covert than his greeting.

"Language is a futile sort of makeshift," he told Betty. "Why hasn't somebody made just the right word for saying good-by at a time like this? There's no such word. Maybe that's asking too much. Think what it would have to say! It would have to be gold and jewels and sunlight and color and warmth all rolled into one and held together by heart's desire. It can't be done!"

He spoke the ornate period with a laugh, lightly; but the laugh did not seem to make mock of what he said. There was enough of reality in it to give real pleasure to little Betty. Sterner's parting was in marked contrast. It carried nothing of the ornate. When his moment came, he gave Betty's hand a quick pressure and released it as quickly.

"Good night!" he said quietly, and turned down the pathway to the gate.

On the veranda old Carl waited with Betty till the two men were mounted and gone their way; then he put his big arm about the girl's shoulders and drew her to his side.

"You're a good little old girl!" he said, with unwonted gentleness. "You're happy here with me, ain't you? All right! Listen: Don't you go and get in any rush to swap this happiness on a blind chance for something better. You hear me? You take your time."

CHAPTER II.

Olaf Bjinks looked like something left over from the old days when the race was very inexperienced and free from guile. Looking like that, he had no business drifting into the Guernsey country of Wyoming hunting a job. What's more, he had no business at all interrupting a stiff session of "draw" in Fletch's place. When anything whatever was in process of happening in Fletch's place, it was always decidedly better to let it happen in its own way.

The game was two hours old when Olaf broke in upon it, and the play was for blood. Billy Fortune had the largest stack of chips—and at that his were mostly blues. Steve Brainard had plenty for the purpose in hand. Those two had been winning steadily, easily, and were feeling it. Tom Southwall had lost something, but Tom wasn't caring particularly. As in everything he did, he played poker for the play's sake, not for the winning.

Daniel Sterner—"Buck" Sterner to the menfolks—had been the heavy loser, and he was taking it hard. True to his conception of things, he played frankly for the winning—and he rarely won.

He had lost a lot in the two hours of this game. With table stakes, he was down to one meager little stack of reds and a mere handful of whites—all that was left of his third "buy." Also he was down to a meager remnant of good temper.

It was Steve Brainard's bet. Steve was in a rollicky humor. Grinning widely, he took account of what remained in Sterner's pile.

"Seven dollars!" he said lightly. "All right, Buck, seven it is."

Sterner sighed, wiped the dewy moisture from his troubled forehead, and stopped to consider, fumbling his chips.

"Please, I want a yob," Olaf said, speaking over Billy Fortune's shoulder.

Nobody heard him. Sighing, Sterner slowly pushed his dwindled stack to the center of the table. A moment more, and Steve was adding the chips to his own showy hoard. Frowning, Sterner reached for his pocket; frowning, he

began counting yellow bills from a thick roll for further adventuring.

"Please," said Olaf, "I want a yob."

His mild voice did not distract.

"Buck," said Billy Fortune, "you want me to tell you how to make your chips last longer? Buy more of 'em. Come on; buy plenty this time. It makes me feel mean takin' 'em away from you when we've got you trimmed down to just a little bit of a pinch. Buy a plenty."

Olaf had a patient nature. Apparently it would be better to wait a while for his next address; so he waited. Waiting, he brought from his pocket a jew's-harp and set it to his lips.

Do you put faith in what the dictionary tells you? Your faith must have been shattered to bits if you had heard Olaf just then—for the dictionary says that the jew's-harp is a musical instrument. At its best, that is stretching the definition. Held between Olaf's thick lips and twitched by Olaf's thick finger, the harp had a note like one of those dolorous and eerie sounds you will hear out of doors at night when you are "bedded down" on the ground in a strange place and vainly striving against an attack of jumping insomnia. There was no tune to Olaf's playing, nor anything else to give it form. It had its effect, though. It caught Billy Fortune's instant attention. Billy jerked about in his chair and took a look.

Olaf stood very tall and very broad; Olaf's eyes were china blue, set far apart in a broad, slack-lined face; Olaf's taffy-colored hair hung in a thick mane from the brim of a ridiculous cap. Innocence is an admirable virtue, but Olaf really overdid it.

"Hello!" said Billy. "Gee whiz! Here's a little stranger."

Olaf said his say again, exactly as before: "Please, I want a yob."

"You do?" Billy queried. "What's your name?"

"Olaf Bj——" Olaf spoke the rest of the name in a soft, purring murmur of r's and n's and j's and s's.

"Olaf—what?" Billy questioned. "Spell it."

Olaf spelled it with slow pains. When it was finished, it seemed a very complete job of spelling.

"Oh!" said Billy. "And that spells what? Pronounce it."

Olaf pronounced it. His pronunciation sounded like a large mouthful of soft, predigested food. Billy laughed.

"Shucks! I couldn't say that unless I had a couple of front teeth out. I don't believe that's what it spells, anyway. It spells Bjinks. That's your name."

"Please," said Olaf, "I want a yob."

"Well, for pity's sake!" Billy retorted. "What doin'? Not workin'? You don't look strong enough."

Proudly Olaf squared his great shoulders. "Yess! Joos' whatever kind of work—I do it."

Steve Brainard made his comment: "Buck, you said you was needin' herders. Nobody could look like this chap without bein' just naturally meant for a sheep-herder."

Olaf's mind caught at the word. "S'eep! My papa, he have keep s'eep."

Sterner was not above a thrifty bargain. He questioned and negotiated. Olaf seemed blandly indifferent about the burden of his duties and the matter of his pay. Work was what he wanted. When the negotiations were concluded, Olaf had a "yob."

"All right," said Sterner. "I'll be going home to-morrow or next day, likely. You can hang round and go up with me. Go on, Steve, deal 'em."

Perhaps Olaf did not understand that he was dismissed. He stood where he was, huge and frankly happy with the way things had turned out. Again he offered to put his jew's-harp to his lips. It was Sterner who stopped him. Sterner's eyes were cold, his manner hostile.

"The last man who played one of

those things too close to me," he said, "got it down his windpipe and choked to death on it."

"I wouldn't, Olaf," said Billy. "Chokin' to death is a terrible fatal disease. You better stick it in your pocket."

Olaf held the harp in the hollow of his big hand, regarding it solemnly. Only dimly did he comprehend.

"She cos' me joos' a nickel," he said. "She is gif a lot of moosic for a nickel. I nefer haf enough moosic yet."

"Put that thing away!" Sterner ordered. His was the voice of authority, and meekly Olaf obeyed. "Now deal 'em!" said Sterner.

But the new deal halted at a new interruption. Poddy Bruce came hurrying in from the street, hurried over to the table, and hurriedly found a chair. Poddy was built just right for hurrying. He was absurdly thin and long drawn out, with most of his length in his stiltlike legs. He carried no weight to speak of, save for a ridiculous little paunch which seemed to bear no relation whatever to his other proportions. Imagine a croquet ball caught just above the middle of a long, limp stocking, and you will conceive Poddy's figure.

The absurdity of Poddy's form was not his sole affliction. Poddy stammered—oh, terribly! As he dragged up his chair and crowded into his place, he was struggling mightily with the first premonitory symptoms of speech. The cards were falling smoothly from Steve's practiced fingers, but Poddy spread his hands upon the table to check the deal.

"Wuh-wuh——" he stuttered before his laboring tongue fell impotent. Steve dealt another card around. "Wuh-wuh ——" Poddy gurgled.

"Don't!" Billy Fortune objected. "You're gummin' up the game. You've got time to say it before the next deal, if you don't get excited. You never will get it said if you get excited."

"Keep out!" Sterner ordered. "You're costing me money. I've spent three hundred already, just waiting for my luck to turn. Here's where it starts to change. Wait, now!"

Southwall spoke, then, mildly: "Poddy was just trying to ask us to wait a minute and let him get in. There's no rush, Poddy, if it's Buck's money you're after. Buck's luck won't change with this hand. Buck's luck at poker never will change at all."

Sterner's eyes narrowed to cold slits. If Southwall had spoken in light jest, Sterner took it in earnest. He did not like to be twitted upon his weakness; particularly he did not relish a twit from Southwall. He was not overfond of Southwall.

"That's awful true, Buck," Billy Fortune said. "If you couldn't afford to lose so well, I wouldn't play with you, because you never will know how to play this game. You're too anxious."

Steve Brainard was impatient. "Oh, sugar! What is this—a game of poker, or a talkin' match? It's your say, Tom."

That pot fell to Billy's portion. Poddy Bruce gasped and sputtered: "Tut-tut-to him that huh-hath shall be gug-gug-given! Kik-kik-Christmas! Lemme gug-gug-get in!"

Billy laughed softly. Poddy promised diversion in an evening whose fortunes had grown monotonous. Casually he watched while Poddy counted his money upon the table. Poddy's roll was not so thick as Sterner's, but its complexion was no less golden. Plainly Poddy could well afford a bit of expensive amusement if he chose.

"Bub-Bub-Billy," Poddy challenged, "I'll mum-make you a spup-portin' pup-proposition. I'm stut-tartin' late, but I'll bub-bet you somethin' on the side. I'll bub-bub-bet you tut-twenty on the side that I can tut-trim Tut-Tut-Tommy."

That was altogether like Poddy. The thing in hand never quite sufficed him; always he wanted some sort of sporting proposition on the side. Lacking that zest, everything in life had for him a stale savor.

"Take him up, Billy," Southwall urged. "I'll play better if I have somebody besides myself betting on my game. That's the trouble with me—losing my own money doesn't bother me enough. I'd hate to lose yours for you. Take him up, and then watch me."

CHAPTER III.

Before long the play had another spectator. Like Olaf, this man was conspicuously a stranger to the Guernsey country. Never had the Guernsey country produced one of his mold. He came in quietly from the street, walked quietly to the bar, and gave a quiet order for a drink; but his quiet would not let him escape notice. The players noticed him forthwith. Poddy Bruce bent over and whispered in Billy Fortune's ear:

"Bub-Bub-Billy, I'll bub-bet you ten that man kik-comes from some pup-place away up North, where they live on bub-bub-blubber."

The stranger was a blubbery sort of man, with a figure like a vast sausage unskillfully stuffed into its skin. Wherever you looked—at cheeks or neck or wrists—there were creased, bulging rolls of fat. When he walked, his legs spread far apart, labored heavily under their load. When he looked at you, his eyes peered out of deep pits of fat; when he spoke, his voice seemed to come bubbling up through thick fat.

Billy Fortune did not take Poddy's offer. He had hardly heard it; he was too busy watching the newcomer. Alertly he watched while the fat man put away his drink. Not amusement, but something subtler, was in Billy's eyes. When the stranger faced about from the bar, Billy's attention was again upon his cards, but his fingers were fidgeting nervously.

The fat man rolled over to the table and stood for a little while behind Buck Sterner's chair, but he gave that up presently and moved along to Southwall's place. There he stayed, keeping silence, but looking on intently, till by and by Southwall negotiated a swift, spirited, victorious stroke.

"Now, you see, Billy!" Southwall laughed over his imposing new stack. "I needed something to play for besides my own winning."

The stranger gave a short, fat chuckle of approval, then spoke his approval aloud in a fat wheeze: "You certainly did play scientific poker that time, young man! The real thing, that was."

"Scientific!" Billy Fortune echoed, and his glance rested lazily upon the big, round, puffy face. "Say, if you're one of them that knows scientific poker, maybe you'd like to set in here a while yourself."

The stranger spread his fat hands in a gesture of deprecation. "Oh, gentlemen, gentlemen!" he chuckled. "You're miles and miles beyond my depth. I couldn't even start with you. A clothing drummer has no business with real poker. A couple of hours of penny ante on Saturday night—that's about my limit."

"Clothing?" Billy commented. "Well, I've played this game for clothing, too, before now. I lost the breeches off of me up at Douglas once, after I'd lost everything I had in 'em."

Buck Sterner made a feint toward his pocket, but withdrew his hand. "No," he said dully; "four hundred's enough for one night. It takes a lot of wool, these days, to make that much money. I reckon I'm through for tonight."

Steve Brainard, shuffling the cards idly, spoke in whimsical comment: "It's a great game, draw is—ain't it? Buck

loses his wool playin' it, and the wool gets made up into breeches, and then Billy loses the breeches. That's real complete. What are we goin' to do now, with Buck quittin'?"

Southwall pushed back from the table. "With Buck quitting," he said carelessly, "the fountain's dried up. Let's all quit. There's no fun in swapping dollars round among ourselves. There ought to be one angel in the game, anyway, to keep up the interest."

His tone was not taunting, but Sterner seemed to find offense in the words. Angrily he, too, pushed away from the table. Without waiting for the ceremonious farewell drink, he went out to the street. Nor did the stranger linger. He was not invited. As he departed, Southwall's amused glance followed him from the bar. Billy Fortune stood nearest in the line, and it was to Billy that Southwall spoke.

"This life gives us a lot to be thankful for," he laughed over his glass. "I can't make up my mind whether I ought to be most thankful for what's been given me or for what I haven't got. I'm certainly glad I haven't a disposition like Buck's; nor I wouldn't want a figure like that clothes man's. Would you?"

Billy reflected. When he spoke, it was not in direct answer to the question:

"Listen, Tom. Say, Buck and that clothes man are liable to get to be real well acquainted with each other before so very long."

There was nothing much in the words, unless the listener happened to know Billy's cryptic style. Southwall knew Billy very well.

"What!" Puzzled, Southwall's eyes quested for signs, but Billy's face was bland. "What do you mean?" Southwall asked directly.

"Oh, nothin' much," Billy said. "I ain't sayin' anything for sure. You needn't say nothin', either, not unless you want to. Buck's got as good a chance as anybody to do his own guessin'. That fat man ain't any clothes man. Yes, he is, too, but the clothes he's dealin' in have got stripes on 'em that go round and round. That kind of stripes ain't a bit stylish in our set."

Southwall's face grew suddenly grave; his attention was suddenly keen.

"What's that?" he questioned. "Billy, my friend, that's just a blind surmise."

"Is it?" Billy parried. "All right. Just the same, I'm surmisin' correct. I'd be willing to swear I am. I'd swear to it on a great big bunch of Bibles. I'd pretty near be willin' to bet on it."

Southwall fell silent, drumming upon the bar with his fingers, letting his drink wait. "No fooling, Billy," he said by and by. "This is serious. You know how serious it is. Honestly, now, do you know what you're talking about?"

With Billy, complete seriousness was a last extremity. "All right!" he mocked. "You wait and see how much of a surmiser I am. I'm surmisin' that this fat man is goin' to stick round here for quite a spell. I'm surmisin' that he's goin' to find out he likes the country first rate. I'm surmisin' he's goin' to make up his mind he wants to try the fishin' up in the cañon, and mebbe the shootin' on the flats. I'm surmisin' that about to-morrow he'll begin explainin' about his stomach bein' out of fix, and about how bad he's been sleepin', and how bad he's needin' a rest; and after that he'll just keep on remainin'. And you'll see he'll remain mostly up around where Buck has been makin' his new land filin's lately. And Buck won't be likely to suspicion a thing about what he's after, unless somebody tells him. A suspicious man like Buck never does suspicion the truth. First thing you know, Fatty will have Buck dead to rights on that land business, all ready for the grand jury. Yes, sir, Tommy, I'll bet you on it."

Southwall's face was troubled. "For all your foolishness, Billy, you're not a fool. You know more than you're telling. But what makes you think he's after Buck right now? There are others."

"Sure!" Billy agreed. "But Buck's the biggest game in the country. Ain't it reasonable that the government'll take him first? They'll get the rest of 'em after while. If they get 'em all—everybody that's been stealin' land—they'll have a real respectable string, won't they? Buck Sterner and the Croker outfit and the Vandigs and Old Man Stanchfield——"

Southwall stirred uneasily. Billy laughed.

"Shucks, Tommy!" he said lightly. "What's it to you? I'd think you'd be tickled. It ain't goin' to hurt you; it's goin' to take your fight off your hands. If the government takes hold, it's goin' to leave you in a heap better shape in the Sink Hole country, and over at the Gap. Besides"—there was a sudden flare of daring impertinence in this new item—"besides, that girl ain't liable to like Buck near so well as she does now when this large person gets through with him."

Southwall flushed, the color rising to the very roots of his hair. "Don't, Billy!" he said.

"Why not?" Billy retorted. "Me and you ain't strangers, that we've got to talk so dainty. It don't hurt nothin', me sayin' it. It's just what you've been sayin' to yourself. You needn't to tell me you haven't. It's what anybody would think, if he's halfway human. It's what I'm thinkin' myself, just because I'm a friend of hers. I ain't wantin' Buck to get her, any more than you are. And Buck's been playin' it low-down on you, cuttin' down your range with them fake filin's of his, and runnin' it over you every time he gets a chance. If I was you, more ways than one I'd be feelin' plumb friendly toward the government for tryin' to get him out of my way. If it was me——"

"Don't, Billy!" Southwall said again; and Billy conceded the point.

"All right, then, I won't. Just the same, I'll bet you money, marbles, or chalk that I've got it guessed right about this fat lad. And if I have, then we ain't liable to be keepin' Buck with us so very long. I ain't goin' to feel so awful bad about that. I don't know why you'd need to, either."

Southwall turned from the bar and went out to the street; Billy, at his side, whistling and jingling a heavy pocketful of silver. Together they walked toward the hotel, a little distance up the street. The hour was late, and they must be early astir in the morning, ready for humdrum duty after this night's brief respite. Crossing the road, Billy paused suddenly and caught Southwall's arm.

"For the love of country!" he said softly. "Look who's there! What in the name of goodness is he up to, do you reckon?"

At a table within the lamplit hotel office Sterner sat writing, intent upon his work. On the porch before the uncurtained window, trying at once to draw close and to keep in shadowy concealment, Carl Stanchfield's dwarf, Jacky, crouched. A holstered belt sagged heavily across his hips; his hand fumbled nervously, impotently, in an effort to free the weapon he bore. Billy Fortune ran lightly to the cripple's side, staying his arm, speaking without haste:

"Hello, Jacky! I didn't know you was in town. Just get in?" Casually, in friendly fashion, he took possession of the weapon. "Say, you'd ought to throw off your gun first thing. They're gettin' strict about totin' guns in town these days. Better let me keep this for you till mornin'."

The hunchback made neither resistance nor response. He seemed to have brought himself to a state of high ten-

sion. Now, all at once, the tension relaxed. In silence he drew back from the dim light of the window, dropped from the end of the porch, and slipped away into the darkness.

"Tommy, did you notice that?" Billy questioned quietly. "Gunnin' for old Buck! What's he doin' that for? Does he know, do you reckon? Or is it just craziness?"

Southwall said nothing. Perplexedly Billy turned the heavy six-shooter in his hand, speculating.

"What had I better do?" he queried. "He's scared off for this time. But ought I be tellin' Buck, against the next time? I guess I'd better."

He belittled the incident for Sterner's ears, giving it a comedy aspect, laughing over his warning. Sterner listened without show of excitement.

"Thanks, Billy," he said quietly, and returned to his writing.

CHAPTER IV.

Buck Sterner was the sheep king of the Guernsey country of Wyoming; which, being interpreted, meant that he ran more sheep than anybody else round about. His bands were numbered by the tens of thousands. Having the sheep, it followed as a matter of course that he must have the range and the water. There he had shown his royal genius. Anybody may acquire sheep, but he who acquires an empire of well-watered range under his own dominion must have in him the real old-fashioned kingly quality which enables him to get what isn't his.

Buck Sterner's range was a very empire. Gone were the days when the stockman, whether with cattle or sheep or horses, might pasture where he pleased without regard for boundaries. Long since the great range country had been partitioned after a rude fashion which gave to every man the land he was able to get and hold against his neighbors by craft or force under color of right. The system was rough and ready, but it had tacit consent, pending a better time.

When you had passed the rim of Sterner's outer line of camps, no matter from what direction you came, you would find it a long, long way to his headquarters at the center of his domain. If you had asked Buck to tell you how much land he controlled, his answer would have been vaguely approximate. Of course he wouldn't tell you. There are state secrets in all kingdoms. He knew, though, exactly what he had down to the last least fragment. So did his neighbors know—the princes and the barons and the smaller fry, even to the little half-section homesteaders who fought for footholds here and there. Year by year, as his herds and his ambition had thrived, Sterner had pushed his grasping tentacles farther and farther out along the waterways, ruthlessly famishing the lesser folk.

Olaf Bjinks, at one of the outlying camps, was entertaining visitors overnight. His guests were Billy Fortune and a big, blubbery-looking stranger, bound together for a week's hunting and fishing "up above." Hunting and fishing thereabouts were known to be at their best within the lines of Sterner's preserves.

Olaf's method of entertainment was charmingly simple. He allowed his guests to help themselves to his camp fire for their supper cookery; and after that he looked on blandly while they brought their tarp beds from the mountain wagon and spread them upon the ground. Then, when his night lanterns were set in place about the sheep bed ground, Olaf set himself serenely down beside the fire, brought his jew's-harp from his pocket, and put it to his lips. Till that moment, conversation in the camp had been scrappy, haphazard; but the jew's-harp inspired speech.

It was the blubbery person who spoke first. He seemed a jovial soul, squatting by the fire in a huge, grotesque, shapeless mass with the flickering light of the flames playing ruddily upon his big, bulging face. The harp's tuneless monody brought a thick, good-natured wheeze of laughter from his fat throat.

"Oh, great! Billy, that's just the touch we needed to make this thing complete!"

"Yes," said Billy. "It is touchin'—ain't it?"

"It's Olympian!" the fat man chortled. "It's a picture—a poem! Pan and his pipes! Look at his face, and look at those magnificent shadows beyond him!"

The ecstatic speech went over Billy's head. Billy's notion of the Olympian proposition was but vague; his notion of Pan was tied up with the prosaic business of cookery. He didn't know what the fat man was driving at; he saw no more inspiring spectacle than a tow-headed oaf twanging a jew's-harp.

A sheep dog, reposing beneath the camp wagon, raised his head and spoke a long, lugubrious protest. From their bed ground the sheep, myriad-voiced, gave uneasy response. Olaf took the harp from his mouth, holding it in the hollow of his hand and waiting till the clamor would abate, blinking solemnly across the fire at his guests.

"It iss no use to play her," he lamented. "I cannot hear her if the s'eep do not be still." With stoic patience he sat staring out into the vast void of the night. "It is awful lonesome," he said by and by. "It iss not like wis my papa's s'eep. My papa's s'eep, I take dem home at night. I am not scared wis my papa's s'eep. Here I am awful lonesome and scared. If I cannot hear the moosic, it scares me to listen to so much stillness." Dolefully he eyed the futile harp. "I wis' she could sing loud! I wis' she could say 'boom!'—big! It is awful lonesome."

The fat man's laugh sounded hollow. His eyes, too, were turned toward the mighty darkness, and his bulk was shaken by a shudder.

"My soul!" he said thickly. "I know what he means! Billy, I wouldn't spend a night out here alone for money. I suppose you don't understand that—do you? You've never had a fit of the black terrors in all your life—have you?"

Billy chuckled in lazy amusement. "It's all accordin' to the way you're brought up, I reckon. With me, the only place I ever get scared is where the lights are shinin', with a mess of strange folks around."

Heavy with weariness, Billy dozed off after a time. The fat man shuffled closer to the dying fire, trying to poke the embers into companionable blaze. There was no companionship in the voiceless, brooding Olaf. From far out among the hills came the thin wail of a coyote. Dying, the ghostly sound left the night very still. There was no least breath of air astir. Beyond the fire Olaf loomed gigantic, unhuman in the gloom. The fat man cleared his throat.

"Friend," he said, "try playing that harp again, won't you? The thing may take the curse off this silence, anyway."

Reassurance came with the morning. It was a brilliant morning. No phantom of the night could live in it. In the cool of the dawn the fat man ate his breakfast ravenously; and while he ate he jested with ponderous gayety, then lent an awkward hand at breaking camp. Working, he joked; joking, he hoisted himself presently to his seat in the wagon, trying to settle his bulk to the jolt and swing upon the stony trail.

"Not so fast!" he begged. "Pity me! Remember yesterday. Forty tough miles yesterday—and how many more to-day?"

"It's better than twenty more," Billy

said, "till we hit the house. But you'll sleep in a bed to-night. Sterner's got good beds. After that, you ain't liable to see a real bed for the whole trip. There ain't any beds but Sterner's from now on, after we're inside his lines."

"Inside his lines?" the fat man echoed. "What do you mean by that? We can't be on his territory now."

It was innocently said. Billy Fortune, too, was a master hand at innocence. "Oh, Buck, he's quite a person round here," he said lightly.

"Well, but—twenty miles!" the fat man cried. "How in the world could one man ever get a piece of land twenty miles across?"

"It's forty mile across his land, this way," Billy corrected. "I don't know how he got it, unless he just sort of accumulated it. There's a couple of sage chickens yonder, runnin'. They're young ones, too. They'd go good for dinner. Want to try a shot?"

Though the wagon stopped, the fat man missed both birds at easy range. Billy made no comment, but filed the failure away in his memory. As the birds went lumbering off upon slow, heavy wing, the fat man laughed.

"It must be your magnificent distances that fooled me. I had that forty miles in my mind." Clumsily he fooled with the ejector, trying to throw out the empty shells. "Twenty miles from center to circumference! And that belongs to just one man? I can't imagine it. It's taken me most of a lifetime to pay for just one little town lot. How could one man ever manage to pay for such a stretch as this?"

"I don't know," said Billy. "There's been years when wool has been plumb high. I expect Buck clips as much as anybody. Mebbe that explains it. Better let me get them shells out for you, if you want to do any more shootin'."

"Forty miles!" the fat man marveled. "Why, you might set half a dozen Chicagos down on Sterner's land—couldn't you? That's too much land for any one man to own."

"Chicago," Billy drawled. "Chicago's a hot little old town. I'm real fond of Chicago myself."

After a time the fat man quit his angling. That was just as well; he was casting for a sly fish. Only when his companion went through the process of reeling up his mental line and abandoning the play did Billy speak frankly.

"Yes, sir, I like Chicago," he said. "Chicago's real full of funny folks, ain't it? Chicago was the place where I run across you the first time."

"What!" The fat man stared, and his thick lips fell loosely apart.

"I knew you didn't remember me," Billy said. "You wouldn't be likely to. But I remember you. It was up in the courthouse where I saw you, when they was havin' some kind of a hearin' about them coal lands in Chicago. There was a bunch of us boys that just blew in, and you got us tangled up with them that was goin' to be witnesses. I couldn't hardly forget you. I knowed you the first minute I set eyes on you down at Fletch's place."

The fat man glowered angrily for a moment, puffed, and stammered angrily: "You mean—you mean——"

Billy laughed with easy good nature. "Oh, we might just as well get this thing straight. There ain't any use hidin' it. I know what you're here for. It didn't take a wizard to guess that. You're workin' for the government on Buck Sterner's land claims—ain't you? That's all right. You don't have to tell me nothin', nor you needn't be askin' me all this mess of questions about Buck, because I won't answer 'em. It ain't polite to tell such things out here—and I'm one of these real polite men."

The stranger's anger was cooling to discomfiture. "But, Billy, when I hired you——"

"Listen!" Billy interposed gently. "You hired me to take you fishin' and shootin', and that's just exactly what I'm doin'. You didn't have to tell me you was a government detective; nor I didn't have to tell you I knew you was one. That part of it's just as long as it is short. If you want to do somethin' besides huntin' and shootin' while we're out, that's all right with me. You go right straight ahead. I ain't carin', nor I ain't sayin' a word, not either way. I'm just keepin' my mouth shut about that part. If that don't suit you, now's a real good time to say so."

The fat man meditated, taking a sidewise look now and again at Billy's face. When Billy chose, he could let his face inspire confidence. Just now he didn't want to abandon this adventure.

"Well," the fat man said slowly, "it's —it's unusual; but I must go on with my work. Since you know, I suppose it's safer to have you with me and under some obligation than to have you loose. If I may have your word——"

Billy took that quite simply, without offense. "It don't need my word for keepin' my mouth shut. It stays shut itself, when it's got somethin' to stay shut for. It won't talk on this trip—not about this business. You're here for fishin' and shootin', and I'm here to show you the best places; that's all. That's all we'll be talkin' about—unless you happen to take a notion to tell me somethin' about the clothin' business." He grinned impudently. The fat man liked his impudence. Doubt went to sleep.

"All right, my friend," the fat man said. "We'll let it go that way. We're a couple of irresponsibles on a lark. I'm Sam Bloomfield, clothing salesman; and you're Billy Fortune—ah—Billy Fortune—— How do they describe you round here?"

"They don't," said Billy. "They've give up tryin'."

CHAPTER V.

As a host, Buck Sterner had his good points. In that guise, beneath his own roof, he was not the Buck Sterner who made moan over his losses at poker in Fletch's place. From the front door of his ranch house he could see for miles down the trail that wound through red hills and over sagebrush flats. Whenever he saw anybody coming, though still afar off, he would give a comfortable-sounding order to the China boy in his kitchen, then look carefully to the strategic placing of a box of good cigars and a bottle or two; and after that he would bide his time a trifle impatiently till the moment came for walking out to cry a personal welcome. He was very good at that sort of thing. It wouldn't matter whether you arrived as a tramp or a magnate, you would get your welcome and you would fare upon the best Sterner had to give.

Buck was unaffectedly glad to see Billy Fortune and big Sam Bloomfield. Supper time was drawing on, and he abhorred taking his evening meal in solitude. From his post of waiting he swung his broad-rimmed hat and called aloud:

"Hello, there! Seems to me you're driving mighty slow, Billy. You've been twenty-five minutes coming from the dry crossing."

Billy grinned. "But just look what I'm haulin'! This ain't what you'd call a speedy load."

The fat man laughed in jolly fashion. "No, don't blame Billy. Blame the gods who fashioned me as I am. We're slow in arriving, but we're mighty glad to be here." Ponderously he descended from his seat, offering a pudgy hand. "My name's Bloomfield, Mr. Sterner. I saw you at Guernsey a couple of days ago. Perhaps you remember? I've engaged Billy to take me out fishing, and he's responsible for my being here now.

He's taken it for granted that you'll keep us overnight. I wonder if you can really let us stay?"

Sterner met that in kind. "I wonder if you think I'd really let you go. It's an event when any one comes to stay overnight with me, out here in this wilderness. Can you attend to the team yourself, Billy? You know where to put 'em, and where to find the feed. Hurry up! There's a good drink waiting, and some antelope steak afterward. I was lucky yesterday. Antelope are getting scarce, Mr. Bloomfield. Come in—come in!"

The hour was mellow with all good-fellowship. Sterner had skimmed the thickest cream from the markets for the supply of his own table. When solid eating and drinking were finished, at a word the sandaled Chinaman opened cans and jars of titbits gathered from far places. There was no sequence to the service; caprice dictated the order. Sterner had an uncanny understanding of ways for prodding and teasing a cloyed appetite to fresh adventure. Betweenwhiles there was smoke and talk, and at the last a wee sip of something which brought fire into the fat man's eyes and kindled a warm word upon his tongue.

Billy Fortune toyed with his thimbleful portion in its tiny etched glass.

"Me—drinkin' pale-pink stuff!" he mocked. "Buck, if the boys would ever get to know it——"

Bloomfield allowed an infinitesimal drop to moisten his thick lips.

"Don't talk, Billy!" he chided. "This isn't drinking; this is a religious ceremony. Don't talk. Pray!" His huge body was reduced to a pulp, saturated with content. "If there's any sin or suffering in the world anywhere," he purred, "let's dispose of it now. If mine enemies want mercy, full measure, pressed down and running over, let them stand before me now! I feel as if I could beat heavenly compassion at its own game right this minute."

The house stood open to the night, but a log fire blazed upon the broad stone hearth in Sterner's living room. There were deep lounging chairs standing about. The spirit of romance came and sat with them in the firelight. There was good talk, talk which ranged free over the wide field of life. Life had been for those three a thing of many savors; none of the three had been much troubled by the conventions.

In his corner, Billy Fortune waited curiously for the moment when Bloomfield's speech would take a turn toward professional craft. He thought Bloomfield would begin talking presently about the sheep business and about the methods which had made Sterner a king. There was nothing of the sort.

In due time the China boy brought hot water and sugar and a golden-brown bottle. Sterner stood up.

"You boys will be tired," he said. "On a night like this, there's always one particular minute when the kindest thing a man may do for his guests is to show them where they're to sleep. I know where this whisky came from, and I know it's good. Say when, Mr. Bloomfield."

He saw to their well-being in the big, airy bedroom with its two big, comfortable beds, then lingered for a moment.

"Billy," he said, "you'd better camp right here at the house while you're out. There's no use going any farther if it's fishing you're after. You know that. The best fishing on the place isn't two miles from here. There's no use bunking on stony ground when you may have springs and a mattress. Stay here. You'd be mighty welcome."

"This sure suits me," Billy grinned; but Bloomfield interposed:

"No, no! I couldn't think of it!" He laughed, but the laugh was empty of mirth. "Be merciful, Sterner! Look at me! Two hundred and forty

pounds—and I've put on ten pounds more to-night. I've got to get out and stir round. That's—that's what I came here for. Don't tempt me, please!"

When Sterner was gone, Bloomfield sat inert on the edge of his bed. Billy Fortune was undressed and stretched between the sheets before the fat man's shoes were off. The big face was heavy with tribulation; all its lines tended downward.

"You Billy!" he said softly. "It's a nice jack pot I'm in here—isn't it? You oughtn't have brought me here. How do you reckon this makes me feel? And how do you reckon I'm going to feel after a while, when I remember back to this night?"

Billy made no answer. He didn't want to talk; he wanted to listen. Maybe his own part in the business of the coming week would not be wholly passive. He wanted to know what was on the inside of the fat man's soul concerning the work in hand. He held his tongue.

"It's a beastly job!" Bloomfield grumbled. He pulled his tie loose and flung it from him, then jerked at the buttons of his shirt. "Billy," he challenged, "did you ever betray a man's confidence—and do it for pay?"

"Me? No, I don't know as I have," Billy said mildly.

"Well, don't try it. My soul! I'd almost rather be in his shoes than mine." He set his teeth upon a harsh oath. "I wish he'd turned us away. I wish you hadn't come here at all. What's he going to think of me when he finds out?"

Billy snuggled lazily down, tucking the covers comfortably about him. "Oh, shucks!" he scoffed. "If it was me, that wouldn't worry me. It won't worry Buck. If Buck had knew, it would have been all the same. He'd have done just exactly the same as he did. And you can come back here after it's all over, and it'll be just like this. It's a notion Buck's got about folks comin' to his house. Just a comical notion."

"Comical?" Bloomfield brooded upon the word. "Comical! Yes, very!" He sat pondering heavily, scowling. "Oh, well!" he said by and by. "Let it go! This life's nothing but a big joke, anyway. I've got to go ahead with this thing. It's my duty. Duty! There's another sweet word!" After a moment he roused from his somber state. "Billy," he said, "there was one of the old-timers who said that duties are ours, but events are God's. Do you get that? Can you make any sense out of it?"

"Sense?" Billy echoed. "Yes, indeedy! That's just what I'm aimin' to tell you. Doin' your duty is the way you make your livin', ain't it? Well, then, why don't you just go right straight ahead and do it? Nobody's goin' to care much. Nor it ain't goin' to make much difference with the way things happen. A man that's always botherin' about how important his duty is, he don't change things much."

With that fragment of consolation Billy turned over and went to sleep. Bloomfield, too, got into bed, succumbing heavily to weariness and to much meat and drink.

Neither man stirred when their door was opened after a time with slow stealth. Sandaled feet slipped quietly over the straw-matted floor, and a small electric torch glowed for an instant. In the kitchen, the China boy set Bloomfield's bag upon a table, then stood waiting while Sterner slipped the clasps.

The bag was like its owner, heavy and full-bodied, its lines sagging ungracefully. Within lay an untidy array of odds and ends of clothing and implements of the masculine toilet. These Sterner passed over; but his hand seized upon a worn leather portfolio encircled by a rubber band and bulging

full of letters and documents and blank forms. Without hesitation, Sterner laid the portfolio open. He did not undertake to possess himself of its secrets, save one. At a glance he saw that the papers related to the business of the department of the interior. Apparently that was all he cared to know, for he replaced the portfolio and closed the bag.

"All right, Fong," he said curtly. "Take it back and put it where you got it. Quietly, now!"

CHAPTER VI.

Billy Fortune roused lazily from untroubled slumber. It was not yet sunrise, but the morning light was pale, molten gold. Billy lay motionless, blinking drowsily, trying to put off the moment of full awakening.

A voice outside his window brought him sharply to himself and set him to listening. There was only one such voice in the Guernsey country.

"I'll bub-be dud-dud-darned if I'll stut-tut-tand for it!" Poddy Bruce was saying. There was an interval of inarticulate gurgling in Poddy's throat, of heroic struggle for words. "Your mum-men are stut-tringing a half mile of wire where you haven't gug-gug-got even a thief's right. You've gug-got no rights at all on that sus-side the kik-creek. You've never kik-kik-claimed any. You're shutting mum-me and Tut-Tut-Tommy away from the only water we've gug-got for the nun-north end of our pup-pasture. What the ——"

Tom Southwall's voice interposed. Southwall's tone was low, but full of grim tension: "Wait a minute, Poddy. Sterner knows all that. What we've come to find out, Sterner, is whether you're going to try to make that line of fence stick. That's what we want to know—just that!"

There was a little interval of silence. Carefully Billy raised himself upon his elbow, peering out with stealth around the edge of the window curtain. Sterner stood upon the porch, looking down upon his visitors. Evidently they had come far and in haste, for even in the cool air of early morning their horses were in a lather. The faces of the two betrayed strong excitement. Sterner's face alone showed no acute feeling. Bold-featured, strong, it was like a hard mask. Deliberately he let the silence draw itself out till it became exasperating, then all but insulting.

"Come!" Southwall cried. "Let's have it! It's been tacitly understood that you'd keep on this side the creek, and now your men are running fence on the other side, across Cottonwood Gap. You know what that means. What are you doing it for?"

Sterner's lips parted in a syllable of cold laughter. "A tacit understanding? I don't remember any such understanding."

Southwall's voice rose angrily: "You know perfectly well that we've been working on that theory. We've kept our bands west of Low Creek, and you've always kept yours on this side till now. That's always been the working theory on that range."

"Your own theory," Sterner amended. "I didn't make the theory for you. I've never given you any reason for such a theory, except by letting you use that water till I needed it myself. I need it now. I'm going to shift some big bands to that range over there. There's no more water there than I'll be needing. That's why I'm stringing that fence."

Southwall's horse danced under the rider's nervous twitching of the bridle rein. Southwall's temper was rising beyond control.

"You crook!" he cried hotly. "Then this goes, does it? This is a showdown, is it? Why, you haven't a shadow of right over there. You've

never made a single filing on that land. Your fence is just plain brute lawlessness. You're not even at the pains of practicing a legal fraud, as you've done with the rest of your water. There isn't one of your hired homesteaders' shacks anywhere along the creek."

Sterner spoke with cold calm: "No homestead filings on Low Creek? That's another of your easy theories. If you're expecting to stay in the sheep business, you ought to keep your eye on the land-office records."

Southwall was a bit staggered. "What?" he demanded. "Do you mean to say you've been making filings?"

"Look at the records," Sterner retorted. Abruptly his voice grew harsh and hard. "You're a pair of fools! I've done no more than you might have done for yourselves. You might have had me frozen out of the Sink Hole country long ago; you've had plenty of chances while I've been working on the lower end of my range. You've loafed on your job and let me put one over on you—that's all."

"We might have done it!" Southwall retorted. "We might have worked the fraud first! You know perfectly well that we're doing nothing of the sort. You know well enough that we haven't acquired a single acre by fraud. You know we've always fought against that. I didn't dream you'd dare practice it on us."

"Oh—dare!" Sterner said coolly.

Southwall urged his restless horse close, bent from the saddle, and shook his tightened fist in Sterner's face. "Then this is a show-down?" he demanded.

"A show-down," Sterner said. "Yes, if you want to call it that. My new fence stays right where it is, if that's what you want to know."

It was Poddy Bruce who found voice then, after a struggle.

"Bub-Bub-Buck," he challenged, "I'll bub-bet you it dud-don't! I'll make you a spup-portin' pup-proposition it don't! I'll bub-bub-bet you a million it dud-don't!"

Again Sterner laughed quietly. "Save your money, Poddy." His manner changed by a degree; became a shade less hardy, a shade more taunting. "I'm not debating the matter with you. It's doing you no good at all to stay here and argue. You've come a long way before breakfast, and it's a long way back. Don't let me detain you—unless I may offer you a drink."

Without a word, Southwall jerked his horse about and spurred down the lane to the open trail. Poddy lingered. Poddy was slower than Southwall to reach the white heat of anger, slower to gain any climax of feeling.

"Bub-Bub-Buck," he protested, "do you kik-call this white? We've bub-been white with you. We've never made a kik-kik-kick when your sheep gug-got over on our gug-grass. We've bub-been white. You know what this'll dud-do to us. If that fence stut-ticks, it'll kik-kill us off. We can't stut-tay over there without that water."

Sterner's tone lost a little of its hostility, though his words were no less unrelenting. "If you fellows want to find new range, I'll not be standing in your way. There's still some open country farther west." He smiled upon the perturbed Poddy with a tolerant sort of pity. "If you were alone in this business, I might talk to you; but you're hooked up wrong. I've got nothing against you. That partner of yours is the man I'm after. He's been here long enough. He's in my way, and I'm going to get rid of him. Tell him that for me, if you like."

From the trail Southwall called with hot impatience. Reluctantly Poddy picked up his bridle rein and followed down the lane.

Looking on from his seclusion, Billy Fortune chuckled quietly. This might be a bit of near-tragedy brewing, but

there was no harm in laughing at the comedy mixed up with it. Poddy Bruce made a comical figure in the saddle, with his long, limp legs dangling and his grotesque little paunch bobbing in time to the horse's stride. Then Billy stopped his chuckling suddenly as he turned from the window and saw that Bloomfield, too, was wide awake and listening intently.

"Oh!" Billy said. "You've been hearin', then?"

Bloomfield nodded. "I heard. And that's the man who's been so good to us overnight! My soul, but this is a curious country of yours!" Laboriously he sat up on the edge of his bed, thrusting out his fat legs, wrinkling his fat face. Slowly the wrinkles cleared away and his little eyes glinted humorously in their deep recesses.

"Look out, Billy!" he warned. "I'm about to burst into song!" And then in his fat wheeze he sang:

"When a villain's not engaged in his employment,
Nor maturing his felonious little plans,
His capacity for innocent enjoyment
Is just as great as any honest man's.
Our feelings we with difficulty smother
When constabulary duty's to be done.
Oh, take one consideration with another,
A policeman's lot is not a happy one!"

He rolled the words thickly upon his tongue. "There you've got it, my friend. That's rotten nonsense, but it's bully good sense, too. Get up, now; let's hurry and see what the villain has been fixing for breakfast."

If the villain felt any concern whatever about anything in life, he was a master at concealment. Breakfast was an achievement; and throughout the meal Sterner's jocund manner seemed quite unforced. His talk turned, as if spontaneously, to the picturesque side of range life and work. Now, with no adroit coaxing, he spoke freely of his encounters with the neighbors over boundaries; he made a joke of the oblique means he had used to enforce his ambitions; he was at no pains to be on guard against the stranger. The sheer audacity of it made Billy Fortune wonder.

After breakfast, Sterner's good-byes were spoken heartily.

"Well, come again!" he urged. "Make this home while you're in the country, and don't fail to stop on the way back. We do better here than leaving the latchstring out; we leave our doors standing wide open."

When the wagon was gone, a change came upon him—a sudden and sharp dismissal of all pretense, a complete return to grim earnest. From his office he put in an imperative call for telephone connection with Cheyenne. The name he spoke was a name to conjure with in Wyoming politics, but Sterner's demand was brusque:

"Busy? Well, jar him loose. I want him now. No, I'll not call again. Tell him Sterner wants him." To the man himself, his speech was no less of the savor of a command. "Why haven't I had warning that the department was sending a secret-service agent up here? It was your business to know it. That's a part of your obligation to us. Well, the man's here, and he's starting work on my case. He'll get me if he's let alone; you know that. I'm vulnerable. Call him off. I don't care whose orders he's working under; have him called off. No, I'll not talk compromise. I'm going straight ahead, exactly as I've planned things. They'll try to get me for an example—you know that. I'll not stand for it, not for a holy minute! I've told you this before, but you mark it again now: If this case against me is carried on, then the whole darned structure comes down. I can pull it down, and you know it. You'll have no machine with the stockmen. It's square up to you. I'll not quit. You have this man called off, and do it quick!"

CHAPTER VII.

For two long miles of their way Tom Southwall and Poddy Bruce galloped hard side by side in dead silence. Their reasons for silence were quite unlike. It was rage that held Southwall voiceless. Poddy was bursting with desire to talk; language seethed and simmered in his brain, but the swift pace kept his struggling tongue impotent. By and by he put out his hand and gripped Southwall's arm.

"Wuh-wait!" he gasped. "I kik-can't tut-tut-talk when we're gug-going so fast."

Southwall's livid face made an odd contrast with his blazing eyes. "Talk!" he cried. "Talk! In Heaven's name, be still!"

"Bub-but I've gug-got something to sus-say!" Poddy protested. "Hold up! Sus-say, what are we gug-going to do now? Is it kik-kik-quit?"

"Quit?" Southwall flamed. "No, we'll not quit! We'll fight! If it's fight he wants, he'll get it." An oath crackled and sizzled upon his tense lips; he was not considering all he said. "He's gone the limit. Here's where we stop him. And we'll stop him with our own hands. Do you hear?"

Poddy did not undertake to retort in kind. Instead, he drew his hand slowly across his dry lips, and his eyes grew wistful.

"I wish I kik-could have kik-quit hatin' him long enough to tut-take that dud-dud-drink," he said. "I'm nun-needin' a drink now real bub-bub-bad." He was not jesting. "Stut-top him!" he brooded. "Stut-tut-top him by ourselves! Juh-Juh-Jerusalem! It kik-can't be done! Stut-top a bub-blizzard by blowin' your bub-breath on it! We kik-can't stop Bub-Bub-Buck."

Southwall's wrath was at the blistering point, with a wide inclusiveness. "Oh, shut up!" he stormed. "You're just gabbling. We're going to take our sheep to water through that gap so long as we've got one head left. He'll not hinder us. If he tries——"

"Kik-Christmas!" Poddy scoffed. "You and mum-me with our little outfit, we'd pup-play hell gug-gettin' in his road! I ain't anxious to tut-try it."

Southwall did not respond. He was not attending closely to Poddy's stutterings. They had come to a point where the trail forked, with one lean, sinuous arm leading off southward toward home, the other bending away to the north. There Southwall drew rein, somber-eyed, busy with his own thoughts.

"They'll not have their fence finished to-day to keep us away from the creek," he said presently. "Go on down, Poddy, and help the boys with their watering at noon, and then get ready to go to the land office to-night to see what filings he's made. I'll be back before you leave. I'm going to see what he's been doing farther up the creek."

"Up the kik-creek?" Poddy stared; then a wry grin contorted his lips. "Tut-Tut-Tommy, you're tut-tellin' me a lie!" he said mildly. "You're gug-goin' up to Stut-tanchfield's to see that gug-girl. That's where you're gug-goin'. This is a hell of a tut-time to go kik-kik-courtin'."

Southwall did not heed. Already he was upon his way, striking in spurs and riding hard. If indeed he was going a-wooing, his manner bespoke most uncommon zeal.

Although he made all speed, urging his weary beast to the full stretch of endurance, it was well past mid-morning when he came to the end of his way. Impetuous desire was in his eyes, running far ahead and seeking, seeking. After a time, still afar off, he saw what he sought, and the lines upon his face softened. Before he came within hailing distance his eyes were gentle

and his lips smiling. In the dooryard, working over her flower garden, was little Betty.

A small detail, you might have said, to produce such an effect. Well, Betty wasn't very large. When she stretched to her proudest height, the taller posts in the yard fence easily overtopped her shining brown head. The roomy envelope of her blue gingham apron could not disguise her slenderness. As for size, she was a mere trifle; but if you had sat in Southwall's saddle on that morning, hurrying closer and closer and keeping your eyes fixed steadfastly upon her while you rode, you wouldn't have wished for any change. Exactly as she was, line for line and shade for shade, little Betty stood daintily complete.

At the yard gate, Southwall flung himself from his saddle, letting his bridle rein drag. Betty came down the path to meet him, Wyoming fashion. Was it merely the custom of the country that brought her? Maybe; but then Tom Southwall, who knew the customs of the country well, was letting himself be deceived. He read a welcome more personal in the quickening light in her clear eyes, in the warmth of color that tinged her sunbrowned cheeks, and in the frank pressure of her hand. He laughed softly, his voice resonant with delight.

"The prettiest posy of them all!" he said. "Do you want to know what flower you made me think of, coming up the trail and watching you?"

She laughed, too, lightly, easily. "I hope it was one of the good old hardy perennials," she said. "The others are all so obstinate out here, and so disappointing."

He shook his head gently. "No. It's the flower I liked better than all the others, back home. It never disappointed me. The little windflower."

She was not displeased, though she made mock: "A windflower! I? Pale, fragile, pink! The sun that's been tanning me has made you color blind. I'm a marigold. Look at me again!"

"I'm looking," he returned. Her color heightened under his steady scrutiny. "Tell me when I must stop looking."

For all her frankness of manner, her glance was the first to fall in this encounter. If agitation counted in the score, then Southwall had scored first.

"The sun's very warm out here," she said, for diversion. "Come to the porch. My vines give a little shade up there." She turned to lead the way, but he stopped her.

"No—wait!" he said quickly. "I can't stay. I must go back. Let me talk to you here for just a minute. I've come a long way for just this minute with you."

She looked at him quickly, startled. It needed no subtlety of perception to discover the sudden change in him. He had put aside all mere gallantry, all light pretense. For a little time he stood before her, silent, tight-lipped, his strong hands playing with his broad-rimmed hat, turning it over and over, crushing it shapeless and plucking it back into form.

"I'll have to say it headlong," he began. "There doesn't seem to be any other way. I'll blunder, too. I can't say it as I want to. But it isn't the heart of me that's blundering." He waited, mightily perturbed, hungry for any least sign that would give strength to his courage. He could read no sign in her demure posture, her bent head and lightly clasped hands. He had to go on without help:

"I might have told you this long ago. It's been true for a long time. But I've been putting it off. I don't know how to tell you why. It will sound like a coward's reason. But I wasn't afraid. I've been waiting till I could be sure about things—about the place I could

take and what I could make of myself. That wasn't sure a year ago. Does that sound mean and poor, when a man's trying to tell a girl he loves her?"

He had given her fair warning that he would blunder. The man who argues over his love-making is a sorry blunderer. Since creation's morning, no right-minded girl has cared much for argument about love. There was nothing for Betty to say. After a time Southwall took a new hold upon himself.

"I haven't come here to-day," he said, "because I've found my place or seen my way clearly. I'm farther than ever from that. I'll have to play the game harder than ever now. But that doesn't matter. There's nothing in the world that matters to me now except that I had to come to you. I couldn't put it off any longer. I couldn't keep from coming to-day to tell you—to tell you——"

That was a poor place for halting and stammering, but Southwall halted and stammered as if he had spent a lifetime in mastering the knack of it. So ready with pretty compliment and verbal trifling, he was all but inarticulate in this strait. What girl alive could have escaped amusement at his poor plight? Amusement lightly curled the corners of Betty's pretty mouth and set the lights in her pretty eyes to dancing. Beholding, Southwall was utterly dismayed. He was surely a master blunderer.

"Don't answer me now," he said abjectly. "You can't, of course. But I couldn't be satisfied till I'd told you. I wanted you to know, and I want you to remember. Maybe some time—I can't tell what may happen to me. I'm going against a big change in my work. Nobody can tell how it's coming out; but some time—some time, maybe——"

Watching his helpless floundering, Betty laughed—a golden tinkle of genuine enjoyment. She wasn't cruel, but laughter made the cruelest wound she might have given just then to the solemn orator before her. He was in no state of mind to understand.

"Oh, I know it's ridiculous!" he cried. "No man like me has a right to come barehanded to a girl like you. As if the gift of his love might make up for all he lacks besides! It's ridiculous, but——". He stopped suddenly in panic fright, turning away to where his horse browsed near by. "I can't get it right now," he said miserably. "But I—I'll come back. I'll not give you up till I—not till I must."

Dully he climbed to his saddle and dully rode away, bearing the pain of defeat in his heart. He had come twenty-five miles for that, and twenty-five long miles lay ahead of him for his disconsolate return. Her cheeks glowing scarlet, Betty stood where he had left her, watching his retreat. Not once did he look back. When he was well out of hearing, laughter seized the girl anew—a very riot of laughter. She did her best to curb its madness, but it would not be conquered. By and by she let it have its way, bent her head upon her arms, and laughed in utter abandon, laughed till tears choked her.

It was late in the afternoon when Southwall came to his own ground. At Cottonwood Gap, on the border of the lands known as the Sink Hole, he paused for an inspection.

Sterner's fence was not yet completed. Evidently his men were taking time to build well. Heavy posts had been set deep, and rolls of barbed wire lay ready to be strung. The barrier would extend from wall to wall of the half-mile-wide passage through the high bluff that marked the western boundary of the Sink Hole. From Southwall's range beyond, that passage had given the only access to the creek for a long distance up and downstream. To be sure, there were steep ways here and there over the bluff, but these trails

were of no use for moving several thousand sheep at once.

Sterner's men were not about. In all likelihood they had gone for the night to one of the sheep camps above or below; but undoubtedly they would return to their task in the morning. Perhaps not to-morrow, but surely by another day's noon watering time, Southwall must face a hard situation. This northern end of his range had been of great value, but it would be quite valueless now if that fence remained in place. The loss of a dozen square miles of the best sheep pasture in the country was not a loss easy to be borne. Considering that Buck Sterner would be the man to profit by the loss, Southwall swore bitterly, giving his whole heart to it.

It occurred to him presently that he was swearing into empty air and achieving nothing in particular. With a final snappy word or two for good measure, he urged his tired horse ahead, riding for his own nearest camp two miles back from the Gap.

The herder in charge was slow-witted and slow of speech, after the manner of flock tenders. There was not much that he could tell.

"We didn't have any trouble to-day," he said stolidly. "Poddy, he come down at noon, and we went through to water, same as usual. Buck's men didn't try to stop us, goin' or comin'. They didn't do nothin' but josh us a little. They said if we wanted water for the critters to-morrow we'd better be prayin' for rain. I wouldn't wonder but they meant it. I wouldn't wonder but——"

Southwall was in no temper for long-drawn colloquy. He had got the news he wanted. He gave a brief order:

"Let the bands graze over that way in the morning, as you've always done. I'll be with you myself before noon."

He found no solace at his ranch house, another two miles beyond. The house, standing bare upon the open plain, was in darkness. The stove in the bare bachelors' kitchen held no fire. Southwall lit a lamp and set it upon the kitchen table. There under his hand he found a note from Poddy Bruce. The note was very brief, very pointed. Given a pencil and a scrap of paper, Poddy did not stammer over what he had to say:

> No sense losing time waiting here for you. Pulling out this afternoon for Guernsey, and from there to the land office. Be back quick. Sterner's folks didn't do nothing to-day, but it will be awful different soon. If you happen to see Buck, tell him for me I said for him to go to Halifax till I get back. Yrs. truly, PODDY.
>
> P. S.—Tommy, I guess you are right. If you say fight him, why, we will fight him. He will lick us, but what is the difference? Yrs. truly, PODDY.

For all his distress of mind, Southwall felt the pain of ravenous hunger. It was fifteen hours since his early breakfast, and he had spent a grilling day in the saddle. He cooked for himself a hearty supper. That helped to deaden his sharpest pangs. When he had eaten, he went at once to bed; but despite his great weariness of body, he could not get to sleep. After an hour of useless trial, he got up and sat by the kitchen stove, trying to bring his thoughts into order and plan for what he must meet. That effort, too, was futile. Nothing like order seemed possible in his world just then; nothing but chaos had come out of the day past, and nothing but chaos seemed to lie ahead. By and by, overwrought, he put on his clothes and went out of doors. The barren, unlovely rooms of the house cramped him, prisoned him, made him feel somehow that human sympathy was infinitely remote. Out of doors, the stars would appear closer and more companionable than humankind. For a long time he wandered about aimlessly, brooding. For once the stars were distant, their kindliness withdrawn from him. Altogether he

put in a comfortless night. The cold, dead gray of first dawn was very welcome, for the dawn would bring the day and the day would bring action.

His telephone bell rang a shrill summons to the house. That would be Poddy Bruce, he thought, calling for counsel. But the voice he heard was not Poddy's. It was a girl's voice, a voice tense with pain and fright.

"This is Betty Stanchfield," it said. "Oh—can you come—quick? Dad has been hurt. I'm afraid he's hurt badly. I don't know what it is. I found him lying on the floor. It looks as if there has been a robbery. Can you come?"

Southwall asked no needless, curious questions.

"Have you called a doctor?" he queried.

"I've tried," Betty said. "Doctor Burgess has been out all night, down country. I haven't reached him yet, but they've sent messengers for him. Don't stop for that. Just come! I'm almost alone here. The foreman is out visiting the camps, and no one is here but two or three of the men."

"Keep your courage!" Southwall called. "I'll be with you as soon as my best horse can take me there."

He made utmost speed. At the Gap, which he must pass, he saw that Sterner's men were already gathering for the day's work, though it was not yet sunrise. Southwall did not halt. His fortunes at the Gap must take care of themselves. The horse he rode was a half-broken brute, evil-tempered under curb, but perfectly suited to this errand. The rider let him have his head, without thought of anything but haste.

Ten miles up the trail, Southwall encountered Sterner descending. In all likelihood Sterner was going down to give personal oversight to the work of his men. Southwall passed him at a gallop, without a sign of acknowledgment; then, upon sudden impulse, he wheeled and called back:

"Sterner! I'm going up to Stanchfield's. Do you know that the old man is hurt?"

"No." Sterner, too, turned and rode back. "What's the matter?"

Abruptly, without loss of words, Southwall told what he knew. Sterner listened without comment till he had the story as complete as Southwall was able to make it. The effect upon him was marked. Not often did he betray agitation, but now his strong face paled.

"Good Lord!" he cried, then struck in spurs and galloped at Southwall's side.

CHAPTER VIII.

On the ride to Stanchfield's, Southwall and Sterner exchanged few words. During the first few minutes, Sterner questioned eagerly, persistently, asking for every detail; but Southwall's answers were short and curt. He knew nothing beyond what he had told. By and by Sterner abandoned his effort, and for the rest of the long way there was silence between the two till they flung themselves from their saddles at Stanchfield's gate.

Little Betty met them in profound distress.

"There's no change," she said. "The doctor isn't here yet, but one of the messengers has found him and sent him on. Dad has been unconscious ever since I found him, except twice when he's opened his eyes for a moment. I couldn't tell whether he knew me then. He hasn't spoken or moved at all."

Half clothed and much disheveled, old Carl's body lay inert upon a couch in the big living room, its posture that of complete collapse. One of the ranch hands was beside the couch, helping the girl keep watch. They had done but little for the injured man, and that little unskillfully. A bandage was about his

head, stained by a thin ooze of blood; and bloodstains showed, too, upon his disordered clothing. There was only the sign of his deep breathing to show life; he was in complete unconsciousness.

Southwall knelt and began removing the bandage.

"Let me see," he said. "Maybe there's something more I can do. I used to know something about taking care of a wound, when I fancied I might make a doctor of myself." His touch was not professional, but it had a deft gentleness. The wound was a deep cut back of the left temple, of ragged form. It was such a wound as might have been made by a heavy fall.

"If you'll give me some water and a new bandage," Southwall said, "I'll cleanse this a little better, and then we'd better get him to bed. We can manage that, all right, without the doctor."

Sterner did not lend a hand at that task of dressing the wound. Instead, he began questioning the girl. There was not much that she could tell.

"He was lying on the floor over there in the corner by that window," she said. "The window was open and the screen broken out, just as it is. I've left everything as it was. I haven't tried to straighten up at all. That drawer of his desk was standing open, too, and those letters were on the floor."

"Have you missed anything?" Sterner asked. "Is there anything to make you think there was a robbery?"

"I don't know," Betty returned. "Dad has always been so careless and so—so untidy with his things. He's been used to keeping money in his desk. Sometimes he would have a great deal. He's always liked to pay the men in money. All the men knew he kept it there—just thrown loose in the drawer that's open. I don't know how much he had yesterday; I don't know if he had any at all. I haven't looked to see if there's any there now."

"Is there nothing else?" Sterner questioned. "Nothing at all that might help us?"

Betty shook her head, troubled, hesitating. "Nothing," she said, "only—only—— I don't like to say it. It may not mean anything. I can't believe that it does. But—Jacky is gone."

"Jacky!" The exclamation came from the lips of both men. Southwall flashed a glance at Sterner. Sterner's eyes were narrowed, his lips grimly set. Curiously Southwall listened for what he would say. After a little interval Sterner spoke briefly:

"No, it may not mean anything. He's such an irresponsible chap. If I were you, I shouldn't say anything to any one about Jacky—not till we have time to look into things a bit. We'd better keep that just to ourselves for a while."

Together he and Southwall put old Carl into his own bed, doing what they were able, then returned to the living room. There Sterner spoke at once, with his habitual directness:

"It's Jacky's doing, of course. The boy's insane—not merely weak-minded, now, but dangerously insane. Don't you remember the other night, down at Guernsey, when Billy Fortune took the gun from him? He was after me then. There wasn't any reason. I've never had anything whatever to do with him. It's insanity, that's all. Perhaps we'd better look at the desk."

He took the initiative there, too, though Southwall stood at hand, looking on. The desk was a heavy, old-fashioned piece, each drawer with its separate lock. All the drawers save one were secured. The one standing open had not been forced, for in the lock was a short length of heavy steel wire, bent to serve as a key. No great ingenuity had been necessary for fashioning or using the crude device. Sterner gave it a quick scrutiny before

turning attention to the contents of the drawer.

True enough, old Carl was not methodical in keeping his desk. The drawer was a jumble of odds and ends —old notebooks, scrawled loose sheets of figures and memoranda, two or three heavy envelopes stuffed with newspaper clippings, a handful of fractional coins —a mere hodgepodge. Nothing of value appeared. Sterner's examination was but cursory. Stooping, he gathered the scattered papers from the floor and dropped them into the drawer, then locked it and gave the improvised key into Southwall's hand.

"Better keep that," he said. "We can't do anything with this mess till the old man's able to help us. There doesn't seem to be much we can do yet, except trying to find Jacky. We'll talk of that after the doctor comes, when we know something about Stanchfield's condition." Steadily his eyes met Southwall's. "We shall have to stay with this proposition, you and I, and do what we can. Very well. I'm going to send word to my men at the Gap that they're to stop work on that fence till we're through with this business."

Southwall stared. Sterner laughed with cold cynicism. "Don't mistake me," he said. "That isn't out of consideration for you. I'm doing it on Miss Stanchfield's account. She needs our help right now. You can give yours with an easier mind if you know that that fence matter is waiting. I'll go ahead with it later, when this is over."

He turned abruptly and went out of doors, as if indifferent to what Southwall might say to that. Alone, he paced the veranda for an hour, smoking, till he saw the doctor coming up the trail. It was he who met the doctor at the end of the lane.

"Listen to me, Burgess," he said peremptorily. "This appears to be serious. The old man's daughter is badly frightened. I don't want you to alarm her. When you've made your examination, talk to me first, if it's a grave case. You understand?"

Doctor Burgess nodded. He was a pale-eyed, pale-faced, weary-looking little man, not much given to words. He did not question Sterner's authority or motives; there were few men thereabouts who did venture to question when Sterner gave an order. After a half hour in the house, obediently he rejoined Sterner in the yard.

"Bad as it need be," he said tersely. "The skull's depressed—not fractured, but bent in enough to cause pressure and paralysis. The bone must be raised."

"Well?" Sterner queried. "And after that?"

"Recovery," said Burgess. "The probabilities are that the brain tissue isn't injured. The pressure inhibits its functions, that's all. When the pressure's removed, there will probably be immediate partial recovery, with complete recovery afterward."

"What sort of an operation is it?" Sterner asked. "Very delicate? Can you perform it?"

"Certainly," Doctor Burgess returned. "I'll need help, but one of you two men can do what's necessary to help me. If there's no injury beyond what's indicated, we can get on with it well enough."

Sterner deliberated for a moment. "'Well enough' won't do," he said. "We can't take any chances, Burgess. Tell me this: Don't the conditions justify delaying till we can get another surgeon here? This isn't an ordinary case. There mustn't be any accidents."

"There's nothing extraordinary in the case," the doctor returned. "I've performed several more difficult operations of the same sort."

"But not in any case where recovery meant so much as in this one," Sterner urged. "Complete recovery is vital

here, for the girl's sake. Is there danger in waiting till we can get a surgeon here—a good one?"

Doctor Burgess' answer was given slowly, a trifle reluctantly: "Danger? No—provided there's no tissue injured—and there probably isn't. Twice I've operated several weeks after such an accident, with recovery in both cases. I shouldn't say there's danger in waiting; but——"

"Then we'll wait!" Sterner interrupted. "Tell the daughter so. Make her any explanation you like, not to distress her; but tell her we'll have to wait. Give me the names of some of the surgeons you know—the best you know of in Denver or Kansas City or Omaha. I'll see to getting one of them here. Let the girl understand that." He was eager beyond his wont. "Keep her from needless anxiety. Make her feel that we're doing the only right thing." He laid his hand upon the little man's shoulder. "Do that, Burgess, and you'll find it worth your while in the regard of—all of us."

So, in his talk with little Betty, Burgess minimized the peril her father was in, seeking to give her reassurance. He was good at that. She was further reassured when Sterner left at once upon his errand to summon the other surgeon.

"I'll not trust to telegraphing," Sterner told her. "I'll ride to town and use the long-distance phone, so I'll know I've got him. Don't worry. I'll get one or the other of them started on his way before night."

Once on the trail, he diverged from the direct way to town, riding hard to his own ranch house, halting in the lane and calling sharply:

"Fong! Fong!" There was no answer to the hail, repeated again and again. Sterner dismounted and entered the house, hurrying back to the kitchen, then flinging open the door of the Chinaman's room. Fong was not there. Sterner swore with hot impatience. "Where's the fool gone to? To the Gap, I wonder? He knew I was to be there to-day. But I can't take half a day for riding over there now. Damnation!"

In that humor, he went to his telephone and called Cheyenne, demanding talk with the magnate to whom he had given such imperious orders twenty-four hours ago. This time he was even more commanding.

"What have you done toward having this secret-service man withdrawn?" he questioned. "What! You want time? Time! I'll give you no time. Not a day! You listen to me! There'll be the very devil to pay up here if this man isn't recalled absolutely at once. There's not ten minutes to spare for you to play politics in. This isn't politics; it's business. It's more than that for me. I'll take no excuse at all. You burn the wires to Washington and have this fellow pulled off before to-morrow night. I'll not stand for anything else. No, I'll not argue. You've heard me; now do it!"

In haste he kindled a fire and made a pot of strong coffee, cooked for himself a hearty meal, and when it was eaten he saddled a fresh horse and took the trail again, riding in black humor.

CHAPTER IX.

Tom Southwall insisted upon taking little Betty's place for a time at old Carl's bedside. There would be nursing enough after a while, he told her gently; now there was no need for her care, but only for such watching as he might do. She would better save her strength while she could, against the later time. The doctor and he could do all that need be done.

When he had prevailed upon her, he aided Burgess in another and more complete cleansing of the wound. That done, he spoke quietly.

"The speech area in the brain is larger than that depression, isn't it?" he asked. "How much of the area do you think is involved?"

Burgess peered at him quickly, acutely.

"What!" he said. "What do you know about speech areas?"

"Not so much as I'd like to know," Southwall returned. "I've forgotten a part of what I used to know. But I remember the situation of the area. And I know he'll not speak till that pressure is relieved. But will he be able to when that's done?"

"Perhaps," said Burgess. "We can't be certain of that. Sometimes the patient begins right where he left off, if the injury isn't great; and sometimes he must start all over again, clear back at his A B C's. That depends upon how deep the hurt is. This hurt doesn't appear to be very deep—just deep enough to be paralyzing, I should say. And part of that may result from shock."

"Doctor," Southwall said, "you're considered hereabouts as a good surgeon. This operation isn't vastly difficult for so good a man as you. Will you tell me just why you're waiting?"

The point-blank question, so simply spoken, embarrassed the little man. He laughed in awkward deprecation.

"Yes, I'm a fair-to-middling surgeon. I could do this operation. But —well, one doesn't like to urge his own fitness against the wishes of the persons in interest. Mr. Sterner is a particular friend of the young lady's, isn't he?"

"So am I," Southwall said simply. "As to that, it's about a toss-up, I fancy. Was it at Mr. Sterner's suggestion that you deferred the operation?"

"He wished to have the best possible attention given the patient," Burgess returned. "I couldn't well refuse that, considering that delay of a day or two entails no special risk. Had the fracture been more marked, with injury to the tissue and probability of clot——"

"Yes, I understand," Southwall interposed. He let the subject drop then, and plainly the mild-mannered little doctor was not eager to continue the argument.

"I'm half asleep on my feet," he said. "I've been up all night. I think I'll try to catch a nap in the next room. Call me if you need me for anything."

Southwall sat alone at the bedside, watching intently, waiting. For an hour there was no least movement. Then suddenly Stanchfield's eyes opened. For a moment the eyes stared blankly at the ceiling, with no gleam of understanding. Southwall stooped over the bed, bending close, speaking very quietly.

"All right!" he said. "It's all right. Everything will be all right!" He took the old man's limp hand in his. "Do you know me?" he questioned. "Can you understand what I'm saying? If you can, press my hand with your fingers."

There was no response. Twice Southwall repeated his question. Stanchfield's hand gave no sign, though it seemed to the watcher that the troubled eyes held a gleam of eagerness. Southwall reached over and took Stanchfield's other hand.

"Now!" he said. "Press my fingers if you understand."

That time he felt movement faint and tremulous, but unmistakable. Southwall bent closer.

"Good!" he encouraged. "It's all right! Is there something you want to tell me?"

Again Stanchfield's fingers stirred with effort, ever so slightly.

"Do you know who hurt you?" Southwall asked, and again came the feeble response. "Was it Jacky?" Southwall questioned.

The light in Stanchfield's eyes was clouding as the brief interval of consciousness passed. Southwall sat down again to wait. There was no change before the doctor came in by and by to relieve the watcher. Then Southwall went out to the veranda to smoke, walking up and down and puzzling over his problem. There Betty joined him after a little time.

She was greatly distressed, though she bravely tried to show nothing but courage. Southwall smiled upon her for reassurance.

"Listen to me, girl!" he said directly. "You mustn't be so worried. It's coming out all right. I haven't a doubt of it. You mustn't doubt it, either. We'll have him strong and well again in just a little while."

"I know," she returned. "I know we shall!" She drew closer, laying her hand lightly upon his arm. "I'm not afraid—not now. But what should I have done without good friends? I've been thinking. A woman's strength doesn't seem to be at its best at a time like this. A woman's strength seems to be made for enduring instead of *doing*. Do you know what I mean?"

Her confidence was very intimate, very sweet. His own courage came upon him—courage to match his high desire. But another impulse came with it. He spoke with deliberate lightness:

"Life needs all sorts and degrees of strength. I reckon every one of us has the sort of strength he needs for his job, whatever it is. Look yonder! There's an outfit that's probably packing with it some kind of problem all its own, with strength to match it. A queer-looking outfit!"

A light wagon had come up the trail to the foot of the lane, halting there—a wagon built for easy travel with easy loads. From the seat a man descended, coming up the path toward the house, bearing a camera on its tripod. He was a shabby little man, travel-worn in appearance, but bright-eyed and merry-voiced.

"Pictures?" he said, with an accent. "I make very good pictures—cheap."

Southwall laughed and shook his head. "No, old man. Not this time."

"Cheap!" the wanderer repeated. "I make one, and if you don't like it you don't need to pay." He smiled with an impudence whose daring did not offend. "I play safe, you see! My picture is bound to be good, with so pretty a lady in it. Wouldn't the gentleman like to have a good picture of the pretty lady?"

"We're not feeling right for a picture to-day," Southwall said. The little man sighed wearily.

"I make you a proposition," he announced. "I make you a picture for my dinner. Come! It save me time to stop and cook for myself. And we will both do kindness besides."

It was little Betty who took up the argument. "You may have dinner, but you mustn't offer to pay for it. Sit down here in the shade, and I'll bring you something to eat."

The wayfarer accepted with the tranquillity of one long used to taking things as they came. Out of the sun, with business put aside, he relaxed into easy friendliness.

"So big a land!" he said to Southwall. "A land so full of wonderful pictures, but so empty of people to buy! I thought to find a settled country. But there are no people in it—only the great pictures!"

He was hungry, and ate with the frank appetite of hunger. When he had finished, he brought from his cart a portfolio of prints and gave it into Betty's hand.

"Please!" he said gently. "You will take one you like—or two—as many as you will—please ! It is not for pay; it is just tribute."

She could not refuse. The portfolio

held exquisite fragments of landscape, caught here and there in the wilderness and vivid with the wilderness spirit. Betty chose one from the lot, speaking her genuine delight. The little man did not linger then, but picked up his kit and went away, carrying himself with an air. Southwall looked after him at his departure and spoke with sudden feeling:

"Why do you suppose he's doing it? To make a living? Is that it? Or has something gone wrong with him? That's it, most likely. Something's gone wrong." He laughed, but the laugh lacked all mirth. "Oh, my soul! If nothing ever went wrong with any of us, what a world this would be!"

CHAPTER X.

Fat Sam Bloomfield was unaffectedly glad to get away from Sterner's ranch house. When he had said his good-byes, in the face of Sterner's unflagging hospitality, he hectored Billy Fortune impatiently to make all speed. Only when the wagon had left the house out of sight behind the first hill did his uneasiness relax.

"Good enough!" he said. "Now you can slow down and let me think a minute. My word, I was feeling mean! And that's not a nice feeling."

For a mile or two there was no further exchange of words. Billy attended steadily to his driving, and the fat man to his thinking. He was thinking hard, too, staring straight ahead out of his fat peepholes of eyes, sucking on a dead cigar, taking the roughness of the trail without protest.

"Tell me this," he said abruptly, after a time: "How's the shooting over there at that place they were talking about—Cottonwood Gap?"

"Fair," Billy said. "Pretty fair. That country ain't been grazed to death yet. We might happen to strike a deer comin' down to the good grass along the creek. There's lots of chickens. We're headin' that way now."

"All right," Bloomfield returned briefly. "Keep on going."

With that he went back to his cogitating. Covertly Billy watched the heavy, round face. As he watched, slowly a change appeared. The flabby, shapeless rolls of fat gathered firmness. When by and by Bloomfield spoke, his voice had a new quality.

"Look here, Billy," he said. "We've been making a joke of this business so far. Now we'll drop that for a minute. I want an understanding with you. You know what I'm working on, so there's no harm in putting it to you straight. I've been sizing you up, my friend, since yesterday. I've got you sized up right, too. See if I haven't. I'll talk plain. The way to keep you safe on this trip is to trust you to the limit. I mustn't feel that you're against me. The best way for me to make sure of that is to keep in the open with you. Isn't that right?"

Billy did not try to jest over the matter. "That's about correct," he said quietly.

"Well, then, listen!" Bloomfield's manner was unaffectedly candid. "You've known of these public-land frauds. You know more than I do about some parts of the business, for you've seen it going on for years, all round you. You've grown so used to it that maybe you don't think of it any longer as lawbreaking. It is, though, Billy. It's a crime—a big, serious, organized crime—and now the government's trying to break it up and put a stop to it. My job is to gather proofs against some of the guilty men. That's what I'm after now. I'm working on this man Sterner's case. Sterner's gotten thousands of acres of government land by fraud. You know what a farce it's been, as men like him have worked it—hiring fake homesteaders to enter lands and turn them over to the ranch-

men. I'm not merely calling hard names now. That's stealing, and the men who do that sort of thing are thieves. If they'd taken the government's money instead of land, or if they'd taken your land away from you by that sort of trickery, you'd call it stealing, fast enough. It is stealing, no matter what they've taken or who they've taken it from. What do you think about it yourself?"

Billy spoke with lazy gravity: "I expect mebbe I'd better leave it to you to do most of the thinkin' about that, and me just stick to the camp work."

Bloomfield shot a quick glance at Billy's face. "Ah, yes! Just so! My mistake! You mean—— Well, that's all right. Perfectly all right! That brings me straight to the next thing. I suppose I'd better not count on you to give me any help in what I'm doing. You might give me a lot of help if you would, but I'd better not count on it."

Billy met that, too, with becoming seriousness. "No, I expect mebbe you'd better not. I'd hate to have to disappoint you." He returned Bloomfield's direct gaze in kind. "I told you yesterday just how it would be. It don't seem as if I'd changed my mind since then. I ain't sayin' I'm takin' sides with Sterner nor anybody else. But I like to be able to look a man in the face when I meet up with him, it don't matter who he is nor what he's done. That's all there is to that. I ain't goin' to help you dig up your proofs, and I ain't goin' to want you to tell me what you get. I'd feel mean about that, somehow. What I find out for myself I don't have to tell nobody. I found out who you are. I ain't obligated to tell Buck Sterner. I don't have to tell him anything. Nor I ain't goin' to tell you anything, either."

Bloomfield was not displeased. "All right, my friend," he said. "The subject's dropped. Hereafter, when we talk, we'll confine our conversation to dodos and whangdoodles and cabbages and kings and creation's varied and interesting miscellany." The pucker cleared from his face. He spat over the wheel and sought to adjust himself to greater ease on the jolting wagon seat. Professional care slipped from his big shoulders and fell away. "You Billy!" he cried. "This is certainly one glorious morning. Listen to that meadow lark! He's liable to ruin himself, singing like that." He spat again and cleared his throat with care, then chanted upon the quiet air:

"Hark, hark! the lark at heaven's gate sings,
And Phœbus 'gins arise,
His steeds to water at those springs
On chalic'd flowers that lies!
And winking Mary buds begin
To ope their golden eyes.

"How would you like to write poetry for a living, Billy?" he challenged. "This country ought to breed some great poets. I'd be a poet myself if I stayed here for a while. The life of a poet must be a great life, don't you think? 'There's a pleasure in poetic pain which only poets know.'"

Billy grinned. "I don't know about the pleasure part of it, but most poetry sure does give me a pain."

CHAPTER XI.

They made their night's camp opposite Cottonwood Gap on the green bottom lands of Low Creek. That was fine camping ground, with abundant lush pasturage, abundant shelter under the towering cottonwoods, abundant respite from the monotony of flat, toneless color on the sun-baked plain they had crossed. Bloomfield's profound content expressed itself in a windy sigh as he bathed his dust-stained face in a pool beneath the trees.

"My word!" he cried. "There's scenery here, too. Look at that bluff over yonder! Magnificent! I wasn't ex-

pecting anything like this. I'm glad we came, Billy."

"The scenery'll keep," Billy said tersely. "There's a million chickens in here, round the water. You might try your hand again with the gun, if you want to, while I'm tendin' to things. They're so thick you can't miss 'em, even if you shut both eyes when you shoot. You could run 'em down with a club. I've done it lots of times."

Bloomfield shot and shot, but missed and missed—performed prodigies of missing. The fun of watching palled upon Billy presently, and he took the gun into his own hands.

"You're tearin' up your scenery too much," he objected. "It's supper time, too. If you're anxious to work the fat off of you, you ought to try livin' for a while on just what you could kill for yourself."

Presently he set half a dozen plump, dark chicken breasts to broil over the fire, bedded his coffeepot in a nest of coals, and brought a lot of canned stuff from the wagon. It was all done deftly, quietly. Bloomfield, looking on, laughed a confession of his discomfiture.

"It's a shameful thing to be merely an amateur," he said. "A man must always pay for being an amateur—mustn't he?—full price. To have the tang of life come secondhand and stale—that's the price, Billy. To have to depend upon other people to do for you what you'd have pure delight in doing for yourself—do you know what I mean? Aren't you an amateur yourself at something?"

Billy stooped to turn the spits that held his chicken breasts.

"Who? Me?" he said. "Why, yes, I reckon there might be a few things I ain't good at. Singin' soprano in the choir, or kissin' a man with long whiskers. I reckon I'd be sort of poor at either of them things."

Supper was drawn from the fire and served primitively upon the ground. As he tasted and found the first incomparable outdoor savor, Bloomfield became radiant.

"One thing I like about me," he joked, "is that I'm such a whole-souled eater. Give me a man's size job of eating, and I'm—— Never mind. Just watch!"

He ate to repletion, gaining in the luster of delight with the mouthfuls. By and by he lounged back against a roll of bedding and felt for his cigar case.

"Fine—fine!" he cried. "Oh, man, dear! I'm as contented as an infant cradled in the lap of an angel. Partly it's food, and partly it's my innocent heart. 'Keep me innocent; make others great.' There's nothing like it, boy! You know how it feels, don't you? Say, if you might have your pick, which would you rather be—innocent, or what? Think, now! If the whole of life were wide open to you!"

Billy had declined a cigar, and was busy with a cigarette, lolling at his ease.

"If life was wide open to me," he echoed lazily. "I reckon it has been—ain't it? Anyway, I've took pretty much what I wanted. I expect I've had my share, and I ain't ever felt as if I'd ought to give any of it back on account of the way I got it."

Bloomfield took a closer squint at the sun-tanned face. "What?" he queried. "Is that the truth? And you've had everything you wanted?"

"Everything I could get," Billy said. "If I can't get a thing without too much trouble, I just quit wantin' it. Everything but one. I ain't ever held an ace-high straight flush yet. I expect I'll keep sort of uncontented till I get one. But that's all. The rest of it's been suitin' me real well."

The fat man was insistent. "You don't mean to say that everything in life has come out for you just as you wanted it to!"

"Oh, sugar!" Billy retorted. "If

nothin' ever turned out any way except just the way we figure we want it to, this world would be a horrible, humdrum place. I wouldn't want to live in it. I'd rather have things keep surprisin' me than have 'em come like I can figure 'em out for myself beforehand. You take Buck Sterner, now. Buck, he ain't been surprised in quite a while. Things have always happened for Buck like he'd figured they would. Wouldn't you think that would get terrible tedious? I know mighty well I wouldn't trade places with him, not if I couldn't have any more variety than he gets out of it."

Bloomfield gave a dry chuckle. "I don't know, Billy, but maybe he's about due for a little variety now. Maybe I'll be doing him a kindness in giving it to him—who knows? If your philosophy is right, he'll get some spiritual good—won't he?"

Billy was not to be coaxed into that conversational quagmire.

"What is it you'll want me to be doin', while you're doin' your work?" he questioned. "If you're goin' to be runnin' land lines, or the like of that, I ain't goin' along with you. I don't want to know a thing about what you're up to that way, in case anybody would ask me—and the way not to know anything is to stay plumb ignorant. I don't mind watchin' you shoot, if I have to, but this other——"

Bloomfield nodded. "All right, Billy. I'll remember. You just stick round. I'll not bother you any more about my work—not a word."

When morning came, he was as good as his pledge, for after breakfast he took his gun and went laboring away on foot to the hills—a quaint figure, appearing little enough like an agent of grim vengeance for righteousness' sake. Billy laughed at the notion. As the morning passed, now and again he heard the sound of Bloomfield's gun; but the sound, echoing faintly in the wide desert spaces, carried an odd futility. Bloomfield returned to camp at noon, empty-handed, but with appetite again at full tide. His ill luck had not dismayed him. With infinite zest he sat sniffing the odors of Billy's cookery, too hungry for much talk.

"God sends meat, and the devil sends cooks," he purred over his heaped-up portion. "That's a good old saying. Do you believe it? It must be true—both ends of the proposition. Your cooking is certainly devilish good."

He ambled away again when the nooning was over, leaving Billy to loaf. That suited Billy's mood exactly. Lazily he watched the herders bring Southwall's sheep through the Gap to water and return with them to the range. Sterner's men, at work on the fence, did not offer to interfere. They attended stolidly to their task until, after an hour or so, a messenger came in the saddle. Work stopped then, and the workers drifted away toward a sheep camp far down the creek. Billy wondered a little at that—but not much. Active curiosity was less agreeable just then than letting his thoughts play vagrant, adventuring as they would. He had been enjoying himself mightily in an untroubled world all his own. He was almost resentful when the messenger, with his errand done, rode leisurely across the creek and up to the camp; nevertheless, he hailed the newcomer with the easy comradery of the wide-plains country:

"Get down, Sid. Your critter's needin' a coolin' off. What's all the hurry?"

Sid dropped from his saddle and let himself down at Billy's side. He had a manner of importance. It is something to be the bearer of thrilling news in a land where news of any sort is at a premium.

"I reckon you ain't heard yet," he said. "Old man Stanchfield's been killed, pretty near it. They say tha'

crazy cripple of hisn was the one that done it. They tell me he got away with a wad of the old man's money."

"Stanchfield!" Billy cried. "Jacky! And he stole money? Oh, it ain't so!"

Leisurely, with much relish, Sid filled in the details of his stunning outline. The story was news, beyond a doubt, as he told it; but, although he wove much fervid fancy with his fact, the effect was disappointing. After the first sharp surprise and the first startled outcry, Billy fell curiously reticent —attentive enough, even to the point of avid interest, but withholding the story-teller's reward of excited comment.

"I don't believe it!" he said again, when Sid had told all he knew or could conjure. "I don't believe Jacky would do it. That poor crip ain't got gumption enough for doin' a thing like that. I don't believe it!"

"Oh, thunder!" Sid derided. "Everybody else believes it was him. You always did like to be contrary." Billy had no retort for that. Sid desisted from further effort, and felt about for his "makin's." Deftly, with one hand, he rolled a cigarette, making a fine show of the good craftsman's pride.

"Well, anyway," he said, "it's stopped Buck's wire stringin' over yonder. Buck and Tommy, they're real busy."

Billy was willing to discuss that, though in his own fashion.

"Sufferin' Peter!" he drawled. "What's ailin' that Buck person? What's he stringin' more fence for? Ain't he ever goin' to get all he wants? He's sure got pretty near plenty. I can't figure out what he's always wantin' with more."

"Some men act that way," Sid ventured. "If it comes to that, most everybody wants too much of somethin' or other. With Buck it's land. Me, I want a string of wives. I wonder why it ain't fashionable any more to have too many wives? It used to be. What makes 'em want to pinch you down to just one wife, when they're willin' to let you have too much of everything else?"

Billy let that pass. He had his own notions on the woman proposition, notions not to be lightly shared with slack-minded chaps like Sid. After a little time Sid got to his feet.

"Well, so long!" he said. "I'll be gettin' back."

When he was gone, the day had a new dimension for Billy. His indolent humor was quite gone. For a long time he sat intent. He had belittled Sid's dramatic version of the tragedy and its motives; but the bare, harsh facts troubled him, puzzled him. He did not like an unsolved mystery, and here was a mystery not to be solved by mere conjecture.

He was quiet at supper time. So was Bloomfield—tired, too, after his unaccustomed hours afoot and alone, and a bit inclined to be peevish.

"Blast your sage chickens!" he complained. "What sort of a bird do you call that? It's uncanny the way they can stand stock-still and duck a charge of shot. I couldn't hit a feather of 'em."

He sulked for a while over that, then gorged himself with supper. Before the last glow of dusk was faded he tumbled heavily into his bed and fell heavily asleep. Billy, too, took to his blankets early. He was in no hurry for sleep. If sleep came, let it come; if not, he could look at the stars and think.

He did not reckon the time by hours. The night seemed not a thing of hours, but a vast, majestic duration, an infinite depth which set no bounds upon his mind. Billy had always liked to get ready for sleep on such a night out of doors.

He was nearing the point of sleep when a sound pricked him suddenly

back to full, alert consciousness. It was a mere trifle of sound, but it was alien—a stealthy step drawing toward the camp over pebbly ground. Billy lay motionless, listening. No doubt the visitor was guided by the dull glow of the supper-fire embers. He came on slowly, without hailing the camp as a visitor should. Beside the fire, he kept his manner of stealth. There was barely light enough to let Billy see the vague bulk of a man's form; but after a moment the straggler struck a match, holding it with the flame carefully cupped between his hands while he looked about. Billy glimpsed his face then. It was Stanchfield's hunch-backed Jacky.

A word rose to Billy's lips, but he held it back and lay watching, waiting till Jacky's purpose would appear. It was an inoffensive purpose. By the light of his match flame he found the grub box beyond the fire. Another match let him make a quick search. He was not particular, but helped himself to two or three of the cans that came handiest, tucked them under his arm, and made a quick and quiet retreat. With deliberate intent Billy let him go, settling down to the comfort of his blankets.

"Looks mean—don't it?" he brooded. "Just the same, I don't believe he done it. Anyway, I wasn't goin' to stop him—that poor crip!" He listened. Jacky's step had died away to silence. From far off in the deep hollow of the night came the cry of a coyote, and then profound silence, measureless as the black void itself.

"The poor crip!" Billy whispered drowsily.

CHAPTER XII.

It was the morning of another day when Sterner returned to Stanchfield's after his errand down country. He had been in the saddle all night. Though it was but little past dawn, already the house was quietly astir. On the veranda Doctor Burgess stood, tasting the cool freshness of the air and talking with little Betty. To Sterner's eager first question he gave simple answer:

"There's no change. He's rested pretty well, with short intervals of consciousness; but he hasn't spoken a syllable. His condition's just about as it was when you left."

"I found a surgeon," Sterner said. "Brighting, of Omaha. He's a brain specialist, with a lot of experience in such cases. I telephoned the railroad headquarters at Omaha and got the advice of their chief surgeons. Brighting has work to do to-day in hospital, but he'll leave to-night, and he'll bring a trained nurse with him. I'm to meet their train in the morning. They'll be at the house by noon. He wants you to stay with the case meanwhile, Burgess, if you will."

Burgess heard the report without comment, acquiescing in it.

"Mr. Southwall is with the patient," he said. "I'll tell him what you say."

For a little time Sterner stood in silence before the girl, his head uncovered, his deep eyes intent upon her face, searching its every line with an eagerness he did not try to conceal. Another woman might have found his intentness disconcerting, so uncompromising was its mood, so unmistakable the revelation it gave. Betty met the look with the gentle dignity of complete self-possession.

"You have been very kind," she murmured.

"Kind?" He echoed the word as if it held no meaning for him just then. "Don't talk of kindness. Forget the kindness. Girl, I want you to try to forget everything else in the world for this one minute, and think only of what I'm saying. Can you do that? Put all the rest aside—everything! Never mind what I've said to you before, or

what you've known of me. Never mind if this isn't the time for saying what I must say. What does it matter? I can't put it off till another time—I can't!"

Her calm eyes met his with sweet steadfastness, wondering, but without fear. He put aside all restraint.

"Oh, dear girl!" he cried. "Listen, then! Since I left here yesterday, I've been doing a lot of thinking. Never before in my life have I thought so hard or so plainly and unrelentingly about myself. I've discovered something—something I didn't know was in me at all. That's what I want to tell you."

He did not find it easy to go on. It was as if he groped his way over new ground where there were no trails marked for him, no familiar landmarks to guide him. He had nothing for guidance save her interest. Though she stood silent, he knew beyond all doubt that he had her deepest interest. She was not trying to hide that from him.

"I'm thirty years old," he said, "but I've never studied myself for a minute. I've just taken it for granted that I knew myself well enough. I knew well enough what I could do. I knew the strength I had for going ahead and getting what I wanted. I've never told you, but I suppose you know something about what I've got. It's a lot, and I've been getting it steadily and easily, without much trouble. It's been very easy. I haven't been thinking about much else than getting rich and having my own way about things. I've never been obliged to stop and think of how other people felt about it. I haven't cared. Oh, I've known that people have been growing afraid of me since I've gotten so much—envious, maybe, or afraid of what I might do to them. I've beaten all the men around here at getting ahead, and I haven't cared how it's hurt them. Most of them have been hurt, too, one way or another. It's made them afraid of me. It's made lots of them hate me. I've known that. But the thing that's never come to me before is that there's not a man anywhere in the country who's fond of me. Not one!"

Betty's attention was unswerving—all that any man might have desired. She did not speak. He was not waiting for that.

"I've never thought of that till last night, when I was riding up here alone," he said. "It's perfectly true, though. But that's not what matters. Here's the thing: Girl, in all my life it's never occurred to me for a moment that I'm not a good man."

He was not abasing himself, in lover's strategy. He spoke as one who merely recorded a fact. Betty's eyes grew deeper. This was not the man as she had known him, the man whose unremitting courtship had been but an expression of his own robust desire. There was a new quality in him now, a quality that was almost humility.

"What I've got hasn't come as a reward for goodness," he went on steadily. "I couldn't have won it by goodness. That's plain enough, even if I haven't thought of it before. You can't understand that—can you?—how a man may live and do his work and take his place without a thought of the right and wrong of what he's doing. I'd have gone on like that for the rest of my life if it hadn't been for you."

He was passionately eager to be understood. "Don't try to soften what I've said, out of sympathy for me. Don't condone anything. Let it stand as I've said it—bare and ugly. That's the way it's been. I'd have spent the rest of my life so but for you. Your life hasn't been like mine at all. Your life has been good, and goodness has delighted you. I know! You wouldn't find anything to give you delight in what I've been and what I've done.

That's what I've been thinking about. And I've been wondering what my life might be like if it had in it something besides fear and distrust and hate—if it really had love in it."

For the first time she saw him deeply agitated. He put out his hand to hers, but drew back.

"I've been telling you I loved you," he said. "I've told you so over and over again. It wasn't true, was it? It wasn't half true. I didn't know what love might be. I didn't know how to love anybody but myself. I didn't love you. I wanted you, just to please myself. That's been the only reason I've ever had for what I've wanted—just to get things for myself. I've made life a game to be played for the winnings—and I've never lost anything worth while. That sounds terribly brutal, doesn't it? But it's the truth. Love hasn't shaped my life at all. Love hasn't taught me anything or given me anything, for I've had nothing to do with it. But—girl, girl, I've been thinking! It's not just yourself that I'll be wanting, after this. I'll be wanting your love and your goodness."

A thrill of exultation came to him, for he saw her clear eyes suddenly tear-dimmed, her lips grown tremulous. Not the greatest warmth of his ardor as a wooer had so moved her.

"There!" he said, very gently. "I had to tell you, and I want you to remember. I don't know what's coming out of it all. I can't make my life over from the beginning. I'll have to do some more thinking. But when I think of you, after this, it will be in a new way."

He took her hand then, holding it in a firm, gentle clasp. Bending, he touched the soft fingers with his lips.

"There!" he said again. "I haven't distressed you, have I?"

"No," she breathed. "No, no!" She withdrew her hand then suddenly, for Tom Southwall had come quietly to the door.

"Your father roused for just a moment," Southwall said. "He seemed to be trying to speak. Doctor Burgess thought so. But he wasn't able. He's gone back to sleep. He's quite easy."

"I'm glad!" Betty said. "I'll go see to breakfast now, while he doesn't need us."

Left together, the two men stood face to face, eye to eye. Never was the contrast between them so strongly marked as in that moment. For all the weariness of body begotten by his hard night's ride, Sterner stood robust, self-centered, and self-contained. Southwall was deeply agitated, his face very pale, his hands clutching and opening nervously. It was Sterner who broke the brief silence.

"I suppose Burgess has told you of what I've done for the operation," he said. "I've done something more. Perhaps you'd better know it. I've reported the affair to the sheriff's office. They've started the hunt for Jacky."

Southwall's answer was low-voiced, but into his eyes there flashed a hot, passionate flame, a light of fierce and implacable hostility.

"You wolf!" he said bitterly. "You conscienceless, contemptible wolf!"

"What!" The word snapped angrily upon Sterner's lips; but then he took firm hold upon himself; though his face was crimsoned, he was master of his tongue. "I don't know what you mean. I don't care. This isn't the time nor the place for resenting an insult—nor for offering one, for that matter. We'll have our chance another time." He turned away with that and went down the path to attend to his tired horse.

CHAPTER XIII.

Billy Fortune chose not to tell Bloomfield of Jacky's visit to camp in the night. For so talkative a man, Billy

had a rather exceptional gift of reticence. His was a reticence which did not betray itself by a show of careful secretiveness. Seeing Billy at breakfast time, jocund and happy-go-lucky, Bloomfield had no means of knowing that anything uncommon had happened while he slept.

Bloomfield had fixed no routine for the camp, had set no hours for himself or Billy in the day's work. This morning he lingered long over breakfast and smoked two cigars instead of one, reclining in the shade and letting his mind play irresponsibly for a time before it took up its task. Yesterday's long hours afield had tired him.

"I'm lazy by nature," he told Billy. "I must work for my living, but I stick to work only because that's the easiest way I know for getting a living. To live by my wits—I don't know that I'd mind the immorality of that a bit, but it's too strenuous a life for a lazy man. I've been tempted to try it often, but I've always backed down. I shouldn't be able to rest easy betweentimes. A grafter must keep his mind's eye wide open every minute. That's the part I shouldn't relish. Have you ever tried grafting, Billy?"

"Not for a livin'," Billy said. "Just for sport. If there's anything in the blessed world that I ain't tried, just for sport, I don't know what it is. It's real interestin'—ain't it?—to find out for yourself what you can do when you try. I sold a cuckoo clock to a deaf-and-dumb man once, just to see if I could. That was a mean trick. And there was one time when I helped another lad sell a big mess of love medicine to the Sioux Indians over at Rosebud. We had them buck Indians livin' on the stuff for as much as a week, till it got too tedious to tickle me any more." Billy's lightness was sobered by a degree or two. "No, sir—not for a livin'! When it comes to gettin' a livin', I'd a heap rather work. That's a true word."

The fat man mouthed his cigar, letting his glance wander over the wide sweep of sunlit landscape and up to the flawless sky. "'Tis the primal curse,'" he sighed, "'but softened into mercy; made the pledge of cheerful days, and nights without a groan.'" A laugh followed upon the sigh. "Well, we've settled that between us. Now what next, Billy?"

Billy was squinting up the trail. "I don't know just what you might call it," he said. "You take a look. That ain't a squatter's outfit."

It was the wandering photographer's car, driven by the merry-faced little man who had halted at Stanchfield's ranch for yesterday's dinner. The car's approach was unhurried. When it came to the grove, the driver drew rein, smiling in friendly fellowship at the campers.

"Pictures?" he queried. "Good ones! Let me make a good picture of the two happy gentlemen."

Bloomfield laughed. "Billy, behold the busy business man! What do you think of that, now? Business—out here! What's your rush, friend? Take your time. It's early yet. Have you had your breakfast?"

"Oh, long since!" said the little man. "Me, I beat the birds. It is my habit."

"Oh, it is?" Bloomfield returned. "The early-worm idea. Well, that's a good, old, thoroughly respectable line of conduct. For my part, though, I've quit eating early worms, if I can help it."

The little man smiled his merriest. "Sure! For me it is necessity. I must use the long daylight for my pictures." His inquisitive eyes wandered over the camp, taking account of things. "I see a coffeepot," he suggested. "If it has a small cup of coffee in it, perhaps——"

"Bet your life!" said Billy Fortune. "Get down."

The wanderer sat with them, tasting his coffee in appreciative sips, making

a cigarette of black tobacco in brown paper. The cigarette alone marked him as an outlander. As he sipped and smoked with slow and full enjoyment, his restless eyes picked out the details of the camp's setting.

"So many pictures!" he said. "And so very beautiful! Me, I make pictures of people for pay; but the pictures I love are those, like yonder. I am an artist. Let me show you!"

With undisguised pride he brought his portfolio and exhibited what it held, discoursing of art. After that he made another cigarette and sat enjoying the glories of light and shade and form about the camp.

"I tell you," he said presently: "I have the idea to stop here for to-day and make pictures. Those magnificent rocks yonder—not often will the artist see rocks so well arranged. You will not mind, perhaps, if I make camp here? Not too close to you, but down below, there, under the trees."

"Mind!" Bloomfield cried. "Delighted! There's no sense in having two camps, though. This one's yours. Delighted! Billy, won't you be good enough to look after the gentleman's team? Let's do this thing right."

Billy, out of hearing while he cared for the horses, missed the next item in the little comedy. Sam Bloomfield chuckled quietly, deep in his throat:

"You Jerry! My word, that's the best rôle you've played yet! Bully!"

The little man kept his indolent posture, but spoke with sudden nervous energy:

"Listen, Sam! The chief's in Cheyenne. I picked up a message from him early yesterday morning. Do you know that your man Sterner is wise to you? Well, he is. He's been on the telephone, raising Cain trying to get you pulled off. It won't work. There's no influence that can stop this case. Chief says that's an absolute certainty. If it's true, then it doesn't matter much that Sterner knows—does it?"

Bloomfield considered. "No, not much. But I'll keep him from knowing we know he knows. That isn't vital, maybe, but it's best. What have you been doing with your outfit?"

"I'll show you after while," the other returned. "I've got lots of stuff—nearly forty photographs of the claim shanties scattered round over the Sterner holdings. They're all identified by land numbers. I'm keeping that up over here. I've been taking photographs of the fences, too, checking 'em up with the surveyors' lines. I'll let you see 'em when there's a chance. Who's this fellow you've got with you? Is he straight?"

"Straight's the right word," Bloomfield said simply. "He's got notions of his own about things. He's not helping me, but he's not hindering, and I know he won't talk."

Billy returned to the fire and began his after-breakfast task. The little man lapsed easily into the part he was playing, smiling his thanks. Soon he got his camera and tripod from the wagon and left camp, going slowly, moving as a vagrant artist should. Bloomfield went to his work, too, before long, carrying his shotgun.

"This isn't merely for form's sake, now," he told Billy. "I'm going to hit one of those chickens before I quit. You see if I don't!"

Left alone, Billy found the morning long and a bit dull. Loafing had lost its fine edge of contentment. There were two hours ahead of him before he must begin cooking dinner. He set off for the hills beyond the creek, straggling along without definite end, allowing each moment's whim to direct the next step. Off duty and with time hanging a trifle heavy, Billy could summon an almost childlike interest in whatever was nearest at hand. A litter of chert chips, on the site of an ancient

Indian workshop, engaged him for a little while as he searched the ground for arrowheads and hide knives; then he stopped to watch the antics of a family of baby horned lizards on a sun-warmed rock; then, because a steep, stony slope challenged him with its difficulty, he began scrambling and struggling from point to point over a hillside, keeping on stubbornly till he had gained the top and dropped down breathless in the sparse shelter of a clump of dwarfed cedars. There indolence returned to him. The spot made a fine resting place, with a boundless outlook over a tumbling mass of wild hills. For all its stern ruggedness, the prospect held a majestic tranquillity. High in air, an eagle soared, boldly pricked out against the deep azure background. The combination suited Billy's humor very well. The eagle's tireless flight was a subtle union of vast power with little effort. It fired the man's imagination. For a long time he watched, till the long spiral sweep took the splendid creature beyond the range of his sight.

Billy laughed his enjoyment. "My sinful soul! If I could do that, I'd keep right on doin' it till I wound up in—where do you reckon I would wind up? I wouldn't care. I'd just keep on goin', anyway." His mind followed where the fancy led till something else caught his attention.

At the foot of the rough slope a man came into sight from among the rocks. From Billy's height, the figure appeared as a mere pygmy, oddly foreshortened, and so far away that recognition was at first impossible. The man was on foot. Squinting, trying to make him out, Billy saw that he was behaving in curious fashion. At the bottom of the hill, ragged bowlders were strewn in disarray. The man was making these shelter him. He was not seeking shelter against the sun, for he kept always on the sunny side, crouching, peering out, bending low, and dodging from one point to the next, moving painfully toward the creek valley and keeping vigilant watch upon something invisible to Billy. There was nothing to indicate what it was that the skulker sought to avoid; for all that Billy could see, the man might have been playing a child's game.

"Crazy with the heat!" Billy told himself. A notion flashed into his mind and he strained his eyes to confirm it. "No, it ain't Jacky; he's no humpback. Well, then, who is he?"

The dodger had reached a point where a hundred yards of open ground stretched between the bowlder that concealed him and the next below. For a little time he halted, resting against the stone as if to recover strength and breath; then suddenly, at full speed, he began to run across the open gap.

A gunshot rang out upon the stately silence. On the instant Billy's wits were alert. Instinct made him seek first for the place from which the shot had come, but the echoes were quicker than his trained senses; the echoes took up the report and swelled it to a rattling volley. That could not be Sam Bloomfield's shotgun; unmistakably the shot had been fired by a rifle. There was no betraying smoke puff, but the ball had thrown up a tiny jet of sand close behind the running man.

The runner was inspired to a new show of speed, but panic had come with his fear. He was running wildly, stumbling headlong, striving desperately, turning once to see whether he would better run forward or return to his last shelter, then plunging ahead.

He slowed down at a second shot, and the fling of his struggling legs lost firmness. For a few strides he held his pace, then fell into a walk, turning aside from his path. After a moment he was down on hands and knees, crawling; then he lay at his length upon the sand, making impotent efforts to

rise. The echoes of the rifle's report died away, and silence settled.

Billy was upon his feet, starting down the slope, running, sliding, scrambling, heedless of himself, making his way toward the prostrate figure. He felt no more than a benumbed sort of curiosity as to his own safety. The rifleman appeared satisfied, for the deep silence held.

Billy spoke a startled cry as he bent over the fallen man:

"Judas Priest! It's Buck Sterner's Chinaman! It's that Fong boy! Well, for the love of country!"

The man was quite dead. It needed no expert judgment to make sure of that. When he knew, Billy rose and drew back from the body with a sharp pang of sick aversion. Sudden death had left upon the Chinaman's face a remnant of the last passion it had shown in life—the passion of mortal terror; the dull pallor of the yellow skin was hideous. Billy turned away and stood wondering.

"In the name of Heaven!" he said aloud. "What's the sense of it? Who'd do a thing like that? And what would he be wantin' to do it for?"

His reason gave him no answer, no least shred of clew. By and by, striving against strong repugnance, he bent again and turned the body upon its back. It was clothed in plains-country fashion, in trousers and gray shirt. The shirt gaped open over the breast, as if for relief against the heat of the morning. From the vent protruded the end of a sheaf of folded papers, crumpled and soiled and now freshly blood-stained. Gingerly Billy drew the packet out. It was made up of a score or more of documents. Across the face of the uppermost was boldly scrawled an ink-smeared legend: "Sink Hole Entries."

"Don't that beat you!" Billy pondered. "What's Fong been doin' with 'em, now? And what am I goin' to do with 'em? What am I goin' to do with *him?* It's a mean-lookin' proposition. I've got to do somethin', though. I reckon I ought to tell somebody. But who am I goin' to tell?" Slowly he worked out a crude analysis: "He's Buck's man. And the Sink Hole business is Buck's business—mostly. There's nobody else—— Oh, wait, now! Stanchfield! Old Stanchfield's land comes down past the edge of the Sink Hole, don't it? Billy, you don't suppose——" His mind groped through a maze of surmise, but he could make out nothing clearly. He must have time for thinking. "There's one thing," he argued: "It's liable to make a heap of difference who I tell it to. And there's another thing: I don't have to tell it to nobody till I've figured it out some. Nor I ain't goin' to. We're goin' to keep it to ourselves, Billy, for right now."

He did not return the papers to their hiding place. At a little distance from the body he laid the packet upon the ground and moved a heavy stone to cover it. It occurred to him then that he might be watched, but there was no sign anywhere of human presence. At any rate, he had not been molested. He turned again to look at the sprawling body.

"I reckon I'll have to come back after dinner with a shovel and tend to you," he said aloud. Even in the face of tragedy he could not abate his native habit. "There won't be no hymn singin', though," he warned the dead man. "All I'm goin' to do for you is to fix you so the coyotes won't get you."

Once away from the scene, its horror did not long oppress him. At the creek, he was quite ready to be interested by the events of his two hours' absence.

At two points, above and below camp, great bands of sheep had been driven out of the hills to the eastward, three or four thousand to the band,

spreading out over the bottom lands. Herders' wagons had come with them, and at both points camps were making. On the plain below the hills, still farther downstream, a third band was drawing slowly toward the water. These were all Sterner outfits. Billy was sure of that, even before he recognized the huge, blond Olaf Bjinks at the nearest camp. He turned a little out of his way for a word with Olaf.

"What you doin' here?" he queried. "Whatever's the idea of makin' so long a drive as from where we left you the other day? You've drove a sight of fat off your critters, runnin' 'em so far at a stretch."

Olaf blinked his pale eyes stolidly. "I don' know what," he said. "Mist' Sterner, he iss say fetch dose s'eep quick, and I haf fetch 'em quick. I don' know. No. 2 band, she iss fetch more far yet. I don' know."

"Oh!" Billy said. He did not stop to comment, but went on to his own camp. Upon the whole, he was rather enjoying himself; for out of the chaos of circumstances he saw big drama taking form.

At dinner he was his saturnine self, leaving the talk for the most part to Bloomfield and the little photographer, but taking an easy part now and then. After dinner he waited till the others were gone to their work; then, toward mid-afternoon, he shouldered his camp shovel and went to his own task.

He made short work of it. The grave he dug was shallow; but when he had shoveled the earth back he began heaping stones upon it, piling them high, making the body secure against scavenging beasts. That part of his work was done thoroughly.

"Well, there!" he grimly apostrophized the dead. "I reckon that'll hold you. I'm bein' as kind to you as I can. If Buck Sterner ever wants to do any more than that, we'll sure know where to find you."

As an afterthought, he went to the stone he had rolled into place in the morning to conceal the packet of papers. He wanted to make sure that he would be able to identify that spot, too, if need came. Lifting the bowlder, he bent and peered beneath. Startled, he let the heavy mass slip from his fingers. Again he raised it for another look, then stood erect with an exclamation. The papers were gone.

CHAPTER XIV.

Doctor Brighting came from Stanchfield's room and out to the veranda where little Betty waited with Sterner and Tom Southwall. Skilled as a surgeon, Doctor Brighting was no less skilled in the niceties of friendly service. His smile was kindly, his voice had a hearty ring. He went to Betty's side and laid his hand upon her pretty head.

"Well," he said, "I think we may say we've come through in fine style. You mustn't be anxious. The break was rather worse than might have been expected; but there will be perfect recovery, no doubt. I'm ready to give you my word on that. You mustn't expect too much, though, all at once. The brain is a sensitive little machine. Don't let your mind be troubled if he comes to himself only a step at a time. There will be some delirium, you know—incoherence and excitement and a lot of talk which won't mean anything. It's all right. He'll get well."

The girl bent her head upon the arm of her chair, sobbing. Brighting's hand petted her, his fine voice gave her inarticulate syllables of comfort, as if she had been a child.

"You may go in by and by," he said. "Not too soon. Let him rest a bit. Don't brood. Keep busy about something. I'll tell you: Make me a cup of coffee now—there's a good girl!"

When she was gone, he spoke brusquely to the men:

"Who's Jacky? The patient's first word was 'Jacky!' He's said it a good many times. A son?"

"No, not a son," Southwall said. "A servant."

"Ah!" Brighting returned. "Well, it would be a good idea to let him have Jacky, pretty soon. It'll quiet him, very likely."

Sterner spoke with grim quiet: "We're trying to find Jacky now. Jacky is supposed to be the man responsible for this hurt."

"So?" There was an accent of incredulity in the word. "You say he's 'supposed to be.' It isn't known, then?"

"No, it isn't known," Southwall interposed. "That's merely guesswork. There's no direct proof."

Sterner retorted, with a sudden flare of heat: "The proof's quite plain. A jury isn't likely to consider it weak."

"I shouldn't have thought it," Brighting said. "The patient's manner wouldn't suggest it at all."

Southwall made a diversion. "Now that the operation is done," he questioned, "am I needed here? I should like to get away so soon as I may."

"You've been a good nurse"—Brighting smiled—"but you'll not be needed any longer for the nursing. I'm to stay till to-morrow, and Doctor Burgess will remain in the house for a day or two after that. The nurse I brought is quite capable. No, there's nothing to keep you, if you want to go."

Southwall took prompt advantage of his release. When Betty appeared, bearing the doctor's coffee, Tom was ready to say good-by. He made a brief ceremony of it, though what he said was genuine enough:

"It's a long wire that runs down to my house, but one short word over it will bring me on the run if you need me. You mustn't hesitate to speak it. You won't, will you?"

"No," she said gently, simply, her grave eyes holding his. "I shan't hesitate. How could I, after this? You have been so good to me!" She seemed not to be taking account of the others; impulsively she offered him both her hands. "And if there is ever a need of yours that I may serve—— Good-by!"

Sterner lingered. In Brighting's presence he sat silent, preoccupied, attending only now and then and briefly to what the others were saying. When he was left with Betty, he made no apparent effort to change his mood. The change came of itself, slowly. His exchange of words with Southwall had affected him beyond the words' importance, stiffening the lines of his face, kindling in his eyes a smoldering, dull fire. He was always intolerant of opposition of any sort; coming from Southwall, its effect was doubly irritating. Little by little his temper subsided, but there was no quick rebound of spirit. In her relief, little Betty essayed talk, but his responses were abstracted. He had to emerge from his difficulty of mind in his own way.

When he spoke, his speech had no relevance to what had gone before, yet its manner was as if he took up his theme naturally and as a matter of course.

"If you let a man have the making of himself wholly in his own hands," he said, "with just himself to think about, and no one else to keep watch on what he does, he'll turn out nothing but a grotesque effigy of a man. That's what I am now."

The saying was too obscure for an answer from the girl. She kept silence, knowing well that he would make his meaning concrete enough. So he did, going at it straightforwardly.

"I'm not a trained lover," he said. "There's nothing of that in me. Since I've been coming here I've never brought you even the most trifling gift—not even a handful of flowers. Pretty gifts and pretty talk would have seemed to me like trying to cover up and hide my roughnesses. I haven't wanted to hide anything from you. I've wanted you to know me as I am, if you can—roughnesses and all. That's the best compliment I've known how to pay you."

She took that as she had taken his every declaration from the first, calmly. Her calm baffled him, while it gave him subdued delight, too. In his secret heart he had not wanted his wooing to be easy. He had grown sated with the commonplace savor of easy victories; he wanted this to be different.

"Listen, girl!" he went on. "You've been very considerate of me, always. You haven't taken what I've offered you, but you've let me come back and offer it over and over again. I've tried to be satisfied with that. But I can't be satisfied now to go on in the old way. There's something else now. You've always said 'no' to me. I've been wondering if you always think of me only in that way. Aren't there times—moments, maybe—when you think of me in another way?"

Rarely had he seen her agitated. Before this direct appeal she colored deeply; but it pleased him mightily to see that her eyes were not averted; they were steadfast, unabashed, fearless. This steadfast fearlessness had been her greatest charm for him. He did not want to discover weakness in her; and self-conscious, shy confusion would have seemed to him a weakness.

"No—wait!" he said. "That way of saying it wasn't fair. This is what I mean: I haven't appeared to you yet as the man you will love. Before you can love me, you must find in me something you haven't found yet. I must be different, somehow, from the man you've known. Do you ever think of me as being different—as the sort of man you would have me be?"

He knew that she could be as downright as he when the need came; he knew that he would have a downright answer.

"Yes," she said softly, "I have thought of that."

"I'm glad!" he returned. "I wish I might know what change you would make in me. Wait! That sounds vain and absurd enough, I know. It would be absurd if I didn't mean exactly what I'm asking. This isn't idle foolishness. I'm dead in earnest."

She did not hesitate. "No," she said simply, "I can't tell you that. I'm not one of the women who want men made over after a woman's pattern. I want men to be what they're able to make themselves."

He considered that deliberately, turning it over and over in his mind, trying to make sure of it.

"Yes," he said, by and by, "I think I know what you mean. I told you yesterday it had never occurred to me that I wasn't a good man. Well, that might be changed. I might get to be what people call a good man. But that wouldn't happen through my love of goodness. Goodness will never be a passion with me, for its own sake. If you loved me and wanted to make me a good man, you could do it. It might not be very hard. But I can see what's wrong with that."

He was following out the point carefully, steadily. That was his way with everything. He would not let himself slur over a difficulty.

"This is the hardest thing of all to say to you," he went on. "When I'm not thinking about you, I'm not thinking about goodness, either. It doesn't seem to concern me at all. That's

what makes me doubtful. The sort of goodness that comes in that way is no better than a weakness—is it? Trying to be good, because you wanted it, would be like letting my hands fall slack. I shouldn't like that. If I were going to try to be a good man, I'd want to be able to respect myself for it. I couldn't do that unless I believed in goodness for its own sake. I suppose that's what you mean, too—isn't it?"

"Yes," she agreed quietly, "that is just what I mean."

He rose, standing before her. "Well, I'm going now. And I'm going without as much hope as I've had at other times." He took her hand and held it with firm pressure. "I don't know what's coming out of it all. I've been living pretty much in the dark, and thinking blindly about a lot of things. I shan't get over that right away. If I change at all, it won't happen all at once. You'll let me keep on coming to you—won't you? It helps me to come over here and look at you and get a word or two from you."

"You may come whenever you like," she told him simply.

"You don't say you'll be glad to see me," he made comment. "I rather like that. I'm not fond of polite pretenses. I'll come again. I'll come every time as a lover, too; but I shan't ask you again to give me your love till I'm surer about several things. Good-by, for this time. While I'm away from you, maybe I shan't be trying very hard to be good, but I'll be thinking about it. That's something, isn't it?"

He rode away from the house slowly, letting his horse set its own gait. Though it was getting to the end of the afternoon, he made no haste. At the fork of the trail he drew rein, considering, undecided, allowing his beast to browse the dry bunch grass, taking plenty of time for making up his mind. Suddenly he pulled his slack rein tight.

"What's the use!" he cried aloud. "Goodness! Goodness can't stop me yet. I've got to see it through. I can't quit now."

Sharply, under spur, he took the trail leading to Cottonwood Gap.

CHAPTER XV.

Billy Fortune was a bit impatient over the lull in events at the Gap. When a stage was once set for drama, Billy liked to have the curtain rise and the action begin. Here things were pretty much at a standstill. Sterner's sheep, to be sure, held the pasturage along the creek; but Southwall's bands were driven each day through the Gap to water, and were not molested. Billy was sure that Sterner had not abandoned his enterprise; Sterner was not a man to abandon anything to which his hand was set. Neither would Southwall give up tamely. The contest would be well worth watching.

Meanwhile, the days were tranquil, golden. Billy had the camp to himself for the most part, with not much to do but invite his soul. His camp tending made no great demands upon him. The little photographer was waiting over, protesting his infatuation with the beauties of the rugged hills. He was abroad with his camera all day. Bloomfield, too, kept to his work tirelessly; but to Billy he was an easy taskmaster, asking nothing but food—food served on time, and plenty of it.

Upon the evening of his fourth day in camp, Bloomfield came in, jubilant, hilarious, bearing the torn and shattered carcass of an old sage cock. While still afar off, he swung the limp bird above his head, shouting his triumph. Tenderly, proudly, he laid it down beside the fire and stood over it, gloating.

"I got him, Billy!" he chuckled.

"Oh, I got him! It wasn't marksmanship that did it; it was brains. Why didn't you tell me the sage chicken's a brainy creature? If you get him, you've got to outwit him. That's what I did with this fellow. I shot at him twice, and he ducked both times. Then, the next time, I didn't shoot at him at all; I shot away under him, and he ducked right square into it!"

He was vastly pleased with himself. Billy hadn't the heart to alloy his pleasure. He touched the shattered bird with his foot, rolling it over upon the sand.

"Yes, sir; you sure did get him," he agreed. "By the look of him, you must have been all of ten yards off, too. What are you wantin' to do with him? If I was you, I 'most believe I'd take his skin off and salt it and take it home to show your wife."

"My wife!" Bloomfield said. "I haven't any wife—God bless her! My mother keeps house for me; and my mother doesn't approve of slaughter in sport. It would wound her dear old heart if I told her I'd killed anything. Don't bother about skinning him. Just get him ready, and cook him, quick. Don't take his breast off. Cook all of him. This is an occasion, friend. We'll eat the whole business. Don't waste a scrap."

Billy did as he was told; but slyly he made other provision for himself. Perhaps you have never tried eating an old sage cock, killed in late summer. It isn't much done. Bloomfield tried—tried ravenously at first, then perplexedly, then doggedly, pausing between bites to pick queer little things out of his teeth. The little photographer had abandoned his portion after a mere skirmish.

"I dare say I hurried you too much with the cooking," Bloomfield suggested, by and by. "He seems a bit underdone, or something. What are these hard little lumps he's got in him? I never noticed them before."

"I wouldn't wonder if they're shot," Billy said mildly. "You did a mighty good job of shootin' him—a heap better than I mostly do. Me, I mostly just shoot their heads off."

Bloomfield persisted even unto the end. The time came when he gazed victorious at a litter of bones and fragments.

"Well, there!" he cried. "A nervy old bird—fought to the last mouthful. But I rather fancy he's finished now. I'm a contented man, Billy."

He looked the part, sitting in a huge lump beside the fire, smoking, watching Billy at his after-supper work and basking in the warm luxury of the deepening dusk. A supreme satisfaction was upon him. The artist, too, was content, enjoying his brown cigarette.

"Friends," Bloomfield said, "if only I might feel forever just like this! Right this minute I'm an honest man, a pious man, a man full of the milk of all human kindness. There's not a virtue in the catalogue that isn't mine right now. If only I might stay just this way! Why can't this sort of thing last? Do the gods grow jealous of having us too much like them? Is that it?"

Neither of his listeners mocked at that. The little man gave assent by a gesture. Billy came from his finished dishwashing and dropped to a seat between the two, making himself easy on the warm sand.

"I know what you're meanin'," he said. "There's times when I like to feel that way, too, just for variety. It wouldn't do for all the time, though—would it? We've got to take things the way they come, by turns, because that's the way they're meant. Don't you reckon that's the best way?"

Bloomfield sighed, letting the sigh puff out his fat lips.

"Yes, yes!" he returned. "I dare say! That's as good a reason as any, if there must be a reason why we can't live up to the divinity in us." He glanced askance at his companion, as if debating whether to go on. "Tell me this, Billy: When you were a little boy, what was it you dreamed of becoming? Something a lot better than you've ever been, wasn't it?"

Billy laughed a little shamefacedly. "Yes, sir; it sure was! I was goin' to get to be a doctor, so I could cure all the sick women and kids. There was a little cripple girl that died, back home, and they took me to the funeral, and her mother—— Oh, shucks!"

Pensive memory made Bloomfield's fat face appear almost grotesque in the flickering firelight. "I wanted to preach," he said. "Think of that, now! I had it all lined out. I was going to spend my life preaching that there isn't any hell. The hell-fire notion was the first thing my mind gagged over when I was big enough to begin thinking for myself. Now see what I'm doing—spending my days making all the hell I can for poor chaps who've happened to get off on the wrong foot. That's the job I'll be working at tomorrow. I'm doing it for pay, too. I'm making my living by it. That's the hell of it for me. Oh, well!" He shifted uneasily upon the sand and spoke as though with an effort to shift his mood, too. "To-morrow isn't here yet. This is to-night, and yonder's a magnificent skyful of stars. Take a look at 'em. What do you think about 'em? 'The sentinel stars set their watch in the sky.' What are they watching for, Billy? Just to see us go wrong? Is that all? Or is it to see that everything comes out right by and by? 'Silently, one by one, in the infinite meadows of heaven, blossomed the lovely stars, the forget-me-nots of the angels.' Is that the truth?"

"You can search me," Billy said. "If I could tell you the answer to that—— Sugar!"

The little man made his contribution: "When I was a youngster, my mind was set that I would be a great painter—not for the fame of it, and not for the rewards, but so that all men who would look at my pictures might know for a certainty that beauty is a heavenly thing. And now see! I am getting old, and I am no better than a tramp. The work I have done is nothing—nothing at all!" He waved his cigarette with a quaint, grave gesture of acquiescence, renunciation. "Ah, well! Yes, I am a failure but for one thing: I have kept my own faith in the beautiful. I have made no good use of that faith, but I keep it clean. If I can keep it so to the end, maybe that will not be so bad."

Bloomfield squinted curiously at the smiling, dark face. "You, too!" he said softly. "My soul! There must be something in it. What do our poor little failures signify, if the big thing itself is true? I'd be reconciled to a hundred lifetimes of shabby failure if I could only be sure at last that the promptings I feel toward decency and righteousness are something more than a madness of my own. I wonder! Billy, I certainly wish you'd tell me."

"Do you?" said Billy. "Well, I certainly won't."

The fat man went to his bed before long; and soon the little photographer left Billy to himself. As usual after a lazy day, Billy dallied with sleep, putting it off, getting a sensuous enjoyment out of its first lulling approach. He had the low fire for company, and the warm wind out of the south, and the exquisite symphony of night sounds. It was very pleasant.

Again his attention was arrested by another sound, the sound of stealthy movement near by. Without betraying that he had heard, Billy listened with sharp care, and made sure that

some one was hovering at a little distance, in the sheltering shadows of the cottonwoods. Quietly Billy spoke:

"Jacky! Don't be afraid of me. I'm your friend. I want to give you something to eat."

With an armload of canned stuff from the grub box he left the fire, speaking again for reassurance:

"Jacky! Nobody's goin' to hurt you. Come and get it. You know I'm a friend of yours."

There was no response, but Billy caught a glimpse of the slinking figure drawing a step or two nearer, then hanging back fearfully.

"All right!" he said. "Here, I'll put the stuff down and leave it for you, so you can get it. Help yourself. Come and get some more when you want it." He made his manner quite matter of fact, as though the affair had in it nothing extraordinary; and, quite as casually, he added the next item: "And, say, Jacky—them papers. You know—the ones the Chinaman had on him. You take real good care of 'em. Stanchfield, he's liable to need 'em real bad. Don't you lose 'em."

Still there was no answer. Billy let it go at that. Whistling, he returned to the fire and sat down for a last cigarette, his mind comfortable with the thought of Jacky once more full-fed. He was at peace with circumstances. He had no means of knowing that the little photographer, turning in his blankets, was chuckling to himself. He had no reason whatever for suspecting that the prowler out yonder in the shadows, to whom he had unbosomed himself, was not the hunchbacked, half-witted Jacky, but Sterner, instead, reconnoitering, his wits keenly alert.

CHAPTER XVI.

Southwall rode homeward from Stanchfield's ranch with his mind torn by doubt, tormented by a tangle of complexities. He was in no condition for orderly thinking; he made no attempt at that. He could do no better than stare blankly into the intricacies of the maze ahead of him.

There was no rise in his spirits when he came to his own ranch house. The house stood dark in its bare yard. Evidently Poddy Bruce was not yet home from his down-country errand. The kitchen was in ugly disarray. Sheer animal hunger drove him to cooking a late supper; sheer animal exhaustion, after his disturbed nights in the sick room, sent him at once to bed. He slept heavily, dreamlessly, waking at dawn. The night had brought him no mental refreshment, no zest for the day; but it had at least restored the strength of his body and given a firmer texture to his will.

To-day he must be taking a new grip upon his own affairs. There could be no doubt of that. Sterner would be back at his work at the Gap, more than ever inexorably bent upon conquest. Their relations in the two or three days' interval had served only to increase the already straining tension. Sterner would be grimly set upon pushing his fight; Southwall was no less grimly determined upon resisting to the uttermost.

He drank his morning coffee, then set off at once for the Gap. Sterner's crew was not yet at work. Across the creek, at Bloomfield's camp, the blue smoke of the breakfast fire floated lazily in the warm air. Impatiently curious, Southwall drew near. Billy Fortune was at his dishwashing; fat Sam Bloomfield and the little photographer puttered over preparations for their day.

Bloomfield hailed the visitor with robust good nature:

"Welcome, friend! I can't call you stranger, after watching you play draw one night at Guernsey. Friend's the word, after that. Get down, won't

you? I don't quite know how to do the honors at a vagabond's camp, beyond telling you my name. My name's Bloomfield. You know Billy Fortune. And this gentleman here is—— My word! I don't believe I've discovered his name yet."

"I've seen the gentleman before," Southwall said briefly. He was even curt in his perplexity over this encounter, his eyes questing about the camp for signs. Billy Fortune, bending above his dishpan, filled in the fat man's incomplete sketch of himself:

"Mr. Bloomfield's just havin' a little picnic for his health. His stomach's been a little out of shape."

Bloomfield laughed. "Stomach out of shape? Yes—look at it! I'm trying my best to walk some of the fat off of it. But Billy's cooking puts on pounds while I'm walking off ounces. Hopeless! Won't you get down and have a smoke?"

"No," Southwall said abruptly. "I can't stop." He made no effort to soften his manner for courtesy's sake. Nor did the fat man linger out of civility.

"Well," he said, "if you won't visit with us now, come again. You'll find no trouble with the latchstring. Excuse me; I see a bunch of chickens down yonder by the water."

He tucked his gun under his arm and labored off. The little artist followed soon with his camera. Southwall watched them go; then spoke sharply:

"Billy, who's that man? What's he doing here?"

"Who?" said Billy. "That plump person? Why, Tommy, it's sort of hard to tell what he is here for, just by watchin' him. You'd pretty near have to take his word for it. He says he's come here to shoot. That's what he hired me to fetch him out for. If you ask me, I don't know why he's doin' it, because he never hits nothin'."

"How does he happen to be at the Gap right now?" Southwall demanded brusquely.

"Well, that's what I'm tellin' you," Billy said. "I told you I fetched him up here. How could he be any place else?"

"Oh, stop it!" Southwall rasped. "Down there at Fletch's you pretended to know who he is. Well, what do you know?"

"I know he seems like a perfectly nice man," Billy parried. "Real friendly. Most fat men are that way. Ain't you noticed it?" He dropped his nonsense suddenly. "Cut it out, Tommy! He ain't payin' me to know anything about him. You know me better than to be askin' them kind of questions. If you want to know somethin' about him, why don't you go and ask him."

The blanks were not hard to fill in. Billy's very reluctance made it easier. Southwall spoke with hot irritation:

"You had no business to bring a government agent in here now. I don't want a government man overseeing this affair of mine."

"Don't you?" Billy returned. "Well, there ain't any use tellin' me about it. Why don't you mention it to the government?" Then, as Southwall tightened his rein: "Look here, Tommy! You're actin' the dunce. It ain't goin' to do you a speck of good to be fussin' at me for this. That's plumb foolish. And that ain't all your foolishness. You're a fool for tryin' to go against Buck Sterner, the way you're takin'. What makes you? You ain't a man that's ever been anxious for trouble."

The words were as fire to the inflammable fiber of Southwall's temper. He swore fiercely, in a sudden access of fury that would not be checked. That was not like the Southwall of Billy's intimate knowledge—the man who was used to meeting losses and gains alike in the spirit of one who asked no odds in any game. Billy was sure that out-

cry of any sort from Southwall betrayed uncommonly deep and sharp hurt.

"Trouble!" he shouted. "Who's been making the trouble? When have I made trouble for any man? I've kept the peace, and I've kept my own place. I've been law-abiding here. I've done as much as any man to try to give this country a good name and keep it free of scoundrelism. I'll not let any scoundrel alive kick me out of the place that's fairly mine. The line is bound to be drawn somewhere against that sort of thing, and I've drawn it right there at Low Creek."

Billy's face wore a look of grave sympathy as he listened to the tirade, but inwardly he was anything but grave. "Yes, I expect that's so, Tommy," he agreed. "Now, if Buck could just see it that way—high-minded, you know, and law-abidin' ——"

"I'll make him see it, before we're through!" Southwall cried. "He's the one who's making trouble. Why? If it's more room he wants, there's nobody on the east of him, not for miles. There's a lot of open country along this south line, too."

"Yes, that's so, Tommy," Billy said again. "But, you see, you ain't east of him, nor you ain't south. You're west. Don't that kind of explain it, mebbe?"

Southwall's anger grew vociferous. "I? What have I done to him? He told me himself that he's going to push me out. What have I done to him? I've respected every right of his—every right he even claims——"

"All but one, Tommy," Billy cut in. "Oh, shoot! You can't be meanin' you don't know what he's doin' it for. Judas Priest! If you're as dumb as that, I hope he does get her away from you. You'd be a nice man to take care of her—wouldn't you?"

Southwall's face flamed scarlet. That was was not the lover's confusion. Billy had touched a spot made raw by days and nights of brooding.

"Stop!" he ordered hotly. "That's a thing you're not to talk about. That's infernal impertinence."

Billy fell silent. He knew well enough that he would not have to wait long. He bore the waiting a lot more placidly than did Southwall. By and by Southwall's eyes lost their scowl of irritation. Irritation is but a surface sign. His thoughts were settling to bed rock.

"What do you mean, Billy?" he questioned. His guard was down. Billy had a perfect opening.

"You don't claim to know much about a woman, do you?" he said. "Nor you ain't a speck wise about men, neither. You've been associatin' with sheep too long. A sheepman gets that way. He gets woolly-minded. Sufferin' Peter, Tommy! You don't know as much about the man-and-woman business as the first man did, away back yonder. Honest, is that the best you know? It ain't ever struck you at all that Buck's playin' for any stake but your little patch of grass? Ain't you ever had the least little bit of a notion that a nice girl like her is awful liable to be wantin' the best man in sight? Buck sure knows it."

"Don't be a fool, Billy!" Southwall said shortly.

"Fool!" Billy retorted. "If I am one, then there's a couple of fools under this tree. I wouldn't trade my kind of foolishness for yours. Mebbe I'm a fool for frettin' myself any about you, but I ain't as rank a one as you are. You sure are rank, Tommy! I've been real fond of you, before this; but I'm kind of losin' it. A man that'll act like you're doin', he ain't worth stayin' fond of. If you're that kind of a quitter then right here's where I quit, too. I ain't goin' to bother about you any more."

"Oh, stop it!" Southwall flared.

"You're a great talker; but you're one of the talkers who never say anything. What is it I've done?"

That made Billy peevish. "Done?" he echoed. "Oh, nothin'. Just what any man would do, I reckon. Just what I'd be doin' myself, likely. If I was lovin' her, I expect I'd be showin' her just like you are—'I want you, but I wouldn't wonder if Buck hadn't better get you.' Every way I could I'd be lettin' her see I didn't think she was worth makin' a real man-size try for. I'd show her I was willin' to fight this Buck man for a little piece of land and a little creek of water, without carin' a hoot how much it cost me, but wasn't willin' to fight a lick for her. That's the best way, Tommy—sure! Seein' that Buck's real apt to take everything else you've got, he might as well have the girl, too—mightn't he? That's the way I'd look at it, if it was me."

The taunt, piled up with slow deliberation, left Southwall shaking, inarticulate. Billy stood as he was, his hands pushed deep into his pockets, sardonically calm. Raging, Southwall jerked his horse around and struck in spurs; but after a dozen strides he whirled back again, riding close, his voice stormy.

"Billy, you don't know what you're saying! This fight with Sterner—— You know I've got ten-to-one odds against me. There's nothing sure in it. My own place isn't sure at all. More than likely he'll ruin me."

"Fiddle!" Billy interrupted. "Say, Tommy, which is the meanest way of fightin'—gougin' or bitin'? They're both sort of mean, mebbe; but then, fightin's a mean business. If you take all the meanness out of fightin', there's nothin' left of it. A fight's a fight." That was a trifle cryptic. Southwall waited, scowling. Billy got a light for a new-made cigarette. The glance he turned upon Southwall was level, serious.

"This is what I'm aimin' to tell you," he said. "I ain't any hand to bite when I'm in a scrap; but if I ever got mixed up with a man that gouged, and if I felt his thumb reachin' for my eye, I wouldn't squander my time just hopin' he might mebbe change his mind. I'd bite, and I'd bite quick—nor I wouldn't feel sorry afterward, not a mite. If it come to that, I'd be a heap sorrier for my own eye than I would be for the other man's thumb. Oh, shucks, Tommy! Don't be so dull. You know what I mean. If Buck's goin' to gouge, why don't you try bitin'? What if you ain't fond of lickin' a man that way? Would you be any fonder of gettin' licked like that? It's got to be one or the other, ain't it? He's the one that started it; and he's made his brag he's goin' to gouge you out of here. Well, then—bite him! Oh, listen! You know the shape he's in. You could have the United States government on your side in a minute if you'd only invite 'em."

Life surged suddenly into Southwall's somber face; his every nerve snapped taut.

"Don't—don't!" he cried. "Billy—man! If I were fighting for the land—— I'm not! It's not that at all. It's place I'm fighting for—place, and—life, and—more than life. Have you never wanted to stand out and prove yourself and find just what there was in you that entitled you to call yourself a man? Billy, have you never wanted something so much that you couldn't bring yourself to take it except by the best strength you had? Can't you understand?"

"Go on," Billy said soberly. "You might as well tell me the rest of it, straight. A man don't talk that way, except about just one thing. It's the girl you're talkin' about."

Southwall did not attempt to parry that thrust. Billy offered another, aimed at a vital spot:

"Buck's got her in his mind, too. Do you reckon he's thinkin' like you are on account of her? Do you reckon he's figurin' on fightin' clean on account of her? The only thing he's thinkin' about in this business is gettin' you out of his road. And then what? You're talkin' real noble, Tommy—but you ain't talkin' sense. If the government ever does get after him, you know mighty well what they'll try to do to him. If I was bettin', I'd bet on the government. She don't know about that yet—does she? Just what if she wouldn't find it out till it was too late? Can't you be human enough to think about that? Then what good would your high-and-mighty notions do her? It's comin' some time, Tommy, and they're goin' to know about it then. What's the hurt of havin' it come now, before it's too late to do her any good?"

Passion rose in Southwall, dyeing his face crimson through the tan. "Billy, that's just what I don't want! Can't you see? She mustn't know—not now—not till I——" He flung out his hands in a gesture of challenge and appeal. "Think! If it were you, would you want to take the way you're talking about?"

Billy grinned. The grin became a chuckle. Lively lights danced in his eyes. The question struck the very solar plexus of his private faith in the man-and-woman relation.

"Who? Me?" he returned. "Oh, you can't go by what I'd do—me bein' such a fool." He stopped his sparring then. "I just wanted to hear you say it, Tommy. I know what you're meanin'. If it was me, I'd have to settle it with just Buck; and I'd take forty lickin's before I'd let the girl hear me makin' a holler. You're tootin' right I would!"

Southwall did not prolong that phase of the argument; that item was disposed of.

"I don't want Bloomfield here," he said. "I'd give a great deal if he were away. His work won't be kept quiet." Across the creek, Sterner's men were riding up to their day's work on the fence, going about their preparations methodically. "There's the thing I want settled!" Southwall cried. "If that fence stands——"

"Well," Billy said, "Buck's goin' to do all he can to settle that quick for you. They'll have that wire strung by noon. Then what are you goin' to do?"

The question went unanswered. With somber eyes Southwall sat regarding the movements of the crew at the Gap. Billy spoke quietly:

"There's another thing, Tommy. Say, you and me, we don't take much stock in what they're tellin' about that crip Jacky—do we?"

"What?" Southwall demanded sharply. "Jacky? What do you know about Jacky? Tell me!"

"Nothin' much," said Billy; "only—they're sort of wonderin' what's become of him, ain't they? His duckin' out from Stanchfield's right when he did—— That looks kind of curious, don't it? But I don't believe Jacky's friends ought to worry about it much."

"Billy!" Southwall ordered. "Tell me what you know!"

"I don't know such a great sight," Billy parried. "I've got a notion he's just hidin' out somewheres round here; and I'd be willin' to bet he ain't starvin' to death. I've got another notion, too, that he's right apt to turn up when he's wanted real bad." Suddenly he diverged from that theme. "Oh, Tommy—looky! See who's comin'!"

It was Poddy Bruce, rounding the curve of a near hill, following the trail to the Gap, homeward bound. There was no mad haste in his pace; he rode sedately, with an air of untroubled leisure.

"Oh, for pity's sake!" Billy cried. "Whatever's that jigger he's got with him?"

The query was eminently a fair one. Tied to Poddy's saddle, swinging to the horse's stride, blazing in the brilliant sunlight, hung a huge brass horn, vast-throated, vastly convoluted, vastly impressive in its shining splendor. Getting sight of the watchers at the camp, Poddy lifted the horn in his arms, setting the mouthpiece to his lips. His beast plunged, stopped dead still, and flung protesting hoofs high. Poddy laughed delightedly.

"Bub-been havin' a huh-hell of a time!" he called. "My pup-pony won't stut-tand for it at-tut-tall! She pup-pitched me off, the first tut-time I tut-tried it, back on the flats. Tut-took me half a dud-day to kik-catch her. That's what mum-mum-makes me so late."

Southwall swore—a ripping oath, tense with anger.

"Poddy!" he shouted. "You ass! What have you been doing?"

Poddy was not a whit dismayed. "I won it at a ruh-raffle," he said lightly. "I had to kik-kill time somehow, while they was gug-goin' over the records for me. There was a Dud-Dutchman raf-flin' this off in a sus-saloon, and I wuh-won it. Just a little spup-portin' pup-proposition. Don't gug-get sore, Tut-Tut-Tommy. Mebbe some time some-bub-body'll kik-come along that can pup-play it."

Southwall's anger rose to full tide, flaming in his eyes. Poddy could not avoid seeing.

"Oh!" he said. "That Bub-Bub-Buck—— He's gug-got us. He's gug-got entries on bub-both sides of the kik-creek, all the way, clear from huh-hell to bub-breakfast. He's gug-got us froze out."

Raging, Southwall wheeled his horse and rode at top speed across the creek and on through the Gap. There was no parting word. Poddy Bruce watched the flying figure with odd surprise.

"What's ailin' Tut-Tut-Tommy?" he stuttered. "He's got no kik-call to act like that. He's awful unruh-reason-abub-bubble." With whimsical fondness he raised the great horn in his arms, patting its burnished body. "Pup-poor old gug-girl!" he consoled. "You ain't gug-goin' to be pup-popular with him. And I was aimin' to gug-give you a gug-good home!" Gently he released the ties that bound the huge thing to his saddle, and passed it gently to Billy's arms. "You tut-take it," he said. "I better gug-get Tut-Tut-Tommy kind of kik-ca'med down first, before I tut-take it home. And I reckon I bub-better be gug-goin'. Tut-Tut-Tommy, he'll bub-be gettin' pup-peevish with me."

Left alone with the monster, Billy laughed. "Ain't it comical!" he said aloud. "Ain't it all plumb comical, though! If folks could only see the comicalness, instead of bein' so rank melancholy——" He smoked a cigarette, dwelling upon the matter. Inspiration was not long delayed. "Sure! That lonesome Norwegian! He was wantin' somethin' that could say 'boom!' I reckon this chap could say it, if he had a little encouragement."

Forthwith, intent only upon the delicious comedy of the thing, he bore the horn to Olaf's camp, where the blond giant tended his sheep at their grazing. He received the strange gift with hungry arms and hungry eyes.

"I be so glad!" he said simply. "It iss so still! And if I listen at night, dere iss so many noises! I do not know vere dey come out of. It iss such sly noises! My dogs, dey hear dem, too, but dey cannot see vat it iss. Dey ruffle up and dey w'ine in deir t'roats. It scares me so bad; I choost sit and sit, and listen and listen. Now I can haf moosic!" In ecstasy he cuddled

the horn against his broad breast. It was a long time before he ventured timidly to consider the mouthpiece.

"It'll be friendly for you," Billy said. "You ain't ever played one of 'em, have you? It comes sort of clumsy at first, till you find out their funny little ways." An imp of the perverse stirred in his mind. "Listen! If you want to make it play, you've got to suck on it. You put that little end in your mouth, and then suck as hard as you can."

Gingerly, delicately, Olaf encompassed the mouthpiece with his lips and gave a tentative suck.

"Oh, harder!" Billy urged. "Go right at it! And while you're suckin', you want to keep wigglin' your fingers on them little pump things in the middle. You'll get it after a while. Harder! You've got to get the knack of it."

CHAPTER XVII.

Before noon, Sterner's men had finished stringing the wire across the Gap, making the line sheep-tight. When their work was done, they did not disperse; instead, they found a sheltered spot among the cottonwoods on the creek, and waited as though under orders. From somewhere a supply of whisky had come—a plentiful supply, as Billy knew from the swift-rising tide of boisterous noise. In any company like that there must be weak heads, quick to react to the excitement of drink. Half an hour brought turbulence.

Was there purpose in it? Billy wondered. Perhaps. Other signs of purpose were not lacking. Toward noon, Sterner's sheep bands, thousands strong, were moved toward a common point on the creek, opposite the Gap, so close together that it needed vigilant care on the part of herders and dogs to hold each band intact. That was quite contrary to everyday practice. It could not be mere accident. There must be an ulterior object. That became plainer when Sterner himself, once and again, rode back and forth, scanning the ground briefly. Looking on, putting item with item, Billy knew well enough that the day would not be uneventful. His preparation of dinner went on fitfully while he kept his lookout.

At dinner time, while the others ate hungrily, he watched—watched with all the eagerness of an ardent lover of stirring drama. By and by interest quickened; for far in the distance, beyond the Gap, he saw the beginning of movement. To the eye untrained, there would have been nothing more than a faint, smudgy blur of dirty white against the pallid yellow of the plain; but those were trained eyes that watched. Billy knew that Southwall's sheep were coming toward the water. They would be grazing a little as they advanced; but they would not loiter much, for this was the thirsty hour.

Billy said nothing to his camp companions. Dinner over, they went away, unobserving. That dusty blot yonder signified nothing to them, even if they saw it. When they were gone, Billy let his dishwashing wait while he found a comfortable resting place, and gave himself up to the spectacle.

Sterner rode again along the creek, saw the advancing herd, and went about among his men with orders. At his laborers' camp he halted. Evidently he was having trouble there with discipline; two hours of loitering with whisky had made the men intractable; Sterner's voice rose angrily, commanding, threatening. After a time two or three of the less hardy ones left their shelter and went stolidly toward the Gap and on to the fence line, waiting there.

The herd was drawing close to the barrier, urged now by men and dogs. From the rear, Southwall circled the band and rode at a gallop in the lead.

Encountering the wire, he flung himself from the saddle.

"Judas Priest!" Billy made comment. "He ain't ever goin' to have the nerve! Folks don't monkey with wire that Buck strings. Yes, he is! Darned if he ain't goin' to cut it!"

Sterner's men were making vociferous, drunken protest. What they said was not borne to Billy's ears. Southwall might not have heard, for all the heed he gave. Hastily, but with care, he was opening panels in the fence, clipping strand by strand, curling the cut ends round the posts to make freest passage. The objectors did not offer resistance by force. His work done, Southwall got into his saddle and came on.

The sheep crowded through the Gap in a compact mass, then spread, fanwise, to looser order, as they descended to the water. Sterner's bands, too, were being held at the stream, though their watering time was past.

Sterner himself sat his horse at a little distance, immovably watching. Billy Fortune had said truly that this man was not used to having his will opposed once it was known, or his lines crossed once they were fixed. But he had never had to deal in conclusions with an antagonist of Southwall's temper. He must have known that Southwall would not stop and turn back tamely at a line of wire. He did not offer to take a hand in the encounter when the wire was cut, but sat waiting, watching till the sheep were drinking. Then, savagely, as one who had flung all restraint away, he spurred down to the creek, his voice rising in a wild oath.

"Get out of here!" he shouted. "Get your sheep out! I've leased these claims. You've got no rights here. Get out!"

Southwall made no response—did not even glance Sterner's way, but gave a signal to his herders and to Poddy Bruce, at the rear of the band; then sat watching the huddled beasts at the water's edge. There was studied insult in his manner of indifference, in his utterly ignoring the challenge. Storming, Sterner rode closer, crossing to Southwall's side of the stream. Loosing the coiled rope at his saddle horn, he swung down and began lashing furiously at the crowded sheep, driving in spurs again and again to make his horse plunge and kick, doing his utmost to stir the flock into excited panic. Purpose, not blind brutality, actuated him. His men, farther up the slope, raised their voices in shrill outcry, driving the rearmost ranks of the herd in fright hard upon those ahead; and Sterner's bands, held so long in check, were loosed together. Seconds, and all the thousands were tangled in inextricable confusion, moving as one body, Southwall's with the rest, drifting back to the eastward range.

The suddenness of the bold ruse left Southwall helpless. He made no effort to interfere, spoke no word of protest. When the thing was done, Sterner straightened in his saddle and laughed in sardonic satisfaction, crying his triumph with an oath.

"I warned you to get them out!" he shouted. "Now do it if you can!"

The harsh taunt stung Southwall to ungoverned fury. A braided rawhide quirt hung from his saddle horn. Unthinking, raging, he jerked it loose, drove his horse headlong at Sterner, and struck again and again in blind passion, wholly reckless of aim, knowing only that the lash was finding its mark at every stroke.

Poddy Bruce caught the last cutting stroke upon his own shoulder, as he spurred his horse between the others, fighting to force them apart. Poddy, too, was raging; but his rage took another turn.

"Kik-kik-kik——" he shrilled. By and by he managed to get the word fin-

ished "Kik-kik-quit it! Tut-Tut-Tommy, you fool! You're a pup-pair of fools! Kik-quit it! Bub-Bub-Buck, I thought you was a mum-man. What's the sense? This ain't sus-settlin' anything. Kik-quit it!" Chattering, Poddy held his place between the warriors. Neither man was armed for a fight at more than arm's length; he struggled to keep them apart.

A vivid line lay across Sterner's face, where a stroke of the whip had fallen; another stroke had lashed off his hat. He made futile efforts to drive Poddy aside; inarticulate with passionate anger, he tried to cry aloud, but the cry choked ludicrously in his throat. He raised his coiled rope high, but it entangled itself over his head, and his arm fell impotent. His fury overwhelmed his will. He flung his rope to the ground, wheeled, and galloped across the creek, riding toward the hills, utterly incapable of choosing his way.

Poddy Bruce watched him go. When he was gone, Poddy laughed a little. Unless Poddy could keep himself worked up to white heat in the thick of action, he was not a warlike chap.

"Tut-Tut-Tommy!" he said. "Shuh-shame on you! You're a dud-disgrace to me!" He straightened his hat and wiped the sweat from his flushed face. "There's no sus-sense in that. That kik-kind of a fight is so dud-darned in-kik-con-kik-clusive. Let's gug-get out of here, while the goin's gug-good. We've got to kik-cool off before we kik-can do any thinkin'. Kik-kik-come on!"

His erratic mind had veered back toward whimsical good humor by the time they passed the fence line.

"Tut-Tut-Tommy," he said lightly, "he's got our sheep; but you kik-cut his wire, and you hit him with a whip. You're the only mum-man that's ever dud-done either of them things to him. If you look at it right, this life's full of kik-com-pup-pensations!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

Billy Fortune's afternoon teemed with interest. He had seen a fight—a dramatic sort of fight, while it lasted. He knew well enough, though, that it had brought nothing to the point of quits. While he worked, his agile mind was busily trying to forecast the next turn in events. Something was bound to happen, after that midday encounter; neither Southwall nor Sterner was the sort of man to put off the final reckoning. What was to come would be likely to come swiftly.

In the middle of the afternoon, two badged special deputies from the sheriff's office rode into camp, hot and tired. They were not the sort that Billy was fond of. Special sheriff's duty in the range country falls for the most part to the odds and ends of humankind—men ready to attempt anything for a little ready money. But though Billy's affections were withheld, he could not deny the hospitality of the camp.

"We're a-lookin' for that there man of Stanchfield's," one of the fellows said. "What's this his name is, now? You know who it is, I reckon. I don't reckon you've saw him, this last couple days."

"Who?" Billy said. "That Jacky?"

"That's the one! They claim he's up round here, somewhere. A hell of a country for a man to be hidin' out in! This sun'll kill him before he's located."

They were taking no great zest in the chase. The camp was comfortable; they loafed and smoked, letting the hours go over them. One of Sterner's men, in an excess of friendliness, brought over a half-emptied bottle of whisky. While they drank, supper was getting under way. There would be

no more of man hunting till another day.

Bloomfield's good humor was broad enough upon its foundations not to be disturbed by the intrusion of his self-made guests. His taste in men was catholic. He welcomed the sheriff's deputies in a spirit whose warmth was not fictitious. During supper he led the talk; and when the meal was done, he contributed good cigars. By the time Billy Fortune was ready to join the group about the fire, its temper was comradely, jocund. If tragedy brooded over the spot, the properties and accessories of tragedy were hidden from sight.

The night was large, genial, quick with the feeling of strong life. From the near-by camp, where Sterner's men were loitering and drinking, there came the sounds of robust revelry. The whisky was holding out well. The laborers were making a rowdy holiday. Now and again, when the clamor swelled to full tide, Billy Fortune listened a trifle wistfully.

"Ain't it comical," he ventured presently, "how whisky can keep on interestin' you? Why do you reckon that is? There must be somethin' to it, besides just foolishness, even if you can't give a name to it."

The fat man laughed. "'O thou invisible spirit of wine! If thou hast no name to be known by, let us call thee devil.'"

"No, that ain't right!" Billy protested stoutly. "Whisky don't put the devil in a man; it just fetches out the devil that's in him already—if there's a devil there. It works the other way, too. There's been times when it's made me feel like a whole flock of angels. When folks are damnin' the drink, they ought to think about that part. But it ain't fashionable any more to try to stick up for whisky—is it? It ain't hardly respectable to say a friendly word about it. Just the same, it don't always make a brute beast out of a man, unless he's a brute beast to start with."

The fat man tipped back his head and let his laughter go free. Billy bridled a little at the note of raillery in the laughter. He had not spoken altogether in jest. One of the officers took up Billy's point.

"Yes, sir! Ain't that the truth! With me, I ain't ever ashamed of myself only when I've had a few drinks—and then it ain't the liquor that makes me ashamed on account of drinkin' it. It's the sight it gives me of the kind of rooster I am. After I've had just about so many, I've got to hurry up and take more, to make me forget what the first few have showed me. Yes, sir, liquor sure does show you a sight of things about yourself."

Sterner came to the fire then, appearing quietly out of the night. He offered a curt, inclusive greeting, but spoke no word in explanation. He seemed to have no definite errand, for he found a seat upon the sand, and lapsed into heavy silence, staring into the low fire. The reaction of the tempestuous day was strong upon him, gripping him, binding him hard and fast. If he had struggled against depression, the struggle had ceased; he was accepting it now as the inevitable—morose, tight-lipped, somber of eye. The dull-red line made by Southwall's whiplash lay plain across his face, the bruised skin discoloring, showing sinister.

Sterner took no part at all in the free-and-easy talk; he seemed not to hear anything of what was said. He did not rouse even when Poddy Bruce came to join the company, grinning and stuttering. Sterner's presence didn't bother Poddy. Under provocation, Poddy was a hot-headed fighter; but he bore no malice between times.

"Hello, Bub-Bub-Buck!" he saluted simply; then at large, grinning round the circle: "I just thought I'd dud-

drop over. Sus-society down at our pup-place has been kik-kind of dull this evenin'. Tut-Tut-Tommy, he dud-don't ap-pup-preciate my kik-company a bit. Kik-Christmas! It's a huh-hell of a world! I reckoned mum-mebbe you boys could kik-kind of cheer me up some."

It needed Olaf Bjinks to complete the motley company; so Olaf came next, lugging his horn. He hung back a little when he saw his master, fearing rebuke for leaving his charge; but Sterner offered no protest, and Olaf sat down, drawing as close as he could get to the flickering fire, the huge body of the horn he nursed upon his knees shining bravely.

"Dose odder mens, dey iss sleep," he said. "I am too scared to sleep. It iss so big, and I keep listen for somet'ing I do not efer hear. If I could choost hear it vunce, it vould not scare me so bad; but it scares me vaiting for it. And de moosic, she is not play yet."

With an air of heroic patience, he raised the horn and set the mouthpiece to his lips, sucking hard, over and over again. That no sound responded did not dismay him. He knew no doubt. A light shone deep in his eyes. So appear the eyes of any earnest spirit glimpsing some great thing afar off. By and by, when he could do no more, Olaf laid the horn down, his hand lingering upon it fondly.

"I cannot do it again till pretty soon," he said. "But I do it! Yess! Always I am been lofe moosic, and now I s'all haf moosic. I am nefer haf anyt'ing I lofe, not so long as I lif, only mine modder. From eferyt'ing else I lofe, not'ing could I haf."

There fell a little silence. Bloomfield stirred in his place, and the light of pure deviltry upon Billy's face faded by a degree or two. Poddy Bruce chuckled softly, but no man spoke for a time.

"Yess!" Olaf sighed. "It iss awful nice to haf de t'ing you lofe—somet'ing or odder."

Bloomfield regarded him curiously. There was something incongruous in having this simple-minded fellow speak so; yet the saving grace of utter sincerity was in his saying.

"'Love, like death,'" Bloomfield murmured, in his fat throat, "'levels all ranks, and lays the shepherd's crook beside the scepter.'"

The words went over Olaf's understanding. Olaf was not concerned with the philosophy of love, but with love itself.

"Mine modder," he said gravely, "she iss choost vun to efer say to me, 'I lofe you.' Moosic, she say it to me, but not any voman."

"What?" Billy Fortune cried. "Never loved a woman? Oh, for pity's sake!" He looked at Olaf with new interest. "Shucks! You ain't meanin' you've never loved even one of 'em."

Olaf was not abashed. An odd change had come upon him. Now and then you have seen a face which in one moment appeared as mere clay roughly thumbed into human form, and in the next moment bore a look as if the hand of a master artist had touched up its crude lines. Something like that had happened to Olaf.

"Yess," he said very quietly, "I haf lofed a voman."

"Oh!" Billy returned. "I thought it was funny if you never had. What made you quit?"

Olaf did not take that as an impertinence, but rather as a matter of course. It was quite natural that Billy should ask; he answered just as naturally: "I haf not efer quit. I lofe her yet, more as efer; but she iss not lofe me. She iss back home. So I haf come here."

The story was reduced to its simplest terms; its very simplicity gave Billy no chance at all for airy mockery.

"Oh!" he said again. "Well, that's

the way it goes sometimes. There's been lots of 'em that said they didn't love me, on account of different things. It sure helped me to find out a lot I didn't know about myself, anyway. What was it that this one didn't like about you?"

That, too, Olaf answered plainly. His mind knew no subtlety.

"She iss not lofe me. I say, 'I lofe you,' efer so many times, till she tell me: 'Olaf, can you lofe for two?' She say: 'Olaf, if you can lofe for two, take me. But you will haf to lofe for two, because I do not lofe you.' And I say, 'No!' I say: 'I lofe you, but I do not lofe mineself so as to take you like dat.' And so I come ofer here, and she iss stay home."

There was another interval of silence. With a sudden movement, Sterner prodded the fire with his booted foot. Out of the queer rag bag of his memory, Bloomfield brought another patch to put upon the talk.

"Ai-ai! 'What shadows we are, what shadows we pursue!'" He twisted his bulk restlessly, studying the dead end of his half-burned cigar. The little photographer stirred in his place, clasping his arms about his bent knees, an odd softness in the light of his lively eyes.

"Yes," he said. "The longer I live, the less am I willing to judge a man upon his everyday behavior, when the common impulses of everyday are working in him. Greed and lust and hate, and all suchlike sordidness—that doesn't show the man he is. What he will do for love's sake, on just the one supreme day of his life—there's the test of him!"

Poddy Bruce pushed his hat to the back of his head, then pulled it sharply down over his eyes, squinting from one to another of the circle of faces.

"Ain't that the tut-truth!" he made comment. "Kik-Christmas! When you see what love can dud-do, it's a wonder it ain't more pup-pup-popular. I can't understut-tand it."

"Nobody else can," said Billy Fortune. "This sure is a crazy little old world."

Bloomfield laughed softly. "Crazy, Billy? Oh, I don't know. Maybe it wouldn't seem so crazy if we'd own up to our decencies. We celebrate our indecencies; we cry them from the housetops, and show them at our mastheads, as if we wanted to be known by them. We don't advertise the time when we've withheld our hands and curbed our hearts back from evil. Why not? You wouldn't have any trouble finding out the stupidly wrong things I've done; but the brutalities I've been decent enough to keep myself from doing, just for pure decency's sake—that's another story, Billy. We keep that sort of thing to ourselves, don't we? If it weren't for those secret goodnesses of ours—the chances for evil we pass up, and the ugly vanities we throttle, and the purity we won't permit our selfishness to harm—— My soul! If it weren't for that kind of thing, then we'd have a mad world, my masters!"

Billy hadn't been following that with painstaking care. From under the sheltering brim of his hat he was watching Sterner's face. A very iron mask of a face it appeared, with its grim, immovable lines; yet there was something showing through the mask. Sterner's air of listless weariness was gone. There was no weariness in the deep, bold eyes, nor in the set of the firm, bold chin, nor in the lift of the square, strong shoulders. Sterner had been listening intently.

"Yes, sir," Billy said, rather at random, "that's certainly so! I've tried it myself, a couple of times, and it certainly works. There was once, I remember, when I set my head on doin' a fool thing. I ain't goin' to tell you what it was; I'd be ashamed to. I was goin' to do it because there was a man I

hated, and I was aimin' to do him dirt. I'd have done it, too—only I had to ride twenty miles to get to the place. Nighttime, it was, with stars, and nothin' else for company but the thing I was meditatin' about. Watchin' them stars was what done it, I reckon, because the notion come to me from them. 'You Billy!' I says to myself. 'Just take a good look at 'em, now. You don't ever catch the stars turnin' out of their way to do devilment—do you? You couldn't do this thing, either, except by goin' out of your way for it. That's the only way devilment ever gets done—by turnin' out of the way for it.' And then, by the time I got to where I was goin', I done the very opposite of what I'd set out to; and nobody ever knew in the world what I'd been figurin' on. I didn't get religion—it wasn't that. I just found out I wasn't really wantin' to hurt that man as much as my meanness had made me think I was."

Talking, Billy was rolling a cigarette with extra care, smoothing and patting it into perfect form. Carefully he got a light before he ventured the reflective last word: "It's right comical. We keep foolin' ourselves a lot worse than other folks ever fool us. Wantin' to get a thing fools us into believin' we'd love to have it; and wantin' to do a thing fools us into thinkin' we'd love it after it's done. That ain't so, most of the time. No, sir, I ain't ever been what you'd call religious; but I reckon you might say when we aim at meanness we're just tryin' to run a fool whizzer on the Almighty. It won't work—will it? He's always callin' them kind of bluffs, and makin' us feel real simple. I've found out it's better to pass, most always, when holdin' a mean hand, and just check the bettin' up to Him."

Olaf Bjinks lifted the horn from his knees, enveloped the mouthpiece once more with his lips, and took a deep-lunged pull, twiddling the keys with zeal. His mind had not tried to follow the philosophic abstraction. To Olaf's mind, philosophic abstractions were but the dry rind of life scaling off. To suck his horn gave him something concrete to think about. After a moment he rose.

"I guess I go back to dose s'eep," he said. "Dose s'eep, maybe dey iss lonesome for me."

Bloomfield watched the big fellow go hulking away, looming larger and larger as the shadows enveloped him. The fat man drew a deep, ragged sigh.

"Yonder goes a wise man!" he said gravely. "He doesn't look it; but he's a wise man. He's found out that heart's desire isn't all of life. 'He gave us the desire of our hearts, but He put leanness into our souls.' There's the nub of the matter."

One of the sheriff's officers was asleep, sprawled uncouthly upon the sand; the other deputy had followed the talk with an understanding that limped and halted.

"I don't know," he said dully. "I don't hardly reckon there's anything to it, only just takin' things the way they come. I ain't frettin' none about whether I'm good or bad. I've got to do whatever I can get a chance to do. Like this job now. I ain't hankerin' to see that humpback of Stanchfield's strung up; but I've sort of got to eat and drink, even if somebody else has got to hang for it. I ain't sure but what goodness and badness is all poppycock, anyhow. It ain't goodness that gets me my livin'. I ain't never heard of nobody offerin' no reward for runnin' down one of these good men."

The little photographer turned a keen glance upon him.

"No?" he said. "Haven't you, really? There was such a case, once. The thirty pieces of silver—— Have you never heard of that case?"

"Oh—him!" the deputy returned.

"That's some different. Me, I ain't no Judas."

"Shucks!" Billy Fortune protested. "We're all nothin' but a bunch of Judases, if you just cinch our attention onto what we're goin' to get out of it for pay, without givin' us a chance to think about the other part. That old-timer Judas person, he wasn't so plumb proud of his pay—was he?—after he'd had time to think it over. It made him sick and disgusted—didn't it? Well, that's what I'm sayin'. I've felt like that, too, times when I've tried to jump the other man out of the bettin' with nothin' in my own hand. That way seems right smart to you, when you make it stick; but you take it one time with another, and that ain't the way to play the game."

Poddy Bruce turned the talk abruptly out of this channel.

"How mum-much is the reward for Juh-Jacky?" he queried.

The deputy shifted his position. "Why," he said awkwardly, "it's right smart, I'd say. I'd say it's more than the job's worth. There must be somethin' back behind it that we ain't been told, because they tell me it's some of Stanchfield's friends that's puttin' up the money."

"Oh!" said Poddy. "Some of Stut-Stanchfield's friends! Is that sus-so? I was askin' Tut-Tut-Tommy, but he wouldn't tut-tell me. Tut-Tut-Tommy, he's like a bub-bear with a sore ear. Bub-Bub-Buck, who is it?"

Sterner stirred uneasily, but he did not speak; for while he hesitated, there came suddenly out of the night a sound—a sound vast and deep and far-reaching; a sound that throbbed for a moment full and strong, sobbed itself away to silence, rose again, sank, and swelled. It was a most gripping, compelling sort of sound. Fancy the voice of Melancholy herself raised in a cry of utter abandon. Fancy newly christened Satan, not yet come into his own, plunging down and crying to empty space his anguish. That was something of the effect.

Fat Sam Bloomfield drew himself erect, staring. The sheriff's man was upon his feet, feeling for the gun at his belt. Poddy Bruce gaped and sputtered.

"Hell's bub-bells!" he cried.

The sound died and was born again—a very blight of sound. Again it rose, deep-throated, menacing, filling the calm of the night to overflowing. The roisterers at Sterner's camp were quieted, listening. The Voice called once again, and yet again; and with the sound there came the clamor of myriad sheep bleating piteously in startled commotion. At the herders' camps the dogs were growing frantic.

"What in the world——" Bloomfield gasped. All at once the truth struck Billy Fortune.

"Sufferin' Peter!" he said. "It's Olaf Bjinks! That's what it is! He's quit suckin' on his horn. He's found out! He's tootin' the damned thing! Oh, for the love of country!"

Bloomfield laughed aloud in sharp relief. "My heartfelt thanks, Billy!" he said. "Unexplained, that noise would have given me the jimmies in a minute. Just listen! And that chap is getting consolation out of it!"

There was another effect. A man was running toward the camp in the darkness, blundering and stumbling over the stones in the creek bed, calling inarticulately. Stanchfield's Jacky came into the range of the firelight, hatless, disheveled, his eyes starting, his white lips gibbering in abject fright. No doubt the Voice had spoken to his soul in accusation. Thought of hiding in safety in the loneliness of the night was gone from his mind; fear had driven him to another refuge—the refuge of human contact. His shaking knees bent beneath him. Kneeling, he dragged himself over the sand toward

Billy Fortune, his hands outstretched, groping. His palsied tongue struggled mightily with speech.

The group sat motionless under the first sharp surprise. The sheriff's man felt the first prompting to action. There was a reward for Jacky. The fellow drew near, but Billy interfered.

"No, you don't! You wait, now! Let him alone! There'll be nothin' doin' till we find out what's the matter with him. I'm takin' care of him right now. You keep your hands off!"

Jacky moaned and mouthed. Save by quick surmise, Billy could make nothing out of it, but intuitively he knew what terror was in the half-wit's mind, compelling him to this extremity.

"What's that, Jacky?" he questioned. "Say it again!"

Jacky's lips spoke nothing intelligible. Billy's interpretation was a piece of bold pretense, ventured upon sudden impulse.

"Buck," he said abruptly, "he's sayin' your Chinaman's been killed out there in the hills."

Sterner leaped to his feet with an oath. Crying aloud, Jacky fell at his length, groveling, hiding his face upon his arms.

"Damnation!" Sterner shouted. "The Chinaman! Find out where he is. Make him tell! I've got to find him."

Billy did not put the question. Out of the vague distance Olaf's horn lifted its voice once again, quavering, plaintive, unearthly. Jacky's crazed brain responded. Screaming, he fought himself away from Billy's hand upon his shoulder, got his feet under him, and ran blindly, plunging toward the darkness.

There was no pursuit. Upon impulse as unreasoning as Jacky's own, the sheriff's man fired three or four shots after the flying figure. Jacky fell headlong and lay still, a shapeless shadow among the other shadows.

The watchers ran then. Sterner was the first to reach the body. Stooping, in reckless frenzy he tore at the disordered clothing, ripping the shirt open, thrusting his hands inside, fumbling, making mad haste.

"Keep away!" he cried. "Let me see!"

The little photographer spoke quietly:

"You are searching for papers, Mr. Sterner? You needn't trouble. Let some of us see if the man is dead. Those papers—— They are in quite safe hands. I happened to find them myself, and the department of justice has them now, ready for the grand jury."

CHAPTER XIX.

In the troubled days when old Carl Stanchfield's mind was feeling its way slowly back to reality, it was not the doctor's skill nor the nurse's training that gave him his firmest hold upon life. Little Betty's sweet presence was the center of his every waking moment. Others might minister to the needs of his body; none but Betty could serve the greater need. His hours of feverish rest were quieter when Betty sat beside his bed, her hand in his. Rousing from stupor or sleep, always his eyes sought at once for her face. She comforted him, strengthened him.

Even when delirium grew less, and his brain had its rational intervals, with all his faculties sound, his tongue remained rebellious, disobedient to his will. At times it was plain that he was thinking clearly, but his speech faltered, as if he fought for command of every simplest word.

Jacky's name was the burden of his first articulate cry when the pressure of the crushed bone was relieved, and Jacky's name hung upon his lips in his first coherent hours. Thought of Jacky obsessed him; that one word was spoken over and over again insistently. When he was able to summon two

words together, his question was of Jacky.

Betty sought to quiet him, but he would not be quieted by evasive pretense. Nothing less than the truth would do that. By and by Betty told him simply what she knew.

"He's gone, daddy. He went away the night you were hurt, and he hasn't come back. We don't know where he is, but we're hunting for him. You mustn't worry about him. It will be all right."

He was not satisfied. A score of times, numberless times, he repeated his question. When Betty knew of Jacky's death she would have concealed that from her father; but, upon the doctor's counsel, she told him, softening the fact as well as she was able, holding back the brutal manner of the boy's end.

"It was an accident, daddy," she said. "He must have lost his mind altogether. He was hiding in the hills, down by the Gap, running away from people. Nobody knows how he was living. And then he was found dead."

Old Carl took the story quietly. Lifelong habit was strong there. With him, always the deepest emotions had been undemonstrative, his deepest hurts borne most silently. For a long time he lay, his eyes intent upon Betty's face, searching it profoundly. It was she who broke the tense interlude.

"Oh, daddy!" she cried. "It's best that way. Surely it's best! His life would have been so dreadful always. He could never have been anything in life but just what he was."

With great effort old Carl spoke, syllable by syllable: "Just what—he was! He was—your lover. He loved you. He—loved me."

After a little time of brooding quiet, he spoke again:

"Tom! I—want him—quick!"

When Southwall came upon the summons, he spent an hour in secret with old Carl. The old man was very eager. Often his eagerness outstripped his laboring tongue, but somehow, bit by bit, he made himself understood.

"Tom," he said slowly, "you—tell me this: When—when I was—knocked out—you asked me some—questions about who—hurt me. I tried to tell you—with my—fingers. Did you—get it?"

"I got enough," Southwall answered. "It wasn't Jacky, was it? That was what I wanted."

"Jacky!" Carl echoed. "No! It was—Buck Sterner's—Chinaman. I caught him at—my desk. He tried to—knife me. We had a—nasty fight. Jacky—came in. Then the—Chinaman—threw me and—hurt my head. I saw—Jacky go—after him."

"Yes, I know," Southwall interposed. "It's straight now. The Chinaman's dead. Jacky killed him. He'd stolen some of your Sink Hole papers. The government has them now. The government's making a fraud case against Sterner on those Sink Hole entries."

Old Carl listened keenly, with avid interest. For a long time he offered no response. When at last he spoke, his mind was back upon the personal note:

"And now Jacky's—dead, too! Yes, I—know!" Hardily he contended against the rising tide of feeling. "Tom, Jacky—loved me. He—loved my—girl. And now—— Tom, I've been—thinking. I'm an—old man. When I'm—not here any more, my—girl——" His helpless weakness overwhelmed him. "I don't—know," he said after a time. "This—life is such—a blind lead. We can't—see around—the corners. I want her to—be happy. Happy! I can't say it—right. We men—— Why can't we—all—play square and—come clean? I haven't—been square. I've been as crooked—as Sterner. We're both—guilty as—hell in those—frauds. I've been a—crook and a—thief. But—I made my wife—happy. She was—happy because

I—loved her. Love! Tom, that's the —thing I—don't understand. I can—understand hate—and wickedness and —all that, but—love is too—big for me."

Wearily his eyes closed and he lay still. He had not yet said what he wanted. He tried again, after a little while:

"Love! Love seems to—make everything else—all right. If my girl could —have love—the real thing—I'd feel safe about—all the rest. Love can't betray a—woman's happiness—not real love. Real love never—betrayed anything—not any trust that was—given it."

"Yes, I believe that," Southwall said simply. "What is it you're thinking about? There's something you're wanting to say besides that, isn't there?"

"I reckon I'll—never get it said," Stanchfield returned dully. "I wanted to—talk it over with you, but the thing I'm—trying to say—gets away from me. I've had a notion she—might—love Sterner. That's it! If she does—— That's what I've been—thinking about. If she does, he ought to—have his—chance. We've got no right to—deny love its chance. I've been a—mean scrapper in—my time. I'd have—scrapped him to a standstill once for—what he's done. But I'm going to—keep my hands off—now. Tom, I don't —want you to say anything about—what you know. I want us to—keep that dead. Will you?"

For a long time Southwall sat without a word. Presently he got out of his chair and paced the room aimlessly.

"Carl," he said abruptly, "do you know just what you're saying? Do you know all of what he's done? He was willing to put the whole responsibility of this business on that crippled Jacky. He was willing to save himself so. He was willing to let you lie here for two days without the operation, just so you couldn't talk, while he was trying to find a way to save himself. It was Sterner who started the hunt for Jacky. He made out the case against Jacky and put up a reward——"

Stanchfield checked the angry recital by a gesture.

"Wait, now!" he commanded. "You can't tell me—anything I don't know about—the sort of man he is. If it was just between—him and me, I'd—fight him to a finish, and I'd—hate him to the end. But—listen! I can't get away from this: I've been as—bad as he is. He's got nothing—on me that way. I've been a—thief and a—crook. But I loved my wife, and—I made her happy. God knows I did! Love did that. If he could make—my girl happy—— Tom, if they—loved each other, I'd—I'd kill you or anybody else that—did anything to spoil it."

It was not his weakness that spoke. The finest strength he knew was in what he said. Southwall saw that plainly. Amidst the old man's disordered fancies that one conviction stood firm, inviolate. Southwall drew close, standing over the bed.

"I'll give you my word," he said, "that I'll never do anything to spoil love. But, Carl, I love her, too!"

Fire blazed deep in the old eyes; the old lips moved, but were silent while the perplexed brain took hold of the declaration.

"I love her, too," Southwall said again. "I'm going to tell her so."

Stanchfield spoke simply, with slow difficulty:

"I've wondered—if you did." In sheer weakness his eyes fell shut. "It's more than I can—see through. Oh, my —little girl!"

CHAPTER XX.

Once again Sterner was ahead of Southwall with little Betty Stanchfield. He had gone to her as the hart goes to the water brooks, with a need that would not be denied.

She was very lovely when he came upon her, with the languorous glory of the summer day about her, warming her soft cheeks, tingeing her soft hair, shining in her soft eyes. Desire flamed in the man's heart—a passionate pain of desire, but it was not that which shaped his first words to her.

"Before I can talk to you," he said, "I want you to tell me something. Have you heard anything about me in these last few days?"

She shook her head, her eyes questioning his. "No," she told him, "I have heard nothing. What is it you mean?"

"I'm glad," he said. "I wanted this meeting with you to be like the others. It's to be the last, Betty."

Startled wonder was upon her face. "What do you say?" she asked. "The last? Why, what——"

"I'll tell you that before I'm done," he said. "Please let me do it in my own way. I think I can make you understand, and I want you to understand. Yes, I do!" It needed all his robust strength of will, but hard word by word, difficult step by step, he went on deliberately:

"You'll be hearing some rough things about me pretty soon. They're bound to come to you. And they'll be mostly true. The plain fact of it is that my life has jarred to a standstill all at once."

Her eyes were questioning, questioning. Her sweet dismay brought a choking laugh to his lips.

"Of course it's of no use telling you not to be sorry," he said. "You can't help feeling sorry for me. But I didn't come here to ask for sympathy. I'm getting just what's coming to me. I've done a lot of evil, and I haven't cared who was hurt by it. That sort of thing can't go on forever without any consequences. I used to think it could, but it isn't true. I suppose I'd better say it straight. I was indicted this morning by the Federal grand jury at Cheyenne for some of the things I've done in getting hold of some of my land. I'll have to stand trial on the charge. There isn't a fighting chance that I shan't be convicted."

"Oh!" she breathed in sharp pain. "Oh!"

"You see I'm not trying to belittle it or soften it at all," he went on. "I don't want to. I want you to know exactly the truth. If I didn't tell you the truth, there'd be no good in the rest of what I want to say. I'm going to take just what's given me. That isn't like me, is it? I've always fought hard —wickedly, if I must—to make things come out my way. I might fight this thing and beat it, if I were willing. Bribery and craft and the power I've got—— There's always a chance. But I shan't take that way."

He stopped, contending with himself. His next words came impetuously, on the tide of uncontrollable feeling:

"That isn't the thing that matters! Do you know why I'm taking this way? Tell me! It isn't because I've lost my courage for fighting. It isn't because I'm not big enough to meet it. I could do that, if I would. But I won't! Oh, girl—— Don't be afraid. Tell me honestly: Do you know why I'm taking this way?"

Her eyes held to his with all the sweet steadfastness he loved.

"Yes," she said faintly, "I think—I know."

He laughed out exultantly. There was no note of defeat in his voice, but triumph.

"You have done that for me!" he cried. "I want you to believe it and remember it always—always! I'm glad to give up all I've got. That doesn't count. The punishment I may have to take—that doesn't count. I don't want you to be thinking of me as a man whipped and shamed and crushed. I'll not be that. I want you to think of what I mean to be by and by. There's

a lot of life ahead of me. You've made me want to have it worth something. No, don't look away from me! Let me see the tears."

Very gently he took her hand in his. "If I had known you long ago—— Well, that's beside the mark now. I'm going through with it, girl. You've made me willing. You couldn't give me love, but you've given me the next best thing." He smiled down upon her, standing before her in the pride of a new strength. "There's nothing more now but to hear you say 'Good-by, and God bless you!' "

"Good-by," she said after him, "and —oh, God bless you and give you everything—everything!"

When Southwall found her, she had passed the stress of tears. A deep calm was upon her as she met him. Somehow the glamour of happy youth had merged into the greater glory of full womanhood. The man's eyes could not miss the subtle change. Beholding, he felt all hot turbulence of spirit die out of him, all doubt, all his overstrung intensities. Without a word of prelude he opened his arms.

"I love you!" he said simply. "I've waited too long to say it." Then, because when it was said it seemed the only thing in the world worth saying, he said it over and over again: "Betty, I love you—I love you—I love you!"

All womanly, she drew closer to him, looking up into his face.

"No, you haven't waited too long," she said, with sweet gravity. "This is just the right moment in my whole life."

CHAPTER XXI.

Billy Fortune was breaking camp at Cottonwood Gap, going about his work with orderly precision. For all his happy-go-lucky moods betweenwhiles, Billy was a methodical worker. His packing and roping went ahead swiftly, smoothly.

"Well, there!" he said by and by. "That's all but the grub box. We better get early dinner here and have it over with. It's a good piece to the next water." He straightened from his task, stretching the stiffness from his muscles, letting his thoughts rise above commonplace duty.

"It's been a plumb pleasant trip," he remarked mildly. "But sufferin' Peter! It's made somethin' of a difference to several folks—ain't it?—us bein' here this week. I've been sort of meditatin' over that."

Bloomfield and the little photographer sat smoking, waiting for departure. The fat man fidgeted as his mind dwelt for a moment upon Billy's suggestion.

"Oh, Lord!" he sighed heavily. "Made a difference! I should say it has! It hasn't set anybody ahead either, so far as I can see. That's the devil of it. Vengeance! Did anybody ever know any good to come of it? 'Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord.' I wish to glory He'd take it out of our hands then. I'm sick of the job."

The little artist attended thoughtfully to a brown-paper cigarette.

"Some time," he said; "not now, but some time—there will flash upon the earth a single moment of perfect peace, when no man feels so much as a quiver of hatred or covetousness or any bitterness at all. Not a long millennium, mind you, but just one single fleeting moment. The lion won't have time to lie down beside the lamb, but he'll vision it. And then after that——"

"Well?" Bloomfield prompted. "And then what?"

The little man waved his hand. "Who knows! A divine unrest, perhaps. It won't need a thousand years. One wholly perfect moment would turn the trick. Earth would never be the same again."

Billy took that soberly. "It ain't as rank ridiculous as it sounds," he made

comment. "All a man needs mostly to get him headed right is just time enough to see he's headed wrong. We ain't travelin' the wrong trails just because we want to get to the wrong places; it's because we lose our way and travel so blind. You just let us get waked up once—that's the only blessed thing we need."

"My soul!" Bloomfield cried. "Is that the truth? The good I would do—— Oh, Lord!"

Tom Southwall came down the trail, riding fast, homeward bound. Opposite the camp, he gave a high-flung salute and a hail, his voice ringing; then, upon impulse, he checked his horse and rode near.

"You Billy!" he called in sheer excess of spirit. Lightness of heart was in his every movement, in every firm line of his erect figure. Wheeling, he rode quickly away, but there had been time enough for delivering his message. Billy understood.

"Oh, that's it!" he said. "'You Billy!' So that's it! And he's come from up yonder. Well, that's good!"

Bloomfield spoke dully: "There's one man who seems pleased by what we've done. Our work will make things easier for him, won't it?"

Billy turned a lazy glance upon the fat man. "Oh, shucks!" he mocked. "Him? That's all you know! That lad, he ain't thinkin' about sheep nor land. Right this minute he don't know there's such a thing in this world as wool or mutton or grass. It's a girl. He's seein' her pretty face floatin' ahead of him, and he'll be seein' it all day long, it don't matter what he's lookin' at. And to-night he'll go outdoors and see that very same face mapped for him in the sky, with a couple of shiny stars for her eyes and one of them misty little star clouds for her pretty hair. I reckon I know. I've been that way myself a million times."

Bloomfield tried to laugh, but the sound died in birth. Moodily he sucked upon the tattered end of his cigar.

"Almighty!" he cried. "If love will do that for a man, in God's name why aren't we all lovers?"

"You can search me!" said Billy.

Something Like Samson

By Henry Rucker

Author of "A Cheerful Giver," Etc.

Samson had his weak spot—so had Arturo, the handsome Italian, who, among other things, was a bear at driving a car. If he had stuck to the motor-racing game you wouldn't have had this rich yarn. But the movies lured him—the movies and a "vampire" woman

IF the Sunset State of California thinks it can irritate me by passing fresh laws it is making a mighty serious mistake, and one that it will live to regret. I announce in public that I don't care a snap about this new regulation, and California may as well know it. Anyhow, I'm through with automobile road racing.

Maybe you read in the papers that they've gone and prohibited road racing altogether. That's the truth. Up in Sacramento the bewhiskered patriots forgathered and had a long talk about it, and the decision was that from then on there would be no more road racing amid the orange groves and ripe olives. *A bas* the speed boys, with their eight-cylinder road eaters! And if you look at the legislative prohibition in one way, it has some sense to it.

Of course, the new ruling was aimed at a lone, particular, and much-raced district. You can't go and road race loosely around California, because God didn't make the State after the general plans of a billiard table. Every now and then a large and impenetrable mountain gets in your way, and the only way over it is to take your speed buggy apart and ship it in pieces, via muleback. Most of the Golden State is wholly and permanently unfitted for motor racing, and so when the Solons determined to cut it out of the list of popular amusements, that meant just one thing.

It meant that the ambitious automobile trade in Los Angeles and San Francisco would no longer be permitted to tear the sable night wide open in desperate endeavors to bust the road record between those two jealous cities. That and nothing more. And, as I said, it's a good thing, when you think of the farmers, fruit growers, chickens, and small cars that sometimes get tangled up in your wheels on a dark night.

There was a lot of moaning in Los Angeles when the new rule was announced, because Los Angeles is full of speed maniacs and motor-car manufacturers who believe that they can beat the last record. That's what it always was—the last record. There never was such a thing as a final record, but maybe there is now, seeing nobody will be allowed to try again.

All of which leads me up in my own staggering and uncertain manner to the last time a Van Borrow stock car skittered through the night on the tail of a fresh record. That record has long since been wiped out, because we hung it up some time ago and the cars have been improved. But wait till I tell you.

You may not know Charley van Borrow, but if you live in California and never heard of him something is wrong with your hearing. Everybody knows

Charley van Borrow and loves him. He has more friends than the city directory in a drug store. He also is the possessor of the largest voice in the known world, and if you are ever walking aimlessly through California and suddenly hear a series of crashing sounds, which you first mistake to be thunder, that's Charley van Borrow speaking quietly to some friend.

He is still in the automobile business, and he makes enough money each year to pave a couple of Los Angeles streets with diamonds; and, while they don't maybe need diamond paving, they certainly need paving of some kind and need it bad.

Our old combination is now dispersed, but in those early days of the Van Borrow car it consisted of Charley van Borrow, Arturo Salvini, and little old me. That was a great combination, and I say it with as much modesty as I can scrape up. What we three did to those ambitious automobile manufacturers would cause the tears of pity to spring to the sternest eye.

Charley made the cars, Arturo drove them, and I sat beside Arturo in all our tests and kept the car in shape, my position being officially termed "mechanician," though I was a heap more than that. It was my calling in life, with Charley always pointing a warning finger at me, to keep Arturo calm; and if you can think up a lot of easy jobs, one of them is not keeping Arturo Salvini calm. He was and is the uncalmest man. Even in a dining room, or walking across a placid park, it is difficult to calm Arturo, because he is constantly in a state of eruption, like old Mount Vesuvius, from whose shady slopes his forbears sprang.

Arturo had another name, which he bore legitimately and signed to contracts. His father had selected America for a home, coming direct from Naples in the bottom of the ship and without false pride. In San Francisco the old boy decided that as a future star-spangled citizen he might as well sound like one, so he walked into a judge's office and asked about the supply of good American names.

"Jones," said the judge.

"All right. I want my name changed to Jones," said the sire of Arturo.

When he emerged from the judicial atmosphere, he had been christened John Paul Jones, and in later years, when our Arturo came along, he began life immediately as John Paul Jones.

Van and I always knew him and thought of him as Arturo Salvini, but the sporting editors hung onto his regular American name, and you can believe that every time Arturo started in a race there was plenty to write about him. He certainly was a bear at driving a car.

You might think there would be some social distinctions between Charley van Borrow and me and Arturo. There were none. There are none, even to this day, though Van now has enough money to choke the Suez Canal and I'm still drilling along. Van and Arturo and I got on together like three pals, first during the days of comparative poverty, and later when we all had a share in the company, though you might more truthfully refer to mine as a sharette.

Anyhow, when Van first leaped into the business and began turning out the old four-cylinder Van Borrow car, I quit my job with the gas-engine people and joined him; and, likewise, Arturo gave up free-lance racing and hooked on with us. Thereafter we went through California triumphantly, grabbing a prize here and there, winning a stock-car race now and then, and generally contributing to the growing fame of the Van Borrow. It was a good car —that old four. The first ones ever made are still climbing mountain peaks.

Right here I will pause to give you a brief sketch of the three of us, because

it is necessary in order to keep a line on the facts as they follow. Charley van Borrow is a big, round-faced man, with a broken arm and a sunny disposition. He got the disposition from his wife, and old-timers will tell you he didn't amount to much before he met her. The broken arm he obtained by riding backward down a precipice, accompanied by a two-ton car, which the authorities later picked off him. He has blue eyes, a slight prominence where his waist line would be, if there were any such things as waist lines in his family, and, as I said, a copious voice, which nature evidently intended for a behemoth. He is generous to a fault, and he don't care whose fault.

Passing on to myself, I will say with a slight blush that I am not much to look at, being small, but I am the best motor-car mechanic in California, and that means the habitable globe. Thus we come blithely to Arturo Salvini. I have purposely saved him for the last, because he is a complicated cuss and it is hard to understand him in a minute.

Arturo's father was a handsome dog, and no doubt left a trail of busted hearts all along the Italian coast when he came to America. Similarly, Arturo is gifted with appearance. He walks through this world, thinking that people are looking at him with jealous eyes and saying to each other, "Gosh, isn't he handsome!" And the worst of it is, that's quite true.

He is six feet high and adorned with a long mop of sleek, black hair, which he parts every morning with a hair separator, plastering down the divided sections with *eau de something.* His eyes are deep, dark, mysterious, and Italian, and above them are two broad, bushy eyebrows. When he has just finished shaving his face looks blue-white, and he is always in the state of just having shaved. His cheeks are pink and rosily Italian, and his nose is large, prominent, and aggressive. His teeth are the whitest teeth which can be found in any male face from here to Madagascar. They are white, and in addition they gleam and glisten like pearls on a lady's chest. They are large and very even, and, when he smiles, the entire country lights up for a short distance.

He is always uncertain about his many perfections. Sometimes he is vainest of his hair, and then again he passes up the hair and thinks only of his nose; but, in the long run, he is proudest of his teeth, and the time he wasted on his person used to irk me, especially when we were busy.

"You certainly hate yourself, don't you?" I used to say, when he would be polishing the teeth for thirty-seven minutes.

"I respect the gifts God gave me," he would answer, beginning a minute and lengthy treatment of his raven locks. "It would do you some good occasionally to take a bath, you poor herring."

Well, you can forgive a guy for being vain when he has the goods, and Arturo had them. He used to get mash notes from little girls, and big ones, too, and he acted mighty decent about them, usually writing a moral letter to their fathers. He had his weak spots, of course, and we took a fiendish joy in kidding him about his looks. The easiest way was to attack one of his treasured features and then ride him hard. I suppose Arturo Salvini was the vainest man in the world, and, like most vain men, he was easily annoyed. But, murder, how he could drive a motor car!

In those days the Van Borrow plant was only a decimal point compared with the present outfit, and it was located down Puente way, where Van owned an orange grove. Puente was our headquarters, whenever Arturo and I weren't busy winning races or trying for records. It was there that Arturo

met Nan Oliphant and the New Arts bunch of trained actors.

I remember, as though it were yesterday, the first time Eddie Donlon blew into Puente with his cameras and asked Van if it would be all right to go ahead and do a lot of rural exteriors, getting in parts of the grove for some fool story he was filming. Van said yes, of course. If you asked Van for his left leg, he would have said yes, of course.

The New Arts Film Company belongs in Los Angeles, and for years Eddie Donlon, who is blue-eyed and Irish, has been its leading director. He showed up with his gang of painted beauties, a machine for making his own electricity, a truck loaded with tents and junk, and a flock of carpenters. Nan Oliphant descended leisurely and somewhat like a queen from the New Arts limousine.

She was not an unpleasant spectacle. Even now, when the years are beginning on her last trenches, you can gaze upon her without making your eyes water. She was twenty-seven years old, and had been an actress long enough for her hair to turn a babyish yellow. She wore clothes which would make a good gasper gasp freely, and she had the same use for men that a spider has for the succulent fly. Man has been handing poor, weak woman a raw deal ever since Adam teed off. Every day the papers show you where some big brute of a man has put over something new and despicable on a lady, but I will state here that Nan Oliphant evened up for her sex.

They said she got three hundred a week for being a camera vampire, but outside of that she did a little light vampiring in her off hours. In Los Angeles the unimportant actresses spoke of her with envious awe, and the male population crossed its fingers and went out through the side doors; and Nan reveled in her repute.

She could take a perfectly good man from the bosom of his peaceful surroundings, and in a couple of weeks turn him into what you notice on the street when the steam roller has run over something. The bigger they were, the harder they fell. She took them, one and all, strong, upstanding men, and made them fall in love with her; whereupon she would lead them a dog's life for a time, and then push them off the dock with a heartless laugh. One of them was a young Los Angeles banker, fresh from an Eastern college. His folks found him in the bathtub, and they tried to keep it out of the papers.

All these facts were known to me and Van, and when the siren first appeared on our grounds I walked carefully past her at a distance, so that nothing would happen to me. Nothing did happen to me. It happened to Arturo Salvini:

The poor tadpole took one long look at her, as she stood there beside her car, and fell in love. Now, when an ordinary man falls in love he does so quietly, and tries to conceal his condition from his friends, at least for a time. Arturo was no ordinary man. He had never concealed anything from any one. When he fell in love it was like a safe falling into a cistern. He came, indirectly, from Mount Vesuvius, as I have said, and his idea of peace would be a rocking-chair on top of the said mountain. Violent he was by nature and given to loud expletive. When he lost a road race, all the old cursers in the place gathered round to learn some real cursing. Everything he did was violent, and, consequently, when he fell in love, Van and I beheld the casualty with horror and loathing. It was as plain as day that Nan Oliphant was about to hang another scalp on her clothesline.

Furthermore, we knew that Arturo, in love, would be about as much use to

us in the automobile business as water in the gas.

"This," Van said to me, after a week of it, "will certainly never do. I wish I had said no to Eddie Donlon."

He looked over ruefully at Arturo and Nan. They were sitting on the porch, back of the machine shop, and Arturo was telling Nan something that was making her laugh. Arturo was also laughing, and his white teeth glistened in the sun.

"Wouldn't it make you sick!" Van went on viciously. "Here's one wop goose that's cooked and cooked good. What'll I do about this, George? We can't stand by and see that female put Arturo on the bum."

"Don't ask me," I said reproachfully. "You oughtn't to have let that crowd of tramps in here. It's your fault."

"Well," continued Van, "see if you can think of anything. You can't, of course, but see if you can."

I said I would and I tried, but, to save me, I couldn't think of a thing. Every day the movie people busted in from Los Angeles and worked on their picture, and every day Arturo Salvini sank deeper. He was gone. He was not only madly in love, but he filled himself with the false notion that he ought to act in the pictures, being helped out in this delusion by Nan.

"You are so handsome," I heard her say to him in her cooing voice. "You have such splendid features, Arturo, dear."

He sat there and looked up into her eyes, drinking it in.

"You think I could act?" he asked her.

"Certainly you could," she said. "Your face is ideal for the camera. This nose! These teeth! Your smile alone will make you worth thousands to any company, because women like men who can smile as you do, my dear." She smoothed his hair with her hand and tapped her finger coquettishly against Arturo's teeth, thereby driving him wilder than he was, which was pretty wild. I went away then, feeling sort of sick.

So Arturo took after Eddie Donlon and badgered that poor director until Eddie asked Van's permission to kill our driver. He promised the infatuated idiot that he would give him a chance, and things drifted on this way, getting worse and worse every day. The automobile business went to pot, so far as Arturo was concerned, and when I spoke to him he merely sneered at me.

Van had been looking forward for months to the new six-cylinder car over which our engineers had been struggling, and at that time, if you said six cylinders to the automobile people, you'd be laughed at. But the six was coming on slowly, and we all believed and prayed that the new car would mark an advance in automobiles. Therefore, we needed Arturo around the place. It was no time for a crazy infatuation, and Van mourned.

I came into the offices one of these sad mornings, along toward the time when Eddie Donlon was finishing his orange-grove picture, and discovered Van at the telephone. It was early, and as I passed on through to see if the boy had brought me a letter, I observed Arturo shaving in the inside office, which he sometimes used as a bedroom. That was the morning the New Art people failed to show up on time, but they were expected later, and it appeared that Nan Oliphant's personal touring car had met with trouble. Nan was telephoning the Puente plant and asking Van to send up a car after her, her maid, and the pup.

"Sure," Van said over the telephone. "Glad to, Miss Oliphant. You ought to have a Van Borrow car. They never break down."

Then Nan evidently asked after Arturo.

"Yeah, he's here," Van laughed. "Most likely he's waiting somewhere out on the road for you to show up. What's that?"

His laugh disappeared.

"Wait a minute. Wait a minute," he interrupted, and rather unpleasantly I thought. "You've got that all wrong, lady. Somebody's been kidding you. And I'll put you straight, so you won't make mistakes in future. Arturo is one of us. He's just as good in this plant as I am."

He waited, frowning. Arturo, who had stopped shaving, stepped to his door, the brush poised before his lathered face.

"Servant!" Van went on. "Say, listen to me, miss. You're all wrong. Arturo is no servant. You think he shines shoes around here, or cleans up after the hands go home? He's one of us, I tell you, and if he knew how you regarded him, he'd be mighty hurt. I'm hurt, myself. Certainly he's an Italian, but he's a man of culture and breeding, and you want to forget it quick if you have any funny notion about class distinctions. He's as good as I am or better, and, begging your pardon, he's as good as you are. No, ma'am. No-o-o-o, ma'am."

The conversation continued for another second or two, and I judged that Miss Oliphant was loosening up freely about our talented driver. Apparently she had decided that Arturo was on a level with the greasers around the place, and Van was peeved. But if Van was peeved, there is nothing left to tell of Arturo's mental state. He has an expressive countenance, and as Van talked it passed through several changes.

When Van hung up the receiver Arturo slowly went back to his shaving, and he wore the look of a man who would like to use his razor for something other than cutting whiskers. He was as sore as a couple of ulcerated teeth. I know. I have worked with that wop long enough to tell his moods by the look in his eye, and when Van left the phone and walked outside I joined him.

"Say," I began, "there's liable to be a high-class crime on this place to-day. Arturo heard everything you said."

Instead of looking shocked, Van chuckled.

"I trust he did," he grinned. "How'd he take it?"

Then I tumbled.

"Can't you figure it?" Van demanded, looking more cheerful every minute. "Of course, I don't like to hurt Arturo's tender feelings, but this romance has got to be busted. That was my first effort. If it doesn't work I'll go and try something else. It might work at that."

"Judging by Arturo's open countenance," I said, "it ought to begin working at once. He'll probably light a match to that yellow-haired female when she shows up. He stood there with his mouth open, all lathered up, and holding the razor as though he'd like to shave the lady with it."

Van laughed heartily and walked off, but I decided to linger. I felt that I was in for a treat, because I know Arturo. The vendetta surges in his Italian veins. He don't forget insults or forgive 'em. I decided I would be right there in plain sight when Eddie Donlon's crew appeared for the final day's work and Nan Oliphant hopped into the situation.

I made no mistake.

When Eddie Donlon helped the queenly Nan down from her car, Arturo was hurrying across the walk between the factory and the offices. He was spick and span, newly shaved, immaculately clad in flannels, panama hat, and white shoes. I gathered that he was in haste and so did the unsuspicious Nan Oliphant, because she planted herself, with a bright smile, directly in his path. She held out her hand to

him, smiling sweetly, and spoke the greetings of the dewy morn, while the New Arts people looked on good-naturedly.

"Good morning, Arturo," Nan said, blocking his way.

Arturo stopped dead. He looked at Nan without opening his mouth. There was no answering smile on his face. His hands remained stiffly at his sides. On his lips there was the silent, deadly sneer which Arturo uses when he wishes to crush some unfortunate human being. He stepped off the walk, the sneer gathering in fresh scorn. He deliberately walked around Nan Oliphant, looking her in the eye, while the actors and Eddie Donlon gazed in stupefied amazement. Nan looked at Arturo with the wide eyes of one who totally fails to understand. And Arturo sneered on.

Maybe you have seen people who can put a lot of English onto a sneer, but never was there any one in this world with Arturo's gift for conveying utter contempt and loathing without saying a word. He had the most efficient sneer. It was bitter, biting, and it seemed to take in yourself and all your ancestors, conveying an impression which, if put into words, would result in a couple or three murders on the spot.

He was now giving this to Nan, free of charge. There was a nasty curved twist to the flesh around the bottom of his nose which meant an ocean of insult just by itself, and his upper lip was partly concealed by the lower one, which always climbed up when Arturo desired to sneer his hard, Italian sneer. I have never seen a lady insulted any better. And it jarred her right down to her twenty-dollar pumps with the gold buckles. It left her speechless. Eddie Donlon had to take her by the shoulder a moment later, when Arturo passed on.

Subsequently, Nan deigned to speak to me, which was unusual, because she was as casual with me as though I cleaned the horses.

"What is the matter with your friend Arturo?" she asked.

"Nothing," I answered, "that I know of."

"I don't understand his action."

"I do," I said, grinning cheerily. "Whenever Arturo looks at anybody like he looked at you, it just means one thing. I never saw him look that way but once before, and that was when he killed the greaser in San Antone. That sneer of his means death, and it's lucky you ain't a man."

Of course, Arturo never killed anybody, but I put that in to make it strong.

"You must have done something to him," I volunteered. "He wouldn't sneer at you if you didn't—at least, not that way. If you knew what that sneer means in English, you wouldn't be standing here peaceful. What did you do?"

"I did nothing," Miss Oliphant snapped. "Dog," she said gently. "Swine! Imbecile!" Then she laughed a little, tossed her yellow head, and sauntered off. And I will put in here that she has never since addressed a word to me. That afternoon, Eddie Donlon finished up his work on the Van Borrow grove and the New Arts people went back to Los Angeles for good. For good is right. Arturo came back to earth next day, a bit silent but eager to work, and Van indulged himself in some chuckles and loaned me thirty dollars for a new rifle I'd wanted.

II.

As I said before, we were over our necks in work on the new six, and from one end of the shop to the other things were humming. That six marked a distinct advancement in automobile construction, though the manufacturers of fours wouldn't admit it for a minute.

The old Van Borrow machine was as good a car as you could buy for the money, but Van had always insisted that a six had the call and that the future car was a six or even an eight.

Maybe you know that all the big races ever held in America have been won by fours, and that's easily explained. A four will always show more power on the flat. On hills, a six or an eight makes a fool out of a four, and Van's idea was to produce a six which would walk away from the existing fours on hills and on the level, too.

There was always one California-made car that dogged us and tried to make our life miserable, and that was the Moonbeam Four. There was a pest for you. A man named Swarthmore was president of the Moonbeam Company, and it seems he'd appointed himself personal enemy of Van Borrow and the Van Borrow car. Every time we did anything good the Moonbeam people tried to beat our record, and once in a while they succeeded, whereupon they'd have a fit of advertising in all the papers. We hated them, and no wonder. Why can't people go on about their business, without picking on other people?

When we lowered the old record between Los Angeles and Frisco in the Van Borrow four-cylinder car, the Moonbeam people raced us with a specially built machine, and our car was a plain stock model, at that. But they didn't beat us. We romped into Frisco forty minutes ahead of them, and then they explained it in the advertisements by telling about a busted steering gear. Something was always happening to their cars when they competed with us, but dog-gone them, they never beat us. Not with Arturo on the job.

Well, when Van began to announce the coming six the Moonbeam people indulged in loud laugher. They intimated to customers that Mr. Van Borrow would presently be looking out through the bars and telling visitors to the institution that he was George Washington. They gave us the merry ha-ha in their newspaper stuff, and declared that no six ever made could beat a Moonbeam four over the timeworn course between Los Angeles and Frisco. It just shows you. The Moonbeam people make nothing but sixes nowadays, and if you ask about fours the manager will fall on the floor in a faint.

"Some day," Van said to me, reading his newspaper, "I'm going to take Mr. Swarthmore out to the coast at Santa Monica and see how far I can kick him toward Japan. Meantime, we're going to show up that tin beetle he thinks is a motor car."

So the Van Borrow engineers plugged along under Van's eye, and gradually the new motor began to look like something. Better still, it began to sound like something, and once or twice Arturo took it out on the road and made it act like something. Our prayers were being answered. Of course, we had a lot of bad luck with delays and disappointing experiments, but Van had faith in the six, and finally our chief engineer announced that he'd finished his work. There were only a few sixes on the market at the time, and they were Eastern makes. Ours stood to beat anything so far invented and shoved into a motor car.

Van gave off three cheers, and we started the work-outs, which were satisfactory, though they didn't prove much in the way of endurance. But we had a bird of an engine, and she'd show us eighty-five miles on the flat, which is pretty fair, even yet, though you hear a lot of hot air about what motor cars can do.

I'm talking about regular automobiles, now, full of seats and upholstery and such—not racing skeletons skinned down to engine and wheels. We never

did go in for freaks of that kind, because Van was in the automobile business, and a racing car doesn't prove anything except that it is a racing car. Any time we won a race or made a fresh record we were willing to sell the identical car that did it, because we had flocks more of them in the storerooms. Van's desire was to show the California populace what the Van Borrow car could do and then sell them the car that did it, which is the right dope when you think of it, and characteristic of our boss.

Then we got ready for the usual test between Los Angeles and San Francisco—the same that is now forbidden by law—and when our announcement came out in the papers the Moonbeam folks lit into us and declared they were going to show us up. They had a jocular advertisement, sort of making fun of the six, and they stated seriously that a six was no good because it hadn't endurance, used up too much gas, fell down on the speed, and generally wasn't worth powder to blow it up. They said a new high-power four would scatter dust in the fatuous eye of any six that ever started, and, furthermore, they said they'd prove it. If Mr. Van Borrow ever started his six for Frisco they'd go right along in the new Moonbeam four and do circles around us all the way up the coast. That's what they said. I can't repeat what Van said when he read it.

Van selected a certain Saturday night and announced it. Our new six would start from the Plaza in Los Angeles at eight o'clock on Saturday evening, and the usual judges and timekeepers were appointed to see that everything was straight. Up in Frisco the telegraph company appointed a couple of men to watch for the Van Borrow car and report its arrival, and thus things were when our bad luck began to break even faster than usual.

First, the Moonbeam's Mr. Swarthmore came out with a signed statement voicing his opinion that the six-cylinder automobile engine was largely a piece of cheese, and of no more use to the general public than a six-legged chair. The four was the right engine, and to prove that Mr. Van Borrow was a deluded imbecile Mr. Swarthmore would start a new Moonbeam four right beside our six and lead us into Frisco by ever so many hours. I had to throw water on Van when he read the statement.

Next thing that happened, happened directly to me, and if I wasn't as quick as a cat, I would now be under the daisies. A fool mechanic backed a machine into me and nailed me against a wall, and when they lifted me up my collar bone was good and busted. The doctor put the pieces together and tied me in bandages, and right there it was apparent that the Van Borrow test car would have a fresh mechanician on the Saturday-night trial.

That was a serious accident, not to me, but to our chances of hanging up a new road record, the old one being then twelve hours and fifteen minutes between the two coast cities. I knew the car like no one else knew it, and while we decided to put Davy Clarke in my place, Davy isn't as fast a workman as I am, and in one of these cross-country dashes on a dark night speed is the only thing that counts.

That was the first trouble, and it came on Sunday morning along with the ringing of church bells and other dismal events. That Sabbath afternoon I passed through Arturo's private suite, and I observed a letter lying open on top of his dresser.

I try to be as honorable as the next guy in my daily affairs, and you won't find me reading other peoples' mail once in a million years, but this was the once. I saw a name on the bottom of the sheet, and I felt a moral right to investigate, which I did with great speed. The name was Nan Oliphant!

The communication said that Nan would smother her pride. Even after what had happened, she would write Arturo, because his actions had been incomprehensible. Just this one time she would forget her dignity and stoop from her perch long enough to ask Arturo why he had sneered at her and ignored her greeting. There was a lot more, but the rest has nothing to do with it, being the gab a yellow-haired actress writes when she writes.

I went on out of the room, feeling that things were getting themselves balled up every way you looked. Van must have walked under a row of ladders. And then on Monday morning, about ten o'clock, Arturo blew into the office and handed us the shock which I have always contended first started Van's apoplexy. Arturo reached the office a few minutes before I arrived, and I heard Van's voice first, which is the voice you always hear first when Van is talking.

"You want to *what!*" Van roared, as I came in, leading my busted shoulder tenderly.

"That's what I said," Arturo retorted. "You ain't deaf, are you?"

Van sank into his big chair, pawing feebly at the air, and Arturo glared at him with a surly frown. In a good many ways our talented race driver is a child.

"What do you think?" Van went on in a subdued roar, looking over at me. "What *do* you think the poor lizard wants to do this Monday morning, with the car starting Saturday night and not half ready for the test? He wants to go *fishing!*"

"Fishing?" I echoed, refusing to believe it.

"Fishing!" Van yelled again. "Now, you know, George, why they have to keep on building idiots' homes. And the car starts Saturday night of this very week!"

I looked over at Arturo. He was leaning pensively against the safe, smoking a cigarette and blowing the smoke lazily into the air. On his face was a gentle smile.

"I don't see why you should make such a fuss if I want to go fishing," he said. "I'll be back before the end of the week."

Van glared at him and exploded into inarticulate sound.

"You and George can do everything to the car that has to be done," Arturo went on placidly. "After all, I can only drive it, and I'll be back in time for that. Have some sense."

"You know how much depends on this trip," Van said pleadingly. "It's the first six that ever went the route, Arturo, and the Moonbeam people are going to gum things for us if they can. This is no time for you to be away. We'll need you every day this week, and you know that the future of the car depends on what she does Saturday night. Be a good fellow, Arturo. Stick around. Go fishing afterward."

"I tell you I'll be back before Saturday," Arturo answered irritably. "You talk as if I was a child. This race doesn't start till Saturday night. I'm going, that's all, and you might as well quit yelling about it."

Well, we argued for a while, but Van and I lost out. Arturo had made up what he thinks is his mind, and, when he does that, you've got to let him have his way. You can't budge him any more than you can smoke a cigarette in a shower bath.

He went out after a time, calling us unreasonable, and Van opened up his Monday stock of profanity and spread it around the room. I joined him. It was bad enough to have a green mechanic on the car, but it was far worse to have Arturo absent on this important week, when we'd be making test runs every day and tuning up generally. It was an untried six, of course. That's what made us so hopping.

Van was mad, but his judgment remained unclouded. Arturo prowled around morosely, and Van watched him and wondered, because when Arturo goes fishing it is not a slight little episode. It is an event and borders on being an expedition. The only place he ever goes is where we all go, which is the Sespe River country, high up in the Sierra Madre Mountains behind Ventura. It is sixty-four miles north from Los Angeles to Ventura and thirty more to Wheeler's Cold Springs, which is as far as the automobile can go on account of a superfluity of caverns, rocks, abysses, inclined mountain trails, and other irritants. From Wheeler's Cold Springs you pass onward to the Sespe River, wearing a small but active mule on the under side of your person.

"One thing's sure," Van said that Monday afternoon. "This Italian maniac has lost his reason, what there was left, and somebody's got to watch him. Wherever he goes, you go with him, George. No telling where he'll land. He's got a sulky fit, and when he's that way he's liable to head for Senegambia and leave us flat with the car. You pile along with him and wire me what he does and where he goes."

So that was decided. I was to accompany Arturo on his fishing expedition, and ordinarily he is a keen, clever fisherman. I broke the news to him later, and he howled like a cat on a back fence, though in the past we three have always fished the Sespe River together in peace and amity.

"You ain't going fishing with me at all," he said, with a certain lack of enthusiastic politeness.

"I *am* going fishing with you," I answered. "I can't do any good around here, and I might as well take a vacation."

"Well, people that invite themselves to go with other people who didn't invite them and don't want them—you know there's a name for that," he continued.

"No matter. I'm going fishing, too," I insisted, and rather than continue an unpleasant subject, especially as I can be as stubborn as any one, he dropped it, though I could see I was going to be as welcome on the trip as the bill collector on a rainy Monday morning.

It began to look like a funny fishing trip almost immediately. Usually we load up a machine with tackle and fishing clothes and something to eat, drink, and smoke, but from Arturo's preliminaries you would have thought he was going to the presidential ball. He packed a couple of bags full of fancy clothes, got his hair cut, had his nails manicured, bought a new hat, and dolled himself up generally. He procured a fancy riding suit with these pants that stick out sideways as though you'd slipped a car wheel in your pocket accidentally, and he took along a limp leather volume of Omar Khayyam, which, as everybody knows, is almost indespensable to the true fisherman.

So it happened that Arturo and I went fishing, taking along the old touring car that had done such noble duty in the past. I promised Van to let him know all the jolly news, and I figured there would be some news. At first I looked for just a fishing trip, but after Arturo began to dress himself like a broken limb, I went back and estimated again. I recollected the letter from Nan Oliphant asking him to tell her why he had scorned her, and I came to the conclusion that maybe Arturo and I would just accidentally run across the lady. These deductions didn't come to me all at once, but by the time we reached Ventura, with Arturo driving in gloomy silence, I had it pretty well figured.

We made the sixty odd miles up to Ventura without incident, and turned into the mountains, and from then on

we climbed steadily, with the old car trying to cough her engine up through the hood. We skipped through wet river beds, climbed steep passes, and curved around precipices which would have worried me with any other driver but our esteemed wop.

Finally we landed at Wheeler's Cold Springs, which consists of an automobile shed, a sleeping house, a room where you eat, and forty thousand mosquitoes. There we dismantled the car and shoved it out of sight, and four hours later, mounted on mules and rattling loudly from our equipment, we set sail for the Sespe River, which is over twelve large, full-grown mountains. I tried to enliven the situation with jovial discourse, but Arturo was as silent and morose as a canned sardine.

III.

I am not used to riding on a mule.

Nature designed me to be a non-mule riding person, but there is no other way to the Sespe. At first, when Van and Arturo and I made that mule trip, I was frightened badly, and one of the extra noises we made came from my chattering teeth, but I became accustomed to the novelty of looking down the side of my leg and seeing a small house right beside my foot, the house being four miles beyond my foot and directly downward.

So we pounded along the trail, Arturo leading on a mauve-colored mule. It is a long, hard, tortuous pull from Wheeler's Springs to the Sespe, and if you have any weak spots in your nature, they will certainly show up. And when we clanked into the old camping grounds where the Sespe curves around Needleback Mountain, I opened my eyes, which were the only part of me not sore, and observed. I knew then why we had come fishing. The first person who came out of the cluster of tents to greet us was Nan Oliphant.

Off at one side Eddie Donlon was telling a bunch of actors exactly how bad they were, and I realized that we had busted into the movies once again, which is something you are always doing in California. A lengthy person named Woolson was the New Arts leading man, and, when I first saw him, he was leading a roan horse through a river bed and wearing an expression of ferocious disgust. Nan kissed Arturo but omitted me.

That was why Arturo had suddenly desired to go fishing. That night I watched him and Nan for a while, and I knew that whatever trouble had once existed was now removed. Our intrepid race driver was laughing happily and Nan was cooing and patting Arturo's black head in her best vampire manner. I immediately wrote out a telegram on a sugar sack, handed it to Rainey, our beloved guide, and bribed him to gallop back over the twelve fat mountains and put it on the wire. This is what I said:

Arturo came up here to meet Nan. Thicker than ever. GEORGE.

When Van got the telegram, he dropped everything and started for the Sespe River, hesitating over whether he would get out a writ of replevin or something to bring Arturo back with him. But he ought to have known he couldn't do anything with the infatuated hairpin. In the meantime, Mr. Woolson, the perfect leading man, fell into a gully and either busted up his insides or pretended he did, in order, as I thought, to avoid some very rough mountain work. Arturo leaped into the breach and offered himself to Eddie Donlon.

"You promised to give me a chance to act," he argued. "Here it is."

Eddie refused to make Arturo a star, but he switched his company about and put a young fellow with red hair into the lead. Then he gave the red-

head part to Arturo, doing so only because he was desperately shy of actors, there being no humans within fifty miles in any direction.

"And smile," I heard Eddie telling Arturo when he signed up. "You aren't going to be of much use in this picture unless you smile. Keep the side of your head toward the camera, so's we can shoot that nose of yours. I'll tell you flatly that your nose and teeth are what get you this job."

Arturo nodded delightedly.

"What did I tell you?" whispered Nan Oliphant. "You handsome hound!"

That was the situation that lay in wait for Van when he arrived on a white horse, accompanied by the indefatigable Rainey, who is the only regular human being I ever knew who seemed happy on a horse. That was Wednesday morning.

"Now, tell me about it," Van demanded.

"There's nothing to tell except that Arturo knew Nan was up here on a picture, and that's why he came. He hasn't spoken to me, and he's acting for Eddie Donlon."

"What about the Van Borrow Motor Company?" Van asked. "What about Saturday night?"

"I don't know," I said dismally.

Arturo came in with the bunch for noonday feed, and then there ensued a scene. The new actor stared at Van in angry astonishment.

"Well," he said, now using his sneer on Van, "what brought you?"

"I came up to get you and take you back, you egg-headed imbecile," Van roared. "Do you realize there's a new car waiting to start Saturday night? What's the matter with you, anyhow?"

"You think you're a wise guy, don't you?" Arturo went on icily. "You think you can run me. Well, you can't. This is a free country, and I'm my own boss. I'm going to stay right here——"

"Who's going to drive the car?"

"That's *your* funeral," Arturo answered. "And, furthermore, let me tell you what I think about you. I know all about that fake telephone conversation. I know what you did to split us up. You thought you'd come in between Nan and me, didn't you? Well, you're a four-flusher, and you didn't make good. Go on back home and wash your face."

Arturo turned and walked haughtily away, leaving Van and me in deep melancholy. The rest of the actors laughed at us. Nan Oliphant passed and looked at Van as though he was a wiggling angleworm. I sought to console my boss, but words were futile. Van decided to return to Los Angeles immediately.

"You stay with him," he said to me in parting. "Arturo is simply out of his mind, but he got out at a bad time for the company. You watch him. If anything turns up, wire me as quick as you can."

"Who'll drive?" I asked hopelessly.

"I'll drive myself," Van said. "We ain't licked yet."

If Van had said he was going to swim to Asia, it would have as much sense to it. But Van's a game citizen. And I knew he'd drive, or try to, if he said he would. Thus he departed.

Well, from then on for a little while I had a thoroughly disagreeable time up there on the Sespe River. Nan and Arturo were sore on me because I was Van's friend; Eddie Donlon was too busy to talk to me, and I wouldn't talk to the rest of that greasy crew on a bet. All in all, I had a great time, the same as I'd have in some good jail. I thought of Van driving the new six against Joe Linquist of the Moonbeam gang—Joe is the second best race driver on the Pacific coast—and my heart bled, because even if the six was all that Van expected, we'd have no chance

to win with Van at the wheel. No chance at all. He could have got forty better drivers than himself, but I knew he wouldn't. He wanted to keep the thing in the family, all outsiders barred. Van's funny that way.

On Friday evening I overheard Nan and Arturo in the middle of a love spat. Arturo claimed that Nan was too attentive to Woolson, with his fractured interior, and Nan explained coldly that Arturo was entirely off his nut—which I agreed with. They had a number of words, but nothing very murderous. I hoped it would blossom into something terrible, but it didn't—just dragged along drearily as lovers' quarrels do, and Arturo went to bed in a blue funk.

About dawn I was awakened. It seemed to me that a near-by mountain, in moving about, had accidentally stepped on my chest. I crawled out into the chilly dawn and found one of these Sierra storms tearing things to pieces. My tent had collapsed, burying me in its ruins, and when I could see through the howling gale, I noticed that other tents had caved in, among them Arturo's. It had blown clean over and fastened itself to a tree, and Arturo was clawing his way out from under beds and washstands.

I went to his rescue, and, while he chased the tent, I restored things to rights, and we got them back where they belonged after a while. During Arturo's short absence I looked around in the semidarkness. There was something that attracted my attention. I looked at it long, earnestly, and in profound amazement. I picked it up and examined it, all by my lonely self. Then I took out the rubber pouch in which I carry tobacco, emptied out the contents, and put what I had found into the rubber pouch, which I then restored to my pocket.

Ten minutes later the storm subsided and the camp went back to sleep. Arturo didn't even thank me for my help, the worthless wretch, but I failed to feel grieved. I was happy for the first time in a week. I did not sleep, because I felt too good.

The rest of the camp arose at the usual time and Eddie Donlon started off with the gang, but Arturo remained within his tent. Two or three people called him to get up, but he answered them profanely. Eddie Donlon came back to get him, and I hope to die if Arturo didn't swear at him. Finally they dragged him out into the glorious sunlight, and everybody saw at once that a great change had come over the handsome new actor. He glowered.

Then came Nan Oliphant, beautiful as a witch. She caught Arturo unawares and sought to make up in gentle amiability for her sharpness of the previous evening. Arturo turned on her, and, for the second time, he stared at her in silence. To her greeting he returned nothing but the well-known sneer. She knew that sneer now and what it meant.

There, before the gang, she cut loose, and for the first time Arturo had a peek at her real character. She descended to words and phrases which have no place in this moral chronicle. She displayed her true form, and the way she lashed the silent, sneering Italian was a revelation in female shamelessness. No decent man in this world could love a woman who talked as Nan did that beautiful summer morn.

Finally Arturo walked away from her, but she followed him, slinging wordy poison over his shoulder into his closed face. Then she went back to her own people, white with rage.

I got behind a Joshua tree and performed the Aztec dance of the joyous lizards.

Twenty minutes later I passed Arturo's tent and heard him groaning in agony.

"Can I do anything?" I asked through the flap, but not looking in.

"Get the mules," he answered, in a muffled, weak voice that had nothing in it of Arturo's normal brusqueness. "See if you can get Rainey, and find out how quick we can start from this—hole."

Once more I let off three silent cheers. Then I dashed up the hill and found our guide. I spoke to him briefly, telling him we wanted mules and speed. We were going back to Wheeler's Springs pronto.

"What's the fastest time over the trail?" I demanded. He told me.

"All right. We've got to beat it."

Rainey laughed, and said we'd try.

It was almost four o'clock when we got the mules and piled out of the New Arts camp, and Arturo spoke no word to living soul. He saw nothing of Eddie Donlon, who was off up in the mountains, or the yellow-haired hussy who had lured him from his work. The sneer was still upon his face, but there was now another look, which was determination.

You see, we left the film camp on the Sespe about four o'clock. Van and the new six were due to leave Los Angeles at eight o'clock that night, and that meant the car would probably pass through Ventura shortly after nine. And Arturo Salvini, son of the spaghetti people, was now over his madness. He was aiming to cut off Van at Ventura, and, therefore, we galloped our mules over places which Rainey told me meant certain death.

Well, we got into Wheeler's Springs covered with dust, and flung ourselves off the mules and into the touring car. Then we started for Ventura. I believe it is thirty miles from the Springs, due west, all down mountain, and entirely over bowlders, with high precipices waiting for you on the curves. And we made it in sixty-two minutes, which will never be equaled.

We left the Springs at eight o'clock, just as Van was starting from the Plaza in Los Angeles, and, when we tore into the main street of Ventura, the entire population was standing on either side of the road.

"Have they gone through?" I yelled, leaping from our car.

"Moonbeam went by fifteen minutes ago," somebody shouted, and I saw Arturo turn his face toward heaven as if in thanksgiving. The new Van Borrow six was still coming from Los Angeles, and I saw Arturo pick two red lanterns off a brick pile. I got two more from an open sewer on a side street, and we lined up the four lanterns across the middle of Main Street.

"You'll get killed for that," an ignorant man shouted to us. "He's behind time now."

And poor old Van *was* behind time, too. We caught his lights far down the road, and he was coming at a fair clip, but when he struck Ventura the Moonbeam was already thirty-one minutes ahead, and I suppose Van must have groaned when he saw the four red lamps blocking him. The new six roared to a quick stop and purred there, and then I saw Van. He was yelling and demanding to know who the blankety blank blank did it and why. Then I shouted. I tore open the front door, grabbed Arturo with my good arm, and hurled him in on top of the astounded boss. Van didn't stop to ask questions, because this was no time for delays. He simply crawled out from under Arturo into the back seat, and our wop driver shook the gauntlets off Van's hands and slid under the wheel. Davy Clarke, the substitute mechanician, looked at us dumbly.

"Get out of there," I yelled. "Climb into the back seat, Davy. I'm going to be mechanician on this trip and you're my assistant."

Arturo was stepping on the gas pedal, listening to the roar, and adjusting his

goggles. I ran back and kicked the four red lights into the ditch, and then took my old place beside the best automobile driver that ever touched a wheel. We started after Mr. Joe Linquist and his flying four.

Well, I will not take up your time with a detailed description of that road contest between a new six and an old four, but the Moonbeam had thirty-two minutes on us when we started from Ventura. It is almost five hundred miles to Frisco, and a few minutes after we flashed out of the little oil town, the new six began to sing to us. It was a peaceful and heart-warming song. Now and then I glanced down at the indicator and laughed softly, because we were moving along right rapidly.

We caught Mr. Joe Linquist and his Moonbeam in Topanga Cañon, which is nineteen miles and all uphill, and as we passed them I leaned out the side and ridded my system of much useless profanity. Back of me I could hear Van yelling words which will never be printed anywhere, and then the Moonbeam sank behind us and the six purred on through the dark. That was a great night, folks. Arturo drove like a mad demon and never a word did he speak.

Well, we breezed into San Francisco and through Market Street to the telegraph office, where we timed in at ten minutes after six in the morning, and they registered us officially as having made the complete run in ten hours and ten minutes, which was a brand-new record. The old one was twelve hours and fifteen minutes. And one hour thirty-one minutes behind us, the Moonbeam sneaked into town.

The reporters came around to interview us even at that unearthly hour, and I banged Van on the back for a while, after which I banged Arturo. We were all happy. The new six had proved itself, and Van knew what that meant for the future. With Van's arm around my shoulder, we leaned on the telegraph desk and answered questions, while we waited to find out where the Moonbeam was, and then I explained something.

"Gosh," Van said, wiping the grime from his face, "this has been a big thing. But I don't understand it yet. How did you get Arturo out of that hell nest up there, and what ails him? He hasn't said a word since he climbed into the car, but that doesn't matter. He's in the car, God bless him."

"I have now a few words to say," I began, taking hold of Van, "after which I am going away somewhere on a little vacation. I've got something I want you to give Arturo for me, but I don't want to be around when you give it, because I wish to continue living for a long time."

Then I told Van rapidly all that happened up in the camp. I related the incident of the early-morning storm and how I helped Arturo right things, and how I saw something in Arturo's tent which attracted my attention and which I slipped into my tobacco pouch. While Van chuckled joyously, I told of Nan Oliphant's vicious attack upon our kingpin driver, and of his disgust as he realized her true character.

"Sure," said Van impatiently, "but still I don't understand. What'd he sneer at her for this time? What was it you saw in his tent?"

"Something he's going to need," I grinned. "Now you hand it to him, and, when he asks you where I am so he can come and kill me, you tell him I've gone to British Columbia and won't be back this summer."

Van laughed again and held out his hand.

I reached into my hip pocket, extracted my rubber tobacco pouch, and removed therefrom Arturo's teeth—one of the finest sets of male teeth I have ever beheld. Then I went out through the back door of the telegraph office and kept right on going.

Elementary Finance

By J. Frank Davis

Author of "Garland: Ranger Service," "The Courage of Fear," Etc.

"One of these here New Yorkers, when he gets down here, kain't get interested in business because we don't do it right. Slow we are, and countrified. Our banks is just sublimated pawnshops and our finance is primitive. No, that ain't the word. Elementary. That's it! Our finance is el-e-mentary"

A BRAVE man may win battles and a coward may save his skin, but not underestimating an opponent is the beginning of wisdom.

Buck Leonard, a comfortable array of winnings on the table before him, dealt the cards for what it was agreed should be the last jack pot of the session. Four men before him had dealt, and in all the twenty-four hands there had been not a pair of openers. Five handsome one-dollar chips decorated the center of the table.

"A little bird tells me I am going to crack this and take away all your money," remarked Doc Milliken, as he lifted his cards to the level of his face and carefully opened them to discover the pip marks in the corners. "The bird lied! Pass!"

"Pass!" in succession declared Jim Sweetland, the city marshal, Carroll Emery, and Marvin, the New Yorker.

"That causes me to look," said Buck, who had not picked up his cards.

He slowly investigated his hand. The first two cards were kings. The next was a ten. The fourth was a king.

"She's open for a matter of about five iron dollars," he declared gayly. "Come on in, fellers! There are secret reasons why I need the money."

Doc Milliken's face indicated that he was pleased and desired to conceal the fact, as he pushed in ten browns. "Thus lifting it five and causing all pikers to dash for safety," he observed.

"I've dashed!" said Sweetland, promptly tossing his hand into the discard.

The city marshal studied his cards ruminatively. "It's a shame to let Doc run that kind of a whizzer," he remarked, "but I don't see how I'm goin' to stop it with three spades and two clubs, and no pairs. Good night! I've gone!"

Emery ditched his cards in disgusted silence.

Marvin, the New Yorker, pondered deeply, looked his hand over again with care, hesitated, and pushed forward ten dollars.

During this procedure, Buck glanced carelessly at his fifth card, which he had not seen when he opened. It was a ten.

"There is only one way to play two pairs," he remarked. "Heavy before the draw, and lay 'em down afterward if you don't better. I have a hunch about that betterin'. Hence this l-e-e-tle raise of another ten."

Doc Milliken saw the raise. Marvin again considered his hand. The New Yorker, although a pretty good player, had been having poor luck, and was thirty or forty dollars loser. His face gave no clew to his thoughts, but his

fingers seemed a little reluctant as he also contributed ten more brown chips.

"All right!" said Buck cheerfully. "Let's go! Cards and spades, if any."

Doc Milliken said he would wish one card, and if it wasn't the right one, he would likely commit murder. Marvin, without hesitation, also drew one.

Buck threw the pack on the table, and grinned his poker grin, which meant nothing whatever.

"Me deciding not to take any that-a-way," he remarked, "I hereby place ten dollars in the center—thus."

"Beats *me!*" remarked Doc Milliken briefly.

Marvin had shuffled his one card in with the other four, and was now surveying the completed hand.

"I'll raise you"—he judicially considered his remaining chips, counted out a stack, and shoved it forward—"twenty-five."

Buck's eyes rested carelessly on the well-manicured hand that was pushing in the chips. It was shaking a trifle. He lifted them to the New Yorker's face. It was as impassive as usual, but there was a little white line about the mouth.

Marvin had been unable to open the pot. Otherwise, sitting in his position, he would have done so. He had not overlooked openers; he had studied his hand too carefully for that. He drew one card; for a straight or flush necessarily, since otherwise he could have opened. He understood the game, he was betting into a pat hand—and his fingers were trembling.

"I never could see no use," Buck remarked cheerfully, "in sendin' twenty-five perfectly good dollars after twenty-five bad ones. Hence and therefore, it is all yours, Mr. Marvin."

"Well, wouldn't that make you mad!" fumed the New Yorker, throwing his hand, face up, on the table. "Look at it! A straight flush! Five to nine of diamonds—got the seven right in the middle! And not a decent hand out against it!"

"Let's see your openers, Buck," suggested Doc Milliken.

Leonard spread his hand. "Golly, I'm a lucky pup!" he grinned, still eying Marvin's straight flush admiringly.

"A king full!" cried the New Yorker, his eyes popping. "Now, why in thunder didn't you raise me? Why didn't you *call,* anyway?"

"I swear I don't know," confessed Buck sheepishly. "I had a hunch. Lots of times I play a hunch that-a-way. I s'pose it's foolish, but I do it. Well ——" He turned to the city marshal, who was banking. "Now that the Lawd has watched over the drunks, children, and fools, I'll take these winnin's you fellers have so kindly donated and go home. Great gobs of mud, wasn't I lucky!"

Two days later, William Marvin called to see Buck Leonard during business hours at the Mendon State Bank. He found Buck in the little president's room with nothing on his mind apparently but his thinning hair.

Marvin had been hanging around Mendon for three or four weeks. He was a personable chap of about thirty-one or thirty-two, always well dressed, but not overdressed, with a pleasant manner and an ability to make friends.

When he arrived in Mendon, stating merely that he had come to Texas for a rest and to escape the rigors of the Eastern spring, and that somebody in San Antonio had recommended Mendon as a good place in which to rusticate, combining small-town quietness with an excellent hotel, he deposited a small New York draft with the State bank and thereby began an acquaintance with Leonard, its president. A fortnight or so later, Buck happened to mention the king of American indoor sports, and learned that Marvin also

fancied the game. An invitation followed to join a session of the coterie that gathered in Doc Milliken's office. Since then the Easterner had been a fairly frequent and entirely congenial participant. If he had lost considerably more than he had won, quite obviously he could afford it.

The New Yorker had rented an automobile and driven pretty widely about the county, and in other ways had shown an interest in south Texas that ought to have been flattering to the residents—so many of his fellow townsmen taking little note of matters that are not bounded on the south by the Battery and on the north by the Bronx.

He often dropped in on Buck, at either the bank or the real-estate office, and on this occasion there was nothing to indicate that he had anything more in view than a few minutes of lazy gossip.

The day lent itself to laziness. It was hot in the sun, and the few people on the street were keeping in the shade of the permanent awnings that covered the sidewalks. Although it was February, a scattering of the men were in their shirt sleeves.

In the bank there seemed to be no business at all. The cashier was lolling in the window of his cage, trading unimportant small talk with a big-hatted farmer in high boots, whose automobile, the tonneau filled with provisions for his ranch, stood before the general store across the street. The bookkeeper stopped at the end of each column of figures to gaze out of the window, and spent more time gazing than he did adding.

This lack of energy did not seem to disturb Buck Leonard, the bank's boss. In fact, he was the laziest-looking occupant of the place. His door into the main room of the bank stood wide open. He had a bottom drawer of his roll-top desk open, and sat with his chair tipped back, his broad-brimmed, peaked hat tipped forward almost to his nose, and his feet comfortably adjusted on the edge of the drawer.

"Not very busy to-day, colonel," the New Yorker commented, as he took the chair toward which Buck waved him.

"Not exactly what you would call a bustlin' hive of industry, and that's a fact," admitted Buck. He shrewdly appraised Marvin's wandering glance through the door at the indolence of the outer room. "I expect this don't look to you as if it *was* a bank."

Marvin laughed shortly at thus having his thoughts read. "I *was* thinking it looked a little different from the banks around Broadway and Wall," he admitted.

"And I reckon there's quite some difference between our bankin' and the way they do it up in New York," conceded Buck. "We countrymen would look pretty slow if we got to doin' business with those fellows, I expect."

Marvin was too courteous to agree without qualification. "Oh, well. Look at the size of New York and the experience they get," he said.

"That's it. Opportunity and experience. What makes us Texans slow is that we haven't had 'em."

"And there's one other thing, if you don't mind my seeming a bit critical. Banks in big cities are partners of capital, working to help develop business in every direction. Your Texas banks are money-lending institutions merely—sublimated pawnshops, if I may say so. You fill the need of a generation ago, but I don't think you're keeping up to the procession. Your banking is like the State's way of looking at modern finance—elementary."

"I expect you're right," Buck agreed. "We do things more or less like our daddies did. But we get along. We get along."

"Don't think I dropped in to tell you how you ought to run your bank, or how anybody ought to run a bank for

that matter. I'm not a banker. As a matter of fact, I've got a little business on my mind this morning. A little idea that has been growing for the past week, and one I think you can help me work out, if you will."

Buck waited, smiling.

"I certainly like this winter climate in south Texas, and there are going to be business opportunities here, too, by and by. I've got a notion to get hold of a piece of land somewhere here in Salado County and get some fellows I know up in New York interested with me. Not a very big piece, perhaps, as farms go down here, but, say, five or six thousand acres. I'd want it far enough from town, so it wouldn't cost too much and so there would be plenty of game—birds and deer and javelins, you know—and we would probably put some cattle on it. Then, in the season, my friends and I could come down here for a while and shoot."

"I reckon you could find something that would suit. We got more land around here than anything else."

"I *have* found it—and that's one reason I've come to you. You are the administrator of the Snell estate, aren't you?"

"The bank is."

'And the Snell estate owns a pretty good-sized pasture down on the south edge of the county—eighteen or nineteen miles from here."

'"Yes. Six thousand acres."

"I happened to ride through it a week ago. Looks good to me. Good grass for cattle. Water hole up at the west end of it. And game! You have to kick the quail out of your way. I think that would be just the place."

"Well—I don't know. Miz Snell she's up in Dallas. She ain't lived here since Bill died. I'd have to get in touch with her nachully."

"About how much would it cost?"

"Why, I suppose about twelve or fifteen dollars an acre. That's about the value down there, bein' so far from the railroad."

"Oh, I didn't intend to buy it. I'd like to lease it."

"That's different. I don't know whether Miz Snell would want to."

"Cattle land down that way leases for about ten cents an acre, doesn't it?"

"It does not. It brings nearer twenty-five."

"Oh, colonel! You know that's too ——"

"What sort of offer you want to make?"

"Well, we might make it twelve—or thirteen. We aren't rich men, colonel. Just fairly well-to-do chaps. We'd want a long lease, because there isn't any ranch house there, and even if there was, we'd want to build our own place —a sort of hunting lodge, you know, where we could put up quite a party, with outbuildings for cookhouses and all that sort of thing. We'd have to spend quite a bit of money fixing the place up—and there's fencing needed, too. We'd need a long lease."

"Five years?"

"Oh, no. Ten, at least. Twenty would be better."

"I'll tell you what I'll do, Mr. Marvin. I'll write Miz Snell this evenin'. Let you know as soon as I hear."

Marvin rose and shook down the legs of his rather tight trousers. "Well, I'll be moving over to the hotel," he said. "It's most noon, and first come is best fed."

Buck Leonard followed his retreating figure with speculative eyes. Slightly raising his voice, he called to the combination clerk-stenographer who occupied a little room at the rear:

"Oh, Miss Annie! Bring your book, please."

When Miss Annie had come, and opened her book and selected a pencil and patted her hair and opened the book again because its leaves had blown shut, and picked up the pencil because

she had dropped it while she was fixing the book, and found the point broken, so that she had to select another, and patted her hair—you see, stenographers are stenographers, even in south Texas—he had arranged in his mind what he wanted to say.

"Letter to Mr. Vanderpool, New York City. Address is in the files. Mark it personal."

The name of Thomas Vanderhoven Vanderpool is known on two continents. Men of substance with offices in Wall Street or lower Broadway are said to lift their hats even when passing the trust company over which he presides.

It happens, however, that Mr. Vanderpool likes to hunt. Also he likes to get away from his home atmosphere of jealousy, hatred, fear, and fawning adoration. Therefore, on more than one occasion when his secretaries have been informing anxious financiers that they haven't the slightest idea just where Mr. Vanderpool is, or exactly when he will return, the eminent malefactor of great wealth has been nursing a sunburned nose and rising with the little birds in Salado County to stalk the fairly numerous but elusive deer.

"'Dear sir,'" Buck dictated, "'I should appreciate it if you would have some assistant write me whatever information you can properly give me regarding William T. Marvin, who says he has an office in the Reuter Building, Broad Street, and that he is a broker in a small way.

"'Was very sorry you could not get down here this winter, but trust the war will be over before another year, and that you will get here in time for the opening of the season. I got a ten-pronged buck the first day in that same pasture where you shot the two big ones last year. Trusting I am not troubling you too much, and with best personal regards, I am yours truly.' That's all, Miss Annie. Get it out right off, before dinner."

Miss Annie closed her book, picked up her pencils, patted her hair, and obeyed instructions, and in due time this reply was received:

COLONEL BUCKLEY J. LEONARD, *State Bank, Mendon, Texas.*

DEAR COLONEL: Party regarding whom you inquire is not personally a man of large means, but his reputation is good, and he is probably able to carry out any proposition he makes. He is engaged to marry the eldest daughter of Nicholas Vane, president of the Vane-Burroughs Oil Company, and is usually regarded as representing Mr. Vane in his business dealings. If this does not give you all the information you need, I shall be only too glad to have any specific investigation made that you may desire.

I certainly missed my trip to Texas this last winter, but I could not leave the war babies. If things can be arranged another season, I hope to see you. My kindest regards to Doctor Milliken and the others of my acquaintance. Be sure to drop in when you are in New York. I want to show you how well that big head I got the last day looks. It is mounted here in my private office. Yours very truly,

T. V. VANDERPOOL.

Buck folded this letter carefully, and put it in his pocket, not trusting it to Miss Annie or the files.

"Nick Vane, eh?" he mused. He sat a few minutes in thought and then walked forward to the cashier's desk.

"I gotta go out of town two or three days," he said. "Things will run along all right, I guess." He strolled over to the office of his land and development company, and gave similar information to young Murphy, the clerk, salesman, and official welcomer of prospective purchasers. He took the evening train to San Antonio.

He did not remain in San Antonio, however, but crossed the city, boarded a southbound train at another station, and, by a roundabout route of railroad, automobile, and horse, came upon the Snell pasture, twenty miles south of Mendon, from the farther side. He was alone and had with him facilities

for a brief period of camping. He set out methodically to ride slowly over every acre of the property.

Late in the day, he stopped his horse at the border of the water hole, near the western boundary, and smiled his satisfaction. His search was ended. At one side of the little lake, seeping out from hidden crevices, a greenish layer of oil floated on the surface of the water.

"So old Nick 'lows to do some wildcattin'," Buck remarked aloud. "Marvin's been here a month; it must be at least six weeks since some scout discovered this. Well, well! Buster," this last to his horse, "we'll get a drink up at the other end of this tank, away from that nasty green stuff, and then we'll call it a day and start for home."

On arriving at San Antonio, he succeeded in getting the president of the Western Prairie Oil Company by long-distance telephone at his office in New Orleans. That gentleman insisted he wasn't at all interested in new Texas fields, and that he didn't plan to drill any more wells for a year or two anyway—but agreed that he would have an expert drop down into Salado County quietly and look over the Snell pasture. In the course of the conversation, Buck succeeded in letting him know, without actually saying so, that the Vane-Burroughs people were already interested.

Being bitter and uncompromising rivals in the same field, and their controlling owners being enemies to boot, the name of the Vane-Burroughs Company is as lurid a red rag to the bulls of the Western Prairie as the name of the Western Prairie is an exasperating annoyance to old Nicholas Vane and his predatory associates.

Rather well satisfied with himself, Buck took a train for Mendon, and was looking over the books of the land company the following morning when Marvin dropped in.

"Missed you the last few days," he remarked, as he accepted a cigar and made himself comfortable. "How's the metropolis?"

"Tourist season's goin' strong. Santone's full of flubdubbery and diamonds. Peacock Alley, in the St. Agony, just after supper time, glistens like a salt mine. Me, I don't like so big a town. I'm always glad to get my business done and get back here, where I can eat in my shirt sleeves if I want to."

"And business?"

"Oh, fair. Gettin' better all the time. Some of that war-order prosperity is beginnin' to get out into the far countries."

"Speaking of business, has any reply come yet from Mrs. Snell?"

"Yes. I found it waitin' for me this mawnin'. Miz Snell she don't know just what she wants to do. She wants me to advise her."

"Well?"

"I think I gotta know a leetle more about it. Come through! What are you really plannin' to do with that property?"

"Why, just what I told you. Put some cattle on it and build a hunting lodge."

"Fifteen-dollar land is pretty valuable for cattle."

Buck stared at Marvin speculatively, and Marvin stared back with a fine assumption of innocence.

"I wonder," mused the colonel, "if you are plannin' to drill."

"Huh?" The New Yorker, startled out of his complacency, dropped cigar ashes on himself, and, rising hastily, dusted them off while he recovered from the shock.

"That soil down there in the south part of the county," Leonard went on artlessly, "is from twenty-two to thirty feet thick. If a man could get artesian water for irrigation, I bet the land would be worth five hundred dollars an acre."

Marvin breathed again. "You haven't

told me what you're going to advise Mrs. Snell," he urged.

"I don't just exactly know. There's other heirs to be consulted, too, and the court. We're just administrators, of course. However—— Oh, I guess if you offered twenty-two cents an acre—— I can't promise, though. I'd have to think that over."

"Twenty-two cents is altogether too much. Why, for fourteen I can lease cattle land six miles nearer Mendon."

"Why don't you?"

"It isn't as good a place for game. That shooting privilege is the principal thing that interests me."

"Well—— You wasn't in any special hurry, was you?"

"Why, I've had quite a vacation. I'll be going back in a little while. I ought to be back now."

"If you find you have to go before I get hold of the rest of the heirs, I kin write you what they say. There won't be any more shootin' season till next October."

"Oh, I didn't mean I was thinking of leaving to-day or to-morrow. I expect to be here a week or so yet."

"That's fine. The boys will shore miss you when you're gone."

This was on Friday. On the following Tuesday, Marvin brought up the subject again, saying he might feel willing to pay eighteen cents an acre, and Leonard replied that he had heard from one of the late Mr. Snell's sons—the one who lived in Kansas City—and he wasn't sure the estate ought to rent the pasture, as land was advancing all the time in south Texas and they might get a chance to sell it.

On Thursday, Marvin authorized Buck to offer the estate twenty, and Buck promised to straightway write all the Snells and also to see the judge of the probate court about it, in order to hasten the transaction if the heirs should agree. That afternoon's mail brought a letter from the president of the Western Prairie Oil Company, reading:

B. J. LEONARD, ESQ., *Mendon State Bank, Mendon, Texas.*

DEAR SIR: We have investigated the property regarding which the writer talked with you over the telephone a short time ago, and it is our geologist's opinion that the oil seepage does not necessarily indicate any great quantity of oil. In fact, the geological formation of the land does not encourage much expenditure for experimental development.

However, if you would like us to undertake the drilling of one or perhaps two test wells, we will make a lease upon the customary terms of continuous development if the production of the experimental wells should warrant it, and one-eighth royalty to you. This is our best offer. If you do not care to consider it, further discussion would be a waste of your time and mine. We shall pay no bonus for the lease.

"Bring your book, please, Miss Annie!" called Buck, after he had read this letter three times and sat immersed in thought for a quarter of an hour.

"Letter to Nicholas Vane, Vane-Burroughs Oil Company, Broadway, New York.

"DEAR SIR: Relative to your investigations regarding prices, et cetera, of lease of the Snell pasture in this county, regarding which your Mr. Marvin and I have had conversations, you will excuse me for writing you in person, but I always prefer to do business with the principal direct in any transaction.

"Change that, Miss Annie, to 'direct with the principal.' All right?

" 'Geologists of the Western Prairie Oil Company, who have examined the property since your examination was made, have made us a fairly satisfactory offer for the lease; but, all things being equal, I should be glad to do business with you, not only because of my high regard for yourself, but because I and others here in Mendon have a sincere liking for your son-in-law-to-be.' Is that 'son-in-law-to-be' the right way to put it, Miss Annie?"

"I don't know."

"Neither do I. Cut it out! Make it 'sincere liking for young Mr. Marvin.' Here we go again!

"'I hereby make you a firm offer of the Snell pasture, six thousand acres more or less, on the following terms: A ten-year lease of the surface rights for pasturage at twenty-two cents an acre, or thirteen hundred and twenty dollars a year. Mineral rights as follows: You to drill two wells within the next six months and at least one well per annum during the life of the contract and to pay us a royalty of one-eighth of a barrel production. Or you can have the mineral lease alone, without the surface lease, upon the same drilling and lease terms by paying us a bonus of five thousand dollars cash. This offer is good for two weeks from to-day, after which it is withdrawn. Yours truly.' That's all, Miss Annie. I want to get that off to-night."

The two weeks had not elapsed when young Mr. Marvin, still bored to extinction by the peaceful monotony of Mendon, but unable to close the business that had brought him there, for the apparently good reason, as Colonel Leonard informed him from time to time, that the Snell heirs were mighty slow in attending to their correspondence, received a letter from New York that caused him surprise and consternation, not to say chagrin.

Above the gnarly signature of the Vane-Burroughs magnate, these words stared at him:

DEAR WILLIAM: Why the blazes didn't you tell me the Mendon State Bank was run by Colonel Buckley J. Leonard? It would have saved a lot of time and trouble if you had happened to mention his name in some of your letters.

That grinning old Comanche took nearly two thousand dollars away from me in the smoking room the last time but one I came back from Europe, and I held the better hands three-quarters of the time. Any man that can play poker like he can is no man for me to send *you* up against.

Inclosed find copy of Leonard's letter. On receipt of this, call on him at once and execute mineral lease in your own name for the Snell pasture, on the terms he has named—two wells the first six months, at least one per annum thereafter, and one-eighth royalty—and hand him draft on me for five thousand dollars for bonus. Meantime thank the Lord he didn't take it into his head to stick us up for ten.

Then come home. Yours,

NICHOLAS VANE.

P. S.—Give the old thief my best regards. Tell him I worded it that way.

"Where is our young friend Marvin? I don't recollect seein' him to-day," asked Doc Milliken as Jim Sweetland deftly dealt the second hand that evening.

"Gone home," replied Buck, idly stacking his chips.

"Home!" exclaimed Emery. "He might 'a' found time to come around and say adios. Must 'a' left in a hurry."

"Yes," said Buck. "It seems he cleaned up a little matter he come down for, and then he taken a notion to get right out. I don't know's I blame him at that. He'd been here quite some time, and these young New York fellers they nachully get homesick, bein' away from the bright lights and all. Most other men have business to interest 'em, but one of these here New Yorkers, when he gets down here, kain't get interested in business because we don't do it right. Slow we are, and countrified. Our banks is just sublimated pawnshops and our finance is primitive. No, that ain't the word. Elementary. That's it! Our finance is el-e-mentary. You kain't blame——"

"Is this a game of cards or a monologue?" demanded the city marshal icily.

"What? Did you open it, Ben? Then just for that I'm goin' to look at this last card that I ain't picked up yet, and if she's a heart I'm goin' to raise you five dollars and watch you hike for the tall timber. By golly! She is and I do!"

The Phantom U-Boat

Being the personal narrative of Thomas Harding, American marine engineer, and one time commander of a monster submersible whose piratical activities during the earlier portion of the Great War brought about consequences that threatened the peace of America and supplied what was known as the "Great Submarine Mystery" which, while it lasted, kept almost every nation in the world on the anxious seat

Edited by ROY NORTON

Author of "A Caravan of Mystery," "The Plunderer," Etc.

(***In Four Parts—Part One***)

CHAPTER I.

YOU don't know my name or exactly what part of South America I am now favoring with my presence. And, what is more, I propose to take jolly good care that you don't get information on either point. I'm not exactly a vain man, nor an egotist; so I do not give this screed for any other motive than to clear up what was known as the "Great Submarine Mystery," that, while it lasted, kept almost every nation in the world on a very anxious, nervous seat, caused rulers and diplomats to tear their hair, cost reams and reams of international notes, threatened to cause war between the United States and both the Allies and the Central Powers of Europe, who were fighting tooth and nail, and, up to the time of this explanation, remains a mystery.

I am an American by birth and descent. I'm thirty-five years old, and graduated from a high school in a certain town on the Atlantic coast—not very far from where a very distinguished president once spent his summers fishing. I admit recklessness, desperation, and sometimes lawlessness. My parents were as decent as ever lived. Let there be no mistake about that. They sent me to the Boston Tech, where I got into scrape after scrape, condoned because of a certain physical prowess, before the faculty came to the conclusion that either I must get out or the institute would have to close its career and lock the doors. You see, they didn't understand me or in the least realize that I was simply sputtering over with those animal spirits which come to boys with big bodies who have hitherto had vents, such as sailing, swimming, boxing, shooting, and fishing, to get rid of surplus energy. And then, after being summarily expelled within a few months of graduation, I didn't dare go home. I was ashamed to do so in those hours of melancholy, because I remembered too late the infinite sacrifices my father and mother had made for my education, and I decided, boylike, to carve a career before I personally appealed for forgiveness. My method of carving it was to walk straight down to a naval office and enlist. There is a certain retired officer who said this of me when I had for about the twentieth time run afoul of rules and regulations: "That chap simply can't understand discipline. He's

spoiled by the men between decks because he is the best boxer in the navy, and he has a laugh that turns away wrath. He's a seaman by instinct, a fighter for the fun of it, and a damnable nuisance because he's loaded to the muzzle with magnetism and mischief. If he deserts, I'll not weep, and I shall wish him luck."

This was said where I couldn't help overhear it. I sometimes think it was his way of giving me a friendly tip. Anyhow, with a somewhat heavy heart, I took it as such, and deserted at the first port, thus ending my second misspent career.

I thought perhaps I could become a cattle owner if I went West, but became a plain, prosaic cow-puncher, wearing either dirty old "chaps" or blue denim overalls, and learned that the days when a man could possess himself of a few thousand acres of range and a few thousand head of steers for the asking were gone. I abandoned my third career, hoping to become a miner. I still believe I might have done so but for the news that my father and mother had both died within a sixth-month, my father professing to have forgotten that he had ever had a son, my mother still praying, I am positive, for her wandering boy.

The news broke me up, smashed me! I had blundered too long to ever make good their persistent hopes or my intermittent, worthless dreams. It was as if some great object in life had been removed, and—my anchors were gone. I hit a big bully of a foreman for kicking a man I liked, and hit him too hard. I hereby avow that I had not the slightest wish, intention, or desire to kill him, but it was in a new drift, there was a jagged corner of porphyry sticking out that he struck as he fell, and it ended him.

Foolishly I took to my heels, assisted by the men of the mine who hadn't liked that foreman. I got to San Francisco, and took to the sea, because it offered more security than the land, and also because I knew that, with my knowledge of it from boyhood, I could make good. When in trouble nearly all Cape Cod men turn to salt water. I did not know for more than three years that had I faced trial the sympathy of the miners and the unpopularity of the dead foreman would have cleared me; that the very officers themselves thought he had but gotten his just deserts, and made no very strenuous efforts to apprehend me.

I became a sailor, pearl fisher, and very nearly a beach comber before I pulled up again, hankering to be somebody worth while. I worked hard to advance until I gained a master's certificate, and might have kept at it but for an accident to an undersea boat in Honolulu. That emergency revived my old technical knowledge, and, by putting it to some use, I attracted the attention of a certain builder who gave me a job in one of the two largest submarine-boat yards in America. I perfected a periscope device, and, on the ground that he had furnished time, money, and shop for the experiment, he claimed the patent. I quit, fought till my money was gone, and lost.

Embittered, I took to the sea again, and was wrecked on an island, where, with one other white man—and he a treacherous, slinking creature—I subsisted for nearly a year with none but a very low order of native for company. And when I was rescued I learned that the delay in rescue had been caused by a great European war that had nearly cleared the trading seas of craft.

I worked my way to New York on a windjammer as second mate. I was a good second mate, and the skipper of that tramp offered me the first mate's berth if I would sign on again, but it couldn't be done. I was enamored of the lights at night, the great buildings

that had grown since last I saw New York streets, the brilliant restaurants, where at night one might sit quietly in a corner, wearing his clothes like a gentleman, listening to music and voices, and surreptitiously glancing at beautiful women while concealing his own calloused hands beneath the napery. I spent, without a regret, my last quarter of a dollar in tipping the boy who handed me my hat one night. I had really lived life for a month. I was ready to try again for a career, with this difference: that now I had resolved to garner money to assume a different life than that of a haphazard wanderer.

To resolve and to execute are two different efforts, the latter less easy than the former. I found this out while planning which way to turn and subsisting by pawning some of my new clothes and small possessions. It was the moment of fate that threw me into the society of Jack Masters on that evening when my landlord had locked my door. And I had no place to sleep. I knew by the walk of him, as he passed where I sat on a park bench, that he was a seafaring man. After a hesitating moment, and as if deciding to enjoy the balmy spring night for a while, he returned and sat down beside me. For a minute or so he was silent, then looked at me as if inviting conversation.

"Kind of warm, isn't it?" he remarked, and I noted that use of "isn't" and decided he had not served all his time before the mast. I agreed, and remarked to my inner self that I was mighty glad of it, because a park bench is none too comfortable on the average spring night. Something I said interested him.

"That sounds like sailor's talk," he said abruptly.

I admitted that I had been to sea, more or less.

"So have I," he exclaimed. "Nearly all my life. That is—ever since I left the McVickers people over on the other side."

He stopped, and chuckled in a way that pleased me immensely. It sounded like the sort of chuckle I might have vented when thinking of some of my own past escapades—that is, provided I had money in my pocket and a place to sleep and eat. He caught my start of comradeship, and added, with all the frankness of a seafaring man meeting a comprehending fellow: "Designing and constructing engineer, until I took a dislike to my super and proved to be the better man. After that they decided they could get along without me, and, by Jove, they have!"

This time he laughed in a big, mellow voice, throwing his head back over his big, broad shoulders and exposing his teeth to the moonlight. I warmed up to him more and more. And let me here add, irrelevant as it may seem to this, my explanation, that I am still thankful for that instant's prescience, and very grateful to fate for having given me to know Jack Masters.

"I shouldn't have taken you for an Englishman," I said.

"Nor am I. American all the way. I went over there because I had a little invention to sell—submarine improvement—that I couldn't dispose of here. Didn't work, but was so promising that they took it on. Handsomely, too, in case I could perfect it. Maybe I could have done so except for that row with the superintendent. One can't tell. Since then—well, you know how it is. A fellow puts off and drifts—when things don't come his way."

"Just what I'm doing," I muttered, and could have cursed myself for the slip, but his sharp ear caught it and my meaning.

"Say, mate," he said, sliding a little nearer to me on the bench and speaking with bashful hesitancy, "you aren't—you aren't out of luck, are you?"

I'm afraid I laughed a trifle bitterly.

It made him curious. He braced himself and insisted on an answer. Now let me remark that I never have begged a cent, or more, from any man, borrowed very seldom, and hate a sniveler. Yet I'll be blessed if there wasn't something about Jack Masters that made me blurt out my condition. There are a few such men as that—human men—that a chap can't resist telling his troubles to when hard pressed and perplexed because he knows instinctively that these few men understand and sympathize. He asked what I intended to do. I told him that I should strike the water front in the morning, and, if I could do no better, "ship for'ard" before night.

"Oh, I shouldn't do that," he protested. "It's a dog life to a man who has held a certificate." And then he offered, in that same shy way, to lend me ten dollars, which I promptly refused.

"Anyhow," he insisted, "you must come with me to-night. I'm stopping in a little boarding house on the East Side whose skipper borrowed some money from me one time, and—well, I'm eating it out. That was my agreement; long time ago. I can fix your part of it so you don't need to worry."

I'm not ashamed that I accepted so readily, for I knew he meant it. Indeed, I'm glad, because, within a week, we were real friends. I learned, before the week was out, that he, too, was in hard financial straits. We talked of a hundred things we might try, including a break into the great war that was then raging on the other side of the Atlantic.

"They can use men like us over there," he would frequently declare. "I'd rather join the British side; but, after all, I'm pretty neutral and am looking out for myself. I'm a mere mercenary now. I've got to get into shape to go ahead with my own work unless I want to die as a chief engineer on some smoke boat."

Personally, I didn't care much then which side won. All that I could think about was my own needs, and they seemed very urgent. We decided to cross over as soon as we could get away, and the means were not long in coming. It was just ten days after I met Jack Masters when he came home, with a quiet grin, and announced that he had on that day taken on as third engineer on the *Marion,* a freighter that was going with a cargo of munitions to Glasgow, and that I could get on as an oiler. It was just fifteen days later when we sailed, heading to the far northward route to avoid any chance of a holdup, and both of us were, unawares, off on the big venture.

The *Marion* was a scrap heap that had been dragged out of a sea bone yard at a time when anything that might float could get a charter. She was a wheezy, patched-up, obsolete tub, whose rusted plates were held together with paint, and whose bottom was solid cement. She was the last ship on the seas that any self-respecting sailor would ship on, and her skipper was a man who had been on the beach so often that his name had become a byword. She couldn't have got insurance with him aboard save at high premiums, but that was not a deterrent fact in that spring month, when insurance risks were not being taken on a ship loaded with munitions and bound through a danger zone. Her crew was the worst I have ever seen, bar none. Half of them were ex-jailbirds pretending to be sailors or steamship men, and the other half were the sweepings of the New York and Hoboken water front. The chief engineer was a drunken swine, and the stokehole was filled with a lot of adventurers who mutinied and fought on Jack's watch before we had cleared two days.

It was a very pleasant party, that mutiny. The second engineer was just climbing the ladder when it began, and

stood there listening while Jack tried to get this gang of mobsmen back to work. I didn't know then, and don't now, what it was about. I believe it was because a renegade cockney had been floored by a West India nigger with a coal shovel. The second ran up to get the chief, but couldn't arouse that gentleman, who, at that moment, was sleeping off a combination of rum, whisky, and pepper sauce. The second mate came back down just as things began to happen, and got his skull bashed in from behind by some one who disliked him. Jack shouted for me, and I came with a wrench. It was the toughest battle I had ever been engaged in, for we fought backward and forward across slippery gratings, into the engines, and once got so far as the shaft tunnel, where the cockney got his back broken like a slender stick by the very nigger who had caused the row.

Jack was down on the floor, and I had a dislocated thumb when the party came to a finish. I had occasion, several times, while dodging picks, shovels, and chunks of coal, to be thankful that I had learned to box and protect myself in a very rough school. Fortunately I found a broken pick handle on the boiler-room floor, and a pick handle is about as useful a weapon in a mêlée as exists. I consider one better even than a broken pool cue in a barroom fight. They swing easier and with more certainty.

I don't think I should have been so severe had not Jack fallen, but that made a madman of me. I saw all shades of red. If the *Marion* had sunk beneath our feet, I would have waded through the rising waters or fought in the rat trap to hurt some one in payment for his injury. The thought of Jack, who had been my benefactor, was, however, no more than a motive, and I am told by those who fought that my work was good and productive of results. When I recovered my senses there were three men down and several with battered heads; but I was master. They admitted it.

"You'll fall to work now, and I'll brain the first man that grumbles or so much as bats an eye!" I told them, as I went toward them, panting, and still inflamed, with my club. And they did. I got Jack up, and bandaged him and took the engines myself. The second, now very dead, I laid out on a grating, and then whistled the bridge. The first officer came down, called the skipper, and he succeeded in getting the chief engineer out. The net result was that we slowed down at sunrise, buried our dead, and Jack was promoted to second, while I took his place.

Now, the odd part of life is that men of a certain stripe are, like dogs of a certain stripe, loyal or subservient to those who beat them. They understand physical force, and, if it is coupled subsequently with justice, come to regard their conqueror with admiration. That I had six feet and two inches of brawn and bone, and could handle my body like a featherweight, appealed to them more than the fact that I had brains of a certain sort in my head. It is enough to say that I mastered them, and that both Jack and the chief engineer came to regard me as the mainstay of the hamper. I fought that nigger with my fists, and knocked him out, because I overheard him boast that, without my pick handle, he could have beaten me to a pulp. I rammed a surly Dane's head against a hot furnace door because he tried to brain me from behind with a coal hammer, but merely bruised my shoulder. I made two men who quarreled down there in that heat fight it out on the engine-room floor while I acted as referee. I promoted a man to become an oiler because he tried to quiet a promiscuous fight, and I honestly tried to discipline that stokehole crew.

It was on June the fifth, 1916, at exactly fifteen minutes past nine, when the big accident happened. I am particular concerning time and date because I had just regulated the dead second engineer's watch that the chief had given me, and made a mark on the calendar that hung beside the engine-room clock. Personally I think the *Marion* struck a torpedo that had been discharged harmlessly by a submarine. Jack thinks it must have been an internal explosion in her cargo; but this I know, that at about No. 2 hold she went up, carrying away the bridge, chart house, and, incidentally, most of her officers; that I whistled to the bridge and got no response, saw that the for'ard bulkheads were shedding great flakes of rust, then shouted to the stokehole to clear, and ran upward after shutting off steam and opening the blow-outs. I ran for Jack's room, and met him coming out, staggering, as if half dazed. I caught him by the arm and dragged him with me to the No. 3 starboard boat, and shouted for assistance. It was plain to me that the rusted old bulkheads of the *Marion* could not last long, and I was right. I never saw a deck officer or the chief engineer, but I did see the fellows from below and ordered them to lower away the No. 3 boat. I suppose it was my voice, that they knew and obeyed, that made them rush my way. I believe some of the crew got off in the No. 2 port boat, and know that later we saw three of the rafts—untenanted.

When there was time to think, all I could see was that there was no longer the black shape of the *Marion* on the water, that the boat I was in was full, and that not a call was answered or the stroke of another oar to be heard. I don't know what became of any one outside those in the boat I had manned. If any others of those aboard the *Marion* survived, I do not know it. I know only that when dawn came I could count fourteen men in my boat, including Jack Masters and the stoke crew.

"If it hadn't been for you, sir," one of them said, "we'd have gone down like rats in a trap."

"Aye, that's true!" growled the others, almost in unison.

"We'll lay to here until it gets lighter," I said, somewhat touched by their approbation, "and see if we can't find some one else. Take turns in shouting and listening."

It was a very long wait until dawn. Once I slept, despite the repeated cries. And then the whole eastern horizon turned a chill, pallid gray, and we began to peer about us. There was nothing but wreckage. The sea was as calm as a Christian's heart. We found the rafts —untenanted—two or three floating things not so easy to look upon, a couple of collapsible boats, the skipper's cap, and the chief engineer's coat. That was all. We were quite alone. I laid a course by the boat's compass to the north'ard, recalling that on the previous day our longitude and latitude had shown that we must be off the coast of Greenland. The water butts were full of good, sweet water, and the regulation supply of sea biscuits was in the tins when we broached them. The sea remained smooth, and it was both Jack's and my belief that land could be reached provided the weather did not go against us. And we were right. It was on the third day after the loss of the *Marion* that we sighted it, low-lying and distant. Cramped with long confinement, sickened of sea biscuit, and tired of the ceaseless pull of the oars, we took fresh heart and put more strength into our efforts. It was after darkness—or such half darkness as appears in those latitudes—had set in when we dragged the boat and moved our cramped limbs on the sandy beach. As far as the eye could see there was not a sign of human habitation, but we had at least reached land.

CHAPTER II.

I had not expected to exercise any authority whatever over that wearied, hollow-eyed band of men after we reached the beach. As a matter of fact, I didn't care to. All I hoped for was that either together, as a band, or separately, as individuals, we should make our way to some inhabited place before our food supply, already very limited, was at an end. I even suggested to Jack that morning that we divide the remaining sea biscuit and strike to the eastward independently, but the men themselves decreed otherwise. Their spokesman was a chap named Scruggs, one of the men with whom I had fought the hardest and handled the roughest.

"Everybody get together here!" he shouted before the morning rations were broached, and, when the crowd gave him attention, said: "The only way we can pull through is to stick together. We all know that. And we can't stick together without havin' a skipper whose talk goes. Ain't that so?"

Apparently they were fairly agreed, for but one or two men grumbled. I didn't like it, but held my tongue. If Scruggs proposed to make himself leader of the expedition, I thought Jack and I could endure it so long as it suited us, then bid it a calm good-by when we got sufficiently tired of his dictation; but Scruggs' speech surprised me.

"There's two men here, boys," he said, "that know more'n any of us, and we know they do. That's the engineers, Mr. Masters and Mr. Harding. Mr. Harding and me ain't been good friends all the time, but he has got a wallop and a way of doin' things that goes for mine. I'm for him. How about it, you fellers?"

I tried to decline the honor in favor of Jack, but the crowd wouldn't have it. Jack added his voice to theirs, and I was "unanimously elected," as they say at the political conventions. I gave them a talk. It was straight from the shoulder. I told them that if I took hold of the situation they must obey me absolutely, and that I'd stand for no interference about rationing out the food, the water, and the work. It seemed to please them, because they announced in a chorus that they'd murder any man who didn't uphold my authority. So on that morning, before food was doled out, I found myself in command of this forlorn expedition, whose only object was to preserve life in the bodies of the party and to get somewhere—it didn't matter where—so long as it offered a return to civilization, and the point of civilization was of no more consequence than anything else to these tramps and adventurers of the land and seas.

The first thing I did was to take possession of the remaining supplies, cut them to the limit, and dole out each man his share. One or two of them didn't like it, but were promptly hushed by their fellows. Then I appointed Scruggs, Jack, and one other to be custodians of the supplies. That seemed to please the whole crowd, because they were assured that with so many hands in the division each would get a square deal.

There was one high knoll that stood back from the seacoast about four miles, as nearly as I could estimate the distance, and to this I sent four men. They were to climb up it and see if anything could be discovered from its lofty outlook that might direct us on a course. Four more were to go to the westward, being careful not to go so far that they could not return by nightfall, two on a similar errand to the northwest, and two to the northeast, while Jack and I were to travel along the beach eastward. Any party that discovered signs of human beings was to start a smudge fire

and keep it up until the others could reach it. I had Scruggs deal out a noontime ration for each person, emptied biscuit tins enough to give each outfit some water, and we started.

It was chance alone that made Jack and me take a course that was productive of results, and strange results they were, and strange events they led to. I shall never forget the barrenness of that beach, the sense of loneliness that overpowered us, the bleakness of the land, sea, and sky as we plodded stubbornly ahead. We halted at noon for a half hour's rest, and then plugged ahead toward a rather prominent headland that had come to view, fixing that as our goal for the day's effort. It was farther than we anticipated, but we stuck to it resolutely, hoping that around its bend we might see something—a village, perhaps, with good luck; a farmhouse, with less luck, or a fisherman's shack as the least of all. Anything that would let us know where we were and how to reach some place of succor. Intent on what could be seen beyond the point, we quickened our steps as we approached it, and found, to our disappointment, that the beach had given way to sheer rock, against the base of which the sea beat languidly.

"Looks as if we should have to climb it," Jack said impatiently, and I agreed.

We found it hard work, but eventually stood on top, and, panting from our efforts, looked hopefully beyond.

"Not a blessed thing in sight!" exclaimed Jack, suddenly seating himself on a bowlder.

I stood for a long time, with disappointment that was keen. All day long we had searched the sky line at intervals for any beacon of hope sent up in smoke columns to tell us that some of the other parties had met with success. I looked again. The sky was unsullied.

"Well, Jack," I said, throwing myself beside him, "it looks to me as if we might be in for a long chase. If we but had a map or a sextant—anything to tell where we are!"

"I'm glad you cut down those rations," was all that my shipmate had to say, and to me it sounded ominously suggestive.

We sat and discussed our difficulties for a quarter of an hour before I thought of turning back. I got to my feet, and, lazily curious, advanced to the very edge of the cliff and looked downward at that portion which had not been visible from our perch. To the west'ard stretched the long, pale line of beach that we must traverse to our camp, broken only when it reached the base of our cliff. With a sailor's "head for height" I leaned out and saw the waves breaking quietly against its foot. I moved farther to the east, and looked downward to discover a little cove bounded by the ubiquitous sand, and then blinked my eyes and bent farther over.

At the very edge of the cove was something aground that, for an instant, I thought must be a dead whale. Then I saw that this was an optical delusion due to height, and that it could not be an ordinary mammal.

"Jack! Jack!" I called. "Come here! What the deuce is that thing down there?"

"Where?" he asked, as he came to my side.

"There—just below! Lean farther out."

He dropped on his belly, and wriggled along until he looked downward almost at the vertical.

"I'll be hanged if I know," he said, as if perplexed, his voice rising to me in a monotone. "Looks to me like a man-made thing. Maybe it's the keel of a ship that has been wrecked."

"Let's go down and see," I suggested, and led the way downward. It was hard work reaching that beach. We had to make a long detour, but at last

stood at the water's edge and gaped in astonishment.

Lying before us, with a stranded bow and slightly tilted, was what appeared to be a monstrous submarine, bigger than any we had ever seen. Astern she might have been afloat, but her bow was fast in the sand. Her conning tower was closed and rusted over the top.

"It gets me!" declared my friend. "She's not up here for air or supplies, otherwise her ventilator hatches in the superstructure would be open and there would be some one on that deck."

"And, what's more, the sand has bedded round her bow," I added. "And besides no sane man would ever drive her up that far."

"Low tide now," Jack said.

"All the more reason why she shouldn't be there," I objected.

"But who ever heard of a submarine like that?" demanded my partner. "Why—that thing, judging from what's awash, must be more than three hundred and fifty feet long!"

I agreed. If a submarine, it was the biggest ever attempted. I seized a huge stone, waded out through the surf, climbed aboard by a steel side ladder, and advanced toward what looked like the conning tower. It was diamond-shaped, I discovered, and everywhere was rust. Rust that covered everything, and at the foot of the diamond-shaped superstructure seaweed had gathered, and hung like shrouds collected from the bottom of the sea, as well as around the sheathing for the wireless masts. I battered heavily with the stone upon its surface, and stared at the hatches, faintly hoping to see one fly upward and expose a man's face; but nothing appeared. I tried again, and Jack joined me with another bowlder, uniting his blows with mine until the sound came back to us hollowly. We desisted at last and inspected all that could be seen more closely. We found where one periscope stand had been snapped off, and its pipe filled with sand. Otherwise, so far as we could see, the boat was sound.

"It looks to me," said Jack, after we had regained the beach, "as if she is afloat astern. It's only that she is jammed upon the beach that keeps her from floating away. By the piper that played before Moses, Tom—if we could——"

"Salvage her!" I shouted. "Open her, float her, anchor her, and turn her over to whatever government she belongs to, and we make a fortune! The fortune we've looked for, Jack!"

For a few minutes we stood there, dazzled by the dream, forgetting that we were but two shipwrecked men who had that day eaten but a half ration of sea biscuit, after having walked miles in hope of finding some human being who could give us food and direct us on our way. The absurdity of our dream came to us in swift reaction, and the fall was as swift as had been our flight. We could do nothing. It would be impossible for us to even find a way to moor her securely. Had the submarine been of solid gold, we should at that moment have been equally helpless to cash it in.. We could not dare to be certain that she would be there on our return; but, as we climbed back over the ridge and started for our camp, we came to the conclusion that she would probably remain beached until an offshore storm, accompanied by an extreme high tide, boosted her away to an ocean grave or to become a floating menace of the ocean currents.

And then, tired, rendered more hopeless by our total inability to take advantage of this promising opportunity, we fell into a half-morose silence. Plainly we were down on our luck! It was far later than we had realized when we started our long tramp back to the camp, and before long the night began to fall. In our half-starved and

thirsty state, it appeared to come quickly. We were sorry that we had drained our portion of water so freely during the day—were sorry that we had so hastily eaten our short ration. The clank of the empty biscuit tin in which we carried our water, and which Jack had strung across his shoulder, was in itself a constant and tantalizing suggestion. The miles grew longer as we progressed, and now a low-flung fog swooped stealthily down from the tundra behind to obscure everything about us. We began to believe that we must have passed our fellows, and debated whether to turn back and retrace our steps. We shouted at intervals, our voices returning to us from the fog, derisively muffled, as if tossed back to our lips to prove their futility. We stopped at intervals to listen, but there was no sound save that of the waves that seemed to our imaginations louder than before. We discussed stopping for the night, and trying to sleep back in the sparse tundra's edge, but decided to travel for one half hour more. And then, just as we were beginning to contemplate seeking a place where we could at least get a half-dry sand dune for a couch, Jack, who was in the lead, gave a shout:

"Tom! The boat! There she is!"

I shouted as did he, expecting a response, but none came. We ran down to the craft, and found her strongly moored and a little higher out of the water than we had left her that morning.

"What the deuce does it mean?" I said, perplexed. "Where do you suppose the boys are?"

We called several times, then struck a match and looked into the boat. A scrap of white memoranda paper, torn from some worn pocketbook, lay on the midseat, weighted down by a stone.

"Come to the high hill," it read in a sailor's scrawl. "Found some stuff there."

That was all, and it was after midnight. We found the place where that morning the custodians of the rations had buried their tins in the sand, and were again disappointed. An empty hole was all we found. We sought the place where the water butts had been stored, and had better success, for they were all there, and we drank deeply and as only exhausted, thirsty men can drink. There was no possibility of finding the high hill through that mantle of fog and darkness, so, hoping that "the stuff" referred to was food, we made ourselves as comfortable as we could in the boat and went to sleep.

It was barely four o'clock when Jack woke me, and we crawled stiffly out. The sky had cleared, and the air was crisp. Off to the north we could see the hill, and even as we looked at it a thin wisp of smoke became visible that speedily grew to a dense column.

"They are doing all they can to let us know where they are, anyhow," said Jack, as we started toward the landmark. And this was further proven by the fact that when we had gone scarcely two miles—or halfway—over unspeakably bad going, where there were no signs of trails and tundra bogs and "niggerheads" rendered walking difficult, we heard a shout and saw Scruggs and two others waving to us.

"We were pretty badly worried about you two, captain," he exclaimed when at long conversational distance. "We thought sure you'd see our signal yesterday afternoon. We started the smoke at four o'clock."

Jack and I looked at each other, aware that in our return journey we had been so absorbed in our conjectures about the submarine we had forgotten to look for a signal of any kind. Scruggs was floundering toward us through a morass, and I think it was then and there that I began to like him, in spite of his ugly, pockmarked, bulldog face. He made me like him more

when he reached us there in the middle of that swampy place and proved his thoughtfulness.

"Sorry we didn't leave some grub down there at the boat," he said almost shamefacedly; "but, you see, sir, we thought you'd surely come before so late. So I brought somethin' with me."

To our great satisfaction he dragged a bundle from inside his jacket, wrapped in an old newspaper, and from it produced some enormous sandwiches made of "griddlecakes" and slices of salt pork so thick that they would have satisfied far hungrier men than we.

"You see," he explained, as we fell ravenously on this magnificent breakfast, "the boys couldn't find any houses nor nothin' from the top of that hill for a long time; then one of 'em swore he saw what had been a path runnin' away toward another hill behind. That was Tinker Jones, him what says he used to be a miner out West. So the other fellers, havin' nothin' better to do, let him have it that way and follered him. Tinker was sure right. Around that other hill they found a shack, where some time some fellers had tried minin' and give it up, I guess. Tinker says it's that way. We found the mine, but didn't go very far into it. Tinker say it's been abandoned for a whole season, he thinks, because there's stuff growin' on what he calls the dump. Tinker thinks maybe they shut down for want of funds or somethin' and intended to come back, but got fooled somehow and didn't. Says maybe the war put the kibosh on 'em. Anyhow, there was a sort of storehouse there with plenty of grub, such as it is. Flour, some corn meal, salt horse, little bacon, lot of rice, tea, coffee —oh, we got grub enough, all right, to run us for a long time!"

I think that the news was a little too much for Jack and me for a moment or two, because we were speechless, and stood there with our mouths open, forgetting to eat.

"The boys are terribly worried about you two," Scruggs went on, "and I sort of think we'd best move that way as soon as possible, so's they won't start out to look for you."

I was a little touched by this manifestation of friendliness. I felt like apologizing to Scruggs for having given him a thumping; but, inasmuch as apologies are the hardest tasks on earth, let it pass by. He had proved that he bore no malice, and was to prove it a dozen times later.

We traveled like new men after that liberal stoking of food, and, as far as Jack and I were concerned, spurred forward by curiosity. We gained the top of the first hill, and Scruggs led the way down it toward another and lower one barely a half mile distant, from behind which the column of smoke steadly climbed upward. A sudden thought entered my head, and I shouted to him:

"Scruggs! Go ahead fast as you can, and tell the boys to put out that smudge."

He stopped, and looked at me in astonishment.

"If a boat was to be passing, sir, the smoke——"

"Never mind," I ordered. "Do as I say, and be quick. I've a reason." I turned to his two companions and said: "Boys, you go on with him. You can go faster than we can. We've had mighty little sleep."

They obeyed, and, when they were out of hearing, I faced the perplexed Jack.

"Don't you get my meaning?" I asked, with a grin.

He shook his head.

"Why, it's this: You and I have got to decide about salvaging that submarine. If there's food and stuff here ——"

"Good Lord!" he gasped. "I'd for-

gotten it! Why—Tom, maybe that fortune we want isn't hopelessly lost, after all."

"Not by a jugful! This may give us a chance."

"But it's your find," he asserted.

"And yours! Whatever comes, you and I go halves."

"If we could make sure of her——" he said thoughtfully. "If we had the stuff to even moor her——"

"Suppose we let that part go till we see what there is to work with up here at Tinker's mine," I said. "Then, if we think there's a chance of salvage, we'll let any of the boys in that wish to take a chance, and do some work on shares. Does that strike you?"

"Strikes me as being mighty liberal of you," he said, as we started forward; "but it's all up to you. As I said, you found her."

He halted once more on the way, and asked: "Do you think it's wise to let that whole outfit in on this? Some of them are a pretty tough lot."

I thought of that, too; but, to be frank, all distrust dissipated from my mind when I saw the smoke suddenly die away, heard heavy cheers, and saw all those fellows come racing down to meet us. They crowded around, rough and tough as some of them were, and left no doubt of their joy at our return. I'm not sorry to this day that then and there I resolved to trust them and call the whole past off. I can't account for it why it was that I succeeded in gaining and holding their confidence in the way I did. I do know that I had it. I know, too, that they broadened me, more or less, and gave me the conviction that there are but few men who are wholly bad. I have no doubt, from the worldly form of ethics, there were at least half of those men who would have been declared incorrigibles and hopeless by any jail warden in our land; but that doesn't matter from my point of view, because they proved loyal to me, or at least material that could be hammered into loyalty when self-interest failed to discipline them.

Jack and I opened our eyes at sight of that deserted mining plant. There was a big main building, built after the style of a logging camp, with one end given up to a long table, a big range, and racks for plates and cooking utensils. The far end of the room was lined with bunks in tiers. The building had been constructed to provide for twenty men, and my shipmates pointed out with glee that from a store they had taken an abundance of blankets and bedding. There were even pillows, towels, and a case of overalls and jumpers, cap and Mackinaws—a sort of miners' slop chest, I should say, where the men could procure necessaries on account. The storehouse itself was fairly well filled with provisions. A fire was roaring in the range, and a man who had been chosen as "doctor," or cook, was already kneading a batch of bread. It was an earthly paradise to these chaps from the stokehole of the *Marion*, whose dirty, smelly quarters were such as nothing but an old tramp tub could equal.

"Tinker," I called, after I had finished this part of my inspection, "where is the mine? Is there any kind of a plant?"

"Fair, sir," he replied. "They had a pretty good makeshift machine shop, blacksmith's outfit, and small hoist."

My mind soared in eagerness.

"Let's go and see it," I said, and he led the way.

"We aren't goin' to minin', are we, captain?" asked one of my stokers, with a laugh, but I did not answer. I was too intent on inspecting that hoist. I could have shouted with joy when I discovered that we had more than a hundred feet of first-class steel cable at our disposal. I am still sorry that I abused that cable, but I have no way of repaying.

I lost no time in my decision. I called them all back into the main cabin and told them to listen to what I had to say. I put it to them frankly that Jack and I had found a submarine of an unknown type that was to us something of a mystery, but that we believed worth salvaging if the job could be done.

"She may not be worth a penny," I said, "and any work done on her may be lost work. But what I wish to say is this: We've got stuff enough here at our disposal to make a try at her. She's either worth a lot of money or nothing. Jack Masters and I are both fairly good mechanicians and engineers. He has invented one submarine. I've worked on them. We are going to take a chance. We're ready to cut you fellows in, as many of you as wish to take a chance with us, on the usual ship basis. Now talk it over and see what you think about it. Jack and I will go out so you can have time to decide."

We walked outside and waited. We had less than ten minutes before we heard a boisterous cheer from inside, and Scruggs came to the door and shouted: "You are wanted, sir, and Mr. Masters."

We returned, and Scruggs, acting as spokesman, said they had agreed unanimously to take the chance, I to receive the captain's share, Jack to take the chief engineer's share, and the others to divide equally. There were no articles to sign in that new company. They had everything to gain and nothing to lose. And they were prepared to obey orders and work with a will. The chance of being something more than slaves of the shovel and furnace appealed to them. All men may have dreams.

"I think we'd best try, first of all, to get that cable down there and moor her, to make certain, don't you, Tom?" my friend suggested, and I gave the orders.

It broke my heart to have to cut that cable, but there was no other way to handle it. I found that there were four of my helpers, besides Jack and myself, who could splice it together again, which was one way out. I sent eight men with supplies that would be needed, and bade them cache it near the submarine and return; then, with the remainder of my crowd, fell to dismantling the hoist. I doubt if there were ever a more wearied set of men turned into bunks that night than we were, but the work was under way, and there was no sign of a storm. We were prepared to move the first section of the cable over that long and trying road on the next day, and to camp there on the following night. The great hope was prepared to materialize.

CHAPTER III.

Have you ever tried to wallow over a tundra with an ordinary pack weighing anywhere between thirty and a hundred pounds on your back? If you haven't, you've got something coming to you that will make you believe Dante left out one fosse of his inferno. If you have, you can imagine what kind of a task we had, strung out in line, to get that steel cable, section by section, down to the beach. We slipped and fell and chafed; we sweated, cursed, and groaned. We sprawled and rested and tried again; but at last we got the first half of it there, launched the boat, stowed it aboard, and then rowed to that forsaken submarine.

"Hasn't moved an inch since we were here yesterday," Jack declared after an inspection, and then we fell to splicing the cable. It is odd what little things one has to fight. For instance, it was easier to get the cable spliced and bent fast than it was to find any means of anchoring it on shore. We had to con-

struct a "Dead Man" out of stones gathered over a whole section where sizable ones were scarce, and as a last resort risked our necks prizing pieces off the top of the cliff. One of the boys fell and dislocated a shoulder. One of them smashed a thumb so badly that we had to whittle the first joint off with a pocketknife. But, with all cuts, bruises, and mishaps, we got that wrecked submarine moored with two lines before we quit that night.

It required all of the next day to bring from the mine such part of the machine plant as we knew would be required to remove the conning-tower hatch, together with other supplies we thought might be required, and it was not until the third day that we tackled the job of opening her. She had emergency eyes and stays outside, but from these the rust had to be chipped slowly and with extreme care. And after this was done we discovered that she was equipped with interior threaded plates, making it necessary to apply considerable power through ringbolts to unscrew the plate. So firmly was the plate set that we had to make another trip to the mine, build a capstan, bring it back, and rig it on the beach before we could make any impression on it whatever. For a time it looked as if we might have to take the engine and boiler from the mine to do our work, and we were somewhat discouraged. The rope we tried on the capstan and bent round the cupola into the ringbolts broke when fourteen bullies strained against the bars of that mighty capstan, and we had to unbend one of the cables that moored her and adjust that.

It is astonishing how certain thrills stand out in one's life, and usually they are caused by very little or absurd things. Such was the memorable thrill I had when I gave the order for the boys to lean against their capstan bars after that cable was rigged, saw their broad shoulders slowly heave forward, heard the creak and strain of the drum as it caught up the last bit of slack, take the strain, and then saw them lunge forward in confusion as the top plate turned. Both Jack and I ran up alongside the conning tower now that the danger of a parting cable was gone, and released the cable and bent it for a new hold. Again the men turned, and again we made fast. And then, as if intent on complete surrender, the plate came away, and, before we could block it, slipped over the side into ten feet of water. Jack had to jump quickly to avoid being struck by it, and I made an involuntary rush forward, and did not stop until I reached the beach. The rush of foul air and gas that was liberated was something beyond words. The stench that arose could have but one cause. It tainted the very atmosphere of the beach. We retreated farther away without a word, and, hardened as we were to vicissitude and death, stood silent until Scruggs remarked, as if to himself: "Poor devils! What a way to pass out! Better to drown."

I shudder and am nauseated yet by the memory of the task that we had to carry out. I would not order any man into that pesthole of death, and called for volunteers. Not all of them responded. Men of the sea are a peculiar lot. Some of them have an inborn horror of dead men, and yet these same men might fight to the death and kill or die willingly, blindly, or stoically. I wonder if there would ever be a murder committed if a man before striking might prevision the sight of his victim after death!

We tried to make respirators of strips torn from our shirts saturated with bicarbonate of soda that the cook brought, but were beaten back. We decided that some of us should return to the mine and try to discover in its stores some makeshift disinfectant, leaving the hatch open in the meantime,

and with a standing guard to watch the weather, and if it threatened to blow up a sea, lash a tarpaulin over it at all costs. Jack and I found at the mine a big tin of formaldehyde, quantities of sulphur, and one small flask of ammonia.

And the next time we ventured to our task we succeeded. It was horrible. We carried eighteen corpses from that beach trap. Some of them were in German uniforms, others in their working garb. The engineer had died while working at his engines, and lay beside them with a wrench that had evidently fallen from his hand when he was asphyxiated. A lieutenant commander was bent forward over his tiny desk, and a bottle of ink had been overturned in his last struggle, and had saturated his blond hair. When we lifted him we saw that up to the last moment of consciousness he had been writing a faithful report of his difficulty that was to end in death, hoping thereby to explain, for the benefit of his countrymen, the defects that had caused the catastrophe and how to remedy them.

We gave those chaps a decent burial up there on the sandy beach, and made a huge cairn over their grave. I have their names, together with the latitude, longitude, and a rough map of the coast line, which I shall mail to the German war office at the proper time; for these men died bravely, I know from what I saw, and are worthy of a better grave and honors befitting the manner of their end.

Both Jack and I, familiar as we were with submarines, were absolutely astounded by our discoveries in the interior of our find. To the eye her engine-room equipment appeared totally inadequate to her bulk and displacement. Her engines, of a highly improved Diesel, or heavy-fuel type, we proved later could develop less than three thousand horse power. They were of the four-cycle type, but more compact than any we had ever seen, and fortunate it was for us that we had both worked for private rather than U. S. government concerns, because our country, still primitive and out of date in many things pertaining to the sea, continues to use the obsolete, dangerous, and well-nigh useless gasoline system for its so-called submarines. But what we could not understand as we peered about us with emergency candles taken from the brackets, and groped our way through the tunnellike engine room, was how it was possible to handle a boat of such imposing dimensions with such small power. Unlike all submarines we had known, her engine compartment was absurdly small, as if the silent Diesels were merely an auxiliary power rather than the potent one used to drive her on the surface. They were in a separate and bulkheaded compartment, and we discovered that they were not coupled directly with the shafts, as had been the practice to which we were accustomed. All the cumbersome reducing gear was missing.

As we advanced into the next compartment we were again surprised by the size of the electric installation.

"Say! You don't suppose this craft is equipped with a common power—that it uses the same power on the surface as well when submerged, do you?" Jack suddenly asked me, holding his candle high enough to expose the bewilderment on his face.

"If so, they've—they've got a new thing in accumulators or——"

"Else the most marvelous storage batteries the world has ever dreamed of!" he finished for me.

Together we passed back through the intricate but sometimes familiar maze of electric motors, and found the after engine-room hatch that should expose the accumulators. Something was there in the shape of vats; but, unlike

either the familiar lead-sulphuric acid cell or the Edison potassium-lithium hydrate combination, fixed in steel cases, we were looking for the first time at the storage batteries which will eventually become famous, the batteries that have been pronounced failures by those who have known of them, and that cost the crew of the first submarine equipped with them their very lives. Not that the batteries created the deadly chlorine gas, by the decomposition of sea water through electrolysis, but that at the critical moment their power had failed to work the pumps with sufficient strength to overcome the hydrostatic pressure.

Nearly all the latest-model submarines have safety keels that can be detached from the boat by interior mechanism when all else fails, and thus, by considerable release of weight, permit the boat to overcome the pressure that binds her in the depths. We sought the releasing devices, and found them jammed and bent. They also failed at the critical moment to do their work.

We turned back through the boat, marveling at her equipment and comfort. There were four small cabins for officers, also a combination cabin and wireless operators' compartment, and we saw that she was equipped with the very latest method of undersea wireless, as well as with submarine bells and microphones. There were comfortable quarters for a crew of twenty men, making it evident that, owing to her preponderant use of electric power, the number of men needed to operate her had been less than half what would have been required under any known system to handle a boat of her size. There was a comfortable dining saloon, and even a small social saloon with a piano and a huge gramaphone, evidencing the care that had been bestowed on the crew's comfort and welfare. The piano was open, and a book of Wagnerian selections was spread on the rack, just as it had been left before the ghastly tragedy overtook the boat and all her human servants.

With something bordering on reluctance, we gathered together all the boat's logs and records and all the private papers and letters we could find, but the story was plainly told.

From the dead officers' log, papers, and final statement, we learned that the submarine was a radical departure from any that had ever been built. She was manned solely by volunteers, who were previously warned of the hazard of their enterprise and were men without families or dependents. She was an experiment, built with hope, but so revolutionary in character that she caused many misgivings. This grim fact stood out as evidence of the naval board's doubts. Theoretically, her batteries, the most compact and delicate ever produced, were to give her the enormous cruising radius of fifteen thousand miles under normal speed. These batteries were not entirely of metal, but were composed largely of chemicals in a semiliquid—almost glutinous—mass.

Jack and I, poring over the dead officers' records and log, were astounded to learn that they had actually logged a speed of twenty-two knots when submerged, and nearly thirty-one when running at high surface. It seemed incredible. She had sustained but one accident at the start, when, on the surface, she was caught in a squall at drill and lost a collapsible boat and two of her crew. Evidently for the first five days she had proven better than expected, and then was chronicled the first difficulty with the new batteries. It was trivial at first, and appeared to be a question of installation. One of the batteries disintegrated, according to the engineer's log, and he gave, in an appended memorandum, his theory of the cause for

this defect. He gave a surprisingly clear account of the action of the chemicals, and I think must have been a chemist as well as an engineer himself, evidence of the thoroughness with which Germany conducted all her warlike experiments. He tried readjustments and experiments of his own, all of which came to nothing. He had outlined the experiment he proposed to conduct to remedy the greatest defect, and undoubtedly this was the one on which he was at work when death overtook him. He deserves the scientific credit for perfecting these batteries, I do hereby witness, and I wish that at the proper time due credit may be given him. His name was Josef Wirtz, and he had been a technical engineer, constructing designer, manufacturer, and experimenter in Aix-la-Chapelle when war broke out, and he had responded as a reserve man to his country's demand. I say that he deserves the credit for that invention because later Jack and I merely carried it to completion, with what success the whole world is now aware.

The submarine found difficulty in arising after submersion, although her pumps were designed to empty her water ballast when the pressure exceeded two hundred pounds to the square inch and she had been tested to a depth of three hundred and fifty feet under pressure of one hundred and fifty pounds. Recognizing this danger, and that it would necessitate considerable changes, her officers decided to seek some sequestered place where she could rest on the surface. This was told by her commander's log. He knew that it would be hopeless to attempt to run to a German port without the ability to proceed under water, and was therefore driven to turn toward the uninhabited coasts of Greenland as offering the best refuge. Then, when land was actually in sight, occurred the sinister event that carried with it death. He sighted an English cruiser coming directly toward him and apparently scanning the coast. There is a record of his suspense, of his hope that she would sheer off, of the elation sustained when she did, and then of the fact that she appeared to have sighted him and had altered her course to bring her back upon him. He called his crew together, and, like the decent chap he must have been, explained to them his dire extremity. To surrender meant probable exploitation of their secret with all that it implied; to give to the hands of their powerful and astute enemy full knowledge of the most promising undersea boat ever attempted. To submerge meant that they took chances of never regaining the surface. The log says they voted as one man to take the chance, believing that if they died their secret would pass with them. His private account told their sufferings; of the engineer's attempt to so repair her as to bring her back to the surface; of the final agonies of death as man after man went quietly to his fate; of his own physical sensations, and the last lines he wrote were these:

> Wirtz and I are alone left. Beneath me he hammers—feebly, more feebly, but fighting gamely to the last. My dizziness increases until it is hard to distinguish between the labored thumping of my heart and Wirtz's blows. If I could only get word to the Fatherland of how these men have cheerfully given all to preserve the secret of the *Sea Fox*, I could go more easily, I think. I am certain—certain—certain—that—that—that——

And it ended in a meaningless scrawl as his pen determinedly pushed across the paper in his dying fingers.

Although both Masters and I could speak German rather fluently, thanks to the school lessons that we hated, it was slow work deciphering that crabbed chirography with its eloquent tale of loyalty to a cause that, right or wrong, was still big enough to ennoble those who had died for it. We buried them

all in one trench, officers and men, thinking that probably this would have been their choice had they had a voice. Sentiment on our part? Perhaps.

"You see, what happened was probably this," Jack said, after we had finished our melancholy task. "They were probably but a few miles offshore when they submerged, and their drift, while under water and endeavoring to get her to rise on a long angle, carried them still nearer. They would naturally keep her headed for shore if possible. Then, after it was all over for them, she still had sufficient buoyancy to keep her clear of the bottom, and along comes a storm of unusual violence which, with the current, carried her ashore, where we found her."

That seemed to be the only reasonable explanation, or else that when the engineer dropped his pumps were still striving to empty her water ballast and succeeded partially after his death. In this case, she would have slowly come to the surface with her dead crew, and gradually been washed ashore. As a point of interest our later examination of her engines rather lent some color to the latter theory.

We found ample stores aboard her, nearly all of which, being hermetically sealed, had sustained no damage whatever. In fact, her equipment was superb from repair shop to commander's quarters. We found full signal books of English, French, Russian, United States, and German codes; flags of all nations; charts of the seven seas, and a small technical library that covered everything from sea almanacs to the latest maritime report; marine telephones and torpedoes; submersible four-inch guns and shells; the latest apparatus for undersea reckoning, and quantities of rules and regulations. A veritable nest of information and appliances. We fished the lost plate from the sea, and put it back in place while coming to a decision what we should do. And in the meantime, at intervals, after we had her thoroughly cleaned, fumigated, and rendered wholesome, Jack and I pored over her plans, found conveniently packed in a cylindrical case in the chief engineer's tiny cabin. It was most fortunate for us that between us we had much technical knowledge. Mine, while not nearly so complete as Jack's, enabled me to at least prove a valuable assistant and a good counselor.

The more we viewed our problem, the more difficult it became. It was a question with us whether, if we could reach Germany with news of our find, that government would pay us a penny of salvage on a submarine that had killed a crew and then willfully drifted her nose against a beach. Next, it was a question, considering Britain's constantly increasing control of the seas, whether Germany could actually send a fresh and expert crew to try to recover the vessel, and almost certain that she could send no convoy to tow it to port. To deal with England, which was accessible, if ever we could follow the beach to some port, was equally uncertain. Her price would probably be very low, unless we could actually bring the vessel to port, thus proving its capability. We could scarcely hope to convince her of our story if we merely succeeded in getting there with the plans which we should be compelled to admit had thus far, in practice, proven a tragic failure. Moreover, Great Britain was rumored to have magnificent submarines of her own under construction, of a type that could be trusted and had been proven adequate for all her needs. The more we thought it over and discussed it, the more convinced we became that our find was worthless from either a salvage or salable point of view, unless we could bring it to perfection ourselves. To simply turn her over as she stood, as a salvage job, we began to see, was

not going to make us rich by a long way. Salvage laws pay from one-tenth to one-half the value of the property thus saved, and, no matter what she cost, the German government would scarcely fix her value at more than a hundred thousand dollars, and allow us a tenth of that sum as our reward. Ten thousand dollars to be divided between fourteen men! And we on Greenland, at a point far north-northeast of Cape Farewell, as we now definitely knew by the submarine's log. Greenland, with a total population of about twelve or fifteen thousand souls and with practically all her settlements on the distant southwestern coast! The dreams were, in truth, vanishing under the white light of reason and logic.

Jack and I threshed the whole subject out before we made a move, and then decided to put it bluntly before our crew. I shall not forget that meeting there on the beach under the late, pale twilight of the far North. I was brutally frank with the men because I wished them to see all the difficulties of our position and how limited were our prospects even under the most optimistic glow. I took the maps from the charthouse with me to show our exact position and how far we must travel in any event to reach the saving grace of civilization.

"I put it up to you chaps," I concluded, "by asking your opinion as to what course we shall pursue. I'll go with the majority. Masters and I have talked it over thoroughly."

"And I agree with Tom," Jack added. "I'll go by what the majority decides. But I wish to say this, that to abandon the boat and try to tramp or coast to the nearest known port or village, looks to me like an almost hopeless chance. It is certain that not all of us will pull through. It is probable that most of us will die, if not all of us."

The men were silent for a few minutes, and then began to ask questions. It was Scruggs who came to the point the quickest.

"Any chance that she could be repaired enough to be seaworthy?" he asked.

"Yes, I think so," Jack replied, with a hesitation that did not escape my notice. "But if we fail, and I'm not dead positive that we would not do that very same, we should have had our work for nothing and have shortened our time to get away. Winter falls early and harsh this far north."

"But you think there isn't much chance for us to pull through if we try to get somewhere by land or in a row-boat," insisted Scruggs doggedly.

"I do," Jack answered.

"And you, captain?" Scruggs demanded.

"I agree," was all I could truthfully say.

"Then," declared Scruggs, swinging around to look at those nearest him, "what I think is this: We were wrecked together after we'd worked and fought together. We got to land together after we'd come pretty close to dyin' together. It's not fair to some poor blokes that ain't as strong as the rest of us to start out, knowin' before we start that the weaker blokes are only walkin' or pullin' an oar till they drop dead. I say for mine that we ought to stick together, take a chance together, and, if any of us has got to go, go together. That's me!"

They burst into a cheer, and I could see through the gloom that Scruggs' marred, prize fighter's face was aglow. The man looked handsome and rugged to me that night. I was daily finding in him so much to admire that I had forgotten all his physical defects. He got to his feet, as if unable to address them while sitting still, and stood there by the meager camp fire to express his views.

"We weren't a happy ship, on the *Marion*," he said quietly. "We fought

each other from hell to breakfast. Some of us got the worst of it, and some of us the best of it; but any man who wouldn't fight in a hole like that, with grub that was none too good and work that wasn't too easy, is no man, anyhow. I like the fellers I licked, and I like the man that licked me. We're men now, and understand and know each other a lot better'n we did when we started on that cussed voyage. We've got a man at the head of us that has dead sure proven to be all A-1 man, and that, with all due respect for Mr. Masters, who sails a close second to him. Wherever either Mr. Harding or Mr. Masters wants to go is good enough for me to try to follow. Whatever they decide to do is good enough for me to try to do, although I'm nothin'. Nothin' at all, but a man that's punched and kicked or been punched and kicked since the time I first went to sea more'n twenty years ago. It looks to me as if the only chance we had for all of us to live or to die—together—is to stick to that boat lyin' there with her nose on the beach. If Mr. Masters and Mr. Harding can't make her go, nobody can, and we're done in. If they can make her go, we're big enough and strong enough and ugly enough to be a crew. If they don't make good with her, I for one won't kick and grumble, because I know they'll have done their best. If they do make good and get anything out of it, I for one will take what they give me, knowin' all the time—yes, knowin' it—that I got a square deal for once in my life, and that's somethin' that has been handed me mighty seldom. It's worth doin' a whole lot for, I say, and worth dyin' for if it comes to a show-down. What do you fellers think?"

It was not very dignified of me, I shall admit, but in the midst of the loud yell and confusion of approval that followed I couldn't resist jumping to my feet and catching Scruggs by the hand.

"Scruggs," I blurted out, "you and I haven't always been good friends, but I'd like to let you know what I think of you here and now—and—and can't. Only this—that—Scruggs, you're as good a man as I ever hope to be, and may I be hanged at the end of a gallows knot and rot through perdition if I don't try to be worthy of what you've said of me. That goes!"

Jack followed my example. The yells increased.

Men of the sea are sometimes like children. There we were, confronted by almost insurmountable odds, on as isolated a beach as could be found on the maps, and yet, had any one looked down upon us from the cliff behind, he would have sworn we were all drunk with elation. Elated over the thousandth chance in a world where those odds are usually considered more than heavy. But I shall freely admit that the trust and faith those chaps had in Jack and me caused us to act as we did later, because—and this seems rather sentimental, too—both of us wished to make the whole crowd independent for life as far as money is concerned. Our adventures proved conclusively to my own mind that any fifteen men who will stick together long enough, support one another long enough, and try whole-heartedly for the general good can come as near to tipping the earth off its orbit as can be done by any human power.

CHAPTER IV.

For nearly a month we worked and tested and readjusted and experimented with our find. We took the engines down as far as necessary, with the help of our willing crew, and practically altered her pumping system to overcome the loss of buoyancy that had cost the original crew their lives. We were ready for the high tides to float her

off, assisted by her own power, which, as far as we could discern, had been rendered perfect. We proved that had Wirtz lived long enough to finish his experiment he would have perfected the storage batteries that will soon be no longer a secret and are certain to supersede all others and revolutionize the storage of power. Indeed, it was less work to carry out to completion the corrections he had conceived by hard and difficult experimentations than it was to alter the ballistic provisions of the boat. After we got her power to working smoothly we tackled that task in her miniature machine shop, and, while the work was rough, it proved adequate. We rigged winches and anchors to the nearest point of cliff and waited with much anxiety; for it was certain that if we could not get her off at the first attempt, we should have to wait in idleness for another neap tide, or try to build a cofferdam at the cost of infinite labor and with inadequate material carried from the mine. Our anxiety may therefore be appreciated when we stood, at a few minutes before midnight of one hazy morning and watched the tide crawl lazily up past her forefoot that lay inert in the sand. Her mooring cable had been lengthened to permit a long slack, her Diesels were crudely rigged to bring power on the winze, and her screws were connected up to the power furnished by her storage batteries. We had done all we could. I stood in the open conning tower, Jack was down in the engine room, four men at the winze, and, that no possible iota of power might be lost, the remainder of our men were out with a towline in the *Marion's* boat, waiting to do all they could at the oars. We had calculated the exact minute of high tide as closely as possible, and I stood with my eyes fixed on the illuminated clock above the commander's desk to give the signal. Her ballast tanks were blown out, so that she floated as lightly forward as we could make her, and we had even surrounded her bows at low tide with all the empty barrels and other buoyant material that we had been able to collect from on board and at the mine. We calculated that the surge of these would materially assist as they were submerged by the incoming tide. Mentally, as I stood there watching the clock, I could think of nothing undone. And then came the moment!

I rang the engine-room bell for full speed astern, signaled to Scruggs to turn power into our improvised winze, then shouted to the men at the winze to give her the strain and to the men in the boat to put all the meat they had into a pull. For what seemed to me, standing there straining with suspense, it was an interminable time before she answered. I cried loudly for more effort from all, and her screws fairly tore the water to shreds, and I could hear the fellows in the boat yelling in time as they bit the water and surged on their oars. It was like the mad finish of an exciting race. I caught myself actually clinging to the coping of the conning tower and yelling like a maniac, as if any effort of mine could help. And then, just as I was beginning to despair, I felt a shudder beneath my feet, the slide of the sand beneath her forefoot as it relinquished its suction, and the submarine slipped slowly astern with a sense of buoyant relief, as if glad to be free. I think all of us were cheering at once. I rang down the engine, the boat crew came alongside and swarmed up on the deck, Jack and Scruggs came hurriedly up from below, and we held a jubilation meeting there in the pale night that was worth experiencing. I set a watch of two men, and the others of us got into a boat and rowed ashore. I was actually tempted to risk observation, and put riding lights on her, now that I was actually in command of a craft.

It may readily be conceived that there was small sleep for any of us that night and that we were aboard again very early in the morning for our first trial run. We made a tour of the little bay without stopping, and returned at noon, without having discovered a single defect in our work. We had lunch ashore, and then came the most trying test of all. We were going to submerge.

I called for volunteers and selected four, including Scruggs. We proposed to tow the rowboat behind us to the point of the first attempt, and it was to stand by, because, we decided, in case of accident and failure, to risk firing all men possible through the torpedo tubes, and the last man would have to take his chance of forcing open the manhole of the conning tower, so that he could at least drown decently and have done with the lingering job. It is easy enough to imagine what our sensations were when I gave the order to submerge. The sun looked pretty good to me when I took a peep at it before shutting myself down into the steel mass that had proved a death trap for other men who probably knew nearly as much about the craft as we did.

I saw the white light change to green in the forward periscope, and heard the faint, myriad little noises that accompany the rush of water into tanks. The electric lights appeared white and ghastly, and rendered the faces of the men a sickly, pallid color. I went below, and stood by Jack, who was watching the indicators marking our depth. You may believe we were not out to make any records, and had chosen our spot with perhaps more caution than we had ever before displayed in our somewhat reckless lives. The point of the indicator slid slowly around with almost sinister ease, until we found ourselves counting "seven, eight, nine, ten" fathoms, and then it stopped. We were resting on the bottom of that shallow depth that would prove about as deadly as a hundred if our new installation failed to work.

"Well?" Jack asked, looking at me, and I nodded my head. I can assure you that there were six men on that boat who stared very intently at the indicator when we heard the pumps begin to thump and surge and felt the steel shell around us vibrating as the compressed air fought the water. And then there were six men who laughed boisterously, evidencing the nervous strain they had been under, and the relief they felt when they saw the pointer of the indicator begin to retrace its path. It was absurdly easy! We derided ourselves secretly for our individual fears; fears that we had been ashamed to admit to one another. We were elated. We were surcharged with confidence. We felt ourselves superior to those of our fellows who waited above on the surface of the sea. We accepted their vociferous congratulations with broad grins, indulged in a smoke all around and much good-natured banter before we boldly traveled farther out to sea and gave our prize a severe test. We gave her the limit she would be called upon to make, and felt her quiver under pressure before we were convinced that our work had been well done, and, in sheer bravado, ran away from our waiting boat on the surface and signaled derisively from a half mile away. We submerged and went out to sea, to return at full speed, awash, and for the first time began to comprehend that we were the monarchs of the undersea. I can still smile when I recall that our crowd acted like a lot of schoolboys out on a spree when we went ashore to collect our stuff, and I wish to add this, as one of the decencies we actually did, that we piled aboard all the material we had taken from the mine and voyaged easily that night down that long stretch to our first landing. We slept aboard, the

men drawing lots for berths. We had our first meal aboard, at which the "Doctor" was duly installed into his permanent post as cook and we voted him extra pay. We gave him a steward. I appointed Scruggs as chief officer; but, after a good-natured wrangle with Jack Masters, relinquished him that he might become assistant engineer, and chose Tinker as my subordinate. We voted Tinker extra wages as a reward for having discovered the mine. And then we gave every man some sort of commission. Whimsicality was the rule. They were a bunch of mighty good chaps, those men who had been recently nothing more than stokers or oilers aboard that rotten tub, the *Marion,* now come to rest at the bottom of the rather unfurrowed sea. The crew "before the mast" consisted of but one man, and they threw dice for that honor, while we chief officers umpired the cast. The crew, a Cape Cod man who had wandered far, danced a true hornpipe, his uncut, sandy hair flopping over his eyes, and swore that he would mutiny if his rations were short, promised to cut the cook's throat, hamstring Tinker, and scuttle the ship. Without in the least realizing it, we were already on our way to piracy freebooting, and scourging the seas. I shall say this much for my pirates, none of them had a drop of alcoholic liquor to drink from the day they came aboard the submarine until the day they left her. I saw to that myself, and personally threw overboard a case of champagne that had possibly been reserved to celebrate the first German victory. Also, I add this, that we all, myself included, toiled back across the tundra and replaced that well-spliced hoist cable, the tools we had carried away, and left the deserted mine in as shipshape condition as when we found it. We did not then, and never did, so far as I am aware, rob individuals.

I wish to make this plain, provided the report I have already made has not become public. When I opened the boat's strong box with the keys taken from the dead commander's pocket I found in the compartments certain sums of money belonging to members of his crew and himself. This I did not touch. I did, later, confiscate the sum of eleven thousand four hundred and twenty-five dollars American gold that was provided by the German government to purchase supplies, I presume, in case of emergency.

In a certain sense there seems justice in the fact that I did actually use that sum to purchase supplies for the boat.

Our observations proved that we were almost on the Arctic Circle in longitude forty west, hence roughly distant from Bergen about three thousand eight hundred miles, and from an American post about three thousand three hundred miles. The commander's log book showed that his craft had been run approximately five thousand miles, which, provided the wastage had not been excessive, left ten thousand miles in her capacity without restoring. Jack and I made certain that her oil supplies had not been exhausted, not by the tank gauges alone, but also by opening the tanks and measuring them. Scruggs took an inventory of her supplies, and found that they should prove ample for more than ninety days. Furthermore, I may add, they were as good as could be had aboard any ship in any service. Her supply of fresh water was not as prime as it might have been, but we purified it by throwing permanganate of potash crystals in the tanks. We put in a week training our crew to their new tasks, and did it by short, practical runs and submersions until we had each man proficient in his allotted task. At the end of that brief training period, we had not only proven our boat seaworthy, but astonishingly capable. We were ready to move, but the

question as to where had given Jack and me much worrk. We had what we knew to be a valuable asset, but we did not propose to turn it over to any one for a fool's song or a troubadour's trifle.

"It strikes me," said Jack solemnly, as we conferred in my cabin, "that we should go to Bergen, where there is a German consul, and negotiate with him."

"But why not go to Boston? It's nearer," I objected.

"Because there are no German mail services from there that are regular, and it would take much time. Whereas, if we can get into touch with German authorities at Bergen, we can negotiate without delay."

"Then why not take a chance and run clear through to Zeebrugge, Heligoland, or Cuxhaven?" I asked.

"Suppose, when you landed at any of these points, and began to negotiate, you found that Germany had no inclination to pay the price we ask? Suppose the authorities simply nabbed us and announced that they would let the salvage courts decide after the war is over? Do you think any nation at war is going to let such a boat as we have escape after it is once in the net? Not likely! They've got too much at stake. They can't afford it. We've got to negotiate from a place where we can't be held prisoner, and Bergen is the best place."

It was pretty stiff reasoning to overcome, and yet I was reluctant to take the longer journey. I said so.

"But I think," declared my most competent partner, "that we have supplies enough to return to an American port in event of failure. It can fail only if those new batteries develop some entirely unanticipated flaw."

"Which they did with her first crew," I added, with meaning. "And, besides, don't you suppose there is danger of the Norwegian government, that as far as we have learned is extremely anxious to preserve her neutrality, seizing us offhand?" He poo-hooed that idea; but, while decided to surrender to the wishes of the friend to whom I owed so much, and for whom I had conceived a great affection, I was resolved to safeguard the enterprise in every possible way.

"Have we got a Norwegian in the gang?" I asked, as this thought took possession of my mind.

"Yes, that chap, Olaf. He's either that or a Swede. I'm not sure which, although he talks like a cockney. And a good, competent man he is, too."

"That chap? I thought he was a cockney and his name a joke! Let's have a talk with him."

I signaled the bridge rigged over the superstructure where Tinker was on watch, and asked him to send me Olaf. The latter, who had been lolling about the boat-shaped deck above, came almost immediately.

"Olaf," I asked, "are you a Swede, a Norwegian, or a cockney Englishman?"

"Norwegian," he answered explosively, as if indignant that his nationality should be questioned. "Born and brought up till I was a grown man in Bergen. But—but—a little police matter and—I had to run."

I suppressed my satisfaction.

"Then I suppose you know the waters about there?"

"Know them? I've had a second-rate pilot's license for those fiords," he declared.

"Then Bergen it is," I said to Jack, and again turned to Olaf.

"Could you pilot us to some place not too far from Bergen, where we could be safe for a few days, and from which some of us could go to Bergen?"

The man chuckled. "There are a dozen places I know, captain, and one in particular. There is a certain hole where all I have to do is to run in and

the people would lie to the king himself if he came around asking questions, but we have to dive to get there." I reached up to the chart case and unrolled the one covering our ground. Olaf came and pointed his finger as he explained.

"Right there," he said, staring at the chart, "is a little settlement of about forty or fifty people. They don't ask any questions, and like to be left alone. They knew me before I went to England ten years ago. I can get their boats if there are any of them left."

I studied the depths approaching this point, and saw that we should have ample water and clear way which are quite necessary to a submarine submerged, because, once the periscope is under, the boat is as blind as a man with two glass eyes. Olaf appreciated my thought.

"Oh, you can get in all right," he said, with a grin. "There will be some warships and patrols about here—at this spot; then we'll have to grope along under water to about here—and come up at night. From then I can take her on the surface, unless it's blacker than death, because I can almost smell my way up that fiord for a hundred miles, if I haven't forgotten how."

"But it's on the wrong side from Bergen," I said, with my eyes on the map.

"Yes, but right across here"—and again he indicated with a grimy finger —"are wooded spots where no one lives. Safe! Very safe for a small boat that isn't looking for police. Then there's a road up there—over a steep climb—that dips down about here, and takes one to Bergen. Oh, I know all about that road! When I was a boy—— Um-mh! I wasn't always a pilot, captain."

I still think it rather a mark of confidence that none of the crew made a protest or asked a question when I announced our proposed voyage. Rough and tough as most of those chaps were, that gave me respect, authority, and discipline.

It was early in the evening when we bade farewell to the point where we had landed the *Marion's* boat, a half-despairing, half-fed, half-clothed group of men. As a parting contribution to the mine, I left the boat pulled high and dry. I had already left enough gold from the *Sea Fox's* locker to pay for the provisions we had used and the damage we had done. I rang down the power after we were a mile out at sea, and all hands came on deck to take a last look at the high knoll that landmarked the site of the mine that had been our preservation. We never knew who owned it or its name. Probably we never shall, but all of us were very grateful on that night we sailed to those unknown men. Clear and high the hill stood against a background of pale, fascinating arctic light. Away off on the coast line we could see the headland where we had found the boat, and were perhaps saddened a little at the thought of the brave men we had buried there beneath a cairn.

"By Jove, I feel almost like parting from an old friend!" Jack exclaimed loudly enough for the men standing below to hear, and one of them looked up and said: "Same down here, sir! We've just been saying that ourselves."

But with sailorlike promptitude they all forgot, and I doubt if many of them gave it a second thought when I got the boat under way for her long cruise. We had but begun our journey to seas of adventure, and all that had gone before was tame compared with what was confronting us.

TO BE CONTINUED IN THE ISSUE OF DECEMBER 20TH.

Once Too Often

By H. C. Witwer

Author of "Pretty Soft," "Pie," Etc.

"A fighter with a good old Irish name is like a guy demonstrating a trick razor; it gets the crowd." This is the story of Pat O'Reilly, who, however, never got any nearer Ireland than the Battery, and whose name was Aaron Goldberg. He had an excellent reason for changing his name

THE great thing about givin' the brew, the ladies, and the ponies a play—is knowin' when to stop! Any boob from Times Square can be a live one for a night, but it takes a wise guy from Brandy Crossing, Louisiana, or some burg like that, to lay off before the rent money goes. You probably remember the old sayin' in the Bible, the dictionary, or *one* of them big, thick books—about the pitcher that went to the plate too often and gets hit for a home run with the bases full, don't you? Well, it's *somethin'* like that, anyhow, but what I'm gettin' at is this: The boob is the guy that says, "Well, I cop the last two pots, which makes me even, and from now on I'm playin' on velvet—gimme some more chips, Joe!" The wise guy says, "Takin' that last hand just puts me where I started. I got the same amount of dough I come in here with, and I promised the wife I'd be home early—good night, boys, I'm through!"

Do you get me?

You know they call *them* guys tightwads and all that stuff, but them's the birds that can look at their gas bills without gettin' cramps over the heart, and they don't have to save up for a new pair of pants by takin' four bits out of their weekly insult for six months!

Yes, they're awful stupid, them fellows are—if you don't believe it, ask any panhandler!

I was handlin' fighters when you was makin' your mother think that you couldn't be anything worse than president when you grew up on account of the way you said, "Mamma!" I've heard a lot about this art-and-temperament stuff, and both of them are the bunk! The fight game is the same as any other business, from sellin' milk to peddlin' railroads. If you got somethin' to deliver, and come through with it, you win—that's all there is to it! There's only one way to finish in the money in any game on earth—just one thing you got to remember, and that is:

Beat the other guy to the punch!

But to get back to what I started to tell you about—this knowin' when to call it a day—knowin' how to fight got Pat O'Reilly a chance to meet the lightweight champion; not knowin' when to stop lost him that same opportunity, as you call it.

In the first place, I better tell you that Pat O'Reilly's real name was Aaron Goldberg. He never got no nearer to Ireland than the Battery. But when he came to me, he said he wanted to hide his own name because the family, which had figured on him bein' a necktie salesman, might get peeved if they found out he was a box fighter. So I called him Pat O'Reilly, because

a fighter with a good old Irish name is like a guy in a window demonstratin' a trick razor. It gets the crowd—know what I mean?

When I first met him, I was runnin' a café up in Harlem as a side line to lookin' after my stable of fighters, and I'm sittin' at the cash desk one afternoon, watchin' the waiters tryin' to give me the worst of it, when I hear somebody say:

"I'm talking maybe to Mister Brennan?"

"I wouldn't be surprised," I says, lookin' around; "your voice sounds human enough at that. Did the steak give you some trouble, or do you think one of the waiters has taken you for your watch?"

I give him the up and down, and I see a little bit of a guy standin' at the side of the desk. He's got on a cap, a sweater, and a suit of clothes that looks like the guy that made it fell off the water wagon the day he laid out the plans. It don't even try to fit him. He ain't much over eighteen, and I could see that if somebody staked him to a couple of meals and some new scenery he wouldn't be a bad-lookin' kid. But he's awful delicate lookin'—I remember thinkin' at the time that when he sneezed somebody must have had to hold him down to keep him from blowin' himself away. But it was the way he carried himself that gets me. He looks like he wants to say, "Excuse me for livin'!" and, not havin' nerve enough to do that, he wants it to show in his face. Do you make me?

He takes off his cap and shuffles around in front of the desk.

"Are you Mister Brennan—the manager from prize fighters?" he repeats.

"Well," I says, playin' safe, "I'm awful close to him. What did you want to see him about?"

"Only about five minutes!" he comes back. "I—I wouldn't keep him from work. All I want is that he should get me a chance to fight!"

"Have you tried France or Belgium yet?" I asks him. "I hear they're lookin' for guys like you over there."

"Believe me," he says, without battin' an eye, "I would laugh in a minute—it ain't often I see such a comical feller which could make jokes like an actor—only I got to see Mister Brennan right away!"

Honest, it was a riot! Here's this guy that looks as if a nasty look would kill him, longin' for a chance to trade wallops with somebody!

"Son," I says, "I might as well tell you that I don't think there's any use of you seein' Mister Brennan. If you ever did get in a ring, and somebody started to wave a towel over you, the breeze would blow you out of the clubhouse before the fight started!"

"Well," he tells me, with a grin, "the least he could do is give me a chance! I don't want he should do me a favor. Anyhow, you could tell him I'll be back again with the names from the fellers I stopped!"

"Stopped!" I says. "What did *you* stop them for—a match?"

He looked at me like he'd get sore if he had the nerve.

"When it comes, now, to joking," he chirps, "I ain't what you call it a star—but if you think I couldn't fight, wait till you give it a look my record, and I'll betcha——"

"Yes, I know!" I breaks in, wavin' him away. "I got you right away! You'll be the next champion, all right—but of what I don't know! Where have you been fightin'," I says, "that nobody ever heard of you? Or have you been *stabbin'* these guys you claim you stopped?"

"Yes!" he pipes, pullin' that grin on me again. "Stabbin' them with left hooks!"

"Oho!" I says. "You're tryin' to outpoint me, ain't you?"

I commence to get interested in this little guy—figurin' that if he can handle a pair of five-ounce gloves as fast as that, he might do.

"What do you weigh?" I asks him.

"I could make it a hundred and thirty, ring side!" he says, brightenin' up some. "Where do you want I should report?"

Now, I'm askin' you—would *you* turn down a guy like that?

Neither did I!

The next mornin' I had him up to the trainin' camp—and he hands me the biggest shock I ever got in my life. Not only me, but the rest of the bunch, too. But a guy called Kid Winters, which was the trial horse I had picked out for Goldberg, got the biggest surprise of anybody—only he didn't know it for about fifteen minutes afterward.

When Goldberg steps out of the dressin' room in his ring togs, it looked like a rotten trick to turn him loose among them huskies I had lined up there, without a gun or somethin' like that to protect himself with. He starts over to me—and Kid Winters, who's standin' by the bag, waitin' for him, sings out:

"Has the hearse backed up yet?"

Everybody laughs but Goldberg. He swings around on the Kid, with that little, deceivin' body of his all hunched up, and pipes:

"Better you should send it quick a wire your family. I don't want they should blame me I didn't tell them you're coming home!"

"What d'ye mean I'm comin' home?" snarls the Kid.

"Well," says Goldberg, dancin' around him, "somebody's got to bury you, don't they?"

They're mixin' it while we're still laughin'—that is, Goldberg's mixin' it. Kid Winters was coverin' up and backin' away, tryin' to stop that rain of boxin' gloves with somethin' besides his face. He didn't have a Chinaman's chance! To say Goldberg was clever would be like admittin' ice was cold. Why, on the level, he could have boxed ten rounds under a needle shower and never been hit by a drop of water—you should have seen this guy! He just plays with Winter for about three minutes, and then out shoots his left, the right follows it—and Kid Winters takes a dive.

Say! Only the hard-wood floor kept the Kid from bein' buried alive! In fifteen minutes we got him where he knows close friends, and the first thing he says is that he's goin' to sue me.

"Sue me?" I says. "What's the idea?"

"For not gettin' that ceilin' fixed!" he tells me, without a smile. "I knew that thing was comin' down some day, and I had a hunch I'd be under it when it did!"

That's the kind of a wallop Goldberg carried.

Well—the rest was soft after that. Under the name of Pat O'Reilly, Goldberg cleaned up everything in the lightweight division just like he bounced Winters in the gym that first day. He never had a fight go over four rounds, unless we let the other guy stay on purpose. I took him all over the country, and pretty soon the sportin' writers is bawlin' me out because he's fightin' twice a week, and every week, at that. They said I was so partial to money that I was workin' this boy to death just so I could grab a few extra bones for myself.

But they had the wrong dope! I could no more stop this guy from fightin' than you could stop a chorus girl from usin' a telephone. If he'd have had his way, he'd 'a' been fightin' every night and ringin' in a matinée now and then, too! The days he wasn't in a ring somewheres he'd sit around figurin' how much money he

was losin' by not bein' some place wallopin' somebody, and then he'd bawl me out and call me a bum manager because I let him have some open dates!

He might have run out on me, at that, if I didn't have him sewed up with one of the greatest little contracts that was ever put on paper. A lawyer named Blumstein doped it out, and it was a bear! One day when Goldberg started to get nasty because I wouldn't let him fight for fifty dollars less than our guarantee, I read it over to him.

"'Senough!" he says, before I get half through. "The low life which wrote that should come up here some day. I'll betcha he wouldn't be able he could write even his initials for six years afterward! If you had gone to an Irisher lawyer, or something, he should fix it up a contract I could maybe get a chance to make some money! But like that if I should even want to send it a postal card somebody, I got first to ask you it's all right, and then tear off half from the picture for *you!*"

He never made no kick after that!

About a year after I first met Goldberg, every newspaper in the country was beggin' the champion to fight him. We had clubs offerin' purses that would have bought off Germany, but there was nothin' doin'. Don't think it was Goldberg's fault—— Why, say! Every time I'd get a wire from some new place askin' would he fight the champion, and take fifteen thousand dollars for his bit, he'd make me read it to him about a dozen times, and then he'd close his eyes and say:

"Gevahlt! If they would give me fifteen thousand dollars, I'll fight Jess Willard, and he could have a brick in each hand!"

And he would have made a stab at it at that!

But this champion guy had seen Goldberg fight a couple of times, and that was a-plenty. He didn't care for none of my boy's game—didn't want any part of him at all! He just stalled along, pullin' all kinds of alibis and takin' on dubs instead of Goldberg till the newspapers got out their hammers. They panned this so-called champ so hard that the fight fans laid off him, and, after a while, he couldn't get no work because nobody would show up to see him quarrel but the poor boob picked for the slaughter. He couldn't have drawed a crowd if he had offered to dive off the Woolworth Building into a bucket of water! He's just about ready to give in and sign up with Goldberg—I heard that afterward—when ——

Say! Ain't luck a funny thing, though? Ain't it? Goldberg looked like the next lightweight champion if anybody ever did. I didn't see how he could miss it with everything comin' our way like it was then. Why, if things had broke as well for Belgium as they were breakin' for us at the time, the kaiser would have quit cold!

Then along comes the well-known jinx, Young Cohen and Goldberg's old man. That's the combination that beat us out of the title!

Now, this here Young Cohen person was a tough kid from the East Side who had started to box lightweights instead of fish about the same time Goldberg did. He'd gone along knockin' 'em dead just like my boy, until he breaks his arm in trainin' one day, and gets laid up for six months. Then he had to start at the bottom again and right cross his way up. I'd had Goldberg matched to meet him twice, but both times this Cohen guy hurts his bum arm about the day before the mill, and there's nothin' doin'. I got disgusted, went along after the others—and forgot about Cohen.

But this guy comes back! He trails right along after Goldberg, and them that my boy stopped in three rounds, Cohen bounces in two! Why, he got

so good that right at the time when we're pounding the champion for a fight, he gets into the game himself! A couple of the papers comes out with a big story and a lot of pictures, showin' that Cohen has got as much right to fight the champion as Goldberg has. Pretty soon they all kick in with the same stuff, and just what I was afraid would happen comes off.

Goldberg has got to fight Young Cohen first. The winner gets the bout with the champion.

I battle this Cohen guy's manager through the papers for three months, and he battles me back. By that time the fight fans are so nutty to see Goldberg and Cohen collide, that a club in New York offers us eight thousand dollars for our bit in a ten-round bout.

When Goldberg hears that, he grabs his hat and beats it down to the newspapers one mornin' when I'm asleep. That night I take one look at the sportin' finals and throw up my hands. All over every front page was this:

O'Reilly Agrees to Meet Young Cohen.

That's all I read—the flash was enough! O'Reilly, you know, was what I had christened Goldberg. Of course, if I had called it off then it would have practically ruled me off in New York. I didn't want that fight then, though, believe me—I wanted the champion and the big money. Not that I was afraid Cohen would stick one over on my boy, but——

What's the use of takin' chances—know what I mean?

I go downtown the next day, meet Cohen's manager, and we sign the articles for the go.

That same afternoon I'm up at the camp, lookin' at Goldberg and a bunch of handlers disappearin' down the road for the regular mornin' ten-mile canter, and, as I turns back into the gym, I almost fall over what I thought at the first flash was Noah's grandfather or the guy that sold George Washington the hatchet. Why, this guy must have been a middle-aged man when Adam and Eve quit that Eden place for an elevator apartment! He's hidin' behind a bumper crop of whiskers that saved him the expense of buyin' a vest. When I get my second wind, I says:

"Well, pop—what can I do for you?"

He clears his throat a couple of times and looks at me like I'm up before him for dynamitin' the orphan asylum.

"That you could ask from my lawyer!" he says finally. "Where is my Aaron?"

"I don't make you," I tells him. "Your which?"

"I think it would be a year now that you got him," he goes on, as if he hadn't heard what I said. "I want he should go home with me to his mutter and little Abie, which you could believe it they don't stop cryin' only long enough they should sleep since he goes away!"

I take a good, long look at him, and then I feel like I had stopped a fast one with my ear!

"I got you!" I yells. "You're Goldberg's father!"

"Right away he hollers at me!" he says, lookin' up at the ceilin'. "Sure," he goes on. "What then? You took him away from me, what for I don't know—I think maybe the judge he could find it out! But he's got it a job in a factory from neckwear, and every week he's getting eight dollars, when——"

"Ha! ha!" I laughs, buttin' in on him. "Cheer up, pop! Do you know what he gets every week now? Well, hold on to your hat and I'll tell you—just about a thousand dollars more than the neckwear foundry clears every six months! He can go back and buy that place now and not miss the change. Now, listen to this—that boy of yours made four thousand beans last week!"

"Four thousand beans?" he repeats

after me, fondlin' that circus beard of his. "He makes it *beans* now?"

"You said it!" I tell him. "That was his bit for last week—four thousand dollars!"

The old guy makes a funny little noise in his throat and turns pale. He grabs me by the arm like there's a reward offered for me, dead or alive.

"Excuse!" he says, kinda weak. "I'm getting old—I couldn't hear so good like before. I thought you said *four thousand dollars!*"

"So I did!" I comes back. "Four thousand is right! He'd make a lot more if——"

He's got me by the arm again, makin' that funny little noise.

"Gott zei dank!" he hollers. "Four thousand *dollars!* Before you said it was *beans!*"

"Beans is dollars," I tell him, tryin' to keep from laughin' out loud. "See—money, dough, kale, iron men, bones, bucks, mazuma——"

"The song I could hear later!" he breaks in. "Where is Aaron? Where is he mein son? He's got it a big business now, yes?"

"No," I says. "He's a fighter! And the greatest at his weight in the game! He'll be champion of the world in a couple of months!"

"A fighter?" pipes the old man, lookin' as if it's as clear as ink to him. "Aaron a *fighter?*"

"Fighter is right!" I says. "He's been fightin' for me ever since he blew the family fireside and the necktie works!"

The old man makes a grab at his whiskers again and looks at me like one of us is crazy. He takes off his hat, looks at it, and puts it on again. He coughs three or four times and blows his nose twice. Then he puts his hand on my arm.

"I want I should get it right," he says. "A feller calls you maybe a low life, Aaron gives him it a kick, and right away you give Aaron four thousand dollars, yes?"

"Pop," I says, "come inside and take a load off your feet and I'll give you the works. You got the idea all right, but I can see you're slightly balled up on the details!"

I took him in the gym, closed the doors, and saw him safely in a chair. For somethin' like an hour I give him Aaron's ring record and net receipts. It was a little hard at first, because the old man's got as much idea of what I'm talkin' about as a goldfish has about auction pinochle, but by givin' the sign language a play, and talkin' slow, I make him get me.

Of course, he's crazy to see Aaron before he does anything else, but Aaron's got a date to knock a guy cold that night, and, as it's his last start before he takes on Young Cohen, I don't want him to miss. So I coaxes the old man to go home and break the big news first and then meet me at the clubhouse before the fight that night.

It was tough goin', but I got across.

The last preliminary bout is just windin' up, when I shoo the old man through the crowd and plant him in a chair about ten yards from the ring side that night. He settles down and lights a cigar I had staked him to, takin' in the mob, the noise, and all the rest of it like he's gettin' ready to see his first lynchin'—know what I mean? He shades his eyes from the calcium lights, and he's as nervous as a guy askin' the boss for a raise.

"I don't see Aaron," he says. "And ——"

"Aaron will be there, all right, pop!" I heads him off, pattin' him on the shoulder. "He'll be there sixty ways! Wait until you see this kid of yours work. Now you sit right here and I'll go around and tell Pat—or Aaron, I mean"—I just catches meself in time—"I'll tell Aaron that you're here."

With that I slips around to the dressin' room.

The handlers is just lacin' up Goldberg's shoes, and he's sittin' there hummin' some little tune and lookin' so happy I hate to pull the bad news. We're gettin' a guarantee of a thousand dollars for this quarrel, and it's only ten rounds.

"Say," I begins, "who do you think is out in front there to-night to watch you work?"

"When it comes to riddles," he says, grinnin' up at me, "you would have to ask some one else. As long as there's a thousand dollars out there, I wouldn't care if nobody showed up but the referee!"

"Well," I tells him, "you better grab hold of somethin' and hold fast—your *father* has come to see you!"

Say! He jumps up so quick he like to knock me over the water bucket!

"You're telling me my *father* is here?" he yells.

You should have seen his face!

"Yes!" I says. "You don't look like you're terrible glad to hear it, either. What's the matter—are you off the old man now that you're makin' the large money?"

He throws up his hands and sinks back in the chair like it's all off.

"I want you should tell me the straight truth," he says, "like you're swearing it from a book. How did *he* come here?"

I give him the works—just like I give it to you, and the kid listens like it's the story of a shipwreck with none saved. When I get all through he shakes his head just like I'd seen the old man do it.

"All I could say," he sighs, "is that I'm going to get it to-night such a beating that when I'm eighty-six I could still remember it. First he'll get it a club——"

"What do you mean you'll get a beatin'?" I butts in. "You don't think you're goin' to lose this fight, do you?"

"This feller I'm going to fight," he comes back, curlin' up his lip—"this feller I'm going to fight to-night would think he fell off the roof from the city hall in a couple of minutes! I'll betcha the first chance he gets he jumps out of the ring!" He stops and takes a long breath. "But," he says, "when my *father* gives a look from me with no clothes on but this here, now, tights, which it would be better for swimmin'—oi! What he would do to me I shouldn't want it to happen my worst friend!"

He looks so sad I got to laugh right out. Here's this guy with a kick in each hand that would bounce a mule, worryin' about what that old man who couldn't have put out a light was goin' to hand *him!*

"Why, you big boob!" I laughs at him, "you can push him over with your little finger! He's——"

He turns on me so quick I throwed up my hands, thinkin' he was goin' to take a wallop at me.

"Do you want I should hit my father!" he shoots at me. "Better he should break it half a dozen clubs over me! Suppose he is old—he couldn't be young forever, could he? Believe me, I'm laughin' at you, you should be so foolish!"

We're outside in a minute and climbin' in the ring. The minute Goldberg stands up in the middle, the crowd goes crazy—honest, if the buildin' next door had been blowed up, they wouldn't have heard it go! I went over and looked at the other guy's bandages and saw that he didn't have no horseshoes in his gloves, and then, while the mob is still cheerin' for "O'Reilly," I goes back to the old man.

Say! You'd have thought he was watchin' the burnin' of Rome—his eyes and mouth is open as far as they can go. But he was game, and right in

there, ready for anything, when I shoves my way through the jam and sits down beside him, on some guy's lap.

The announcer eases himself into the ring and the two thousand maniacs around it lay off the noise for a minute while he introduces the guy "O'Reilly" is goin' to battle. Three or four guys hollers "Hurray!"

Then the announcer clears his throat and waves to the other side of the ring.

"In this corner," he begins, "over here—Pat O'Reilly, the——"

That's as far as he got, because the crowd, which is made up mostly of gents from the well-known land of the shamrock, lets off steam at that point. The roof stayed on, but I'll bet everything else went! I turns to the old man to see how he's takin' it.

"*O'Reilly* he's calling himself now!" he mutters, lookin' up at the ceilin' and jammin' his hat down tight on his head. "Aaron, *aber* Goldberg ain't no more good enough! He's got to have it a name from an Irisher, and he comes out here without any clothes on! Oi! His mamma should see this!"

Before I can say anything, the bell rings, and they're off.

This guy the kid is fightin' is eight pounds heavier than him, but my boy, takin' a slant over his shoulder to see if he can see the old man, is out for bear! They fiddle around in the middle of the ring, with everybody in the place but me and the old man tellin' 'em how to mix it; and the other guy—Wild-cat Fagan, he calls himself—starts a left swing. The old man bends his head down and whispers to me, all excited:

"Oi! The big low life should hit my Aaron! Look yourself how big he is 'longside my little boy! Oi! Look at that, such a slap he makes at him! What's the matter them fellers hollerin' don't give him a chair, he should protect himself!"

All at once he looks up sideways at the ring—and then he jumps up off the chair so quick that I go tumblin' off the guy I'm sittin' on and land flat on the floor, under them. While I'm tryin' to get up, I hear the old man screamin':

"Aaron! Run, Aaron! Look out, from the beck he's giving a slap! Oi, that nobody should help him, my poor boy! Give a run, Aaron! You could easy jump over them ropes! Oi, such a smesh he's giving him—look, now, he's got him by the neck!"

He keeps dancin' up and down and yellin' like that until half the crowd is watchin' the fight and the other half is watchin' him. On the level, it was funny at that. I'm tryin' to get up off the floor, and a lot of guys is yellin' their heads off and walkin' all over me, when I twist my head up and I see the old man climbin' up on his chair. Just then the noise that you only hear *one* time from a fight crowd begins. It ain't like the other racket—it's—well, a guy outside the clubhouse could hear it and know right away that somebody was gettin' theirs and gettin' it good!

I don't know whether the kid had heard the old man or not, but he had started his rally. I didn't have to *see* it—I knew it from the noise. But here's the riot. The old man is standin' on his chair, see? He grabs some guy's hat off and waves it in the air.

"Hurry up, Aaron!" he yells. "Givem! givem! You got right—remember he hit you first; I seen it! Oi! Look now the big *schnorrer!* Look! He's trying he should run away from my Aaron! Oi! He gives him a hit here and there! Look at mine Aaron! Oi, what a boy! Give him again, Aaron! Quick before comes the police! Watch he don't jump down from the ropes! Oi, such a knockdown! He's laying now on the floor—I'll betcha he wouldn't get up! Only I want mamma should see this! Look, the feller he's

counting with the fingers! *Ein, zwei, drei——"*

I'm up with him by this time, and the kid is walkin' to his corner. The other guy is out—as cold as Siberia. The crowd is rushin' for the doors. But the old man is still jumpin' around on the chair. He turns on me, soaks me in the ribs, and yells:

"Like *this* he gives him—look!"

And he makes another pass at me and knocks some guy's hat off.

"Lay off, lay off!" I hollers at him. "Is the whole family battlers now? You'll be gettin' me in a jam here in a minute—wallopin' strange guys and all that! Take it easy, will you?"

He sits down at that and wipes his eyes, mumblin' away to himself.

"What do you think of your kid now?" I says. "He's *there,* ain't he?"

He's off that chair in a second—I never saw nothin' so fast. I guess that's where the kid got his speed. Up goes the old man's hands.

"Like *this* he gives him!" he pipes, and I duck a left swing.

"Hey, listen, bo!" I begs him, grabbin' at his arms. "Stop it, will you? I'm out of trainin'—can't you talk without tryin' to bounce me? Now get this! I'm goin' to take you back to see your boy, and nix on the rough stuff! The kid is scared stiff now, thinkin' you're goin' to wallop him. You got to promise me you won't, or you don't go back. Do you get that?"

There ain't no answer, because the old man ain't there. I jump up on the chair so I can look over the crowd which is still pilin' out the doors, and I see him about three feet away, with some guy backed up against the wall.

"Such a little feller he is, too!" I hear the old man sayin', with the other guy lookin' at him like he thinks he's nutty. "Such a little feller, mind you, but brave like a lion! He gives a crack like *this* and *this*——"

Zam!—off goes the other guy's hat!

"Hey, will you lay off!" I screams. I jumps over and pulls the old man away just as the other guy makes a pass at him. "What are you tryin' to do?" I yells in the old man's ear. "You don't have to take 'em *all* on to-night, do you? Call it a day, will you, before somebody busts you one!"

"Only I'm showing him how my Aaron knocks it down this big *schnorrer!*" he says, pullin' away from me. "Look! First he gives it a little run, fency like a actor, see? Then like *this* he gives him a——"

I dodge in and get a half Nelson on him and hold him that way till I runs him into the kid's dressin' room.

The minute the kid sees him, you know what he does? On the level, he begins to *weep!* What does the old man do? He runs for him and grabs him around the neck, and in another minute the two of them is hangin' onto each other and cryin' out loud. Of course it was a riot, sure, but say! I don't know—it didn't strike me as bein' so funny at the time—know what I mean? Here's this old guy that probably never had nothin' before in his life to feel this way about—comin' over here in the steerage and bein' kicked and knocked around and all that, see? And then the kid runs away and leaves him flat to top it all off.

And then the kid makes good, see? Here he is gettin' the big dough, and instead of bein' cuffed around like in the old country, the kid is wallopin' somebody else, everybody is cheerin' him, *and he's gettin' paid for it!*

Say! They was entitled to act like that, wasn't they?

Yes, and I'd have been right in there cryin' with them, too, if I hadn't beat it. I'm funny that way—know what I mean?

Well, they make up and the kid goes home with the old man that night. He slips his father his part of the thousand he got for the fight, and it was some

happy party, let me tell you! They tried to get me to go along with them, but I laid off the old-home-week stuff. They'd only have broke me all up, anyhow—know what I mean?

It was right about here that what *you'd* probably call fate steps in and crabs me and the kid and the fight with Young Cohen. *You'd* call it fate, but it wasn't fate at all. Not on your life—it was the old man!

The kid shows up at the camp next mornin' a little late, but he's as happy as the old man was the night before. He didn't have much to say, but he told me he had fixed up everything with the family and slipped them a big slice of his bank roll. The old man was goin' in business and little Abie was bein' pointed for high school.

Every night after he's through at the gym he goes home to the old man, and every mornin' he comes back late. At first it's only half an hour or somethin' like that—then it gets three hours, half a day, and finally one day he don't show up at all.

The next time he comes in I call him over in a corner where nobody can grab an earful of what I'm sayin'. First I give him a long look, and what I saw makes me good and sore. Here's this guy supposed to be trainin' for the hardest fight of his life, and he looks as if he'd been out all night, hittin' up the old rye or somethin' like that. He's got a scratch on one side of his face and a little cut on his lip and these here dark rings that get under your eyes when you hit the hay and can't sleep.

"Hey!" I says. "Where was you last night? Have you gone back to the necktie foundry to work nights or what, eh?"

He don't say a word.

"Well, well! Come across!" I tells him. "What is it—a secret?"

"Listen!" he says, after lookin' around like he's afraid it'll get all over. "I couldn't say a word now! You could believe it that if I should tell anybody, you'll be the one. From me you could have anything—but on account of special reasons I couldn't tell you this now. Later—we would see."

"That's fine stuff!" I hollers, gettin' madder every minute. "That's great—*nit!* I'm your manager, and you got a big fight on. I got to know what you're doin' at night, and I got a special reason myself for tellin' you this—if you don't come through with the works I'm off you! I'll go dig up a regular fighter and you can be on your way!"

He hangs his head for a minute, and then he says very sadlike:

"Right away he wants I should go! I'm askin' you now a question; look good in your mind. Ain't there something which you done some time you wouldn't want it should be sent around to everybody on postal cards?"

"Heh?" I says, stallin' for a minute. "Well, what of it?" (I ain't sayin' there was anything like that, know what I mean? But——) "Look here, Goldberg," I goes on, "I want to tell you this. If you've started to give the rye a play now that you got a piece of money, we part right here! Any guy that starts to fight booze might as well lay off everything else at the go in. You can't train for Young Cohen with whisky as a sparrin' partner!"

"Mr. Brennan," says the kid, lookin' me right in the eye, "you could believe it that by me whisky is poison. I don't know if you got to eat it plain, fried, or maybe spread on a piece of bread. It ain't that. I'll tell you what it is as soon as I fight Young Cohen."

What could I do? I worked on him for an hour by the clock and pulled stuff that would have got a murderer off with a bawlin' out, but nothin' doin', and as it was only a week before the muss with Young Cohen, I laid off.

Well, it keeps up right to the day before the fight. The kid goes home every night from the gym ready and willin'

to take on a coupla wild cats—and every mornin' he comes back all in. He's got me so worried I'm in bad shape myself, and after puttin' all the handlers through the third degree, I even have him followed when he leaves the camp at night. But Sherlock Holmes would have quit cold if he'd 'a' been up against a proposition like this.

It was one of them deep, dark mysteries like why people eat limburger cheese—know what I mean?

The night before the big fight I made a last try at nailin' him so he can't get away. I got it all framed up to have one of the handlers give him an argument just as he's knockin' off for the day, and then I'm goin' to slip all the locks on the gym, see? I'm goin' to keep him where I can watch him until the bell rings the next night.

Did it work?

Not exactly. The kid pulls out his watch while the handler I had framed is tryin' to get his goat. He sees what time it is—sticks a choppy right hook on the other guy's chin and is out the door before the handler hit the floor. When *I* get there, he's gone.

I get everybody in the camp, a coupla private detectives, and the police force lookin' for him. It was like tryin' to find water that wasn't damp. I sit up all night without even makin' a stab at goin' to bed. Just figure it out yourself how I felt—we were to get eight thousand dollars for our bit with the privilege of a percentage of the gross—and the club is sold out!

Don't mind me gettin' sore when I think of it now. It's like everybody rememberin' havin' scarlet fever when they was a kid. It's a long time ago now, but remember when the hundred-to-one shot was beaten by a nose? Can you recollect when She said: 'I'm sorry, but there's another guy'?—when you got fired from your first job?—when the guy you voted for and bet on lost out by one ballot?

Well, roll 'em all into one—that's the way I felt the next mornin'—the day of the fight, mind you, when this fighter of mine rolls into the gym about eleven o'clock.

I didn't know at first whether it was him or some refugee from an operatin' room. He's got more bandage and court-plaster on his face than the average drug store keeps in stock, and he limps in as if one of his legs is broke in easy five or six places. He ambles right on past the handlers, who are lookin' at him and each other like what they see ain't really there. Say, he looked like an accident on its way to happen somewheres! He stops finally in front of me.

"Believe me!" he says, from somewhere under that tire tape and stuff. "Believe me, I'm a sick man!"

"Was the train goin' very fast?" I asks him, tryin' to keep the brakes on. "You big stiff—do you know what I ought to do with you?"

"Wait!" he says, in a little, weak voice. "Don't do it any more! I got enough, you could take my word for it! I only got it maybe tnree teeth left and——"

"What were you doin' on the roof?" I yells. "Or did they all jump on you at once, or maybe the guy didn't blow his horn loud enough and——"

"It ain't no time to get comical now," he butts in, wavin' me to stop. "Because if you should tell me a joke which a dead man has got to laugh at it, I couldn't even raise a smile. Keep it on your shirt—you should hear everything now."

I looked at him, and I had a hard time to keep from bouncin' a chair off his head and finishin' the job. The house sold out, waitin' for this guy, and from the flash I got at him he wouldn't be able to fight for another *year*.

"Shoot!" I says. "And, believe me,

you want to be prepared to tell me the greatest story a guy ever heard, because if your stuff is in any way poor—I'll let myself go and strangle you!"

"I'll begin from the start," he says, talkin' fast and edgin' away from me, "and you could blame yourself from everything. Because if you hadn't brought it around my father I'd be all right to-day instead of in this here, now, condition I'm in."

"Never mind about *me*," I says. "Go on—pull your alibi and make it good."

"It all comes from the night I met my father and go home with him," he begins, sittin' down on a stool. "After the mamma and all goes to bed, we're sittin' up in the parlor and I'm telling him all about what's happened since I run away. My father he's sittin' there, quiet like a rat. He's looking straight at the floor, thinking heavy—like a feller who's tryin' to get an idear how he could make brass into gold. Sudden he gives it a jump up, grabs me by the arm, tells me get it quick my hat and coat and come with him. By us, when the father or the mother asks we should do something, we first do it—then maybe after we ask questions. I get my hat and coat and he gets it his.

"Quiet we go out of the house we shouldn't wake anybody. Down this street, up that street he takes me. On the corner from Hazel Avenue and Liberty Street there's a fruit stand and a feller is sittin' there roastin' chestnuts. My father stops and says to me:

"'Aaron, there sits a low life which only yesterday he hollers after me such names I wouldn't even tell you. Also he throws it a piece wood at me. I want now you are such a *grosser* fighter you should give him like you did the feller at the theater to-night.'

"I'm asking you, what could I do?" says the kid, with a sigh. "It's my father, ain't it? I look around careful and the street's empty. I walk up to this feller and start to give him an argument, but my father gets quick excited and hollers:

"'Aaron, givem quick a crack like this and we should hurry home.'

"I wallop this guy and he wallops me. While it lasted I'm telling you it was a fight. Final I hooks him on the jaw and he goes out. Then we runs all the way home. There you are. I'm up late, and in the morning I don't hear it the alarm clock and——"

I could hardly keep from fallin' off the chair laughin', bad as was the hole I was in. But I breaks in on him.

"That was only the *first* night," I says. "You was all right the next mornin'. What about all the other nights and last night? Did you and the guy at the fruit stand fight a world's series?"

"Gimme it a chance you should hear it all," says the kid. "I never seen that feller no more. The next night my father's got it another guy which once he had pushed him off the curb and he wants I should beat him up. All right, I beat him up. The next night another feller. The next he rings in two fellers on me one after the other—the last one he could handle himself, and I got all I can do to *shade* him. And so it goes. Every night I got to wallop a new feller which some time in his life he had made some crack at my father when he goes around with his pushcart."

"I suppose you're gonna tell me that they all come around to the house last night and nailed you, eh?" I says.

"No!" says the kid. "Let me tell it, will you? I wouldn't leave out nothin'. Last night for the first time I tell my father he shouldn't ask me to beat up somebody because I got a big fight on to-night, which it is not on account of being called names, but for *gelt*. Makes no difference. One more feller he's got he wants *special* I should beat. This feller is hanging out around the corner

a year ago with his gang, and when my father goes past them they throw snowballs at him, which one of them knocks it off his hat. What can I do? It's my father, ain't it? He takes me around the house where this feller lives, and in about maybe half an hour he comes down the street. He's got it with him a girl, and when they come under a lamppost I see him good. Oi, does my heart give it a jump! Right away I know who is it. Here's who my father wants I should beat up——"

"Never mind who it was," I says. "Hurry up with your story. I got to do somethin' about this fight over the telephone pretty quick."

"Suits me," he comes back. "Well, I try to give my father an argument, but it's no use. He wants nothing only I should beat up this feller. What could I do? It's my father, ain't it? I takes a wallop at this feller as he goes past me."

He stops and gives a long, deep sigh.

"Well, well?" I asks, when he don't say any more. "What happened?"

"Give a look!" he says. "Give a look at me—and then you should ask it what happened!"

I jumped up all of a sudden. I had the big idea.

"Quick!" I yells, shakin' the kid by the shoulder. "Who was this guy? Gimme his name and I'll rush around and get him. Maybe we can save some of our forfeit money. Anybody that can give *you* a trimmin' like that ought to be able to bounce Young Cohen in one round. Quick—who was he? I'll get him for Young Cohen, by Heaven, and put him in the ring with him instead of you to-night!"

The kid gives a short, funny little laugh.

"Don't get happy," he says. "You couldn't put *this* fellow on with Young Cohen to-night—or a hundred years from now."

"Can't put him on? Why not?" I hollers.

"Didn't I try to tell you before?" he says, lookin' up at me. *"That was Young Cohen!"*

THE FRIENDSHIP OF JIM CALLAHAN

WHEN Clark Griffith, the manager of the Washington baseball team in the American League, got married, his mother-in-law became an ardent baseball fan. Up to that time she had never seen a game of ball in her life. But from the date of the wedding she was utterly convinced that baseball was the greatest game in the world, and that Clark Griffith was the greatest manager in the game.

When Clark first took charge of the Washington team, Jim Callahan, one of his closest friends, was manager of the Chicago American League team. He took his aggregation to Washington, and, while he dined every night at Clark Griffith's home, he took four straight games from Clark's team.

After the fourth victory, Clark's mother-in-law, who is Scotch, blew up.

"A fine friend of Clark's, that Jim Callahan!" she confided to her daughter. "He comes up here and eats all of Clark's dinners, and he puts in that big Ed Walsh to pitch every day, and wins all the games from Clark!"

The Vanishing Ambassador

By Robert Welles Ritchie

Author of "Stalemate," "His Master's Voice," Etc.

Upon the decision of the President of the United States in regard to a proposition presented by a European ambassador hung the destinies of ninety-nine millions, the history of one hundred and forty-one years, perhaps the fate of democracy. Another story of Gaspard Detournelles, field marshal of all Raoul Flack's predatory raids against intrenched wealth.

AFFAIRS diplomatic were as grave as they might be short of that grim final recourse and obliteration of all sanity which spells itself in three letters. The madness that was Europe's threatened almost hourly to leap the Atlantic and involve the greatest neutral in the general debacle—carry destruction to the only continent of the world's four so far spared the infection of blood lust. Once this neutral, a child in the profundities of Old World jockeying of the pawns, gave over the security of peace for the red insanity of war, the other little fellows who'd been bristling and feinting in the thick of it over yonder would be dragged in, too, and Armageddon would be that prophesied by John on Patmos.

The big, soft neutral blundered nearer the edge of the abyss.

Notably in this crisis the papers only guessed, but did not know, the true status of affairs. Two men alone in all the United States knew the seriousness of the moment, those two the president and Prince Otto, ambassador of a Certain Puissant Power. The president, masterful in this time of stress and ready for the good of ninety-nine millions to arrogate to himself any and all saving powers, preferred to keep to himself knowledge of the gravity of events until such time as it might be necessary for him to appeal to the Congress for sanction of the ultimate step. It served Prince Otto equally well to abet the president's conspiracy of silence—for a time, at least; so, being the astute diplomat that he was, his lips never opened save to smile.

One may cover the ground of this diplomatic impasse—which, kind Providence willing, will not become public property until all to-day's swords are rusted—by saying that, after exchange of notes courteously worded in the edged phrase of the council cabinet and imperial closet, things had come to a point when an answer was demanded of the president. A plain, categorical answer. Would he or would he not? The question, as put to the chief executive by Prince Otto in the privacy of the White House office was not "Will the United States guarantee thus and so?" But it was: "Will you, in behalf

Other stories of Raoul Flack's enemies to society were published in the issues of November 7th and November 20th.

of the United States, guarantee this and that order of conduct?" The query was a personal one, put directly by a Certain Puissant Potentate to the President of the United States through the mouth of the trusted Prince Otto.

Upon its decision hung the destinies of ninety-nine millions, the history of one hundred and forty-one years, perhaps the fate of democracy.

"His majesty requests that your excellency arrive at an answer at the earliest possible season," Prince Otto had said, with a grave inclination of the head. "Because upon your decision rests a future fraught with possibilities the most weighty both for my country and for yours. If I may—to avoid public suspicion that any matter of moment exists between the two governments—I shall leave to-night for New York. The strain of these few weeks, your excellency"—Prince Otto had let fall, for the barest fraction of a second, his mask of official formality, and the eyes of the man were drawn in weariness. The president stepped quickly to him and grasped his hand.

"Go to New York, then, my friend. Play—lose yourself—forget. If only I——" He broke off abruptly, but the yearning in his eyes, the droop that would come to the corners of his smile despite his effort at cheerfulness, were sufficiently vocal.

"It is understood, then"—the tall, gray-haired man with the keen, eagle-bold features hesitated perceptibly—"your answer will be given to me exclusively. The—ah—delicacy of the situation, which you thoroughly understand, your excellency, prohibits the sending of an answer through your ambassador at his majesty's court. His majesty would not admit there was anything between you two necessitating such an answer. Embarrassment ——"

"Yes—yes, I understand fully," the president assured. "Saturday you shall have my answer. And in the meantime, the Hotel Buxton?"

"I shall be at the Buxton—where the lights shine on Broadway." Prince Otto bowed and left the room with a light step.

Down on lower Wall Street, where the roar of the elevated drowns the bleat of the lambs at shearing, a shady brokerage is tucked away in a shabby basement. It is not a hefty firm; it has no member on Exchange; its credit is about as long as a thirtieth day in February. But B. Y. Bang & Co.—let's call it that and avoid libelous personalities—B. Y. Bang & Co. take 'em coming and going and manage to knock down a very tidy income. B. Y. Bang & Co. ask no questions. If a tempted clerk from one of the big trust companies brings down a sheaf of bonds to deposit as collateral against his waning margin, Mr. B. Y. Bang, who is also "& Co.," does not inquire how a hundred-a-month clerk came to possess such gilt-edge securities. Not so. Nor is the messenger boy's scanty roll overlooked or scorned in the day's work. Bang believes in the parable of the mustard seed.

On a morning in the midst of a pleasant bullish season, when "war babies" were bouncing fat and many a tyro was running a shoe string into a kale farm, a stranger entered the dim office of B. Y. Bang & Co. He was a little, old-young man with preternaturally white and bloodless countenance showing under the flat rim of his tile, hair white as linen, and hands delicate and nervous as pale spiders. Scrupulously correct was his dress—cutaway very tight-breasted and a little foreign in cut, with a button of the Legion of Honor in the lapel, puff tie speared with a remarkably handsome pearl just off white and shading to rose, waistcoat and trousers what the column in the theater programs denominates *distingué*. His

whole personality lay in his eyes, which were black and alive and deeply shadowed in sockets hollowed out undeniably by some long suffering.

The visitor peremptorily waved aside a pallid underling and asked for Bang. Seated opposite that predatory animal in his dusty inner lair, he began without preliminaries:

"You have discretion in business, is it not so?" B. Y. Bang opened his fat eyelids a trifle, but preserved his poise. He solemnly assured in the affirmative.

"You will handle an account—perhaps a large account—in confidence, without revealing the name?" A strong dash of accent lay in the little man's speech. Bang decided it was French.

"Some of the biggest accounts on the Street are carried sub rosa in this firm," Bang lied easily, "and nobody's the wiser. We do inside work for the big fellows."

"I shall open an account with you," the visitor announced. "But only on the understanding that it shall be carried on your books under a—how shall I say?—*nom de guerre.* Call it "Account X. Y."

"Certainly, Mr.—ah——"

"X. Y.," the little gray customer supplied.

"Certainly, Mr. X. Y." Bang's smile was foxlike and knowing. "You'll be buying Compound Motors, now, or ——"

"No, selling," Mr. X. Y. cut him short. "I shall sell short. But not until Saturday. Remember, not a sale until Saturday."

"Hum-m-m!" Bang mused. "Selling short, eh? And against a bull market? I'll have to have at least fifteen points' margin. The risk, you know——"

"Take a memorandum now of what I wish to sell," the fatuous X. Y. commanded. "Honesdale Steel, twenty thousand shares; Amalgamated Aëros, twenty thousand——" The Bang eyes widened with each notation he made on his order pad. Why, this old dodo bird was picking the prime babies of the whole war nursery to sell short on—the fat ones, milk-fed, and climbing the ladder to high prices for a year gone. The bulls' pets! Of course, & Co. was quick to remind B. Y. Bang, these were all kiters—undigested and unstable as Billy Hell; but as long as the bull market held strong, good as wheat. Unless a panic bounced into the Street—a regular hell-roarin' panic, like 1907—anybody who'd sell short on Honesdale and those others might as well kiss da-da to his money. However——

"I shall make a deposit now sufficient to cover transactions of the first day," the white-faced customer was saying. He drew from a neat wallet a certified check on a downtown trust company for a sum considerably larger than Bang had considered demanding as margin. "I do not think," the customer continued, "there will be any call for more margin. Now, if you please, the receipt——"

Bang's pen hesitated at a blank line in his receipt form.

"Raoul Flack," the other prompted, then pocketed the bit of paper. Without more words, he trotted out to the street.

This Tuesday when Raoul Flack, little father of the Incomparables—expatriate band of Europe's most scientific criminals—left his deposit to cover an extraordinary bear campaign in the Street was the day following the arrival of Prince Otto, ambassador extraordinary, at the Buxton, Broadway's newest citadel of magnificence.

Any night in winter, when the quick dark has fallen between the cocktail and the *café au kirsch,* Broadway has its magic hour such as you'll find nowhere on earth. That is when the late

diners in the restaurants and the early diners in the uptown homes and clubs meet in two solidly flowing streams, guttering and eddying like a tide among rocks about the cave mouths of the theaters. Up and down the white street and into the cross rips of side streets swells the ebb and flux of gayety, of wealth and adventure incarnate in wide eyes of youth. Here are little whirlpools where a bedizened carriage starter halts a limousine and with the air of an emperor swings back a door to give a satisfying flash of a girl's face within, of trailing furs, glint of jewels, trim silken ankle outthrust to find the step. Here a backwash in the foyer of the opera, seen through swinging glass panels; shoulders of women gleaming startlingly under the dropping of wraps; coiffures like ancient cameos; severe black-and-white regalia of men with patrician faces and hair sleeked back from brows. Down between the ebullient sidewalk tides rove the dragons of acetylene—veering, charging, nuzzling the curb; eyes of automobiles staring white and lidless. And, above all, the man-made firmament of Broadway—stars, comets, nebulæ, all glowing, crackling in jewel design, stabbing at the eye with a steady mechanical dreadfulness. Light leaps down from these intricate constellations; light streams from tier upon tier of windows in office buildings, shops, hotels; light burns blue as heart of sapphire from the heavy arcs at every corner and café entrance.

Broadway's thousands at theater hour breathe light, drink light, soak light into their veins. Theirs a world wherein light is pervasive as air—and as little sensed.

At eight-two o'clock on a Friday night—the Friday following the coming to town of Prince Otto, the ambassador—every light on Broadway for a half mile either way of the Forty-second Street hub flicked out. Broadway, the street and its iridescent bounding walls, was plunged into the subcellar of night.

Bang! A manhole cover at the Forty-second Street crossing leaped twenty feet in air and crashed down on a taxi's top. A gout of blue and yellow flames spurted out to paint the backs of folk madly scrambling for protection. Bang—bang! Two more stripes of weird hell-fire in Longacre, a block north.

Then from right and left, north and south sounded the soul-wrenching wailing of sirens and stuttering glang—glang-glang of engine gongs. Apparatus, answering a fire alarm, was boiling down into the black street from a dozen houses.

The panic was completed. All up and down the long alley of darkness, treble screech of women, bellow of men, mad charging of terrified herds out of restaurant, hotel, and cabaret.

II.

The broad lobby of the Hotel Buxton, place of Byzantine magnificence, known in the racy vernacular of Broadway as "Millionaires' Walk," was crowded with sleekly dressed folk when the lights suddenly went blank. Women and their escorts, coming out of the various dining rooms to take autos to the theater, collided with the idlers in the lobby, became hopelessly mixed, lost their heads. Clerks behind the onyx-and-mahogany desk began to bellow orders for "Everybody, sit down!" Then the wail of the sirens converging upon the Buxton—for it was from that point an alarm had been turned in the instant of the dousing of the lights—and the precipitating touch was added to panic. The broad spaces between heavy pillars were filled with surging, hysterically yelling guests. Firemen carrying lanterns shoved their way through the milling pack, trailing flat ribbons of hose after them.

Somehow order was wrenched out of chaos after the grumbling firemen had departed. The flicker of candles began to streak the gilt-incrusted walls of lobby and dining room. Women laughed in high-pitched voices as they called to their escorts through the dark. A genius in charge of the taxis at the curb gave an order which swung a dozen cars into position like gun batteries and brought their lights streaming through long windows to illumine the black caves indoors.

Broadway was not long recovering from the panic; even though none of the theaters could raise their curtains, and the hasty requisition of candles made ghost walks of the cabarets, the careless crowd was in a humor to make a joke of the whole phenomenon after the first flush of hysteria. The lights came on again after a matter of two hours. Engineers from the electric company traced the break to a place in the new Broadway subway, under construction. The point of a pick had been driven through the gutta-percha skin of a great cable of feed wires into the live nest within; the blowing up of the manholes and extinguishing of every light on a mile-long circuit had been an instantaneous result. That this was an audacious piece of vandalism there was no doubt; if the pick wielder had not worn rubber gloves—found with the pick near the point of puncture—he would have been instantly killed. Yet beyond the spirit of senseless mischief, no motive for darkening Broadway appeared, either to the electricians or the detectives summoned from the Tenderloin station. A dozen theatrical managers mourned their loss of a night's box-office receipts; twice that number of cabaret owners and restaurateurs cried over liquors that were not spilled, and—on the surface of things—that was an end to the incident.

But in truth it was only the beginning.

Swift machinery of rumor was set in motion a full hour before the lights came back to Broadway. And in this wise:

A ring at the telephone of the night city editor's desk, and a voice, slightly Gallic, saying: "Have you heard that Prince Otto, the ambassador, is strangely missing? No? It is quite true. From his rooms at the Hotel Buxton—during the period of darkness—he was not even fully dressed. They will tell your reporter about it at the hotel. Good-by."

Six night city editors received this smash in their ears. Twice that number of news gatherers were unleashed from six offices. Publicity, that great leveling engine of the city, was thundering on the trail of sensation.

Ere this the desk force of the Hotel Buxton knew that something untoward had passed in the dark. Their first intimation came less than fifteen minutes after the dousing of the lights, when a high-pitched plaint reached their ears out of the confusion across the mahogany:

"My master, der brince, he iss gone bei his apartment! I fear somedings—come oop and examine!"

It was not until the prince's valet became troublesome with his insistence that the attention of the distracted executive staff could be pried away from the larger worries of the moment. To quiet the voluble mouth, the assistant manager of the hotel found Boylan in the dark and sent him up to room No. 1552. Boylan—Roger Boylan, the detective without frills, plain, stub-toed, and competent disciple of the old school of crime detection without the use of stage properties—was serving the Buxton temporarily as house detective. His ability was not above the position, for just at this time the famous Mordaunt pearls happened to be under the Buxton roof, and a discreet management was taking no chances.

Boylan accompanied the flustered valet to Prince Otto's apartment, lit by a candle. When he entered the bedroom, he saw several noteworthy things —first, a light chair overturned and with one of its legs broken; secondly, an evening coat, silk waistcoat, overcoat, and silk topper neatly laid out on the bed. On the dresser before the mirror lay a pair of white gloves, the upper one with its wrist turned back as if a wearer had been interrupted in putting it on his hand; a black leather case from which studs and cuff links had been taken; a box of evening ties, with one missing.

"My master, der brince, was preparing for the opera," the valet was chattering. "To Washington he iss returning by midnight train—see, here his bag, all packed by myself, and his tronk already gone. I go to secure tickets. I am not out of the room ten minutes when baff! the lights disabbear. Back immediately I come. He iss gone! Here iss his coat—his waistcoat—his hat. In his shirt he makes a disabbearance."

"The prince—did he break that chair?" asked Boylan, indicating the overturned Louis Quinze affair of gilt-and-rose upholstery.

"Of course not! Der brince, my master, has nefer der grosses rages."

The detective took the candlestick from the dresser and knelt to the floor, sweeping the feeble point of flame slowly back and forth between the bed's foot and the door. A handkerchief lay there. He brought it close to the candle flame and examined it carefully. In one corner was a crown in fine needlework. About an inch away, the soft linen bore a curious, horseshoelike stamp, as of fine nail heads. Boylan looked at this stamp quizzically, then arose and carried the handkerchief to the dresser. There he spread it flat and with a soft pencil traced the curve of the indented mark.

"Got one of the prince's shoes handy?" he queried, without looking up from his task. The valet hastily threw back the lid of the traveling case and brought to Boylan a patent-leather walking shoe. This Boylan set, sole down, on the handkerchief, settling the line of the heel as nearly as possible on the traced outline. He ran his pencil about the heel and lifted the shoe. Now two penciled curves were marked on the handkerchief; they coincided at the top, but separated by almost a quarter inch along the outward spring.

"Your master has large feet," the detective mused. "Larger of the two, at least." And he tucked the handkerchief in his pocket.

But one other clew confirmed the story of a struggle marked by the broken chair and the alien boot heel on the handkerchief. Under the bed, where it had rolled, Boylan found a tiny disk of pearl shell edged with platinum—a handsome shirt stud for evening wear. This he compared with the pattern of the waistcoat buttons in the silk garment on the bed. They were not at all similar. The valet assured him the studs he himself had placed in the prince's shirt were one of a pattern with the waistcoat buttons.

Here, then, was the fragmentary story of the prince's levitation as these few clews drew it for the detective's eye: A man in evening dress, probably not so heavy as the ambassador—for his foot was smaller—had come to this room in the dark and while the prince was finishing his late dressing alone. There had been a short struggle before the Buxton's distinguished guest was overpowered; the intruder had coerced Prince Otto into leaving his room half dressed as he was, without waistcoat, evening coat, hat, or overcoat. The invader had forced the prince to leave his room and taken him —where?

Beyond the outer door of the apart-

ment the trail stopped abruptly. Not a sign, not a clew in the long, carpeted tunnel of blackness which was the hall. Search of every vacant room on the fifteenth floor, which was the level of Prince Otto's apartment, and of every other unoccupied and unlocked suite in the great hotel failed to reveal a hint. While bell hops and clerks from the executive staff were prosecuting this blind groping, Boylan looked to the elevators. Of the six passenger elevators, not a one had moved since the lights went off; their operators did not dare trust the current. One of two freight elevators, in shafts at the far side of the hotel, was in its place at the ground-floor level; the other was missing. After many minutes, the hotel's engineer discovered the second elevator on the bumpers at the bottom of its shaft, which lay at the lowest step of the twenty-story ladder, in the hotel's sub-basement. The head porter and each of his assistants denied, under Boylan's catechism, that any of them had been in the freight elevator after the lights were engulfed.

With an electric torch to guide him, Boylan descended to the sub-basement. It was a dark desert of echoing walls and heavy supporting columns of masonry. Somewhere beyond the feeble stab of the torch the purring of steam and mutter of revolving axles in well-oiled bearings marked the engine room and dynamo, steel heart of all this intricate mechanism for housing wealth. The detective began at the heavy fireproof door, pushed back from the elevator cage to trace ever-widening circles across the cement floor with the white marker of the torch. Footprints he knew he would not find on the resistant face of the made stone; there was not enough dust to register the sweep of a fly's wing. But perhaps—— Here was the missing elevator, pointing to the trail of a kidnaper, blind as the trail's objective might be. Just the primitive hunting instinct which made Roger Boylan competent in his trade urged him on in the half-appreciated hope that something might turn up.

Something did.

He was perhaps thirty feet away from the elevator and out in a black jungle of casks and storage bins when a yellow glint leaped to his eye. He stooped and picked up from the floor a gold intaglio ring. It was a heavy jewel, a trifle exaggerated in taste. In its face was cut a coat of arms.

The valet identified the ornament at once as his master's.

Long before the finding of the ring, however, the fat was in the fire for the distracted executives of the Hotel Buxton. Vainly did they deny to the reporters that they, or any one, had telephoned to the various papers a tale of Prince Otto's disappearance. Without effect did they employ the lie direct and declare that the illustrious prince had gone to the opera, had departed for Washington, had dined out with friends. The big eyes of bell hops reflected cloaked mystery; all the hotel buzzed with rumor. Then, when secret-service men, hastily summoned from the New York office of the government bureau, came to take up the trail of the vanished ambassador, murder was out. One of the news gatherers —he of the liveliest imagination—saw in the coincidence of a suddenly darkened Broadway and a false fire alarm sent in from the Buxton with the disappearance of Prince Otto the finesse of a plot extraordinary, far-reaching; and his managing editor, catching over the wire a glow from the reporter's creative spark, sent rushing to his Washington correspondent an order:

> See president; ask him what effect kidnaping of Prince Otto will have on present delicate relations.

Before midnight the darkening of Broadway, as a news feature, dwindled

to second-page importance, and the levitation of Prince Otto was the whirlwind sensation. Wires sang the tale out to all the ramifications of a great news agency's ganglia. Cables took up the rote and dot-and-dashed it to a certain European capital, where it was bound to create tremendous interest. Down in Washington, an embassy building blazed into light and a corps of underlings hurled themselves at the task of whipping into code the hectic report of a first secretary to his home government. In Washington, too, correspondents hurried to the White House despite the lateness of the hour, only to be met by an implacable black face which said: "The pres'dunt hab nothin' to say." But the president, alone in his study, was sitting at the end of a long-distance telephone, calling anxiously upon the New York office of the secret service for every scrap of news concerning the hunt for Prince Otto.

This was the eve of that Saturday when he, the president, must give to Prince Otto, the ambassador, that answer to a Certain Puissant Potentate's pressing question.

When the secret-service men came winging in taxis to the Buxton, they listened somewhat perfunctorily to the statement of the square-toed, stocky little man introduced to them as Boylan, house detective. Of course, so far as he'd gone he'd done very well—they said this much patronizingly; and would Boylan show them just whereabouts in the sub-basement he had picked up Prince Otto's ring? The lights had come on again when the four government sleuths and Roger Boylan descended to the subterranean vastness. Boylan pointed where the ring had lain. It was on a direct line between the freight elevator and a distant wooden wall perhaps a hundred feet away. This was the temporary partition erected by the diggers of the new Broadway subway against the time when masons should come with hollow tile to brick off the Buxton's cellar from the great trench through which traffic would thunder; just heavy boards laid end to end to the height of the sub-basement's ceiling. The searchers moved slowly down the length of the wooden wall. They found a small door roughly cut in the face of pine. It was fastened on the opposite side; but a slicing bar brought from the furnace room soon forced the padlock, and the secret-service men stepped through into heavy gloom. Boylan would have followed, but the door was unceremoniously slammed against him.

Your city-wise and blasé Broadway wiseacre may know the matrimonial adventures of Jean Wiggs, latest bareback dancer at Henri's, better than the history of his immediate ancestors; he is an encyclopedia of things to eat and drink, and his knowledge of the White Street's naughtiness is profound. But he knows nothing about the ground moles who are digging out the core of his beloved street right under his feet. If this Mr. Worldly-wise Man should step out of one of the lobster conservatories some night, cover his immaculate broadcloth and linen with a yellow slicker, and clamber down a ladder—just one ladder—he'd find himself in a new world. There, under the cold light of sputtering arcs, he would see the hard-rock men—tough fellows from the Cœur d'Alene and Cripple Creek—riding bucking drills against the bleak face of Manhattan schist; swarthy laborers from the south of Europe bending their backs over the muck pile to fill iron "gondolas" with slabs of rock ripped out by dynamite; timberers driving wedges under the foot-square supports that keep Broadway from tumbling into the hole. Just under the timber roof, and clinging to it like fat serpents, run the black and glistening coils of electric cables—thousands of wires carrying the current on its mis

sion of labor to light Broadway, to whirl the human voice across space. Rough flumes link together the broken ends of sewers. Great square mats of woven rope, like ship's fenders, hang sailwise from the overhead beams, ready to harness the rending dynamite. Of all Greater New York, here, indeed, is unexplored country in its very heart.

But only at the head of construction is all this activity, this weird terra incognita of scaffolding, derrick, and ladderwork. Behind, where the ground moles have finished their burrowing and the masons and tracklayers have not yet come, stretches a black catacomb—blank space, housed over by wood and invaded by no man. Two miles of it.

The conjunction of the ring found on the subbasement floor and the nearby exit from cellar to subway pointed for the secret-service men an obvious trail. Particularly when they discovered fresh footprints—the prints of two pairs of feet—in a patch of mud just beyond the rude door. The ring, they reasoned, had been dropped by the kidnaped prince to mark the flight of his captor. They followed the subway trench to the first exit below the Buxton—a ladder springing upward to the interior of a disused shaft house, from which access to the street was offered by a door. When they found the staple holding the padlock on this door drawn, forced from within, they held this proof positive that the ambassador's abductor had rushed him up to the street by this exit. Darkness mantled Broadway at that time; even a man in shirt sleeves could have been hustled into a waiting automobile and away without attracting notice. Indeed, the secret-service officers found several people who were sure they had seen such a shirt-sleeved man in the company of one other—some said two—being helped into a limousine there in the lee of the shaft house. But it was too dark to read the number of the machine.

So pursuit halted at the end of a blind alley.

For all but Roger Boylan.

Boylan had "held out on" the secret-service men when they came to the Buxton and questioned him. Why he did this Boylan could not have explained satisfactorily to himself, nor did he try. Perhaps it was resentment of the superior attitude of the government sleuths; perhaps just professional eagerness to stay with the game and pursue unhindered clews of his own discovering. Whatever the impulse, the fact is that he turned over to the government agents only the gold intaglio ring and the story of its discovery. He kept the handkerchief with the heel print on it and the shirt stud he had found under the bed in Prince Otto's room. The only possible clews to the identity of the kidnaper were his and his alone. With these he was ready to tilt a free lance with the best of them.

III.

Headlines in all the papers the following morning were black and menacing. News sharps in the several editorial rooms, who during the past month of acute diplomatic strain had allowed themselves to do some guessing, slipped a couple of pegs in their conservatism and guessed more daringly. The words "Prince Otto" were linked in heavy type with bombshells of printer's point as "Crisis" and "Ultimatum." What lay behind the disappearance of the ambassador under indications of duress could not be conjectured as easily as what impended when this grave news became generally known in a certain European capital. "A deliberate attempt of enemies of the United States," said the radical *Blade,* "to force us into a false position, from which there will be no escaping short of war."

All this sort of thing hit Wall Street like a blast of Dakota wind on a con-

servatory of orchids. So delicately nurtured an infant is the war baby, so petted and coddled by kind bulls—far different temperamentally, these bulls, from the pastured species—that even a hint of disturbance of the market by affairs outside brings a colic. As some wag on the curb put it: "The foot that rocks the war baby plays hell." When the Exchange opened for Saturday business, Honesdale Steel stood comfortably at ninety four and one-eighth; Amalgamated Aëros were hardly four points short of that. The first hour of trading clipped two points from the one and three and one-eighth from the other. These and all the other infants in the war crèche were, to adopt a sporting term, saved by the bell, which was the noon signal for the end of Saturday's trading.

Incidentally, B. Y. Bang, shady broker, knuckled the lines in his forehead with a perplexed air as he totted up in his books a sum in five figures to the credit of the "X. Y." account. And he wondered where the little rooster with the bloodless hands got his info on this impending bear raid. He wondered—and he wondered.

Roger Boylan did not read the papers; he was too busy. The minute the shops were opened on Saturday, he visited a certain fashionable jewel establishment on Fifth Avenue, whose manager he knew on terms of intimacy and mutual service. Him he buttonholed and drew to a secluded counter. In a few words Boylan gave the true facts of last night's prodigy, then unrolled a wisp of tissue paper and displayed the pearl-and-platinum stud.

"I want to know the name of the man who made this," he bluntly demanded. The jeweler put a glass to his eye and turned the button's lower side up for searching inspection.

"I thought so," he murmured. "Recognized the style. And here's the trademark. See Simpson, manufacturing jeweler, Maiden Lane."

Boylan pocketed the precious stud and hurried down to the street of diamonds in the financial district. Simpson, head of the firm he visited, recognized the stud as of his output. It was a recent design, Simpson said, but a poor seller; he'd withdrawn it from the market within a month after turning it out.

"Good!" Boylan murmured hopefully. "Give me a list of the places where you sold this style of furniture."

Saturday was a bad day for the business Boylan now embarked upon—bad because the next day was Sunday, and all he wanted to do had to be crowded into those few hours before the retail jewelers closed for a day. Nor was a short cut to be employed. Nothing but slow, painstaking grind ahead.

From Simpson's city salesman he procured a list of the purchasers of this line—nine retailers in the greater city and one in Newark, New Jersey. Then commenced the round of the eight within striking distance. Boylan made the jumps in a taxicab, and the little clock which ticked off the dollars sped not half so fast as the city clocks that mocked him with the impetuous sweep of their minute and hour hands. The first three jewelers visited had sold none of Simpson's evening-wear set. The next one yielded the names and addresses of two purchasers. A Brooklyn retailer had three purchasers on his books—all women scouting on early Christmas shopping.

Just ten minutes before the hour of closing, Boylan, in a fashionable Fifth Avenue shop, was examining a memorandum of the names and addresses of four purchasers of sets similar to sample. Not a flicker of gray eyes, not a tremor of the pencil point as he methodically copied into a notebook the data offered. One of the entries read:

Gaspard Detournelles, No. 1177 West Ninety-first Street.

Gaspard Detournelles, the exquisite, the consummate actor in society's little comedies; Gaspard Detournelles, field marshal of all Raoul Flack's predatory raids against intrenched wealth! Twice before had Boylan's groping fist touched but not quite gripped the gloved hand of Detournelles. Now a third time, and at the end of a trail blazed by a pearl-and-platinum shirt stud. Roger Boylan was tremendously pleased at this unexpected revelation; in part because he had vaguely anticipated it. None but the Incomparables and their infinitely resourceful master, Flack, the bloodless thinker, could have dared attempt such an extraordinary crime as the kidnaping of Prince Otto, much less conceived it. On prior occasions, Boylan had matched his wits against theirs unaided and in tense solo games of swift deduction and lightning action. Now again!

As he wedged himself into the crowded uptown subway train, he scanned the headlines of the late-afternoon editions. They screamed prophecy of woe. "Emperor Suspects Trick," bellowed a top line of block type, and scarcely smaller print told how "War Lord Holds U. S. Responsible for Safety of Prince Otto." Another heading bleated the resentment of Congress at the suspected withholding of important information on the crisis by the president. Still a third barked about panic on Wall Street: "War Rumors Sicken War Babies."

Roger Boylan, plain detective, wondered if he had grasped the tail of a comet.

It was eleven o'clock by the neat Dresden-china timepiece on the mantel, and for two hours Boylan had been enjoying alone the hospitality of Detournelles' apartment on West Ninety-first Street. He sat by a shaded lamp, a handsome volume of art reproductions from the Louvre galleries spread across his knees, on a table handy to his reach Scotch, siphon, and ice. These incidentals he had found for himself after letting himself into the rooms with a skeleton key. He was in a comfortable glow of pleasurable anticipation.

The faint click of a key in a lock, and Boylan's hand leaped to the light to extinguish it. He sat tensed in the darkness. Sound of voices coming down the hallway without; of a door opened; a hand fumbling for the lighting switch—Boylan could hear the scratching of finger nails against woodwork. Then light leaped down from an overhead cluster.

The detective looked up from his volume of art prints to greet with a smile the two standing bolted to the floor—Gaspard Detournelles and Raoul Flack. Their eyes were not on the detective's, but were glued to the hand that lay carelessly flung across the arm of the chair. It gripped a short, stumpy automatic with a glint of competency about the rim of its staring, blank eye. The unwavering gaze of that dead eye was hypnotic.

"Be seated, gentlemen, and take a weight off your shoes," Boylan cordially invited. "Flack—Detournelles, m' son, have a drink. Ice here—Scotch —— No, no, Detournelles, leave that door closed. Lock it. That's right; now bring the key to me, please."

As the young Frenchman reluctantly approached Boylan's chair and held out his hand with the key, the detective took the tips of his fingers in his and scrutinized the palm. He chuckled.

"Uh-huh! I thought as much. Blisters, eh? Well, my boy, you can't do mucker's work in the subway for three dollars per without scarring up your hands some. Still"—he chuckled again —"you learned a whole lot about subway connections with the Buxton. Bright boy!"

A dull flush was creeping up over the Frenchman's saturnine features. Raoul Flack, still standing where the flicking on of the lights had caught him, seemed to have shriveled into his clothes; his face had the leathery-white look of a slashed potato withered in the air.

"Sit down!" Boylan again commanded. "Might as well be comfortable until the wagon comes. And we'll talk while we wait. Flack, I'm onto the whole game, you see. What I don't know—and I'd just as soon admit it—is why you pulled it. Are you working for somebody on the other side—somebody who's playing a deep game to get us into war?"

Raoul Flack had regained his composure by a steely effort. Now he smiled back at the detective. But the carbon points in the cavernous eye sockets shot light that denied mirth.

"You are wonderful," he murmured, showing his teeth in a sudden lifting of the lip. "You know everything. Why inquire?"

"Well, let it go at that for the present," Boylan returned, in great good humor. "Next question: Where's this prince fellow?"

"Ah, M'sieu Boylan, you jest," Flack purred. "Surely you, worker of miracles, know that."

While Boylan kept his eyes steadily on the twain, and the automatic supplied a third watchful one, his left hand went searching across the table beside him, found a telephone, and moved it closer. Without emphasis, the detective spoke again:

"You, Flack—and get this, too, Detournelles: I'm going to call Spring 3100; that's police headquarters. I'm going to tell them to send the wagon for two birds I've got here, against whom there's enough evidence for thirty years each—you know, Flack; not only a kidnaping charge, but the Engwald business, the Edgerton Miles sapphire collar——"

"But that does not restore this important Prince Otto to his very necessary duties in Washington," the white-headed little man interrupted. "If he is not in Washington in a very few days, the consequences to this country—ah, *quel malheur!*"

Roger Boylan had launched his bluff, and it had been met by bluff, quick as a sword flash. The detective was wise enough to know his limitations—to realize he could not bulldoze this suave little man with the lynx eyes. Yet was he bull-headed enough to push his *tour de force.* He lifted the receiver from the hook. "Gim-me Spring 3100," he said.

"Wait!" Flack held up a white hand. "Listen to me. I will compromise. You cannot afford to jail us without knowing where Prince Otto is. We shall never tell if you do. And disaster will visit your country." A hoarse growling came from the black mouth of the telephone; the police operator at headquarters was on the wire. Boylan turned the transmitter mouth down on the table. "Go ahead," he grunted.

"For our freedom we give to you Prince Otto, the ambassador," Flack snapped. "Jail us, and his face is never seen again. War comes within a week. Have your choice."

Boylan never did swifter thinking in his life. What the papers had screeched passed across his mind. He faced a situation too great for his imagination to compass. That he, Roger Boylan, should hold such tremendous destinies in his hand!

"All right, headquarters—false alarm," he growled into the telephone transmitter, and hung up. Then to the bloodless little man with the bright, burning eyes, "Shoot!" he said.

Call it a hundred square feet of Tibet in the heart of New York—that grave-

yard. When a merchant prince built around it his ten-story department store twenty years ago, a few people of delicate sensibilities denounced his act as impious desecration. But the merchant prince glazed all of the windows save a few in the elevator shaft, which looked down on this sacred ground of the old dead, and people forgot they were buying ribbons, stovepipe, and bath towels almost over hallowed bones. A few hectic write-ups in the Sunday papers, and this burial place was forever blotted from sight and memory of busy Manhattan. Then, in recent times, a mysterious shift of trade moved all the shopping district from the avenue to a mile uptown. With other great stores in the neighborhood, this one hedging about the forgotten grave ground had to be abandoned. Now its shell stands bleak and untenanted, dusty eyes looking down on the roaring shuttles of the elevated and the street below, once populous with shoppers. More than ever before is this plot of tottering tombstones cloistered from all the world.

In a sexton's tool house, built against one wall of the great stone box inclosing the dead's quarter acre, Roger Boylan found Prince Otto that night. He was padlocked from escape, alone, with a tiny kerosene stove to keep him from freezing and a dozen cans of soup to sustain him. Much shouting to the blank walls surrounding him had robbed the prince of his voice. Isolation in this mold-spotted prison, the cold, terror, the effects of a blow from a revolver butt on his head during the struggle with Detournelles in the prince's bedroom at the Buxton—these circumstances had reduced the kidnaped diplomat to a pitiable state of collapse and semihysteria.

It was near two o'clock of Sunday morning when a taxi whizzed up to the curb before the door of the Hotel Buxton. Boylan, thrusting his head out of the dropped window, lustily shouted for a porter. Between them they half carried Prince Otto into the lobby and up to his bed on the fifteenth floor. When the hotel manager, roused from sleep and with a bath robe thrown over his pajamas, attempted to embrace Roger Boylan as he clamored for the story of how the hotel's precious guest had been recovered, the detective adroitly dodged both the salute and the question.

"Aw, just went out and found him," said Detective Boylan. Nor did he ever commit himself further, not even to Prince Otto.

The very handsome cross of the Order of St. Odowic came to him a few weeks after the clearing of the diplomatic clouds, together with a draft on a certain European bank of prominence for the equivalent of ten thousand dollars. Mrs. Roger Boylan wears the cross on the end of a gold chain once every year. That is on March 17th, when the Hibernians give their St. Patrick's ball at Terrace Garden.

Oh, yes, there's B. Y. Bang, shady broker, to be disposed of in a concluding paragraph. Well, Mr. Bang never, never could get it through his head why that little white rooster who opened that "X. Y." account with him and cleaned up something like twenty thousand dollars on the first day of the bear raid on war babies never came to get his money. Never wrote; never wired for it. Just dropped out of sight. Of course Bang held the cash, both principal and fat increment, for a certain time, and then, when the mysterious X. Y. still remained silent——

Well, pretty soft for B. Y. Bang.

The next story in this series—entitled "Virus X"—will appear in the December 20th POPULAR.

Azulito, the Whistler

By Buck Connor

Author of "If a Horse Could Talk," Etc.

The War Zone was a bigger round-up than Azulito, the blue roan from Texas, had ever seen. It was a big *man's*-war that he had come to take part in; but he had his own private war to wage

AZULITO, the blue roan from west Texas, shifted his weight from the right hind foot to the left and stood again hip-shot fashion in a sunny corner of the remount pen of the English army and dreamed, it may be, of cool winds that blew across the far mesas whence he came. Across the high, board fence a switch engine, drilling cars, shrieked at a crossing; stock cars, emptied of their tight-packed loads of horses and mules, destined to hear the roar of the battles raging across seas, slammed together in a way to make the blue roan flatten his ears as at an enemy. Only last night had Azulito felt, as well as heard, that jarring smash of cars coming together with the screech of set brakes and the shuffling feet of the animals. As a foretaste of what the future held in the way of noise and clamor—and then death, merciful only when swift—the long journey of the contract buyer's train had been amply enlightening as to the discomfort one may bear and still be able to roll over three times afterward in the comparative luxury of a corral that has earth dust beneath and the blue sky above, and mangers piled high with hay, and troughs where one may drink when one is thirsty—provided one is willing to ignore the queer taste of the "dope" which protects one from shipping fever—and, for company, horses and mules of every walk in life and from every corner of the Southwest. Acquaintances there were, with whom a companionable horse might gossip; friends there were, with whom Azulito had traveled many a hard trail under the weight of wind-browned riders as hard muscled as the horses that bore them; friends there were—and some who were not friends.

"Looks as if all the outfits are here," remarked an old 3Y horse. "I never did see such a crowd, except one year at Cheyenne. I roped there in '10."

"Who was that O T gray that just passed with his ears laid back?" asked a blazed-faced sorrel. "I've seen him edgin' up fer a swipe at yuh with his heels, Roanie, a couple uh times while you wasn't lookin'."

"Oh, he's just a mess uh brain storms," replied the blue roan.

"Seems then like he'd organize his few brains into a workin' unit an' try 'n' make hisself a regular hand. He's sure got it in for you, Roanie; yuh want to watch out fer him," commented the sorrel, as he nodded a friendly greeting to a brown mule just joining the group.

"'Pears like he would, don't it?" returned the blue roan placidly.

"Scuse me, fellows," said the blazed-faced sorrel, lifting his head to the bunch, "this is Skeeter, the nigh wheeler of the wagon crew from my outfit in Colorado. Oh, he's served his time;

he's headed out to join a mountain battery—whatever that means."

The mule returned the nods from the little group and slipped into the place they made for him while they settled down again to range gossip.

"Look!" said Skeeter. "O T is over there throwin' in with that Arizona outfit and talkin' 'bout yuh, Roanie. I heard him givin' them your pedigree as I came by."

"Well, he won't get any too much of a welcome with them broom-tail bronks," observed the blazed-faced sorrel, with a lazy switch of his tail at a pestering fly. "I sure do hate a knocker."

O T came wandering back from the corner of the remount pen where the gang from Winslow had not welcomed him. "Loadin' up the strangers, Azulito?" he taunted as he went by. "'Bout all yuh ever do is to crow yer own doings."

Three or four of the old D Bar horses that knew him laid flat their ears and bunched their rumps in a battery for self-defense. O T, noting the significance of the move, looked at Azulito and turned back his upper lip as at something too offensive for words, and went his contemptuous way.

"If I hit my guess right, that hoss is sure spoilin' fer trouble," spoke up a black horse branded Box O, from Oklahoma. "'N' sometimes in crowds like this they get accommodated, too. Of course, it's not my funeral, but 'Quién sabe?' as that brown pony from New Mexico says."

"Why don't yuh take it *outa him,* Roanie?" blurted one of the group, a horse from the Hashknife range. "I certainly wouldn't let 'im lord me around like that; you know you've got heaps of backin' here."

"I'm doin' all I can to keep out of trouble," said Azulito, laying his head over the neck of the blazed-faced sorrel. "Maybe when they cut and class this bunch for that range they call the War Zone, I'll get rid of him for all time. I'm a peaceable-minded cuss, myself."

"Well, all I can say is, that you are sure taking an awful lot of his four-flushin' about here. Not me—I'd make him high-tail it across this whole State of Texas," insisted the Hashknife hand.

"I guess they'll do the cuttin' an' classin' to-morrow," volunteered Skeeter. "I heard Ted Brooks, the foreman, dividin' his crew for the work. Artillery stuff will be worked first—teams mostly; they'll be branded broad arrow on left hip and U on right hip. I heard him say that means war stock, bred in America. I'm hopin' my teammate, the off wheeler, is cut with me; that's why we've been hangin' out together so much. I don't like this packin' game; pullin's my line."

"Now you fellows know," continued the blue roan, his mind clinging to the insult he had chosen to ignore, "an old hand like me, whose range trainin' is his pride, sure hates to be forced to take on any such roughneck as that O T gray. I've always tried to avoid this messin' of heels and pawin' the air with such ridge runners. I'm trying to make good for my boss—he expects me to make the limit price of one hundred and sixty-five dollars. I heard him tell the buyer that I could not be sold 'at the halter,' and that he felt sure they could not 'bush' me, as I've gathered they call cutting the price. He even took the bunch with the understanding that I'd be cut to him with the outfit."

"What's that?" asked the Box O horse, as all hands stretched their necks in the direction of the feed mangers in the main pen, whence came the sound of squealing and the sharp impact of battering hoofs. "That's his game, eh?" he continued, as the bunch shifted themselves so as to be better able to see what was happening. "That mare an'

colt never bother any one; he must have just up and tried to run it on her by biting her youngster. Well, she sure is a wolf, by the way she's made him hit the back trail!" This last as the O T gray was dodging to escape the bay mare's bites, which tactics she adopted after slamming him with her heels, as several of her range friends came loping up to take a hand.

"Well, you know yourself, Roanie," spoke up a buckskin T Bar horse, "he always had a pick on the young stuff at the home ranch—even stirred up a mess uh trouble with that measly ole spavined burro that the boss' kid rode."

"How's it come that he's always singling you out for his slurs, Roanie?" asked the blazed-faced sorrel with the inquisitiveness of the born gossip.

"It was back in '12 at the time of the Brazos drive," explained Azulito, scratching his slate-colored nose thoughtfully upon a post. "It was during the horse round-up. We had been gathered from the ranges along the Pecos—you know there's always new hands in the *remuda,* and the O T gray was one of 'em. That fool horse was plumb locoed and could not be trusted even in the rough string, let alone being put in the night-hoss class. The *segundo* told Wart Simms to rope him out an' take the pitchin' outa him. Wart and I were top hands on that outfit, and, after cinching me up to the three-finger limit, he gets down his rope and built in after the gray—sorta cautious-like at first, with his loop draggin' low to keep from scaring the wise ones, who were millin' with heads ducked low to avoid the chance of a loop settlin' over 'em. O T gets his ears and eyes as high as one of them s'ciety hosses at a stock show, and Wart makes a pretty toss of his rope, and it lights plumb round and full over O T's head; but with all his feeble-mindedness that hoss savvied enough to duck and back out of the loop 'fore it tightened up, an' breaks for t'other side of the *remuda.* Wart, he rides me through the herd with his eyes peeled on O T, who was edgin' the *remuda* in its milling. Sudden like O T makes a dash fer the brakes something like a mile away. Wart, he points me and gives me free rein, and even though O T did figger hisself some stepper, say, he had no chance at all! I just lined out and hit 'turn ole cow' gait—we overhauled him at the very edge of them brakes, and right here I want to say that Wart Simms is sure some dinger with a twine; he just naturally floated that loop onto O T while he was ducking into the brush. Well, the gray run on the rope and popped; he's a pretty hefty youngster, too, but I held his ten-fifty all same as I would a saddle blanket in a norther—sorta enjoyed it, in fact.

"Well, 'fore he knowed it, Mouse Jones was a-settin' on his head holdin' him down while Wart shucked me of my saddle and stacked it right in his big middle and yelled 'Turn 'im loose!' O T got to his feet—after sprawlin'—an' lunged once across the bed-wagon tongue and stood there bench-legged till Wart raked him from his ears to saddle skirts with his spurs. Then he ups and hits out with some buck jumps that was so darn reckless and vicious that it was classy—and Wart a-pawin' him in the shoulders every jump an' whoopin' like a Comanche with his war paint on."

"Hadn't O T ever been combed out before?" asked Skeeter, as all the group nodded appreciatively. "Seems like ——"

"As I was going to say," continued Azulito, "the foreman yelled for the boys who was mounted to circle him; 'fraid he'd do Wart and hisself heaps of damage if not properly hazed. Sure enough, he fetched up in a prairie-dog town and sprawled all over it an' Wart, who got his sides scraped some and got up looking a heap like as if he'd tangled with an old she-bear with cubs. They

gets O T's rigging off and led him into camp, and I noticed his sides were like ribbons where Wart had sure scratched him with them ole star-rowel spurs; Wart must have got in his wool and sang like a locust; as one of the boys who messed with poetry some was always sayin':

"He bawled like a yearlin'
An' he chawed at his tail,
An' headed fer the mesa
Without any trail."

Skeeter hee-hawed uproariously at the story, whereupon Azulito lifted up his ears inquiringly until he remembered that Skeeter was only a mule anyway, and not to be credited with horse manners.

"That's the first time I ever heard it right," said the blazed-faced sorrel, as he moved away from Skeeter disapprovingly.

All ears were perked toward the big gate where Shorty, the feed boy, was unfastening it to allow them the privilege of fresh-filled mangers of mixed alfalfa hay. The sun was fast setting behind the snow-capped summit of Piños Altos and the evening feed hour had arrived. Those who knew the ways of crowded corrals and the confusion of shipping, moved briskly over to drink before the new stuff arrived from the trains already unloading at the chutes. After that they could find themselves a comfortable place where they and their friends could spend the evening together, talking over other days, ignoring the noise from the chutes where the attendants called hoarse commands as they prodded new arrivals out of the cars and down into the pens.

Bedding down in a strange corral, with yet stranger associates, is not what one could call productive of sleep and rest, so the D Bar horses and their friends made camp together that night, for social as well as protective purposes; and, like their riders on the outfits where they had ranged, they gave the evening over to talking of what most interested them—the range and the range things.

When the sun was throwing its first rays over Davis Mountain and the attendants began to stir about, water was turned into the metal troughs and the day's work had been started. Mounted men rode in to separate the herds into colors and classes, and, as fast as this was done, the horses and mules were tagged by the men who trimmed them for inspection, and led by—town horses, range horses, livery cobs, draft horses, and mules for the field artillery, trimly built saddle horses for the cavalry—black horses, bay horses, sorrel horses, and roans—it seemed to Azulito as though all the horses in the world must be gathered there. The almost continuous call "Reject!" or "Accept!" became a monotonous chant that sealed the fates of the animals as they were led forth past the officers in charge of the inspection.

"Whistler!" cried one of the men on the ground, as the O T gray was led forward and back awaiting the final decision of the board.

"What did that feller say?" asked the Box O horse curiously.

"Whistler," answered the brown mule, Skeeter. "I heard Brooks tell that red-faced kid it meant rowdy, and that a horse called that is to be sold only 'at the halter,' which means that he'll be 'bushed.' Couldn't expect anything better of that O T horse."

"Hold that horse until we get through with this artillery stuff!" commanded a gray-haired man, whose military bearing pronounced him head of the Remount Service. "A likely-looking officer's mount."

The attendant, hurried to the limit of endurance, hastily tied O T in a makeshift fashion to the fence close to Azulito and his range pals.

Excitement ran high among the animals as horses were led past; and many

a friendship formed on the range during long drives of trail herds or with round-up wagons or on night guard, was that day broken up for all time.

Azulito, standing with his friends in a far corner, watched the endless procession and wondered what it all meant. This War Zone that men talked of must be a bigger round-up than he had ever seen, to need so many horses. Why did they want the ignorant town horses that knew nothing except to travel along hard-beaten trails, fast or slow as their masters might desire?

He watched, with his chin resting upon the plump withers of the blazed-faced sorrel. He listened, his ears perked forward, to the calls of these strange men. Ted Brooks he knew and trusted. He had felt the prick of spur rowels—had felt and responded to the call. He had felt oftener the playful, flat-handed slap of affection as men passed him by. Ted Brooks had slapped him on the rump the day he had arrived there. Ted Brooks had said: "Hello, Azulito, you blue-nosed old cuss! You're looking like a two-year-old. Don't remember me, hey?" Then he had passed on.

Azulito had looked after him intently, just as he watched him now. Dimly he remembered a long trip on a dark night, and a strange man in the saddle, who groaned and gave queer, reasonless lurches sidewise now and then, though his legs were the legs of a rider. He hoped Ted Brooks was going to the War Zone, and that he would choose him——

"Look out there!" snorted a little bay horse from the Arizona outfit, and dodged enlighteningly away from Azulito as the O T neared him.

The horses scattered to the open as the gray whirled and with a vicious suddenness bombarded the blue roan in the ribs with his heels. Surprised but not in the least intimidated, Azulito squared his powerful body as if making ready to hold a big steer, and returned the attack. He was in the corner and he had been caught off his guard, but he had learned to meet emergencies as they came. His shod heels smashed square on the rump of the gray.

The O T gray grunted at the impact, and Skeeter lifted high his nose and hee-hawed unfeelingly.

"Take it outa him, Roanie!" snorted the blazed-faced sorrel, "he's got it comin' to 'im!"

The gray, treacherous to the marrow of his bones, shook his head contemptuously and pretended to walk away; whirled abruptly with bared teeth and snapped. Azulito pivoted himself on his hind feet, and his withers were scraped clean of hair where the gray's teeth met.

"Better speed up," brayed Skeeter, "if you aim to do business with Roanie!"

Azulito, watching always from the tail of his eye, swung the other way and again landed both feet true upon the rump of the gray. Then, heads lowered and ears flattened to their necks, they circled once.

The O T, ducking still lower, snapped unexpectedly at Azulito's tendons—a treacherous wolf bite that made the bunch snort and lay back their ears at its foulness.

Azulito's heels shot out and away from the attack, and came near catching Skeeter, who had pressed close in his eagerness to miss no move of the fight.

For all the blind rage that filled Azulito now, he was wary; until that moment his had been the attitude of defense, but now he fought to kill—he, the placid-natured friend of all living creatures save the O T gray.

Once he circled, and the gray thought him beaten and bent to repeat the treachery. Then, with lowered head and ears laid flat, the blue roan became a demon of thrashing, iron-shod hoofs.

He caught the gray on the neck and shoulder, and sent him staggering. Another blow, and a bone cracked sharply. The gray went down, trembling, to his knees.

Men shouted, but Azulito did not hear. For the time being, he was a fiend of a horse. His hind feet touched the dust of the corral only to spurn it as they shot upward. Again and again they landed terrifically true upon the beaten gray. Another crack that told of a broken bone, and the gray lay prone in the dust, a heap of quivering flesh that had been a horse before its skull was shattered.

Azulito heard the voice of Ted Brooks shouting angrily to another man, and he turned apathetically that way. He looked down at the O T gray, and felt no triumph in the victory. He knew that the horse was dead. He knew that he had killed. Man-killers he had known—hate-crazed horses who fought the master tribe. He was not as were they, yet he had killed because of his hate. He moved a step away from the gray heap—away from the uneasy little circle of his friends. The men came running, and with them ran Ted Brooks. Azulito gave a shake of his black mane and went forth to meet them. In front of the dead horse he stopped and waited. His flanks heaved, but his eyes were wide and calm. He looked at Ted Brooks.

"He ought to be shot!" shouted the officer from his station. "Murderous beast like that—look out for him, men; he's gone bad!"

Azulito heard, and he knew that the man was speaking of him. But he took another tentative step forward and waited, and his calm eyes were on Ted Brooks. Ted Brooks would understand. He would judge.

As they neared him and saw that he had no impulse toward retreat, the other men hung back. But Ted Brooks walked up and laid his hand upon Azulito's halter. He did not say anything at all, but his touch was friendly. He turned and started back toward the platform, and, as he turned, he snapped his fingers once. Azulito followed him to the platform, obeying that light touch upon his mane.

"Reject!" bawled the officer, even before Azulito had come up to him. "Whistler!" and he added to one at his elbow: "Outrage—to bring an outlaw like that here! I'd put a bullet in his brain if he was mine."

Ted Brooks grinned. "All right—I'll just buy him for myself," he stated calmly. "I need a saddle horse, anyway."

"Whistler!" brayed Skeeter, the irrepressible. "Whistler! What do yuh know 'bout that?"

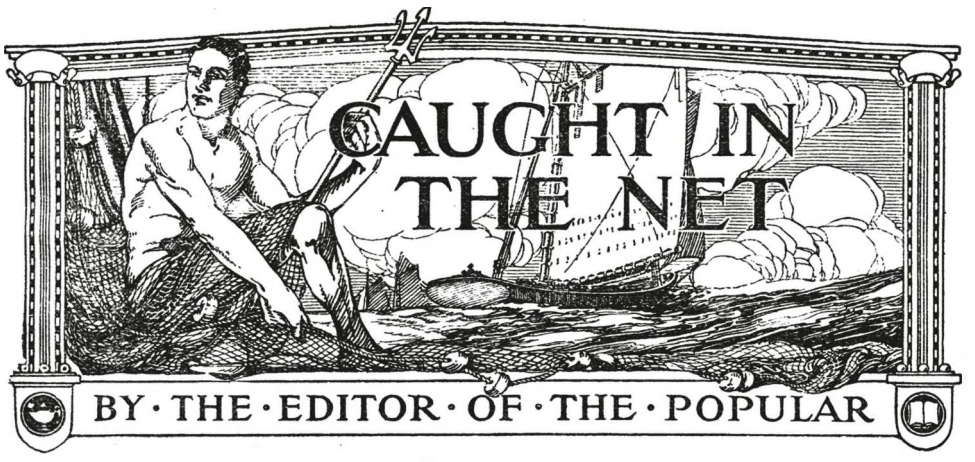
"So long, pardner," nickered the blazed-faced sorrel. "I'm sure glad you took care uh yourself, no matter what they call yuh."

Azulito stopped uncertainly and looked back at the corner where his friends were already closing up the gap he had left. In their life on the range called the War Zone, he would have no part, save as they talked of him and the fight he had made that day. A roustabout team with two attendants was already dragging the carcass of O T away, and the younger horses were sniffing curiously the place where he had fallen.

Whistler they had named him—but there was recompense for the injustice in the friendly hand upon his mane.

"That's all right, boy," Ted Brooks was saying in his ear. "You're too good a hand to go off to the Zone an' get all shot to pieces. You come with me."

Azulito lifted his head for a last glance toward his mates. He turned, and, limping a little, followed docilely his new master—the master he would have chosen—his blue nose resting lightly on Ted Brooks' shoulder.



AMERICAN COLONIES

AMERICAN colonies in foreign cities are harmless aggregations of persons with an independent income who feel more at home away from home. They indulge in mild gossip, and drown a faint nostalgia by believing they are more cultivated than the Philistine plodders in Texas and Iowa. They generally belong to the "old stock." There are few of them left, they believe, and the crude fatherland has grown away from their fineness, and is no longer worthy of their residence.

They become near-citizens of the adopted place, though sometimes not devoted enough to pay taxes in it, and aim perseveringly at its select society. Each step in their climb proves to them that there is recognition for such qualities as theirs in an old civilization. All this is merely human comedy in peace days, but at a time of international crisis they become more significant than their importance warrants. For with the fine perspective which from seven to twenty-three years of absence give, they speak dogmatically of home affairs. And being the only Americans on hand, their opinion becomes the interpretation of American affairs for the nation in which they live. This is where they rise to the importance of being a damage, and even a misfortune.

"The Middle West is somewhat crude. All the best people live in the East. The old families are the saving remnant of America. The rest don't matter."

The information possessed by many French people is largely fed to them by the American Colony—a group of charming and cultivated persons who have resided across the water for many years. The American Colony receives much of its information from the Paris edition of the New York *Herald*, Harvard College, and the group of persons in old Boston, old Philadelphia, and Lenox-Easthampton, East Sixties—New York. They have used a sleeping car when they went through the States where the electoral votes come from. So curiously are these admirable persons out of touch with their country that certain of them issued a list of "five hundred names" of well-known Americans—largely Eastern-trained college professors—in sympathy with the allied cause. And this list they called "the élite." Anything more unrepresentative of American public opinion than the list and the phrase that headed it could not be imagined. Among the gentlemen constantly quoted in France as voicing the sentiment of one hundred

million people is Mr. Whitney Warren—a very generous and high-minded gentleman, a distinguished architect, who expresses the opinions of a very tiny group of Europeanized New Yorkers.

No other race is so clear-headed, so open to ideas, as the French, and yet one finds their officials ignorant of the American situation. They believe that European affairs have been made clear to our nation, and that we have revealed a moral infirmity. The reason is that they are brought into constant contact with the American Colony, who mislead them.

ALCOHOL INSIDE AND OUT

IT is the fashion to anathematize alcohol. One can hardly take up a paper or a periodical without reading of its blight upon the human race. There are innumerable books written on the subject proving alcohol to be the cause of nine-tenths of all crime and misery. It is brother to insanity, and the handmaiden to disease and death. And as we read of this great evil, we are stirred to pity and wrath. Some of us become extremists in our emotional revolt against the ancient enemy and declare that the world would be better without alcohol of any kind or description. Of course this is a mistaken attitude. Alcohol, properly employed, is one of the blessings of earth. Man alone is responsible for its perversion.

Chemists will tell you that, next to water, alcohol is the most important of all chemicals. Put inside a man, it may produce madness and murder, but as an essential element of ether and chloroform it deadens pain immeasurably and enables physicians and surgeons to ameliorate suffering and save life. Without alcohol, neither of these anæsthetics is possible. Put in the stomach, it ruins the organs of digestion, but used in an engine, it develops extraordinary motor power. Fumes of alcohol in the brain lead us to say that the fellow affected is "lit up," and when the chemical is applied as an actual illuminant it is found to possess wonderful qualities both as light and heat. Inside a man, it hardens his liver and hobnails his kidneys; but as a necessary component of shellac, it is invaluable in the arts and industries. It may rob a man's eyes of their luster and clarity, but in the manufacture of brilliant and beautiful dyes alcohol is indispensable.

People do not half realize or appreciate the many uses and services of alcohol. More and more it is being used in the industries. To give you an idea of its wide application, we will name a few of its activities. Alcohol is necessary to the making of medicines, smokeless powder, celluloid, artificial silk, and photographic supplies. If you have any idea of the far-reaching effect of these things, and the capital invested in them, you will come to the conclusion that alcohol outside of the human system is a benefit and not a bane.

By economists and physicists it is predicted that when coal and oil have been exhausted on the earth, alcohol will take their place as motor power, heater, and illuminator. Already alcohol made from potatoes has been successfully used to run taxicabs in Berlin, and it has been burned as an illuminant, incandescent alcohol mantles having been invented.

While the sun shines, it is safe to assert that the supply of alcohol will never be exhausted, for it is the energy of that heavenly body which will keep renewing this invaluable chemical for us through plant life. The stored sunshine in pota-

toes and beets will run our engines, keep us warm, and light our darkness. Perhaps by that time, too, man will have learned that his "evil spirit" may, like the jinni of the Arabian fairy tales, be best as a servant and not as a master—that it is all right imprisoned in motors and lamps, but all wrong freed in his body. We hope so.

THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE DUSTY ROAD

SOIL and soap are two elemental factors in democracy. Nothing establishes cordial relations between persons of different social status so speedily as a mutual need for soap and water; and nothing puts a wider gulf between them than a monopoly of soap by one—and grime by the other. In fact, from this division spring society's most dangerous elements, the great unwashed and the great unsoiled. When a nation develops these extremes it can look out for revolutions.

The motor car, the dusty road, and the wayside tavern bring about a happy union of these democratic faces.

It gives all sorts of people a chance to wear some of the same soil and touch elbows as they wash together in water from the old well.

We chanced to be staying at a rude roadside tavern where many touring cars stopped for dinner. And the line of dirty, tanned, hair-blown men and women of every occupation and every social degree gayly joking each other on their appearance as they waited their turn for the public washpan was a vision of democracy. When a heavily endowed dowager from a five-thousand-dollar touring car asked the country sister from a four-hundred-dollar Ford, who stood next in line, regarding the smudge on her nose, we felt the line of social demarcation was wearing gloriously thin. And what democracy among the gentlemen, as they discussed spark plugs, inside tubes—and boasted of taking the last hill "on high."

Instead of being merely the plaything of the aristocrat, the touring car, with its road fellowship, has become an agent of democracy.

STATES OF OPPORTUNITY

VIII.—"The Land of Yankee Notions"

NOT all the chances of success are in the West. Opportunity knows no geographical limits. In Connecticut one can thrive in any of a hundred industries, as well as enjoy its rolling hills and lakes. Third smallest of the States in area, it is big enough in its manufactures for an ordinary-sized nation. According to the United States census report on manufactures for 1900-'05, out of 359 products manufactured in this country, 249 were made in Connecticut. That is seven-tenths of the whole output.

Tinware was manufactured in the commonwealth as early as 1770, and articles of tin, steel, and iron were peddled about the land by the celebrated Connecticut Yankee in colonial days. By and by came the equally celebrated clockmakers and peddlers. Generations of a family gave themselves to the occupation of building clocks. Of such were the Terrys, the Jeromes, the Robertses, and the Seth Thomases.

After the War of 1812, manufacturing set in at a rapid pace, and within fifty

years Connecticut had taken the lead in many industries. Big textile factories developed, paper mills were founded, brass and copper works increased. The ingenuity of the Connecticut Yankee was evidenced in a thousand ways in his inventions and contrivances. Howe devised and developed the sewing machine, Goodyear discovered how to vulcanize rubber, and Colt perfected and manufactured his firearms.

Figures from the aforesaid United States census report give the most concrete idea of the present status of manufactures in the State. Connecticut is responsible for 80.7% of the rolled brass and copper, 72.2% of the ammunition, 69.4% of the clocks, 66.9% of the plated ware, 51.6% of the brass ware, and 46.9% of the hardware produced in the entire country.

Of course, the manufacture of munitions in Connecticut has multiplied enormously in the last two years of European warfare, and thousands of workers have been given employment at high wages. But the making of ammunition is an old story in the State. Guns and cannon were made there for the army of Washington, and huge chains were cast with which the channel of the Hudson River was to be blocked against the British.

With the United States government's recent program of preparedness before us, it is reasonable to forecast continued prosperity and wealth to Connecticut and those who want "something to do" won't have far to seek in the confines of that State. And those who sojourn there, we may add, need not fear the famous "Blue Laws" of the commonwealth, for they are honored more in the breach than in the observance.

FROM THE BOOKS

TIME was when a book hunter, a book trapper, a book fisherman, was laughed at for his superstitions. The idea that any one could learn to track down and shoot a deer by reading a book! It was preposterous. The lordly guides of the Adirondacks and of the West jeered the timid sportsman who ventured to quote something he had read about a deer's action when it was wounded, or what kind of fly to use when the water was rising after a sharp thundershower. But Van Dyke—that strange, old, outdoor deer-hunting man!—and Gibson, the artist naturalist, and Hensall, of black-bass fame, and Roosevelt, and Kephart, and scores of other writers have changed all this! The sportsman reads more knowledge than a thousand guides ever knew or dreamed of in their own neck of the woods! The book woodsman knows more about the trees, plants, birds, beasts, fish, and all the other forest and water things than a guide ever knew. The sportsman tells his guide where and how to build a fire and whether to drive deer that day, or to still-hunt them, or to watch the ridge gaps. The sportsman knows, and the native woodsman knows he knows, and when the young backwoods boy receives from his patron a few good nature books he is grateful, for through such literature one must now master woods lore. Even Boone and Crockett, Wetzell and Kenton, and all the rest of them would have learned much that would have been useful to them from the modern know-how books of the outdoors.

Rimrock Jones

By Dane Coolidge

Author of "Pecos Dalhart, Rustler," "Hidden Water," Etc.

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS

Small wonder that Rimrock Jones was disillusioned with humanity, for the very town of Gunsight itself owed him its existence, yet the element that considered itself exclusive frowned upon him and his wild ways. They did not stop to consider that Rimrock put the town on the map, and had been duped and robbed legally by old McBain and L. W. Lockhart. Now, undismayed at his hard luck, Rimrock was again prospecting out in the Tecolote hills, and felt sure he had struck it rich. People laughed at him and his claims. When he tried to borrow money to work his mine he found his friends scoffing as usual. However, the little typist for McBain, Miss Mary Fortune, a stranger in Gunsight, told him she would give him her savings, some four hundred dollars, provided Rimrock would give her shares in his mine. So delighted was he that he swore he'd give her half. Then for a long time Mary heard nothing from him. Even when he came to town he neglected to look her up. She was nettled, but kept her own counsel. Meanwhile, Rimrock had done his best with the loaned money, but it was insufficient. One day, through a trick, he manages to get two thousand dollars from the banker Lockhart. Rimrock thereupon vanishes East. He goes to New York and interests capital in his Tecolote property, and returns flamboyant and apparently rich. Gunsight sits up and takes notice. Rimrock remembers all his friends generously. He visits Miss Fortune and offers her thousands of dollars for her share in his Tecolote copper. But she is firm in her demand to remain a stockholder and take her regular profits. Rimrock is annoyed and angry at her stubborn stand, though he admires her spirit. At length, he agrees to her course, and signs an agreement. Troubles pursue Rimrock. He cannot understand Mary. She is elusive. His proposal of marriage she turns down. McBain tries to jump Rimrock's new property after fresh warning from the owner, and Rimrock kills him. Put in jail, Rimrock refuses to retain a lawyer, and is vindicated by the jury on his own showing. Mary and other of his friends urge him to relocate the dubious claim to his mine, but Rimrock scoffs at their advice.

(A Five-Part Story—Part Three)

CHAPTER XIV.

RIMROCK EXPLAINS.

IT had not taken long, after his triumphant home-coming, for Rimrock to wreck his own happiness.

That old rift between them, regarding the law, had been opened the very first day; and it was not a difference that could be explained and adjusted, for neither would concede they were wrong. As the daughter of a judge, conservatively brought up in a community where an outlaw was abhorred, Mary Fortune could no more agree to his program than he could agree to hers. She respected the law, and she turned to the law, instinctively, to right every wrong; but he, from sad experience, knew what a broken reed it was, compared to his gun and his good right hand.

The return to Gunsight was a gloomy affair, but nothing was said of the Old Juan. Abercrombie Jepson guessed, and rightly, that his company was not desired; and they who had set out with the joy of lovers rode back absent-minded and distrait. But the question of the Old Juan was a vital problem, involving other interests besides theirs, and in the morning there

This story began in the November 7th POPULAR.

was a telegram from Whitney H. Stoddard, requesting that the matter be cleared up. Rimrock read it in the office where Mary sat at work, and threw it carelessly down on her desk.

"Well, it's come to a show-down," he said, as she glanced at it. "The question is: Who's running this mine?"

"And the answer?" she inquired, in that impersonal way she had; and Rimrock started as he sensed the subtle challenge.

"Why—*we* are!" he said bluffly. "You and me, of course. You wouldn't quit me on a proposition like this?"

"Yes, I think I would," she answered unhesitatingly. "I think Mr. Stoddard is right. That claim should be located in such a manner as to guarantee that it won't be jumped."

"Uh! You think so, eh? Well, what do you know about it? Can't you take my word for anything?"

"Why, yes, I can. In most matters at the mine I think you're entitled to have your way. But if you elect me as a director in this coming stockholders' meeting, and this question comes before the board, unless you can make me see it differently, I'm likely to vote against you."

Rimrock shoved his big hat to the back of his head, and stood gazing at her fixedly.

"Well, if that's the case," he suggested at last, and then stopped as she caught his meaning.

"Very well," she said; "it isn't too late. You can get you another dummy."

"Will you vote for him?" demanded Rimrock, after an instant's thought, and she nodded her head in assent.

"Well, dang my heart!" muttered Rimrock impatiently, pacing up and down the room. "Here I frame it all up for us two to get together and run the old company right, and the first thing that comes up we split right there and pull off a quarrel to boot. I don't like this, Mary; I want to agree with you. I want to get where we can understand. Now let me explain to you why it is I'm holding out, and then you can have your say-so, too. When I was in jail, I sent for Juan Soto, and it's true—he was born in Mexico. But his parents, so he says, were born south of Tucson, and that makes them American citizens. Now, according to the treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, if any citizen of Mexico moves to the United States, unless he moves back or gives notice, within five years, of his intention of returning to Mexico, he becomes automatically an American citizen. Do you get the idea? Even if Juan was born in Mexico, he's never considered himself a Mexican citizen. He moved back with his folks when he was a little baby, took the oath when he came of age, and has been voting the Democratic ticket ever since. But here's another point—even if he is a Mexican, no private citizen can jump his claim. The Federal government can, but I happen to know that no ordinary citizen can take possession of a foreigner's claim. It's been done, of course, but that lawyer I consulted told me it wasn't according to Hoyle. And here's another point—but what are you laughing at? Ain't I laying the law down right?"

"Why, yes, certainly," conceded Mary; "but, with all this behind you, what's the excuse for defying the law? Why don't you tell Mr. Jepson, or Mr. Stoddard, that the Old Juan is a perfectly good claim?"

"I did!" defended Rimrock; "I told Jepson so yesterday. I used those very same words!"

"Yes, but with another implication. You let it be understood that the reason it was good was that *you* were there with your gun!"

"Stop right there!" commanded Rimrock. "That's the last, ultimate reason that holds in a court of law!

The code is nothing, the Federal law is nothing, even treaties are nothing! The big thing that counts is—possession! Until that claim is recorded it's the *only* reason! The man that holds the ground owns it. And that's why I say, and I stand pat on it yet, that my gun outweighs all the law!"

"Well, I declare," gasped Mary; "you are certainly convincing! Why didn't you tell *me* about it yesterday?"

"Well," began Rimrock, and then he hesitated, "I knew it would bring up —well, another matter, and I don't want to talk about that, yet."

"Yes, I understand," said Mary, very hastily; "but—why didn't you tell Jepson this? I may do you an injustice, but it seemed to me you were seeking a quarrel. But if you had explained the case——"

"What? To Stoddard's man? Why, you must think I'm crazy. Jepson has hired a lawyer, and looked up that claim to the last infinitesimal hickey; he knows more about the Old Juan than I do. And, speaking about quarrels, don't you know that fellow deliberately framed the whole thing? He wanted to know just where I stood on the Old Juan—and he wanted to get me in bad with you."

"With me?"

"Yes, with you! Why, can't you see his game? If he can get you to throw your vote against me, he can knock me out of my control. Add your stock to Stoddard's, and it makes us fifty-fifty —a deadlock, with Jepson in charge. And if he thought for a minute that I couldn't fire him, he'd thumb his nose in my face."

Mary smiled at this picture of primitive defiance in a battle of grown-up men, and yet she saw dimly that Rimrock was right in his estimate of Jepson's motives. Jepson did have a way that was subtly provocative, and his little eyes were shifty, like a boxer's. As the two men faced each other, she could feel the antagonism in every word that they said; and, looking at it as he did, it seemed increasingly reasonable that Rimrock's way was the best. It was better just to fight back without showing his hand, and let Jepson guess what he could.

"But if we'd stand together——" she began, at last, and Rimrock's face lit up.

"That's it!" he said, leaping forward with his hand out; "will you shake on it? You know I'm all right!"

"But not *always* right," she answered, smiling, and put her hand in his. "But you're honest, anyway; and I like you for that. It's agreed, then; we stand together!"

"No-ow, that's the talk!" grinned Rimrock approvingly; "and, besides, I need you, little Mary."

He held on to her hand, but she wrested it away, and turned, blushing, to her work.

"Don't be foolish!" she said, but her feelings were not hurt, for she was smiling again in a minute. "Don't you know," she confided, "I feel utterly helpless when it comes to this matter of the mine. Everything about it seems so absolutely preposterous that I'm glad I'm not going to be a director."

"But you are!" came back Rimrock. "Now, don't tell me different; because you're bull-headed, once you've put yourself on record. There ain't another living soul that I can trust to take that directorship. Even old Hassayamp, down here—and I'd trust him anywhere—might get drunk and vote the wrong way. But you——"

"You don't know me yet," she replied, with decision; "I won't get drunk, but I've got to be convinced. And if you can't convince me that your way is right—and reasonable and just, as well—I give you notice that I'll vote against you. Now, what are you going to say?"

"All right!" he answered promptly; "that's all I ask of you. If you think

I'm wrong, you're welcome to vote against me; but, believe me, this is no Sunday-school job. There's a big fight coming on, I can feel it in my bones; and the best two-handed scrapper wins. Old W. H. Stoddard, when he had me in jail and was hoping I was going to be sent up, he tried to buy me out on this mine. He started at nothing, and went up to twenty million, so you can guess how much it's worth."

"Twenty million!" she echoed.

"Yes; twenty million—and that ain't a tenth of what he might be willing to pay. Can you think that big? Two hundred million dollars? Well, then, imagine that much money thrown down on the desert for him and me to fight over. Do you think it's possible to be pleasant and polite, and always reasonable and just, when you're fighting a man that's never quit yet for a whole danged mountain of copper?" He rose up and shook himself and swelled out his chest and then looked at her and smiled. "Just remember that, in the days that are coming, and give me the benefit of the doubt."

"But I don't believe it!" she exclaimed incredulously. "What ground have you for that valuation of the mine?"

"Well, his offer, for one thing," answered Rimrock soberly; "he never pays what a thing is worth. But did you see Mr. Jepson when I went into the assay house and began looking at those diamond-drill cores? He was sore, believe me, and the longer I stayed there the more fidgety Jepson got. That ore assays big, but the thing that I noticed is that *all* of it carries some values. You can begin at the foot of it and work that whole mountain, and every cubic foot would pay. And that peacock ore, that copper glance! That runs up to forty per cent. Now, here's a job for you as secretary of the company, a little whirl into the higher mathematics. Just find the cubic contents of Tecolote Mountain, and multiply it by three per cent. That's three per cent copper, and, according to those assays, the whole ground averages that. Take twenty claims, each fifteen hundred feet long, five hundred feet across, and say a thousand feet deep; pile the mountain on top of them, take copper at eighteen cents a pound, and give the answer in dollars and cents. Then figure it out another way—figure out the human cussedness that that much copper will produce."

"Why—really," cried Mary, as she sat, staring at him, "you make me almost afraid!"

"And you can mighty well be so," he answered grimly. "It gets me going sometimes. Sometimes I get a hunch that I'd take all my friends and go and camp right there on the Old Juan. Just go out there with guns and hold her down, but that ain't the way it should be done. The minute you show these wolves you're afraid, they'll fly at your throat in a pack. The thing to do is to look 'em in the eye and keep your gun kind of handy, so."

He tapped the old pistol, that he still wore under his coat, and leaned forward, across her desk.

"Now, tell me this," he said: "Knowing what you know now, does it seem so plain criminal—what I did to that robber McBain?"

Mary met his eyes, and, in spite of her, the tears came as she read the desperate longing in his glance. He was asking for justification after those long months of silence, but his deed was abhorrent to her still. She had shuddered when he had touched that heavy pistol, whose shot had snuffed out a man's life; and she shuddered, when she thought of it, when she saw his great hand and the keen eyes that had looked death at McBain. And yet, now he asked it, it no longer seemed criminal, only brutal and murderous—and violent. It was that which she feared

in him, much as she was won by his other qualities, his instinctive resort to violence. But when he asked if she considered it plain criminal, she was forced to answer him:

"No."

"Well, then, what is the reason you always keep away from me and look like you didn't approve? Ain't a man got a right, if he's crowded too far, to stand up and fight for his own? Would you think any better of me if I'd quit in the pinch and let McBain get away with my mine? Wasn't he just a plain robber, only without the nerve, hiring gun fighters to do the rough work? Why, Mary, I feel proud, every time I think about it, that I went there and did what I did! I feel like a man that has done a great duty, and I can't stand it to have you disapprove. When I killed McBain, I served notice on everybody that no man can steal from me, not even if he hides behind the law. And now, with all this coming up, I want you to tell me I did right!"

He thrust out his big head and fixed her eyes fiercely, but she slowly shook her head.

"No," she said, "I can never say that. I think there was another way."

"But I tried that before, when he robbed me of the Gunsight. By grab, you wouldn't have me go to law!"

"You didn't need to go to law," she answered, suddenly flaring up in anger; "I warned you in plenty of time. All you had to do was to go to your property and be there to warn him away."

"Aw, you don't understand!" he cried, in an agony. "Didn't I warn him to keep away? Didn't I come to his office when you were right there, and tell him to keep off my claims? What more could I do? But he went out there, anyhow, and after that there was nothing to do but fight!"

"Well, I'm glad you're satisfied," she said, after a silence. "Let's talk about something else."

"No, let's fight this out!" he answered insistently. "I want you to understand."

"I do," she replied. "I know just how you feel. But unfortunately I see it differently."

"Well, how can you see it? Just tell me how you feel, and see if I can't prove I'm right."

"No, it can't be proved. It goes beyond that. It goes back to the way we've been brought up. My father was a judge, and he worshiped the law—you men out West are different."

"Yes, you bet we are. We don't worship any law unless, by grab, it's right. Why, there used to be a law, a hundred years ago, to hang a man if he stole. They used to hang them by the dozen, right over there in England, and put their heads on a spike. Could you worship that law? Why, no; you know better. But there's a hundred more laws on our statute books to-day that date clear back to that time, and lots of them are just as unreasonable. I believe in justice, and every man for his own rights, and some day I believe you'll agree with me."

"That isn't necessary," she said, smiling slightly; "we can proceed very nicely without."

"Aw, now that's what I mean," he went on appealingly. "We can proceed, but I want more than that. I want you to like me, and approve what I do—and love and marry me, too."

He poured it out hurriedly, and reached blindly to catch her, but she rose up and slipped away.

"No, Rimrock," she said, as she gazed back at him from a distance; "you want too much—all at once. To love and to marry are serious things; they make or mar a woman's whole life. I didn't come out here with the intention of marrying, and I have no such intention yet. And to win a woman's love—may I tell you something? It can never be done by vio-

lence. You may take that big pistol and win a mountain of copper that is worth two hundred million dollars, but love doesn't come that way. You say you want me now, but to-morrow may be different. And, you must remember, you are likely to be rich."

"Yes, and that's why I want you!" burst out Rimrock impulsively. "You can keep me from blowing my money."

"Absolutely convincing—from the man's point of view. But what about the woman's? And if that's all you want, you don't have to have me. You'll find lots of other girls just as capable."

"No, but look! I mean it! I've got to have you—we can throw in our stock together!"

There was a startled pause, in which each stared at the other as if wondering what had happened, and then Mary Fortune smiled. It was a very nice smile, with nothing of laughter in it, but it served to recall Rimrock to his senses.

"I think I know what you mean," she said, at last, "but don't you think you've said enough? I like you just as much; but, really, Rimrock, you're not very good at explaining."

CHAPTER XV.

A GAME FOR BIG STAKES.

The next thirty days—before the stockholders' meeting—were spent by Rimrock in trying to explain. In spite of her suggestion that he was not good at that art, he insisted upon making things worse. What he wanted to say was that the pooling of their stock would be a happy though accidental resultant of their marriage; what he actually said was that they ought to get married because then they would stand together against Stoddard. But Mary only listened with a wise, sometimes wistful, smile, and assured him he was needlessly alarmed. It was that which drove him on—that wistful, patient smile. Somehow he felt, if he could only say the right words, she would lean right over and kiss him!

But those words were never spoken. Rimrock was worried and harassed, and his talk became more and more practical. He was quarreling with Jepson, who stood upon his rights; and Stoddard had served notice that he would attend the meeting in person, which meant it had come to a showdown. So the month dragged by, until at last they sat together in the mahogany-furnished directors' room. Rimrock sat at the head of the polished table, with Mary Fortune near by, and Stoddard and Buckbee opposite. As the friend of all parties—and the retiring director—Buckbee had come in the interest of peace; or so he claimed, but how peace would profit him was a question hard to decide. It might seem, in fact, that war would serve better; for brokers are the sharks in the ocean of finance, and feed and fatten where the battle is fiercest.

Whitney Stoddard sat silent, a tall, nervous man, with a face lined deep with care, and as he waited for the conflict, he tore off long strips of paper and pinched them carefully into little square bits. Elwood Buckbee smiled genially, but his roving eye rested fitfully on Mary Fortune. He was a dashing young man of the Beau Brummel type, and there was an ease and grace in his sinuous movements that must have fluttered many a woman's heart. But now he, too, sat silent, and his appraising glances were disguised in a general smile.

"Well, let's get down to business," began Rimrock, after the preliminaries, "the first thing is to elect a new director. Mr. Buckbee here has been retired, and I nominate Mary Fortune to fill the vacancy."

"Second the motion," rapped out Stoddard, and for a moment Rimrock

hesitated before he took the fatal plunge. He knew very well that, once elected to the directorship, he could never remove her by himself. Either her stock or Stoddard's would have to go into the balance to undo the vote of that day.

"All in favor say 'Aye!'"

"Aye!" said Stoddard grimly; and Rimrock paused again.

"Aye!" he added, and, as Mary wrote it down, she felt the eyes of both of them upon her. The die had been cast, and from that moment on she was the arbiter of all their disputes.

They adjourned, as stockholders, and reconvened immediately as directors; and the first matter that came up was a proposition from Buckbee to market a hundred million shares of common stock.

"You have here," he said, "a phenomenal property—one that will stand the closest of scrutiny; and with the name of Whitney H. Stoddard behind it. More than that, you are on the eve of an enormous production at a time when copper is going up. It is selling now for over eighteen cents, and within a year it will be up in the twenties. Within a very few months, unless I am mistaken, there will be a battle royal in the copper market. The Hackmeister interests have had copper tied up, but the Tecolote Company can break that combine, and at the same time gain an enormous prestige. There will be a fight, of course, but this stock will cost you nothing, and you can retain a controlling share. My proposition is simply that you issue the common and divide it pro rata among you, your present stock then becoming preferred. Then you can put your common on the market in such lots as you wish, and take your profits at the crest. In conclusion, let me say that I will handle all you offer at the customary broker's charge."

He sat down, and Rimrock looked out from under his eyebrows at Stoddard and Mary Fortune.

"Very well," said Stoddard, after waiting for a moment, "it's agreeable to me, I'm sure."

"I'm against it," declared Rimrock promptly. "I'm against any form of reorganization. I'm in favor of producing copper, and taking our profits from that."

"But this is plain velvet," protested Buckbee smilingly. "It's just like money picked up in the road. I don't think I know of any company of importance that hasn't done something of the kind."

"I'm against it," repeated Rimrock, in his stubborn way, and all eyes were turned upon Mary Fortune. She sat very quiet, but her anxious, lip-reading gaze shifted quickly from one to the other.

"Did you get that, Miss Fortune?" asked Buckbee suavely. "The proposition is to issue a hundred million shares of common, and start them at, say, ten cents a share. Then, by a little manipulation, we can raise them to twenty and thirty, and from that on up to a dollar. At that price, of course, you can unload if you wish; I'll keep you fully informed."

"Yes, I understand it," she answered, "but I'm not in favor of it. I think all stock gambling is wrong."

"You—*what?*" exclaimed Buckbee, and Whitney H. Stoddard was so astounded that he was compelled to unmask. His cold, weary eyes became predatory and eager, and a subtle, scornful smile twisted his lips. Even Rimrock was surprised, but he leaned back easily, and gave her a swift, approving smile. She was with him, that was enough; let the stock gamblers rage. He had won in the very first bout.

"But, my dear Miss Fortune," began Stoddard, still smiling, "do you realize what you have done? You have

rejected a profit, at the very least, of one or two million dollars."

"That may be," she said, "but I prefer not to take it unless we give something in return."

"But we do!" broke in Buckbee. "That stock is legitimate. The people that buy in will get rich."

"But the people who buy last will lose," she said. "I know, because I did it myself."

"Oho!" began Buckbee, but at a glance from Stoddard he drew back and concealed his smirk. Then, for half an hour, with his most telling arguments and the hypnotic spell of his eyes, Whitney Stoddard outdid himself to win her over, while Rimrock sat by and smiled. He had tried that himself in days gone by, and he knew Stoddard was wasting his breath. She had made up her mind, and that was the end of it—there would be no Tecolote common. Even Stoddard saw at last that his case was hopeless, and he turned to the next point of attack. Rimrock Jones, he knew, opposed him on general principles—but the girl as a matter of conscience. They would see if that conscience could not be utilized.

"Very well," he said, "I'll withdraw my motion. Let us take up this matter of the saloon."

"What saloon?" demanded Rimrock suddenly, alert and combative; and Stoddard regarded him censoriously.

"I refer," he said, "to the saloon at the camp, which you have put there in spite of Jepson's protests. Now, outside the question of general policy—the effect on the men, the increase in accidents, and the losses that are sure to result—I wish to protest, and to protest most vigorously, against having a whisky camp. I want the Tecolote to draw the best type of men, men of family, who will make it their home, and I think it's a sin under circumstances like this to poison their lives with rum. I could speak on this further, but I simply make a motion that Tecolote be kept a temperance camp."

He paused and met Rimrock's baleful glance with a thin-lipped, fighting smile; and then the battle was on. There were hot words in plenty, and mutual recrimination, but Stoddard held the high moral ground. He stuck to his point that employers had no right to profit by the downfall of their men; and when it came to the vote, without a moment's hesitation, Mary Fortune cast her vote with his.

"What's that?" yelled Rimrock, rising up, black with anger, and striking a great blow on the table. "Have I got to tell Hassayamp to go? This old friend of mine, that helped me and staked me when nobody else would trust me? Then I resign, by grab! If I can't do a little thing like that, I'm going to quit! Right now! You can get another manager! I resign! Now vote on it! You've got to accept it or——"

"I accept it!" said Stoddard, and a wild look crossed Rimrock's face as he saw where his impetuosity had led him. But Mary Fortune, with an understanding smile, shook her head and voted no.

"How do *you* vote?" challenged Stoddard, trying to spur him to the leap, but Rimrock had sensed the chasm.

"I vote *no!*" he said, with answering scowl. "I'll take care of Mr. Hicks, myself. You must take me for a sucker," he added, as an afterthought, but Stoddard was again wearing his mask. It was Buckbee who indulged in the laugh.

"We can't all win," he said, rising up to go. "Think of me and that Tecolote common!"

Rimrock grinned, but Stoddard had come there for a purpose, and he did not choose to unbend.

"Mr. Jones," he began, as they were left alone, "I see we are not able to

agree. Every point that I bring up, you oppose it on general principles. Have you any suggestions for the future?"

"Why, yes," returned Rimrock; "since I'm in control, I suggest that you leave me alone. I know what you'd like—you'd like to have me play dead and let you and Jepson run the mine. But if you've got enough, if you want to get out, I might take that stock off your hands."

A questioning flash came into Stoddard's keen eyes.

"In what way?" he inquired cautiously.

"Well, just place a value on it, whatever you think it's worth, and we'll get right down to business." Rimrock hitched up his trousers, and the square set of his shoulders indicated his perfect willingness to begin. "You're not the only man," he went on importantly, "that's got money to put into mines."

"Perhaps not," admitted Stoddard, "but you take too much for granted if you think I can be bought out for a song."

"Oh, no," protested Rimrock, "I don't think anything like that. I expect you to ask a good price. Yes, a big price. But figure it out, now, what you've put into the mine, and a reasonable return for your risk. Then multiply it by five, or ten, or twenty, whatever you think it's worth, and make me an offer on paper."

"Not at all! Not at all!" rapped out Stoddard hastily. "I'm in the market to buy."

"Well, then, make me an offer," said Rimrock bluffly, "or Miss Fortune here, if she'd like to sell. Here, I'll tell you what you do—you name me a figure that you'll either buy at or sell! Now, that's fair, ain't it?"

A fretful shadow came over Stoddard's face, as he found himself still on the defense, and he sought to change his ground.

"I'll tell you frankly why I make this offer—it's on account of the Old Juan claim. If you had shown any tendency to be in the least reasonable, I'd be the last to propose any change——"

"Never mind about that," broke in Rimrock peremptorily. "I'll take your word for all that. The question is—what's your price?"

"I don't want to sell!" snapped out Stoddard peevishly, "but I'll give you twenty million dollars for your hundred thousand shares of stock."

"You offered that before," countered Rimrock coolly, "when I was shut up in the county jail. But I'm out again now, and I guess you can see I don't figure on being stung."

"I'll give you thirty million," said Stoddard, speaking slowly, "and not a dollar more."

"Will you sell out for that?" demanded Rimrock instantly. "Will you take *forty* for what you hold? You won't? Then what are you offering it to me for? Haven't I got the advantage of control?"

"Well, perhaps you have," answered Stoddard doubtfully, and turned and looked straight at Mary. "Miss Fortune," he said, "I don't know you intimately, but you seem to be a reasonable woman. May I ask at this time whether it is your present intention to hold your stock, or to sell?"

"I intend to hold my stock," replied Mary very quietly, "and to vote it whichever way seems best."

"Then am I to understand that you don't follow Mr. Jones blindly, and that he has no control over your stock?"

Mary nodded, but as Stoddard leaned forward with an offer, she hurried on to explain.

"But at the same time," she said, in her gentlest manner, and with a reassuring glance at her lover, "when we think what hardships Mr. Jones has endured in order to find this mine, and all he has been through since, I think

it is no more than right that he should remain in control."

"Aha! I see!" responded Stoddard cynically. "May I inquire if you young people have an understanding?"

"That is none of your business," she answered sharply, but the telltale blush was there.

"Ah, yes, excuse me," murmured Stoddard playfully. "A lady might well hesitate—with him!"

He cast a teasing glance in the direction of Rimrock, and perceived he had guessed right again. "Well, well," he hurried on, "that does make a difference—it's the most uncertain element in the game. But all this aside, may I ask you young people if you have a top price for your stock? I don't suppose I can meet it, but it's no harm to mention it. Don't be modest—whatever it is!"

"A hundred million dollars!" spoke up Rimrock promptly. "That's what I value my share of the mine."

"And you?" began Stoddard, with a quizzical smile, but Mary seemed not to hear. It was a way she had, when a thing was to be avoided; but Stoddard raised his voice.

"And you, Miss Fortune?" he called insistently. "How much do you want for your stock?"

She glanced up, startled, then looked at Rimrock, and dropped her eyes to the table.

"I don't wish to sell," she answered quietly, and the two men glared at each other.

"Mr. Jones," began Stoddard, in the slow, measured tones of a priest who invokes the only God he knows, "I'm a man of few words—now you can take this or leave it. I'll give you—fifty—million—dollars!"

"Nothing doing!" answered Rimrock. "I don't want to sell. Will you take fifty millions for yours?"

For a moment Stoddard hesitated, then his face became set, and his voice rasped harshly in his throat.

"No!" he said. "I came here to buy. And you'll live to wish you had sold!"

"Like hell!" retorted Rimrock. "This has been my day. I'll know where I'm at, from now on."

CHAPTER XVI.

THE TIGER LADY.

The winter came on with its rains and soft verdure and desert shrubs bursting with bloom, and, for a man who professed to know just exactly where he was at, Rimrock Jones was singularly distrait. When he cast down the glove to Whitney H. Stoddard, that glutton for punishment who had never quit yet, he had looked for something to happen. Each morning he rose up with the confident expectation of hearing that the Old Juan was jumped; but that high, domelike butte remained as lifeless as ever, without a single guard to herd the apex claim. Then he fell to watching Jepson, and talking with the miners, and snooping for some hidden scheme, but Jepson went ahead with his machinelike efficiency until the Tecolote began to turn out ore.

Day and night the low thunder of the powerful batteries told of the milling of hundreds of tons; and the great concentrator, sprawling down on the broad hillside, washed out the copper and separated it from the tailings. Long trains of steel ore cars received the precious concentrates and bore them off to the distant smelters, and at last there came the day when the steady outpay ceased, and the money began to pile up in the bank. L. W.'s bank, of course; for since that fatal fight he had been Rimrock's banker and bosom friend. But that ended the long wait. At the sight of all that money, Rimrock Jones began to spend.

For a year and more Rimrock had been careful and provident—that is,

careful and provident for him. Six months of that time had been spent in the county jail, and since then he had been watching Stoddard. But now Whitney H. Stoddard—and Jepson, too—were uniformly polite and considerate. There was no further question—whatever Rimrock ordered, was done and charged up to the company. That had been Stoddard's payment for his share of the mine, and now the money was pouring back. Rimrock watched it and wondered, then he simply watched it; and at last he began to spend.

His first big blow-out was a raid on the Mint, where Ike Bray still ran his game; and when Rimrock rose up from the faro table, he owned the place, fixtures and all. It had been quite a brush, but Rimrock was lucky; and he had a check book this time, for more luck. That turned the scales, for he outheld the bank; and, when he had won the Mint, he presented it to Old Hassayamp Hicks.

"They can talk all they please," he said, in his presentation speech, which, though brief, invoked tremendous applause, "but the man don't live that can say I don't remember my friends."

Yet how difficult it is to retain all our friends, though we come with gifts in both hands! Rimrock rewarded Hassayamp and L. W. and Woo Chong and every man who had done him a kind act. If money can cement friendships, he had won over the whole town, but with Mary Fortune he had failed. On that first triumphant night, when, after their bout with Stoddard, they realized the true value of their mine, in the dim light of the balcony, and speaking secretly into her ear, he had won, for one instant, a kiss. But it was a kiss of ecstasy, of joy at their triumph and the thought that she had saved him from defeat; and when he laid hold of her and demanded another, she had fought back and leaped up and fled. And after that, repentance; the same joyless waiting; and, at last, drink again, to forget. And then humbler repentance and forgiveness of a kind, but the sweet trustfulness was lost from her smile.

So, with money and friends, there came little of happiness, either for Rimrock or yet for her. They looked at each other across a chasm of differences, where any chance word might offend. He had alluded at one time to the fact that she was deaf, and she had avoided his presence for days. And she had a way, when his breath smelled of drink, of drawing her head away. Once, when he spoke to her in his loud, outdoor voice, she turned away and burst into tears; but she would never explain what it was that had hurt her, more than to ask him not to do it again. So it went, until his wild, ungoverned nature broke all bounds, and he turned to drink.

Yet, if the first phase of his devotion had been passed by Rimrock, he was not lacking in attentions of a kind, and so, one evening, as the westbound train was due, Mary found herself waiting for him in the ladies' balcony. This Oriental retreat, giving them a view of the lobby without exposing them to the rough talk of the men, was common ground for the women of the hotel, and as she looked over the railing, Mary was distinctly conscious of the chic Mrs. Jepson, sitting near. Mrs. Jepson, as the wife of the Tecolote superintendent, was in a social class by herself, and, even after Mary's startling rise to a directorship in the company, Mrs. Jepson still thought of her as a typist. A certain feeling of loyalty to her husband, and a natural fear for his job, however, prompted Mrs. Jepson, as far as possible, to overlook this mere accident of occupation. And behind her too-sweet smile there was another motive—her woman's curiosity was piqued. Not only did this deaf

girl, this ordinary typist, hold the fate of her husband in her hand, but she could, if she wished, marry Rimrock Jones himself, and become the wife of a millionaire. And yet she did not do it. This was out of the ordinary, even in Mrs. Jepson's stratum of society, and so she watched her discreetly.

The train bus dashed up outside the door, and the usual crowd of people came in. There was a whiff of cold air, for the winter night was keen, and then a strange woman appeared. She walked in with a presence, escorted by Jepson, who was returning from a flying trip East; and immediately every eye, including Mrs. Jepson's, was shifted and riveted upon her. She was a tall, slender woman, in a black picture hat, and from the slope of her slim shoulders to the high heels of her slippers she was wrapped in a single tiger skin. Not a Bengal tiger with black and tawny stripes, but a Mexican tiger cat, all leopard spots and red, with gorgeous rosettes in five parallel rows that merged in the pure white of the breast. It was a regal robe, fit to clothe a queen, and as she came in laughing, she displayed the swift, undulating stride of the great beast who had worn that fine skin.

They came down to the desk, and the men who had preceded them gave way to let her pass. She registered her name, meanwhile making some gay answer to a jesting remark from Jepson, who laid aside his dignity to laugh. The clerk joined the merriment, whereupon it was instantly assumed that the lady was quite correct. But women, so they say, are preternaturally quick to recognize an enemy of the home. As Mary gazed down, she became suddenly conscious of a sharp rapping on the balcony rail, and, looking up, she beheld Mrs. Jepson leaning over and glaring at her husband. Perhaps Jepson looked up—he sensed her in some way—and, remembering, glanced wildly about. And then, to the moment, in came Rimrock Jones, striding along, with his big hat in his hand.

It happened as in a play, the swift entrance of the hero, a swifter glance, and the woman smiled. At sight of that tiger-skin coat, Rimrock stopped dead in his tracks—and Jepson saw his chance to escape.

"Mr. Jones," he beckoned frantically, "let me introduce you to Mrs. Hardesty. Excuse me!" And he slipped away. There were explanations later, in the privacy of the Jepson apartments, but Mr. Jepson never could quite understand. Mrs. Hardesty had come out with a card from Mr. Stoddard, and it was his duty, no less, to look after her. But meanwhile the drama moved swiftly on, with Mary in the balcony looking on. She could not hear, but her eyes told her everything, and soon she, too, slipped away. Her appointment was neglected, her existence forgotten. She had come—the other woman!

"Ah, well, well!" cried the newcomer, as she opened her eyes at Rimrock, and held out a jeweled hand. "Have you forgotten me already? I used to see you so often at the Waldorf, but you won't remember!"

"Oh! Back in New York!" exclaimed Rimrock heartily. "What'd you say the name was? Oh, *Hardesty!* Oh, yes! You were a friend of——"

"Mr. Buckbee! Oh, I was sure you would remember me! I've come out to look at your mine!"

They shook hands at that, and the crowd moved off farther, though it increased as the circle expanded, and then Rimrock looked again at the tiger skin.

"Say, by George!" he exclaimed, with unctuous admiration. "Ain't that the finest tiger skin you ever saw? And that's no circus product—that's a genuine *tigre,* the kind they have in old Mexico!"

"Oh, you have been in Mexico? Then that's how you knew it! I meet so many people who don't know. Yes, I have an interest in the famous Tigre Mine, and this was given me by a gentleman there!"

"Well, he must have been crazy over you," declared Rimrock frankly, "or he'd never have parted with that skin!"

"Ah, you flatter me!" she said, and turned to the clerk with an inquiry regarding her room.

"Give her the best there is," spoke up Rimrock with authority, "and charge it up to the company. No, now never you mind! Ain't you a friend of Buckbee's? And didn't you come out to see our mine?"

"Oh, thank you, very much," answered Mrs. Hardesty sweetly. "I prefer to pay, if you don't mind."

"Your privilege," conceded Rimrock; "this is a fine, large, free country. We try to give 'em all what they want."

"Yes, it is!" she exclaimed. "Isn't the coloring wonderful! And have you spent all your life on these plains? Can't we sit down here somewhere? I'm just dying to talk with you. And I have business to talk over, too."

"Oh, not here!" exclaimed Rimrock, as she glanced about the lobby. "This may not be the Waldorf, but we've got some class, all the same. Come up to the balcony, built specially for the ladies. Say, how's friend Buckbee and the rest?"

And then, with the greatest gallantry in the world, he escorted her to Mary's own balcony. There was another, but he did not even think of it. He had forgotten that Mary was in the world. As they sat in the dim alcove, he found himself telling long stories, and listening to the gossip of New York. Every word that he said was received with soft laughter or rapt silence or a ready jest; and when she, in her turn, took the conversation in hand, he found her sharing with him a new and unseen world. It was a woman's world, full of odd surprises. Everything she did seemed quite sweet and reasonable, and at the same time daring and bizarre. She looked at things differently, with a sort of worldly-wise tolerance and an ever-changing, provocative smile. Nothing seemed to shock her even when, to try her, he moved closer; and yet she could understand.

It was a revelation to Rimrock, the laughing way she restrained him; and yet it baffled him, too. They sat there quite late, each delving into the mystery of the other's personality and mind, and as the lower lights were switched off, and the alcove grew dimmer, the talk became increasingly intimate. A vein of poetry, of unsuspected romance, developed in Rimrock's mind, and, far from discouraging it or seeming to belittle it, Mrs. Hardesty responded in kind. It was a rare experience in people so different, this exchange of innermost thoughts, and as their voices grew lower, and all the world seemed far away, they took no notice of a ghost.

It was a woman's form, drifting past in the dark corridor where the carpet was so thick and soft. It paused and passed on, and there was a glint of metal, as of a band of steel over the head. Except for that, it might have been any woman, or any uneasy ghost. For night is the time the dead past comes back, and the soul mourns over what is lost—but at dawn the spirits vanish, and the work of the world goes on.

Mary Fortune appeared late at the company office, for she had very little to do; and even when there, she sat tense and silent. Why not? There was nothing to do. Jepson ran the mine and everything about it, and Rimrock attended to the rest. All she had to do was to keep track of the records and act as secretary to the board of directors. They never met now, except

perfunctorily, to give Rimrock more money to spend. He came in as she sat there, dashing past her for some papers, and was dashing out when she spoke his name.

"Oh, Mr. Jones," she said, and, dimly noting its formality, he paused and questioned her greeting.

"Oh, it's Mister again, is it?" he observed, stopping reluctantly. "Well, what's the matter now?"

"Yes, it's Mister," she said, managing to smile quite naturally. "You know you told me your name was 'Mister,' since you made your pile and all that; but, Mister, I'm going away."

"Going away!" exclaimed Rimrock suddenly, turning to look at her; and then he came hurriedly back.

"Say, what's the matter?" he asked uneasily. "Have I done something else that is wrong?"

"Why, no," she laughed. "What a conscience you have! I'm going East for an operation—I should have gone long ago. Oh, yes, I've been thinking about it for quite a while; but now I'm going to go. You don't know how I dread it. It's very painful, and if it doesn't make me any better, it's likely to make me—worse."

"Oh!" said Rimrock, thoughtfully rubbing his chin. "Well, say, when do you want to go? I'm going East myself, and there ought to be one of us——"

"So soon?" inquired Mary, and, as Rimrock looked at her, he caught a twinkle in her eyes. Not of merriment exactly, but of swift understanding and a hidden, cynical scorn.

"What d'ye mean?" he blustered. "Ain't I got a right——"

"Why, certainly," she returned, still with that subtle resentment. "I have no objections at all. Only it might make a difference to Mr. Stoddard if he found us both away."

"Aw, that's all bosh!" broke out Rimrock impatiently. "He's got his hands more than full in New York. I happen to know he's framing up a copper deal that will lay the Hackmeisters wide open. That's why I want to go back. Mrs. Hardesty says——"

"Mrs. Hardesty?"

Rimrock stopped and looked down. Then he picked up his hat and made another false start for the door.

"Yes, Mrs. Hardesty—she came in last night. That lady that wore the tiger skin."

"Oh!" said Mary, and something in her voice seemed to stab him in the back as he fled.

"Say, what do you mean?" he demanded, coming angrily back. "You speak like something was wrong. Can't a man look twice at some other woman without your saying 'Oh!' I want you to understand that this Mrs. Hardesty is just as good as you are. And, what's more, by grab, she's got stock in our company, and we ought to be treating her nice! Yes, she bought it from Stoddard; and if I could just pull her over——"

"How much stock?" asked Mary, reaching suddenly for a book, and Rimrock fidgeted and turned red.

"Two thousand shares!" he said defiantly. "She's got as much as you have."

"Oh!" murmured Mary, as she ran through the book, and Rimrock flew into a fury.

"Now, for the love of Mike!" he cried, striding toward her. "Don't always be pulling that book! I know you know where every share is, and just who transferred it to who, but this Mrs. Hardesty has told me she's got it, and that ought to be enough!"

"Why, certainly!" agreed Mary instantly, closing the book. "I just didn't recall the name. Is she waiting for you now? Then don't let me detain you. I'll be starting East to-night."

Rimrock rocked on his feet in im-

potent anger, as he groped for a fitting retort.

"Well, go then!" he said. "What do I give a damn?" And he rushed savagely out of the room.

CHAPTER XVII.

AN AFTERTHOUGHT.

It was part of the violent nature of Rimrock that his wrath fell upon both the just and the unjust. Mary Fortune had worsted him in their passage at arms, and left him bruised from head to heels. She had simply let him come on, and at every bludgeon stroke she had replied with a rapier thrust. Without saying a word against the character of Mrs. Hardesty, she had conveyed the thought that she was an adventuress; or, if not exactly that, then something less than a lady. And the sure way in which she had reached for that book was proof positive that the stock was not recorded. But the thing that maddened him most, and against which there was no known defense, was her subtle implication that Mrs. Hardesty was at the bottom of his plan to go East. And so, with the fury still hot in his brain, he made poor company on the road to the Tecolote.

Since Mrs. Hardesty had come, as a stockholder, of course, to look over the company's properties, it was necessary that she should visit the mine, though she was far from keen for the trip. She came down at last, heavily veiled from the sunshine, and Rimrock helped her into his machine; but, being for the moment in a critical mood, and at war in his heart against all women, he looked at her with different eyes. For the best complexion that was ever laid on will not stand the test of the desert, and in the glare of white light she seemed suddenly older and pitifully made up and painted. Even the flash of pearly teeth and the dangerous play of her eyes could not hide the dark shadows beneath; and her conversation, on the morning after, seemed slightly artificial and forced.

Perhaps, in that first flight of their unleashed souls, when they sat close in the balcony alone, they had reached a height that could never be attained when the sun was strong in their eyes. They crouched behind the wind shield, for Rimrock drove recklessly, and went roaring out across the desert, and, between the rush of wind and the sharp kick of the chuck holes, conversation was out of the question. Then they came to the camp, with its long rows of deal houses and the rough bulk of the concentrator and mill; and even this, to Mrs. Hardesty's wind-blown eyes, must have seemed exceedingly Western and raw.

A mine, at the best, is but a hole in the ground; and that which appears on top—the shaft houses and stacks and trestles and dumps—is singularly barren of interest. The Tecolote was better than most, for there were open cuts, with steam shovels scooping up the ore, and miners driving holes into the shattered formation and powder men loading shots. Rimrock showed it all faithfully, and they watched some blasts and took a ride in the gliding cars, but it was hardly a trip that the average lady would travel from New York to take. So they both breathed a sigh when the ordeal was over, and the car had taken them home.

At the door of the hotel, Mrs. Hardesty disappeared, which gave Rimrock a chance for a drink, but as he went past the desk, the clerk called him back and added to the burden of his day.

"What's these?" demanded Rimrock, as the clerk handed over some keys, but he knew them all too well.

"The keys to the office, sir. Miss Fortune left quite suddenly, and requested me to deliver them to you."

"Where'd she go?" he asked, and, not getting an answer, he burst into a

fit of cursing. He could see it all now. She had not gone for an operation, she had gone because she was mad. She was jealous, and that was her way of showing it—she had gone off and left him in a hole. He ought to have known from that look in her eye, and the polite, smiling way she talked. Now he was tied to the mast, and if he went to New York, he would have to turn over the mine to Jepson! And that would give Jepson just the chance he wanted to jump the Old Juan claim.

For a man who was worth fifty million dollars, and could claim a whole town for his friends, Rimrock put in a most miserable night, as he dwelt on this blow to his hopes. He was like a man checkmated at chess—every way he turned he was sure to lose if he moved. For the chance of winning a hypothetical two thousand shares, which Stoddard was supposed to have sold to Mrs. Hardesty, he had thrown away and lost forever his control over Mary Fortune's stock. Now, if he followed after her, and tried to make his peace, he might lose his chance with Mrs. Hardesty as well; and if he stayed with *her,* Mary was fully capable of throwing her vote with Stoddard's. It was more than her stock; it was her director's vote that he needed above everything else!

Rimrock paced up and down in his untidy room, and struggled to find a way out. With Mary gone, he could not even vote a dividend, unless he came to an agreement with Stoddard. He could not get the money to carry out his plans, not even when it lay in bank. He could not appoint a new secretary, to carry on the work while he made his trip to New York. He couldn't do anything but stay right there and wait until he heard from her!

It was a humiliating position for a man to find himself in, and especially after his talk with Mrs. Hardesty. Perhaps he had not considered the ways and means very carefully, but he had promised her to go back to New York. A man like him, with his genius for finance, and his masterful control of men, a man who could rise in a single year from a prospector to a copper king; such a man was wasted in provincial Arizona—his place was in Wall Street, New York. So she had said that night, when they sat close together, and their souls sought the high empyrean of dreams—and now he was balked by a woman. Master of men he was, and king of finance he might be, but woman was still his bane.

He looked at it again by the cold light of day, and that night he appealed to Mrs. Hardesty. She was a woman herself, and wise in the ways of jealousy, intrigue, and love. A single word from her, and this impenetrable mystery might be cleared up like mist before the sun. And she ought to help him, because it was through her, indirectly, that all this trouble had occurred. Until her arrival, there had never been a moment when he had seriously worried over Mary. She had scolded, of course, about his gambling and drinking, and they had had their bad half hours, off and on; but never for an instant had there been the suggestion of a break in their business affairs. About that, at least, she had always been reasonable; but now she was capable of anything. It would not surprise him to get a telegram from Stoddard that he was coming out to take over the control; nor to discover later, across the directors' table, Mary Fortune sitting grimly by. He knew her too well if she once got started! But he passed—it was up to Mrs. Hardesty.

They met at dinner, the lady being indisposed during the day as a result of their strenuous trip, but she came down now, floating gracefully in soft draperies, and Rimrock knew why he had built those broad stairs. He had thought, in jail, that he was building

them for Mary, but they were for Mrs. Hardesty, after all. She was a queen no less in her filmy gown than in the tiger-skin cloak that she wore, and Rimrock dared to use the same compliment on her that he had coined for Mary Fortune. They dined together in a secluded corner on the best that the chef could produce—and, for a Chinaman, he accomplished miracles—but Rimrock said nothing of his troubles. The talk was wholly of gay, distant New York, and of the conflict that was forming there.

For a woman of society, compelled by her widowhood to manage her own affairs, it was wonderful to Rimrock how much she knew of the intricacies of the stock market and of the Exchange. There was not a financier or a broker of note that she did not know by name, and the complex ways by which they achieved their ends were an open book to her. Even Whitney H. Stoddard was known to her personally—the shrewdest intriguer of them all—and yet he, so she said, had a human side to him, and let her in on occasional deals. He had been a close friend of her husband in their boyhood, and that probably accounted for the fact; otherwise he would never have sold her that Tecolote.

"But he's got a string on it," suggested Rimrock shrewdly; but she only drooped her eyelashes and smiled.

"I never carry gossip between rivals," she said. "They might fly at each others' throats. You don't like Mr. Stoddard. Very well, he doesn't like you. He thinks you're flighty and extravagant. But is that any reason why we shouldn't be friends—or why my stock isn't perfectly good?".

"Don't you think it!" answered Rimrock. "Any time you want to sell it——"

"A-ah! At it again!" she chided laughingly. "How like fighting animals men are. If I'd toss that stock, like a bit of raw meat, in the midst of you copper-mad men! But I won't; never fear. In the fight that would follow, I might lose some highly valued friend."

From the droop of her lashes, Rimrock was left to guess who that friend might be, and, not being quick at woman logic, he smiled and thought of Stoddard. They sat late at their table, and, to keep him at ease, Mrs. Hardesty joined him in a cigarette. It was a habit she had learned when Mr. Hardesty was living; although now, of course, every one smoked. Then, back at last in the shadowy alcove—which was suddenly vacated by the Jepsons—they settled down on the Turkish divan and invited their souls with smoke. It rose up lazily as the talk drifted on, and then Rimrock jumped abruptly to his problem.

"Mrs. Hardesty," he said, "I'm in a terrible fix, and I want you to help me out. I never saw the man yet that I couldn't get away with—give me time and room according to my strength—but I've had a girl working for me. She's the secretary of our company, and she fools me every time."

Mrs. Hardesty laughed—it was soft, woman's laughter, as if she enjoyed this joke on mere man—and even when Rimrock explained the dangerous side of his predicament, she refused to take it seriously.

"Ah, you're all alike," she said, sighing comfortably. "I've never known it to fail. It's always the woman who trusts through everything, and the man who disbelieves. I saw her, just a moment, as she passed down the hall, and I don't think you have anything to fear. She's a quiet little thing——"

"Don't you think it!" burst out Rimrock. "You don't know her the way I do. She's an Injun, once she makes up her mind."

"Well, even so," went on Mrs. Hardesty placidly. "What reason have you

to think she means trouble? Did you have any words with her before she went away? What reason did she give when she left?"

"Well," began Rimrock, "the reason she gave was some operation to be performed on her ears. But I know, just as sure as I'm setting here to-night, she did it out of jealousy over you."

"Over me!" repeated Mrs. Hardesty, sitting up abruptly; and then she sank back and shook with laughter. "Why, you foolish boy," she cried, straightening up reproachfully, "why didn't you tell me you were in love? And we sat here for hours! Did she see us, do you suppose? She must have! Was she waiting to speak to you, do you think?"

"My heavens!" exclaimed Rimrock, rising slowly to his feet. "I had an appointment with her—that night!" He paused, and Mrs. Hardesty sat silent, the laughter dead on her lips. "Yes, sir," he went on, "I was going to meet her—here! By grab, I forgot all about it!" He struck his leg a resounding whack, and sank back upon the divan. "Well, now, isn't—that—fierce!" he muttered, and Mrs. Hardesty tittered nervously.

"Ah, well," she said, "it's soon discovered, the reason why she left you so abruptly. But didn't she say a word about it? That doesn't seem very loverlike, to me. What makes you think the child was jealous? Did she mention my name at all?"

"Nope," mumbled Rimrock, "she never mentioned it. That girl is an Injun, all through! And she'll knife me, after this! I can feel it coming. But, by George, I plumb forgot!"

"Oh come now!" consoled Mrs. Hardesty, giving him a gentle pat. "This isn't so bad, after all. If I can only see her, I'll explain it myself. Have you any idea where she's gone?"

"Bought a ticket for New York—where old Stoddard hangs out. I can see my finish right now!"

"No, but listen, Mr. Jones—or may I call you Rimrock? That's such a fine, Western name! Did it ever occur to you that the trains are still running? You could follow, and let me explain!"

"Aw, explain to a tiger cat! Explain to an Apache! I tell you, that girl is an Injun. She'll go with you so far, and stand for quite a little; but when she strikes fire, look out!"

"Oh, very well," murmured Mrs. Hardesty, and reached for a cigarette, which she puffed delicately, while Rimrock gloomed. It was painfully clear now—the cause of Mary's going and the embittered vindictiveness of her smile. Not only had he sat up to talk with Mrs. Hardesty, but he had brought her to where Mary had been waiting. He had actually talked love, without really meaning it, with this fascinating woman of the world; and, having an appointment to meet him right there, how could Mary help but know? He pictured her for a moment, lingering silently in the background, looking on where she could not hear. Was it less than human that she should resent it and make an excuse to go? And yet she had done it so quietly—that was the lady in her—without a word of tragedy or reproach! He remembered suddenly that she had laughed quite naturally, and made some joke about his name being Mister.

"What's that you say about the trains still running?" he demanded, as he roused up from his thoughts. "Well, excuse me, right now! I'm on my way! I'm going back to hunt that girl up!"

He leaped to his feet and left her still smoking, as he rushed off to inquire about the trains.

"Well, well," she murmured, as she gazed thoughtfully after him, "he's as impulsive as any child. Just a great,

big boy—I rather like him—but he won't last long, in New York."

CHAPTER XVIII.

NEW YORK.

Rimrock Jones' return to New York was as dramatic and spectacular as his first visit had been pretentious and prodigal. With two thousand dollars, and a big, black hat, he had passed for a Western millionaire; now, still wearing the hat, but loaded down with real money, he returned, and was hailed as a Crœsus. There are always some people in public life whose least act is heralded to the world; whereas others, much more distinguished, but less given to publicity, accomplish miracles, and are hardly known. And then there are still others who, fed up with flattery and featured in a hundred ways, are all unwittingly the victims of a publicity bureau, whose aim is their ultimate undoing.

A real Western cowboy, with a pistol under his coat, a prospector turned multimillionaire in a year, such a man—especially if he wears a sombrero, and gives five-dollar tips to the bell hops—is sure to break into the prints. But it was a strange coincidence, when Rimrock jumped out of his taxicab and headed for the Waldorf entrance, to find a battery of camera men all lined up to snap him, and a squad of reporters inside. No sooner had Rimrock been shot through the storm door into the gorgeous splendors of Peacock Alley, than they assailed him en masse—much as the bell boys had just done to gain his grip and the five-dollar tip.

That went down first—the five-dollar tip—and his Western remarks on the climate. Then his naïve hospitality in inviting them all to the bar, where they could talk the matter over at their ease, and his equally cordial agreement to make it tea when he was reminded that some reporters were women—it all went down and came out the same evening, at which Rimrock Jones was dazed. If he had telegraphed ahead, or let any one know that he planned to return to New York, it would not have been surprising to find the reporters waiting, for he was, of course, a great man; but this was a quick trip, made on the spur of the moment, and he hadn't told a soul. Yet, in circumstances like these, with a roomful of newspapers, and your name played up big on the front page, it is hardly human nature to inquire too closely or wonder what is going on. Still, there was something up, for even coincidence can explain things only so far.

Leaving out the fact that Mrs. Hardesty might have sent on the telegram herself, and that Whitney H. Stoddard might have motives of his own in inviting his newspapers to act, it did not stand to reason that the first man Rimrock ran into should have had such a sweet inside tip. Yet that was what the gay Buckbee told him—and circumstances proved he was right. The money that Rimrock put up that night, after talking it over in the café, that money was doubled within the next three days, and the stock still continued to advance. It was invested on a margin in Navajoa Copper, a minor holding of the great Hackmeister combine that Stoddard had set out to break.

Stoddard was selling short, so Buckbee explained, throwing great blocks of stock on a market that refused to break; and when the rush came, and Navajoa started up, Rimrock was there with the rest of his roll. It was a game that he took to—any form of gambling—and, besides, he was bucking Stoddard! And then there was Buckbee. He knew more in a minute than some brokers know in a lifetime; and he had promised to keep him advised. Of course, it was a gamble, a man might lose, but it beat any game Rimrock had

played. And copper was going up. Copper, the metal that stood behind it all, and that men could not do without.

There was a movement on such as Rimrock had never dreamed of, to control the copper product of the world. It had been tried before, and had ended disastrously, but that did not prove it impossible. There were in the United States six or eight companies that produced the bulk of the ore. Two or three, like the Tecolote, were closed corporations, where the stock was held by a few; but the rest were on the market, the football of the Street, their stock owned by anybody and everybody. It was for these loose stocks that the combine and Stoddard were fighting, with thousands of the public buying in, and as the price of some stock was jigged up and down, it was the public that cast the die.

If the people were convinced that a certain stock was good, and refused to be shaken down, the price of that stock went up. But if the people, through what they had read, decided that the stock was bad, then there was a panic that nothing could stop, and the big interests snapped up the spoils. So much Rimrock learned from Buckbee, and Mrs. Hardesty told him the rest. It was her judgment, really, that he came to rely upon; though Buckbee was right, in the main. He told the facts, but she went behind them and showed who was pulling the strings.

It was from her that he had learned of the mighty press agencies—which at the moment were making much of his coup—and how shrewd financiers, like the Hackmeisters or Stoddard, used them constantly to influence the market. If it became known, for instance, that Rimrock Jones was plunging on Navajoa, and that within three days he had doubled his money, and was still holding out for a rise; that was big news for Hackmeister, and his papers made the most of it. But if Navajoa went down, and some broker's clerk lost his holdings and committed embezzlement, or if a mining engineer made an adverse report, or the company passed a dividend, then Stoddard's press agents would make the most of each item—if he wished the stock to go down. Otherwise it would not be mentioned. It was by following out such subtleties and closely studying the tape, that brokers like Buckbee guessed out each move in advance, and were able to earn their commissions.

But all this information did not come to Rimrock for nothing—there was a price which had to be paid. For reasons of her own, the dashing Mrs. Hardesty appeared frequently in the Waldorf lobby, and when Rimrock came in with any of his friends, he was expected to introduce them. And Rimrock's friends in that swarming hotel were as numerous as they were in Gunsight. He expected no less.

It was his day of triumph, this return to the Waldorf, where, before he had been but a pretender, and it did his heart good to share his victory with the one woman who could understand. She knew all his ways now, his swift, impulsive hatreds, and his equally impulsive affections; and she knew, as a woman, just when to oppose him and when to lead him on. She knew him, one might say, almost too well for her success; for Rimrock was swayed more by his heart than his head, and at times she seemed a little cold. There was a hard, worldly look that came over her at times, a sly, calculating look that chilled him when he might have told everything he knew.

In some curious way that Rimrock could never fathom, Mrs. Hardesty was interested in stocks. She never explained it, but her visits to the Waldorf had something to do with trades. Whether she bought or sold, gathered tips or purveyed them, or simply guarded her own investments, was a

mystery that he never solved; but she knew many people, and, in some way not specified, she profited by their acquaintance. She was an elusive woman, like another that he knew; but at times she startled him, too. Those times were mostly on the rare occasions when she invited him to supper in her rooms. These were at the St. Cyngia, not far from the Waldorf, a full suite, with two servants to attend. On his first formal call, Rimrock had been taken aback by the wealth and luxury displayed.

But the thing that startled Rimrock, and made him uneasy, was the way she had when they were alone. After the dinner was over, in her luxurious apartments, when the servant had left them alone, as they sat together across the table, and smoked the scented cigarettes that she loved, he could feel a spell, a sort of enchantment, in every soft sweep of her eyes. Those eyes spoke of love; but, leaning across the table, the tiger lady talked of stocks.

It was on the occasion of his first winning on copper, when he had sold out his Navajoa at a big profit; and, after the celebration that he had provided, she had invited him to supper. The cigarettes were smoked, and, with champagne still singing in his ears, Rimrock followed her to the dimly lighted reception room. They sat by the fire, her slim arms gleaming and dark shadows falling beneath her hair; and as Rimrock watched her, his heart in his throat, she glanced up from her musing to smile.

"What a child you are, after all!" she observed, and Rimrock raised his head.

"Yes, sure," he said, "I'm a regular baby. It's a wonder some one hasn't noticed and took me in off the street."

"Yes, it is," she said, with a twist of the lips. "The Street's no place for you. Some of those big bears will get you, sure. But here's what I was thinking. You came back to New York to watch Whitney Stoddard, and be where you could do him the most harm. That's childish in itself, because there's no reason in the world why both of you shouldn't be friends. But never mind that—men will fight, I suppose—it's only a question of weapons."

"Well, what do we care?" answered Rimrock, with a heady smile. "I thought maybe you might adopt me."

"No, indeed," she replied, "you'd run away. I've seen boys like you before. But to think that you'd come back here to get the lifeblood of Stoddard, and then go to buying Navajoa! Why not? Why, you might as well be a mosquito for all the harm you will do. A grown man like you—Rimrock Jones, the copper king—fighting Stoddard through Navajoa!"

"Well, why not?" defended Rimrock. "Didn't I put a crimp in him? Didn't I double my money on the deal?"

"Yes, but why Navajoa? Why not Tecolote? If you must fight, why not use a real club?"

Rimrock thought a while, for the spell was passing, and his mind had switched from her charms.

"How'm I going to use Tecolote?" he blurted out at last. "It's tied up, until I can find that girl!"

"Not necessarily," she replied. "We who live by the Street learn to use our enemies as well as our friends. You will never whip Stoddard as long as you stand off and refuse to sit in on the game. Isn't his vote as good as your friend, the typist's? Then use it to put Tecolote on the market. You know what I mean—to vote Tecolote commons, and get the stakes on the board. Then, while this scramble is on, and he's fighting the Hackmeisters, buy Tecolote and get your control."

"Fine and dandy!" mocked Rimrock. "You're right, I'm a sucker; and it's a shame to take my money. But I don't want any Tecolote commons."

"Why not?" she challenged, laughing gayly at his vehemence. "Are you afraid to play the game?"

"Not so you'd notice it," answered Rimrock grimly, "but I never play the other fellow's game. The Tecolote game is going to be played in Arizona, where my friends can see fair play. But look at Navajoa, how balled up that company is, with its stock all scattered around. Until it comes in for transfer, nobody knows who's got it. They may be sold clear out and never know it. No, I may look easy, but I've been dog-bit once, and I've got the leg to show for it. To issue that stock, we'd have to call in the lawyers and go through some reorganization scheme; and by the time we got through, with Miss Fortune gone, I'd find myself badly left. There'll be no lawyers for me, and no common stock. I know another way to win."

He paused and, as she failed to ask what it was, he grunted and lit another cigarette.

"I wonder," she began, after a thoughtful pause, "if Stoddard doesn't know where she is."

She had guessed it as surely as if he had stated his plan—he still hoped to find Mary Fortune. And then? Well, his plan was a little nebulous right there; but Mary held the necessary stock. If he could get control, in any way whatsoever, of that one per cent of the stock, he could laugh at Stoddard and take his dividends to carry on his fight in coppers. He had neglected her before, but this time it would be different; she could have anything she asked. And his detectives were hunting for her everywhere.

"Don't know," he answered, after a dogged silence. "Why? What makes you think he does?"

She laughed. "You don't know Mr. Stoddard as well as I do. He's a very successful man. Very thorough. If *he* set out to find Mary Fortune, he'd be almost sure to do it."

"H'm," said Rimrock. "I'd better watch him, then. I'll call up about that to-morrow. Just have a man there to watch the door—she might be going in or out."

"What a sleuth you are!" she answered gravely, and then she broke down and laughed. "Well, well," she said, "'tis a battle of wits, but love may find a way. Do you believe in love?" she went on abruptly, as Rimrock showed signs of pique. "I just wanted to know. You great, big, Western men seem more fitted, somehow, for the part of copper kings. But tell me honestly, I feel so trifling to-night, do you believe in the great love for one woman? Or do you hold with these drawing-room philosophers that man is by nature polygamous? Never mind my feelings—just tell me."

She coiled up lazily in her soft plush great chair and regarded him with languid eyes, and Rimrock never suspected that the words he had spoken would go straight to Stoddard that night. He forgot his rejection of a get-together plan and his final refusal of common stocks; all he saw was this woman, with her half-veiled glances and the firelight as it played on her arms. He had confessed his hope of still finding Mary, and of winning her back to his side; but as he gazed at the tiger lady, sprawling so negligently before him, his fickle thoughts wandered to her. He denounced the theory of these latter-day philosophers that man is essentially a brute, and, still watching her furtively, he expressed the conviction that he could love the One Woman forever.

TO BE CONTINUED IN ISSUE OF DECEMBER 20TH.

Charlie Comers' Christmas

By Wilbur Hall

Author of "The Two Terwilligers," "The Coach," Etc.

There wasn't any man they ever had up at Owens County that got hold of folks like Charlie Comers did. A poor, weak body the boy had, but he had a big heart that enabled him to demonstrate the power of mind over matter. Read what happened on the night before Christmas

THIS newfangled State board of control sent a man over into my office last week to see if the county records of Owens County were kept according to the latest scientific discoveries. This fellow grabbed up my loose-leaf, vital-statistics register and took one look.

"Hello!" he says. "How long has this county had the loose-leaf system?"

"Ever since Charlie Comers' Christmas," I says.

"The which?" says he.

By gollies! I was glad he hadn't heard me the first time—making that break. "Ever since Christmas!" I hollered at him. "And if you knock over that pint of ink with your elbow, young feller," I says, "I don't care if you represent the Central Powers, I'll rub your snub nose into it!"

He looked around for the ink and set down that Births and Deaths book of mine, and I began to breathe easier. It was the closest shave I'd had since we, the people of the County of Owens, State of California, falsified the official records in the office of yours truly, county clerk, and if that red-headed little expert from Sacramento had gone on pursuing that subject I wouldn't be running for reëlection right now—I'd be running for Mexico. Because I'd have dropped him right where we stood before I'd let him go back with the story of Charlie Comers' Christmas and our loose-leaf system in the courthouse.

We used to have the ordinary kind of county-record books, but, as I says to Jim Pendergast, the chairman of the county board of supervisors, "Jim," I says, "it's an advantage more ways than one to have them sheets so's you can take out a few choice ones for particular reasons and copy 'em up the way they'd ought to be. What's a few county records between friends?" I says.

Well, Jim was sort of hollering about the expense of our new system at the time, but a few days later a couple of ranchers wrote in to ask how Jim had stood on the school-district funds in January so's they could decide whether they'd vote for him again or not. Jim and I and Martha Mott, the typewriter, we sat up half the night copying that page and changing Jim's vote, and the next day I wrote those fellows that Jim had voted right, as shown by our official records, and Jim said he reckoned that a rich little county like Owens could afford to be up to date and have loose-leaf systems if it wanted 'em.

"Sure," I says. "And remember how we come to get 'em, too," I says.

"Charlie Comers' Christmas," Jim says. "I was down in Arizona, buying

feeders then, but I heard about it. Poor old Charlie!" he says, and blew his nose hard.

I give him a kick on the shins that I'll bet barked him up. "You get out of this county clerk's office if you got to cry all over that there map of Township Forty-two!" I says, and Jim went out, wiping his eyes.

I was glad he moseyed when he did, too, because I had to set down at my desk quick right then and blow *my* nose. I guess there wasn't any man we ever had up in Owens County that got plumb hold of folks like Charlie did. The beatenest, laughingest, generousest cuss that ever lived—and so weak, that Christmas, that Monk Dorgan, the sheriff, had to pack him back from the Collinses, north of the Christian church, and lay him down—and lay him down—— Dog-gone it, a grown man that'd bawl all over the place—I wish Jim Pendergast'd stay out of here if he can't help talking about Charlie Comers' Christmas!

Charlie come in on the afternoon train the ninth of July, a year ago. I recollect the date well, because that was the day Mrs. Snedeker, out on the old Wad Bachelor place, had twins and I got into such an argument with her husband and Doc Adams whether each of them twins should have a separate record or whether they should be wrote in in the same blanks. Walter Neighbors, the district attorney, was down at Lone Pine, interviewing some witnesses, and I had to get out his law books to look it up. Couldn't find it, either, though I looked clean through one set, from Absconding to Zeal of Agent. So I docketed them twins in one space and let old Doc Adams chew the rag over it for a week, which was a good thing for him—kept him from losing so much playing Kelly pool. At any rate, that's how I remember when Charlie Comers got in. He was just able to crawl out of the bus, and Bert Rhine and I helped him into the Istalia and put him to bed. Rhine's the one told me I was right about them twins.

"'Nother goner," Rhine says to me, when we went out to dinner.

"Looks like it."

"Broke, too."

"He tell you?" I says.

"No. Said he was thinking about getting a tent house and doing his own cooking—thought that would be better for him."

"Oh!" I says. "Nice boy, ain't he?"

"You've guessed it! I don't take time to feel sorry for 'em generally. But this chap has got such a smile—notice it?"

"What's his name, Bert?"

"Charlie Comers."

"That's funny," I says.

"How do you mean?"

"On his suit case he's got the initials 'S. R. W.'"

Bert Rhine poured him some ice tea. "You mind your own business, Sam Archer," he says to me.

"Oh, I'm going to," I says. So we began to talk about how fast hogs was going up.

Next day I let county recording go, because it was a powerful warmish day—one hundred and nine in the county treasurer's office, next to mine, and that's only got one west window, too—and when I got down to the Istalia there was this boy Charlie Comers sitting on the porch with three kids standing around him watching him make a tailless kite.

"Good morning," he says, smiling all over his poor, thin face. "You weren't going to tell me this is unusual weather, were you?" he says.

"Well," I says, "I wouldn't call it exactly unusual, but it's hotter than we aim to have it get in July most years. Come to think of it, I guess this *is* sort of what you might call an uncommon spell——"

"I knew it," Charlie Comers said,

and laughed at me. "I been trying to count the folks that have told me this is unusual weather the last two days."

"How many was there?" I says, beginning to smile.

"I lost count yesterday about half past four," he says.

He had to have some paper, then, to cover that kite with, and according to what he said the only good kind was tissue paper.

"You boys got any money?" he said.

Well, they was the Peters boys, and little Stub Collins—they wouldn't have known a nickel if you'd hold it out to them—never saw any. They told Charlie Comers no.

He slipped his poor, thin fingers into his watch pocket and brought out two pennies. "You go over to the store and ask them for two or three sheets. What color do you like best?"

The little Peters kid and Collins' boy said red, and of course the other Peters brat said green to start an argument, and in another minute those three boys were piled on the sidewalk so promiscuous that you couldn't tell which of them was Peters and which was Collins. Charlie Comers got up and reached down into the sprawling mess and drew a Peters the first draw, then he tried his luck again and sorted out a Collins. This stopped the fight. He grinned at them.

"Well," he says, "you're some scrappers, aren't you? Let's call it a no-decision battle and match for colors."

They forgot their quarrel then, and red tissue paper won, and they went off to buy it. Charlie Comers sat down by me and wiped his forehead and hands and coughed till I thought he'd break something.

"You seem to like boys," I said.

"I do." He had to stop and cough again, but it was the last of the series. "Yes, I do. I never had much fun when I was a boy—they started me in a cigar factory when I was seven, sweeping up cuttings. Naturally I've always been trying to catch up on fun."

"You mean you started working when you was seven?" I says.

"Sure."

"In a factory?"

"Yep."

"Well, what kind of tarnation country do you hail from, anyhow?" I says. "I didn't know kids that young could get a job."

Charlie Comers laughed. "Oh, I wouldn't call it a job," he said. "We went in at seven o'clock and crawled out at five, and our fathers collected anywhere from a dollar-seventy to two dollars a week for loaning us to the boss. It was a kind of mutual-benefit arrangement—between the families and the owners."

"Well," I says, "it's about time you played a little. But I wouldn't give pennies to the brats around this town. They ain't used to it."

Charlie Comers was always laughing—he laughed at me again. "Oh, I won't spoil 'em," he says. "If tissue paper is a cent a sheet here, I could buy just three hundred and ten sheets."

"Well," I says, "you'd corner the market with less'n that. You want a job?"

"Of course," he said. "But I'm kind of weak in the knees."

"How are you on typewriting?"

"I don't use my knees for that," he says.

"I thought not. If you can typewrite, I might be able to get you something——"

"I went to night school two years," he said. "Then I worked on a sort of a newspaper—doing sort of newspaper work."

"When was this?"

"After I began to get sick."

"Oh, yes."

Well, Al Raney runs the *Chronicle*. Al is a good fellow, but he couldn't be a much worse writer than he is with-

out being illiterate, so I talked to him, and the next day Charlie Comers was reporter for the *Chronicle*. Bert Rhine took enough more advertising to pay for all Charlie Comers could eat—I don't know, they fixed it up some way, and Charlie Comers was chipper as a sparrow. He wrote good, too—invented a lot of articles about dry farming and milking machines and hog cholera and reclamation and water rights, and he began to run a series about the different old-timers in the Valley. It was great stuff. I don't know how classic it was, but it was good enough for the *Chronicle*. That was how Charlie Comers got hold in Owens County.

Meanwhiles, about a week after this lad came along, there was another one—another sick man—moved in and took up an old house at the edge of town. To look at him, he wasn't as bad off as Comers, but he hadn't been there a week, without any one getting acquainted with him to speak of, before he died.

Charlie was the one that discovered it. He had called on this Spurgeon once, and Spurgeon had had so mightily little to say that Comers gave him up. A few days afterward, somebody had a sick baby out that way, and old Doc Adams picked Charlie up for a ride. They visited the baby, and Comers did more good than ten doctors, playing with the little fellow and making him forget his stomachache, or whatever it was, and then, when they were going away, the mother said:

"That sick man hasn't been out in the sun yesterday or to-day. I would have gone over if it hadn't been for little Ralph."

Doc Adams said: "I guess he's just sulking. Been there once myself, and had my nose bit off, so I ain't a-going."

Charlie Comers got out of the machine. "That's true, doc," he said; "Mr. Spurgeon isn't any great shakes on company, but if there's anything wrong——"

Well, he went on to see, and the doctor waited quite a spell for him, and when Comers came out he was awful tired looking and coughing. "He's dead," he said to the doctor. "Been dead a while. I straightened him up a little."

The doc says: "Humph! It's just as well. He was in the last stages when he came."

Charlie Comers says: "I won't go back now, doc. I'll wait here till the coroner comes. Will you let Newcomb know?"

The doc drove back to town and called Newcomb, and he went out, and between him and Charlie Comers and Fred Ball, our furniture man and undertaker, they did what was to be done. But they couldn't find hide nor hair, trace nor track of who this man Spurgeon was. Not even a front name. He was buried as John Doe Spurgeon, and the county got the burial expenses and a hundred and eight dollars out of an old wallet he'd had. Charlie Comers wanted me to fill in a first name of some kind—said it looked so sort of sad to see a man gone to his long sleep ticketed with a John Doe. But when I asked Walt Neighbors, the district attorney, he said it wouldn't be legal, so I filled him in like I've said. And everybody forgot about him.

Charlie Comers settled down to being one of us. He didn't get any worse, and he didn't get any better. Not much, anyway. Some days he'd be strong and lively, and other days he'd have to take a lay-off, and Al Raney'd tangle his long legs up under his typewriter and grind out some more of that awful stuff we'd used to have for news in the *Chronicle*. In October we had a bad dust storm, and Comers was pretty sick. Some of us got a little worried, and we dug up a few dollars

and sent Doc Adams to talk to a specialist about a new cure there was. But it didn't work—not to speak of. Comers wasn't going to be long-lived, as you might say—anybody could see that.

He was the outbeatenest hand for boys and girls I ever saw. Every time a kid had a birthday, Charlie would find out about it some way and remember it and send something for a present—a ball or a stick horse or a card game or a teething ring or a set of doll dishes—something, depending on the age and gender of the kid—and if you wanted to find him in a hurry you'd call into the street for a boy and ask him where Charlie Comers was, and that boy'd tell you or go find him. And he'd spin 'em stories, too—sitting in the shade of the cottonwoods over at the schoolhouse, or on a picnic at the mouth of Bishop Creek Cañon, or around.

It was this that got him into the only fracas he had. Everybody else in the Valley knew the Job Mountains and how their kids were abused, but for some reason nobody thought to tell Charlie Comers, nor to warn him about running into Job on the subject. Job was a hard customer. We didn't have any use for him, and two or three times there'd been talk of inviting him to skedaddle. Talk, that was all. Well, one day, on one of his rounds after material for those *Chronicle* write-ups, Charlie Comers went by Mountain's place and heard a boy hollering. He drove in, planning to ask his way or something, if he found things were all right and it was only a boy getting a tanning, but when he saw what was going on he jumped down with his buggy whip—that little, slim, frail, weak lad—and made for Joe Mountain like a wild cat.

Joe had a light buggy spoke in his hand, with a—well, let's leave that part go. One of the boys was on the ground, with his shirt ripped off, and bleeding. He had lost his strength to yell and was just moaning.

"You big, hulking brute!" Charlie cried at Job Mountain. "Don't you touch that boy again—not another wallop!"

Job swung around. "What business is it of yours?" he snarled.

Charlie was still going on. "I'll make it my business," he said. "You leave the boy alone."

With that he walks straight by Job Mountain and picks up the boy's head and puts his arms around him and looks the father in the eye. Mountain threw down the whip he'd made, with a cuss word, and went to the barn. Mrs. Mountain came out, scared to death, and between them the two got the boy in and washed up his cuts.

"I'm going to take the boy for a ride now, Mrs. Mountain," Charlie said, when the child was fixed up.

The woman objected. "His pa wouldn't like it," she said.

"I didn't suppose he would," Charlie said. "But I'm going to do it, anyway. I'll be back in half an hour—and I promise you that little Wheeler won't come to any harm."

The lad was afraid to go at first, but Charlie persuaded him with offers of a ball and a bat he said he wanted, and they started. As Charlie turned his horse and rig around, Job Mountain came running.

"Where you going with that boy?" he yelled.

"I'm going to take him to town," Charlie said. "And if you get in my way, I'll lay you wide open with this whip you made yourself." He swung that buggy spoke, and what was fastened to one end of it, out of the buggy. Mountain jumped to grab it, but Charlie jerked it back and let Job have it right across the face and shoulders. "I told you I would!" he cried. "Now you can follow me in, and we'll use

your face for evidence in the case," he said.

Sure enough, he got away with the boy, had Job Mountain arrested, and wrote such a piece in the paper about it that when Judge Whipple tried the father he gave him thirty days and made him serve it, too. Charlie Comers pretty near starved that month, because he took care of Job Mountain's family, and they had enough to eat and something to wear and trinkets to play with —for thirty days, anyway. When Job Mountain came out, he told some cronies that he was going to wait, but he was going to "get" Comers. We heard of it and dropped Job Mountain a hint. So he cooled off, to all appearances, and pretended that he hadn't said anything. Treated his family some better, too, maybe because Charlie Comers would go up there once in a while—alone and without a weapon—to see that he did. Job Mountain's grudge was another thing we all came to forget then, for a while.

It turned colder than usual that November, and the Piute Indians on the reservation west of town said that we were going to have "heap snow." We don't ordinarily get more'n a few inches that melts off about as fast as it falls, but us old-timers knew enough to listen to the Piutes. I had my boys stack the last cutting of alfalfa instead of selling it, and we brought our little herd of steers down from Long Valley as soon as we could after the big round-up, and put them under fence. Most of the other old settlers got ready for cold and the rest of them followed our lead or laughed at us, according to how they was made. The supervisors voted three to two to putting in an extra ten tons of coal, but Jim Pendergast couldn't persuade 'em to put a new roof on the courthouse. That vote was two to three.

The first snow didn't amount to much —six or seven inches, I'd say—but it stayed a mortal long time on the ground. Then, just as it was beginning to melt, on the sixteenth of December, we woke up to find it snowing again and a wind beginning to come down from the Sierras that loom up against our Valley sheer ten thousand feet on the west. On the seventeenth, the blow turned into a blizzard, and two or three shacks caved in from the weight of the snow. It snowed three days, night and day, and when I say snowed I mean snowed! I never saw the beat of it, and I come from Nebraska, too.

Charlie Comers moved into the hotel when his tent house collapsed. It was next to impossible to get around at all, so most of the county officers went to Bert Rhine's place, too, and a lot of our business was carried on there. I say a lot. I mean we did what we had to do. Business—business was snowed in!

Comers was coughing badly. The day the courthouse roof gave way he went out to see the sight and came back and went to bed. I dropped into his room that evening, and I was scared.

He says: "I reckon I'll have to give up the Christmas tree in the school yard."

"I've heard something about it," I says. "Yes, I guess there won't be any bonfire that night."

"But I ain't going to give up the presents, though," he said. "I can't. I've been telling the kids about it for a long time. And things are pretty tough this year—with the hard luck and now this snow—so Christmas will be sort of worse than ever for most of the poor children."

"What's this presents idea?" I says, more to make talk than anything.

"Oh, little knickknacks," Charlie says. "Since I been playing with the kids I've found out that little trinkets tickle 'em as much as bigger things—if you double up and give 'em all two or three. It's the novelty more'n the

price tag," he said, laughing, and then stopping to cough and grab for air.

I says: "You better leave Christmas things for somebody else, Charlie. You're a pretty sick boy," I says.

"Pshaw!" he says. "I'll be all right again in the spring."

"Sure; if you don't go traipsing around in this here snow you will. But spring hasn't come yet."

Charlie looked out of his window and then he looked back at me. His laugh went away and he put out a slim hand, all bone and brown, wrinkled skin, and touched my knee. "I was joking about spring, Sam Archer. I'm not going to see the spring." He stopped, and I tried to think of something to say. "I don't want to, anyway," he went on, with one of his sad smiles. "I'd like to be buried when everything's white, this way, and clean. Clean, like a child's heart."

But in another minute he was laughing again—telling me about how he'd seen Jim Collins trying to crawl out a window of the courthouse when the roof caved in, and how Jim stuck at the middle and yelled because he thought the rest of the place was going to fall atop of him.

Two days before Christmas, the first train we'd had through from Nevada came in, and among the passengers was a sheriff from Pennsylvania. He laughed at what we called a bad snow, even though it was then three feet deep on the level and half the houses in town were stove in from its weight, and he went plunging around in it like he preferred it that way. He ate at the Istalia with the rest of us, and then him and Monk Dorgan, our sheriff, went over to the county jail, where Monk's office was, and they had a talk that lasted quite a while.

The sheriff was named Andrew Buddington, and he was a good-natured, easy fellow, pretty fat, too, and full of stories he'd picked up from traveling men. In the afternoon Monk Dorgan came over to my office in the courthouse that had been repaired enough so's we could work in it on the first floor anyhow, and Monk set down beside my stove and rolled a cigarette and lit the match on his shoe and took a long breath of smoke. Then he told me something.

When he was through, I says: "Well, let's stave him off till after Christmas, anyhow. I don't see any way out. Of course I don't believe what he says, but law is law."

Monk says: "Yes, law is law. But how in thunder we going to keep this sheriff busy till after Thursday?"

"Is he in any hurry?" I says.

"Well, no—and it wouldn't do him any good if he was. I just saw Rand, and he says the road's blocked again and there won't be any trains out for three days, anyhow. But the trouble is to keep him from finding out about ——"

"Sure. I see."

We ended by telling Sheriff Buddington that his man—the man he had come out to get and take back on a forgery charge—was in Round Valley, because Round Valley roads were all blocked with snow and it would be a day or so before anybody could get in from there that would tell the sheriff different. Then Monk Dorgan and I had to scratch our ideas together for another job.

Because the name of the man this Pennsylvania sheriff wanted was Samuel R. Warren, and his description fitted Charlie Comers down to the ground. Bert Rhine was the one that remembered about the initials on Charlie's suit case—S. R. W. But even if we hadn't had that to go on, we would have known. We didn't believe Comers had ever forged anything. Even if he had, there wasn't a man in the Owens Valley, unless it was that ornery Job

Mountain, that would have cared what he was charged with in Pennsylvania or any place else. As far as we could, we'd have perjured ourselves through the political, civil, and criminal codes to keep Sheriff Buddington from finding him. But Charlie was too sick to move, and it was only a question of time before we'd have to give the boy up. And that would have been the end. Three hours in a railroad car in the weather we were having, especially going up through the White Mountains, with their altitude, would have done for Charlie Comers—and all the warrants and extradition papers in the world would have come short of reaching him and bringing him back from the land to which he would go.

Then there was the bigger job of keeping it all from Comers himself. We couldn't believe he was guilty of anything, as I say, but we knew him well enough to be plumb certain he'd hobble right out to Mr. Sheriff from Pennsylvania and give himself up if he heard he was wanted.

We had a conference on it, Bert Rhine and Monk Dorgan and Walter Neighbors, the district attorney, and me.

I says: "Sheriff Buddington is all right for a day or so—because I found out that he's a pinochle fan and I sicked Old Man White on to him, and they're at it for a long session. But sooner or later Buddington will get busy. And we don't want to get our county in bad—if it ain't going to do any good."

The district attorney grunted: "It isn't the county so much. An affidavit to the governor that Charlie Comers is too sick to be moved would stop extradition for a while—till he was better."

"Or dead," Bert Rhine says, and took off his glasses and begun to polish 'em like his life depended on it.

"Yes, or dead," Walt Neighbors said. "No, our trouble is to keep it from Charlie Comers himself. If we could only send this sheriff off satisfied—but he knows Charlie came here. That's the devil of it—he knows he's been here."

Then Sheriff Dorgan says, kind of thinking aloud: "From what Doc Adams says, the sheriff would go away satisfied, all right, if he'd only put off his trip a few weeks more. Charlie ain't going to live very long—not very long."

"Shut your mouth, Monk!" I says, and we all set there, looking at the fire.

Then an idea come sneaking up on me and hit me in the head.

Well, when I'd told the others they jumped up joyous and shook hands all around—and that was the day we started the loose-leaf system of records in the office of the county clerk of Owens County, Sam Archer, yours truly, clerk!

The job took us all afternoon and part of the night, because we had a lot of copying from my old records to do, and we only had two typewriters. But the day before Christmas it was done and ready for inspection.

They left it to me to start the "discovery" of what was in my records. So late that afternoon I found this surprising thing in my vital-statistics book and hustled into the district attorney's office and told him. He was all excited about the news, and he called his deputy—little Billy Meade.

"I'm going to be out a while, Billy," he says. "Mr. Archer thinks he's found the name of the man Sheriff Buddington wants to take back to Pennsylvania with him."

"Found it? Where?" says Billy.

"In his death records."

Billy Meade scratched his head. "I don't recollect anybody——" Then he stopped. "Oh, that poor John Doe fellow that died out by Wrenn's place?"

I nodded. "He called himself Spurgeon," I says. "But we found his name later and I put it into the records and

forgot all about it. He was S. R. Warren, all right."

"Well," Meade says, "that'll spoil things for Old Man White. He and this sheriff are about horse and horse at pinochle, and White was laying out to clean the sheriff up in the next day or two."

We laughed and called in Sheriff Dorgan and he went over to my office and saw my records, then he went through the snow and fetched Sheriff Buddington away from his pinochle and we showed him.

He put on a pair of spectacles and read that record careful and slow, then he asked for a piece of paper and he copied it out. After that he wanted to see Coroner Newcomb and Fred Ball, the undertaker, and they sat into our game and described deceased, and Sheriff Buddington grunted and said it was all clear, and too bad he'd made the trip—but that he'd always wanted to come to California, anyhow, so that was why he hadn't wired to us to make the arrest. Then he went back to the hotel and his pinochle and didn't even demand an affidavit from us nor certify that copy of the death record.

It was so easy we all tickled ourselves to death congratulating ourselves on it, and we went down to the hotel to eat. And there was Sheriff Buddington telling Old Man White about it—and that rat, Job Mountain, sitting beyond the stove and listening! When we came in, Mountain got up and went out.

That afternoon, coming on to Christmas Eve, Dorgan and I found Comers alone, and dressed.

"Good Lord!" Monk says, stopping in the door. "Are you better, or are you out of your head, you young rapscallion? Did the doc tell you you could get up?"

Charlie laughed and coughed. "Sh-h! Don't tell the doctor," he wheezed. "This is the night before Christmas—did you know that? And it's my busy night."

I says: "But, Charlie, it's snowing. You can't——"

"I can't, eh?" he says, tying his necktie with fingers that trembled. "You watch me. And you're going along, too, because this is regular Santa Claus weather and we'll need to do a good job."

Monk and I was thinking of the same thing—that sheriff out there playing pinochle. Monk is kind of quicker in the head than I am. "All right, Charlie," he says, "it's going to be any way you say. But if you get out there into the dining room, Doc Adams'll see you and he'll put you back to bed if he had to do it by main strength and awkwardness. So you just camp right here and Sam Archer'll bring you some grub. Then we'll go on your Santa Claus stunt if you want to."

We arranged it that way, and after Charlie Comers had pretended to eat a little we packed him up in Dorgan's big coat and all the mufflers and handkerchiefs we could find on the place and we smuggled him out of the hotel and half carried him to the Mercantile Store.

Charlie had about twelve dollars left. He bought twelve dollars' worth of gimcracks for kids, and made Mose Stein, the owner of the store, chip in a dollar's worth of candy. Then Monk Dorgan bought into the game with a ten-dollar note, and I chipped in a little, and about that time the two Summers boys happened by and they came across. When we'd cleaned Stein out, we went over to the novelty shop that little Mrs. Petty runs, across Main Street, and on the way we picked up Billy Meade and one of the Wattersons and they joined the procession and we had to have a sleigh to load the stuff in and there was some left over.

Well, it was close to midnight, and we were about through. When we

come to the Collinses, Charlie Comers was in bad shape, but he was bound he was going to pick out the things for these kids and carry 'em in himself. On the way he had an idea about letting the load down through the chimney with a wire, because the roof was low. Little Billy Meade climbed up on to the snow and slid off once, but the second time he made it, and we handed him up the sack, and just then the door opened, and there, with a candle in his hand, was Tommy Collins, about eight years old, in his nightdress, and four or five other Collinses along about the same age peeping around him—half scared and half pleased.

Outside, we were all scattering, because it seemed kind of foolish to get caught at such goings-on by a bunch of kids, but Charlie Comers was too slow. The kids saw him and made for him right through the snow, and in another second they were on him and down he went, with them piling over him and romping and laughing and yelling Merry Christmas and hugging him. He just cried.

By that time, Dad Collins was up, in his short-tailed nightgown, and Mrs. Collins was calling out to know what it was all about, and one of the kids ran back to the fireplace and found the sack and squealed for the others. So Charlie Comers got up and dusted himself off, and then suddenly he coughed violently and slumped down again.

Monk Dorgan got to him first. He lifted him up, like a baby, and brought him out to the sleigh, and the tears were running down the sheriff's face.

"He's gone out, boys!" he said. "Hustle, now!"

We pushed the team as hard as we could, but it was snowing again and progress was slow. Half a block from the Istalia, we stalled, and Monk jumped down and we handed Charlie Comers to him and he carried the boy in—and laid him down. Doc Adams came in a minute or two.

Several of us stayed all that night. Toward morning Charlie went to sleep for a while, but it wasn't a sound sleep. By eight o'clock he was sinking fast. The news had spread all around, and there were folks coming in from all over town and from the close-in ranches—all wanting to do something, and all bringing their kids. We told 'em how sick Charlie was, and that they'd have to be quiet—and durned if they weren't; never saw so many children together at once as still as those were.

I was in the room with Monk Dorgan and the doc and Bert Rhine when Charlie came to, about half past eight.

"I'm—all right," he says, whispering. "Merry Christmas!"

I choked up, but Doc Adams says: "Merry Christmas, Charlie!" And he took his hand, gentle as a woman.

I don't know what tarnation fool let him in—maybe he sneaked around some back way—but it was while we were there, with Charlie going, that Job Mountain showed himself in the door—and behind him was the sheriff from Pennsylvania. Monk Dorgan saw them first, and he made a jump and shoved them outside and closed the door. I told Charlie I was going in to tell some of the kids that he was getting along well and would be all right maybe in a day or two.

"Where are they?" he says, choking a little.

"There's quite a number of 'em in the front rooms."

He took my hand and pulled me down. "Ask them—to sing," he whispered.

I hurried out—I couldn't stand that voice of his. Monk Dorgan was pulling the sheriff along toward the dining room, keeping him quiet. I hurried in to the office and picked out Miss Minton, the school-teacher, and told her

what Charlie wanted, then I went on to join Monk Dorgan—and help him face his trouble.

When I got in, Sheriff Buddington was leaning over a pile on the floor, pulling at the top of it—which was Monk Dorgan. Underneath the pile was a thumping big man, striking out and squealing a little, trying to ward off what Monk Dorgan was giving him. I grabbed Sheriff Buddington. "It's all right, sheriff," I says. "Come on over here—Monk won't kill him."

"What the devil is this?" he demanded, turning to me. "That man Mountain says the sick man is——"

"He isn't, sheriff," I said. "I reckon you've got critters like Mountain in your country that are too ornery to live with decent men like Charlie Comers, haven't you? Charlie was out last night playing Santa Claus for the kids. He caved in, and now he's dying. Once he showed Job Mountain up for beating his boy, and Job wanted to get even."

The sheriff was looking over to where Monk Dorgan was dragging Job Mountain to his knees. "I don't know but what my duty requires me to investigate this thing, though, Mr. Archer," he said. "If I could see your sick man——"

"Well, you can't," I said. "He's too far gone to be bothered. You just take our word for it, and the records of Owens County——"

Monk had Job Mountain up now—pretty groggy and badly cut around the face—and was bringing him to us. "As for what Job Mountain said," I went on, "I expect he's coming over to tell you he lied."

Monk gave Job Mountain a hitch, and the big, hulking brute put up his hands. "Yes, that's right, sheriff," he said, sulkily enough. "I lied about Comers. Yes, I lied." Job slunk out of the room.

Sheriff Buddington looked at us both a minute. Then he sat down. "You say this boy—in the other room—is dying?"

"Yes."

"But he spent last night——"

"Packing Christmas things to the kids, yes. He collapsed at it."

"I see," he said slowly. Then he reached into his pocket. What he took out was the warrant for the arrest of a man called Samuel R. Warren. He took it in both hands and he tore it slowly across and across and dropped the bits to the floor. "I'm glad I didn't find Warren," he said. "The man that runs our county politically is a mill owner. Sam Warren was on a paper back there—he showed up child-labor conditions in the community. The political boss laid out to get him, and when Warren was accused of forgery we didn't any of us believe he was guilty. According to your records, Warren died here three months ago. That lets me out—closes the case. I'm glad of it. Good morning, gentlemen."

He went out after we'd all shook hands. Monk turned to me. "Well," he said, "I guess we're all right now—for that part of it."

"Yes," I said. "And I never thought Charlie Comers was guilty of anything. How could he be?"

We started back toward the boy's room—and just then those children in front of the hotel began to sing—at first with only a few voices, and Miss Minton's and Bert Rhine's tenor dominating 'em, but gradually growing stronger and stronger until they filled the cold Christmas air of the place with their music:

"While shepherds watched their flocks at night,
All seated on the ground,
The Angel of the Lord appeared,
And glory shone around!"

We went back to Charlie Comers, and he was smiling happily and dropping off—dropping off to sleep.

Sea Plunder

By Henry de Vere Stacpoole

Author of "The Gold Trail," "The Buccaneers," Etc.

III.—A CARGO OF CHAMPAGNE

BILLY MEERSAM, an old sailor friend in Frisco, told me this story as I was sitting one day on Rafferty's wharf, contemplating the green water, and smoking. Billy chewed and spat between paragraphs. We were discussing Captain Pat Ginnell and his ways; and Billy, who had served his time on hard ships, and, as a young man, on the *Three Brothers,* that tragedy of the sea which now lies a coal hulk in Gibraltar harbor, had quite a lot to say on hazing captains in general and Captain Pat Ginnell in particular.

"I had one trip with him," said Billy, "shark catchin' down the coast in that old dough dish of his, the *Heart of Ireland.* Treated me crool bad, he did; crool bad he treated me from first to last; his beef was as hard as his fist, and bud barley he served out for coffee. He was known all along the shore side, but he got his gruel at last, and got it good. Now, by any chance did you ever hear of a Captain Mike Blood and his mate, Billy Harman? Knew the parties, did you? Well, now, I'll tell you. Blood it were put the hood on Ginnell. Ginnell laid out to get the better of Blood, and Blood, he got the better of Ginnell. He and Harman signed on for a cruise in the *Heart of Ireland;* then they rose on Ginnell, and took the ship and made him deck hand. They did that. They made a line for a wreck they knew of on a rock be name of San Juan, off the San Lucas Islands, and the three of them were peeling that wreck, and they were just gettin' twenty thousand dollars in gold coin off her, when the party who'd bought the wreck, and his name was Gunderman, lit down on them and collared the boodle and kicked them back into their schooner, givin' them the choice of makin' an offing or takin' a free voyage back to Frisco, with a front seat in the penitentiary thrown in.

"It was a crool setback for them, the dollars hot in their hands one minit and took away the next, you may say, but they didn't quarrel over it; they set out on a new lay, and this is what happened with Cap' Ginnell."

But, with Mr. Meersam's leave, I will take the story from his mouth and tell it in my own way, with additions gathered from the chief protagonists and from other sources.

When the three adventurers, dismissed with a caution by Gunderman, got sail on the *Heart of Ireland,* they steered a sou'westerly course, till San Juan was a speck to northward and the San Lucas Islands were riding high on the sea on the port quarter.

Then Blood hove the schooner to for a council of war, and Ginnell, though reduced again to deck hand, was called into it.

"Well," said Blood, "that's over and done with, and there's no use calling names. Question is what we're to do

This series began in the November 7th issue.

now. We've missed twenty thousand dollars through fooling and delaying, and we've got to make good somehow, even on something small. If I had ten cents in my pocket, Pat Ginnell, I'd leave you and your old shark boat for the nearest point of land and hoof it back to Frisco; but I haven't—worse luck."

"There's no use in carryin' on like that," said Harman. "Frisco's no use to you or me, and your boots would be pretty well wore out before you got there. What I say is this: We've got a schooner that's rigged out for shark fishin'. Well, let's go on that lay; we'll give Ginnell a third share, and he'll share with us in payin' the coolies. Shark oil's fetchin' big prices now in Frisco. It's not twenty thousand dollars, but it's somethin'."

Ginnell, leaning against the after rail and cutting himself a fill of tobacco, laughed in a mirthless way. Then he spoke: "Shark fishin', begob; well, there's a word to be said be me on that. You two thought yourselves mighty clever, collarin' me boat and makin' yourselves masthers of it. I don't say you didn't thrump me ace, I don't say you didn't work it so that I can't have the law on you, but I'll say this, Misther Harman, if you want to go shark fishin', you can work the business yourself, and a nice hand you'll make of it. Why, you don't know the grounds, let alone the work. A third share, and me the rightful owner of this tub! I'll see you hamstrung before I put a hand to it."

"Then get forrard," said Harman. "Don't know the grounds? Maybe I don't know the grounds you used to work farther north, but I know every foot of the grounds here-a-way, right from the big kelp beds to the coast. Why, I been on the fish-commission ship and worked with 'em all through this part, takin' soundin's and specimens—rock, weed, an' fish. Know the bottom here as well as I know the pa'm of me hand."

"Well, if you know it so well, you've no need of me. Lay her on the grounds yourself," said Ginnell.

He went forward.

"Black sullen," said Harman, looking after him. "He ain't no use to lead or drive. Well, let's get her befor the wind an' crowd down closer to Santa Catalina. I'm not sayin' this is a good shark ground, the sea's too much of a blame' fish circus just here—but it's better than nothin'."

They got the *Heart* before the wind, which had died down to a three-knot breeze, Blood steering and Harman forward, on the lookout.

Harman was right, the sea round these coasts is a fish circus, to give it no better name.

The San Lucas Islands and Santa Catalina seem the rendezvous of most of the big fish inhabiting the Pacific. Beginning with San Miguel, the islands run almost parallel to the California coast in a sou'westerly direction, and, seen now from the schooner's deck, they might have been likened to vast ships under press of sail, so tall were they above the sea shimmer and so white in the sunshine their fog-filled cañons.

Away south, miles and miles away across the blue water, the peaks of Santa Catalina Island showed a dream of vague rose and gold.

It was for Santa Catalina that Harman was making now.

To tell the whole truth, bravely as he had talked of his knowledge of these waters, he was not at all sure in his mind as to their shark-bearing capacity. He did not know that for a boat whose business was shark-liver oil, this bit of sea was not the happiest hunting ground.

Nothing is more mysterious than the way fish make streets in the sea and

keep to them; make cities, so to say, and inhabit them at certain seasons; make playgrounds, and play in them.

Off the north of Santa Catalina Island you will find Yellow Fin. Cruise down on the seaward side and you will find a spot where the Yelow Fin vanish and the Yellow Tail take their place; farther south you strike the street of the White Sea Bass, which opens on to Halibut Square, which, in turn, gives upon a vast area, where the Black Sea Bass, the Swordfish, the Albacore, and the Whitefish are at home.

Steer round the south of the island and you hit the suburbs of the great fish city of the Santa Catalina Channel. The Grouper Banks are its purlieus, and the Sunfish keeps guard of its southern gate. You pass Barracuda Street and Bonito Street, till the roar of the Sea Lions from their rocks tells you that you are approaching the Washington Square of undersea things —the great Tuna grounds.

Skirting the Tuna grounds, and right down the Santa Catalina Channel, runs a Broadway which is also a Wall Street, where much business is done in the way of locomotion and destruction. Here are the Killer Whales and the Sulphur-bottom Whales and the Gray Whales, and the Porpoises, Dolphins, Skipjacks, and Sand Dabs.

Sharks you will find nearly everywhere, *but,* and this was a fact unknown to Harman, the sharks, as compared to the other big fish, are few and far between.

It was getting toward sundown, when the schooner, under a freshening wind, came along the seaward side of Santa Catalina Island. The island on this side shows two large bays, separated by a rounded promontory. In the northernmost of these bays they dropped anchor close in shore, in fifteen-fathom water.

II.

At dawn next morning they got the gear ready. The Chinese crew, during the night, had caught a plentiful supply of fish for bait, and, as the sun was looking over the coast hills, they hauled up the anchor and put out for the kelp beds.

There are two great kelp beds off the seaward coast of Santa Catalina, an inner and an outer. Two great submarine forests more thickly populated than any forest on land. This is the haunt of the Black Sea Bass that run in weight up to four hundred pounds, the Ribbon Fish, the Frogfish, and the Kelpfish, that builds its nest just as a bird builds, crabs innumerable, and sea creatures that have never yet been classified or counted.

They tied up to the kelp, and the fishing began, while the sun blazed stronger upon the water and the morning mists died out of the cañons of the island.

The shark hooks baited and lowered were relieved of their bait, but not by sharks; all sorts of bait snatchers inhabit these waters, and they were now simply chewing the fish off the big shark hooks.

Getting on for eleven o'clock, Blood, who had been keeping a restless eye seaward, left his line and went forward with Ginnell's glass, which he leveled at the horizon.

A sail on the sea line to the northwest had attracted his attention an hour ago, and the fact that it had scarcely altered its position, although there was a six-knot breeze blowing, had roused his curiosity.

"What is it?" asked Harman.

"Schooner hove to," said Blood. "No, b'gosh, she's not; she's abandoned."

At the word "abandoned," Ginnell, who had been fishing for want of something better to do, raised his head like a bird of prey.

He also left his line, and came forward. Blood handed him the glass.

"Faith, you're right," said Ginnell; "she's a derelick. Boys, up with them tomfool shark lines; here's a chanst of somethin' decent."

For once Blood and Harman were completely with him; the lines were hauled in, the kelp connections broken, mainsail and jib set, and in a moment, as it were, the *Heart of Ireland* was bounding on the swell, topsail and foresail shaking out now and bellying against the blue till she heeled almost gunwale under to the merry wind, boosting the green water from her bow, and sending the foam flooding in sheets to starboard.

It was as though the thought of plunder had put new heart and life into her, as it certainly had into her owner, Pat Ginnell.

As they drew nearer, they saw the condition of the schooner more clearly. Derelict and deserted, yet with mainsail set, she hung there, clawing at the wind and thrashing about in the mad manner of a vessel commanded only by her tiller.

Now the mainsail would fill and burst out, the boom swaying over to the rattle of block and cordage. For a moment she would give an exhibition of just how a ship ought to sail herself, and then, with a shudder, the air would spill from the sail, and, like a daft woman in a blowing wind, she would reel about with swinging gaff and boom to the tune of the straining rigging, the pitter-patter of the reef points, and the whine of the rudder nearly torn from its pintles.

A couple of cable lengths away the *Heart of Ireland* hove to, the whaleboat was lowered, and Blood, Ginnell, and Harman, leaving Chopstick Charlie in charge of the *Heart,* started for the derelict. They came round the stern of the stranger, and read her name, *Tamalpais,* done in letters that had been white, but were now a dingy yellow.

Then they came along the port side and hooked on to the fore channels, while Blood and the others scrambled on deck.

The deck was clean as a ballroom floor and sparkling with salt from the dried spray; there was no raffle or disorder of any sort. Every boat was gone, and the falls, swinging at full length from the davits, proclaimed the fact that the crew had left the vessel in an orderly manner, though hurriedly enough, no doubt; had abandoned her, leaving the falls swinging and the rudder playing loose and the winds to do what they willed with her.

There was no sign of fire, no disorder that spoke of mutiny, though in cargo and with a low freeboard, she rode free of water, one could tell that by the movement of her underfoot. Fire, leak, mutiny, those are the three reasons for the abandonment of a ship at sea, and there was no sign of any one of them.

Blood led the way aft, the saloon hatch was open, and they came down into the tiny saloon. The sunlight through the starboard portholes was spilling about in water shimmers on the pitch-pine paneling; everything was in order, and a meal was set out on the table, which showed a Maconochie jam tin, some boiled pork, and a basket of bread; plates were laid for two, and the plates had been used.

"Beats all," said Harman, looking round. "Boys, this is a find as good as the dollars. Derelict and not a cat on board, and she's all ninety tons. Then there's the cargo. B' Jiminy, but we're in luck!"

"Let's `roust out the cabins," said Ginnell.

They found the captain's cabin, easily marked by its size and its furniture.

Some oilskins and old clothes were

hanging up by the bunk, a sea chest stood open. It had evidently been rifled of its most precious contents; there was nothing much left in it but some clothes, a pair of sea boots, and some worthless odds and ends. In a locker they found the ship's papers. Blood plunged into these, and announced his discoveries to the others, crowding behind him and peeping over his shoulders.

"Captain Keene, master—bound from Frisco to Sydney with cargo of champagne—— And what in thunder is she doing down here? Never mind—we're the finders." He tossed the papers back in the locker and turned to the others. "No sign of the log. Most likely he's taken it off with him. What I want to see now is the cargo. If it's champagne, and not bottled bilge water, we're made. Come along, boys."

He led the way on deck, and between them they got the tarpaulin cover off the cargo hatch, undid the locking bars, and opened the hatch.

The cargo was perfectly stowed, the cases of California champagne ranged side by side, within touching distance of the hatch opening, and the brands on the boxes answering to the wording of the manifest.

Before doing anything more, Blood got the sail off the schooner, and then, having cast an eye round the horizon, more for weather than shipping, he came to the hatch edge and took his seat, with his feet dangling and his toes touching the cases. The others stood while he talked to them.

"There's some chaps," said Blood, "who'd be for running crooked on this game, taking the schooner off to some easy port and selling her and the cargo, but I'm not going to go in for any such mug's business as that. Frisco and salvage money is my idea."

"And what about the *Yan-Shan?*" asked Ginnell. "Frisco will be reekin' with the story of how Gunderman found us pickin' her bones and how he caught us with the dollars in our hands. Don't you think the underwriters will put that up against us? Maybe they won't say we've murdered the crew of this hooker for the sake of the salvage! Our characters are none too bright to be goin' about with schooners and cargoes of fizz, askin' for salvage money."

"*Your* character ain't," said Harman. "Speak for yourself when you're talkin' of characters, and leave us out. I'm with Blood. I've had enough of this shady business, and I ain't goin' to run crooked no more. Frisco and salvage moneys—my game, b'sides, you needn't come into Frisco harbor. Lend us a couple of your hands to take her in, and we'll do the business and share equal with you in the takin's. I ain't a man to go back on a pal for a few dirty dollars, and my word's as good as my bond all along the water side with pals. I ain't sayin' nothin' about owners or companies; I say with pals, and you'll find your share banked for you in the Bank of California, safe as if you'd put it there yourself."

Ginnell for a moment seemed about to dissent violently from this proposition; then, of a sudden, he fell calm.

"Well," said he, "maybe I'm wrong and maybe you're right, but I ain't goin' to hang behind. If you've fixed on taking her into Frisco, I'll follow you in and help in the swearin'. You two chaps can navigate her with a couple of the coolies I'll lend you, and, mind you, it's equal shares I'm askin'."

"Right," said Harman. "What do you say, Blood?"

"I'm agreeable," said Blood; "though it's more than he deserves, considering all things."

"Well, I'm not goin' to put up no arguments," said Ginnell. "I states me terms, and, now that's fixed, I proposes we takes stock of the cargo. Rig a tackle and get one of them cases on

deck and let's see if the manifest holds when the wrappin's is off."

The others agreed. With the help of a couple of the Chinamen from the boat alongside, they rigged a tackle and got out a case. Harman, poking about, produced a chisel and mallet from the hole where the schooner's carpenter had kept his tools, a strip of boarding was removed from the top of the case, and next moment a champagne bottle, in its straw jacket, was in the hands of Ginnell.

"Packed careful," said he.

He removed the jacket and the pink tissue paper from the bottle, whose gold capsule glittered delightfully in the sunlight.

Then he knocked the bottle's head off, and the amber wine creamed out over his hands and onto the deck.

Harman ran to the galley and fetched a pannikin, and they sampled the stuff, and then Blood, taking the half-empty bottle, threw it overboard.

"We don't want any drinking," said he; "and we'll have to account for every bottle. Now, then, get the lid fixed again and the case back in the hold, and let's see what's in the lazaret in the way of provisions."

They got the case back, closed the hatch, and then started on an inspection of the stores, finding plenty of stuff in the way of pork and rice and flour, but no delicacies. There was not an ounce of tea or coffee, no sugar, no tobacco.

"They must have took it all with them when they made off," said Harman.

"That's easy mended," replied Ginnell. "We can get some stores from the *Heart;* s'pose I go off to her and fetch what's wanted and leave you two chaps here?"

"Not on your life," said Blood; "we all stick together, Pat Ginnell, and so there'll be no monkey tricks played. That's straight. Get your fellers into the boat and let's shove off, then Harman and I can come back with the stores and the hands you can lend us to work her."

"Faith, you're all suspicious," said Ginnell, with a grin. "Well, over with you, and we'll all go back together. I'm gettin' to feel as if I was married to you two chaps. However, there's no use in grumblin'."

"Not a bit," said Blood.

He followed Ginnell into the whaleboat, and, leaving the *Tamalpais* to rock alone on the swell, they made back for the *Heart of Ireland.*

Now, Ginnell, although he had agreed to go back to Frisco, had no inclination to do so, the fact of the matter being that the place had become too hot for him.

He had played with smuggling, and had been friendly with the Greeks of the Upper Bay and the Chinese of Petaluma. He had fished with Chinese sturgeon lines, foul inventions of Satan, as all Chinese sporting, hunting, and fishing contraptions are, and had fallen foul of the patrol men; he had lit his path with blazing drunks as with bonfires, mishandled his fellow creatures, robbed them, cheated them, and lied to them. He had talked big in bars, and the wharf side of San Francisco was sick of him; so, if you understand the strength of the wharf-side stomach, you can form some estimate of the character of Captain Ginnell. He knew quite well the feeling of the harbor side against him, and he knew quite well how that feeling would be inflated at the sight of him coming back triumphant, with a salved schooner in tow. Then there was Gunderman. He feared Gunderman more than he feared the devil, and he feared the story that Gunderman would have to tell even more than he feared Gunderman.

No, he had done with Frisco; he never would go back there again; he had done with the *Heart of Ireland.*

He would strike out again in life with a new name and a new schooner and a cargo of champagne, sell schooner and cargo, and make another start with still another name.

Revolving this decision in his mind, he winked at the backs of Blood and Harman as they went up the little companion ladder before him and gained the deck of the *Heart of Ireland.*

Blood led the way down to the cabin. The lazaret was situated under the cabin floor, and, while Harman opened it, Blood, with a pencil and a bit of paper, figured out their requirements.

"We want a couple of tins of coffee," said he, "and half a dozen of condensed milk—sugar, biscuits—tobacco—beef."

"It's sorry I am I haven't any cigars to offer you," said Ginnell, with a half laugh, "but there's some tins of sardines; be sure an' take the sardines, Mr. Harman, for me heart wouldn't be aisy if I didn't think you were well supplied with comforts."

"I can't find any sardines," said the delving Harman, "but here's baccy enough, and eight tins of beef will be more than enough to get us to Frisco."

"Take a dozen," said Ginnell; "there ain't more than a dozen all told; but, sure, I'll manage to do without, and never grumble so long as you're well supplied."

Blood glanced at him with an angry spark in his eye.

"We've no wish to crowd you, Pat Ginnell," said he, "and what we take we pay for, or we will pay for it when we get to port. You'll please remember you're talking to an Irishman."

"Irishman!" cried Ginnell. "You'll be plazed to remember I'm an Irishman, too."

"Well I know it," replied the other.

This remark, for some unaccountable reason, seemed to incense Ginnell. He clenched his fists, stuck out his jaw, glanced Blood up and down, and then, as if remembering something, brought himself under control with a mighty effort.

"There's no use in talk," said he; "we'd better be gettin' on with our business. You'll want somethin' in the way of a sack to cart all that stuff off to the schooner. I'll fetch you one."

He turned to the companion ladder and climbed it in a leisurely fashion. On deck he took a deep breath and stood for a moment scanning the horizon from north to south. Then he turned and cast his eyes over Santa Catalina and the distant coast line.

Not a sail was visible, nor the faintest indication of smoke in all that stainless blue, sweeping in a great arc from the northern to the southern limits of visibility.

No one was present to watch Ginnell and what he was about to do. No one save God and the sea gulls—for Chinese don't count.

He stepped to the cabin hatch.

"Misther Harman!" cried he.

"Hello!" answered Harman, from below. "Whacher want?"

"It's about the Bank of California I want to speak to you," replied Ginnell.

Harman's round and astonished face appeared at the foot of the ladder.

"Bank of California?" said he. "What the blazes do you mean, Pat Ginnell?"

"Why, you said you'd put me share of the salvage in the Bank of California, didn't you?" replied Ginnell. "Well, I just want to say I'm agreeable to your proposal—and will you be plazed to give the manager me love when you see him?"

With that he shut the hatch, fastening it securely and prisoning the two men below, whose voices came now bearing indications of language enough, one might fancy, to lift the deck. He knew it would take them a day's hard work to break out, and maybe two. Bad as Ginnell might be, he was not a murderer, and he reckoned their

chances were excellent considering the provisions and water they had, their own energies, and the drift of the current, which would take them close up to Santa Catalina.

He also reckoned that they would give him no trouble in the way of pursuit, for he had literally made them a present of the *Heart of Ireland*.

Having satisfied himself that they were well and securely held, he sent the whaleboat off to the *Tamalpais*, laden with the crew's belongings, consisting of all sorts of quaint boxes and mats. This was managed in one journey; the boat came back for him, and, in less than an hour from the start of the business, he found himself standing on the deck of the *Tamalpais*, all the crew transferred, the fellows hauling on the halyards, Chopstick Charlie at the helm, and a good schooner, with a cargo worth many thousands of dollars, underfoot.

He turned to have a look at the compass and a word with the steersman before going below.

Down below he had a complete turnout of the captain's cabin, and found the log for which Harman had hunted in vain; it had got down between the bunk bedding and the paneling, and he brought it into the main cabin, and there, seated at the table, he pored over it, breathing hard and following the passages with his horny thumb.

The thing had been faked most obviously, and the faking had begun two days out from Frisco. A gale that had never blown had driven the *Tamalpais* out of her course, et cetera, et cetera; and Ginnell, with the eye of a sailor and with his knowledge of the condition of the *Tamalpais* when found, saw at once that there was something here darker even than the darkness that Blood and Harman had perceived. Why had the log been faked? Why had the schooner been abandoned? If it were a question of insurance, Captain Keene would have scuttled her or fired her.

Then, again, everything spoke of haste amounting to panic. Why should a vessel, in perfect condition and in good weather, be deserted as though some visible plague had suddenly appeared on board of her?

Ginnell closed the book and tossed it back in the bunk.

"What's the meaning of it?"

Unhappy man, he was soon to find out.

At eight o'clock next morning, in perfect weather, Ginnell, standing by the steersman and casting his eyes around, saw across the heaving blueness of the sea a smudge of smoke on the western horizon. A few minutes later, as the smoke cleared, he made out the form of the vessel that had been firing up.

Captain Keene had left an old pair of binoculars among the other truck in his cabin. Ginnell went down and fetched them on deck, then he looked.

The stranger was a torpedo boat; she was making due south, and, like all torpedo boats, she seemed in a hurry.

Then, all at once, and even as he looked, her form began to alter, she shortened mysteriously, and her two funnels became gradually one.

She had altered her course; she had evidently sighted, and was making direct for, the *Tamalpais*. Not exactly direct, perhaps, but directly enough to make Ginnell's lips dry as sandstone.

"Bad cess to her," said Ginnell to himself; "there's no use in doin' anythin' but pretendin' to be deaf and dumb. And, sure, aren't I an honest trader, with all me credentials, Capt'in Keene, of Frisco, blown out of me course, me mate washed overboard? Let her come."

She came without any letting. Shearing along through the water, across which the hubbub of her engines could be distinctly heard, and within signal-

ing distance, now, she let fly a string of bunting to the breeze, an order to heave to, which the *Tamalpais,* that honest trader, disregarded.

Then came a puff of white smoke, the boom of a gun, and a practice shell that raised a plume of spray a cable length in front of the schooner, and went off, making ducks and drakes for miles across the blue sea.

Ginnell rushed to the halyards himself. Chopstick Charlie, at the wheel, required no orders, and the *Tamalpais* came round, with all her canvas spilling the wind and slatting, while the warship, stealing along now with just a ripple at her stern, came gliding past the stem of the schooner.

They were taking her name, just as a policeman takes the number of a motor car.

It was a ghastly business. No cheery voice, with the inquiry: "What's your name and where are you bound for?" Just a silent inspection, and then a dropped boat.

Next moment a lieutenant of the American navy was coming over the side of the *Tamalpais,* to be received by Ginnell.

"Captain Keene?" asked the lieutenant.

"That's me name," answered the unfortunate, who had determined on the rôle of the blustering innocent; "and who are you, to be boardin' me like this and firing guns at me?"

"Well, of all the —— cheek!" said the other, with a laugh. "A nice dance you've led us since we lost you in that fog."

"Which fog?" asked the astonished Ginnell. "Fog! It's some other ship you're after, for I haven't sighted a fog since leavin' port."

"Oh, close up!" said the other.

His men, who had come on board, were busy with the covering of the main hatch, and he walked forward, to superintend.

The hatch cover off, they rigged a tackle and hauled out a case of champagne; four cases of champagne they brought on deck, and then, attacking the next layer, they brought out a case of a different description. It contained a machine gun.

Under the champagne layer, the *Tamalpais* was crammed right down to the garboard strakes with contraband of war in the form of arms and ammunition for the small South American republic that was just then kicking up a dust around its murdered president.

Ginnell saw his own position at a glance. The *Heart of Ireland* given away to Blood and Harman for the captaincy of a gun runner, and a seized gun runner at that.

He saw now why Keene and his crew had deserted in a hurry. Chased by the warship, and running into a fog, they had slipped away in the boats, making for the coast, while the pursuer had made a dead-west run of it to clear herself of the dangerous coast waters and their rocks and shoals.

That was plain enough to Ginnell, but the prospect ahead of him was not clear at all.

He could never confess the truth about the *Heart of Ireland,* and, when they took him back to Frisco, it would at once be discovered that he was not Keene, but Ginnell. What would happen to him?

What did happen to him? I don't know. Billy Meersam could throw no light on the matter. He said that he believed the thing was "hushed up somehow or 'nother," finishing with the opinion that a good many things are hushed up somehow or 'nother in Frisco.

The fourth story in this series—entitled "Avalon Bay"—will appear in the December 20th POPULAR.

The Nest of Sticks

By Frederick Irving Anderson

Author of "The Peppercorn Entail," "The Mouse Hole," Etc.

In Colombia, in Panama, in Honduras, in every port of the Spanish Main as far east as the Windward Islands you would find some soul pondering over what he might contribute in the way of a stick for this wonderful "Nest"—which was to be a kind of doll's garden in the midst of a void of jungle; all order and peace within; all turmoil and chaos without.

DALTON, the medical inspector of the Amicos division, was making one of his quarterly visits up country to the Plateau of the Three Fire Cones, where his company was varying the monotony of the eternal banana with cocoa beans—and experimenting with a cross between native and Mysore cattle to eradicate the tick. Fever was of sufficient weight in the annual dividend to make Dalton—who knew more about fever than any other man alive—something of a personage when he traveled; there was usually a private train drawn up on a sidetrack to do his bidding.

This time, however, he dodged the upholstery. He was gray, but there was enough of the boy in him yet to make him delight in the wild harum-scarum flight through the tropical thicket of the popgun gasoline motor car, a revised one-lung edition of our ancient hand car, that can go wherever the standard Latin-gauge railroad goes—and in the banana bush the railroad goes everywhere. It is the national highway, with a well-worn path between the rusty rails for burros and Jamaica niggers. Dalton was playing hooky on this trip, with only a self-starter, in the person of a negro boy, to push the motor car until its lone cylinder fired, as a companion, and an exceedingly spare kit. He had several reasons for dodging the inevitable private car. The principal and sufficient one was that should he come on Hecsher, the division superintendent, unawares, up on the plateau, he might get a glimpse of the famous nest. Hecsher was putting together a dovecote for his bride.

Hecsher was putting off his trip north to bring her to her new home until the last orchid should be swelling in its air pot and bursting in many-colored sprays over the portals through which she was to enter in state.

This palace of dreams had become famous throughout Latin America, though the bridegroom had guarded it from chance visitors as some inviolable tomb, only the eyes of his negro artisans being allowed to profane it. The superintendent was a moody, sentimental German, the last man in the world one would have picked for a post six years alone in a tropical bush. But here he had been six years now, dreaming all the while of the paradise he was bringing to fruition. Once in a rare while

he dropped a word of her—but no sooner was it uttered than he seemed overcome with confusion at being caught thinking aloud. The big Teuton was as transparent as a child; and they all wondered what type of woman she might be who was willing to wait six years for him, the gloomy, silent Hecsher, whose eyes seemed devouring pictures in every chance shadow. Finally he had begun to build.

First the giant trees came down; then the bush—all a negro could cut in two strokes of his machete; then followed the rude plow, drawn by his Mysore cattle. At last the square was cut. It lay on the saddle of the mountain, with three volcanoes facing it from across the plateau, looking at the sun. The hungry jungle crowded the square on all sides, boxed it in with dark shadows and heavy vapors. He called it Guapiles—Twins—after the twin rivers that flowed on either side. There was to be only one street in Guapiles, just as there was to be only one house. That one street was the banana railroad, and the Garden of Eden faced it through the columns of a pagoda, draped with weeping vines.

Word of his activities trickled down to the coast; and the wireless man at the point, gossiping with the four winds of heaven one day, said, quite casually, that Hecsher had begun to gather sticks for his nest. The whispering masts at Swan Island, Gracias à Dios, Almirante, Bocas, and as far south along the main as Santa Marta and Cartagena took it up and passed on the information to the army of white men whose prosperity hangs on their success in keeping the banana green until it reaches the market.

Engineers, division superintendents, commercial diplomats playing cat-and-mouse politics with cheese-box states, running transits, laying railroads, draining swamps, fighting mosquitoes, paused in their efforts and smiled, and passed various remarks, sacred and profane, about Hecsher and his nest, the nest he was to call the Twins.

Mendes, down in Colombia, set aside some mahogany logs from a twenty-thousand hectare tract he was clearing for King Banana—had them sawed into board, plank, and timber, and stamped the name of Hecsher on every piece that showed a feather. Gaylord, in Panama, back from the coast, quite on his own initiative, saved out some rosewood intended for fence posts and a green orchid he prized above even his pay envelope. Winchell, in Colón, rescued a batch of rosewood railroad ties destined for the burning, and had them turned and squared into staircase spindles. Every ship that tied up at the wharf in Limon had some contribution consigned to "Hecsher Twins." Whether it was their sense of humor, or their sense of fellowship, no one ever inquired, least of all Hecsher himself. Hardly a mother's son of them had ever squeezed more than a half dozen consecutive words out of him—nevertheless they sent sticks for the nest. From Tegucigalpa came a pair of pot-bellied stone gods for the portals through which the bride was to enter. From somewhere back of Guatemala City came a cluster of bells of thin clay, inside of which gold images tinkled incessantly. Watson, in Honduras, found a square of quartz sprinkled with concentric agate, big enough for a table top. And from over the ridge beyond San José toiled a trainload of cedar panels for the dining room, with specific injunction that they should be scoured with a green coconut husk one hour each day for one year.

Nor was that all—fruits, herbs, flowers of exotic hue and fragrance, rare trees, with roots boxed in palm mats, arrived to people this garden, this garden hewn in the midst of the void of jungle, with its four blank walls sullenly facing the nest. It was to be like

a doll's garden in the middle of a playroom floor, all order and peace within, all turmoil and chaos without. Hecsher toiled on, struck dumb by the largesse. There were days when the precious banana had to take a sidetrack while goods consigned to Hecsher Twins were being smuggled up the line; and officials looked on smilingly through their fingers and wrote long reports home of the splendid *esprit de corps* of the organization. Draw an arc from Belize, in British Honduras, down to the Spanish Main, and as far east as the Windward Islands, and in every port you would find some soul pondering over what he might contribute in the way of a stick for this wonderful nest.

So when Dalton, the medical inspector, came popping up the line that morning, his eyes and his thoughts were all for the nest. As he trotted up the office steps, he was just in time to be butted out of the way by a badly shorn priest, accompanied by a sallow, leering little man in an exceedingly dirty set of linens. It was too hot to quarrel; and, besides, the welfare department of the company encouraged the idea that the white men should turn the other cheek to the irritating punctilios of native officials. So the doctor contented himself with a smile.

He didn't say hello to Hecsher as he entered, or offer to shake hands. Hecsher never said hello or good-by to his few intimates, never said much of anything, in fact. But the doctor loved him none the less for it, their peculiar friendship having grown out of the capacity for silence on the one side, and pleasant garrulity on the other. It was a friendship of mutual confidence, founded more on what each instinctively felt the other had of reserve than what lay on the surface.

"You will have to put in a requisition for a wider door here," said Dalton. "I suppose the honorable gentleman who looks as though he sleeps in his Sunday suit is the lord mayor of one of your mess of mud huts, eh?"

"Yes," said Hecsher wearily, thumbing his voluminous whiskers as he still gave attention to the litter of papers on his desk. "We preserve the fiction, doctor, that we have nothing to do with the civil administration. But these yellow bellies have the habit of turning us into policemen every now and then."

His tone was so casual that a listener might have thought he and Dalton had been sitting there gossiping in the heat all morning, instead of just coming together for the first time in months. Nothing disturbed the German's systematic routine. He reached over and touched a bell, and a neat-looking colored boy appeared.

"Send George Crews here," said the superintendent, and again he was immersed in his papers. The doctor began helping himself to lime juice and ice, smiling to himself at the thought that he had arrived just when Hecsher, famous for the manner in which he handled his blacks, as the paternal overlord of the plantation, was embarking on one of his little domestic scenes. The door opened noiselessly. A young negro, not the awkward, shambling monkey of the bush, but a lithe, upright, clear-eyed black, entered and stood respectfully at attention.

"George!"

"Yes, sir, boss." The accent was the peculiar tribal guttural to which the blacks of the Caribbean Islands, from which this part of the world drafts its labor, have reverted.

"Alcalde Don Damon has just gone, George."

"Yes, sir, boss."

The information seemed to convey nothing to him. He waited patiently.

"He wants you, George—wants to put you in jail."

For a startled moment the eyes of the negro, instinct with flight, took

stock of the doors and windows. Then his gaze came back to Hecsher, and his confidence returned.

"Have you done anything wrong, George?" asked the German, now for the first time raising his eyes and letting them rest quietly on the man before him, as though it were an animal he sought to soothe into a sense of security.

"No, sir, boss!" came the answer quickly. Then, as though reviewing the various crimes that might be charged against him, he said carefully: "I got no debt. Gin is—bad for my stummick. No beat my girl. She good woman! I buy her new red dress!"

The negro suddenly raised his arm and pointed through an open window. Dalton turned and looked. A young negress, attired in the most lurid of the reds, straight-backed and square-shouldered, was swinging by with the easy carriage and free stride of a race used to carry burdens on the head.

"Where did you get your woman, George?"

"I buy her, boss, sir! I buy her from yellow man of Don Francisco. I pay five dollar!"

The eyes of the two white men met. One might as well think of scolding Solomon for his thousand wives as attempt to persuade an island black that women are not chattels.

"But the padre tells me he married her to the yellow man." Hecsher's voice was grave, his lips unsmiling. "You cannot buy a man's wife, George."

Nevertheless, that was just what George had done, and the yellow man was perfectly satisfied. However, the duly constituted authority of a cluster of thatched bamboo huts up the line had that day expressed itself as astounded at a custom a hundred generations old, and had demanded the body of the offender.

So Hecsher, with soft patience, explained to the black that he had erred, and that he must comply with the law and go to jail. It was with the utmost difficulty that he made George understand he must go to jail because the alcalde said so, not because Hecsher said so. Suddenly the youth burst into wailings.

"What become of my dyn'mo?" he wailed.

Dalton cocked his ears. Hecsher had been training this negro as attendant of a small hydroelectric station which was to supply light and power for the plantation and the wonderful house; and the black, mastering the intricacies with an extraordinary aptitude, took an awesome pride in his mysterious office. Apparently, then, it was not the prospect of going to jail, nor even the prospect of leaving a bride, for whom he had recently purchased a new red dress, that harrowed his soul. It was the parting with his precious dynamo.

"I am afraid you will have to go, George," said Hecsher, resuming his papers again. "I'll keep the dynamo for you till you come back. Now run along."

This promise eased the torture.

"You say I go, sir, boss?" asked George, brightening.

"I say nothing of the kind," said the lord and master. "The alcalde says you must go. Run along, like a good boy—and don't buy any more wives."

The negro suited the action to the word. He did not stop to say good-by to the red-skirted root of all evil, who was within hail; he started blithely up the track to the jail, which was made of woven bamboo and as invulnerable as a rusty sieve.

"There goes the only boy I have who knows the difference between a cotter pin and a countershaft," said Hecsher, looking after him; and straightway he plunged into his report to the medical inspector as to the con-

dition of his blacks, the totings of his ample store of drugs, and so on. It was brief, delivered with the harsh terseness of the silent man who has few words to waste; and Dalton listened perfunctorily. There was seldom any illness up here on the plateau. Hecsher had a knowledge of medicine, and plied simple remedies to such good effect that the duties of the medical inspector up here began and ended with an O. K. and initials signed to precise reports. Hecsher put aside his papers now, and, over their lime juice, told of a new Peruvian stallion just imported, a chestnut animal with cream-colored mane and tail, and a Spanish jack of rare price. Then they talked of alligators. Alligators were really the common ground on which their intimacy had first begun, because Dalton was interested in nothing so much—outside of the color of a man's tongue—as the imaginary half-dollar spot just below a gator's eyes, through which a .30-.30 bullet may enter and snip out the pinhead brain.

"I have come up to see the house," said the doctor, suddenly broaching the object of his curiosity. The big German pulled at his whiskers, and turned a deep scarlet under their covering.

"No," he said gruffly. "No; oh, no. Not yet."

"But when, then?" persisted the doctor, laughing outright at the confusion which overwhelmed his taciturn friend at the mere mention of this dream of his life.

"You have promised, you know," went on the doctor, still laughing. "Gad, it must be like a world's fair by this time. I hear about it every place I go."

"When do you come this way again?"

"In a fortnight. I go over to see Watkins, and then I double back through here to Limon."

"In two weeks, then," said Hecsher, rising, the ghost of a pleased smile playing about the corners of his mouth. "In two weeks, then, doctor." And he turned and buried himself in his desk, while his guest, accustomed to this abrupt way, started on his journey up and over the ridge, and down the mountainside to the peaceful Pacific. As his motor pop-popped on its path through the close-crowded right of way, he smiled as he thought of the tales he would bear down to Limon on his return.

Dalton finished his business in pills and purges over on the west coast, and tried once more to dodge the parlor-car train that was to speed him on his way back to the center of gravity of the organization. This time he was less successful; and he had to make himself as comfortable as possible in Pullman magnificence, albeit the red cushions of his gorgeous carriage were poisoned to the point of positive danger to keep out red ants. There had been torrential rains the week before, and, as the lonely doctor bumped along in regal splendor, and sighed for his hippety-hopping gasoline motor, he caught occasional glimpses of ugly gashes cut in hillside and gorge, and hastily improvised trestles, as slender as toothpicks, over which his train passed tremblingly. Just as night settled down like a blanket, a rain squall hit him, and for hours the train laboriously crawled up grade, while the rain swished in waves across the roof, and the heavy foliage of the jungle wiped the car on two sides with the pat-patter of beating hail.

Dalton was vaguely wondering if Hecsher would press his hospitality to its usual length of meeting him halfway, when the train came to a bumping stop, and, peering out through the window, he made out, by the light of a lantern, the big form of the German,

in oilskins, toiling with a negro boy to ditch their wildcat gasoline car.

The next minute the master of Guapiles was aboard, coming in with a gust of the tempest. He had with him his Great Dane, a stately female with melancholy eyes, who strode into the compartment at his heels, and shook herself vigorously, regardless of the sacred, poisoned upholstery of the president and honorable board of directors.

Dalton knew he was expected neither to evidence surprise at the German's having coasted eighteen miles down the mountainside, in Stygian darkness, to meet him; nor indignation at the local shower precipitated by the dog. Hecsher divested himself of his oilskins, and found his pipe and tobacco, providentially dry; then, with his wet mop of a dog sitting between his knees, he began his report, with neither a how-do-you-do nor a handshake. That was his way. If he chanced on Dalton within twenty-four hours of a previous meeting, his first words would be official, filling in the gap since their last interview. The fact that the medical inspector might be coming for a shot at that vague half-dollar spot on an alligator's snout, or for a many times postponed view of the famous house, had nothing to do with the matter. Dalton put a question or two about the farm and the Mysores; and the German, talking shop, rumbled on as lurchingly as the train. They talked about the banana blight in the lowlands, and the efforts of the independent planters to get a footing; and Dalton retailed some fresh news of the outside world, the up-north world.

Then of a sudden, and with much stammering, Hecsher began talking about the house. He stroked the wet head of his great dog, and looked wistfully at the creature as he talked. He spoke of the place as one speaks of some peculiarly vivid dream, something almost but not quite possessed. He did not mention the woman; it was all about the house for the woman—but, as he painted the color of it with his few words, she seemed to Dalton to be standing beside him, listening and smiling down on him.

"I suppose your boy, George Crews, has expiated his crime by this time and got back to his darling dynamo?" asked Dalton.

Hecsher stopped abruptly in the act of saying something, and stared stupidly at his guest.

"What!" he finally ejaculated. And then dully, shaking his head and tugging at his whiskers: "You haven't heard about it down below, then?"

"No; what has happened?"

"He has turned himself into a banana tree."

This piece of information was delivered with a grimness that forbade the implication of humor. Dalton knocked the ashes off his cigar and stood up.

"So the only black man you've got who knows the difference between a cotter pin and a countershaft has turned himself into a banana tree, eh?" he exclaimed whimsically. "How did he manage it, Hecsher? If the company had the secret, they might increase the annual dividend!"

The doctor scented the unusual, the uncanny, and the somber aspect of Hecsher whetted his appetite for the details. The superintendent, in ragged sentences, told the story. The Jamaica negro had gone to jail blithely enough that morning when Dalton had stopped over on his trip to the west coast. They had put him under lock and key in their rickety calaboose; but when they carried his bread and water the next morning, they found not Crews, but the woman in the red dress. She explained, quite simply, that she would stay there for Crews as long as they desired. The alcalde stormed that he

wanted the man, not the woman. There was no trouble in finding him, because Crews, content that the strange thing called law was being satisfied in his case by proxy, had gone back to his beloved dynamo, for which he would have paid much more than the price of a woman, even a woman willing to go to jail for him at any time. It was not until appeal was made to Hecsher, and the black brought before him again, that Crews consented to return to jail peacefully. But the next morning the comedy was repeated. Crews had flown, and the negress, in her gaudy frock, was waiting for his breakfast.

They didn't find Crews that day, nor the next, nor the next. He had gone into the brush; and, when the black takes to the bush when mangoes are ripe, there is no catching him. The alcalde told the woman they would keep her until they found her man; she made no murmur, even when they took her out of the open-air jail, and put her in a cellar with six inches of water to sleep on, and lizards and other crawling things to people the darkness.

"This is true romance!" cried Dalton, delighted with the tale. "And yet they tell us that this tribe will have tails in another generation or two. Tell me, Hecsher, would you be willing to sacrifice yourself for a woman—take a jail sentence for her, in six inches of water, and the other trimmings our honorable alcaldes know how to devise. Oh, yes, you would!" he broke off, laughing. "But you are an idealist. You have been slaving, working your fingers down to the bone, here in the bush for six years—all for a woman. But the rest of us—no, I am afraid not! We are not educated up to that yet. Or we are educated beyond it; I don't know which. Go on! What happened then?"

"The second night the woman began to scream."

"Humph!"

"Then my black boy came back."

"Yes!"

"He went to the alcalde—wanted to go in there—to let the woman out. But the alcalde didn't want him. Said he'd rather have Crews around outside listening, with the rest. Then Crews——"

"Crews killed him!" broke in Dalton.

"Certainly," said the German, and he sat staring placidly at his guest. "He stole one of my shotguns—sawed it off, so long—and blew his head off."

The doctor smoked for a full minute over this; then he said:

"I would have done the same thing, Hecsher!"

"Yes," said Hecsher, nodding; "and I too, doctor."

"Did he get his woman?"

"Yes. He went into the bush and sent for them to bring her to him."

"And they brought her?"

"No; they hid. He went after her. He got her. He killed six of them getting her."

"Six!"

"Six," nodded the German. "Six that night. Two more, since. He has the blood lust. He is a wild man! *Himmel!* One stroke, doctor!—when I sent him to jail for something he could not understand—turned him from a creature of intelligence into a savage beast! *Ach!*"

"No; it was not that," interposed the doctor. "It was the woman's scream. Have they caught him yet?"

"Caught him? Pray, how? He turns himself into a banana tree, so they can't find him."

To turn himself into a banana tree is a common enough refuge of a negro gone fantee, at least in the gossip of the huts. Almost as common, in fact, as the horrible household duppies—ghosts. Duppies can be laid by imprisoning them in their graves under huge blocks of stone. That is why a negro funeral

is so solemn a thing. Sometimes, however, they leave chinks in the masonry, through which the duppy can emerge to visit his people who thought to hold him hard and fast. If one employs a good mason, the problem of the duppy is easily solved. But with a bloodthirsty criminal gone fantee, the question is not so simple. Especially when one remembers that there are banana plantations containing fifty thousand acres of trees, one hundred to the acre; and it is difficult to decide on the particular tree. When a red-handed outlaw once acquires this faculty, the plantation negroes cease to seek him; but they leave food offerings about to propitiate the spirit of the banana tree when it assumes human shape again. There is always the same ending, however. Sooner or later the fugitive tires of his lonely, supernatural existence in the bush, and commits depredations on the whites—who are supposed to have nothing to do with the civil law. Then comes his final incarnation, as an alligator, which, as every one knows, has a vulnerable half-dollar mark.

The rain squalls were still sweeping the roof of their car, and the drooping jungle still reaching out its detaining hands to stop the train in its flight when they reached the summit of the rise; and three long blasts of the whistle told them they were nearing the house of the twin rivers. Dalton got into his muggy oilskins. Hecsher and the dog, standing silently waiting, betrayed signs of unusual excitement.

As the doctor and his host threw open the vestibule door, preparing to step down, Dalton was conscious of a peculiar clicking noise, which he at length located in the throat of the German. Hecsher was staring, transfixed, at the blank wall of night confronting him. He opened his mouth, but his tongue for the moment seemed stuck in his throat; then, "Boy!" he roared, and his negro ran back from the engine tender, where he had been gossiping with the driver.

"Where are we, Carson? Why stop here? We go to the house—the house, you understand!"

"We at Wopiless, boss, sir. We home, boss."

Hecsher, with an oath, sprang down. Dalton, at his heels, flashed the rays of a pocket electric torch about him, and the thin stream of light was reflected back to them by the pagoda that guarded the entrance to this sacred shrine. But otherwise all was inky darkness and the sluicing rain.

"The lights? The lights?" cried the master of Twin Rivers.

"Lights?" repeated Dalton. "What lights?"

Then Hecsher, all but dumb with chagrin, confessed. He had planned a little surprise for his friend the doctor. He had trained a second negro as attendant at the electric station; and, before starting on his perilous journey down the mountain, he had turned on the lights in the avenue leading from the pagoda to his nest. The lamps, hidden among the trellises that spanned the path, glowed like fireflies. And now something had gone wrong! The avenue, which was to have been as light as day to welcome the guest, the first guest, of this wonderful house, was wrapped in darkness. Hecsher clapped his hands once, twice, thrice. House servants should have been at hand for the dunnage. But none appeared. Finally, seething with rage, making no effort to cloak his feelings, he started forward, Dalton behind him. Three hours before, when he had left this spot, a beautiful gravel path wound beneath these arches. Now it was a roaring gully, through which they stumbled in mud and piles of stone, in water sometimes up to their knees. A strange, sour smell was in the air. Finally Hecsher stopped like stone. Dalton again flashed his torch. Two pot-bel-

lied stone gods at either side grinned down upon them. About and beyond was a black void.

How long they stood there Dalton could not have told. He sensed only that they were in the midst of irretrievable ruin. Then, as if the very heavens had taken part in staging this thing, the rain suddenly ceased. A patch of sky cleared as if by magic. The snow-white moon of the tropics came out and sailed placidly overhead. Everything now was as light as day.

There was no house. What remained of it, of the wonderful nest whose sticks had been gathered from forest, garden, and buried city, lay a charred heap of ruins. Fire, fierce fire that had defied even the tempest, had leveled it to the ground. And one of the twin rivers, bursting its banks and invading the desolated garden, was fast bearing away blackened timbers. In another hour the last vestige of it, save only the two stalwart stone gods, would be gone. In another month, there would be no clearing in the jungle.

Shortly after daylight, the medical inspector got the master of Twin Rivers as far as the farm office in his car; and his first work, after finding a negro boy he could trust to keep an eye on Hecsher, was to report to headquarters by telegraph what he had seen and what he had learned. On their arrival, the several hundred blacks were assembled in the compound; but they had moved off silently, and lost themselves in the dense forest at the approach of the white men, as though they bore some horrible curse or were enveloped in the aura of a pestilence. The doctor pursued; and he found that it was not he, but the master, before whom they had fled; and on threats and promises he finally persuaded the major portion of them to return to their work, although the elders continued to hide in the bush. Dalton knew the black, by virtue of his long service with them, and he traded on his knowledge that fear is almost as strong as superstition among them. The upshot of it was that he gleaned the perfectly unassimilable information from the bolder among them that a banana tree with a flaming red sash had detached itself from the bush and entered the garden the previous night. He did not question the obvious fact that a banana tree cannot move about from place to place, because he was solemnly told that this banana tree had so moved. It seemed that the flame of the sash had ignited the master's house; then the roaring river had seized the banana tree on its bosom and borne it away to the dark forest whither the terrified negroes might not pursue.

Dalton did not include these facts in his report by telegraph. What he did say was that Hecsher, shorn of his sole possession, was as docile as a child, so docile, indeed, that it was advisable that no one come up the line to see him until a few days had passed, at least. Hecsher had turned to tinkering in his shop; and occasionally during the day, as he returned to his office, the negroes would quietly lay down their hoes and retreat to the edge of the forest, to watch him as though he were not real.

Dalton had not specialized so long on fever as to be blinded to the indications of the present situation. It is one thing when a man robbed of everything in life at one blow raves. It is quite another when a man gives no other evidence of the force of the blow than to draw a slight veil over his eyes and to go about as if nothing were amiss. That was what Hecsher was doing now. Once in a brief trip from his shop he cleared up the odds and ends of business on his desk. He even noticed the vague awe with which the blacks now regarded him.

"They take me for my own duppy, come back to haunt them," he explained to Dalton, as they stood together in

the office door eying the vacant compound. "It is quite possible that some voodoo man has decided that I am a hollow shell, and has passed the word along the line."

Perhaps the voodoo man was right. Perhaps it was only the shell. Hecsher went off whistling. Dalton had never heard him whistle before. The superintendent was still whistling as he sprang on a gasoline car, started it down grade with a rush, and rolled off noisily as the explosions of the lone cylinder smote the still air.

"It's just as well to go along and see what he is about," thought the doctor; and a few minutes later he gave chase. But there was no need of chase, apparently. Hecsher was playing with his electric generator, at the shop, its fine hum filling the dead air. He was experimenting, too, with a set of storage batteries, which were expelling villainous gases under an overcharge which the mechanical German was pushing to the limit. There is no telling what a man may do under stress.

"I am rigging up an electric car, so that I can float through the forest like a real ghost," he explained, when Dalton had watched him fitting motor, countershaft, batteries, and driving chain in a dismantled gasoline car for a full hour. "Come, give me a hand. We will try it out."

The two of them struggled with the heavy machine and finally launched it on the rails. It operated, as Hecsher had prophesied, as softly as a ghost sailing on the wind. For an instant they pulled up in front of the pagoda. And then Hecsher spoke of his house, for the first time since the catastrophe —merely a wave of the hand and a shrug and: "There is the end of that."

For a space of fully five minutes he sat taking in the scene, and then he roused himself with a start. He threw over the lever, and their car slid softly forward. There was no accounting for his moods; it were folly to attempt to do so; and Dalton, sleepless now for thirty-six hours, was conscious only of the gentle motion of their vehicle as it plunged forward through the tunnel of ever-drooping palms. Finally night came down, and they were still speeding onward. Apparently Hecsher was bent on putting distance between himself and the place. They came to the long grade, and with power shut off and brakes softly applied they slid down into the tunnel that became ever and ever denser black. Dalton's heavy eyes closed. He woke in a fright, but found his companion sitting as rigid as before, the car still rolling on.

"We'll turn here," said Hecsher suddenly, and the two men dismounted and sweated and swore as they tugged at the heavy machine to lift it off the track and turn it about. Then they started again, and for another hour they ran along a level. Dalton, in moments of wakefulness, tried to think where they were, but he had to confess himself lost, until they suddenly came on a clearing, and the roaring of waters, and the dull picture shown by the bright moon told him that they had come to his pet alligator grounds. He could not forbear a smile, and he was wide awake when Hecsher opened a box on the machine and handed him his pet rifle. It had a flick of white paint on the tip of the forward sight, and such is the character of the tropical moon that this white speck would become phosphorescent at certain angles, enabling a man used to the trick to shoot almost as accurately at night as in the daytime.

They worked their way afoot into the bush, Indian file. The two old friends had threaded these same paths a hundred times before, and their way was swift to a little thatched cover to shade them from the night vapors, where they could lie and smoke and whisper and wait for the game to appear on the

mirrorlike surface of a pool just below them, where the turbulent waters of the hills suddenly became calm.

But thirty-six hours out of bed under such circumstances as had transpired this day took the fire of the chase out of even so doughty a sportsman as the medical inspector. The phosphorescent ball on his front sight, as he peered over it from his corner, began to dance and take on strange shapes. His head nodded and fell. He was fast asleep. Out of the depths of this sleep he was suddenly roused by the deafening report of a rifle at his very ear, it seemed. He would have sworn that he heard a scream, but the reverberations of the shot now drowned every other sound.

"I got him!"

It was Hecsher, flat on his belly in his corner, still peering out over the sights of his rifle off into the dull moonlight. Some creature was thrashing in the water a hundred yards away, the foam livid in the moonlight. Hecsher pulled his trigger again, and still a third time. Then he got up, laughing.

"*Gott!*" he cried, and he seized the now wide-awake medical inspector and drew him to his feet and shook him vigorously. "Doctor, I am a man again!" he fairly shouted in the other's ear. "Come! Let us go back."

"But aren't you going to try for his carcass?" demanded the doctor, who, with a pelt at one's very finger ends, could not understand leaving the trophy.

"And what would I do with it if I had it? Let the monkeys eat it?" laughed Hecsher. In another moment they were aboard their ghostlike car again, sailing through the night. Hecsher knew the division like a book. Thrice he roused Dalton to tend the brakes while he left their car to throw a switch. But Dalton, now the strain was over, each time sank back again; and the sun was well up when he felt himself roughly shaken by a cluster of white men among whom he at length recognized several of his own personal staff.

"Where the devil am I, Hopkins? And where is Hecsher?" he cried.

"Hecsher?" said the man spoken to as Hopkins. "Were you with Hecsher?"

"I thought I was—but maybe I wasn't if you say so. Where am I?"

"You are on the cocoa siding just outside the Limon yards. Hecsher made the gangplank of the Dutch boat at seven this morning, just as she was pulling out. We have been trying to wireless him, but he won't answer."

None of the hundred and one men who contributed sticks to the famous nest ever saw Hecsher again, or heard of him. Dalton is still bobbing back and forth through his inspection bailiwick like a shuttlecock, occasionally eluding those who have a private train to tender him for the more joyous, carefree gasoline car. Last fall, one year from the day that the house of sticks was destroyed, Dalton heard some tidings about his pet alligator pool which caused him to play hooky all by himself and revisit the spot. His negro boy flatly refused to accompany him beyond the last spur—said he would wait for him there until he returned. Dalton pressed on alone; what he found was a negro woman, lithe and straight-limbed, with a red rag of a dress draped about her, living in a bamboo hut beside the pool. She was a witch doctor, practicing voodoo. Her altar was a banana tree just coming to fruit, its shaggy bole marred by three cysts about waist high. The tree was her husband, so she said.

"The Bell," a "haunted-house" story, by Arthur Stringer, and two Christmas stories, by H. H. Knibbs and B. W. Sinclair, will appear in the next issue.

A Chat With You

WHEN you tap an oil well, you know what is coming. It is going to be the one thing as long as the well flows. You know that an apple tree will always produce apples, that a rosebush will never surprise you with a cluster of violets, and that prunes are positively never found growing on persimmon trees. Human beings are not so reliable. There is something incalculable about man, an infinite variety, an abounding element of surprise. We don't know what to expect from each other. We ourselves never know what we are going to do next. Writers can never tell how great their production is going to be or what character it will take. As Burns explains:

"Perhaps it may turn out a song, perhaps turn out a sermon."

You ask us from time to time why we do not have more stories by certain authors. There are various reasons. No author worth while has an unlimited output. And no author is going to be continually writing the stories you want to read. We don't believe in tying ourselves up to produce all of any man's output. We prefer to choose our own stories. We agree with the sound sense of Washington Irving, who refused to bind himself to write for the *Cornhill Magazine*. He said that it would be to the magazine's disadvantage. Here's the way he put it:

"It will be something like trading with a gypsy for the fruit of his prowlings, who may at one time have nothing but a wooden bowl to offer, and at another time, a silver tankard."

If you see authors who have written for THE POPULAR contributing to other magazines from time to time, remember this: Whether we go in for the wooden bowls or the silver tankards, we leave it for you to say, but we do claim that we are consistent in our fiction, and give you nothing but the sort of thing we have led you to expect from us.

WE don't pretend to know everything about getting out a magazine, but we think it means something more than, and different from, contracting for stories by a number of well-known authors. The unknown authors are quite as interesting to us. Only a few months ago, few people reading the fiction magazines had heard of J. Frank Davis. A complete novel by this author is to appear in the next issue of the magazine. Beyond telling you that it is a novel of action and diplomatic intrigue, that it is as good as or better than anything Davis has written yet, and that it is called "A Fourfold Game," we think we need say nothing. You know already that Davis can tell a good story, that he can introduce us to real human beings, that he knows the Southwest and the border, and that he is a genuine POPULAR author.

ARTHUR STRINGER appears in the next number of THE POPULAR; so does H. de Vere Stacpoole, Robert Welles Ritchie, and Bertrand W. Sinclair. H. H. Knibbs has a Christmas story in the same issue. All of these

names, as well as those of Dane Coolidge and Roy Norton, who contribute the serial features, are well known to you. It isn't, however, just because the authors are well known that you get their stories. It is because the tales are POPULAR stories, and the best of their kind.

THERE is no secret, inside stuff to be learned about authorship. Sometimes we have an idea that advice will help a man, and sometimes we think that it is just a matter of natural ability, or the reverse. The truth lies somewhere between the two. Those who keep on trying have the best chance. Every man should learn best in his own fashion. There are so many different factors that go to make a story excellent or the reverse that volumes have been written trying to explain them. There are so many things you must do, and so many things you mustn't do, that the end of teaching is likely to be confusion. Example is so much better than precept, and the way to learn how to write good fiction is to read it. If you have ever taken lessons in golf, you will realize how too many detailed instructions leave you worse off than you were before. You must keep your eye on the ball, and keep your head steady, and yet you must not stiffen up. You mustn't pull in your hands at the end of a stroke. There are about a hundred other directions, and many a man who has been able to drive a ball two hundred yards on his very first trial, before he knew how hard it was, has been utterly incapacitated after a lesson or two.

THERE is a business man in Chicago who learned to play golf after the age of fifty, and learned faster and better than most youngsters. He had his secret. It was his own idea, but we hereby hand it over to you, and you can apply it to golf or writing or tennis or anything else you want to try. It is simple enough: He hired a professional, and instead of allowing the professional to tell him things he made the professional play while he watched him. At five on a summer morning the professional and the business man would appear at the first tee with twenty golf balls. One by one the professional would drive them off, and the business man would watch him. It is easier to imitate a thing you see than to build up and execute a movement from a description in words. The business man took a swing for himself now and then, but most of the lessons were spent in watching the professional. This is a true story. Take it for what it is worth. If you want to write, you may apply the theory by studying closely the stories of other people. If you can learn that way, it will save a whole lot of explanation.

WE suppose, after all, that this is what is meant when they say that people are self-taught. They simply have used their own five senses to learn things instead of having them pointed out and diagramed on a blackboard. It explains, perhaps, why many people who never attended college are hired to lecture to college students, why so many scientists, thinkers, teachers, and writers are not the products of formal education, but have blazed their own trail. It is a cheerful reflection, we think, that a man who can read has the keys of all knowledge in his hand, and is as free as his own will and abilities permit.

The Popular

For DECEMBER 20th

The Complete Novel,

"A Fourfold Game"

A story of

Action and International Intrigue,

By J. FRANK DAVIS

"The Bell"

A Ghost Story,

By ARTHUR STRINGER

Christmas Stories

by

H. H. KNIBBS, and
B. W. SINCLAIR

Humorous Stories, Sea Stories and Detective Stories

by

H. C. WITWER
H. DE VERE STACPOOLE
ROY NORTON
ROBERT WELLES RITCHIE

And the

Great Western Serial,

"Rimrock Jones"

By DANE COOLIDGE

BLOUSES AT $1.00

FROM OUR MIDWINTER BARGAIN BOOK

THIS ATTRACTIVE ILLUSTRATED BOOK consists of 72 beautifully illustrated pages of REAL BARGAINS. If you need Muslin Underwear, you will find a complete line of beautiful garments offered at prices so reasonable that you will be amazed. This book also shows stunning advance Spring Styles in wearing apparel. All you have to do is drop us a postal card and ask for Catalogue No. 76R, and as soon as we hear from you this book of MONEY-SAVING BARGAINS will be forwarded immediately.

The Pretty Blouses pictured on this page are examples of the marvelous values you will find in our Midwinter Bargain Book. Write for it to-day.

BE SURE TO ASK FOR CATALOGUE No. 76R.

We Pay All Mail and Express Charges

2R12 $1.00

2R13 $1.00

2R10 $1.00

Dainty, Serviceable and Becoming

2R12—An Exceptional Value. Dainty little Blouse of dressy, attractive design, made of sheer white washable Voile. The front is elaborated with insertions of Val. lace in Filet pattern, panels of Swiss embroidery and clusters of fine tucks. The deep sailor collar is of all-over Swiss embroidery, trimmed with lace to match front. The front and shoulders are trimmed with veining and blouse fastens in front with pearl buttons. White only. 32 to 46 Bust. Special Value. Postage or expressage prepaid **$1.00**

New Style Blouse for $1.00

2R11—A Fetching Blouse of simple and charming style, made of good quality washable white Voile. The front of this attractive little waist has a deep plaited Jabot of Voile daintily edged with lace in Filet pattern. The square sailor collar is lace edged to match. Shoulders, arm holes and cuffs are finished with veining and the blouse fastens with tiny pearl buttons in front, where it is also trimmed with veining. Comes in sizes 32 to 46 Bust. White only. Special Midwinter Value. **$1.00** Postage or expressage prepaid..... **$1.00**

No. 2R11—$1.00

A Blouse with Chic Cape Collar

2R10—Dainty Blouse of charmingly effective style, made of good quality washable white Voile. This pleasing little model is cut with fashionable blouse fulness and its chief feature is the deep, graceful cape collar of all-over Swiss embroidery, prettily edged with Val. lace. The blouse fastens with fancy pearl buttons and has long sleeves with lace-trimmed cuffs. Comes in white only. Sizes 32 to 46 Bust. Special Midwinter Value. Mail or express charges prepaid..... ..... **$1.00**

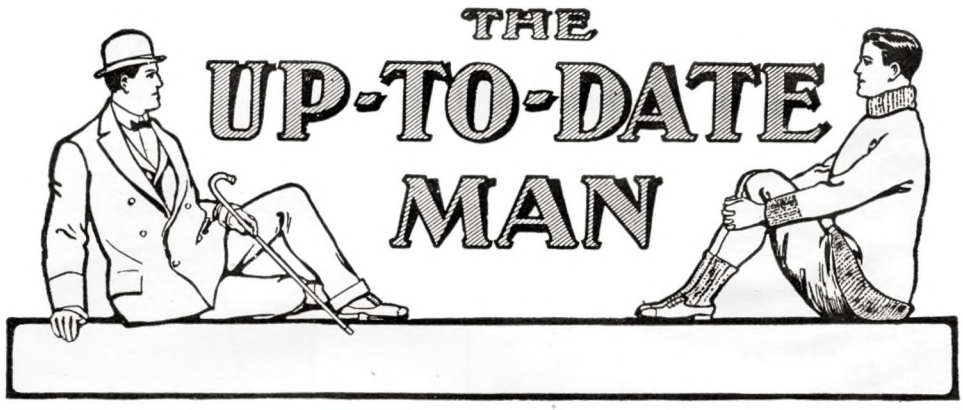
A Dainty Silk Blouse for $1.00

2R13—Chic little semi-tailored Blouse of washable white Japanese Silk. The front is finished with full-length clusters of fine tucks and sprays of white silk embroidery. Model has turn-over collar and band cuffs of self material; fastens in front with pearl buttons. Comes in white only. Sizes 32 to 44 Bust. An unusual value for this low price. Postage or expressage prepaid **$1.00**

We Pay All Mail or Express Charges on Anything You Buy from Us

BELLAS HESS & CO
WASHINGTON, MORTON & BARROW STS.
NEW YORK CITY, N.Y.

We Guarantee to Please You or Refund Your Money



The readers of the magazine may write to this department about any problem of dress. Every question will be promptly answered, provided that a stamped, self-addressed envelope is inclosed.

WITH the drub of the drum and the blare of the bugle reverberating abroad, it is not only natural, but inescapable, that men's dress should continue to show the military influence, especially in overcoats.

Moreover, this influence promises to be not merely passing, but permanent, and to reconstruct some present-day modes. It is the soldier, not the statesman, who is shifting frontiers, and tearing up geographies. His, and his only, is the outstanding figure in the march of events.

Therefore, military fashions, or at least fashions of military inspiration, will keep on cropping up for many years. A case in point is the latest overcoat with a swinging hood like that on an army officer's greatcoat. The hood may be used as a head covering, or left unused, but it certainly lends a slashingly dashing air.

Those short greatcoats, pinched of waist, hunched of shoulder, and scant of skirt, that you see about town, are middle-class affairs, which are many removes from correct style.

The fashionable overgarment this season is of goodly length, and does not stick out in the back like the tail feathers of a pugnacious bantam.

For city wear, the form-fitting coat strikes the fashion of the hour. It shows that soft-falling, full-fold drapery of skirt so smart just now

The deep-swerving patch pockets, together with the broadish collar and lapels, and the waistiness (without a marked flare) are the badges of the well-cut overgarment.

Quite the smartest of all slip-ons has a shoulder cape, somewhat like the evening Inverness, which fastens right and tight at the collar, "*à la militaire.*"

Apropos of things military, much puerile pother is being made over wrist watches, the spreading vogue of which for the sports was chronicled in these columns some years ago.

The wrist watch in itself is not effeminate, though I'll grant you that he who wears it might be. Both European and American army officers wear wrist watches, simply because they're tremendously convenient, and spare one the nuisance of fishing in pockets.

When a men's fashion writer crosses the line into women's fashions, he knows how Stanley felt in Darkest Africa. So, shaking like a bowl of marmalade, and reddening like a house afire, let me pipe my chirp and take to my heels.

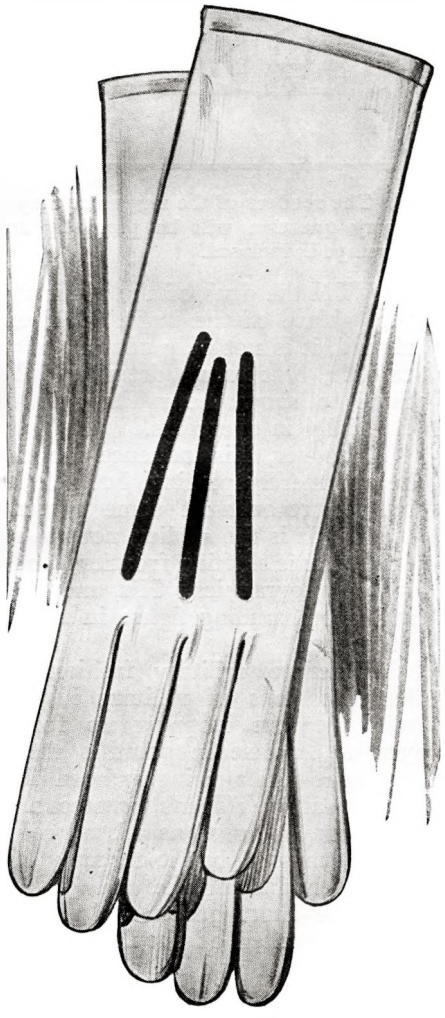
Ice skating is to be the midwinter sport of the gay world. Women of society are going in for turnouts of leather —kid, suede, and the like.

This may or may not be the reason why men are taking up skating waistcoats and jackets of suede and kid, which, in a way, are softer than linen, and make up very smartly.

In truth, kid waistcoats are no novelty. They were worn some twelve years ago in what was known as the "strap" waistcoat, which terminated at the bottom in a tongue of leather that you drew through a loop around the waist, there being no buttons. Some men even went to the length of having evening ties of white kid to match.

Whether this fashion or foible, or whatever you wish to call it, will live long or die soon, is purely conjectural.

The "kiltie" golf brogan is not new to my readers. Indeed, it has always been part of the standard golf kit worn on the St. Andrew's links in Fifeshire



Correct Gloves.

and the Westward Ho in Devonshire, probably the two most famous clubs in the world.

This shoe has a thick sole and a broad, squat heel. The leather tongue is slashed and spreads out fanwise after the manner of a Scotchman's kilt; hence its name. The tongue is detachable. The sole is studded with calks or hobnails.

To be sure, the "kiltie" brogan will not better your stroke, and if you are

Science stamped "Wear" on Neōlin

"The world has moved past leather as a sole."

That sentence was written when Neōlin came. Science had created a synthetic sole—a better sole—which is neither rubber nor leather. And which *saves money by saving wear.*

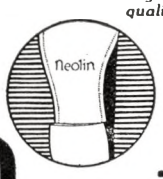
For Neōlin lasts longer than good leather, and far longer than *most* leather.

Then Neōlin is flexible, foot-comforting and foot-muscling—a natural tread in fact. Also it is waterproof, a health insurance without a premium.

To sum up: Science created a modern miracle of foot-gear in Neōlin—a *universal* foot-wear for men, for women, for children—for saving, for comfort, for looks.

Get Neōlin on new shoes or as new soles, at shoe dealers or shoe-repairers—who have it or can get it in black, white or tan. Also *mark* that mark—stamp it on your memory: Neōlin

—the trade symbol for a changeless quality product of



The Goodyear Tire & Rubber Co.
Akron, Ohio

Neōlin

Trade Mark Reg. U. S. Pat. Off.

Better than Leather

"What y' Doin' Now, Bill?"

You don't have to ask that question of a ***trained*** man, because you ***know*** his position is a permanent one—that he is not at the mercy of conditions that affect the ***untrained*** man.

You can always be sure of a good position and a good salary if you have the ***special training*** that puts and keeps you in demand. The International Correspondence Schools will bring ***special training*** to you, no matter where you live, or how little spare time or spare cash you have.

To learn ***how*** the I. C. S. can help you, and how you can easily qualify for success in your ***chosen occupation,*** mark and mail the attached coupon today. Doing so costs you only the postage. You assume no obligation. If you ***think*** you're ambitious, marking the coupon will ***prove*** it. Do it NOW.

I. C. S., Box 3276, Scranton, Pa.

TEAR OUT HERE

INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS

Box 3276, SCRANTON, PA.

Explain, without obligating me, how I can qualify for the position, or in the subject, before which I mark X.

☐ ELECTRICAL ENGINEER	☐ SALESMANSHIP
☐ Electric Lighting	☐ ADVERTISING MAN
☐ Electric Car Running	☐ Window Trimmer
☐ Electric Wiring	☐ Show Card Writer
☐ Telegraph Expert	☐ Outdoor Sign Painter
☐ Practical Telephony	☐ RAILROADER
☐ MECHANICAL ENGINEER	☐ ILLUSTRATOR
☐ Mechanical Draftsman	☐ DESIGNER
☐ Machine Shop Practice	☐ BOOKKEEPER
☐ Gas Engineer	☐ Stenographer and Typist
☐ CIVIL ENGINEER	☐ Cert. Public Accountant
☐ Surveying and Mapping	☐ Railway Accountant
☐ MINE FOREMAN OR ENGINEER	☐ Commercial Law
☐ Metallurgist or Prospector	☐ GOOD ENGLISH
☐ STATIONARY ENGINEER	☐ Teacher
☐ Marine Engineer	☐ Common School Subjects
☐ ARCHITECT	☐ CIVIL SERVICE
☐ Contractor and Builder	☐ Railway Mail Clerk
☐ Architectural Draftsman	☐ AGRICULTURE
☐ Concrete Builder	☐ Textile Overseer or Supt.
☐ Structural Engineer	☐ Navigator ☐ Spanish
☐ PLUMBING AND HEATING	☐ Poultry Raising ☐ German
☐ Sheet Metal Worker	☐ AUTOMOBILES ☐ French
☐ CHEMICAL ENGINEER	☐ Auto Repairing ☐ Italian

Name _____

Occupation & Employer _____

Street and No. _____

City _____ State _____

If name of Course you want is not in this list, write it below.

sound in wind and limb, and free from spavin, glanders, or heaves, as the horse trainer puts it, you'll be just as good at medal or match play without it, as with it.

However, a fashion of this sort is engagingly picturesque, and serves to preserve the rugged traditions of the game, dear to the old stager.

It seems settled that overcoats for day wear having shoulder capes will be in fashion. This exemplifies the sustained influence of the military "motif" in men's dress. While this mode is confessedly foreign, it is slowly edging into general vogue. Anyway, it is the only deep-reaching change that is possible in overcoats, which have tick-tacked monotonously from short to long, and from tight to loose, for ten years.

During no bygone season has formal afternoon dress been more forbiddingly formal than this winter. Indeed, you fairly crackle as you move about in frock suit, starched linen waistcoat, boardlike shirt, stiffly laundered collar, varnished (patent leather) boots, top hat, and buckskin gloves.

The double-breasted frock.—Cut with full-fold, bell-bottom skirts, which spread gradually from the waistline down, terminating in voluminous drapery. The cutaway coat is also proper.

The single-breasted waistcoat.—Of white, snuff-brown, or dove-gray, with decided waist pinch and the bottommost button to skip.

The trousers.—Of black, silk-striped worsted, cut fuller than hitherto, and flexing a shade over the instep.

The shirt.—Of plain, white linen, stiffly starched, with attached, squarish single cuffs.

The collar and cravat.—Of heavy four or five-ply linen, in the poke or lap-front shape, with a puffed throw-over scarf of white, black, or pearl-gray, held in place with a pearl pin.

The boots.—Of varnished (patent leather) with soft kid buttoned tops or all varnished, after the French mode, with laced tops.

The silk hat.—Of the English block, with the belled crown and the new scooped or extra-curled brim.

The gloves.—Of heavy, white buckskin, fastening with a single pearl button, for promenade.

BEAUNASH.

"Baby Grand"

The Christmas Gift Good All Year 'Round

Parents, boys and girls and guests are all fascinated by the royal games of Carom and Pocket Billiards when played on Brunswick tables in cozy home surroundings.

After school hours and winter evenings always find the Brunswick the center of merriment and wholesome exercise. Some styles can be set up quickly anywhere and taken down easily after play.

Made of beautiful oak and mahogany, richly inlaid—speed, accuracy and ever-level smoothness—sizes to fit all homes.

Brunswick Home Billiard Tables

$30 and Up—Pay 10c a Day

A small first payment puts any Brunswick that you select in your home for Christmas. After that, pay the balance monthly—*terms as low as 10c a day.*

Balls, Cues, Etc., FREE

With every Brunswick Table we give you a complete Brunswick high-class Playing Outfit—Rack, Markers Balls, Cues, Tips, expert book of 33 games, etc.

Get our 30-day home trial offer and see these tables in our handsome colored catalog—"Billiards—The Home Magnet."

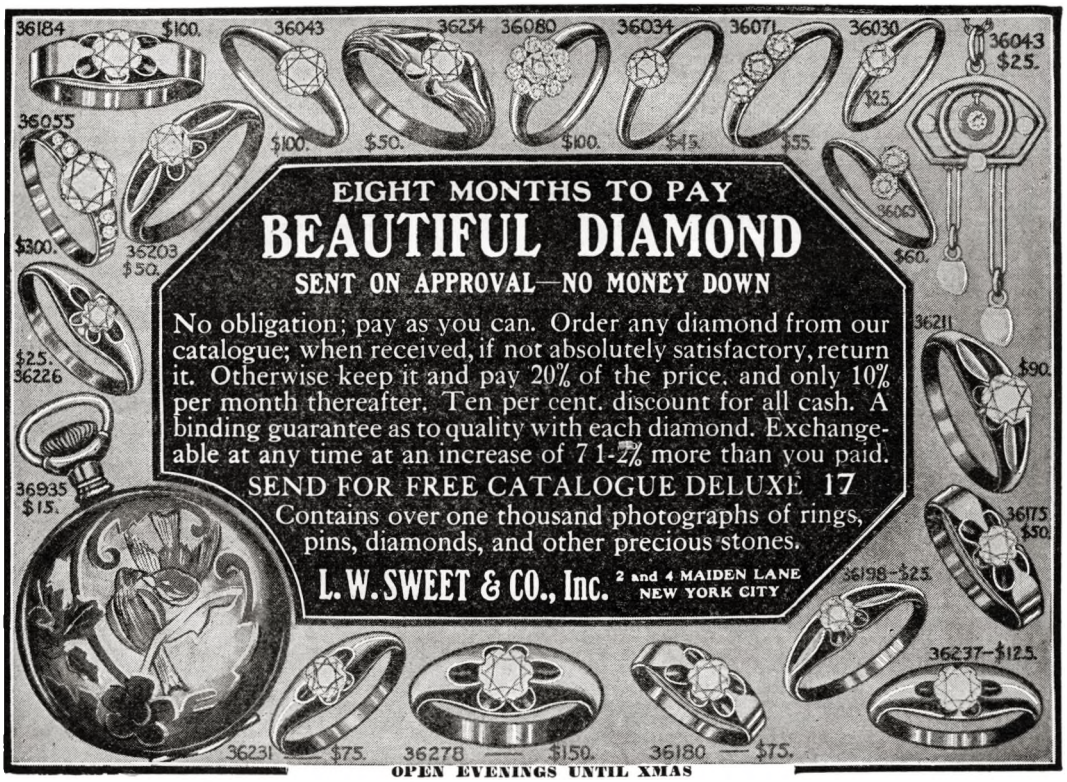
Write or send the attached coupon and have this book by return mail free! Send today and decide in time for Christmas delivery.

The Brunswick-Balke-Collender Co., Dept 41Y
623-633 S. Wabash Ave.
Chicago, Ill.

Send FREE, postpaid, color-book, **"Billiards—The Home Magnet"** and tell about your home trial offer.

Name .....

Address .....



ANY WATCH YOU WANT on CREDIT

1917 Models

WALTHAM
HAMILTON
ELGIN, MILLER
Illinois, Howard

Sent on 30 Days Free Trial

No Money Down

Express Prepaid in Advance by Me

You take no chances with me. I am "Square Deal" Miller and I trust the people. That is why I am doing the greatest Credit Watch, Diamond and Jewelry business in the country. Suppose you want any one of the country's best makes of watches? Name any one, I have it for you. No money Down, Express Prepaid. **A full month to carry it in your pocket** and the easiest of Long Time Payments. That's the test that tells. All these watches **GUARANTEED 25 YEARS**

I Smash the Terms

No References Demanded

My terms are made to suit you. You get unlimited credit, with no red tape, notes or collectors. All unnecessary detail left out.

An "Open Charge" Account

the same kind of credit you get from your grocer. No matter where you live or what your income is, you can now own the finest watch, a beautiful diamond or any rare jewelry and never miss the money.

Costly Catalog FREE

Send me your name and address so I can mail you, Free and postpaid, the most beautiful catalog of its kind ever printed. I want you to have this book. It's a gem. It illustrates all makes of valuable **Watches, Elegant Genuine Diamonds,** and a vast assortment of **Beautiful Jewelry,** all on the easiest and most liberal terms.

Square Deal MILLER
PRES.
703 Miller Bldg., Detroit, Mich.

BE THRIFTY
BUY A DIAMOND
PAY MONTHLY

MONEY REFUNDED
IF YOU CAN BUY
CHEAPER
FOR CASH.

SQUARE DEAL MILLER PRES.

Fine Diamonds
Our diamonds are all perfect cut beautiful stones, white in color and lots of fire.

Fine Diamonds
You cannot buy by mail better diamonds at any price than we are selling on credit.

FREE CATALOG COUPON

SQUARE DEAL MILLER, Pres.
703 Miller Bldg., Detroit, Mich.

Please send me your 1917 Catalog and explain fully your 30 Day Trial Plan and Easy Terms

Name.....

Address.....

For Your Throat

When troubled with coughing, hoarseness, voice-strain, tickling in throat, or irritation in the bronchial tubes, place one of

BROWN'S Bronchial TROCHES

in the mouth—let it slowly dissolve, and get welcome relief. Irritation and tickling gradually lessen, cough ceases, voice clears—the vocal chords are eased and strengthened. Contain no opiates—safe to take. 25c, 50c and $1 at druggists.

The new 10c Trial Size Box fits the vest pocket.

If your dealer cannot supply you, we will mail any size upon receipt of price.

John I. Brown & Son, Boston, Mass.

Beautifully Curly, Wavy Hair Like "Nature's Own"

In three hours you can have just the prettiest curls and waves! And they remain a long time, when Liquid Silmerine is used before rolling the hair in curlers.

Liquid Silmerine

is perfectly harmless. Easily applied with brush. Hair is nice and fluffy when combed out. Silmerine is also a splendid dressing. Keeps hair fine and glossy. Directions with bottle. At your druggist's.

Taxidermy Book FREE.

Stuff Beautiful Birds.

Learn by mail to stuff and mount all kinds of birds, animals, fish and game heads, make rugs, tan skins. Mount your own specimens and make money preserving for others. Men, women and boys learn easily and quickly. Success guaranteed or no tuition. Write today for our wonderful FREE book **"How to Learn to Mount Birds and Animals."** N.W. School of Taxidermy, 1141 Elwood Bldg., Omaha, Neb.

Write Today.

GET RID OF THAT FAT

FREE TRIAL TREATMENT

Sent on request. Ask for my "pay-when-reduced" offer. My treatment has reduced at the rate of a pound a day. No dieting, no exercise, absolutely safe and sure method. Let me send you proof at my expense.

DR. R. NEWMAN, Licensed Physician,
State New York, 286 Fifth Avenue, New York, Desk C-46

Don't Wear a Truss

BROOKS' APPLIANCE, the modern scientific invention, the wonderful new discovery that relieves rupture will be sent on trial. No obnoxious springs or pads. Has automatic Air Cushions. Binds and draws the broken parts together as you would a broken limb. No salves. No lies. Durable, cheap. **Sent on trial to prove it.** Protected by U. S. patents. Catalogue and measure blanks mailed free. Send name and address today.

C. E. BROOKS, 212 State Street, Marshall, Mich.

Why Did He Tempt Death?

Captain Macklin, high-hearted soldier of fortune, just out of West Point, looked into the eyes of death. The other man's gun was leveled at his heart, but Captain Macklin fired into the air. The girl was the cause of it all—but she didn't know—she did not understand.

Captain Macklin—seeking adventure in faraway lands and escaping death a hundred times by a hair's breadth—with a proud spirit and a ready hand——

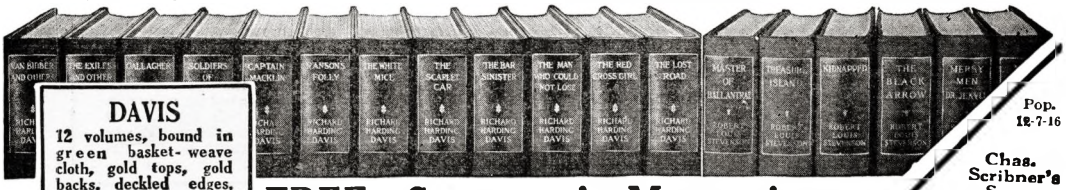
Read his story as told by Richard Harding Davis. Read about Captain Macklin and all those others, who to you, in this modern, machine-made world, bring back the romance, the chivalry, the thrill of youth and adventure. Send this coupon for the new, uniform set of

Richard Harding Davis

When the great heart of Richard Harding Davis was stilled, he left twelve volumes, crowded with breathless and vivid tales. To him, romance was a reality—and his own career, with its perils and its daring—was that of a knight of the twentieth century.

And that spirit of adventure and youth in his own heart—he brings you in the patient courage of Clay, American pioneer of industry; Gallagher, the office boy with a nose for news; Vera—spirit medium—the sordid soul of the African Congo; and the half-crazed Everett; tales of London Clubs and New York streets; and of soft, luminous, odorous tropic nights, when adventure lurks behind every palm.

Theodore Roosevelt said: His heart flamed against cruelty and injustice. His writings form a text-book of Americanism which all our people would do well to read at the present time.



DAVIS
12 volumes, bound in green basket-weave cloth, gold tops, gold backs, deckled edges, illustrated.

STEVENSON
6 volumes, bound in maroon vellum cloth, gold tops, gold backs, illustrated.

Pop. 12-7-16

FREE—Stevenson's Masterpieces

To those who send the coupon promptly we will give a set of Stevenson's masterpieces, in 6 volumes.

Here are the greatest two writers of books of adventure that have ever lived. You can get one at a reduced price and the other *free.* Send this coupon and thrill again with Treasure Island, with Kidnapped, with pirates, and double personalities and buccaneers.

MAIL COUPON AT ONCE

Send the coupon for your set now, at once, before the edition is exhausted. This is a beautiful uniform edition of all his novels and stories, rearranged, set in new, clear, type—printed on fine, creamy paper—bound in a good and handsome uniform binding.

The library that does not own Stevenson, and the library that does not own Davis, is no real library at all. Send the coupon today for them both.

CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS, Fifth Avenue, New York

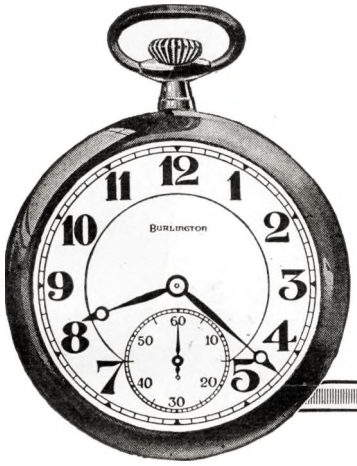
Chas. Scribner's Sons
597 Fifth Avenue
New York, N. Y.

Send me, all charges prepaid, complete set of Richard Harding Davis, in 12 volumes. Also send absolutely free the set of Stevenson, in 6 volumes. If the books are not satisfactory I will return both sets within 10 days, at your expense. Otherwise I will send you $1.00 a month for 15 months.

Name .....

Address .....

Special Introductory Offer!—



The new Burlington—just out—distributed now for the first time—and on an astounding offer. The superb new model far surpassing everything of the past. 21 jewels, adjusted to positions, temperature and isochronism. New thin design—and all the newest ideas in gold strata cases to choose from. Send coupon today for full particulars.

And—we will send you this master watch without a cent down. If you decide to buy it—you pay *only* the rock-bottom price—the same price that even wholesale jeweler must pay.

$2.50 a Month!

Just think of it! $2.50 a month—less than ten cents a day will pay, at the rock-bottom price, for the New 21-Jewel Burlington—the master watch. This perfect time-piece will be sent to you, prepaid, without a cent deposit so that you can see and examine it for yourself. When you hold it in your hand you will realize what a gigantic value it is—and you will know how the Burlington brought the highest watch value within the reach of all.

21 Jewels

—adjusted to positions
—adjusted to temperature
—adjusted to isochronism
—adjusted to the second.

Runs almost 2 days in one winding.
On an Iron-clad guarantee.

Newest

up-to-date ideas in gold strata cases—the master products of the goldsmith's art are illustrated in colors in our new Watch Book. All yours to choose from. Write for the new watch book now.

Burlington Watch Co.
19th St. and Marshall Blvd.
Dept. 1141 Chicago, Ill.

Please send me, without obligation (and prepaid), your free book on watches, with full explanation of your cash or $2.50 a month offer on the Burlington Watch.

Name.....

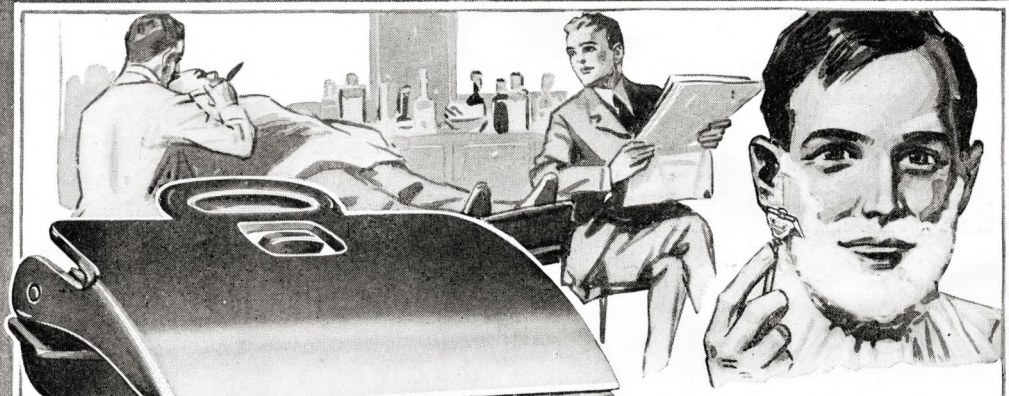
Address.....

.....

Catalog Now Off the Press

Write today for our new catalog. Read about this gigantic watch value. Learn about watch movements and why 21 jewels are the number prescribed by watch experts. Read what makes a watch movement perfect—and how the Burlington is adjusted to the second. The watch book is free. Write for it today and get posted on watches and watch values. Send the coupon.

Burlington Watch Co. Dept. 1141, 19th St. & California Av., Chicago



You're Always "Next"!

GEM

GEM DAMASKEENE BLADES RAZOR

are *always ready*—for a swift, soft, smooth shave—at *any* time—and GEM lasts for years. Some far-off day—when a GEM wears out—we'll *then* know how long they last, but, until then, your guess is as good as ours. Used 35 YEARS—on a BILLION beards—and we've yet to see a worn-out GEM.

GEM CUTLERY CO., Inc., New York
Canadian Branch: 591 St. Catherine St. W., Montreal

LEADING DEALERS

35 Years Experience perfected the GEM. Made it simple—yet efficient. Sturdy—yet light. Convenient—yet compact. Handsome—yet low-priced, *everything* an ideal razor should be.

The Only Blade

The GEM DAMASKEENE Blade fits most safeties. Perfectly balanced—gives DOUBLE Service.

7 for 35c.

Outfit includes Shaving Frame and Stropping Handle with 7 DAMASKEENE Blades in sturdy handsome Case.

Life Service for a Dollar-Bill

$1.00

Published 7. 1916

THE POPULAR MAGAZINE

Volume XLII Number 6