TWICE-A-MONTH DEC. 7, 1923

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I only ask that you risk two cents on the strength of my word that the contents of this amazing book will show you the way to a prosperity that you never dreamed possible, in a fascinating field that you never thought of entering. This book is now free. Read my offer.

By J. E. GREENSLADE

First let me ask you two questions. **One:** Do you consider that you are as intelligent as the average mail-clerk, farmhand, office clerk, mechanic, or bookkeeper?

Second: If you suddenly found yourself with all the money you needed to spend, wearing the best clothes, living in a fine neighborhood, driving a good car and belonging to the best clubs—but having to make good in a job that paid $10,000 a year, would it scare you? There are men to whom $10,000 a year is so much that the idea of earning it themselves never occurs to them. They will always be in routine jobs at low pay. Their dreams will never come true. But yours will if you will absorb what I am going to tell you.

Now, in one quick step you can enter the field where opportunities in your favor are ten to one—the Selling field. You know that Salesmen top the list of moneymakers—that the salesman is his own boss—that his work is fascinating, interesting and highly profitable! But the thing you doubt is your own ability. All right, but you can become a first-class, money-making salesman in an amazingly easy way.

Proof That Salesmen Are Made —Not "Born"

The story of six men who once thought salesmen were "born," who did not believe they were "cut out for selling," is on this page.

Thousands of men like these six men who formerly thought salesmen were "born," are now enjoying magnificent earnings in the selling field. They were bookkeepers, mechanics, farmers, clerks—even doctors, lawyers and ministers—but in a few months after writing to the National Salesmen's Training Association they were out in the field selling—and making more money than they had ever hoped to make.

Sounds remarkable, doesn't it? Yet there is nothing remarkable about it. Salesmanship is governed by rules and laws. There is a certain way of saying and doing things, a certain way of approaching a prospect to get his undivided attention, certain ways to overcome objections, batter down prejudice, and overcome competition.

Just as you learned the alphabet, so you can learn salesmanship. And through the NATIONAL DEMONSTRATION METHOD—an exclusive feature of the N. S. T. A. System of Salesmanship Training—you gain actual experience while studying.

Years of Selling Experience in a Few Weeks

The N. S. T. A. System of Salesmanship Training and Employment Service will enable you to quickly step into the ranks of successful salesmen—will give you a big advantage over those who lack this training. It will enable you to jump from small pay to a real man's income.

Remarkable Book, "Modern Salesmanship" Sent Free

With my compliments I want to send you a most remarkable book, "Modern Salesmanship."

It will show you how you can easily become a master Salesman—a big money-maker—how the N. S. T. A. System of Salesmanship Training will give you years of selling experience in a few weeks; how our FREE employment service will help select and secure a good selling position when you are qualified and ready. And it will give you success stories of former routine workers who are now earning amazing salaries as salesmen. Mail the coupon today. It may be the turning point in your life.

National Salesmen's Training Association
Dept. 4-W Chicago, Ill.

National Salesmen's Training Association
Dept. 4-W, Chicago, Ill.

I simply want to see the facts. Send me free your book, "Modern Salesmanship," and Proof that I can become a Master Salesman.

Name.....

Address.....

City.....State.....

Age.....Occupation.....

READ!

$9,000 First Year
Ellis Sumner Cook, 20 E. Jackson Blvd., Chicago, left a $25 a week job and last year made $9,000!

$100 a Month to $100 a Week in Only 3 Months
H. D. Miller, another Chicago boy, was making $100 a month as stenographer in July, 1922. In September, 3 months later, he was making $100 a week as a salesman.

$150 to $500 a Month
W. P. Clenny, of Kansas City, Mo., stepped from a $150 a month clerkship into a selling job at $500 a month. He is making $850 a month now.

$6,500 a Year
M. V. Stephens, of Albany, Ky., was making $25 a week. He took up this training and now makes five times that much.

Small Pay to Big Earnings
J. H. Cash, of Atlanta, Ga., exchanged his $75 a month job for one which pays him $500 a month.

Now Sales Manager at $10,000 a Year
O. H. Malfroot, of Boston, Mass., stepped into a $10,000 position as a SALES MANAGER—so thorough is this training. All these successes are due to this easy, fascinating and rapid way to master certain invincible secrets of selling.

EMPLOYERS

are invited to write to the Employment Dept. of the N. S. T. A. We can put you in touch with just the men you need. No charge for this service to you or our members. Employers are also cordially invited to request details about the N. S. T. A. Group Plan of instruction for entire sales forces. Synopsis and charts sent without obligation.

There is a special reason why you should ask your news dealer to reserve for you a copy of the next POPULAR. The reason is George Parsons Bradford's gripping tale of mystery and adventure in a tropical setting, "SHARE AND SHARE ALIKE," a complete book-length novel worth eight times the price of the magazine. It will be ready for you on the news stands together with eleven other stories and a serial on December 20th. Don't miss your Christmas POPULAR.

Vol. LXX DECEMBER 7, 1923 No. 4

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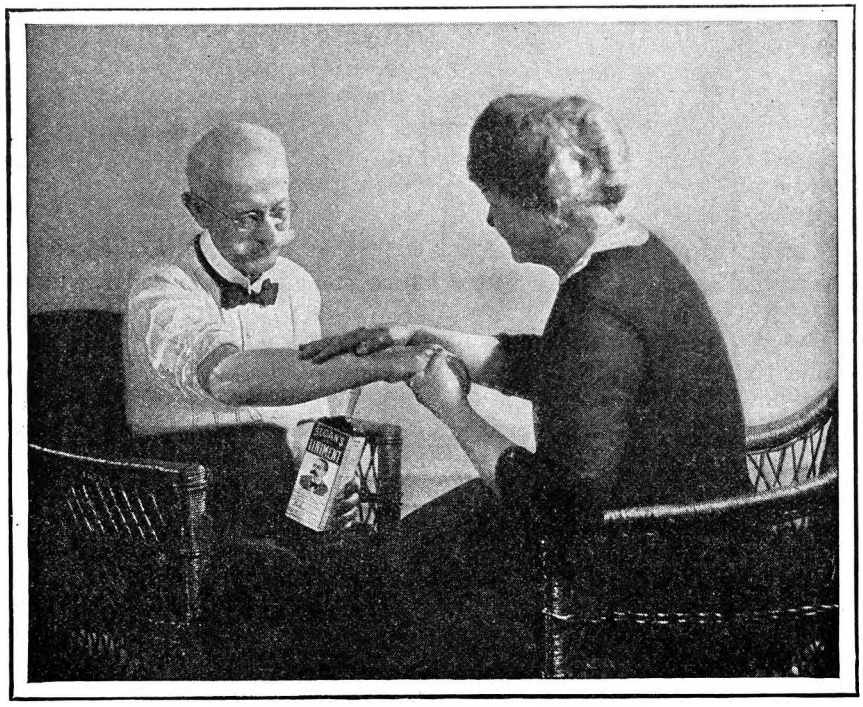

If your rheumatism comes on again this year—

How can a medicine that is applied on the outside of the skin reach a pain deep down in the joints and muscles? This treatment acts by stimulating the brain to send new blood to the affected area

DON'T suffer unnecessary pain. Get relief at once. It may be splendidly courageous to just "grin and bear it"—but it is a frightful waste of the very vital resources you need to help you get rid of the cause of the pain.

Your doctor will tell you that pain should always be relieved—just as quickly and as completely as possible.

And this relief is easily at hand. However deep-seated, however hard to reach the pain may seem to you, it can be stopped—quickly and permanently.

Nearly fifty years ago a remedy for muscular pain was given to the world that has brought relief to so many sufferers that today you will find it in one home out of every three.

This remedy is Sloan's Liniment—probably the foremost household remedy in America, used all over the world and recommended by doctors everywhere.

No matter where the pain is, no matter how deep down in joints and muscles, *it can be reached* if the natural curative powers *inside* the body are only aroused.

When you use Sloan's, it stimulates the nerves on the skin. They arouse the brain, which in turn causes the blood vessels to expand throughout the painful area, *under* the place where the liniment has been applied. Rich new blood rushes in.

This new blood coming, freshly purified, from heart and lungs, with all its marvelous germ-destroying, upbuilding powers brings to sick, pain-ridden tissues just what they need to heal them.

This is the scientifically correct way to relieve pain. It doesn't just deaden the nerves. It gives your own natural bodily defenses the aid they need to drive out the cause of pain.

Don't wait until you are in actual need. Get a bottle of Sloan's this very day, and have it on hand—35c at all druggists. Just apply it—no rubbing is necessary. It will not stain. Immediately you will feel a gentle warmth—then a pleasant tingling of the skin—then, almost magically, relief from pain. There is no burning, no blistering, only quick, lasting relief.

SLOAN'S Liniment — *Kills pain*

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a wonderful idea in Christmas gifts

THE gift of a Corona will mean more this year than ever before. You can now select a Corona Keyboard which exactly suits the vocation of the one who is to receive it.

There is scarcely anyone who does not need a Corona nowadays. In business, in school, in the home, Corona is fast replacing the pen.

It's a satisfying gift to give, or to receive—wonderfully durable, light, compact, yet big in the work it does.

Corona has a 10-inch carriage, a two-color, automatically reversing ribbon, back spacer, margin release, platen release, paper release, self-spacing carriage return—everything you would expect in a heavy machine—yet it costs only half as much.

Place your order today for one or more Coronas for Christmas. Your dealer will deliver the machines, specially packed in beautiful Christmas cartons, on whatever date you specify. If your phone book doesn't list "Corona," mail the coupon for the address of the nearest store.

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120 MAIN ST., GROTON, N. Y.

Use this list to select your Christmas Corona

If the vocation of the person to whom you will give Corona is not listed here, mail the coupon below.

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Architects	XC-Special
Authors	Standard Portable No. 20
Bankers	" " " "
Business Men	" " " "
Chemists	XC-Chemical
Children	No. 20
Doctors	Medical No. 19
Druggists	" " "
Engineers	XC-Engineering
Farmers	No. 20
Housewives	" "
Insurance Men	" "
Lawyers	" "
Linguists	XC-Polyglot or any one of 50 languages
Ministers	No. 20
Playwrights	" "
Realtors	" "
Retailers	XC-A
Salesmen	XC-A or Special
Secretaries	No. 20
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MAKE $120 WEEKLY IN SPARE TIME—Sell what the public wants—long distance radio receiving sets. Two sales weekly pays $120 profit. No big investment, no canvassing. Sharpe of Colorado made $955 in one month. Representatives wanted at once. This plan is sweeping the country—write today giving name of your county. Ozarka, 829 Washington Blvd., Chicago.

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TAILORING SALESMEN. Make $10.00 profit on sale. Get our outfit made-to-measure suits. 160 fabrics. Six prices $18.00 to $39.00. Finest goods. Union made. Fix your own selling prices. Make all the profit you want. Undersell all competition. Lower prices than any other line—you get big profits in advance. We deliver and collect. Guaranteed quality by firm established 1880. Write for full particulars. Fred Kauffmann, The American Tailor, 1300 W. Harrison St., Chicago, Dept. E 53.

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BE YOUR OWN BOSS, $100.00 sufficient. Handle your own cash. Dept. 113, Paul Kaye, 149 B'way, New York.

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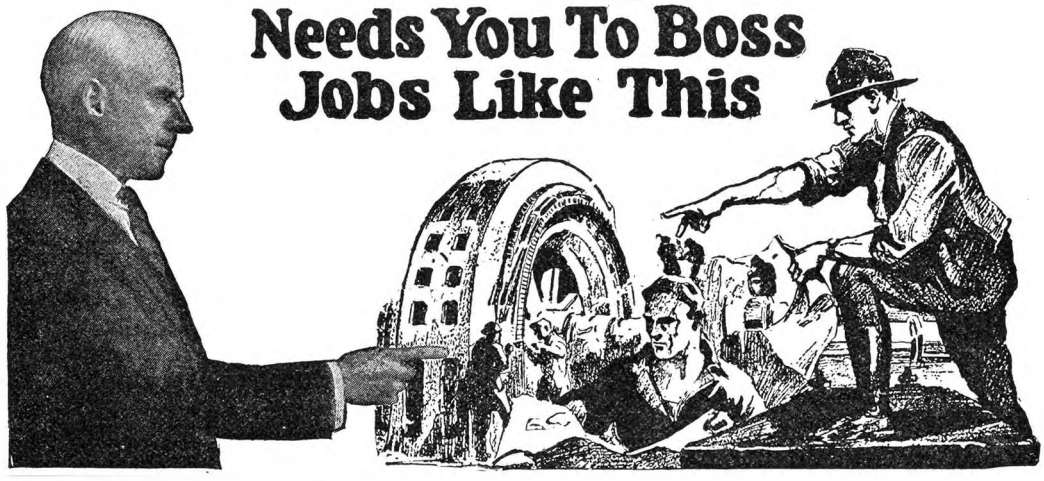

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Name.....

Address.....

Occupation.....Age.....

The "Cooke" Trained Man is the "Big Pay" Man

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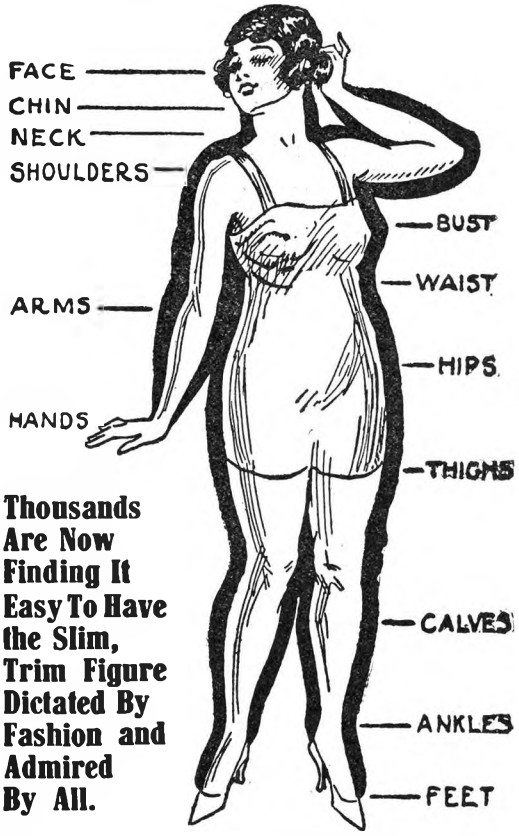
GET ON THE STAGE. I tell you how! Send stamp for instructive Stage Book and particulars. K. La Delle, Box 557, Los Angeles, Cal.

Would You Like To Lose a Pound a Day? Then Try This Delightfully Simple Way---



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Science Discloses Method of Quickly Reducing Excess Weight—Many Losing a Pound a Day Without Starvation Dieting or Exercise —Greatly Improves Appearance. Generous Sample Sent Free.

Quick Results ***No Exercise*** ***No Starvation Dieting.*** Rid-O-Fat, the scientific compound, comes in convenient tablet form, and is practically tasteless. You simply take one at each meal and bedtime. Results often surprising in their rapidity.

Within a few days you should be conscious of a new feeling of energy and lightness, taking the place of that tired, worn-out feeling.

Quickly as the fat gland resumes normal functioning you should lose weight in a healthy, normal manner. Many fat, ungainly figures are in this scientific manner helped to regain their normal and idealistic proportions, giving that fashionable slenderness and athletic poise.

And all this time you live as you please.

Nature is doing the work. No more irksome exercise—no more denying yourself of all the things you like. Take just one small, pleasant Rid-O-Fat tablet after each meal. Could anything be more simple?

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Since the announcement of the wonderful Rid-O-Fat formula it has been used by more than 100,000 people. Twenty to thirty thousand more people are writing for it every month. The following letters show what users think of the scientific Rid-O-Fat system of fat reduction:

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Lost Twenty Pounds In Three Weeks

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Generous Sample FREE

I want every fat person to have a chance to try Rid-O-Fat in their own homes at my expense. I don't want them to take my word or that of the thousands who have used it. I want them to see for themselves that the results are more pleasing than anything I can say. To introduce Rid-O-Fat in a million more homes I will send a free sample to anyone who will write for it. In fact it is really more than a sample, as it is sufficient to reduce the average person several pounds. I will also send with the sample an interesting booklet that explains the scientific reason for fat, and why Rid-O-Fat meets with the highest approval.

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Scientists have discovered that excess fat is often caused by the subnormal action of a small gland. Once this gland is healthy and functioning properly, your weight should reduce naturally and without effort on your part, to the normal amount for your height.

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Complexion, health and figure are improved at the same time. The result is new vitality, magnetism and personal charm that makes for success. Tasks once hard become easy and life worth while.

THE POPULAR MAGAZINE

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Money to Burn

By Reginald Wright Kauffman

Author of "The Yankee Ambassador," "The House of Bondage," Etc.

Readers of THE POPULAR will undoubtedly remember with a thrill of retrospective pleasure Mr. Kauffman's last novel, that high-hearted tale of modern chivalry and adventure, "The Yankee Ambassador." Here is a similar treat—a swift-moving story, bubbling over with spirit, packed with hair-raising situations, and shot through with episodes where tragedy lurks near the surface, and sometimes breaks through. It is the story of what happened to an American medical student who started "on the beach" at San Domingo and wound up as the unofficial henchman of the U. S. secret service, and, if you had asked him, "the happiest man alive."—THE EDITOR.

(*A* ***Complete Novel***)

CHAPTER I.

DEADLY WEAPONS.

"YOU'LL swing for this! By God, you'll swing for it!"

Dan's mind, even in the third instant following his plunge, turned back to the long events of this day which ended in the threat of hanging—the day which marked him as a murderer.

After a squeamish voyage of infernal weather the British tramp steamer *Hawk*—nine hundred tons, Captain Goldthwait, New York to West Indian ports—had limped at last across an unruffled sea, blue and transparent. There, where the waters of the Atlantic and the Caribbean meet, morning had dawned like the unfolding of a pale pink rose. Far away off the old tub's starboard quarter a silver-gray blot against the glittering azure of the sky increased in size; gradually it seemed to descend to the world's rim until it detached itself from the heavens: Mount Diablo of Santo Domingo.

The *Hawk* groaned at sight of it like a man with sore corns, but the cranky screw continued, however unsteadily, its revolutions. The heat was intense and the direct

summer sun cast a shadowless glare over peeling stack, suspicious deck, paint-hungry sides. A sinister craft; as regiments contract the temperament of their colonels so do merchant vessels assume a likeness to their commanders—sullen, ominous, a discord in that marine symphony, Captain Goldthwait's ocean peddler advertised its master's character to air and wave.

Below, the young American with the straight blue eyes and open smile who was acting as ship's doctor, stood just within a cabin, having finished the professional part of his call on the only passenger. Dan Stone presented a picture of the physically well-proportioned man; but so nicely balanced were his muscles that only a trained gaze would have marked him out for being of unusual strength—of quick movement and long endurance—which he really was. Anybody not both anatomist and psychologist would have been preoccupied with his impetuous face; his frank glance that was too ready to accept the rest of the world on its own terms, and his boyishly unruly hair, tow-colored and irreconcilably rebellious to the brushes—and anybody with a knowledge of the *Hawk's* captain would have wondered how Stone came to be his medico and how long he could stand that tyrant's gaff.

"Oh, she's a rum ship," this young man grinned.

"Rum?" echoed the passenger from his bunk. He nearly pulled himself to a sitting posture. "Is *that* what she is?"

The *Hawk* was no floating fortress of free speech. Though few of the hands understood English, Stone glanced beyond the door to make sure that he wasn't overheard. Then he glanced back at his mysterious patient.

"I don't mean liquor, Mr. Hoagland. Her liquor's milk, all right, condensed milk, to be dropped here, there and everywhere till we dump the last at Port of Spain; only I bet it's curdled by now. I just meant she was —well, what our British friends call *rum*."

This patient was the only American aboard, and if Stone's presence furnished him with material for speculation, he was a puzzle to Stone. The acting doctor rarely indulged the vice of personal questions but he found it hard to understand why so well-groomed a person—well groomed even in his illness—should have chosen this manifestly disreputable tramp when, as a hundred signs gave testimony to even this fresh-water physician, he was accustomed to ocean liners. However, the urbane Mr. Hoagland had kept largely to himself and until stricken with ptomaine poisoning mostly confined his conversation to the tempestuous captain and the latter's malicious mate.

The *Hawk,* if she had made much more bad weather would have been in real danger of foundering. During the storm which swooped down upon them within an hour of their dropping Sandy Hook—and which had only yesterday subsided—she shipped veritable seas that seemed to push her completely beneath the surface of the ocean and hold her there until, miraculously, she wriggled back to life. Though possibly ignorant of her captain's temper, Hoagland, who must have had some choice of boat, should have gleaned from the most cursory observation a general idea of the *Hawk's* sea qualities before ever he came aboard of her. Did he have to hurry from his country for his country's good?

"You're some doctor!" said he now—he was a wiry little man with thin hair and a snub nose. "Why d' you pick a tub like this?"

It was exactly the query that Dan Stone, M. D.—minus, would have liked to put to Hoagland. However, he answered it easily enough:

"Because I'm not really a doctor yet."

"No diploma?"

"Third year and working my way through. First summer I was a second-rate hotel clerk at a third-rate seaside resort. Last year I was a hospital orderly. Two weeks ago the mate of this boat got in a scrap and I happened along when he needed some first aid. The *Hawk* wanted a doctor and asked no questions; I wanted a job and didn't ask any, either. So here I am."

It was his way to make light of his own hardships. He laughed at them now. He didn't like to talk about himself and so he neglected to add that, nursing a dream about some day setting up practice in these latitudes, he wanted to better his already nearly perfect knowledge of Spanish and that he wanted, also, to see something of West Indian ecclesiastical architecture.

"Well," persisted his patient, "but why do you call it a rum ship?"

Dan laughed again. He thought of the rats that scuttled over him when he tried to sleep. He was bunking with a crew that had no notion of personal cleanliness; even

now he could smell the stench of their quarters; they never volunteered to police the place; its deck was a mass of filth, swabbed only when his threats of violence moved his messmates to sullen effort. But he laughed, because he had found that the easiest method of supporting tyranny, and all he said was:

"*You* wouldn't call it a champagne one, would you?"

Rum it was because rum furnished its commander with the chiefest of his preoccupations. Congressmen from the farm and senators that have never gone deeper than the *Leviathan's* dining room have devised some well-intentioned laws for sailor folk; so has His Britannic Majesty's Parliament; but when a ship's master is far at sea and his boat returns only once in five years to its home port that master may become a master indeed. If he is a bully born, with a hatred of humanity because he can abuse it, and if he overstokes his temper with the fuel of alcohol, his ship will be as much a floating hell as ever was any slaver's in the Middle Passage—and Captain Goldthwait was the devil to meet all these requirements and enjoy them.

For Stone things had begun to go wrong when the Goddess of Liberty stolidly watched the *Hawk* pass her pedestal. The bull-necked, blue-nosed captain had coveted the liberal graft to be acquired by surrendering his cabin to the unexpected and eleventh-hour passenger; but, once the cabin was surrendered, he fell into an abiding rage because he had to occupy the mate's instead. Cross-eyed Johnson, the mate, cursed at having to bunk with the engineer, whom he hated, and Dan, who had been promised a couch in the engineer's quarters, was contemptuously housed with the doubtful West Indian crew.

Being there he was promptly treated as belonging. Almost the first warmth proved too much for the *Hawk's* so-called cold-storage locker. The beef went bad and half the ship's company with it: Hoagland fell a victim. Dan saved himself by subsisting on pilot biscuit and coffee, yet that he saved the others was not charged to his credit. Captain Goldthwait's habit was to regard as less than human any being that lived forward; twice already he had raised his drunken but powerful hands against the doctor.

"The day his fist touches me," Dan quietly vowed, "I'll first knock him down, and then leave the ship, if I have to swim till I go under."

Now Hoagland was answering his latest question with another: "No, I wouldn't call it a champagne ship, but I might say it was a milk punch. What do you make of the captain?"

Was the misplaced passenger asking all this because he really wanted to learn more of the *Hawk*—or because he wanted to find out something about Stone? Dan had nothing to conceal, and therefore retained his natural reticence.

"I haven't seen enough of him to think at all," he said. He bade his patient a quick good-by and went on deck.

The *Hawk* had entered a bay and was skirting shores where luxuriant vegetation rose abruptly from the water's edge and climbed mountain high behind. Tangles of greenery grew steep as a medieval city's walls, from the sea grape to the banana fan and so to strange varieties of palm. At the far head of the landlocked sea a little town, all gleaming white and hot, peeped from its verdant frame.

Dan accosted a passing member of the crew.

"Sanchez," explained that one. Close off their port bow, he pointed to San Lorenzo and, well to starboard, Santa Barbara de Samaná.

The profession of medicine and the study of church architecture do not entail a thorough knowledge of geography; Dan had understood that the city of Santo Domingo was to be their first call and he now assumed that all this lay in their course thither. For the rest, it was enough for him that the way was beautiful and that he was passing over waters that Columbus sailed when he had his first glimpses of the New World.

There came a cry from alongside and answering shouts from the bridge. A face appeared over the rail: wide nose and thick lips, yet skin of purest copper and straight black hair. The body that followed was clad in a dirty uniform bedecked with much gold lace; one foot wore a patent-leather dancing pump, the other a canvas tennis shoe. The negro-Indian pilot climbed to the wheelhouse. A moment later hulking Captain Goldthwait passed, without so much as a nod, on his way below.

The *Hawk's* progress was very slow. Dan waited until the swift tropical night de-

scended and the yellow stars drooped close above the funnel. The land turned to lilac and little lights began to appear on shore. Then cross-eyed Johnson hurried up to him:

"Where've ye been?"

The mate spoke always the broad tongue of Avonmouth, and now he spoke with an even more than usual brusqueness.

"Here," said Dan quietly.

"Been a-lukin' everywheres fur ye."

"I've been in full view all the time."

"Well, ye're wanted."

"Where?"

"In my cabin," Johnson leered; "and," he added, "I'd advise ye hurry!"

Stone left him and went where ordered, but the young man's heart was hot. He wanted to practice obedience, but he pressed the limits of endurance. He determined on a defiant course of action.

There was a small table in the mate's stifling quarters. Here, under a smoking lamp, sprawled Captain Goldthwait. His huge bulk lolled forward; his lurching elbows, supported by the table top, swelled the muscles of his arms until, over them, the coat sleeves strained tight; his monstrous shoulders were hunched to his hairy ears. A lowering, brutal face—his brows were knitted over a large book and over his repugnance for anything so contemptible as the printed page; his blue nose was a dark splash between his crimson cheeks; from his thick lips, curling scornfully, his breath issued with a sibilant sound and, in that airless cubby-hole, hung heavily: it was heavy with Barbadoes rum.

"You sent for me?" asked Dan—and then he recognized the book and flushed a little.

"Yes."

Goldthwait grunted the monosyllable. He had always detested the doctor, because the doctor would show no fear of him. Now a drunken cunning had come to the aid of that enmity and pointed a way to revenge—and profit as well. The captain transfixed his auditor with a concentrated glare.

Dan stood his ground. He was resolved to make the captain state his grievance. The captain, on the other hand, was resolved to stare the medical student into startled speech and then take offense at it. However, Dan's temper was longer than Goldthwait's and Dan won.

"I sent for you a half hour ago!" the captain suddenly roared. "Where have you been hiding yourself?"

"I have been on deck all afternoon."

"On deck! Why haven't you been attending to your job?"

"I haven't any patients left, except the passenger, and he won't need me till eight bells."

"None of your lip! I've found out you're no doctor—and I'll have no damned lip from you!"

Goldthwait's hairy right fist pounded the volume and Dan winced. He had to speak out, after all, but he kept as much anger from his voice as he could manage:

"I don't mean to be impudent, sir; but at the same time I want proper treatment in return."

Had the captain been sober his reply would have been a blow. He was far from sober and so there was no honesty in his rage. It was the slow rage that traps. He leaned back in his chair with an ugly grin and a choked oath.

"Go on," said he.

"I never pretended to be a graduate physician," Dan imperturbably continued, "but I was shipped as doctor and I've been treated like a deck hand. Graduate or not I've saved half your crew for you and all I've got in return is curses—almost blows. Our agreement hasn't once been kept—on your part or Johnson's."

"So that's it?" sneered the captain. "Well, what do you want?"

"I'm going to have my pay to date and leave the ship at Santo Domingo City."

Whether or not that statement was expected Dan never knew. It served, in any case, as the opening for an attack, which was what Goldthwait wanted.

"Leave the ship?" Goldthwait sprang up. "Desert? You signed for the voyage, and I'll have you in irons in five minutes!"

He leaned across the table. He shook a fist under Dan's nose.

"If you do that," began Stone, "I'll——"

"Law?" screamed the captain, before any mention could be made of courts. "Don't you talk to me about law! You signed as a doctor and you ain't one. What'll the law say to that? A doctor!" He thumped the volume again, and his descending paw tore loose one of its treasured pages. "Johnson found this book in your duffel bag. And what's it about? Medicine? No! It's all about how they built churches. Now then, young fellow, you go to jail ashore for a faker—breaking the regulations about ships'

doctors—or else you stay aboard of us without pay!"

The brute's guile was unworthy of the name; his flagrant scheme was to punish Dan and at the same time divert to his own pocket the medico's wages. Goldthwait's right hand went up again. Its open palm, swinging over the table, caught Stone across the face.

Dan staggered back. When, in an instant, sight returned, he saw the captain in the act of wrenching the cover from the book.

There are not extant a dozen examples of the 1620 edition of Amades Lizarrago's monumental work on "The Cathedrals and Churches of New Spain"—and this copy was one of them. It was priceless in the old-book market, but, poor as he was, Dan Stone would never have sold his copy. Along with a useless passion for the lesser phases of ecclesiastical architecture and a hundred or two other old volumes that book formed the only legacy left him by the father he had loved.

Dan vaulted the table. Goldthwait sprang back until the cabin wall stopped him. He whipped out a pistol and fired. One of Stone's fists knocked up the weapon not an instant too soon; the other drove itself into the captain's raging face.

Almost at once the thing had happened. Goldthwait was too dissipated a bully to stand punishment. His eyes started from their sockets; as if a painter's brush swept over them his cheeks turned purple; his mouth screwed upward on one side, like the mouth of a man in a fit, and he pitched over and fell his full length on the floor.

"You've murdered him! You'll swing for this! By God, you'll swing for it!"

The cross-eyed Johnson was in the doorway. Dan gave one look at Goldthwait's form. It was horribly still.

He wheeled. He flung the mate aside.

He rushed on deck—poised on the rail—plunged.

CHAPTER II.

THE BEACH COMBER.

Stone was a good swimmer. On this night of his plunge from the *Hawk* he needed all his strength and all his art.

It was with the speed of a St. Moritz toboggan that he struck the water a few yards beyond the ship's side. Down he went among the cool recesses—and still down. His ears roared, his chest collapsed. He remembered having heard that, somewhere off Porto Rico, Mount Everest itself could be all but submerged; he seemed to be plumbing a scarcely minor abyss. Still, there is a level at which sea water refuses the unprotected body of a human diver; Dan reached that and from it at last ascended.

Lights overhead; stars; lights directly out front; a town. He struck out for it.

Blue parrot fish swam with him; he could not see them. Striped "sergeant majors" fled his approach. A cub shark followed him—and then turned tail.

It turned tail because Dan found himself among breakers. He fought; he was tossed high. He thought he was lost but the tide was with him and the underpull light. One great wave flung him landward; he lowered his feet. Waist deep in the water he stood on comfortingly firm sands.

He was penniless; he dared not enter the town, yet he was too near exhaustion to go beyond it. He staggered down the damp darkness of the beach. Here, though the sky was illumined overhead, the night was impenetrable. Dan's right foot struck something that moved with a groan; he bounded aside and his left kicked a body that swore cordially. The sands were full of derelict men, seeking sleep. With a resignation that made him one of them Dan sank down, more desirous of rest than of escape.

The town's water-front street was not a hundred yards away and under its rare lamps he could see barefoot citizens parading with umbrellas raised against the supposedly evil effects of starshine. The heat of the day was gone, the air was chilly, and Dan was wet through. He burrowed into the sand.

"Look out there! Don't crowd."

Dan gasped an apology to the invisible neighbor that he had discommoded. The fellow was evidently an American; he grumbled: "There's plenty of room on San Lorenzo sands."

San Lorenzo! Dan had assumed that during his interview in the cabin the *Hawk* had progressed toward her announced destination:

"This isn't Santo Domingo?"

The voice of his fellow beach comber cackled a feeble laugh: "What sort o' rum do *you* drink? Course it's Santo Domingo, but San Domingo City's clear across the

island—an' if you've just come to Española, why, take it from me, you've come to the nearest thing to hell this side of the real place."

He dropped into a low monologue of anathemas. This was a land of fever and sudden death; the towns were barbarous, the jungle savage. In the interior human sacrifices established the reign of the worshiped snake; San Lorenzo's saloons were outnumbered by the *hounforts* of sorcerere. Neither Dan's silence nor the livid objections of other sleepy loafers discouraged the diatribe:

"If you don't take your hat off and say 'Good day' before you ask a negro for a job he'll tell you he'll cut your heart out and drink your blood—and if you turn your back he'll make good, too. And don't you get sick here. If you do they'll call in a witch doctor. I had the jimjams last week. They took me to the municipal hospital—the cots are dirty mattresses on the floor and the chickens walk over you. All they do for you's give you one mess o' red beans and then let you die."

He rumbled on. The oaths of the surrounding company ended in discouragement. Even Dan ceased to listen.

What was he to do? It was barely conceivable that Johnson counted him drowned; but even if he was not sought his plight was desperate. Small opportunity for a medical student in this isle of witchcraft! Ecclesiastical architecture? Dan smiled grimly at the darkness. In the little town where he had been brought up that Pennsylvania-Dutch lawyer who administered the elder Stone's estate—and left, as he thought, nothing save some valueless books—had cautioned the heir:

"Your pop was the kindest-hearted man as effer lived, but he hadn't an eye fer money yet. If you want to git along, boy, keep your eyes off'n print."

And now, because of a printed book, Dan had incurred the charge of murder! Despair propped wide his eyelids.

Dawn came at last, or rather full morning. One minute the waters were dark as midnight; the next, and with the smell of seaweed at low tide, the silver gulls and "long-tails" in silver spray flew above a sea of dancing gold. Dan's neighbors sat up, stretching and scratching: in every concluding stage of rascally vagabondage, negroes from Haiti and Martinique, Frenchmen from Marseilles, outcast Britons dismissed by the Bahamas, Spanish, Portuguese, Italians, Levantines and the New York wharf rat that had cursed Santo Domingo: the sweepings of fifty ports from Glasgow and Varna to Demarara and the Chagres. Over on the water-front street gaudily dressed mulatto women appeared, hands on swaying hips, baskets of green and yellow mangoes balanced on their turbaned heads. Through these a tall, fat man in spotless white pushed his easy way; he led by the arm a shy and graceful girl and walked with magnificent unconcern straight among the riffraff of the beach.

In those surroundings the mere cleanliness of the newcomers shone like ice. The man's broad Panama was the largest Dan had ever seen. It surmounted a wide, dark face with eyes distinctly Latin, yet very bright and quick. Full lips smiled urbanely under a sweeping mustache, when not hidden by a plump hand, the nails of which strong teeth bit now and then. To the wrist of this hand a leather thong secured a malacca cane, and, when the fingers were not at the mouth, the stick was swung with utter carelessness of its frequent descent upon the backs of beach combers scuttling like beetles before it.

The New Yorker had lounged away. Dan addressed a fellow that might hail from Caracas:

"Quién está el rico señor?"

The South American shrugged; he didn't know who the rich gentleman might be.

The girl was a picture of dusky loveliness, pure, and pure Spanish. She slightly turned her ankle in the sands and the lace covering fell from her head and frightened face—a face that one would say was merely peeping in at life's door, and not well enough liking what it saw there to enter. Her glance met Dan's; she blushed and hurriedly replaced the mantilla.

An opening tea rose blown upon an ash heap. Stone felt the dust upon him; he turned aside.

But as he did so his eyes swept the bay. San Lorenzo boasted no docks; the men of ships must come ashore in boats. Well, there was the *Hawk* and a longboat putting off from her! The medical student wheeled again and found himself closely face to face with the man in white.

"Can you give me a job?"

The startled question rose to his tongue

at the thought that here might be a planter from the interior about to return thither, and it proved well grounded. It came instinctively in English, but in English the large man at once smilingly replied:

"This is a strange question, and you do not look as if you belonged"—the speaker advanced before his girl companion and smiled down at the denizens of the foreshore—"as if you belonged here. What sort of work do you want?"

Out of the corner of an eye Dan saw the *Hawk's* boat hurrying to shore like a water spider. "Any kind," said he.

The Panama shook a soft negative. "Any kind is no kind. I fear——"

Stone extended a detaining hand. "I can do most all sorts of unskilled labor; I'm a third-year medical student, but——"

At the mention of medicine that other's smile passed. He was all attention and interest.

"A doctor?"

"Not quite."

"But almost? Yes? Why then, perhaps —listen, señor. On my sugar plantation the one man invaluable that truly understands the machinery is too ill to move. I am but now arrived, waiting that a doctor's office should open, but despairing that a medico should leave his practice for me. If you could prove yourself what you say, it would be worth to me one thousand dollars monthly. Besides, these two San Lorenzo doctors of course speak Spanish; I prefer a foreigner. There has been talk of peonage —groundless, of course, but still—you do not know Spanish?"

Two hundred yards away the boat was landing: "No," said Dan. He hated himself for the lie.

"Ah, then if you could prove that you have sufficient knowledge of medicine——"

"Señor," said Dan, "I can't. I've no papers; but didn't I tell you I was a third-year student—tell you before I could guess what you wanted? Only get me away from here—get me away from here quick!" He saw Johnson stepping ashore; evidently a hurried and fruitless search of the previous night was now to be renewed by day. It must be made fruitless to the end! "I was ship's doctor on that tramp out there; I killed a man in a fight. I give you my word it was an accident, but it looked bad, and they're after me." He put the stranger directly between himself and the search party. He appealed to the girl: "Señorita, you——"

The girl's hand made a gesture as if of dissent, and the planter interrupted quickly: "My niece does not speak English. Nevertheless, you did indeed call yourself a medical student before I had spoken of a physician." He looked over his shoulder and observed and understood the hustle at the boat. "Walk slowly, he concluded, "but ahead of us and in this direction, opposite to your pursuers. I think that I may be persuaded to engage your professional services."

CHAPTER III.

A SHADOW AT A DOOR.

From San Lorenzo's water front Dan paced slowly inland, the broad man in white shielding his retreat, one hand agrip of that veiled girl beside him. They skirted half the town.

"To the right now!"

His smiling dark face bent forward and over the shorter Dan. He popped a cigar into the American's wonderingly opened mouth and plumped his flamboyant Panama on the American's head, which was two sizes too small for it.

"So! You must not attract too much attention, but *I* may be a gentleman taking hatless the early air."

They turned into a street lined by tamarind trees. Barefoot mulattoes made way for them with the inherent courtesy that the Domingan always exhibits on a thoroughfare. In the middle distance two soldiers in ragged blue lounged toward them.

"Stop!" The stranger paused before a providential public surrey, drawn by two humble horses. "To Sanchez," he directed the negro driver, "and double pay for double speed, once we've turned the corner of the Corniche." He lifted the girl into the front seat and overshadowed Dan in the rear. "To the coffee house of José Logronó in the Street of the Pink Turtledoves. And thereafter—forget!"

The driver appeared used to such instructions. Without parley he lashed his beasts, and Dan sank against the moth-eaten cushions too weak and too grateful to be inquisitive. He saw the town recede on either hand. They turned, beyond it, into the shore road, between the open water and a natural hedge of prickly pear and red cedar. The horses were lashed to a gallop; the

crazy surrey canopy swayed like a boat in a land swell. Dan saw the girl tossed this way and that; she did not cry out but she clutched the seat back with delicate fingers, the knuckles straining through their satin skin.

"The lady——" he began.

He had turned to find his benefactor's brilliant eyes steadfastly contemplating him:

"She will not be hurt. My niece understands our Domingan conveyances. Speak rather of yourself; I wish to hear more of your medical education."

He used the calm of one accustomed to obedience. Talk of any sort was more of a physical feat than an intellectual amusement in that rattling carriage and Dan was never a man to consider himself an interesting topic. Nevertheless the stranger's questions were pointed and Stone managed to answer them. That his replies were satisfactory was evidenced by the inquisitor's frequent nods of approval and the cross-examination was still in progress when they entered what Dan concluded must be the city of Sanchez.

"Slower here!" the big man ordered.

Speed would now have been, indeed, impossible. The streets were narrow and crooked; they were ill-paved and full of rotting refuse and of a human rabble equally decayed. Gray palaces of the early sixteenth century were elbowed by modern huts in staring yellow or impertinent pink. On the ruined wall of a stately dwelling that must once have housed some Spanish hidalgo there blazed the green-and-red poster of a music hall. Gambling hells and low saloons pressed upon squalid shops; haphazard electric wires drooped dangerously from fragile poles bending under the weight of lolling loafers.

"Here," said the planter, with the manner of an apologetic host, "you see the worst of the República Dominicana. It is the mixture of blood that effects this." He drew himself up until his head nearly touched the carriage top. "*I*, for my part, am pure Castilian."

They were passing the neglected remains of a once splendid church. Dan's glance caressed it; his knowledge could date it almost to the day of its consecration. But his guide had evidently concluded that the time was come to repay some of Stone's personal information in kind.

"My name," said he, in his silken voice, "is Ramon Diego Villeta y Cortez. Unlike most persons of my caste in this country I raise some herds of cattle, but, as I intimated to you, señor, I possess also a large sugar plantation. To that has come an order, very big and very pressing. Well then, at such a moment, my only engineer—he is taken ill. He has spasms—convulsions. He says that he has suffered thus before. He says that it is what you doctors call uræmic poisoning. Is this"—Don Ramon smiled ingratiatingly—"is this urgent?"

Dan tore his eyes from the church. "Urgent? If he diagnoses his own case correctly it's all that and then some."

Villeta explained symptoms.

"He may be cured at once," said Dan, "or he may be dead before we arrive."

The Domingan shrugged. "It is far in the interior."

They were drawing into the squalid outskirts of Sanchez. Don Ramon waved the driver to a series of inconspicuous streets and bade him reduce the pace and proceed more slowly still.

"You observe," he pursued to his guest, "that I take you on faith. I have told my name: what is yours?"

"Dan Stone." The American gulped as he said it. "Daniel Gurney Stone."

"On the ship where you met with your little—let us say 'accident'"—Villeta shrugged the matter casually away—"you had signed in that complete manner?"

"No. Simply D. G. Stone."

"I see. Well, now, a silly law makes it imperative that we register at the coffee house, because we shall be delayed there for a couple of hours. I suggest to you, señor, that it might be the part of wisdom to forget the surname—temporarily. My advice is that you call yourself Daniel Gurney."

Dan said nothing. He did not like subterfuge but he liked the gallows less.

They were climbing the narrowest and dirtiest of all the streets thus far encountered. The horses slipped on the slope and the girl on the front seat pressed a lace handkerchief to her nose. Behind the red jalousies of doorways was the glimpse of already tired inhabitants; dark children reached up brown hands for coppers. Don Ramon shooed them off with his jeweled fingers, like so many flies.

"The tropics," he smiled at Dan, "do not

make for American hustle. Except for the engineer, my workmen are all natives; they also are tired—like this. They mean no harm but the siesta is consolatory. So, when they feel like taking it, they have the slightly awkward habit of suspending labor by throwing a stone into the machinery. That is why Tucker's health is so important to me. Ah," he exclaimed as the carriage stopped before a grimy-white building that was just sleepily opening for the day, "here is our present destination!"

He paid the driver—whose exultant *"Gracias!"* bore instant testimony to the size of the reward—and, again leading the muffled girl, pushed Dan before him into a small, dark apartment set with tables and high-backed benches. From among these an aproned host-waiter appeared and bowed low in patent recognition.

"José," said Don Ramon, "your parlor, at once!" He clapped his fat hands. "I shall leave this American señor there for a short time, and you will send coffee to him; coffee, two eggs *à la coq,* some of your wife's delicious rolls, butter, honey—yes, and a bit of fresh fish if you have it. He is very hungry."

They were obsequiously conducted to a moldy living room on the floor above. The girl, released by Don Ramon, seated herself in the darkest corner, her mantilla still covering her face. Dan, at his employer's order, wrote prescriptions for such medicines as he thought might be needed by his distant patient.

Don Ramon watched him, biting his nails. When the orders were completed:

"I shall borrow your hat," said he jovially, "and proceed on these errands." He retook his Panama. "I shall buy you another head covering, Doctor Gurney—oh, do not shudder at the appellation!—and I shall procure you an alpaca coat that will more or less fit. Rest here until I come back. You are best not observed—is it not so?"

Involuntarily Dan's eyes turned toward the shadowy figure of the girl. "If only she spoke English, the time would pass all too rapidly in the company of your very charming niece."

But Don Ramon's hand went to his mustached mouth and he frowned uneasily:

"The Señorita Gertruda requires a constitutional," said he.

He bowed gallantly to his niece, who rose slowly to take his proffered arm. Then he was all smiles. He led her from the room humming blithely an old Domingan song:

"My mistress is a lady—a lady—his lady;
She smiles, her lord not looking, and throws a rose to me——"

Well, he couldn't mean his niece by that. Dan tried to forget her, but over the edge of the departing mantilla a pair of sloe-black eyes had given him a glance that was almost an appeal. He walked toward the window and looked down through the half-open shutter, held wide at its base by a stick to let in the morning air before the sun should rise so high as to demand its barricade.

Don Ramon was still humming as he passed up the street with the girl on his arm, but the words of his song could no longer be distinguished. There were few other pedestrians in view, yet as Villeta proceeded Dan suddenly saw a shadow detach itself from a doorway opposite the coffee house of the Street of the Pink Turtledoves and cautiously follow the Dominicans. It was the solitary passenger of the *Hawk,* the American, Hoagland!

CHAPTER IV.

IN THE DARK.

Two hot hours later they were aboard the slipshod train that—when so inclined and hurricanes permit—strolls, now and then, between Sanchez and Concepcion de la Vega, the mantilla-hidden girl, package-laden Don Ramon, and Dan suitably clothed and restored to some likeness of his proper self. At the station, Hoagland—as when Villeta returned to José's coffee house—had been nowhere in sight and since the planter had seemingly chanced to elude his unsuspected stalker Stone held his peace concerning him.

"Don Ramon," he reasoned, "appears to have arguments of his own for avoiding investigations. If I tell him his association with me has been observed and resulted in an attempt to follow him, he may think I'm a good person to leave behind."

Villeta, on his part, must have had certain qualms. When the train was delayed by an unturned switch just east of the terminus of La Vega he ordered a premature descent, lest telegrams had advised the police there to be on the lookout for Dan's arrival.

Here the air was bracing. Mountains

rose not far away, and one especially beautiful peak held the American's gaze.

"Ah, yes"—his guide was instantly aware of his preoccupation—"our beautiful Yaqui of the Cordilleras del Cibao. Myself, I prefer the Sierra de Monte Cristi and the dead volcanic north." He made a wide gesture. "Alas, it is in the opposite direction that our way lies. We go, tediously, through the Dark Country. Now, turn to the left!"

Once more they threaded bystreets—Villeta's knowledge of these towns seemed inexhaustible—and proceeded to an inn, where mules were waiting them, a broken-nosed Carib in charge.

"Señor Medico," said Don Ramon, "this is my faithful and devoted Luis." In Spanish he added to the Indian: "Is there any news?"

The tone was suspiciously different for the last words, which received a negative reply from the Indian; but before Dan could weigh this an inquisitive landlord, who did not seem to know Villeta by sight, began to question him. Don Ramon, after a moment's survey of the man, became effusive in explanation:

"We are bound for Santa Cerro, to be sure, for the sugar plantation of the illustrious Señor Guanito. Come, Luis, let us start. We must arrive at our destination before sundown."

They mounted, the girl evidently friendly to her side saddle, and with elaborate adieus trotted off. Santa Cerro lay, as a matter of fact, toward the Sierras. The landlord watched the caravan set out in that direction; he did not see them sharply turn at the next street to the left and proceed rapidly into a road to the southwest.

It was market day. La Vega was full of farmers and their families from the uplands; men, women and children, creoles and mulattoes, in blue denim, silk sashes and brilliant bodices, high sombreros and crimson turbans. Any party leaving the town was a party after their own hearts; the elders waved brown palms, the youngsters toddled up and offered each a cheek for kissing. Dan saw the señorita's lithe shoulders heave—saw her bend to pat the curly head of a laughing boy—pressed his mount forward he knew not why, and, as her hand returned, it brushed his.

"Now," said Don Ramon, immediately pushing between, "now you shall see the true Santo Domingo."

They made first for the plains and among the sources of the Yaqui del Norte, with its miraculous waterfalls, its rapids boiling over rocks of every brilliant shade. Luis headed the line, the girl followed, and Villeta and Dan, where it was possible, went abreast to bring up the rear. Only once was this order shifted, and the shift revealed that the Indian lived in mortal terror of his master.

Ramon interrupted some jovial description of local customs to urge his mount ahead with certain instructions for the guide. The trail was overgrown, and Luis intent on picking it; a bamboo stalk slipped from his protective grasp and brushed the Castilian's swarthy cheek. As if it were a thunderbolt that stalk slew Villeta's smile.

"Quita alla!" he cried, and added a thumping oath. *"Es possible?"*

Luis, a moment ago, had looked anything but a coward. Now, as he turned in his saddle, utter fear stared from his eyes. Don Ramon, with a single blow, knocked him clear of his mule and a yard into the thicket.

As quickly as it had come, however, the storm passed. Luis returned, his face a tangle of thorn scratches, to his ever-advancing post, and Villeta, resuming his smile as a man might pick up his hat, came back to Dan and continued his anecdote. The girl rode on with bowed head.

They reached roads of sorts and, before these ceased, climbed along their dusty and uneven tracks. Now heavy vegetation steamed all about; again appeared open spaces dotted by thatched and whitewashed huts and broken by tiny farms. The first valleys were fragrant with the perfume of coffee blossoms grown in the shade of trees designed for the aromatic plants' protection; higher up these surrendered to maize and sweet potatoes, and, as the heights approached, to fields of millet.

Finally the travelers dipped to the edge of the Great Jungle of the Interior; straight into this Luis picked, for more than two miles, an invisible way. Then, out of an unexpected clearing, rose the ruins of a forgotten castle, its fallen masonry overgrown by rank weeds, among which lizards darted to their holes; and here the sudden sun flashed a farewell and sank. The party was in total darkness and must so remain until moon and stars should achieve nocturnal brilliancy.

Luis, with the aid of a flash lamp, made their preparations for the night. Out of

miraculous saddlebags he produced a score of necessities. He slung hammocks between the trees, he canopied them with nettings; he built a fire and soon produced a supper.

The girl ate scantily, alone and in the shadows. Don Ramon proved a mighty trencherman and laughed through the meal, commending its cook as if nothing but kindness and respect had ever passed between them.

"No bread," he smiled to Dan. "We prefer millet in Domingo. But see these yams. You do not have green plantain in America of the North, nor yet casava roots —and you do not have such coffee." His eyes answered the gleam of the camp fire and he rubbed his hands. "So," he breathed over a deftly rolled cigarette, "you will cure my friend Tucker?"

"If we are in time," Stone reminded him.

"Of course—if we are in time. And who knows?" Ramon genially continued. "We may even acquire a little what you call yellow jack to keep you amused. We have many interesting diseases in Domingo: elephantiasis, fevers; the sleeping sickness, which I think is mostly feigned. Oh, you should have experience indeed when you leave us!" He rubbed his plump hands again. "When you leave us," he repeated. "And accidents, too—there are of course often little accidents where there is machinery."

He paused. With one raised fat palm he mirthfully requested better attention:

"You hear that? No?"

Dan nodded. From far away there came the monotonous beating of a drum.

"The *papalois* of blacks whose fathers crossed the hills from Haiti," Villeta explained. "That is the first call to their rites of voodoo."

To the sound of this vesper summons the pilgrims sought their hammocks, but sleep was tardy in its approach to Dan. The tropic moon rose, washing trees and vines in liquid emerald, and with it rose all the night sounds of the West Indian forest: the whistling frogs, barkings as of wild dogs, the buzz of insects and a guttural chorus which reminded the tossing Stone of nothing so much as the cries of baboons heard on his single visit to the Bronx Zoo.

When he did sleep it was to waken with a start. Cold sweat was rolling into his wide eyes. He brushed it away: the bright moon was reënforced by the last glow of the fire. Directly above his head the mosquito netting bulged oddly downward; something that had not been there before—something like a tree limb from one of the trunks supporting his hammock. The limb swayed.

It fell. Clammy and slimy and heavy it fell, and, circling canopy and hammock, the thick coils of the snake wrapped Dan around and squeezed.

A shriek rang out. Not his own; he saw the beautiful face of the girl distorted by terror. Dan had no chance to cry; he was struggling with all his imprisoned strength at the horror that encircled him.

"Coming!"

That was Ramon's voice. The huge man flung himself upon the monster. The thing's flat head darted up and gaped at him. With an exultant laugh Villeta ripped that head from its bloody body.

Dan slept no more, and all next day his unrefreshed body was taxed by the party's continued penetration into the jungle. It was one long push through trees and bushes bound together by wiry creepers under arches of lofty green. Orchids, now lovely and now repulsive, bloomed about them, jasmine odors fanned their sweating cheeks, stinging insects beclouded them and land crabs scuttled underfoot. Only the never-resting trade winds made it possible to endure.

Not until the latest afternoon did they reach their journey's end. They came upon a slatternly pueblo of adobe huts, toiled wearily along a more or less modern road and halted before a high stone wall. It was yellow and weedy and it stretched to right and left until it disappeared in the renewed jungle.

Ramon rode up to a thick nail-studded door and jangled a bell. The door swung wide; six half-clothed peons stood there to welcome their master.

"We are home at last," said Villeta. "Señor Medico, consider all on my poor estate your own."

A strange arrival. No shouts from the servants; the only smile that upon Don Ramon's round face. The half-savage peons drew aside while the cavalcade rode up a mile of neglected avenue.

The great *palacio* appeared beyond a curve, on a hillock. It was a double-balconied, rambling building of stone, partly new but mostly very aged, and colored a

deep pink. It rose before them from behind a semicircular clearing sprinkled, none too artistically, with sago palms, hedges of hibiscus, century plants and bamboo. In a marsh to their left a grove of mangroves steeped their roots at dank water where mosquitoes bred, and, between these and the house, Dan noticed, with strange interest, a deserted graveyard, its flat tombs askew and broken, its stones moss covered and half hidden among rubber trees and melancholy vines.

Something else, however, straightway caught his eyes. It was a crumbling chapel that leaned against one side of the older portion of the *palacio,* attached to the east wing and seeming, on second glance, to form part of the dwelling. He could see that it was, or had been, a perfect example of the ecclesiastical architecture of New Spain. Enthusiasm fired his voice:

"That's a fine thing. I must look that over one of these days."

Don Ramon turned sharply and then as sharply turned away.

"Only an old chapel," he said—for the first time he addressed Dan brusquely—"interesting only to me, and to me only because my late wife's ancestors lie buried in it or about it. Toussaint's soldiers wrecked it when they drove the Spaniards out of all the island, and after the return it was never repaired. The stone roof is dangerous; a pair of my inquisitive peons—my servants," he quickly corrected—"were killed in the place as late as February. Therefore I have locked it up." He eyed Dan again; he was smiling now, but now his smile seemed different. "Those prying servants; their death was one of the things I thought of when I spoke to you of accidents. You remember that I spoke to you of accidents last night?"

Dan met that smile wonderingly. "Why, yes."

"Very good. I must ask you not to venture near the old chapel, Señor Medico."

And then into Dan's mind there readvanced a question that had troubled him all the while he waited for Don Ramon at the coffee house of José Logronó in Sanchez—a question that only the difficulties and dangers of the subsequent journey had banished.

"Why did this man offer such a salary to a third-year medical student, turned beach comber and wanted by the police? For a thousand a month I'll bet he could have hired any two regular physicians in all Haiti and Santo Domingo!"

CHAPTER V.

FLYING STEEL.

They came to a long flight of wide pink steps narrowing at the top and to the *palacio's* ancient doorway surmounted by a pure Spanish fanlight. While Dan made sure of the medicines that had been brought, two native servants, who looked like cattlemen, stepped from out of the shadows, their machetes thrust in belts made by twisting around their waists lariats that would easily support the weight of a man. The peons leaped toward the tired mules and at a gesture from Don Ramon, who did not otherwise greet them, led the animals away in broken-nosed Luis' company. The girl at a word from her uncle hurried by the open door and disappeared down a vaulted hallway. To Stone, Villeta repeated the Castilian form of welcome.

"First of all," said Dan, "I'd like to see my patient."

"My dear fellow!" Villeta put his brown, jeweled hand gently on the young man's shoulder. "You must have refreshment. You must bathe and rest! There is no such haste after a two days' journey."

"But I told you that he might be dead by now!"

Don Ramon's wide face shook in smiling dissent.

"You were too occupied to hear? But no, it is your excusable ignorance of Spanish. My servants say he is not dead—not even a little. And now"—he smiled deprecatingly as if at Stone's zeal—"this so-lucky patient must be made ready."

In the twilight of the hall Dan had been trying to make certain that his medicines were intact.

"Not at all!" he exclaimed. His professional manner, though young, would brook little interference; here he must be his own master. "The patient," said he decisively, "needn't be made ready for his doctor, nor, in the circumstances, need his doctor be made ready for the patient. I've come a long way and the man was very sick when I started. I wish to see him at once, if you please."

Ramon grunted protestingly. *"Muy señor mio——"*

From far down the hall a raucous scream

interrupted him in the Domingan cry for help: *"Socorro!—Socorro!—Socorro!"*

Something rushed through the dark air. A wing brushed Dan's startled face, and then, by the light from the still-opened door, he saw a green-and-yellow parrot settle on one of his host's broad shoulders and begin to peck in a sort of insolent affection at Villeta's swarthy cheek.

"Do not be alarmed," Don Ramon smiled. He put up a plump hand and stroked the bird with a kindness unmistakably genuine. "This is only my best friend, Pedro. Pedro, this is the good American doctor come to cure Señor Tucker." And in Spanish he bade the bird speak to his guest and apologize for having annoyed him.

Pedro cocked his head and glared at Dan with an evil eye.

"Lo siento!" he squawked, but, if he indeed knew what he was saying, his tone belied the apology inherent in the words.

Meanwhile Villeta appeared to have been using this diversion as a cover to reconsider Dan's indubitably fixed demand.

"So you must see your patient at once?"

"At once," said Dan firmly.

Don Ramon shrugged. "You American doctors!" he chaffed. "So impetuous! But I think the results of your impetuosity are good. I have much confidence in American doctors."

He had submitted. Dismissing Pedro he led the way up broad stairs and then through long and echoing corridors.

This portion of the building—obviously the old portion—seemed untenanted, and yet Dan had the sense of unseen presences. Once he thought he heard the patter of bare feet ahead, yet nobody was overtaken—nobody visible. Again his ear caught what sounded like a woman's sob, but neither Ramon's niece nor any other woman came in view. So Villeta and his physician made a half dozen turns, past rooms apparently deserted, and came to a narrow stone staircase up which they climbed to the very top of the house. As they mounted Villeta talked genially but in a voice that seemed gradually to rise and was, Dan somehow suspected, meant to carry a warning of their approach.

They gained now another hall and here, at one closed door more, Villeta stopped. He spoke against the panel to some one behind it:

"It is the master," said he in Spanish. "I bring a strange doctor."

Was there the slightest sound from within? Dan could have sworn to one, yet when after an instant's unnecessary pause they entered he observed no occupant save the sick man.

That one, in a bare apartment, under a high and narrow window, lay on a lofty old four-poster bed, tossing to and fro, his long fingers plucking at the sheet that covered him from feet to chin. His age was perhaps fifty-two or three, and the stiff hair of his head, as well as the stubble on his cheeks, was iron gray. In health he must have been one of those gaunt New Englanders of the Massachusetts coast whose families used to recruit the whaling trade; narrow men and hard, but honest and brave, who see small help for themselves or anybody else in a future world yet live in this one a life of rectitude. How fallen he might be from the estate of his forbears there was now, however, no telling; his face was purple, his eyes feverishly aglare and his lips so stiffened as to emit only, at occasional intervals, a low groan.

"Unconscious?" asked Don Ramon.

Dan lifted an eyelid. "Unconscious."

"But you can bring him around?" Villeta frowningly gnawed at his fingers. "The work is of such an importance and so immediate. If you can bring him around for one week only——"

Stone was busy with an examination. "If he gets well for a week he gets well entirely. I want hot water; there must be a counterirritant. Tumblers—spoons"—he looked about the all-but-empty room—"hot-water bottles, or cloths—if you've nothing better. I suppose there is no ice? I must know just how this man has been kept alive so far—and why is there no one here to nurse him now?"

"There is—or there just has been!" Don Ramon soothed. "The nurse must have stepped out for something."

"What has he been fed? I must have full details." There was about all this too much the look of neglect to suit Dan. If the patient was to be cured, there could be no longer any carelessness or inattention. "A nurse must be in constant attendance!"

"I am amazed that he left even for a moment," said Don Ramon. He looked really perplexed and Dan softened a little.

"The thing is, Don Ramon," said he, "if this man is to live I must have all the help I can get."

"You shall! You shall!" Villeta, one eye on the unconscious man, paced the somber room. "You thought, perhaps, that I seemed too much to realize the impossibility of great hurry at the start of our journey; now, having made the journey, you should understand that I was but facing facts like a philosopher, which I am. I tell you truly: Señor Josiah Tucker is more important to me at present than anything else—anybody else—on my estate." He looked anxiously at Dan. "Do everything in your power to save him!"

"Then have me sent at once the articles I called for! Your servants"—he caught himself in time—"have you none that understands English?"

Villeta's eyelids flickered as if in self-questioning. "No," he said. "None save my personal servant and he understands and speaks only incompletely. But you shall have his services whenever possible, and by all—all—your every gesture shall be obeyed." He turned to the door. "I go now to have those articles brought to you. When you have done all for the time possible, inquire for the *comedor*—for the dining room, and do me the honor of joining me there for a poor supper." He hesitated again. "Tucker is quite unconscious, is he not?"

"Quite," said Dan.

Don Ramon left. Only a few moments later there came a knock at the door. Though Dan hurried to open it he found no one there, and yet his orders had been wonderfully fulfilled. On the tiles of the passage stood everything that he had ordered.

Grumbling at the lack of another's presence he set to work in the dual capacity of physician and nurse. Desperately he toiled over the man before him; the crisis was apparently passed; the fever must be slowly abating; but the patient was still very ill indeed.

Under his fellow countryman's ministrations Tucker gradually entered another state. He began to move feebly; the glassiness left his eyes and he passed directly from complete unconsciousness to semidelirium. Incoherent phrases tumbled from his lips, now in Spanish, now in Yankee speech. Dan did not try to catch their meaning, nor, at first, would he have been able to, for they were barely mumbled. Then, all at once, they became clear:

"Ink—this won't do; it won't do! Ink, ink!—I must have——" He half sat up; he clutched Dan's arm.

"Yes, yes," said Dan; a medical student true to type, he had the habit of most doctors and all nurses, who regard every sick man as either a baby or an idiot. "You shall have ink, and a pen, and paper, too—just as soon as you are a little better."

"Ah, paper!" This had been an unfortunate suggestion; it increased Tucker's excitement. "That's it; that's what I was trying to think of! I can't wait any longer. Paper—paper—paper!"

Complete sentences followed, but now utterly unintelligible. The man probably wanted to write home to his wife, or else an expected letter from her had failed to arrive. His excitement was becoming intense to the point of complete delirium. He was tossing with such increasing violence that, unaided, Dan must soon be unable to hold him.

There was a bell rope. Dan pulled it but heard no jangle. He rushed to the door and called in English for help. He dreaded to leave his patient and yet assistance he must have. He ran a few paces down the hall: it was empty. Then, not daring to remain longer absent, he turned back.

The door had closed behind him. As he reached for the knob he was startled into momentary inactivity by a new sound from within; the sound of a voice totally different from the New Englander's. It was thin and high-pitched; it was unmistakably Dominigan, and, with foul spurts of native dirtiness, it was shrieking in the island patois:

"You rabbit fool that are food for the snake! You talk too much. I told you to hold your tongue before the doctor! I told you! By the Diamond of the Toad, but now you shall pay!"

Dan flung wide the door. Like nothing human—like a black jungle cat—like a devil—a hideous form was kicking in the bed; it knelt right upon the patient's chest and its long and yellow claws were digging deeper and deeper into the sick man's throat.

Dan leaped upon the creature and wrenched it off. With loathing hands and rising hair he tossed it, struggling and spitting, into the farthest corner—a dwarf hunchback with a twisted face.

Dan turned to the patient, whose breath was sterterous. Then something warned him not to lose sight of the object in the corner and he wheeled again.

Across the room flew a vicious knife.

Stone dodged just in time. The long blade buried itself a full two inches in the soft wood of the wainscoting not half a foot from his heart.

CHAPTER VI.

A FIGHTING CHANCE.

At the same instant Dan rushed to the hunchback and the hunchback leaped at Dan. The impact was terrific but its advantage lay all with the dwarf. He had jumped directly for the oncoming head; arms and legs tightened about Dan like the tentacles of an octopus and fangs as if a dog snapped at his throat. He staggered backward. Then heavy feet pounded on the flags of the corridor; Stone's summons had been heard below. Don Ramon puffed into the room.

"Qué—qué—qué?"

He plucked the hunchback like a lizard from his perch and held him dangling by the collar of his ragged, dirty shirt.

"The patient was violent," panted Dan. "I ran for help. This maniac must have been hiding under the bed. When I came back he was strangling Tucker."

He hurried to the sick man and rapidly assured himself that that one was not desperately the worse.

"Fernando Peña!" Villeta's voice was that of a bull. "How often have I told you that it is important that he live?"

Dan glanced over his shoulder. At Don Ramon's feet the hunchback cringed, his talons that had thrown the murderous knife raised in trembling supplication. It was a frightfully distorted shape, clad only in its shirt and abbreviated trousers; the eyes burned under shaggy brows; from one high cheek bone downward across the yellow face ran a tallowy scar that drew the mouth up in a crooked and perpetual grin.

Resuming his ministrations Dan heard the creature break into a torrent of pleading and defense. It was a patois that to be wholly understood would have required Stone's undivided attention, but he made out that Peña sought to justify his recent actions through some mysterious fear, and woven into every other sentence was the shrill cry:

"Tucker talks, Tucker talks, Tucker talks!"

"He was only——" Dan had been about to repeat, in confutation, what the patient had said. But he checked himself in time; he had long ago come to the conclusion that it would be somehow dangerous to betray his deception and admit a knowledge of Spanish. Villeta, moreover, was already in the act of translating, glibly and falsely.

"My personal servant," he smiled apologetically, and his voice was soft and smooth again, "this Fernando Peña, says that Tucker became violent and he, trying to hold him, was so attacked by you—who of course misunderstood his intent—that he somewhat lost his temper. He is sorry."

Dan had done his best for the patient. He gave Don Ramon his full face and he made it as much a mask as he was able, under the circumstances.

"I see," he said, but his lips drew tight. The little matter of the knife had not been mentioned. "Well, Tucker didn't need such excessive attention. It is unfortunate, besides, because it may retard if not actually prevent his recovery. He had excited himself by repeating certain words——"

Don Ramon nibbled at his nails; he raised his brows. "What words? Do you recall them, Señor Medico?"

"Oh, it was just delirium. Something or other about paper and ink. I think he must want to write home about his illness."

Was there a quick intake of a breath? Dan glanced toward the patient but though he moved restlessly from side to side he breathed almost normally. The huge planter and the gargoyle dwarf stood still as statues.

"Words of that sort from a man in this condition," Dan continued, "hardly ever mean much, though they sometimes indicate obsessions. Our main job now is to give Tucker rest and quiet—and not let this man of yours try any more stunts in what you call a mere fit of temper."

"There, there!" said Don Ramon, waving a persuasive hand. "It will all go well henceforth. But do, please, tell me of your patient's general condition. That is the important thing, is it not so?"

"He can live if he's given a chance."

"He shall be given it; he shall be! And now," said the planter, "why not administer him a quieting draft? Do, and let us all descend and sup. My own meal was interrupted and I am famished. You say that my dear Tucker requires quiet: give it him. You can leave him safely now. I will send Luis to stay here and report to us any change. Come! We shall all feel happier for eating."

There was truth in what Ramon said. Dan finally agreed to his suggestion.

"And now," said Villeta, softly rubbing satisfied palms together, "the quarrel will be healed. Fernando," he ordered, "you will shake hands without delay with the Señor Medico."

The hunchback slunk forward and put out the long and bony fist that had so lately sought to kill the man to whom it was now offered. Villeta was facing Dan, so that Peña's malformed back was presented to him; he could not see his servant's face, but Dan saw. Mingled with the fellow's smile of repentance was an expression of concentrated malignity; it was with cold fingers that Stone returned the handclasp.

Don Ramon led the way out and Dan followed. Over his shoulder he saw the hunchback dart to the wall, drag out the murderous knife and sheath it before leaving the room. As the American continued on his way he realized that nothing but the fear of arrest held him within the hacienda.

The dining room was a vast and shadowy apartment lighted only by a single pair of candelabra on its big mahogany table. Two covers were laid, and one of these proclaimed Villeta's recent interruption. Dan's mind flew to the girl and he wondered if she was not another and a stronger tie that bound him here.

"The señorita——"

"Eats always alone," said Don Ramon. "It is a custom among the ladies of our country when there are strangers in the house."

Strangers! They had made that long journey together; she had slept last night in a hammock not five yards from his own; her cry had saved his life. Dan could not accept Don Ramon's definition. It was true that Stone had not exchanged one word with her; that once only had he seen her face; yet she might have now been sitting at his side so completely did the thought of her dominate him. Present, she had impressed him deeply; absent, he found her more potent still.

It was a mighty meal: *anguilas y queso rollado*—eels and a grated cheese, very strong—a mixture of rice and beans, sweet potatoes and bananas. The flavor of garlic and the bite of pepper were not to Dan's simpler taste and the frying in olive oil was perhaps overrich, but of its style the cooking was notably good and the wines had quite evidently been raised from a cellar musty and cobwebbed with age.

Peña waited on the diners in a silence that was too soft-footed. Now he was at Don Ramon's elbow, now at Dan's, appearing like a jinni summoned from the shadows, changing shape as he altered his distance. Not once throughout Villeta's jokes and chatter could Dan dispossess his mind of the hunchback's proximity.

"You must take a look around my little estate in the morning," Don Ramon smiled across the stretch of candlelight. "It is something that must seem novel to North Americans."

Dan was about to make a polite response when he saw the face of Fernando Peña grinningly mirrored in a silver plate before him.

"The tropical fruits out there in my gardens," Villeta lavishly ran on, "bananas, breadfruit, oranges, tangerines—you will be free to help yourself to them."

Fernando's muscular hand moved around his master and placed a heaping dish of twice-roasted tortillas before him.

"But the chapel you noticed," Don Ramon continued almost parenthetically, "that alone, as I have said, I must forbid you to enter. For some antiquary it might be a thing of beauty to be sure, but of a dangerous and deadly beauty, too. None can venture there safely, and so"—he pushed a large forkful of the tortillas between his ample lips—"I have given explicit orders. I wish no more deaths on my hands."

"Too bad it's in such poor condition," commented Dan. "Now, architecturally it is——"

A drop of hot coffee spilled on his wrist. Peña again!

"Yes, yes. One day I shall have it restored, but until then——" Don Ramon sighed and launched forth on a dissertation of the countryside's flowers and the high coloring of its birds.

At last, the long meal concluded. Villeta, clapping his hands, addressed his servant, ordered him to conduct Dan to his room, and himself bade the American an elaborate good night; it had been too bad to keep him up so late when he must be so weary.

The guest could have wished for another guide, but the hunchback's manner had completely altered. He was become servile and smiling as, his grotesque form partly lighted by the candle he bore and casting an apish

shadow on the paving, he led the way upstairs.

"I'll give my patient a good-night visit first," said Dan. It annoyed him that he dared not address the hunchback directly in Spanish, when the man had such an imperfect knowledge of Stone's native tongue.

His guide silently reversed their course. Luis was in the sick room when they entered it; he reported no change.

Arrived at Tucker's side Dan, however, saw that delirium and fever had both disappeared. He spoke to the patient in a cheery American voice, remarked that the gray stubble of his beard might even be shaved off in the morning and suggested an increasingly tempting diet. At first, only Tucker's eyes answered. Dan leaned over the bed to time the pulse and then realized that Tucker was trying to whisper something.

Was the delirium returning? Stone leaned closer; the whispering ceased. Peña was peering, under Dan's arm, straight into the patient's eyes.

There was no use in protest now. Pretending to have noticed nothing and postponing action of any sort in the matter until the morrow, Dan bade Tucker good night. He promised to call early in the morning and unwillingly gave Fernando instructions as to the medicines he left, listening while they were translated to Luis for fulfillment.

Again following the grotesque hunchback and the flickering candle Dan descended the staircase and passed through corridor after twisting corridor. They started to mount again.

"Look here," he objected, "I ought to be nearer Tucker. Suppose I was needed quickly. Why, I couldn't even find my way!"

"Master order." Peña continued onward.

Finally he opened a thick door:

"Here, Señor Medico room," said he.

It was a large chamber, heavily curtained in spite of its tropical setting. Peña pointed out its canopied four-poster bed, in one gloomy corner; the tall mahogany wardrobe appearing actually short beneath the high ceiling; the highboy, the washstand, the two shuttered windows. There was no bell.

"Bring anything?" grinned the servant.

"Not to-night, thank you. But I'll want shaving water in the morning."

"At eight, Señor Medico?"

"Better make it seven-thirty. But no, on second thought, I'll call for it."

"As Señor Medico wish." The hunchback lighted a bedroom candle and, bowing derisively in the shadows, backed obsequiously away.

Alone, Dan looked the great apartment over. He walked to a window and pushing wide its shutter gazed out at a night heavy with stars. In opening that barricade he had loosed the full sound of jungle cries and whistlings, the yammering of farm dogs, the languorous scents of the tropical dark. Leaning far over the sill, tracing the uneven outline of the *palacio*, he could just discern the shape of the forbidden chapel at the farther extremity. He wondered where the girl slept; he noted that his room, like his patient's, was high up in the building and that there was a sheer drop of fifty feet to the ground.

Weariness overcame him. He prepared for bed and climbed in. There was no use in brooding now over the past or the present; sleep was ready on his pillow. From it he wakened to an odd, regular, beating sound. The night was at its darkest but the sound was that of reiterant motion, the unmistakable working of machinery. Turning lazily he told himself that this was doubtless the effect of that pressing order of which Ramon had spoken.

Dan did not waken again until the full glare of the morning and the chatter of innumerable birds made him sit bolt upright. It was only a few minutes after six but the tropics were broad awake.

Out of the window he had opened the night before, he looked now—standing in his bare feet—on a scene of wild beauty. Under the blue dome of the sky he could see a complete semicircle of the walled estate: here some small grazing fields for cattle, there woodland, or acres of tobacco, and all about the house the untidy banana trees—fields and fields of them. He was perplexed; painstakingly he studied the landscape again: cacao trees, coconuts, patches of what looked like melons; the mangroves growing in the graveyard swamp —everything belonging to the tropics seemed to grow within the hacienda, everything, that is, but sugar cane.

Well, a man must shave, anyhow. Stone gave an eager minute to study of the chapel, then, still in his bare feet, crossed the room to call for water. As he drew the knob swiftly inward the deformed figure of Fernando Peña toppled into the room.

CHAPTER VII.

THE HUNCHBACK'S EYES.

Face to face with the unexpected, physical action is man's first impulse; the art of attack and defense is merely the highly specialized expression of a primal instinct, and the Yorkshireman's philosophy is of primitive soundness: "A word and a blow, but the blow first." Dan's arm was quicker than his tongue, but he drew it back just before striking.

"What are you doing at my door?" he demanded.

Intense malignity had been again written on the dwarf's face in the instant of falling into the bedroom; now his expression became servile. His eyes were dull and humble as he answered:

"Señor Medico wake up. Fernando Peña hear him move. Come to ask if shaving water."

"I said I'd call."

"Señor Medico want shaving water?"

"I'll shave after a while. Were you outside this door all night?"

"But no—but no!" Peña shook his head in denial. "Not when Señor Medico sleep."

"So I don't need to be watched when I'm asleep? Well, that's something. I'll go and see my patient as soon as I can jump into a few clothes. Can you tell me what sort of night he had?"

"Señor Tucker toss. He toss, but he not dead."

"I see." Dan scrutinized the man. There was plainly no particular desire in the fellow's mind that Tucker should live but his devotion to his master would probably henceforth keep his temper in place. It was, Dan reflected, a dangerous sort of temper to maintain too close to one.

All through the devious passageways he watched for means of identifying the route. He did not wish this spying attendance. Another time, he thought he might be able to find the patient without aid, though he was certain that once Peña doubled in order to befog him.

Tucker, in his high bed, was now deserted by Luis. Pain also had clearly left him. He was thin, not from the severity of illness, and his cheek bones stood out high and narrow; his chin was pointed and his lips a-tremble. The mouth Dan called either weak or sullen or both—and the eyes, of an unblinking pale gray, were not prepossessing. These things and one more, showing plain now in the glare of tropic day; outside the sheet lay two white inert hands, the tips of all except the little fingers somewhat stained, but the hands themselves delicate and slim. They were not the sort one would expect in a mechanical engineer on a sugar estate and yet they were hands that obviously were constantly used, and with skill.

"How are you feeling this morning, Mr. Tucker?"

The man nodded slightly. It was as if he could not or dared not speak. Dan bustled among the medicines, where Peña was beside him with ostentatious help.

"Fernando," said Stone, peering into a pitcher, "this water's full of ants. Run downstairs and get me some fresh."

The dwarf looked up dully but steadily.

"No," said he.

"No?" Dan flushed. "How dare you say that to me? As this patient's physician I order you to bring fresh water."

"No."

They looked full at each other in a moment's contest of wills. If Dan could not overcome the servant's antipathy to him, he must take a final course. Peña was too important a member of the household for him not to realize that, and however much Don Ramon might order him to be friendly the hunchback would remain lord of his own sentiments. He appeared to be lord of his own actions as well!

"If you don't follow the doctor's orders," said Dan slowly, "this man may die. Shall I tell Don Ramon that that's your wish?"

Fernando spat. Dan's anger rose.

"You bring me the fresh water—at once—or I will throw up the case."

"I go! I go!" Peña had lost, but it was not Dan—it was only fear of displeasing Ramon—that had conquered.

Dan watched the hunchback, shaking his big head and mumbling all the length of the room, make the turn at the door—waited until the soft footfalls no longer sounded, then hurried back to his patient and leaned over him.

"Now," said he, "tell me what you were trying to say last night."

Tucker's weak eyes were pathetic, but traveled doubtfully from the doctor toward the doorway, which, however, was hidden by the high foot of his bed.

"Don't worry. He's gone."

But, either from fear or prudence the sick

man, now gazing fixedly at the ceiling, would utter no sound. His lips began to shape themselves into unvocalized words. Dan watched, puzzled. Not the least whisper came and he could rely on his sight alone for interpretation. It was only after considerable repetition that he made out, bit by bit:

"They want to get rid of me, but they daren't do it just yet. They need me a little longer. Look out for yourself, doctor, but"—here the patient's face showed the distress of desperation—"for God's sake get me away!—I made only one mistake. I put out only one of our printings. That paper maker; he needed money—and I gave him—but what does that matter? Get me away! Get me away!"

Dan heard himself thoughtlessly replying in spoken words:

"Of all the damnable——"

"The fresh water, señor."

The honeyed tones were at his very elbow. The hunchback stood there, his thick lips grinning, as he proffered another pitcher.

Dan seized it. He looked down into the dull eyes of the servant, which, though telling nothing, nevertheless always held a challenge.

"Pitcher little way down hall, señor," said Peña. "Luis maybe fill him. He all ready in hall."

Dan glanced quickly back toward the bed. Josiah Tucker had closed his eyes; beneath an excessive pallor he looked exhausted and hopeless. But Peña's expression as Dan turned back was one of rage fighting against crafty repression.

How much had the hunchback observed? He was just tall enough to see the moving mouth. Had he arrived only when Dan spoke aloud, or had he been silently standing there—concealed by Stone's back, peeping beneath his elbow—during the difficult moments of translation? And, in the latter case, had he too been able to read the lips of the helpless Tucker, or merely attending, had he guessed their import?

CHAPTER VIII.

TWO MILLION DOLLARS.

Silent and doubtful Dan concluded his early-morning duties to his patient, was conducted back to his vast bedchamber and prepared for breakfast. Fernando kept disconcertingly close as he dressed.

"Hot water, Señor Medico? Your socks: here, Señor Medico! Here Señor Medico's coat: Peña too small to help on."

The creature tried Stone's nerves almost beyond endurance. If Dan did not see him directly he was forever catching his distorted reflection in a long mirror at the end of the room.

Dour mystery breathed through the entire hacienda. The forsaken graveyard, half buried in marsh, seemed alive with it, the very stones of the chapel whispered of it. There had been danger and to spare on the water front of San Lorenzo, but the danger of the gallows now seemed almost less ominous than the secret perils of this house of empty corridors, set within the strange walled estate and guarded by peons—that was the right name for them!—who were equally terrified and terrifying.

Save a fellow American? Of course. But from what? He must find that out at the next opportunity. And who was he, himself a fugitive, to be of any genuine help?

Dan descended to the ground floor gloomily, yet there the bright morning sunlight temporarily, at least, dispersed some portion of his dejection. Don Ramon, resplendent in fresh white, was waiting here, his vivid parrot, Pedro, seated on his shoulder and, reaching a gray bill forward, pecking at the full lips under his master's mustache. The breakfast table was laden with bowls of gay flowers and torrid fruits. Steaming coffee was brewing in a brass alcohol-heated percolator, and Don Ramon—who was dressed for a journey in spite of the color of his raiment—at once hurried forward to greet his guest. His manner was the most cheerful in the world. He radiated good health and good nature and waved Dan, with a genial smile, to his seat at the table.

"You slept well? Yes?"

"Quite well," said Dan, and thought again of the machinery heard at night. "And you?"

"I never sleep badly. That is what it is," said Don Ramon, "to have the clear conscience of a babe."

"And the"—Dan hesitated ever so little and blushed a great deal—"and your niece? She enjoyed a good rest, too?"

"My good friend, what could there be upon the conscience of a properly brought-up young girl? Tell me of your patient."

Dan had something to say about that but the moment when Peña reached up a plate

to him seemed not particularly auspicious. He reported in general terms.

Excused from the sick room, Luis assisted the hunchback this morning, for the breakfast was, unlike the breakfast of most Continentals and those of Continental origin, an elaborate affair. Rashers of bacon, broiled fish, eggs baked with green and red peppers, heaps of sweet tortillas as on the night before. Don Ramon's mouth was always open for more, though, between tossings of food to the greedy parrot swaying on the table beside his plate he talked as volubly as ever.

"I regret excessively that I must leave you to your own devices to-day," he said in his soft voice, with a polite bow and a smile that illumined his big round face.

"*Socorro! Socorro!*" squawked Pedro.

"But," continued his master, patting the bird, "when you are not completing the cure of our unfortunate Señor Tucker, you may look about the estate or read. I have quantities of books—English; among the collection many American novels of the sort that one of your several societies formed to suppress something has succeeded in suppressing, so that you may not have seen them. You would like to look them over? Mostly, they are very stupid and mostly they are poorly written; when a book is stupid and poorly written those societies seem to think it is also evil, and I am inclined to believe they are right."

Dan was not sure that he cared for these volumes.

"Well, amuse yourself, at any rate. It is some distance I must go to meet some freight that I expect to be conveyed from San Lorenzo. I must meet it part way, at a transfer. *Regresáre a las siete*—I beg your pardon: I shall return at seven or thereabouts."

Dan, his patient heavily on his mind, tried to find a moment unsupervised by Peña, but, time pressing and the master Santo Domingan being on the very point of leaving, he was finally forced to speak, if at all, before the hunchback.

"Don Ramon," said he, "there's something I want you to do for me."

Villeta's eyes narrowed but his smile was his answer:

"A request? But it is granted!"

Dan was by no means sure of that. "I had hoped," he said, "to have a chance to speak of it in private, but——"

"Well? Well?"

"You want Tucker back at his work as soon as possible?"

"Of a truth, yes!"

Peña hovered over them. He was unconcealedly listening.

"Well, my patient," Dan continued, "is being retarded in his recovery by a sick man's hallucination. He has a foolish fear of Fernando. Unless he's relieved of that attendance, I frankly can't guarantee recovery."

Dan felt rather than saw the dark look that swept over the dwarf's features but Don Ramon burst into a great laugh and, while the parrot echoed him, tapped Stone's arm with his jeweled fat fingers.

"My dear Señor Medico, this is very foolish! You, as a physician, should not hold my poor servant's misfortune against him."

"I don't! I am speaking for my patient."

"But Señor Tucker understands the temperament of my innocent Fernando."

"Sick men have violent fancies."

"Then," said Ramon with a sudden sharpness, "when they are nonsense they should be overcome, or they may grow to mania. Why, Peña is as harmless as a lamb."

"Perhaps." Dan brought it out at last. "But I myself don't like his constant companionship. It's got nothing to do with his misfortune. I simply can't have anybody—*anybody*—dogging my heels the way this man does. I won't stand for it."

His tone was harsh, his purpose firm. After the peon's impudence in the sick chamber and Tucker's appeal for rescue he was resolved to be rid of Fernando. Villeta's shrewd glance read the decision and he shrugged and submitted. Out of one corner of his mouth, "*De nada, no es nada,*" he whispered to Peña, but the next moment he addressed Dan:

"Of course, if the matter is personal to you, why, you are my guest and you shall have your wish. Did I not tell you, before you expressed it, that your wish would be granted?" He turned back to the brooding Peña. "You hear the Señor Medico! if Señor Tucker cannot recover with you in attendance you must surrender your position to Luis. Luis will therefore attend to both the sick American and the well American and will do no more duties in the dining room for the present. But"—and he faced Dan again—"you will have to transmit all

orders through Fernando, because Luis knows no English." Over his shoulder, Don Ramon ascertained that the broken-nosed Carib had left the room. He added softly to Fernando, with a leer that Dan's sharpened eyes did not miss: *"No durará mucho."*

There was nothing much in that of itself: "It will not last long;" but Peña's reply was more explicit and seemed to involve his master, as well as himself, in its implications. He, too, made certain that Luis was still absent. Then he burst forth in a torrent of Spanish that he never dreamed the American would understand:

"This is all a trick, my master. Watch these Americanos. We have enough! Why go to so much pains to get him well for a week? *Muerte el traidor:* Let me kill the sick man now!"

"Plenty of time for that!" said the planter. His smile never deserted him, and his voice was as soft as if he were speaking to a child.

Dan bent his head low above his plate in order to hide the growing horror of his face. But Ramon added emphatically and still in Spanish to the dwarf: "The extra paper comes to-day. Why stop short of our two million dollars?"

The parrot Pedro had hopped to one of the planter's shoulders, its green head impudently on one side.

"Muerte el traidor! Muerte el traidor!" it shrieked and, shrieking, glared at the young American.

CHAPTER IX.

FOOTSTEPS.

Dan's face, as he finally raised it, was impassive, but he had been enabled to paint impassivity there only because of the danger that dangled everywhere now about him. The hacienda was haunted, but some of its ghosts were alive and the worst of them all was some evil purpose. Of that one the patient upstairs lay in desperate fear; it terrorized the lower servants; the hunchback was driven to ungovernable actions on its account; even Don Ramon scrawled his knowledge of it across the walls of his daily life. What—for she could not be guilty of a part in it—what was it doing to the vanished girl?

Dan meant to act but before he acted he would put one question to the planter. Meanwhile, and before interruption was possible, Don Ramon, elaborately jocular and smilingly mendacious, pretended to translate the hunchback's remarks.

"Fernando is so sensitive," Villeta apologized. "He has an intricate and delicate soul—oh, in spite of his poor distorted shape!—and though he wishes, as he says, to oblige the Señor Medico, he so appreciated the honor of his position as guardian angel to our poor patient that you have much hurt his feelings!"

Peña, with a glare at this translation, the gist of which he plainly understood, left the room. He sent Luis back in his stead.

"But," continued Don Ramon, tapping his chest and marking the transfer merely with a lowering of his eyelids, "I—I am master in my hacienda. My orders shall be obeyed. Anything for the good of my workingmen; that is my motto!"

His broad white teeth showed in a radiant smile. Dan wanted to hit him but all he said was, slowly:

"I see. And, by the way, where do you grow your sugar cane, sir?"

Ramon regarded him through quickly narrowed lids.

"Ah," said he, "you know sugar cane? And you have already, so early, been exploring my estate?"

Dan ignored the first question. "No," he answered. "I haven't been exploring your estate but I happened to look out of my window this morning and I couldn't see any cane. It's your main product; I wondered where you kept it."

Villeta's head bent above his parrot as he stroked Pedro's plumage. "You would hardly be able to see the cane from your window, my friend. We grow it in an outlying farm."

"But your work"—Dan wavered between doubt and belief; he was determined to pin the man down—"that is here, isn't it, Don Ramon? The mechanical part of it? Last night I was sure I heard machinery."

The planter leaned forward over the table, pushing a bowl of goldfish from between him and Dan.

"I must sooner or later explain a small matter," said he in his honeyed and most confidential tone. "My business is a little —well, secret. To speak frankly, the Santo Domingan government places an exorbitant export duty on my product, so that I find it expedient to minimize, for my reports to them, its quantity. Add to this the import

duty in the United States, and without some petty subterfuge I simply could not compete." He spread out his fat hands as if in helplessness. "So, truly, but between ourselves, I may say that I am practicing a little deception—innocent in my mind, I assure you!—on the government. As you North Americans would picturesquely say, you—get me?"

Dan thought he did.

Don Ramon leaned back with a sigh, seized a mango, bit into it, spat, then vigorously sucked at it.

"Good! Like a genuine host I place my innermost secrets in your hands. Now," said he as he deposited the golden remnant of fruit on his plate, dipped his fingers into a bowl of water and proceeded to pick his teeth, "I wish to acknowledge with fitting generosity my appreciation of your services. There is no doubt in my mind: you are"—and he smiled—"saving Señor Tucker's life. That is just now of paramount importance to me. If you can put him into working condition by the day after to-morrow—you seem to work miracles—there is no need for you to stay the month. I shall, indeed, pay you double the price I first mentioned in recognition of the cure. Meanwhile"—he beamed with his own lavishness—"I mean to pay you one thousand dollars right away."

The planter seemed determined to placate him. Sitting perfectly still at the breakfast table Dan watched Don Ramon, with Pedro perched securely on a shoulder, hurry from the room; he listened to his footsteps along the empty corridors. Idly at first he counted, all the time resolved somehow to be loyal to his patient: he would save him not only from disease, but from death, however long he might have to stay in this dangerous house. Yes, and—because she, too, must want saving and deserve it—he would somehow save that girl as well! His mind went back to her like steel to a magnet, but throughout all this process he subconsciously continued counting the echoing steps of his host.

Subconsciously at first; then with a purposeful deliberation. The steps ascended a staircase to the left; there were then ten staccato footfalls and the sound of a door that opened on hinges hungry for oil.

Broken-nosed Luis was slowly removing the plates. Dan, desperately seeking an ally, smiled at him a little but secured no response. The Indian was stolidly but not swiftly bent on his work. Just then that unoiled door above was again opened and closed. Ten footsteps followed, the stairs were descended, the length of the corridor traversed. Don Ramon reëntered the dining room.

With a great flourish he gave to Dan what he carried: ten brand-new hundred-dollar bills.

"Behold!" said he and struck an attitude of philanthropy.

Dan took the money; it was, though early in delivery, a bargained payment.

"Thanks."

But Villeta's quick eyes had shot to Luis and saw that the Carib, carrying a couple of plates, stopped in mid-progress and stood staring. Don Ramon flushed. Before, however, he could speak, Luis, overcome with nervousness, tripped and dropped his burden. The china clattered to the tiled floor in a hundred fragments. Ramon's rage raised his huge strength.

His fist closed over the flesh at the back of the Indian's neck; his face was rough with knotted muscles as he lifted Luis, like a kitten, from the floor and with the merest premonitory swing of his own body to gain momentum threw him across the room. The peon's head bashed against the edge of a mahogany buffet; he fell in a heap and fainted.

Ramon laughed at the inert figure; then, for Dan's benefit: "No, you needn't apologize at all!"

Quite readily his muscles relaxed and he turned again to the white-lipped American. He grinned and he said with a shrug of explanation that held not the slightest morsel of regret:

"The only way to keep order with these cattle is to use what you picturesque North Americans call the strong arm!"

During all that vast exertion Pedro had marvelously remained with his claws secure in the cloth above his master's shoulder. Now Villeta plucked him delicately from his perch, kissed him and, with a tender gesture of affectionate farewell, flung him fluttering into the air.

"Hasta la vista!" he waved to the bird. A firm, easy step carried him toward the outer door, but he gave a final reassuring smile to Dan:

"Señor Medico," he waved gayly, *"hasta la vista!"*

CHAPTER X.

FOLLOWED!

"Luis!"

The Indian still lay in a huddled heap but his breathing was now steady. In answer to Dan's cry his eyelids fluttered. He tried to smile—failed—lay silent. There was an ugly gash, not dangerously deep, just above his right temple.

Dan's swiftly questing fingers revealed no broken bone. He saw that a drawer of the buffet stood open; it contained fine table linens. Heedless of consequences he tore several of the napkins into bandages, cleaned the wound with water from a carafe and bound up the sufferer's head.

Evidently a man of iron, this Carib; in an hour, perhaps, he would be about again, yet some rest he must have. Dan thought first of taking him to his own room; then recalled that, next to Tucker, was a small and apparently empty bedchamber to which he had himself hoped to be assigned. Well—he smiled sternly—it would be more convenient to have his patients close together. Fernando's precautions had at first befogged his sense of the plan of the house, but he knew the road well enough now, however circuitously. The moment Luis showed definite signs of returning consciousness Dan put one of the Indian's arms about his neck, supported him by the waist and half led, half carried him to the chosen room at the top of the *palacio*.

They passed no one. Tucker's door was closed. In the neighboring bedchamber stood a bed bearing an uncovered mattress. On this Dan, with practiced skill, made Luis as comfortable as possible. Having fastened the door softly against any eavesdropper he returned to the wounded man, who lay now with his eyes open and intelligent.

"Many—many thanks," murmured the Indian, and Dan, for the first time, noted that, in spite of its broken nose, the face was pleasant.

"Oh, there is nothing to thank me for," he said in Spanish. "What I want you to do is to tell me honestly what is wrong in this hacienda."

The islander started. He rolled terrified eyes and crossed himself.

"The Señor Medico speaks Spanish!"

"Yes," said Dan, and added: "But, for Heaven's sake, don't tell that!"

"If I do," Luis simply answered, "they will kill you."

"I'm not sure they won't anyhow, my friend, but before they do it I don't want to die of curiosity. Come: let me know what's going on here."

Luis shook his bandaged head. "I have no idea."

"You must have! Look here; you can't like this master of yours, or that infernal Fernando, either. I know you hate them both."

The Carib could only repeat that he had no idea. His protest was so solemn—he swore by all the saints—that Dan had at last to believe him.

"Well then," said the American, taking another tack, "help me to get that wretched fellow Tucker safely out of this hole, anyhow."

Luis clasped his thin hands in distress. He looked toward the closed door in a fright that was all but palpable.

"No, no! They find out everything!"

"So you still love Don Ramon?"

The copper face took on a deeper shade; Luis' teeth set.

"He is very cruel to a faithful servant. He will kill me one day; but what can I do? I am helpless! Still, I am grateful to the Señor Medico."

"And that hunchback. You love *him?*"

The swathed face on the pillow writhed. "I hate him! Always he has the better place and all because he was born with a little more intelligence than poor Luis. But no more fidelity! It is not my fault I know no English—that I cannot intrigue cleverly about the paper——"

Paper again: Dan thought that he had found a clew. "The *what?*"

But Luis would on that topic say no more. "I will aid you all I can, Señor Medico, but this Indian can help very little. He must keep his life!"

Dan pursued the paper theme in vain. It became clear that Luis either could not or would not enlighten him, and his doctor's instinct told him that he must not be too insistent. He put, at last, a hand on the Carib's shoulder.

"Well, then," he said not unkindly, "we'll let that pass. But there is another thing: in what room does the señorita lodge?"

At once, Luis' whole manner changed. He sat up in bed.

"The Señor Medico means her no harm?"

Dan vowed that he did not. Then:

"What apartment is now hers," said the Indian, "indeed I do not know. Of old, when I was servant to her esteemed father and her honorable mother—honorable truly, though own sister-in-law to Don Ramon—then I was privileged; but now I do not know what—beyond my commanded duties—goes on inside this hacienda. One of these hundred rooms she must have; more than that I know not."

Dan frowned. "You say that Villeta was her mother's brother?"

"Of a surety; her mother's brother by marriage. His first wife was my dead lady's sister."

"Then how is he owner here?"

"I do not know. Who am I that I should understand the law? I am only a Christian! But this"—and he looked hard into Dan's eyes—"of this I am sure: before God, Don Ramon has no right to these lands; that is why the Señorita Gertruda ran away, and why, overtaking her, he brought her back from San Lorenzo. In San Domingo he may not marry the daughter of his wife's sister—but if he keeps her hidden, he may use—he may perhaps at last acquire—her lands."

The Carib's eyes blazed. He was, after all, a wounded man, and he had told, in broad strokes, all that he knew. Dan remembered that the fellow must have some rest.

"There—there," he said, patting Luis' shoulder, "I'll help her and I'll help you, too. Try to sleep and for a little while forget your troubles. When you wake I'll have planned something. Then we'll talk. But remember this," he concluded, "if you are at all my friend don't speak to me when others can possibly listen; don't look at me as if there were any understanding between us. And, understanding Spanish, I'll know whatever you say to them before me."

His new patient lay in an agony of terror as the doctor left him; Dan was aware of that but he was aware also, and with a sense of gratification, that he had at last a friend in this house of mystery. His spirits rising he went toward the next room, wondering how Tucker fared. He pushed open the door softly so as not to awaken the sick man, should he sleep. Crouched on the floor near the bed, his long arms folded across his flat chest, the crooked-mouthed hunchback was rocking to and fro.

At sight of him Dan's patience came to an abrupt end. "You get out of here!" he ordered. "Don Ramon told you to keep away from this room. Go!"

The hunchback continued rocking. His lips twisted yet more stringently. He looked up at Dan with an impudent leer: "Don Ramon rides, Señor Medico. I am lord when he is absent: I stay!"

He began to hum softly the same tune his master had hummed in the café in the Street of the Pink Turtledoves in Sanchez:

"My mistress is a lady—a lady—his lady;
She smiles, her lord not looking, and throws a rose to me——"

Dan hesitated. Should he use force? Then he glanced toward Tucker. The New Englander's tired eyes conveyed a plain plea against interference.

With no further word Dan left the room. Peña's derisive laughter rang after his footsteps down the stairs.

He decided to walk about the estate and think things over. He must bring some sort of order to his mind; he must decide on some straight course of action. Stopping only for the pith helmet that Don Ramon had brought him at their point of departure he strode to the front door and was about to pass it when he paused at sight of an armed peon, around his waist the Domingan cattleman's machete-bearing lariat, apparently on guard.

Dan, however, was not long halted. He descended the stone steps. He had gone a distance of perhaps fifty yards into the patio toward the deserted graveyard when he realized that, not many feet behind him, the peon followed.

Stone reversed his course. He returned to the house. Within, he made his way to another exit. A second man, similarly armed and lariated, stood there, expressionless, unforbidding, but obviously prepared to follow.

Again the American retreated. He walked from hall to empty room, from room to empty corridor. Every window was shuttered and fastened; he was unable to open one of them. Could these precautions have been taken only against the tropical sun?

His heart beat none too evenly. What, after all, was to be done? Peña was doubtless still with Tucker; the armed peons seemed to confine themselves to guarding the doors of exit. Inaction was beyond en-

durance; Dan determined to explore the interior.

An odd impulse sent him back to the table at which he had breakfasted. Sitting there for a moment he thought of Don Ramon's abrupt excursion of only an hour earlier, and to make sure of its reality he felt in his pockets for the roll of ten bills given him then. They crinkled at his touch. To the left—up the stairs—ten steps—a door. Why, Villeta must have gone at least part way to the forbidden chapel—perhaps the whole way. Dan must find the Señorita Gertruda, but he must also discover Don Ramon's secret. He would, therefore, try to repeat Don Ramon's walk.

He entered a narrower corridor than the main one, to the right. He found the staircase; brief, of worn stone, curving still more to the left. In the short hallway above he took ten steps, approximating the length he thought Villeta's leap would consume in a stride. At the tenth pace he found himself opposite a narrow oak door, pointed at the top.

Dan tried the handle and pushed gently. The door creaked inward and he followed it through.

Closing it after him, he went along the inner corridor on which it opened. He realized that he must be going straight toward the ruined chapel and yet the chapel was level with the earth, whereas this was an upstairs corridor. He almost ran into a second portal; very ancient, very small, the top fastened into an equilaterally pointed architrave of stone, gray from centuries of erosion. It was locked.

Dan knew what it was. That knowledge of ecclesiastical archæology against which the Pennsylvania-Dutch lawyer had inferentially warned him; it was at last of real use. This door would lead to a compartment or gallery overlooking the chancel of the ruined chapel. Medieval noblemen in Europe had built their castles in just such a manner, so that they and their families could, unseen, attend early mass in dressing gowns.

Quite apart from his desire to solve the mystery of the hacienda rose now Dan's interest in a glimpse of the architectural beauties that he knew existed, in whatever ruin, beyond that barrier. The lock was old but too firm to be shaken loose. Nevertheless it was not rusted from disuse. An impelling force made the American grasp the door by its protruding hinges and lift with all his strength.

He was thinking hard. During the night, when he had heard the metallic rhythm of machinery, it had come from this direction. He pushed upward with rigid muscles. The hinges were stiff. Fruitless though the immense effort promised to be he strained on and upward. There came at last a quiver; the door yielded; he let it swing wide.

His architectural knowledge had stood him in good stead. He stepped upon a stone balcony, just such as he had imagined, and looked down at the very picture that his fancy had drawn. The place no longer bore much of the air of a sanctuary. Weeds had invaded it; from between the tiles of the floor purple wild flowers edged their way. The font was broken. Halfway up the apse an unusually large and very rickety confessional box leaned crazily. Sunlight made crooked dusty streaks through a small and partly broken rose window opposite the high altar, which itself was bare and deserted. But what, in spite of all his architectural interest, caught and held Dan's gaze was a hulking black thing of steel that towered in the aisle and seemed, in spite of the general desertion and decay, a living sacrilege on what was once a piece of holy ground. He leaned far over the stone rail to look at it.

Here indeed was the machinery that Dan had heard; two pieces of it, well oiled, perfectly conditioned. Dan was nothing of a mechanic; he did not know the nature of these hulking instruments, but he was looking at them, intently trying to elucidate their meaning, when something hissed beside him.

A rope! A lariat!

It just missed him.

He wheeled.

In the corridor beyond the little door that Dan had lifted from its hinges, in the act of loosing his hold of the failed lasso, stood that first armed peon, who had followed Dan from the *palacio's* front door into the open.

CHAPTER XI.

THE FORTUNE.

For one sharp instant, as Dan wheeled upon him, the peon paused and the two men stood at gaze. The servant was a nimble-bodied black whose teeth flashed

white in a surprised grin. Dan saw the hot light of the savage in that face; he read ferocity in the raggedly clad form that leaned forward ready to spring.

Without a flicker of his wide eyes the guard reached down at last for a machete thrust, in this instance, through the soiled sash about his middle. Of that frightful weapon, part knife, part cleaver, one blow would serve any enemy.

Dan waited no attack from it. As if jumping for the ball in the decisive moment of a football game he took a flying leap and flung himself with all his weight upon the Domingan. One fist smashed into the black face, then seized the neck; the other reached across and downward. It grasped the weapon that the peon was already struggling to draw. The Domingan's arms relaxed and came back mightily; he had the advantage of being braced against the inner wall and now with unexpected power he sought to push Dan away and so gain the chance to free the machete.

They wrestled in silence. Now they were locked in a panting embrace; again the peon wrenched at his knife and Stone strove to drag it away. Each fought with every muscle, used his every ounce of strength.

A fear lest the peon should shout for help appalled Dan. Against that help Stone would be defenseless. Shifting his pressure ever so little, the upper part of the arm that grappled for the machete pressed upward and hard against the moving larynx. For a fraction of time the enemy's eyes bulged. If only Dan could risk a trifle more pressure! But he dared not loosen ever so slightly his grip on the weapon.

The combatants' breath mingled in a cloud of steam. Dan could feel the other's beating on his forehead. His own came and went noisily.

With a twist the peon lowered the upper half of his body and pushed again. The stone balcony rail was only two feet high; the drop from it to the floor of the chapel was a good fifteen feet. As they crashed to the floor of the balcony, neither releasing his hold, Dan realized that the peon's purpose was now to hurl him over that rail. He was handicapped because he must keep a grip on the machete and yet prevent a call for help, and the strength against which he was pitted seemed inexhaustible

The peon lay beneath him. He had let go the machete, but Dan could not secure it, and with one free hand and an arm partially free the black was actually lifting his opponent upward and outward—was lifting him against the rail—up—up——

One of Dan's kicking feet caught the top of the stone fretwork. He shoved backward; he reversed their positions. Consciousness nearly left him as his head struck the balcony paving, but there was no instant to lose. With a heave that promised to be his last he had the surprised body of the peon straddling the corrugated coping itself, where it tottered as if doubtful which way to roll.

Dan's strength was gone but some other force decided the issue. The Domingan, bewildered by the speed of the reversal, lying now on his back, a leg actually on each side of the rail, lost his sense of direction, rolled into mid-air, gathered momentum, flew outward and downward and crashed headlong into the pit of the chapel, hurtling against the rickety confessional box with such force that its door was burst ajar.

Slowly and dazedly Dan struggled partially upright. He pulled himself, by the stone bars, to his knees, and, still breathing hard, looked over the rail. The man that a moment since had been fighting so desperately lay very still below him.

Dan lowered himself from the balcony and dropped to the chapel floor. The Domingan was quite unconscious, but alive. Indeed, a rapid examination showed a fractured leg and a broken arm—the arm that had held the machete, now forgotten on the balcony floor—but the man was not fatally hurt.

Then came a new alarm. As he listened to the faint but certain beatings of his victim's heart Dan heard another sound; it was the sound of approaching steps along the gallery above. Somebody had heard the crash of the Domingan's fall.

There was a narrow space behind the confessional. Stone crept swiftly into this, lying flat, but peeped cautiously around its protecting corner. Through the narrow doorway above came the horrid form of Fernando Peña.

Some broken woodwork lay before Dan, a protecting screen. Prone, he could watch the hunchback's every move without himself being detected.

Peña squeaked a great oath as he peered across the rail. Nimbly he crept over it

and, a long knife between his teeth, leaped the sheer distance with a catlike agility that made him bounce toward the body of the peon as he alighted. He ran to it and leered at it—with a grin of diabolical pleasure he drew back and, knife in hand, surveyed the unconscious man.

"So, you thief, you have been caught by your own cunning!" His voice rang shrilly through the dismantled chapel. "No more sneaking tricks from you whenever the master goes away! No more treachery, my friend. You'll be the third to die here. The rest will all learn enough to keep away—or stay at church forever!"

The hunchback raised his knife and struck. It came up red. He struck again.

After the second blow he had to tug to release the blade. He wiped the dripping steel on his victim's shirt, walked calmly to the chapel's main door and opened it with a great key from his belt. A blast of yellow sunshine silhouetted his gargoyle shape. Then the portal swung behind him and the lock turned. He was probably gone for discreet help to bury the body and repair such damage as he had observed.

Dan was alone.

The murder had happened with a swiftness beyond prevention—a swiftness that outdistanced realization itself. From leap to blow it had not consumed a full minute.

Blaming himself for the amazement that had kept him from his late enemy's rescue Dan crept out of hiding. He looked at the peon. The fingers were already stiffening; there was here no life now left to save.

Although horror enveloped him Stone looked about, determined to see all that could be seen. When he had removed the door above he thought only of the architecture of a crumbling chapel, which he felt such an impelling desire to examine. Now he did not even note its presence except as a correlative to the mundane articles that tenanted the place.

Dan leaned heavily against the wall. An hour ago and this chapel would have fascinated him as a rare example of church architecture; he could see it at this moment only as a charnel house.

Only? His roving eyes were caught again by those twin machines. Even Dan's technical ignorance recognized them for a pair of some sort of presses. More, they were plainly in daily or nightly activity—there was no sign of sugar cane about them.

Shuddering a little he glanced back at the dead peon, then, above his head, to the confessional box against which the body had struck. The impact had broken its glaringly modern lock. Dan looked within.

The interior fittings had long since been ripped out. The box was almost completely filled with neatly arranged piles of American bank notes—new hundred-dollar bills, replicas of those which he at that moment carried in his pocket.

CHAPTER XII.

A SUDDEN DEATH.

Counterfeiting—that must be Don Ramon's secret and the secret of his murderous hunchback lieutenant.

Gingerly Dan stepped across the dead peon and crowded himself within the box. Here everything was methodical. To the top bill of each stack of money was pinned a slip of paper—a memorandum stating the amount piled below.

He began a sum in addition: roughly, he figured that here was the likeness of something over one million six hundred thousand dollars. He remembered what had passed between Villeta and Fernando, the hunchback declaring that they had enough—that more would be dangerous—that printing should cease and Tucker die; Don Ramon standing out for a round two million. Dan recalled a score of hints and judged himself severely for not having put them together.

And Tucker? What was Josiah Tucker's rôle?

Dan thought of the weak, none-too-honest face; the stained fingers. An American, too! Why, of course, the fellow had somehow been seduced from honorable but, in his mind, underpaid government employ; he was the expert necessary, whenever any technical slip occurred, to the actual making of these notes. The rogues had doubtless persuaded him with the promise of lifelong wealth, and he, at long last, lying sick in his bed at the top of the hacienda, had come to realize that they did not mean to fulfill their promise, that they had decided to rid themselves of him when his work was done and so have one less to share the spoils.

A few bits of bank-note paper lay on the floor. Where were the necessary rolls of it? Oh, it was easy to piece the facts together

now! They had just used the last of their old stock; it was a new supply that Ramon rode to-day to meet. When he came back the printing——

Dan stopped short. If he were caught in this chapel by Villeta—if he were caught by Fernando—his life would not be worth a button.

He ran to the door. Peña had locked it. It was heavy and firm and not to be budged by one man's muscular strength. Dan surveyed the sheer sides of the chapel. The only possible exit was by the way he had come, yet there was no slightest projection whereby he could raise himself, and, jump as he might, his fingers could not grasp the lowest opening in the rail of the balcony.

He thought of shoving something over and climbing on it, but there was nothing immediately movable that was of sufficient height. He searched in a desperation that impaired his ingenuity: the high altar—the confessional box—the machinery. Suddenly he saw the lariat. When the peon had thrown it, it shot clear over the rail and there, while Dan looked upward, it lay at his very feet on the chapel floor.

He picked it up and tried to throw it across the rail of the gallery, but he was unskilled and nervous. Once—twice—three times it flew far of the mark. Only on his fourth attempt, which he made with more calculation, did he succeed. The rope circled the rail and was so looped that the farther end hung low enough for his straining fingers to catch it. He knotted the two ends together, tested it for his weight, made it fast to the stone altar rail and, clumsily, clambered up hand over hand.

He was not light and the lariat was old and worn. He had just grasped a balcony post well above his head when, with a snap, the rope broke. His feet dangled for a moment, then he had them braced against the wall of the chapel and with a great swing pulled himself up to safety.

He staggered into the main hallway. As he did so a door opened before him and the Señorita Gertruda drew him inside.

No mantilla masked her now. She stepped back from him, one slim hand to her breast that rose and fell. Her delicately carven face, dusky with the blood of Spain, was flooded by crimson; her lips shone as red as the hibiscus flower that drooped in her blue-black hair; her dark eyes glowed.

"I heard you," she gasped; astoundingly she spoke English: "and, earlier, I heard Don Ramon ride away. It was my chance—the chance that I have been waiting for ever since I first saw you at San Lorenzo." She clasped her hands. "You look honorable. You look kind. You are an American—while my parents lived—before my uncle made me a prisoner for their money's sake—I went to school there. Oh"—and she tottered toward him—"you must rescue me. I am quite, quite alone in the world. There is no one I have the blood right to appeal to. Señor Stone, for the love of the Mother of God take me out of this prison house!"

Still panting from his climb Dan looked at her. She was penniless, she was friendless, she was lovely. Would she be any better off alone in San Domingo City—alone in New York—than here? He was ignorant of the jungle trails; the police sought him; here at the hacienda he was one man against an unscrupulous score, himself a prisoner. He took both of her little hands.

"I'll do it!" said he.

She laughed. There, in the desperation of their plight, she laughed.

"Then go!" she cried. "Make ready. There is an opportunity so long as Don Ramon remains absent—there must be! Luis is friendly. Get Luis; he will find us a way past the other servants. Hurry—hurry!" She was pushing him from the apartment as eagerly as she had drawn him into it. "Go!"

The door closed on him. Heading for the room in which he had left Luis, he ran.

And he ran, some twenty yards away, directly into Fernando Peña.

The hunchback jumped aside. "Where you been?"

Dan drew up. "None of your business. Am I a convict? And are you the warden?"

The question missed Peña. "I been look for you," he said. "Señor Medico, you were mistake' about your patient probably recover. He taken spasm just now. Follow me immediate!"

CHAPTER XIII.

THE WILD CAT.

In what had been the sick room Tucker lay silent and motionless. Dan bent over him.

"He is dead," said Stone.

Peña shrugged.

"Just when," persisted Dan, "was he seized with this—*'spasm?'*"

The hunchback's great gloomy face was not communicative, yet his lips answered glibly enough:

"But now, Señor Medico. It is three minutes—less. I come immediate for doctor. Señor Tucker throw himself; he talk loud; he look black and red. I run."

Peña peered up close to the dead man, too, as if fearful lest he might still be able to speak. "Tucker talks! Tucker talks! Tucker talks!"—Dan almost heard again the servant's protest to Don Ramon. Well, this solved one riddle that had begun to trouble him; the riddle of his promise to rescue his fellow American. Dan drew gradually away, continuing to put questions about the case. He maneuvered so that he stood between Peña and the open door and close to the table on which still rested the dead man's breakfast tray.

"Your master," said Dan, "will not be pleased. He wished Mr. Tucker to live so that he might go on with his work."

Behind Fernando Peña's dull eyes gleamed a flash of triumphant defiance.

"The Good Lord," said he, "he take Señor Tucker because maybe he finish his work already."

There had been the marks of clutching fingers about the dead American's throat; Dan, in his swift examination, had not missed them but until now he had pretended ignorance.

"The Good Lord," he declared, with a clarity that was not to be misunderstood, "did not cause this spasm. That was the devil's work." He looked full at the hunchback and shot out his concluding words. "This man was murdered!"

On the instant, as if the statement were a signal, Fernando's right hand flashed to his knife, ready to throw it; but this time Dan was prepared. With a single movement he seized and flung the breakfast tray straight into the hunchback's face—and he flung himself after it. He was too well aware of his antagonist's bestial strength to take any chances.

Peña was quick to recover. He leaped into mid-air. The pair literally flew into each other's arms, and from the impact rolled to the floor.

Over and over they rolled, nearly crossing the room in the fury of their battle. They knocked down chairs and upset tables. Only the dead man lay unmoved, his open eyes staring upward.

"The devil's work" Dan had called Tucker's murder, and certainly with a demoniac ferocity and a demoniac power Peña fought his accuser. In Fernando's diminutive and malformed body resided a frightful energy. His muscles were iron, his nerves steel. Seen at his ordinary occupations he appeared a creature that the average man could break across his thigh; fired by his frenzy for blood he was all but incapable of defeat, all but irresistible in murder. He fought now with the fury of a jungle beast; his wide nostrils fanned Dan's cheeks with the flame of their breath; his yellow teeth opened through his twisted mouth.

Dan, powerful as he was, felt the sheer horror of contact with deformity upon him and knew himself to be struggling with a wild cat. Peña bit into his coat and through it till he drew blood from the shoulder. The hunchback kicked ruthlessly. With his long, thick, curved nails he clawed; he beat his own arms and head and chest indifferently against his enemy. He shrieked rage and exultation. Suddenly he began to jab, with two rigid fingers, straight at the American's eyes.

Dan was to be blinded! He tried to shout out——

Just then the entire weight of the hunchback miraculously lifted. The voice of Luis shouted encouragement. The Indian, no longer able to stand the din of the struggle, had got out of bed in the next room and, rushing to the rescue, tore the madman from his victim.

"Thanks, Luis!" Dan murmured.

From the rear, the Carib held Peña in a wiry grip. Jerking the towels from the washstand, Dan tied up their captive; his piercing cries they speedily silenced with a pillow slip for gag. They trussed him securely and fastened him tight to the bed on which dead Tucker lay. Peña's eyes glared vengeance.

"But," said Luis in his Spanish patois, "he cannot harm us and only his eyes can speak."

Dan answered: "Señor Tucker's eyes speak also!"

Luis made the sign of the Cross. He tiptoed to the farther end of the room and took two candles from a mantelshelf. He stood the fallen bed table upright and on

this placed one; he moved a chair to the head of the bed on the other side and put the second candle there. He lighted them both.

"Now," said he, "Señor Tucker will rest more quietly."

Dan watched the procedure, gathering his wits as it went on. Tucker had probably been reared a Congregationalist! Then he poured out his plan.

"So," he concluded, "we've got to get the lady and ourselves out of here. Now, every door is guarded. How are we to do it?"

Again he looked at Peña, crouched before him. The bonds were quite secure. He nodded to Luis to precede him from the death chamber.

"You guarded Señor Tucker alive," said he to the glowering Fernando; "you shall stay and guard him dead."

He closed the door and locked it on the outside.

There the Carib answered his question:

"Señor, I do not know how we are to escape."

Said Dan: "One of Don Ramon's servants followed me from the front door, where he was watching. He lies dead—by this hunchback's hand—in the chapel. Did he leave his post deserted? There is a bare chance that he did."

Though Luis' dark eyes were full of a doglike devotion he shook his head doubtfully.

"Well," Dan cheerfully enough responded, "that's our only chance and we've got to take it, anyhow!"

CHAPTER XIV.

THE VAGABOND.

Luis, still bruised and weak from his master's manhandling, nevertheless was sufficiently recovered to be ready to follow—and to follow with an intelligence the lack of which he had bemoaned as his curse in Villeta's service. He made sure that his lariat was secure about his waist; he ran lithely to a cupboard and brought forth two villainous-looking machetes. He rummaged in the buffet for bread and a bottle of wine, and from somewhere procured part of a ham which he slashed into thick slices, bundling the lot up in a cloth and fastening it at his side.

He was just concluding these arrangements when Dan, who had hurried away to fetch the señorita, returned with her: she showed that she realized the seriousness of their undertaking, but her face, though resolute, was as calm as a forest pool.

"That is good," Stone commended Luis, "but we mustn't dally, even for food. Come along!"

Luis' answer was to shove a machete into the American's fist. He tiptoed to the central staircase and halfway down it, reconnoitering. Presently he glanced backward, with a signal that the others should follow.

Dan looked meaningly into the girl's black eyes: "You'll take the risk?"

She bowed assent.

"It *is* a bit of a risk, you know," he warned her.

She put a hand in one of his. "Let us go," said she.

They joined Luis and stole rapidly across the great hall. The front door was open, a glare of sunlight outlining an oblong of the stone floor within, and baking it; just so the peon must have left his post in his haste of suspicion when he followed Dan.

Nevertheless Luis peered cautiously out. Then, "Come," he gestured.

It was the lucky hour of the siesta. As they descended the widening flight of steps to the patio not a creature was visible. Except the ever-moving tendrils of a Pride of India, scarce a leaf stirred in the noonday heat. Under the shadow of a coconut palm a single guard slept. Ramon had reasonably built his reliance on his indoor sentinels and all his outside sentinels relied upon the jungle as the best of prison walls.

"Muerte el traidor!"

From inside the house—from the very corridor that yawned darkly behind them—a raucous voice shattered the quiet with its cry of hate. Dan wheeled, but the Señorita Gertruda smiled recognition, and Luis laid a reassuring hand on his arm.

"Pedro," explained the Carib. Don Ramon's parrot. The dozing guard, familiar with its noise, had not so much as budged.

But peril lurked in the very light of the sun. "Horses," whispered Dan.

Luis led a devious way along a slim path among a riot of convolvuluses and spice and lemon trees to the deserted stables. He crept through a back door and saddled the only three horses among all the mules there. The siesta over, Peña must soon be missed by his fearful but faithful underlings; pursuit would inevitably result. Dan and the

girl waited in anxious silence; but within ten minutes the Carib had rejoined them with the animals and they were mounted and riding warily down the neglected avenue toward the gate in the wall.

Here there was one man at his post and of him Luis summarily disposed. The gatekeeper first blinked at them in the sunshine and then sprang forward; without a word of warning the Carib rode him down. It was a brief but nasty business; the girl hid her eyes; even Dan did not care to look too closely. Luis searched the body and found a key. The escaping prisoners took the road to the village.

They dared not ride too fast. At an easy jog they treaded through the garbage and refuse of the hamlet's single street. Most of the inhabitants were still sleeping heavily; only a few barefoot and half-clothed native children, some dark with Indian blood, more dark from the sun, stared at them. Would they carry a warning of the escape? Luis thought not, but it was clear that they would gladly point the direction of the runaways to any inquisitor.

Dan was for pushing ahead rapidly but the Carib stayed him. The village assumed a serpentine length that Stone found intolerable. The palm-thatched cabins panted in the heat; flies and mosquitoes lazily buzzed outside the motionless jalousies. Mother goats, in the cool of the doorways, would summon their overly energetic kids from danger under the horses' hoofs.

"Whew!" Dan flicked the sweat from his forehead as they passed the final hut and wiped first one wet hand and then the other against a trousers leg. The second hand made those ten notes in his pocket crinkle significantly.

He had decided to risk himself with the police for the sake of Gertruda's safety; he would have Luis lead them by the briefest way to freedom from the hacienda and avoidance of a possibly returning Villeta, and he would then order a progress to the island's capital. Quit of the village at last they turned into a jungle trail. Giant ferns encroached upon it, ropes of vines hung snakelike from the high trees overhead; insects sang and birds of startling color flew from bough to bough. No spot could have seemed more deserted by humankind when they encountered, coming toward them, a vagabond pedestrian.

They drew up abruptly. On their road, even a beggar that was a legitimate beggar, was fit subject for suspicion. This one, gazing straight into Dan's eyes, was ragged beyond anything believable; beyond things believable he was dirty—and beyond things believable he was known and knew.

"Hoagland!" cried Dan. He was half stupefied by the recognition.

The solitary passenger of the *Hawk* grinned through the grime of his middle-aged face. He took off his broad-brimmed native straw hat and disclosed his thatch of thin, damp hair.

"What's your hurry?" he asked genially.

For a wild instant the younger American contemplated precipitate flight. He weighed the case rapidly. Could Hoagland have followed him? How could he know of his roundabout journey here? Dan suddenly pictured the then prosperous-looking American standing in the sheltered doorway of Sanchez and thence tracking Don Ramon as he went to buy clothes and fill prescriptions —the prescriptions that so nearly saved Tucker's life. Hoagland would probably like to put Dan in the hands of justice, but Dan was even now on his way to surrender himself. At any rate here was a fellow countryman. Dan would speak frankly to him and trust to his native sense of fair play.

"Turn around," said he at last. "We've got to hurry on. And walk as fast as you can beside me while I tell you all about it. We're sure to be followed soon, only—only you've got to help—and you will if you're a good American."

Hoagland, under his grime, grinned broadly. "I'm an American all right," said he.

But Dan had a good deal that he felt must be told.

"I've got to justify myself a little, first, I guess, about that affair on the *Hawk*," he said. He looked earnestly at the vagabond, whose ruddy face was raised in a questioning nothing more than polite. "It was an accident—I swear it was—and though there is no excuse for murder, it's what got me into this second mess. Goldthwait went for me; he had a revolver. I hadn't any idea ——" Stone covered his eyes with one hand.

Luis reached over and touched his new master's arm.

"Hist!" he whispered.

From far down the trail behind them un-

mistakably sounded the clatter of many hoofs.

Dan looked to right and left. Dense mangrove swamps, breathing poison and promising, at a short distance, engulfment, bordered either side; they could be reached only through a screen of sour-orange trees and wiry vines. If an attack there was to be the party must make a stand for it where it found them.

Gertruda he ordered five paces—and no more—into the jungle. He flung a rapid explanation to Hoagland, who stepped to the other side of the faint trail. His own mount he pushed to the extreme edge of the trail, covering the señorita's retreat, and bade Luis follow. That order was no sooner executed than the pursuers were upon them.

Waving an automatic and with a shriek of discovery that urged his followers the liberated Peña, muleback, clashed up to them.

"Traitor!" he yelled to Luis and, thrusting his weapon directly against the Carib's broken nose, fired.

Dan's ally fell from his horse, dead.

Stone prodded his own mount forward. As he did so there came a volley of shots from the hunchback's supporters and he thought that he saw Hoagland reel. Himself, he had only his machete and that was straightway stricken from his grasp. The fugitives were hopelessly outnumbered; he saw three peons head into the swamp beside him, apparently for the recapture of Gertruda. Well, there remained the opportunity of dying in her defense. He rode at them.

And then an unbelievable thing happened. Some one jumped at him from behind. Before he could resist his arms were pinioned to his sides and a voice—Hoagland's voice—was shouting in easy Spanish to Peña:

"If this is the man you're after, I've got him—only I think I ought to have a little reward for turning him over to you!"

CHAPTER XV.

DOUBLE CROSSED.

Under the high window of Dan's room a peon stood erect, a carbine resting in the crook of his arm. In the hall outside the locked door of that same apartment a pair of servants were on guard, and they carried automatics. Within, Dan sat, his aching head in his hands, his sick thoughts whirling dizzily from the treachery of Hoagland to the possible fate of the señorita.

A key grated admonishingly. Swaggering like a hand-organ monkey the hunchback came in.

"The señor that captured you was hurt at the start of our little scuffle. We owe him the reward of good care. You are to attend him."

His tone was a grating insult, his speech Spanish. Dan stared at him impassively.

"Oh," Peña mocked, "you can understand me well enough. I know it, for I heard you give orders to Luis in the dead room!"

Dan bit his lip; but, after all, these minor discoveries mattered nothing now. "How was he hurt?" he inquired in the hunchback's own language.

"We do not know. We fear some internal injury. That it is your business to discover."

Not his business, perhaps, but surely his unpleasant duty. Dan rose.

"Look here," he said, "I'm going to attend to this fellow—not because I want to, for he played the traitor to me, and not because you order it, for I'm past being afraid of you or anybody in the whole hacienda. You've got me and you'll do the worst you dare to me, whatever *I* do. No, I'm going to treat your friend because I'm enough of a doctor never to refuse help. But don't you think I deserve a fee? Can't you pay for my services with a little scrap or so of information?"

Peña's crooked smile more than ever distorted his yellow face. Most of us judge our fellows by the sole standard of ourselves; this creature could not conceive of a prisoner in Dan's position as being anxious about any life except his own.

"You want to know what is to happen to you?" he asked; and he answered the question: "What will happen is almost certain, but perfect certainty waits the master's return."

"I don't give a peso what happens—to me," said Dan. "I want to know something about the Señorita Gertruda."

He hated to mention her name in such a presence and might, indeed, have spared his pains. Fernando merely smiled the more—and the more evilly.

"That, also, waits the master's word. Come now to your new sufferer. You are to employ your best skill with him, Señor Medico, for he is the last patient you will ever

have. There is no need of physicians in Heaven!"

Poor Tucker's body had been removed and Hoagland lay on the bed—probably between the very sheets—that had been the New Englander's. All signs of disturbance were, however, removed. The snuffed candles were standing in their usual place on the mantelshelf.

Whatever the hurt incurred by the *Hawk's* erstwhile passenger it seemed to be a severe one. There was no blood but he lay with the relaxation of utter exhaustion. Dan studied the not ill-natured features under the thin mat of hair. It was hard to believe such a man a traitor. Traitor he had, however, patently proved himself, and Stone could not bridle a shudder of aversion.

"You hate him, now?" smiled Peña. It was very pleasant to impose this unwelcome task.

"I'll do my best for him," snapped Dan.

"Ah," laughed Fernando, "I know you will—because you hate him. Thus it is with you Americans; the more you dislike a work, the more you feel that you should do it. Well, then, having a multitude of preparations to make for my master I shall not take the joy of watching you. Do you think the case serious?"

"I'm no wizard," Dan mumbled. "I can't tell anything at the first glance."

"So?" said Peña. "Remember: your last patient! Make a fine job. You will have plenty of time. I shall lock the door but there will be a guard outside of it with a key. Should you require anything, call. Do not be modest of your knowledge of our language; your excellent Spanish will be well understood, Señor Medico."

Bowing with apish irony he left the room and Dan returned perplexedly to the injured man. Hoagland lay with closed eyes and the slightly drawn-back sheet revealed that he was fully clothed; he had no fever, his pulse was regular. Dan stripped off the patient's coat, the better to examine for internal injuries. As he did so something issued out of an inner pocket. It was a small, flat leather case.

Stone relentlessly opened it. Up at him, from under a glazed surface, there stared the certified information that Martin Patrick Hoagland was a special agent of the division of secret service, treasury department, U. S. A.

Dan looked in amazement at his patient. Hoagland was grinning broadly and administering a slow wink.

"That hunchback must be safe downstairs now," he whispered. "I'm all right, of course. And don't take what I did to you too seriously." He spoke in a voice that carried no farther than to Stone's attentive ears. "Had to get in here somehow; any means were fair, in the circumstances. Why, it's on account of this business I came to the island! I got on the trail of some paper; it was shipped by the *Hawk*, and the *Hawk* was really headed for San Lorenzo all the time. Don't know how deep Goldthwait and his cross-eyed Johnson were in the job; but I found out that Ramon had to leave the landing and first two land hauls to an agent; between stumbling over you and that runaway niece that he'd followed he had his hands full. Gee, but I'm stiff! I rode a mule till he died!"

"But you can't do anything in this place!" cried Dan, wildly waving the leather case. "They'll only kill you, too! They've killed five men already and I'm next! I don't care about myself; it's the girl I'm thinking of. I was on my way to give myself up for the Goldthwait killing——"

Hoagland lifted his thin eyebrows. "Did you really think you did for that pirate?"

Dan cried out. Hoagland put a cautioning finger to his lips:

"Can the noise and never mind the details. Goldthwait's as good as ever by now—or as bad—more's the pity."

CHAPTER XVI.

THE TREASURY NOTES.

The mission of Martin P. Hoagland to Santo Domingo had its origin in the greatest shock ever received by certain officials not unconnected with the currency of the United States of America. As the secret-service operative told it to his pseudo-physician there in the fortress of Don Ramon Villeta, the history was shorn until its remaining details constituted the barest statement of fact. What, however, had happened was a clash between temperament and system.

Behind the high walls that protect the government bureau of engraving and printing in Washington an intricate system rules. Laws as stringent as ever those of Draco decree each movement of each employee for each second of his eight-hour day. Among

the money printers everybody is inspected; every part of every job is checked up every minute. System commands it and system is supreme.

Now, concerning system, two things are axiomatic: First, the better the system, the fewer the permitted exceptions; next, when an exception is forced upon a system from the outside, then, the better the system, the worse the confusion. With the former of these axioms, John H. Farley, in charge of the bureau, had been long acquainted. He had just passed his fifty-third birthday when the latter bumped into him.

That year, the second of January fell on a Tuesday, and the bureau opened for business at nine a. m. When he had closed up shop at noon on Saturday, December 30th, Farley, lean and long, looked back on the thus concluded year with all the satisfaction of which his cautious nature was capable. This hook-nosed man with the worried air was head of the division that actually produces America's paper money; he was also a stickler for peace and quiet, and he had made good. No damaged plates—a minimum of reprimands to employees—scarcely any ink troubles—less than even the usual number of dismissals—72.5 per cent of first-printings O. K.'d on initial inspection—and all deliveries on time: a commendable achievement. He could recall but one eruptive half hour and that had been due only to his handsome, but mature, stenographer:

"I—I don't see why I shouldn't be assistant, instead of their running Mr. Dodd over my head!"

She had grown from an awkward girl into a painstaking woman at the bureau, but she had yet to appreciate the fine ideal of the civil-service board.

"I've been here for years," she sobbed. "I know the place inside out and I'm a lot more capable than Mr. Dodd is—but of course I'm only a woman, and all he has to do is pass an examination!"

A woman. Somehow, Farley had seldom before so considered her. He wondered why, in spite of her undeniable good looks, she had always seemed as permanent a fixture of this office as its very vaults; it must be because she was so efficient. He debated whether, being a woman, she had suppressed the more painful prong of her grievance; whether her keen glance had seen that sentence relating to her in the annual character report that he submitted to the secret service:

Smith, Cecilia: pvt. Secy., 10 yrs. in govt. employ; faithful, efficient, incorruptible, will never marry.

On this morning of January 2d, however, Farley shrugged the doubt away. His desk was open and in order, and, as far as work was concerned, Miss Smith was her conscientious self again.

Farley touched a couple of his desk bells. From opposite doorways two men appeared. Luther Lemmell, long in the service, was little and fussy. Grantley Rodd was a bare thirty-five, broad and prosperous looking, with a gold chain conspicuously stretched across the curve of his already expansive waistline.

"We're going to begin the New Year by printing the first of the hundred-dollar Fillmore heads." Farley stroked his jawbone between thumb and forefinger. "The engravers made a time record with their part of the job. The plates reached us"—he consulted an office memorandum—"at eleven-twenty on Saturday. Now we're going to beat the engravers. You gentlemen locked the plates in the safe"—again he consulted the memorandum—"at eleven twenty-five. They'll come out right now at—let's see—nine-ten. They'll be on the presses in ten minutes—I've notified Gough about the make-ready—and we'll have our first official printing under way at nine-thirty sharp. Mr. Lemmell, will you please start the combination?"

It was one of the laws of the great system that only three persons should have knowledge of a safe's combination: one, Farley himself, holding the entire key; the others, two trusted employees—in this case Messrs. Lemmell and Dodd—who guarded one half apiece. At unexpected moments, the combination was changed. The two men left the quiet office and Mr. Farley turned to Cecilia Smith and began the dictation of routine instructions.

He did not get far. Miss Smith was seated on the edge of the desk chair beside him, her pencil poised in air awaiting his sixth sentence, when Dodd and Lemmell rushed back.

"They're gone!"

Farley leaped to his feet. Miss Smith, pencil and notebook still in hand, leaped to hers.

"Gone?" echoed Farley. "You mean the

Fillmore plates are not in the safe where you put them?"

Dodd's large hands trembled; Lemmell nodded convulsively. Farley strode to the door.

"Close the building!" Farley ordered his two assistants. "Get the secret service on the phone—Chief Boyle—then come back to the vault. I must make sure."

Miss Smith followed close at his heels. A glance over his shoulder revealed her interrogative eyes.

"Yes, yes, come along," said he. In the money factory everything is safer done in pairs.

The room to which they went was literally a steel room, and in their speed they brushed with no nod of recognition past the guard at its door. He was an old government servant, far above suspicion in this place where every one was more or less suspect; but—what was of greater weight—he would be the last man to know the combination of the big safe within. There was now no use in questioning him. Within, however, the thick door of that safe stood open just as Lemmell and Dodd had left it in their frantic haste to communicate the news.

"Bad, bad!" Farley groaned at this evidence of their carelessness. He and Miss Smith ran directly to the safe.

"They were to put them here—in this main compartment," said Farley, touching the indicated shelf.

His secretary had been too long in the bureau not to be jealous of its honor. She peered this way and that with nervous, searching eyes intent upon a clew. The room was as vaultlike as always; a series of steel walls, steel compartments, steel locks. It was incredible that anything could have been forcibly tampered with. Miss Smith looked toward the single entrance door; it was of course ajar, but the guard, his back conscientiously to them, leaned beside it, a barricade against intrusion.

Then, suddenly, within the safe itself, something out of the ordinary must have caught the secretary's scrutiny, for, while her chief leaned forward to the ravished shelf, she raised herself quickly to her tiptoes and reached far up over his bent back. From a high pigeonhole she pulled down a heavy package.

"Mr. Farley!" she gasped.

Before he gathered her meaning Lemmell and Dodd pushed past the guard.

"Chief Boyle is on the phone now, sir," said Lemmell. "Will you speak to——"

He stopped. Both newcomers stared at a small paper-wrapped parcel that lay in Miss Smith's outstretched hands. She stood there, pale and swaying a little from excitement.

"They're the Fillmore plates, all right," cried the quickly exultant Dodd. "I know the shape——"

"And I remember the wrapping paper," said Lemmell.

Farley had regained a degree of self-control. "You put them in the main compartment, didn't you?"

"Yes, yes!" declared both Dodd and Lemmell vigorously.

Miss Smith raised her eyebrows: "They were on the *upper* shelf. Oh, they *are* the Fillmore head, aren't they?"

Farley seized them and tore off the cover.

"Of course they are!" He was saved. "And yet——"

"And yet," blurted Dodd, "that *isn't* where we put them!"

"No, sir," Lemmell insisted. "We put them in the main compartment—just where you were looking."

"Are you both certain? You might be mistaken; they were on that upper shelf when we found them. Would you both swear you put them in the main compartment?"

"I remember perfectly," said Dodd.

"I'd swear to it," declared Lemmell.

Miss Smith looked at Farley as if for a decision, but before he could speak Dodd's hearty voice cut in.

"Well, anyway, they're found! The incident's over."

"Is it?" pondered his superior. "I wonder!"

That was the prelude to Hoagland's narrative as told Dan at the hacienda. This is what followed:

One morning, a little more than a month previous to Dan's desertion from the *Hawk*, a man that had never heard of young Stone walked, as of right, into Farley's office.

He was a large man with flat, red hair and a short but bristling red mustache. Importance declared itself even in the details of his well-cared-for clothes, which were all of one shade or another of brown. It spoke in his brown derby, his brown-braided coat, his brown-braided trousers. It shone in the

polish of his neat tan shoes and was impressively evident in a tiny brown neckcloth meticulously tied.

"Mr. Boyle," said Farley, nervously pacing the floor, "you called me an alarmist when I sent for you about those Fillmore plates—and then found them within five minutes. That was January 2d. It's now only March 1st—and look here!" Between trembling fingers he held out two hundred-dollar bills to the chief of the secret service. "An hour ago Dodd went over to the Marine Exchange Bank to see the president about a reissue of bank notes, and he had to wait for him a full twenty minutes while the banker was 'in conference:' these financiers have no more respect for government officers than they have for bucket-shop sharks. Dodd decided to put in the time beside the receiving teller's window—he knows him slightly. While they were talking a depositor came in with a roll of bills and checks. Dodd wasn't much interested, but as the man pushed the deposit through the cage he noticed one of the new hundred-dollar Fillmore certificates. Something special struck Dodd about this one, and after the deposit had been made he got the teller to give him a look. He brought the note to me. We compared it with one of ours. It's counterfeit, chief."

Boyle rose and went to a window. With a magnifying glass he compared the two certificates.

"If this note is bad," Boyle gruffly declared, "then, with all due respect to the government engravers, the counterfeit's a better job than the genuine article. When did you put them out?"

"Three days ago." Farley wet his dry lips.

"When'd you get the plates from the engraver?"

"At eleven-twenty a. m. on Saturday, December 30th. They were brought direct to me by the messenger and were looked at by the people in my office—then at once put into the safe before closing time."

"Who were those people?"

"Mr. Dodd, Mr. Lemmell and my stenographer; but they are all trusted and absolutely above suspicion."

"Oh, sure! What I want to know is how the plates were put in the safe. Miss Smith take them there?"

"Not at all. Dodd and Lemmell went with them. Both men insisted they deposited the plates, as I directed, in the front of the main compartment. They then, in each other's presence, closed the safe, of which I had just changed the combination According to rule, I next separately gave each man his half of the new combination."

"I see. On December 30th. Then there were two days when the bureau was closed. Could a copy of the plates in any way have been made here?"

"Impossible!"

"How about the engraver?"

"He made only the one perfect set, as usual, and destroyed all the false starts in the presence of the regular witnesses."

"Then, in some way the plates must have been removed and copied. Are you really sure of Lemmell and Dodd? Mightn't they have pieced the combination together?"

"They hate each other. Lemmell has worked for the bureau over twenty years and feels that Dodd is an upstart. Dodd's been in government service since he was fourteen—started as a senate page—and with us only six months, but he has a splendid record. On his side, he calls Lemmell old fashioned and fussy and says he ought to be replaced by a younger man."

One by one, the two men, and then Cecilia Smith, and even the stolid guard to the vault, were brought in and interrogated. The last answered the veiled questions asked him with an open-eyed wonder and frankness that at once muffled suspicion. Each of the others satisfactorily accounted for his time between the hour of closing on December 30th and that of opening on January 2d. Lemmell had spent his holiday in bed with a cold that he hoped to cure before the resumption of work. Dodd took his young wife and baby to Atlantic City, catching the first train after noon by running and then having to run from the return express back to his work. Miss Smith went to a matinée on the Saturday afternoon.

"A gentleman from our boarding house took me," said she dryly, and she looked at Farley; here was her way of telling him that she was unmarried entirely from choice.

From the theater she had gone to her married sister's at Alexandria, where she "tended the children" until Tuesday morning. This sister, it appeared, was then in hospital, and all possible help was needed at home with the babies.

"That will do," said Boyle, dismissing her. He directed his next words to Farley. "We

can tab up on all their statements but I think they've told us the truth."

Farley made certain that the door fastened before he answered:

"Chief, there is only one man who knew the whole combination of that safe and could have removed the plates. That man is myself. I think it is my duty to offer my resignation to the secretary of the treasury." The bell of the desk telephone interrupted him. "Hello!" said Farley into it, and then to his visitor: "It's for you, chief."

In his turn Boyle put the receiver to one ear and listened for a moment. Presently he said to Farley:

"It's headquarters talking—Hoagland, my right-hand man there. He's got something from a company that makes paper for you. The concern's been taking stock of their warehouses; they've just discovered the loss of three large rolls."

There was a moment in which the two men looked in amazement at each other. Then Boyle shook an advising finger in Farley's gray face.

"Stop printing," said he.

CHAPTER XVII.

COUNTERFEIT.

"So that's that," said Hoagland.

"But it's not all?" asked Dan Stone.

Hoagland shook his head. There was one scene more.

The mills of the gods grind slowly but the mills of government are a close second. It was April 3d in Washington before the affair of the Fillmore certificates came to the personal attention of the secretary of the treasury.

The secretary, who had not before, even in writing, had the case in its entirety presented to him, listened attentively while first Farley and then Boyle rehearsed their parts in the mystery of the lost-and-found plates and of the subsequent appearance of counterfeit money.

The secretary was of the old school. He looked like a deacon, and as a matter of fact, in his home-town, he was one. He was sixty, small and plump, with a genial pink face and effective side whiskers. His first move was to turn to Farley.

"Of course," said he, "your offer of resignation was very honorable, but of course it was—hum—what I might call too conscientious. Besides, it would attract attention—invite questions. We shan't consider it. Nevertheless"—he picked up and thoughtfully examined a single pencil astray in the ordered emptiness of his desk—"nevertheless, you must understand that this is a most unfortunate incident—most unfortunate, in view of certain hopes and projects of the administration." He tapped the pencil on his desk's glass top—there was to be a presidential election in November.

The long and lean Farley had been sitting bolt upright in an office chair. He now bent forward, his thin hands spread flat on his thin, high knees.

"There are less than a hundred of the certificates in circulation as yet, Mr. Secretary, and we have stopped all printing. Hadn't we better recall the issue?"

"Not at all! Not at all!" Mr. Secretary shook his side whiskers vigorously. "Any such course at present would subject the government as a whole and this administration in particular to financial annoyance and political ridicule. Er—yes, that: and of course such a process would flatter criminals and encourage crime. To be sure it would." He turned to Boyle. "Chief," said he, putting all the force he possessed into his utterance, "these false plates must be found! You have got to ferret the counterfeiters out of their holes. You understand? There is no time to lose. Put every one of your men on the job, if you have to. It is essential that success be accomplished with the utmost speed."

Boyle's red mustache contemplatively rose and fell over a tightly bitten, unlighted cigar.

"We can't do quite that, sir," said he. "We've got a pretty good organization and will win out in the end; but we can't speed up till we've a bit more to go on than we have now. This is an unusual case; these crooks have brains. They've covered up so well, so far, that all we've got to go on to date is that this doesn't seem to be the work of any men figuring in our phony-money records."

The secretary was about to interrupt but Boyle indicated that he had not finished.

"Long before counterfeit was even suspected in this affair, all possible finger prints on the safe were eradicated, and, though we think that there was a removal of the plates from the safe, we have no actual knowledge of it. They were simply, according to two

persons, placed on one shelf; after a couple of nights, missed for five minutes, and then, according to two persons, found on another shelf. The only thing we have to work on is the disappearance of a little paper—possibly mislaid or miscounted—and the appearance of counterfeit money on the market."

"Well, that's plenty, chief!" said the now irritable secretary. "Take it *off* the market! Meanwhile, the treasury will be obliged to stand the loss."

"I get you, sir," said Boyle, "and you can rely on us to do our best." He drew a paper from his pocket. "The oddest thing," he said, "is this: here is the digest of reports from every bank in the country. That counterfeit note accidentally discovered by Dodd just after it was turned into the Marine Exchange Bank on March 1st, is the only known one to be in existence, and the depositor a thoroughly reputable department-store owner—can't tell where it came from. The banks report a few of the real notes—say sixty or seventy: I haven't counted them up—but that's all they do report. It looks now as if the counterfeiters were resting, or had somehow or other been scared off. At any rate, not a single counterfeit Fillmore head seems to have been passed since that first one over a month ago."

"Curious! Curious!" declared the secretary. "Well, Mr. Farley, I believe I'd like to take a look at these two notes and compare with them some of your notes from the presses, or the plates themselves?"

"As I reminded you, sir, we stopped printing a month ago, immediately we discovered counterfeit, and the plates are locked up in the safe. I can send for them"—Farley looked at the secretary interrogatively—"but here"—and he produced almost gingerly a wrapped note—"is what is perhaps easier for comparison for the layman: it is the certified standard bill struck off on December 30th."

"Ah, so much the better!"

The three men, their heads bent close, examined all three notes under a large magnifying glass—first, the standard note, then the note in legitimate circulation, then the counterfeit.

Boyle gave a sharp cry. He actually removed the cigar from his mouth and shook it between thumb and forefinger in order to emphasize his words:

"I told you the crooks' job was better than yours, Farley," said he. "Look here, both of you. There's no blur on this scroll work in the upper left-hand corner of your standard note on the reverse side. Nor is that flaw in this thing which you call the fake note. It appears only on what you call the good notes, of which, by casual count, I estimated there are between sixty and seventy reported by the banks."

"Well?" asked the secretary, puzzled.

"Well?" echoed Farley with dawning suspicion.

"Can't you *see?*" the chief shouted. "Can't you see that Dodd's discovery was the biggest sort of accident. Why, what he reported as bad is actually good, and there's nothing now in circulation *but* counterfeit!"

"That's the way the chief put the case to me," said Hoagland, concluding his chronicle to Stone; "the way he put it to me when I'd come in to report trailing the paper to New York and our friend Goldthwait's *Hawk.*" He winked solemnly to his superfluous physician. "So I took a sea trip and you saved my life—and, remembering how one good turn deserves another, I handed you over to these merry gunmen."

"Oh, well," said Dan, "you thought you had to get in here and that was one way. The question is, what are we going to do now?"

Throughout the narrative he had been thoughtlessly holding Hoagland's leathern credential case. Now, to return it, he held it out to its owner.

But it did not reach the detective. Preparing for some such surprise as was at this instant executed the crafty Peña had lied. The room door was not locked.

It swung open and with an amazing lightness Don Ramon bounded in. He flicked the credentials from Dan's unwarned fingers.

"Thanks—thanks, Señor Medico! A cigarette?" His loud, derisive laughter rang to the ceiling. Then he opened the case. "Ha! Not cigarettes, after all."

He shot a glance at Dan, whose lips were tight—at Hoagland; but Hoagland, at this intrusion, had closed his eyes and returned to apparent unconsciousness. The huge planter drew back a pace.

"So this is your little game, is it?" he purred at Dan. "Fernando was right, then. He is always right. You are a secret-service

agent of the United States come to spy upon my poor house, Señor Medico."

He spread his fat hands wide and moved back the fraction of a step farther.

CHAPTER XVIII.

EXIT FERNANDO.

"Stay there! I will myself kill this fellow!"

Villeta flung the words over one massive shoulder to the guard in the hall, kicked the door shut, and then, with the added force of momentum, rushed upon Dan.

It was the charge of a rhinoceros. Falling before it Dan was caught and enveloped in a mighty grasp that crushed him against Don Ramon's mighty breast, while one of the hands that had torn the jungle serpent's head from its body gripped both of Stone's wrists and bent his arms straight backward from the shoulders. Victim and murderer struck against the bed.

Then the invalid Hoagland suffered a sudden convulsion. The sheet that partially covered him sailed four square into space; it rode the air of battle and, descending, enmeshed both the combatants. A third combatant hurtled after it: the patient threw himself upon Villeta's shoulders.

But Ramon's weight had deceived the detective. Both here and in Sanchez it had seemed to Hoagland to be nothing more than the flabby fat of the heavy eater. Now he was to discover that underneath this soft outer layer worked, unretarded, muscles like the muscles of a crossroads blacksmith.

Try as he would, strain as he did, the secret-service operative, himself no weakling and always in trim, could not rend the planter's titanic hold from the now nearly snapping arms of Dan. Had it not been for the confusion of the suffocating sheet, from which both Stone and Villeta struggled to free themselves, Don Ramon would not have let go at all; but the folds of linen choked him and, as Hoagland guessed this advantage, the secret-service man decided to use it to its utmost capacity. He pulled the sheet the tighter around Ramon's tossing head.

Ramon, half gagged and half smothered, could not call out, and, in order to breathe adequately, he must loose his hold of Dan. He fought the alternative bitterly but at last let go and dropped to his knees. He pushed his body first to the right and then far to the left, knocking over both his assailants and, panting and sweating, sprang upright and twisted the sheet into a ball which he tossed to the bed.

After all, he had been too quick for Hoagland. The alteration of position was accomplished in the merest flash of time. Before the two Americans realized the speed with which his maneuver was enacted they were being dragged by the backs of their necks toward the hall, the door of which was swung wide in answer to a kick from Don Ramon's heavy riding boots. With a contemptuous snort at the dazed guard his master bellowed for better help in the removal of his prisoners:

"Socorro! Socorro!"

His bawl echoed through the house.

From the floor below running footsteps sounded. They sounded nearer; they were ascending the stairs. The sentry at the door, whose noninterference had once been commanded, showed signs of convalescing intelligence. Villeta, Dan and Hoagland were just around the turn of the door when Dan, falling forward, managed to seize one of his captor's ankles. Don Ramon was caught in mid-stride; he fell with a resounding crash.

Heavy men are hard to throw, but if they are thrown, it is heavily. For one instant Villeta lay so still that the sentry's whole attention was given to him, and during that broken moment the Americans scrambled to their feet and stared at each other. To run forward now would be to run into that oncoming help that was climbing the stairs. Dan, quicker in this crisis than Hoagland, grasped the latter's sleeve and pointed within the room.

When Don Ramon had last kicked that door its key dropped from the lock; it lay now a yard beyond the sill. Dan dragged the detective to it. They slammed the door just as a recovered Villeta flung himself against the barrier. Pressing with all their might upon their side of the oaken panel they managed to hold until Dan had turned the key. It was a strong key set in a strong lock; once, perhaps, it had secured other prisoners in that room. The present prisoners were glad for its temporary protection.

Hoagland was armed. He produced two automatics and thrust one into Dan's hands.

"Didn't want to shoot while there was any chance without it," he muttered. "But

it begins to look as if we were coming down to brass tacks now."

Ramon pounded on the door; more and more steps pounded up the stairs and came nearer and nearer along the hall. Villeta cursed the guard, then roared incisive orders. He called for guns, machetes, for all his adherents and for Fernando—above all, Fernando. Over the turmoil, the hunchback's shrill voice sounded finally in answer, from far below:

"At once, Don Ramon! At once!"

Dan drew Hoagland to the window.

"Look!" said he, and he pointed meaningly straight down the precipitous outer wall. "We can't make it that way; never in the world! And we can't escape by the door—and the door can't hold forever. We're trapped. It's only a question of time!"

The secret-service man, one eye on the resounding portal, tapped Dan's shoulder:

"A question of time—that's just it. We must hold out as long as we can. But even then——"

A roar and a smash interrupted him. Don Ramon's peons had arrived in force. Their machetes hacked at the door; their pistols shot through it.

"A minute or two—not more. Listen to that!" Dan spoke between the noise of the blows. "And, if they can't work fast enough this way they'll rig up some sort of battering-ram."

The wood was already splintering. Through the thinnest of the paneling the flash of a peon's evil blade gleamed among the splinters.

After that there was no more talking against the pandemonium. Hoagland gestured to Dan to stand close to the door jamb on one side. He posted himself on the other. He cocked his own weapon and held it ready for the tumultuous moment of the enemy's entrance. Dan sedulously and resolutely imitated his companion's grim preparations.

Crash! The wood seemed breaking at all points and yet the door as a whole somehow still held firm. Hoagland lifted his left arm and examined the watch that encircled his wrist.

"We must keep them back as long as we can!" he shouted; but, through the din of the battering, the younger man was forced only to guess at what he said.

Then came the end. With a rending lunge the door fell inward, and, after it, pell-mell, tumbled the dark attackers.

The first two dropped at the first two shots from either side of the doorway; but what followed was wholly indiscriminate. Instantly the room was full of men and gray smoke pierced by the dull red of explosions. Don Ramon climbed over a pair of bodies and, seeing Hoagland first, hurled himself at the secret-service operative, seizing his wrist and trying to wrench his opponent's pistol free. A couple of other men shouldered after him and fell on Dan, who shot one but missed the other; he did not greatly care, so long as Villeta and Peña remained alive to threaten Gertruda—and Peña had not yet so much as appeared.

The doorway was narrow. The attackers, crowding hard and without order, had to come in only three at a time. An ugly fellow with lopped ears waved his machete in staggering ease. Hoagland saw him and, raising his wrist despite the pressure Don Ramon had on it, fired; one earhole became a slash of blood; the man howled and fell and so held back for a moment those behind him.

Thus matters stood when from outside the room—outside the house itself—a new sound beat through the noise of assault: the galloping of horses. There rose a shriek below stairs, which Dan knew must be Fernando's. Peña had not come up after all! Ramon stood at pause and listened.

"I knew they wouldn't be a minute late!" That was Hoagland's shout breaking the second's lull. "It's the constabulary!"

To all save two of the crowd those English words meant nothing, but to Dan and Don Ramon they came, though so differently, as the magic words that break a spell. Suddenly no longer restrained, Stone broke free with a yell of triumph and battered toward the door, his sole thought the rescue of Gertruda. Villeta's eyes started as if they would roll from his head. He backed rapidly, cursed a peon that was trying to aid; and, roaring *"Vaya!"* he flung the living obstacle aside, kicked his way over the blockade of bodies and dashed from the room and down the staircase.

By now Dan also had vanished. The leaderless peons stopped, turned and stared after Villeta, open-mouthed. Then, with a babel of cries and a savage disregard of their dead and wounded they fled in their master's wake and followed him down the stairs.

Hoagland had rushed to the window. He had been right. The patio was full of armed men and more were galloping up; helmeted natives, officered by Americans. He threw his arms high over his head; he addressed the universe:

"I told you it was only a question of time!"

Then horror trod upon the heels of exultation. He shuddered.

For down in the patio an ugly thing happened. Having scented trouble ahead of his master and not wishing to share it the hunchback had, all too tardily, attempted an escape. Unsightly as he was, he had, Hoagland later learned, a wife in the neighborhood of the village, and wicked as he had abundantly proved himself to all the rest of the world, her, in his crooked way, he loved. Understanding the significance of the approaching hoofs he guessed flight imperative, but without his woman he would not try it. He might have cut across to the farther side of the plantation and made alone for the Haitian interior; instead he thought to slip between the raiders and secure his wife before any escape proper was begun. But he had, in his surprise, miscalculated the distance of the charging constabulary.

As he reached the patio's edge the first four horses galloped in. Their hoofs just missed his diminutive figure. He ducked this way and that. He swerved; he slipped. He fell to his knees. The next four animals crushed his shrieking form in the dust of the avenue.

CHAPTER XIX.

FLAME.

"Dan dear, but I assure you," said the Señorita Gertruda, "and you can yourself see my feet—that they have not been cut off. I can walk perfectly."

He had found her in her own room, deserted by the appointed guards in answer to Don Ramon's summons of assistance, and having once lifted her in his arms he was now carrying her through the door that, from the ground-floor hall, opened to the patio.

"I don't care," said Dan. "I don't want ever to let you go."

"Only," she persisted, "I have not been at all harmed."

"And you never will be!"

"Because, doubtless," the girl laughed, "these officers and men here will aid you to defend me!"

This took his eyes from her and he realized that he was now facing a crowded compound in which stood not a few of his uniformed fellow countrymen. She blushed as he put her down; he blushed as an officer came up to them.

"Mr. Hoagland asked me to tell you, sir, that the house is safely surrounded. Most of the peons are already in custody."

"You—you're really American?" stammered Dan.

"Oh, altogether, sir!"

"In Santo Domingo?"

The questioned man frowned slightly. "I'm afraid you're like most the people back home. Hardly any of them know that United States citizens have been officering the constabulary here practically ever since our navy established a military government in 1916."

He was right. Dan was like most Americans. He contritely admitted having heard of the historic change and then forthwith forgetting it. He recollected that Don Ramon had, for the most part, carefully kept him to the back streets of both San Lorenzo and Sanchez. Of course he had seen no sign of the new order.

"And Hoagland sent for you?"

"Yesterday—a wireless to Puerto Plata."

Dan sniffed at the still air. There was the scent of something burning.

"Where's he now—Hoagland?"

"He's looking for the owner of this hacienda. What's his name? Villeta? It seems the fellow came down the main stairs but he never showed up here, so he must have got out back or else gone up again by another way."

Dan shouted. "Why, good heavens, he's in the chapel, of course!"

The officer smiled. "Saying his prayers?"

"No, no! You don't understand and I hadn't time to tell Hoagland. It's all there—in the chapel; the presses, the fake money and——"

A sweating Hoagland rushed up to them. Something of what Dan said he had caught.

"Where's the chapel? Where *is* the chapel?"

Stone surrendered the señorita to the officers' care and followed by the secret-service agent and a score of men led the way at a run. As they advanced the scent of things burning grew stronger.

"He's burning the money!" cried Dan.

"I don't give a whoop about the money!" panted Hoagland. "What I've got to get is the plates. In a counterfeiting case, as long as the plates exist——"

His breath all but stopped and his words stopped altogether. Dan, running well ahead, remembered that, during his visit to the chapel, he had not once thought about the plates.

The heavy door was unlocked. Whoever was inside had wasted no time in securing it behind his entrance. Dan tore it open; a cloud of smoke rushed out and on it flapped a squawking bird.

"Muerte el traidor!"

Don Ramon, in his extremity, had not forgotten his pet; but now Pedro deserted him for the less stifling atmosphere of the hot afternoon. The parrot flew into the jungle.

The attackers rushed inside. A slow smoke was filling the transept from the rickety confessional box. Originating in the counterfeit hundred-dollar bills the fire had already spread outward; the woodwork was crackling close to the body of the dead peon who lay there staring at the vaulted roof and seeing nothing.

Hoagland tore away a handful of the paper and stuffed it into a coat pocket. As he did so three shots out of an automatic flashed from behind the altar and spattered against the west wall above the raiders' heads.

Dan looked back toward the way by which he had entered.

"The plates!" shrieked Hoagland, divining his purpose while it was yet but half formed. "Never mind the man! The plates are worth more'n their maker. Why——"

But Stone, with quick decision, zigzagged a path among his new-found allies. He had a score of his own to pay. He ran across the patio and into the now deserted house.

He tore upstairs. He rushed light-footed along a gallery and so came, with quick stealth, upon the balcony over which he had thrown the peon who now lay dead there in the chapel.

He looked over the rail. Now he could see Don Ramon quite clearly. The pseudo-planter was taking careful aim from behind the altar at the soldiery and never dreamed of looking up.

From the east end of the balcony it was a long diagonal leap to the shoulders of Villeta below. Dan measured the distance with precision. Could he make it? He climbed upon the rail and poised there. From below, the eyes of the soldiery were raised to him, but Hoagland gestured silence.

Balanced as if for a dive into some quiet swimming pool Dan counted the number of yards and the angle he must cover if he hoped for anything but death on the chapel pavement. Ramon's huge, forward-bent back presented a clear but perilously far-away landing place—a landing place just possible of achievement.

Stone dove.

The wind of his passage whistled in his ears. His heart seemed to stop beating.

But he had not calculated erroneously. Like a missile from a skillful sling he struck his goal; safely between the sharpshooter's shoulders. The impact was tremendous; both the human bullet and its human mark rolled dazed upon the tiles.

When Dan sat up Ramon was surrounded by the raiders and was shrugging his recognition that the time was overripe for surrender.

"You appear to have captured me," said he. "Don't point that revolver like that—it might go off. Never fear, I shall accompany you quietly."

Through the gathering smoke Hoagland was anxiously examining the machinery in the center aisle while a group of soldiers who were not busy watching Don Ramon set themselves to putting out the fire.

"Where are the plates?" the secret-service agent again demanded. "I've got to have those counterfeit plates!"

Don Ramon only smiled.

The plates were not inside the burning confessional box. That was soon evident. Looking on detachedly at the fevered search Villeta bit his nails and shook his head as if he were in no position to offer enlightenment.

Hoagland ran up to Don Ramon; he shoved forward an enraged fist.

"Will you tell me where you've hidden those plates? You know we'll have our troubles with extradition and a jury unless we find 'em—and you know they're more dangerous at large than you are. Where have you hidden them?"

Villeta fairly beamed.

"Señor, I have no idea of what it is that you are talking."

"Shall I kill you, or will you tell me?"

Ramon knew that for a bluff, and he displayed his knowledge laughingly: "You shall kill me."

The bluff was fairly called. Hoagland tossed his thin-thatched head and turned away. Throughout Dan's dash to the balcony he had—under the hampered sharpshooter's fruitless fire—ransacked half the chapel. Now the second half had been vainly scoured. Yet the operative was decided that these imperatively important pieces of metal were somewhere under this groined roof. They must be; all the work had been here accomplished and the place was more securely locked than the chief counterfeiter's own bedroom could have been. Hoagland wheeled on Dan.

"You're a lot of help, you are!" he vociferated. He had to expend his chagrin on somebody. "You've made a lot of use of your opportunities, haven't you? Found out everything that I'd guessed beforehand. Turned up a lot of junk that I didn't half need." One would have thought that he had especially commissioned Dan to come here! "Oh, I wired home for your record and got it all right. Studied medicine and played with church architecture. If you had to play with something why didn't you pick a thing that could be of some use now?"

It was the old taunt. It was, in effect, the jibe against Dan's father that the Pennsylvania-Dutch lawyer had launched at the boy when the elder Stone's estate was settled: "Your pop was the kindest-hearted man as effer lived, but he hadn't an eye fer money yet. If you want to git along, boy, keep your fingers off'n print."

And it stung his father's son to action. Marvelously, he remembered that single detail of the old books on ecclesiastical architecture which solved the pressing problem of his government's present quest.

"I've got it!" he said.

Hoagland fairly shook him. "Got what? Where?"

"The plates. Don't! I mean I know where they are. Listen: in every Catholic altar there is a piece of metal, or a thin mortared stone—the altar stone—that covers a cavity. They put relics of a saint in it. This chapel's not used now, but the altar stone—that hole—*that* must be here; it's just the place for—look in it!"

The plates were there.

CHAPTER XX.

GUILTY UNCLE SAM.

In the tonneau of his big limousine—one of the largest in Washington—the usually genial secretary of the treasury displayed a troubled frown, while, so close to his face that the breath of that neighbor's speech rustled his gray side whiskers, he listened to the deductions of the chief of the secret service.

"It's all a process of elimination," said Boyle, chewing his cigar emphatically. "I'm sorry for poor old Farley, and, except by elimination, we can't get a thing on him. But somebody's got to be the goat or the administration will catch the Old Harry. These fake notes are all over the place, and there's no clew as to how they got there. Well, then, Farley had and has facilities that nobody else could have."

The chief was always direct. He believed in going straight to the point, however brutally. So when the pair arrived at their destination and were finally ushered into Farley's private office he gave that gentleman eye for eye.

Not so the little secretary of the treasury. One sidelong glance showed him the drawn pallor of the suspected man's careworn face and the stoop of his shoulders, which recent worry had forced there. The secretary kept intact the genuine heart of the old-line politician, and he blustered in his fussy manner to cover a regret quite honestly poignant.

"Mr. Farley," he finally began, "the government, as you are well aware, is most disturbed. You've no good news, I fear, in this—er—Fillmore note matter?"

Farley shook his tired head.

Boyle continued to regard the superintendent steadily through his sharp blue eyes.

"The department," said the secretary, "has come to a standstill in the affair. We've got to throw up our hands."

"You mean——"

The secretary blew his nose. "Public disgrace threatens us," said he. "Things can't be hushed up indefinitely. Every bank in the country knows, and when things are known privately they soon come to be known publicly. The coming elections, if I must speak frankly——"

"Do, please," said Farley. "But I understand. I must go."

Boyle clapped him on the shoulder.

"I'm glad you take it that way!"

But Farley was no fool; he guessed what lay behind the chief detective's crude masquerade of good fellowship. He looked at Boyle with a sudden, puzzled gasp. "You can't really think I'm—I'm *guilty?*"

It was an abrupt climax, but before Boyle could answer the office door was thrust open and Miss Smith, tight-lipped, yet evidently bursting with news, looked at her employer for permission to speak. The male trio scowled at her intrusion.

"Well?" asked Farley sharply.

"There are three men outside, with three plain-clothes men besides. They say—that is, one of them says he must see you at once. It's a Mr. Hoagland——"

"Hoagland!" shouted the chief of the secret service. "Bring him in!"

The guards did not enter, but Hoagland, smiling profusely, came, his derby hat in one hand. Behind him followed a sturdy, boyish person with frank eyes and a shock of tow-colored hair, and behind *him*—and quite as if he were glad to accompany them—a broad, big, genial gentleman, immaculately clad in speckless white, whose dark glance flashed from the now incarnadined Miss Smith to the group about the desk, and whose fat hands were decked with rings.

"Well?" snapped Boyle. "What's all this?"

Hoagland did not at once directly answer his chief. Instead, he pushed forward the younger of his two companions and addressed the general assemblage:

"This is Doctor Daniel Gurney Stone," said he, "who's proved of invaluable assistance to us, and *this*"—he pointed to the smiling foreigner—"is Señor Ramon Villeta—according to himself—who can give you some information about those Fillmore plates."

Farley leaned forward and looked at the recent planter with puzzled interest.

"I've seen you before, but I can't think ——" Then he remembered.

Boyle was entirely what he would have called "practical." Quite as if he had never had the slightest suspicion of Farley he now addressed Hoagland:

"Have you got the plates?"

His agent nodded and handed out a carefully wrapped packet.

The secretary of the treasury cleared his throat. He pulled at his whiskers and opened his mouth and yet he did not speak.

"Remember Tucker?" asked Hoagland of Boyle. "Skinny, lanky fellow, government engraver, always had a grouch?"

Simultaneously both Farley and the chief of the secret service signed assent.

"Extra disgruntled," continued Hoagland, "he resigned about six months ago. I've a hunch my friend Señor Villeta here had something to do with it. Well, we found him down there in San Domingo making the hay while the sun shone—or while it didn't! Night work. But that's a long story, and Tucker's dead now. I was just following paper, as you know, chief. The counterfeiters' mistake was in wanting to overdo the thing, just like that Jacobs-Kendig case where the fellows got away with their bills, but were caught by their cigar stamps. These fellows ran short of paper and sent up for more. Some side partner of Tucker's was in on that, and I picked him up as I came through N'York, but I left him locked up downtown, here in Washington. Well, anyhow, I ran into a lively mess down on the island, but this doctor here helped me out and——"

"Got any of their money?" asked Farley.

"Just this," Hoagland said, producing a few charred bills. "All the rest was burned up in an old confessional box where this man Villeta stored it. Money to burn, he had—and he burned it all right!" Hoagland grinned.

Then for the first time during this interview Dan Stone spoke. Out of a trousers pocket he pulled his ten bills.

"I've got this, sir. I was paid this for—well, for semiprofessional medical services."

He placed his thousand dollars on the desk. Boyle, however, had diverted attention by addressing himself to the Santo Domingan.

"You came before me just nine years ago, my friend," he was saying. "It was a little matter of opium smuggling then, but we couldn't get the goods on you. We suspected your wife, too. Where's she now?"

Don Ramon shrugged lightly.

"My new wife, you mean—the wife I married two—three years ago—yes? Oh, she's not concerned! She is living in Buenos Aires."

There came a loud gasp from the door. Every one stared thither. Miss Cecilia Smith, whose continued presence had been overlooked by Villeta, crouched there in a state closely verging on collapse. Never-

theless, even as they all stared, she was pulling her statuesque frame together and already pointing a finger at the foreigner.

"You—you——" she exclaimed.

On her invitation, Mr. Farley had once dined at his stenographer's boarding house. "Miss Smith," asked her employer, "isn't this Señor Villeta a gentleman that used to live where you do?"

She covered her face with those pathetic hands for ten years so efficient in the bureau's service.

"I—I thought we were going to get married!" she blurted. "He made love so—so wonderfully! I'd refused a lot of other men, because I thought you were going to promote me—and at last it was plain you wouldn't." She raised her eyes to Farley's with sudden defiance, but as quickly lowered them. "When I found I was mistaken, I—I—I guess I was a fool. Anyhow, that's why I borrowed them for him."

All but two of the men regarded the handsome penitent with a mixture of bewilderment and compassion.

"Explain yourself!" Boyle shortly ordered.

Quick to attempt to retrieve his error, Don Ramon turned to her: "But, my dear! I am assuredly going to marry you!"

"You—you beast!" she cried. She triumphed. "What about the wife in Buenos Aires?"

She gave him a wholly withering scorn. Boyle had stepped over to her; he grasped her arm as in a vise.

"How did you do it?" he bellowed in her ear.

"Don't touch me like that!" She shook him off. "And don't yell. It's rude."

"Well?" he demanded, but he let go his hold and lowered his voice.

"Mr. Farley," said Miss Smith, ignoring the secret-service chief and, for, some occult reason, facing Dan, as the least unsympathetic man in view, "Mr. Farley had made up the fresh combination of the safe on December 30th. I knew he would—I've been here a good many years—and I believed Don Ramon—I mean, this creature—when he said he just wanted a glimpse at them."

"At what?" asked Boyle. "The plates?"

"Of course, silly! Because he said he was going to be head of the Santo Domingan treasury department and wanted some ideas about plate making, only America was in control of the island and wouldn't let him do anything. Oh," she broke off, "I know I was a fool to believe him, and I knew then it was dreadfully wicked, but I thought Mr. Farley——"

"Miss Smith," Farley explained, "was, I remember, very much annoyed about not getting Dodd's position. I did not speak the combination aloud, and no one—not even you, Miss Smith—saw the paper on which I wrote it."

"Not exactly, Mr. Farley, but when you worked it out you did write it down in ink and you blotted the paper on your desk blotter. I was watching and I know. While you were out of the room, giving Mr. Dodd and Mr. Lemmell their halves of it, I read the blotted numbers by copying them exactly on a sheet of tracing paper and holding that to the light. When we were closing up I brought some unnecessary papers into the vault, straight past Jenkins, the guard. Oh, I often had to do that, and he never looked *into* the room; he always looked *out!* Well, I just opened the safe quickly, stuffed the papers under my dress so he'd see they were gone, and the plates, too, and went directly to the ladies' dressing room."

"Yes? Yes?" It was again Boyle that was speaking.

"There I pinned on my hat and powdered my nose—but—first I wrapped the plates in oilcloth—*he'd* provided it."

"Where did you hide them?"

"Where he told me to; in the box up top that contains water."

"But," protested Farley, still loyal to his system, "every employee is searched on leaving!"

"Yes, sir. Only that was a day before a holiday. I was searched as usual. Then I said I'd forgotten my bag—must have left it in the dressing room—which I'd done, too, on purpose—so I ran up and stuffed the plates again under my dress and just ran back and opened my bag for the inspector to show him nothing was in it that shouldn't be. Then—then I went to the matinée and gave this—this Don Ramon the plates!"

"And next?" Boyle kept the inquisitorial preëminence that he had so difficultly acquired.

"Why next," pursued Miss Smith, now only too ready to convict both herself and her false admirer, "next he gave them back—the way he'd promised to—on the Tuesday morning, when I stopped at the board-

ing house after being at my sister's in Alexandria. I'd been near crazy all the time they were gone. And he"—the memory was almost too much for her—"he thanked me and said I'd helped a poor, oppressed government and wouldn't ever have cause to regret it."

She glared now at her quandam lover.

"And so," she continued, "after the plates were missed on Tuesday morning—we weren't searched when we came *in*, you know—I reached over your head, Mr. Farley, as if I was looking for them, too, and put them on the wrong shelf and found them there. Nobody'd ever suspect *me*," she said bitterly to Boyle; "but I guess this—this beast copied them while he had them. Only, I give you my word, I never dreamed he'd lied—till months afterward." She turned on the fat Lothario: "You're a crook," she said to Don Ramon, "a *crook!* And I want you to know that, since I found you out, I've—I've become engaged to an honest man—I've become engaged to Mr. Farley."

"Ahem!" said the thus announced fiancé.

"Eh?" asked the secretary of the treasury.

"It's quite true," admitted Farley, with a sudden recrudescence of youth. "Of course I didn't know till now——"

"Will it make any difference?" demanded Cecilia Smith, "because if it does, you're free."

She was really very handsome and she had been undeniably truthful. "It won't," said her employer.

Boyle had walked back to the desk and was examining the plates that his agent had brought.

"Villeta," said he, "we've got to hand it to you for one thing. This is an almost perfect job. These are just about flawless. I congratulate you on being the best counterfeiter the service has ever come across."

Don Ramon, now that Farley's secretary had done her worst against him, was his best self once more. He bowed a deprecating acknowledgment to Boyle. Then, with an inclination of apology to Miss Smith, he calmly usurped her place in the limelight. He coughed softly behind a fat hand and having thus secured attention, proceeded:

"As you gentlemen will shortly discover, this affair—at least as far as I am concerned—is all but concluded. Therefore, I may speak frankly. I do not conceal from you that it was my hope—if the initial venture succeeded and if, of course"—he inclined his great head to the gasping Cecilia—"and if, of course, my suit for this fair lady's hand was favored—to borrow, as time passed, other plates by means of her good will and efficient services. Nevertheless, Señor Secret Service Chief, my inherent honesty compels me to confess that I do not entirely deserve your praise——"

"Cut it out—cut out the society stuff!" Hoagland interrupted. "Chief," said he to Boyle, "this guy never had one lone good quality except that he was decent to his Pedro—and Pedro was a bird."

Boyle grinned broadly. "Well, why shouldn't Señor Villeta be good to a bird? He's some bird himself!"

Don Ramon was not, however, to be distracted by persiflage. He went on:

"I was saying, Señor Chief, that I do not entirely deserve your generous encomium, and this is why. Attend, now: Except for one bill that—then without my knowledge—Señor Tucker had given to a temporarily embarrassed señor engaged by a house of paper makers—of bank-note paper makers—I have not yet put one of my notes upon the market."

"What?" At least three voices shouted the unbelieving query.

"But no," smiled Villeta, extending open palms. "You must know that when one what you call 'unloads' in such affairs as this the unloading must be all at once, before governmental alarm is taken. Myself, I wished to print an even two million dollars before I started to sell my wares. I was consistent, and save for the few charred fragments that Señor Hoagland has brought here, and that one unfortunately given the paper maker, the only existing copies of notes that I have printed are now on that desk there. I paid them to this Señor Doctor to quiet him and because I hoped him soon to disappear."

Don Ramon paused. He raised a dramatic arm.

"Gentlemen," he smilingly declared, "you have grievously wronged me. It is not *I* that have been the counterfeiter. *I* used real paper and real plates; *your* paper and the plates that *you* had made. And you never thought to examine what you found, at last, in your own possession!"

There was an astonished silence. Don Ramon was radiant. Dan could not quite suppress a merely nervous chuckle; every-

body else was solemnly dumfounded. Then Farley pressed a finger to the bell designed to summon his senior assistant—and forgot to remove the pressure.

"Bring me," said he, as Lemmell put his head into the crowded room, "the Fillmore hundred-dollar-note plates and the standard note along with them."

"Oh, you will see!" Don Ramon bit his ragged nails while they waited; but he stopped on Lemmell's return and began rubbing his hands again in premonitory satisfaction.

Then, as he watched his contention indubitably verified, he shot his full bolt.

"The plates that were half-innocently substituted by my poor, dear Miss Cecilia Smith here——"

"I hate you!" cried Cecilia. "And I wouldn't knowingly have got Mr. Farley in trouble for *anything!*"

Farley daringly patted her supple shoulders.

"Were," continued the unruffled Villeta, "not those which she had given me. Not at all. What I gave her and what she then gave you were my own counterfeit plates, carefully but quickly copied from the originals—while those originals were in my possession—by your Señor Josiah Tucker, God rest his soul! Señor Secretary of the Treasury, you have been flooding your own country with bogus money!"

They came running toward him—all of them—their mouths agape.

"And," he concluded, "unless you wish to expose your own foolishness by publishing this confession you will find no charge on which legally to hold me."

He had the whip hand. It was Hoagland that struck it down.

"Well, *I* charge you," said he, "with the murder of two of your servants—two of your peons—whom you caught investigating your hacienda's chapel. Stone tells me they died before I got there—these two—but once you're locked up we'll find some of your people willing enough to talk, and if I've learned anything about Santo Domingo"—he looked at Boyle, who nodded a ready approval—"the courts down there, where of course you'll be tried, won't stand for the introduction of any impertinent evidence about matters up here in Washington."

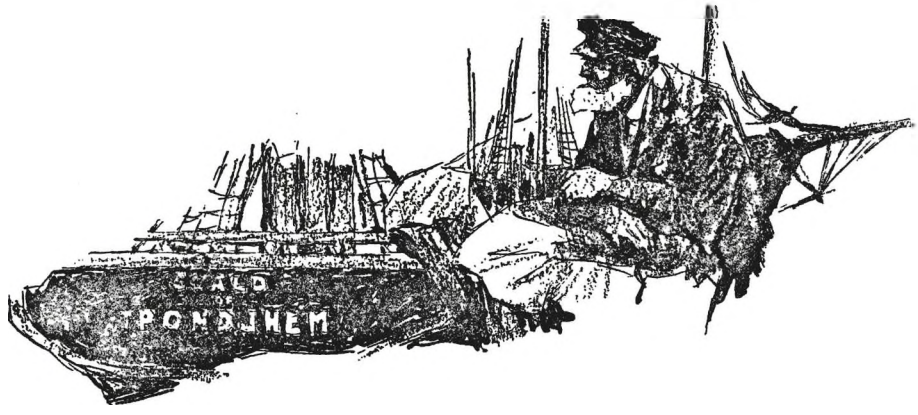
The effect of that speech on the great criminal and the high government officials that it more or less directly involved was manifold. Quite ten minutes had elapsed before so unimportant a person as Daniel Gurney Stone, M. D.-minus, had an opportunity to act in repercussion to its effect on him. Then he managed, after several failures, to drag Hoagland privately into a corner.

"Look here," he whispered. "As far as I can make things out the secretary's letting everybody, except old Ramon, down easy because there's an election due and he doesn't want publicity. He's even going to turn free that good-looking stenographer so she can marry her boss—and he'll probably give her a wedding present, by the looks of him. Why, he's promised me enough out of his own pocket to—well, he's whispered that I may keep the thousand Villeta paid me and apply it to my medical tuition fees. But what I want to ask you's this. You sounded a little while ago as if you knew something about Santo Domingan law. Can you inform me as to a good lawyer in San Domingo City, or Puerto Plata, who'll get back my fiancée's estate for her?"

Look for more of Reginald Wright Kauffman's work in future issues.

FOR THIN PEOPLE ONLY

HAVE you about you—like Mr. Shakespeare's *Cassius*—a lean and hungry look? If so, and you don't like it, write to the United States Bureau of Public Health Service, in Washington, for the free pamphlet telling how to increase your displacement. Thinness is of three kinds—natural, acquired and unhealthful. If your thinness is of the natural sort and you want to take on a little weight for appearances' sake, the pamphlet will tell you how to regulate your diet so as to do it. If your thinness is of the painfully acquired sort, you'll save the two cents by not sending for the pamphlet. If it is of the unhealthful variety the pamphlet will advise you to see a good doctor and tell you why.



The Back Number

By Oswald Wildridge

The story of a man and a ship who came back—an unusually fine and vivid picture of the days of the clipper ships.

AMONG the many distinctions conferred by life upon Captain John Raunce, not the least in its import was this—that he was oftener referred to by the name of a ship than by that which he held as part of his birthright. He was entered in the "Shipping Register" as "John Raunce, master mariner," his service with the China clippers beginning with the *Fearnought* and passing to the *Raleigh,* the *Centurion,* and the *Mandarin;* but on shipboard, in the haunts of sailormen ashore and in the throbbing streets of home and foreign ports it was "Old Fearnought" they called him. And the name singled him out from the ruck, ranked as a decoration. For it was the *Fearnought* that subjected his seamanship to its first supreme test, in alliance with the winds of three great oceans tried his endurance, his heart, his craft, and having proved him gave him a place of pride among the record-breaking lords of the sea and the honor of being "called out of his name."

Even when he surrendered his command of the famous old clipper he carried the title with him and so strong was the bond between the man and the ship that when in the fullness of time the *Fearnought* was condemned as obsolete he grieved for her almost as deeply as on that other day when he came home to find his wife's chair vacant and a newly mounded grave among the hills of his own Lake Country.

"What d'ye think they've done, Kennedy?" he boomed to the mate as he hurried aboard the *Raleigh.* "They've sold the old *Fearnought.* And her as good as the best of them yet. She's had her day and's done for. That's what they say. The short-sighted fools. A ship like that is never done for till she's sunk or wrecked. And now I reckon some swab without a soul'll cut her masts down and turn her into a filthy coal hulk. It's a damnable shame!"

There, after a little more rumbling, the outburst ended. In the fate of his old ship he discerned no pointing finger, nothing that touched his own future. For John Raunce, like all strong men, not to mention a good many of the weaklings, believed in himself and his kingdom he regarded as founded on a rock. But then other people believed in him also, a great host scattered through all the land, and by these it was unthinkable that such a man as Raunce should fall from power.

It was recognized, of course, that he shared the menace of all seafarers—the peril of tempest, of fog and fire and the uncharted rock; it was foreseen also that he might even succumb like other strong men to the terrific strain of the swift enterprise, the sleepless vigil, the craft of Nature's uncertain

forces, or the battle with her malignant moods. But so far as his friends thought of the matter at all they looked for triumph right to the end, with a fitting ceremonial of farewell.

Instead of this he was cast ashore bearing the brand of ignominious defeat. After the manner of many such tragedies, moreover, his downfall had its genesis in success. Long after the *Fearnought* had sailed away into the unknown the House challenged its rivals with the *Mandarin,* renowned at the time for her mainmast towering one hundred and forty-two feet from deck to truck, her main yard of eighty-two feet, and her eighteen hundred tons; and Raunce once more transferring his commodore's flag paved the way to disaster. If only the ship had condemned herself by a bad start. But her maiden voyage promised a fine turn of speed, her second also was good, but after that Raunce could make nothing of her.

"She's a brute," he told his fellow seafarers when they forgathered in the captains' parlor at Dougal's Chandlery in Coiloer Allies, Liverpool. "There isn't a wind of any sort she shows a fancy for and she's the very devil for getting into mischief."

This was on the eve of her fourth departure, and before he had the chance of another chat in the captains' parlor the ship had all her masts carried away, the catastrophe of absolute loss only being averted by a caprice of the wind. He who had never lost anything more than his t'gallant sticks! Under jury rig the clipper limped home a month behind the rest of the fleet and her captain carried ashore a load of disappointment and chagrin, but every strand of abiding faith in his own seamanship untouched.

"I'm not letting her go yet," he declared to the mate as they beat across the bay. "She's a swine, but I can't fancy being beaten and so I'll carry on for another voyage. Then if she licks me again the owners must find me another ship or I must find other owners."

But he had carried on too long. He discovered that perseverance is only a virtue when crowned by success; that the world has few rewards for good intentions. And so he fell. There was no melodrama, nothing beyond a trifling disturbance of the everyday manner. After the falling of the blow in the owners' office he headed straight for Dougal's and his own lips announced his humiliation.

"What's that, Brash?" he said. "Next voyage? There won't be any next voyage. I'm done. Owners have no further use for me. Grown too old. That's what they say in a roundabout fashion. It's the *Mandarin* that's done me. The blasted fraud. Only the owners don't see it. They will have it that the ship's all right; it's the man that's wrong. Right hand lost its cunning. Nerve gone. That's what they make out—nicely wrapped up. And that's all. Youth must have its day. And in two year I'll be sixty."

"Sakes, man, but it is awful," Andrew Dougal gasped, the others too astonished for speech. "Surely you're joking. They'd never cast you adrift."

With ironic fervor Raunce repelled the suggestion. Oh, no; nothing so cruel as that. They had considerately offered him the command of some old wagon that didn't call for any driving; or a nice soft job on the shore staff if he still wished to go on working. The thing they had made up their minds to was that he wasn't fit any longer for one of the clippers. Of course he didn't propose to accept either of the offers. And that was all. He didn't suppose any one else would want him now and he would most likely settle down ashore and rust out or else spend his substance in riotous living.

"He takes it wonderful easy," said Captain Brash when Raunce had gone; but none of them knew how his steps lagged on the way down to the ferry, and they heard not the torturing refrain, "And now I've got to go home and tell it to Joyce. Her father a failure. Done for. Chucked away like a sucked orange."

II.

For active resistance to the decree whereby the whole fabric of his life had been shattered Captain Raunce manifested a most resolute distaste. "Oh, no," he would say, "we'll let it stand. It's the owners' verdict." But the spell of the sea was in no wise broken and his time ashore was mostly divided between Dougal's parlor, where he would sit for hours on end drinking in the tales of life he might no longer share, and rambling from dock to dock among the ships he could no longer command. Until that day when Chance dropped one of its atoms in his path and revealed to him the identity of a ship, the glory of

an opulent past concealed under the rags of a frowsy present. Not that there was anything phenomenal about that. It is one of the fundamental laws of the sea, part of its history too, that while a ship may change her name she cannot detach her personality. There are exceptions to the law, I admit, but the broad principle stands inviolate, the ship remains proof against the sapping attacks of time, the neglect and the embroideries of man.

By all the signs it was not a hopeful day for discovery—one of November's own, land and river half lost in the veiling of a tawny mist, the web of mast and rigging weirdly distorted and magnified. With such a setting the wonder is that John Raunce saw anything at all; but there was little that he missed on these ramblings in dock land and his first glimpse of the *Skald* lit the lamp of interest in his eyes.

"Bless my life," he ejaculated, "it must be. There's only one of 'em. But I thought she'd have been broken up years ago." Bending low, he read the name on the overhang of her stern. "Umph!" he muttered, "same old story. *Skald* of Trondjhem, when it should be *Amadas* of Liverpool. She's the only craft I ever clapped eyes on with a rise like that."

With many men, of course, the thing would have ended here, but Raunce was a being apart from type and the crisis of his own days had ripened him for this encounter. The *Amadas* fitted in with his own disordered tangle like the segment of a child's picture puzzle. By a perfectly natural transition of thought he passed from this ship to others, their exploits, their disappearances, often so unaccountable. Not all had been rent limb from limb by the ship breaker, not all devoured by the sea nor hurled upon destroying rocks. Where might they be hiding, under what flag; what name concealed their greatness and decline? Afterward, when his adventure was accomplished, admiration becoming articulate nearly always framed itself to a single question, "However did you come to think of it?" But it was all quite simple. From surprise and pleasure of discovery he passed to reflection, then to desire, and in the moment of passionate longing suggestion sprang into being.

"If only I could," he breathed thickly. "I'd show them! But—I wonder—I wonder." And yielding to the wooing of wonder he sat himself down on one of the mooring bollards and there amid the discordant activity of the docks abandoned himself to contemplation. When at length he rose and headed for the city, suggestion had acquired the proportions of a somewhat nebulous design. Twisting and twining through all the short cuts, he presently turned in at Silver Alley, and there, to the group of sea warriors gossiping in the captains' parlor, he propounded the question he was later to carry to the ends of the earth. "Do any of you happen to have fallen in with a ship called the *Isidoro?* She was at Durban the last time I heard anything about her, and flying the Italian flag."

About his manner there was a fine affectation of indifference, and so well did he dissemble, giving his inquiry the gloss of mere curiosity, that none suspected its abounding breadth. His quest, moreover, was in vain; they knew as little as himself and so he left them and crossed over to his home on the Cheshire shore—a home upon which the sea had laid the print of its finger as surely as upon the man who created it.

Externally the house, solid, gray and flat-fronted, differed in few of its details from its seventy-odd neighbors; but within it represented all the difference between the home of the landsman and he who traffics abroad in strange waters. Let the landsman be butcher or baker or candlestick maker, only the very few have the power to transmute the fact into terms of domestic environment; but your seafarer suffers no such handicap of expression, and Raunce, having wandered far, had for the garnishing of his dwelling levied tribute on most of the lands imposed between the shores of Britain and the inland sea of Japan, from the North Cape to the Southern Isles. An armory of barbaric weapons, a fearsome idol acquired in Rangoon, tapestries of exquisite weave, the daintiest of china, with all manner of ware in bronze and brass, cabinets and skins and prints, and a treasury of foreign odds and ends, made every room a sheer delight. The carpets he had brought straight from the bazaars of Oriental hucksters, and the quaintly carved chair, wherein his daughter Joyce was seated when his key rattled in the lock, had been picked up in a queer corner of Madras.

And Joyce was even as the house. If this were the home of one of the sea kings, then she was one of the daughters—her skin

gently touched by the fire of the equatorial sun, her eyes alight with flame of adventure, a suggestion of defiance born in the screaming tumult of the Roaring Forties, of unforgetable days and nights on the poop of her father's ship. She was her father's daughter also in the deeper sense—the bond of a thorough understanding was shown by the manner of her greeting. In front of a dozen comrades of the deep he had trailed his secret without betrayal, but Joyce, before the opening of his lips, knew that something tremendous had happened to him in the hours since he left her.

"What is it, dad?" she asked, and suffered no surprise when, frowning down into the fire, he irrelevantly answered that "It might mean beggary for them."

"Is that all?" she flashed back at him, a smile flickering about her lips. "That's not such a frightful price to pay for some of the things you want—things you've set your heart on, the things that really matter."

He had a full appreciation of her reference and it seemed to hearten him.

"True enough," he said, "but it isn't everything. You've got to think of other folks. A man has no right to make others pay for his fancies." And then: "I'm thinking, lassie, that you're a bit of a witch. Reading me as if I were a book. I didn't mean to say a word till I'd slept over it—maybe not even then. But it's no use now. I s'pose I'll have to tell you."

Whereupon settling down in his chair, the girl on the rug by his feet, he made known to her his discovery of the ship whose disguise he had so easily penetrated and the daring design born in the wilderness of the docks. "I'm almost fearing to think about it," he finished off. "It's a thousand-to-one chance. And suppose I should win through; it'll run away with a heap of money—which mebbe I've no right to risk. I've got a tidy bit stored away, I'll own, but not enough for—playing games with. And I can't have you——"

"Me!" she checked him. "As if I would stand in your way. I don't care if you leave me without a penny. Why, this is what I have been praying for. All through there has only been one bogy—that you might not do anything. Not that I've ever really thought it likely. I knew you too well—so well, indeed, that I've kept your bag partly packed ever since you came ashore, and I can have it quite ready in an hour. How soon will you want to start and where will you begin? Durban? Isn't that where you last fell in with her?"

The face which had been so terribly stern ever since John Raunce "came ashore" broke into a delighted smile. "My certes! but you're a chip off the old block, Joyce," he chirped. "You ought to have been a lad. But I'll not be wanting the bag just yet. I'll start across the river. Liverpool docks to begin with. And after that I'll away to the Thames, Bristol, to the Clyde, the Tyne, and Leith. If she's in a British port I'll hunt her down."

"And when you have found her?"

"Well? Haven't I told you?"

"Yes. But—when you have found her?" To strengthen her pleading she drew closer to him, and kneeling by his side laid her hands upon his shoulders. "What about the finish? You remember the girl that Longfellow sings about, 'The skipper had taken his little daughter to bear him company?'"

He saw her drift and his face swiftly gloomed. "I don't know," he returned. "Can't say that I like the idea. It'll be a tremendous business—all flurry—wet decks—carrying on—full of risk. I—I—I think ——" But with the words of refusal on his lips he remembered her reception of his project, her enthusiasm, her readiness for sacrifice. "You shall," he capitulated, grasping both her hands. "It's a bargain. You've earned it. If I find her I'll send for you. You shall share the finish—for well or ill."

But the *Isidoro* was not harboring in any British port, or else John Raunce failed to discover her, and so in due season he embarked on his greater pilgrimage. From Newcastle he cut across to Hamburg and Bremen, whence working back through Rotterdam and Antwerp and so to the Channel ports and Marseilles, he came at last to Brindisi and his first clew, or rather a confused bundle of clews. He wrote to Joyce:

> I've got too much to pick and choose from. And the only thing certain is that *Isidoro* seems to be well favored as a name among Italian shipowners. I've found five of them. And the pedigrees of the ships are so badly mixed up in their slipshod bookkeeping that I'm no forrader. The likeliest of the lot seems to be knocking about the Pacific, so the next letter you get will be from Frisco.

For anything he gained he might as well have remained on the Adriatic, and failure still danced faithfully attendant on his round

from Calcutta to Rangoon, from Malaysia to the China coast and the havens of Japan. He wrote from Shimonoseki:

It's a wearisome bit of hide-and-seek. Perhaps I'm wrong, but somehow I seem to be always on the hooker's trail. It reminds me of that game you used to play when you were a kiddie. Sometimes I'm warm, twice I've got mighty hot, but mostly I'm cold. Cold as the north pole.

This was the first positive note of depression but henceforth in his letters Joyce easily detected an undercurrent of strain and was in no degree surprised when from Melbourne he announced a change in his method:

It's all spend, spend, spend, and nothing to show. Seems to me I might just as well be earning my keep and so I've signed on as skipper of the *Morning Glory*, a schooner registered at Adelaide. She isn't exactly the sort of craft I've been used to, but she'll do. And I reckon that I've as good a chance of finding what I want cruising sailor fashion as in barging about from port to port like some bloated plutocrat. At present we're loading for Honolulu, where there's a freight waiting for shipment to Brisbane.

III.

For the round of a year and a trifle over was John Raunce rated as master of the schooner, and in all things he rendered as faithful service as he had given to the august clipper in his days of high renown. But he never relaxed his quest for that elusive bark with the foreign name: in the crowded harbors of Australia, in desolate lagoons, the ports of the wonderful isles, and also in the desert of the open sea he was ever searching for her, ever with triumphant subtlety propounding the question: "Do you happen to have come across an old bark, name of *Isidoro?*" It was there in the first bunch of things he asked of Gilbert Thorne, the mate of the *Morning Glory*, when he took over the command—Thorne, by the way, being one of that large confraternity of the luckless from whom, in spite of the possession of a master's ticket, the fruits of command are persistently withheld. Of course, at the time Thorne thought nothing about it. *"Isidoro?* Never heard of her." And the ship slipped clean out of his mind.

But he was not allowed to forget. Before the adventure ended he found his life overshadowed by her, and Raunce the bearer of a magnetic secret out of which circumstance fashioned a link binding them together. For Raunce was driven to treat the mate as an ally without whose help he might fail; and when Thorne, on his part, awoke to the intensity of the quest he too fell under its spell, with curiosity, of course, as a secondary power. In all probability the actual birth of Thorne's interest dated from the day they put out to sea for the first time, when Raunce recognized that henceforth it was impossible to work alone.

"Look here, mister," he said, "I'll be much obliged if you'll keep your eyes skinned when I'm not on deck. That old bark I asked you about, the *Isidoro*, I'm rather set on finding her. So if you should happen to raise anything with three masts when I'm below you might give me a call."

In the long run his request was revealed as amounting to very little, for while daylight held he would seldom tear himself away from the deck and should a wisp of sail come creeping round the curve of the sea he would be sure to trap it. Ashore his conduct was molded on the same lines. Once he was free he would set off along the harbor front or leisurely stroll from wharf to wharf, nor would he return until with meticulous care he had appraised every ship at her moorings. And Thorne, interpreting the few external signs, would droop without realizing it under a sense of disappointment. "The Old Man's drawn another blank," he would mutter.

Thus did Old Fearnought thrash his way about until at length coincidence once more stretched forth its arm and gathered in its masterful fingers that tangle of almost hopeless threads. They were beating up for Melbourne at the time, and the very accident that he had so intensely dreaded befell them—the passing of a ship in the night. Taking stock afterwards he discovered no factor so disturbingly impressive. It enriched his life with an enlarged appreciation of mystery, and often tinged his conversation with reflections on the imminence of the unknown.

"There she was, and I didn't know," he would say. "Half an hour longer of darkness or an extra puff o' wind and—everything different till the end of time for three of us: three lives shifted onto a new course—Joyce's, and Gilbert Thorne's, and mine. Almost scares you when you try to think of the things you may have missed."

This time, however, luck was ranged on his side. The schooner emerged from the

blinding presence of the night before it was too late and there a couple of leagues away was that strange craft, a decrepit old tramp, her wooden hull seared and scorched, her sails a mass of patches. Raunce was below when the dawn disclosed her but his eyes picked her up the moment he reached the deck.

"My God!" he gasped. "Look at her, man. Look at her!" Even while he spoke he became a new being, transfigured, his face ashine, years of his lost youth restored to him. That his conduct should have drawn all other eyes he neither knew nor cared. He was focused on a single fact. From all the mercantile armadas of the world Chance had thrown that ship into his presence. There was nothing else. Not until Thorne leveled his glass on the stranger and read aloud the name on her stern—*Dom Pedro* of Lima.

"What's that?" Raunce cried sharply, and then crashing one fist into the palm of the other, "Don't care what name she carries or what flag. They can give her a number if they like. There's only one ship afloat with such an entrance, a rise like that, or masts with such a rake."

"Then, I reckon," Thorne ventured, "she's the *Isidoro* ship you've been looking for."

"That's it, my son," Raunce joyfully assented. "She's found new owners. That's all. Changed her name and hoisted the Peruvian flag. And now, seeing that we've found her, we're not going to lose her. Where she goes we go. Never mind what the owners say. I'll foot the bill whatever it costs me. I'll board her if she sails into the mouth of Hades or rams herself against the Antarctic ice barrier. So glue your eyes on her and set your course according. She'll not walk away from us. She ought to, by rights, but she's got a foul hull. That's plain to be seen."

Extravagant though his vow may sound, he meant it, and so throughout the day they played their game of follow my leader; but when night again overtook them Thorne suggested an alternative course, to which Raunce, after an emphatic rejection, at length agreed. The plan was simple enough. By a little maneuvering soon after daybreak they overhauled the *Dom Pedro,* and learned that she was bound for Brisbane, whereupon the schooner trimmed her sails for Melbourne, whence in due season John Raunce dispatched a cable message of two words to Joyce, "Found her." Afterward he surrendered his command and embarked upon the first boat sailing to Brisbane, where he completed his announcement with a second laconic cable, "Got her. Hongkong. Wait there."

IV.

A more reluctant enterprise than that upon which Gilbert Thorne embarked when the *Morning Glory* had disgorged her cargo of copra and been handed over to a new mate it would be difficult to conceive. At every step action waged bitter conflict with judgment but he relentlessly impelled himself on toward an indeterminate goal. He was going to see the thing through, see what Raunce was up to, for what queer port he was making. And so he threw up his berth and followed the captain to Brisbane, where at the very outset he found mystery piled on mystery. Boarding the *Dom Pedro,* he passed along a disreputable deck to a frowsy cabin, and being bidden to make himself at home was immediately astounded by the proprietorial formula employed by Raunce in his reference to the bark, "My ship." It was impossible to mistake his meaning. It was not command that he implied, but ownership. His voice thrilled with the pride of possession and he lounged back in his worn-out chair a being of supreme content.

"D'ye mean to tell me, sir," Thorne managed to stammer, "that you've bought this —this—lump of bagwash?" and found his question countered by another:

"Can't a man buy a ship if he wants?" As though buying a rotten old hulk or any other kind of craft was an ordinary everyday sort of business. "Now, it's all right," Raunce insisted. "Nothing to make a fuss about." He had bought the ship for reasons of his own—reasons which would presently declare themselves. He had searched all over the world for her. Found her, too. And now he was going to sail her to Hongkong, and if Thorne pleased, he could come along as first mate. "Fact is," he persuasively proceeded, "I want you. You're a sailor. No half bake. That's why I don't want to let you go. And the job I'm going to tackle needs a man who knows how to handle a ship and can keep his nerve."

On the matter of Thorne's nerve he manifested an assurance which the mate afterward confessed was "a bit of an eye-opener." Ever since the first few weeks of their com-

panionship Raunce had been watching him, silently appraising, weighing him up, and always with this day in mind. And he was abundantly satisfied with the test. So that was how it stood. He wanted a man who could sail a ship, one whom he could trust —in sight or out of sight; one who wouldn't talk either—or ask questions; one who would simply take his orders and carry on. This was to be special service and secrecy was essential. But all would be made as clear as daylight in the end. He was careful to refrain from any allusion to money. An offer of a high rate of pay Thorne would have converted into an attempt at purchase, bribery inspired by something shady. He was ripe enough for adventure, but not at the expense of his freedom or his self-respect.

When the time came for the selection of a crew Raunce discovered a task of much greater magnitude—one that laid a severe strain on his discretion and experience.

"Must have the right stuff," he insisted when Thorne suggested that he was being too particular. "It's men that count—always as much as the ship and many times a great deal more." All water rats and dock wallopers he stringently eliminated. None but salt-water men would satisfy—men who could hand, reef and steer and heave the lead—above everything else, men of the clipper breed. Beyond all this, however, there was a sheaf of greater happenings, and before they left Hongkong Gilbert Thorne sat himself down on the edge of his bunk and tried to count them off on his fingers.

"Number One. The Old Man takes me all aback by fetching his girl aboard. And a bonnier craft never set foot on a poop, though I can't make up my mind about the color of her eyes. There doesn't seem t' be a word t' fit. But what the pair of them can be up to—it's as thick as fog. She's as deeply dipped as he is, too. And what she's going to do aboard this beastly old tub is a puzzler.

"Number Two. The Old Man has the ship dry-docked and goes bang on repairs. New masts and new copper sheathing. When scraping would have done.

"Number Three. He plays a couple of his mystery tricks. Has her old yards refitted but fetches a brand-new set on board and stows them away under canvas. Big stuff, too; he'll spread some sail on them, I'm thinking. But he won't have the hooker cleaned up. Below the water line new copper, but above the mark—filthy.

"Number Four. He's desperately keen on lying low when we get to Foo-Choo. Wants me to keep a stopper on my jaw tackle. Not a word about where the hooker comes from or how we found her. And nothing about her refit."

Then there was the matter of the name. Perhaps the greatest surprise of all. A few hours before they made their departure Raunce ordered three of the hands over the side with paint and brushes, and Thorne, coming back from an errand on which he had been sent to the chandlers, discovered the *Isidoro* of Genoa, having become the *Dom Pedro* of Lima, had again changed her title, and now in bold white letters proclaimed herself as

THE BACK NUMBER
of Liverpool.

"That's just what she is," he pronounced as he stepped on board. "The name fits her to a T. An out-and-out back number."

His assurance on the point was disagreeably confirmed when they sailed up the river at Foo-Choo and the bark put down her anchor on the fringe of the tea fleet. Nineteen ships were loading, but only seven of these were fully qualified for a part in the great yearly race to England, two of the others being doubtful and the rest rank outsiders. *The Back Number* was condemned by contrast. Thick-skinned as most sailors though he was, Thorne felt his cheeks burn with shame. It seemed to him that from all the other craft a ribald salvo was being fired. The degradation of it—those in their new attire, black and green and gold, trim and neat, ashine from truck to water line, and his own ship an odious drab. How Raunce could stand it all was a mystery—first the contrast, and after that the jibes of the coarser-fibered captains, the still more trying sympathy of others, the poking inquisitiveness of the few who scented a secret. Nothing appeared to make any impression, however, and even when he might have escaped from the ordeal the Old Man refused to accept the chance. Although, by great good luck, he was one of the first to finish the stowing of the tea chests, he doggedly hung on to his anchor day after day and was still there when toward the end of that month of June the *Crusader* put out to sea, followed on the next tide by the *Dancing*

Faun and the *Woo Sung*. On the second day the fleet thinned out still more; on the evening of the third *The Back Number* lay in the fairway alone, and that night John Raunce, coming off from the shore by boat, sharply ordered the calling of all hands at dawn.

"There's a squad of riggers coming aboard," he added, and giving no time for question hurried away aft and vanished down the companion.

Softly whistling, the mate watched him go. "So that's the game," he said, his eyes a-twinkle. "New sails. New rigging. New yards." A reflective pause, and then, "There's a streak of daylight at last. He didn't want to let the other skippers see his big booms. *Isidoro—Dom Pedro—Back Number.* Strikes me I'm going to be glad I shipped for this trip. It promises to be rather diverting."

Four days after the sailing of the *Crusader* the bark towed down the river, and having reached the open sea, she spread her brand-new suit of sails. But she still carried her grime.

V.

About that voyage of *The Back Number* from Foo-Choo to the Mersey perhaps there is nothing more surprising than the way in which both the ship and her owner confounded the first impressions of the crew. On the third night out it was agreed in the fo'c's'le that the bark was a "proper rip," and the Old Man "a reg'lar devil for carrying on;" while by the time they had been at sea a week Tom Carrodus, the bos'n, was gloomily predicting that if Raunce went on cutting off corners as he had started the hooker would be piled up hard and fast on one of the abounding reefs before she got through the China Sea. It was sheer madness—this was how they looked at it—an open invitation to death, running through this archipelago of reefs, islets, half-tide rocks, in the dark, too, often with only a few feet to spare on either hand; sweeping over shoals where the very color of the water was sufficient to daunt the stoutest heart; sneaking in under the land at sundown to catch the shore breeze, going so close that again and again every man aboard gave the ship up for lost. And yet, in the hour of their greatest peril, they were compelled to admire.

"You'd think the bloomin' wagon was alive," said the bos'n one day after a maneuver of extreme risk. "What strikes me about it ain't so much that the Old Man knows eggsactly what she can do as the hooker knowin' what he wants her t' do and a-doin' it. He'll make her sit up on her starn one o' these days an' wag her bowsprit at the sun. An' the knowledgeableness of 'im likewise. He knows these waters as well as I know Ratcliffe 'Ighway or the Regent's Road at Liverpool, an' so with a bit o' luck he'll mebbe make his landfall."

Concerning all this, of course, the log of *The Back Number* makes no revelation; it merely records a succession of "strong winds" and "squalls," mentions without boast the passing of the Straits on the twenty-third day out, and introduces those stupendous hours in the Indian Ocean with a bald statement running to no more than a couple of lines.

When Thorne turned in the ship was snoring along before a fairly steady breeze; when he awoke she was canted at a steep angle and his little world was filled with a fury of sound. "Jove, but the wind must have got up." That was his first sleepy thought, and then he bolted from his bunk, struggled into his clothes, and clambering up the companion was confounded by the revelation. He had emerged into a realm of terrific passion through which this ship that he had condemned as "a lump of bagwash" was driving with magnificent abandon, her lee rail awash, the slicing thrust of her stem piling up the sea athwart her hull. She was traveling through a valley which she carved for herself as she advanced. To a sailor all this was of course a trifle, part of his bargain, one of the things he ships for and becomes inured to; given a sound vessel and plenty of sea room there was nothing to worry about.

But here there was John Raunce to reckon with and the mark of his work overwhelmed the mate with apprehension. Down below, that deafening cacophony in his ears, he had accepted without question a mental picture of bare poles, or at least poles half stripped of their canvas. Though he had not been called, he quite anticipated that much. Yet here was the bark almost as when he turned in—barring her mizzen royal and gaff-topsail, her colossal pyramid still outspread. Raunce must be mad, stark staring mad. Next thing he would have her dismasted. He was simply chucking their lives

away. His own life too and that of Joyce, his daughter. Hanging on to the companion hatch amid the welter of flying scud, Thorne envisaged the girl prisoned in the cabin, abandoned to terror, maybe on her knees, all hope gone; and rage against her father flamed up again with force that made him ripe for mutiny.

And then he saw her. Made a slight turn and beheld her clinging with one hand to the mizzen shrouds, a life line about her waist, her eyes ashine like stars, lips parted, cheeks flushed. Even her sou'wester was not big enough to conceal the signs of exultation. With a cheery wave of the hand she beckoned him to her, and he would fain have responded, but in time he remembered his duty and climbing the slanting deck to the captain's side was told that "it had come on quite sudden. Started to blow——" But the wind nipped the words and carried half of them away. "Thought wouldn't—call—better let you sleep. No telling—get more. In luck—looks—going to last."

Raunce bent his head to catch the mate's response and bellowed back an indignant retort. "Snug her down? What for?—when logging it off like this. D'ye take—fool? What's—clipper—built for? No good unless—stand up—bit of a blow. This—only start. More coming. Lot more."

For himself, Thorne would have let it end at that, but there was that girl clinging to the shrouds and for her sake he dared again. "What about Miss Joyce?" he yelled, and found that not even for his girl was Raunce touched by fear.

"Joyce," he cried back. "Aye, aye. Did—ever—see girl like her? Happy as—queen. Having time—life. Ought—been a lad." And then, making a trumpet of his hands. "She's been on deck all night. Wish you'd stand by—get her down—cabin. And see—breakfast. What? Oh, no. Have a bite up here." As Thorne turned away to carry out his commission, Raunce laid a detaining hand on his shoulder. "Don't worry, my son," he shouted. "Bit of clipper sailing, that's all. I know what you're thinking. But you're—wrong. Ask Joyce. She knows—father's name—what men called—Old Fearnought—and why. You're going to see—carrying on."

All through the hours of daylight the bark was held to her course, tearing savagely up the short steep seas, half burying herself in the downward plunge, the boom of thunder in her canvas, the shrilling of a devil's chorus in the tautened strings of her cordage. Throughout the night, too, she bored ahead into the profundity of that frantic abyss. All through the second day also, on and on and on, and so she swept into the core of that terrific third when the hurricane altered its method of attack. It was a little after the passing of the night, black as a wolf's throat, into the dismal gray of a sunless dawn, that Thorne first became conscious of a difference in the wind. Not that its violence could be said to have relaxed, but its steadiness was no longer sustained, the violent drive was exchanged for the still more violent gust.

"It's going to change its course," he thought, "and if it does, God help us. She'll turn turtle."

He fancied that Raunce was different also, keener, screwed up to meet a new challenge, and so he braced himself for the call for which he had really been waiting ever since he thrust his head through the cabin companion three days ago. But the waiting was not over yet, not for ever so long—not until noon when the wind suddenly whipped about, and then the voice of the captain crashed into the tumult and Thorne rushed headlong to the main deck. As he cleared the poop he felt the ship heel over, heard a scream: "My God, she's going," saw the sea sheer aloft, a gigantic curling wall, solid and green right up to its creamy crest, saw the main yard stab the wall with its tip, and then was buried in the flood as the monster thundered down upon them. "She's gone," he thought. "Clean over."

But the bark with a sullen roll shook herself free, and there was Thorne battling through it waist deep, heading for the halyards, and bellowing a torrent of orders to men unwilling to obey. For the Old Man had carried on too long; that was the belief of every one aboard, his daring had killed their last shred of confidence; better a place on the solid deck as long as it floated than be hurled from the yards like pellets from a catapult. Aloft there was no foothold, no grip, no chance. Nothing at all. Only to fling themselves on the foot ropes, battle for a few seconds with those canvas giants, flapping, cracking, bone-breaking, man-killing devils, and then—go. Until the testing moment they probably had never given a thought to the price demanded of them, and so to the call of "All hands!" they streamed

at desperate hazard along the deck. Then one heart faltered and the mischief was done. Hesitation proved contagious. Routing authority, breaking down their traditional loyalty, it made each man a law unto himself. They were brave men too, but even the highest courage demands, if not a chance for itself, at any rate the chance of success as the reward of sacrifice; and they were being asked to throw their lives away without the gain of any end. The ship was doomed. On her beam ends already. Nothing could save her. They would not go aloft.

Now, rebellion becoming articulate, they bellowed their defiance aloud, each in his own way, with his own imprecations. The mate might kill them if he liked. And that it looked as though Thorne was bent on doing. Rage took possession of him; murder, the spirit that wipes out the life of a man as lightly as that of a fly. At that instant he had a vision of Joyce, only a few yards from him, lashed to the mizzen shrouds; Joyce, made for life, and doomed by these craven fools to death. His sense of impotence shattered his self-control; with a salvo of searing curses he leaped into their midst, his arm shot out, a man pitched down the deck into the wash of the lee scuppers. A second he kicked away from his grip on a life line, on all within reach he showered a tempest of blows, his arms swinging like flails. But still they held to their rebellion. Here indeed was Force, but impressionless, barren of the personality that commands. That higher power was not upon the deck but on the poop. And in time it spoke, in time to rescue those precious seconds from irretrievable loss. Like a trumpet call it rose above the clamor of wind and sea and maddened men:

"Aloft—you dogs! Aloft! Up with you —every man! D'ye hear?"

And sweeping about they discovered John Raunce by the break of the poop, his sou'-wester pushed back, right arm extended, a revolver covering them. Again he bellowed, "Aloft—you swabs! One——" That first threat was also the last. His conquest was instantaneous.

Yielding everything they sprang into the shrouds, hand over hand they stormed the heights of that appalling region they had refused to face, their surrender not that of one type of fear vanquished by a greater, but a fear submitting to force, spiritual force conquering brute materialism. Their submission was complete too, not a man held back. As the watch tailed on to the braces, confusion again ran riot, but it was confusion leading to an ordered end.

The end was long in declaring itself. Pinned down in the trough, it seemed as if the bark had verily lost her chance, that no human agency could liberate her from the double grip of wind and sea. But Force was dominant still, brain and valiant labor pitted against unreasoning might. From the poop John Raunce worked his ship with all the subtlety which had given him fame; aloft the crew wrestled with those colossal coils of canvas, fingers bleeding, sense throttled, choking, gasping, the labor of half an hour undone in a second; down below also their comrades toiled in a welter of broken sea, up to the waist, to the neck. Nor did any man labor in vain. Perceptibly at last the ship responded, slowly she rose, defiantly shook herself free. Six hours after Gilbert Thorne predicted her doom *The Back Number* was scudding along under lower topsails.

But salvation was only one of the ends achieved. Across the face of the world in those three days of flight the bark had furrowed a line one thousand one hundred and seven knots in length, and, when he had pricked off the course on the chart, Raunce called upon Joyce and the mate to behold the fruit of conquest.

"That's what the old hooker's done," he said with abounding content, "when some of you thought she was booked for Kingdom Come. Three hundred and twenty-five knots the first day, three hundred and seventy the second, and then, for a slap-bang wind-up, four hundred and twelve. Better than the best. You'd never have thought it of her when we picked her up in the Pacific—eh? But then ships are much like folks—you should never judge either by what they wear. Not," he hesitated a moment, his eyes twinkling, "that I'm against dress in its proper place and I don't see why the boat shouldn't have her reward. She's out to win two things this voyage, and, for a start, I reckon she's won a coat of paint. So, as soon's the weather moderates we'll touch her up. Let me see, Joyce. What is it? Hull black, with dummy ports and a gold stripe; lower masts oak grained and upper masts white, bulwark panels white, with a green stencil; and deck houses and all the rest to match. That's the ticket, my

lassie—isn't it? Good Lord! Four hundred and twelve knots in a day! What no other ship has ever done. She's earned all the paint afloat."

VI.

Great is the transforming power of paint. Out of the dissolute derelict picked up at Brisbane it produced a marine dandy. By the time they rounded the Cape the ship had ceased to be a drab: she swept past St. Helena's somber front tricked out in glorified patchwork, and she raised the Lizard Light in queenly apparel. Her class she plainly declared to those with eyes to see. At any rate Captain Peter Snell, of the Liverpool tug *Crowing Cock,* had no doubt on the matter when she hove in sight off the Tuskar. At the end of a night's cruising "on spec" he picked her up an hour after sunrise, her hull burnished by the flood of light to the sheen of beaten copper, her sails as webs of ivory.

"Well, I'm blest!" he gasped, and, slipping abaft the funnel, he called on the engineer to "Look what's comin', Tom! A prize packet. One of the tea boats. We're in luck. She'll be ready t' take steam without barging a lot about the price."

Screening off the sun with his hands he closely scrutinized the bark. "Can't christen her," he growled, and reached for his glasses, whereupon confusion gripped him. "Here's a rum streak. Clipper I've never heard of. *Back Number.* And flying a house flag I've never sighted afore. As delicate as a lady's pocket handkerchief. Looks like a bit o' woman's work. White, with a blue edge, and if it isn't made o' silk I'll eat the timber head. *Back Number.* Which is what she doesn't look. Though she does happen t' be wooden built. Anyhow, that's not the point. What matters is putting a line aboard before some other tug nips along. She's not likely t' want steam at present; but this wind isn't going to hold and she'll be glad of a rope before she's athwart Point Lynas. So we'll put about and go easy till she overhauls us." And then, as the mate joined him on the bridge, "Can't make her out nohow, Dick. There's something about her I ought to remember, and yet—*Back Number*—never heard tell of such a craft. Such a daft name too! No manner of sense in it."

Assured that as long as the wind held any offer of service would be rejected, he planned to let the bark go ahead and himself follow in her wake; but the impetuous wayfarer desired his conversation as well as his company—a flutter of signal flags said so—and almost before she got within hail a strident voice clamored for news.

"Tug ahoy! When did you leave Liverpool?"

"Come out on yesterday morning's tide, sir."

"Any news of the tea boats?"

It was a tall man with a lean frame who asked the question and his eagerness for the answer was betrayed by the way he stretched far out over the rail, hand to straining ear.

"Not a word, sir. Don't think they're expected just yet." A pause, and then: "Do you happen to be tea, sir?"

"We are, my son." Triumphantly the declaration rang across the intervening strip of water flood. "And glory be, we've done it. Eighty-seven days from Foo-Choo! Broke the record and licked the lot."

Eighty-seven days. Licked the lot. Every man aboard the tug pounced upon the words and echoed them in reverential wonder. But ere they had time to raise a cheer they beheld that girl on the poop throw her arms around the captain's neck and the mate grip him by the hand, though the *Crowing Cock* was too far away for them to catch Thorne's naïve avowal, "Well, I don't rightly know what it's all about, sir, but I'm mighty glad whatever it is."

As for Raunce, he was stricken dumb. This was the supreme hour of his life and therefore beyond speech. Abruptly he turned and walked away aft, but swiftly that strength of will which had carried him through so many vicissitudes mastered emotion, and back he went to the rail with another call:

"You don't seem to know me, Peter Snell."

It was an illuminating challenge. It roused the tugboat skipper to a fling of the arms and a shout of exultation. "Dash my deadlights if it isn't Old Fearnought. The Old Man himself. Did ye hear, boys?" This to his crew. "Old Fearnought. Him what got fired for growing old. And now he comes spanking home again with a fresh record. Eighty-seven days from Foo-Choo. And licked the bloomin' pack. Those crack noo ships among 'em. Oh, boys, but this is mighty!"

So mighty indeed that his tug must acclaim it in the tug's own fashion, and there and then he plucked at the siren cord and the *Crowing Cock* screamed a raucous cock-a-doodle-do into the waste places of the sea. His men also lifted up their voices in a lusty shout and the crew of *The Back Number* hung upon the rail and acknowledged the cheer with one of greater fervor and deeper volume.

But the appetite of Captain Peter Snell was merely whetted. He wanted more. For five minutes he gave his eyes a spell of desperately hard work and then through his megaphone he hailed again: "Cap'n Raunce, ahoy! Where did you happen t' pick up your noo command? Can't call her t' mind."

"I picked her up in the Pacific. She was called the *Dom Pedro* and she hoisted the Peruvian flag. Before that she was the *Isidoro,* sailing under Italian colors."

"And what flag might she have sailed under before that?"

"Under the best flag of all, Peter Snell," John Raunce roared back, and he rounded it all off with a command to the mate. "It's time for the paint brushes again," he said. "Those damned letters. We'll have them wiped out. There's only one name for the boat now. She's won it back again. *Fearnought* of Liverpool. And tell the boys to paint it well."

So, with her name restored, the famous old clipper rounded the northwest lightship in the wake of the tug. But without ostentation, as became a ship of her repute. This being much to the disappointment of Peter Snell, against whom John Raunce had threatened all manner of penalties if he so much as laid a finger on his siren cord. As sedately as in the old days she slipped up to the Sloyne, and having put down his anchor off the Salthouse Dock and obtained his bill of health, the captain was rowed ashore and at once betook himself to Silver Alley to report his arrival at Dougal's. "Must have everything done shipshape," he explained to Joyce. And even as he had been hailed between the Tuskar and Point Lynas, so now was he greeted again.

"Why, if it isn't Old Fearnought!"

Cheerily also they made him welcome and begged for news of his wanderings and the manner of his arrival. But when in a voice that rigidly suppressed the ring of exultation he proclaimed his triumph, a sense of deep awe fell upon them and they regarded him almost as one returned from the dead.

"Oh, I've come home just as I used to do. Ship's lying in the river. Left Foo-Choo three days after the crowd. Made the passage in eighty-seven days, port to port. You wouldn't see me reported, for I made my departure aboard a disgraceful old tub called *The Back Number.* Only it happens that on the way she found her proper name again. It's the one she passed on to me when we were both a bit younger."

Afterward, astonishment having spent itself, they clamored for details, and Raunce filled in a few of the blanks. There was nothing to fuss about, he protested. Once he had found his ship the rest was plain sailing. Secrecy was the most awkward part of the business, especially when it came to getting a cargo, but even that was fixed up all right, thanks to his old friend Donaldson, the tea man at Foo-Choo, the only one who shared the secret with Joyce. For the rest Thorne worked it finely—without asking questions—and no one ever suspected his old wooden draggle tail. Wood! That was part of the explanation. Good honest teak. None of your new-fangled iron boxes. And there was nothing more. He had cleared his name, regained his rank—the proof was swinging to an anchor in the river. Docking next tide.

"And after that," Andrew Dougal slyly insinuated, "I s'pose you'll be trying to knock a few more hours off the passage."

But Raunce shook his head. "I'll leave that to others," he said. "Think I'll give Joyce and Gilbert Thorne a chance. The old *Fearnought* 'll make an A-1 wedding present."

Another fine sea story by Mr. Wildridge will appear in an early number.

Ten Knights in a Ballroom

By C. S. Montanye

Author of "Christopher of Columbus, Ohio," "Huckleberry Flynn," Etc.

Ottie Scandrel's luck deserts him—but not Sollie Fishkin.

BACK around the time when Nero was teaching Rome a thing or two about the fine art of violin playing somebody made a remark that had to do with finding good in the worst of things. The party who made the wise crack said something, for a fact. The truth of the assertion was kicked home one night at a little flicker theater in Edgemont, New Jersey, known to the yokelry as the Jewel Movie Palace. There, Ottie Scandrel, the baseball impresario, myself, and three of the Edgemont Tigers—the team of which he was lord and master—knocked the place for five orchestra seats at a bit of entertainment entitled "The Poisoned Bolognie." The picture was a Compo Screencraft Feature. It was one of those masterpieces that left you in doubt. You didn't know whether it called for a tear or a sneer. Two reels of it and Scandrel was slapped dizzy.

"Well, well, well!" he hollered when the film went bad and ran wild. "This is certainly the bunk and no mistake. If they call antics like this drama then Paul Revere never saw a horse!"

"Babe" Benton, the Tigers' sterling catcher, got over a mild case of hysterics inspired by a pathetic love scene between Rupert Romaine, the famous screen lover and Vivian la Grand, who took the part of the fair but penniless *Lady Diana Carstairs.*

"This is immense!" Benton declared. "These here slap-stick comedies certainly smack me for the guffaws. I wonder when they begin to throw the pies?"

Ottie gave me his elbow.

"Come on, Joe, let's walk. If them imbeciles want to stick around and make blockheads of themselves, let them. I got a date with the pad!"

I looked under the seat for my hat. There was no sign of it there until I found Ottie had his foot in it.

"Let's go!" I said. "The quicker the faster!"

We pushed our way down the aisle and reached the back of the theater. Just as we got there the crank artist in the upstairs booth patched the film together and began to unwind it again. As it clicked off we both turned for a backward glance and found the screen completely covered with a close-up of Vivian la Grand. She was getting rid of a quart or two of glycerin tears.

Ottie and I stopped for a look at the newest style in movie weeping.

During the first scenes of the picture Vivian la Grand had not seemed any different from the usual run of silver-sheet heroines. That is, she possessed eyes, mouth, a sad smile and all the rest of it. But in the close-up there was a difference. There, enlarged a few thousand times, was a dark-eyed beauty who could have given Venus a few points in the art of pulchritude. Not

only was she vastly attractive but she had an appealing look that made Scandrel lift a hasty brow.

"Where did *that* little gal come from?" he barked. "I think—eh—maybe we ought to see this here fillum through, after all, Joe. What's the use of us tossing two shillings to the canaries? Come on, let's get them seats back before somebody spots 'em and I have to fight the theater!"

With that he rushed down the aisle, leaving me to stumble after him. Honestly, whenever there's trouble, don't you always find a woman responsible for it? It's a cinch that if Scandrel had known *then* what he was to find out later he'd have passed the picture up and thereby saved his pride, his pocketbook and himself considerable mental anguish.

However, what you don't know won't hurt you.

The Edgemont Tigers, the nine Ottie had bought for cash, and an important unit in the New Jersey Central League, was quite the team. The fact that Scandrel knew less about the management of a ball club than the average person does about clog dancing didn't keep him from feeding his players on a diet of his own conceited ideas. The remarkable part of it was that the team, after he got through, shaped up as well as the "Follies." They not only opened the season in a blaze of glory but settled down to lead the league, working like a troupe of trained mechanics who had been born in the same neighborhood.

Although Manager Scandrel, always a hero in his own eyes, took credit for the Tigers' showing it was really a party known as Mike Rafferty who had propped up the Edgemont outfield and greatly improved the sack department. As smart as Shylock and as clever as a girl with two dates, Rafferty was a free-lance scout who dragged down the pennies by touring the country and pulling Columbuses out in the sticks. Rumor had it that Rafferty cleaned up a Standard Oil income annually. Whether it was true or not the fact remained that my boy friend had paid him *beaucoup* gold for the garden assistants, a shortstop and a couple of pitchers. All of the purchases were nifty and like brass knuckles made themselves felt at once. As was to be expected the Tigers forged rapidly to the front. They stayed there until hard luck knocked the twirling division for room on the shelf. In other words, the regular pill benders had arms as bad as bandits and, like glass, went all to pieces. Shortly thereafter, with substitutes striving valiantly, the team began to slip. By the time "Smoke" O'Brien, one of the first victims of the malady of misfortune, had recovered sufficiently to make a second début the Tigers had lost most of their stripes.

This worried Ottie Scandrel the same as the loss of a needle to a wealthy dressmaker. Ottie, while the team was slipping, had divided his time between Edgemont and Wall Street, New York. The big buffoon, bitten by the oil bug, imagined himself another Morgan and with the savings of a lifetime in a paper bag blithely ducked into Manhattan to take the Stock Exchange and reduce most of the heavy plungers there to the point of starvation.

Not so good!

One morning a couple of weeks after the team was beginning to climb up out of the cellar Babe Benton threw open the door of Ottie's private office and stuck his head in.

"Hey, chief," the big catcher bawled, "there's a mock orange outside labeled Fishkin who wants to have a powwow with you. What'll I do?"

Scandrel laid aside the latest copy of the *Sucker Tips,* a stock-market paper, and looked up.

"Fishkin? I never heard them tell of him. Don't be bothering me when I'm busy."

Benton dropped a nod and disappeared. When the door closed behind him Ottie picked up the ticker news and began to look the dope over as if he knew what it was all about. He had just finished advising me to buy Oleomargarine Preferred when Benton snapped back.

"Hey, chief. This Fishkin claims to be a pitcher. He says it's important."

"Give him the street!" Ottie growled. "If I chewed the rag with all the tramps craving interviews I'd have the Salvation Army looking for customers. Ain't that a fact, Joe?"

The catcher took this with a knowing grin.

"Sure, *I* believe you. But this mockie says he has a letter from Mike Rafferty. How does that listen?"

"That makes it different! Why didn't you say that first? Mike Rafferty, eh? Slip him in in a hurry. I'd as soon offend

Mike as I would poison one of the pet bloodhounds of the Prince of Wales," Scandrel said to me when we were alone again.

Two minutes later and the Babe returned chaperoning Ottie's caller. One look at Sollie Fishkin—as he called himself—and neither of us knew whether to laugh or sympathize with him. Really, the young man was a catastrophe in the line of good looks. Five feet minus in height, Sollie had a pan on him that was one of nature's ludicrous mistakes. Equipped with a pair of beady black eyes and a nose so large that if it had grown another inch he would have swallowed it, he owned up to a pair of ears, that hung out like the Monday wash, and a perpetual smirk. To enhance his attractive appearance Fishkin was turned out in tricky clothes that consisted of white flannels, a lavender neckpiece, high-heeled sport dogs and a straw skimmer that successfully concealed nine eighths of the ivory.

While we were drinking him in as if he were water Fishkin tripped across the room and shoved a letter into Scandrel's fin.

"Off Mike Rafferty!" he chirped. "Go ahead—read it!"

Ottie gave him a look that would have burned up asbestos.

"Act regular!" he snarled. "Don't be giving me no orders. Find a chair and speak when you're spoken to."

The tone of Scandrel's voice would have made the average person go red-headed. Fishkin, however, took it with a smile and a bow and sat down. When Benton finished passing me a wink and retired, Sollie looked across, pulled a silly smile and began to toss the ball of conversation about. He was halfway through telling me what a swell ball park Edgemont had when Ottie passed a plea for quiet and opened the letter given him.

While Fishkin was apologizing for being out of order the owner of the Tigers stabbed the note with a nasty eye and turned to his visitor.

"Mike says that you've been tossing them on a bush team out around the Pennsylvania coal mines. He says you're good and that——"

"I admit it!" Fishkin exclaimed, getting up so quickly that he stumbled over his own feet. "Listen. I want you should hear my record. When it comes to shut-out ball pitching——"

"Behave yourself!" Scandrel snapped. "Who asked you to go into a song and dance? Sit down and don't be clowning around. Rafferty says you're good and recommends I give you a trial but that ain't no reason for you to get a sunstroke. My pill-shooting department has been in the dispensary lately but they're almost out of splints now. For that reason I don't know whether I can use you or not."

"You can!" Sollie cut in hastily. "Give me a trial and I'm yours for keeps. What time shall I show up for batting practice to-morrow morning?"

Scandrel appeared to have difficulty in breathing. Finally he cooled enough to be able to talk again.

"Get yourself some sense!" he ordered roughly. "You take more for granted than a district attorney. Er—drop over some morning next week and I'll see what you got."

"Fine!" Fishkin giggled. "How about ten o'clock to-morrow?"

"You heard me!" Ottie yelped. "You ought to—with them ears."

Sollie grinned like a beagle. I got the idea he was as insulted as a show girl who had just been told she was exceedingly good looking.

"Ten o'clock sharp to-morrow then! Sure! Positively!"

With that he made a quick exit and beat an inkwell out by inches. Scandrel put his feet on the desk and reached for a fresh stogie.

"Equal that one, Joe, if you're able. One of them fresh girls that know more about nerve than a dentist's family. A case of hate at first sight, for a fact. What'll I do? It's nickels to doughnuts that Mike will be as sore as a sprain if I don't grab this lad. Rafferty is that touchy. But what do I want with a freak like Fishkin? If appearance counts for anything this boy isn't worth a handful of German scratch."

"Why not give him a trial and see how he totals up?" I suggested. "You can't judge a book by its cover any more than you can a race horse by the shape of its hoofs or the weather by a morning newspaper. Give him a work. It won't be anything out of your pocket and at least you can assure Rafferty you did your best."

"Maybe you're right at that," Scandrel replied thoughtfully. "I'll try this baby out. If he's there and his price is cheap I'll sign him. And that ain't all I'll do. If he

opens his peep I'll lay him like a carpet. That's a promise!"

Babe Benton hurled open the door again.

"Hey, chief, there's a party outside who wants to see you. The name is Maddock. What'll I do?"

Ottie swung around in his chair.

"Another one? And you say the name is Maddock? What's he—a pitcher, too?"

"Yeah—moving pitchers," the catcher explained. "He claims to represent the Compo Screencraft Features. I guess you've heard of them—they're one of them big deaf-and-dumb drama factories out on the coast."

"The movies?" Scandrel barked. "This is a horse of a different tint. What are you keeping him waiting outside for? Get manners. Send him in at once!"

Slightly excited Ottie jumped up and washed his hands. After that he brushed his hair twice, fingered his six-dollar necktie and looked at me.

"What do you suppose they want?" I queried.

He pulled down his fancy waistcoat and chuckled.

"Maybe they're looking for a leading man. Honest, if the bucket shops paste me again *I'll* be looking for a job as a leading man. That's how bad it's been since Contemptible Copper got beat down by the bears."

Before I could sympathize with him Benton ushered in the morning's second caller. Maddock proved to be a debonair and dapper individual who evidently dressed to assassinate. A diamond headlight was tucked away in his cravat, he wore chamois gloves and a pearl-gray derby that burlesque would have devoured eagerly. Ottie took his engraved card, introduced me and dusted off a chair.

"So you're connected with the Compo people? Well, I'm certainly glad to know you. How is Miss la Grand?"

Maddock registered polite surprise.

"Fine and dandy. Are you acquainted with her?"

"Not yet," Scandrel confessed, "but give me a chance. I only seen her once—in 'The Poisoned Liverwurst'—I think it was. She's the candy and no mistake there. Is she married or engaged or does her mother get her salary?"

"At last reports from the West-coast studio," Maddock smiled, "Miss la Grand was neither. She's leaving to-morrow for the Manhattan scenes in a picture I'll tell you about shortly. It might be a good idea for me to explain exactly why I dropped in, Mr. Scandrel. I am directing the destinies of the Eastern branch of the industry. Just at the moment we are all set to begin shooting a big spectacular picture which we are calling 'Ten Knights in a Ballroom.' This is a combination of medieval and present pageantry. Briefly, we trace through from the Garden of Eden to the present time. The script calls for Daniel in the lions' den and——"

"Sure," Ottie interrupted cheerfully. "I heard of *him*. But do you know why Daniel didn't get hurt?"

Maddock bit like a salmon.

"No, why?"

"Because," Scandrel chuckled, "they were dandy lions. Laugh that off and let's hear the rest of it."

"To continue," Maddock resumed, "in the last reel we are staging a gigantic baseball scene. The continuity, naturally, calls for a baseball park as a location. This is my reason for looking in on you. If you will agree to allow us to use Edgemont Park for six or seven mornings you can write your own ticket on the rent. How does that listen?"

"Like a sympathy orchestra!" Ottie barked promptly. "I suppose that this means that Miss la Grand knock-out will be on the premises? What could be sweeter? We won't have no trouble talking turkey. That's a promise!"

They didn't at that.

An hour later an agreement was drawn up and signed. The motion-picture representative wrote out a check as a deposit and picked up his gray shed.

"You'll hear from us in the course of a day or two," Maddock murmured. "I can't tell you now when we will start work out here. It all depends on Al Brady, our director. If he stays sober we ought to be setting up the camera toward the end of the month."

After another dash or two of repartee Ottie showed the visitor out and came back rubbing his hands.

"Get that, O'Grady? If this ain't a lucky break then anybody can get a kick out of a soft drink. Really, if luck was toys I'd be Santa Claus every night in the year. Just when the stock market is going cuckoo too! Pass the chicory over this way, Joe.

I want to get my brokers on the wire and level off on a thousand shares of Neurotic Steel. If I ain't a millionaire yet it won't be my fault!"

Dark and early the next morning, when the Tigers, chalked up for an afternoon fracas with the Seabright Sentinels, appeared for their usual setting-up exercises there was one player too many on the field. This was a small but familiar figure who was tricked out in an Edgemont uniform three or four sizes too large for him. Ottie, camped on the players' bench, took a look at the stranger and nudged one of the outfielders.

"Who's that added number?" he roared.

"Him?" the outfielder smiled. "Why, that's Mr. Fishkin. He says you O. K.'d him yesterday. So Smoke give him one of the uniforms and——"

Scandrel didn't wait to hear more. He overtook Fishkin between the platter and the mound, caught him by the shoulder, whirled him around and cuffed him twice in the same place.

"I ought to knock you stiff as starch, you dizzy oil can!" he raved. "If ten minutes' conversation makes you a member of this team I suppose a half an hour of it would give you leave to pick my pockets! Tear out of them clothes and make it hasty or I'll give you something beside which Rip van Wrinkle's twenty-year slumber will look like an afternoon nap."

Sollie Fishkin got up, brushed himself off and put on his hat.

"Yes, sir. No, sir. I—I guess I—now—didn't get you right. Didn't you tell me to be out here at ten o'clock sharp without fail?"

"I never said no such thing!" Ottie shouted.

Sollie grinned at the team that surrounded him like a diamond wedding ring on a blondie's finger.

"Ain't that comical? I could have swore that's what you said. I guess I got rotten hearing. But seeing that I am here why not give me a—now—try-out? Honest, I don't want to boast nor nothing but——"

Ottie turned to me.

"This baby sets me up in flames, Joe. You gate him before I lose my temper and have to face a jury for doing something I ought never to have even thought of!"

"Let him strut his stuff," I advised. "See what he's got and have it over with one way or another."

Ottie swung around and faced the subject of our remarks.

"You win!" he sighed. "Get out in the box and perform. Smother his line, Babe."

"This is just like it should be," Fishkin chirped, taking a glove from the player nearest him. "Let's go, fellars!"

He turned toward the mound, tripped, apologized, and called for the pellet.

Sollie wasn't an untamed phenom but at the same time he wasn't so terrible. His principal assets were a good control and a slow curve—which he used whenever he had two strikes hung on the batter—a fast drop and a straight one with not a little stuff on it. His liabilities were his supreme confidence in himself, the size of his feet and a clumsy awkwardness that made an ordinary bull in a china shop look like a lap dog in a limousine.

He worked a few innings and then came over to the bench as pleased with himself as a chorus girl with a diamond wrist watch.

"Is my—now—contract ready?" he began. "Scott and Ruether together ain't got hardly a thing on me, ain't it so? When do we sign?"

"Get over on the side lines or I'll sign you one on the eye!" Ottie snapped. "You're in more of a hurry than the country is for light wines and beer. Who do you think I am—Edison? Beat it now and leave me think you over."

"No, sir. Yes, sir!" Fishkin smirked, moving away.

Scandrel sighed and looked across the diamond.

"I suppose I'll have to take a chance on him because of Rafferty. No fooling, I'll bet he's a bust and already he's as popular with me as the French in the Ruhr. Wait'll I get him in the clubhouse and start to push it to him. I'll give him his contract—certainly—but I'll have him working for me for nothing, I will positively!"

Ottie's ideas were all right but——

As it turned out the argument over the salary would have delighted vaudeville and put an average audience in stitches. Scandrel wanted to give Fishkin a thousand berries less than his other twirlers were working for. The young man, on the other hand, wanted exactly one grand more. It was a meeting between a rock and a hurricane with Ottie impersonating the latter. And, like a rock in a hurricane, threats, two slaps on the jaw and a general shaking up failed

to move Sollie. At four bells, when the dust of conflict settled, Scandrel stuck his self-leaking fountain pen in the ink and passed it across to the victor.

"You'd better ring up the wagon—the heat's got me!" he moaned when Fishkin sidled out with the papers. "The little stiff used hypnotism. I ought to have called for Constable John Law instead of bickering with him. Come on, I got gypped out of my lunch as well as the dough. Let's breeze down Main Street and gather up a little chowder. I need nourishment!"

We left the clubhouse and discovered the Edgemont Tigers were more than holding their own against the aggressive but loose-playing Seabright Sentinels, a team up from southern New Jersey. My boy friend took a look at the score board, recovered some of his complexion and headed for the headquarters of the Edgemont nine. This was the honorable but ancient Hotel Fiasco in the central section of the town. There Ottie had finished his lunch when word came in that the Tigers had copped. This had the same effect on him as money on a beggar.

"So much for that. Er—the cigars are on me, Joe!"

He swaggered out into the lobby of the hostelry, shot his cuffs and headed for the cigar counter. This branch of the business was taken charge of by a charming demoiselle who might have been sweet sixteen or suspicious forty-eight. She dressed and looked like a flapper, had bobbed hair the color of mustard and owned up to the name of Ethel Hastings. For the rest Ethel handled a wicked Havana, was as full of smiles as a baby with a dollar's worth of candy and was ready to tear off the conversation on the slightest pretext.

Once our weeds were drawing freely Miss Hastings broke down and gave way to a series of hilarious laughs.

"Oh, dear," she giggled, "he's positively the funniest thing. He's a whole show in himself!"

"Who—Al Jolson?" Ottie inquired.

Ethel shook the peroxide.

"No, that amusing Mr. Fishkin who maintains that he's the newest but best pitcher on the team. Absolutely, he's as delicious as pie. Just a while ago he was telling me how he used to pick cigars off the tobacco trees down on his father's plantation——"

"And go out and smoke them under the coupon bushes?" Scandrel hissed. "Drop an anchor on that chatter of his. He's so nutty that his last name ought to be Hickory. Take a tip from me and keep your eye on the cash register when Fishkin is around!"

Miss Hastings lost her smile.

"I think you're jealous," she said. "He strikes me as being a perfect gentleman."

"No perfect gentleman would strike a woman!" Scandrel cut in quickly. "But why talk of unpleasant things? Er—I see where that delightful Vivian la Grand is playing in a new picture down at the Jewel. How about me buying a box off a speculator for to-night's performance? The movies are the taffy to you, ain't they?"

Miss Hastings slipped a little powder on her beak and sniffed.

"Thank you, but that Vivian la Grand is one person I simply cannot tolerate. She's as phony as a switchboard operator and how she ever got her popularity is beyond me. I hear that she wears a wig and that off the screen she's a total loss. They tell me that, in round numbers, she's forty-seven and that——"

"Hold the wire!" Ottie broke in. "Somebody's been telling you bedtime stories. Miss la Grand lives up to her name in every sense of the word. Er—you'd better not miss this picture to-night. It's called 'The Iceman's Bride' and it's one of them dramas of the Frozen North. They say there's one scene where Miss la Grand fights six parlor bears single-fisted and——"

"Anyway," the stogie queen continued decidedly, "I just made a date to go to a dance down at Terpsichore Hall. I'll confess that it's with that delightful Mr. Fishkin. Oh, yes, he gave me to understand he's got medals for throwing his feet around the dance floor."

"If he's got medals it's for throwing something that ain't feet," Ottie snorted. "So you'd rather string with him than me? All right. Only, some day when I pull up to the curb in a big car you know what you're going to say."

"Sure," Miss Hastings replied sweetly, "I'll say, 'Two transfers, please!'"

Haven't we fun?

Sollie Fishkin working on a Tiger contract was twice as bad as Sollie Fishkin looking for a job. The team, amused by his first nonsense, got over it speedily and after a few choice samples of his forwardness took

to him the same as tonsilitis. After Sollie had pointed out each player's faults and told them how they could improve their game the Edgemont crowd retired behind a barricade of silence and locked the door behind them.

"This here Fishkin!" O'Brien muttered on several occasions. "Do you suppose his nose makes him so nosey? Every time I turn a corner I fall over him. Then when he begins them musical-comedy jokes of his I fall *on him*. But what good does it do? A cork might learn a few tricks off Sollie. The way he bobs up after you lay him is more remarkable than remarkable itself. He'll be a pitcher that goes to the well once too often!"

Being ostracized and made a social outcast pleased Fishkin more than it annoyed him. It gave him a chance to talk without being interrupted and clown around without interference. He carried his comic-opera traits out to the box with him and registered heavy with the fans by pulling foolishness that had Scandrel frothing at the mouth. Any time or place suited Sollie as long as he had an audience. And being knocked for a goal discouraged the young man not at all.

Really, he was a revue in himself.

During the first week of his stay at the Hotel Fiasco, Fishkin ruined more dinners than an amateur cook—not only with his conversation but his table manners. They were worse than terrible. The minute it was table time Sollie was the first man in the room. The instant he was in a chair he'd grab the weapons and wade in to the tips of his silly ears. The first time Ottie observed him eating with his knife he seized Fishkin by the shoulder and slapped him like a baby.

"Hey!" Scandrel hollered. "Lay off that sword swallowing. If you want to get rid of your tonsils see a physician!"

"Ha-ha!" Fishkin laughed. "I been eating this way for fifteen years and I ain't got a cut yet!"

After that Ottie didn't care if the youth stuck a fork in his eye.

Still agitated because of the contract he had been talked out of and the amount he had been talked into, Manager Scandrel pursued a policy of revenge by working Fishkin as much as possible. Sollie, under fire, was as cool as the mountains in February and as ludicrous as their summer-resort literature in August. Whenever he laid off the cut-up he showed an even performance but these occasions happened only once in a blue moon. When he was right he could show nine innings that were almost a classic in the pitching art. His curve and fast ball worked beautifully and his control would be almost uncanny. The very next day, however, Fishkin would give the tallies away with the generosity of a spendthrift and go up like a kite in the third or fourth chapter. Then Ottie went red-headed. Honestly, Shakespeare at the height of his popularity never wrote more scathing dialogue than the owner of the Edgemont Tigers delivered.

But no matter with what force he put the verbal fireworks over a bawling out worried Fishkin the same as zero temperature does an Eskimo. He laughed it off and put Ottie in a blaze by sauntering indifferently away when he was still talking.

Three weeks after the début of Mr. Fishkin the regular pitching staff of the Tigers was back on the job and the Edgemont fans were beginning to say, "Yes, we have a ball team!" again. In addition to Smoke O'Brien, whose stuff was essentially the real bonded goods, Scandrel had Con Dawson, a young southpaw, doing well on the mound for the home team. With these two in form again and Fishkin turning in an occasional good day the team got a throat hold on third position in the league and kept within striking distance of the Red Bank Pirates, the leaders.

The good showing of his bingle busters brought a fresh rush of optimism to Scandrel. His favorite indoor sport was mentally adding up his own personal share and profits of the championship-series purses. It needed less than little for Ottie to imagine that the Tigers were as good as in and, with unbelievable sang-froid, he gathered up the remains of his bank account and prepared to startle Wall and Broad Streets by snapping up a few thousand shares of Confusion Oil. That Neurotic Steel and Oleomargarine Preferred had passed completely out of the picture were trifles already forgotten.

With Scandrel's imagination Napoleon would have sliced up the universe like a layer cake and consumed it with a spoon!

Two mornings after the Edgemont Tigers, with Con Dawson at the counter, had taken the Trenton Cards for a walk I reached the

ball park and found it in the possession of the Compo Screencraft Features. With at least two thirds of the hamlet's population congregated about the players' entrance and the other third boring holes in the fence it took twenty minutes to battle a way into the interior. Once there the view was somewhat astonishing. Over near the initial sack a camera had been set up fronting a group of interested bystanders whose combined gaze was focused on the box. There, tricked out in a black-and-white uniform that needed only baby Irish lace to set it off was a handsome youth who looked vaguely familiar. He had classical features, long-lashed eyes and a complexion, so sweet and pretty, that any of the feminine population of Broadway would have been glad to trade a limousine for it. I recognized him as being no other than the beautiful Rupert Romaine.

Facing an imaginary batter Romaine was in the act of winding up when a red-faced little jobbie who wore a cigar almost as tall as himself stepped away from the camera, yelled something through a megaphone and cantered out to the slab.

"'At's all wrong, Rupert! You're playing baseball now—not golf! You wind up like a tin boat. Put some steam in it!"

"But, Mr. Brady," Romaine protested, "you must make allowances. Considering the game as something of a rowdy sport I have never observed a regulation pitcher in action. My method of tossing the ball is the result solely of how I imagine it is being done."

Brady grinned crookedly.

"Then you'd better take it in the other arm. Here, let me show you how to groove them over."

He took the horsehide and was wrapping his fingers about it when there was a slight interruption. This was furnished by Sollie Fishkin who broke out of the crowd back of the camera. With his usual colossal impudence Sollie marched out to the platform, took the ball away from Brady and moistened his fingers.

"Watch me!" he advised. "It ain't hard when you know how to do it. Pull your right arm up fast——"

"I'll pull both of mine up fast!" the director snarled. "Who asked you to cut in on this explanation?"

"That's positively all right," Fishkin replied, continuing with the demonstration. "Watch me and you should learn how," he said to the astounded Rupert Romaine. "Snap up your right arm and——"

With that Brady's complexion went tomato. When I turned toward the clubhouse he was poking Mike Rafferty's discovery on the chin. The last I saw of Sollie was when he was getting up, brushing himself off and apologizing.

Scandrel was in the lounge room of the clubhouse—but not alone. Languidly reclining on the most comfortable chair in sight was a young lady so beautiful that one look at her and Mark Antony would have turned his back forever on the Nile. This member of the rare sex was as dark as one a. m., with eyes more intoxicating than absinth and a figure that Dumas would have described as willowy. If the Queen of Sheba could be called attractive Ottie's companion was twice the same with compound interest added. And not only was she soothing to the glance but she had the manners of a débutante, the voice of a prima donna, the grace of a ballet dancer and the style of a society leader.

Scandrel, once he saw me, bounded forward, as tickled as a feather.

"Joe, this here is Miss la Grand, the Compo star. I suppose you seen Al Brady and the rest of them outside shooting that Romaine sapolio. Believe me, they ought to if they don't!" He turned to the seated divinity. "Miss la Grand, mitt a pal of mine, Joseph O'Grady. Joe used to mingle with the pug-uglies but lately he's been putting on a lot of dog and giving Edgemont the sunshine of his smile."

The screen winner bowed.

"I'm chawmed to know you, Mr. O'Grady. Have you been watching our picture? As you possibly know it's called 'Ten Knights in a Ballroom.' These latter scenes are not half as interesting as the portions we shot out on the coast. Rupert is quite excellent all through. He makes a perfect knight-errant——"

"Nightmare!" Ottie chuckled. "That party's entirely too lovely to my way of thinking. Which of the knights is he—Monday?"

Miss la Grand smiled.

"I'm afraid," she said, "you are slightly prejudiced."

Before Ottie could confess whether or not he was the door was thrown open by a tall bird who wore cheaters and a businesslike expression.

"Al's almost ready for you, Vivian!" he called in.

The famous screen beauty arose and gave her arm clock a tumble. This was an inexpensive trifle that had probably never cost a penny more than a couple of thousand cold.

"These directors," she cooed. "We are completely at their mercy."

She was halfway to the door when Scandrel coughed.

"Er—don't forget that lunch date you have with me, Bright Eyes. There's a classy kafe on the Pink Horse Turnpike. It's called Robber's Roost and I must say their chow is quite the sensation. Don't forget!"

The brunette staggered him with a dazzling smile.

"How could I?" she purred.

The instant she had swept majestically out Ottie straightened his cravat and sighed like a blast furnace.

"A regular momma gal to be sure! I'll give you even money that she'll be calling me Ottie and that I'll be calling her Vivian before twilight. If she ain't a queen then neither was Marion Antoinette. Picture me burning up the boulevards with her beside me in one of them big Austrian gas wagons! Don't say nothing, but I'm thinking seriously of buying one of them go-carts. The class, eh?"

I considered him with both curiosity and interest.

"Then Confusion Oil came through for you?"

He curled a lip in a sneer.

"Don't be mentioning that stock to me. It fell like a safe but I ain't sobbing about it. I can take a loss without running into a nervous breakdown. And there's always more ways than one to raise money, ain't there?"

"Possibly," I admitted. "Which one are you thinking of?"

Scandrel winked.

"Ask me the same thing next week. And by the way, I almost forgot. Guess who I got a letter off this morning?"

"Some of your boy friends in Sing Sing?"

"You're as funny as a glass wagon!" Ottie snarled. "This letter was under the door when I got up. It was from that insipid Ethel Hastings. Really, I'm compelled to laugh. Eth says she'd like to go to the movies with me some night this week. I ought to send that note to some comic artist and get pictures drawn to go with it, hey?"

"Then you're not accepting?"

"Accepting?" He buttoned his absurdly tight jacket and grinned like a fox. "Do I seem on the verge of lunacy? Why should I want to break out with Ridiculous Ethel when I introduced myself to La Grand this morning, asked her to come in here out of the sun and made the same kind of a hit with her as the 'Follies' when they're in the sticks. She wanted to know if she hadn't seen me doing a piece of walk around on the Piccalilli—in London. That's the way I affected her!"

We went outside to see how the Ten Knights in the Ballroom were coming along and found Brady taking some close-ups of Vivian la Grand, while six or seven extras in feudal armor were rattling around like a bunch of flivvers.

There was no further sign of Scandrel until the following Tuesday. That afternoon the Tigers were entertaining visitors in the form of the Red Bank Pirates, the league leaders who were quite the heavy hitters and no more formidable than a trio of gunmen armed to the teeth. Because the home team had been showing good form the stands were crowded in anticipation of a battle royal. At the loss of two suspender buttons and a half a cigar I jammed a way through to the Tiger dugout and found Scandrel watching his protégés loosen up out on the field.

"Take the bench, Joe," was his greeting. "You're just in time to sample the real pimiento. This game's ours by a long count or I can't distinguish a glove from a bat. I got a little side bet riding that we take the Pirates and there's another reason why I want to cop. Get comfortable. O'Brien is doing the honors to-day."

The Edgemont twirler, once the game began, didn't start off in a blaze of red fire. For two innings the Pirates pounded him, the combination to his delivery safe in their possession. They showed some powerful stick work with the result there was all kinds of fancy hitting. Before O'Brien was shelled from the pitching peak in the beginning of the fourth Red Bank had gotten to him for eleven hits, three of which were home runs, one a double and one a triple.

"Just the day I wanted him to be good!" Ottie groaned, gnashing his teeth.

He rushed Con Dawson to the rescue and the southpaw proved almost unhittable.

With well-nigh perfect control and an exceptionally intricate ball Dawson held the enemy through until the sixth. During the interim the Tigers had staged a desperate rally, tying the score when Babe Benton poled out a circuit smash that went through the left-field bleachers. But the Edgemont enthusiasm was short-lived. In the next set-to Dawson was struck on the wrist by a wild throw and came in with his arm as limp as paper. The stands gave him sympathy but that didn't charm Ottie into a pleased frame of mind.

"Two sharpshooters out and the score even!" he moaned. "This leaves only that Fishkin imbecile to see us through and I got to send him in. Honest, if hard luck was real estate I'd have lots!"

He bawled for Sollie, who came running, tripped over one of his humorous feet, apologized, and pulled on a glove.

"Such a shame Dawson got hurted, ain't it so?" he snickered. "Still, it's a sick breeze that don't blow nobody something! Here's where I pitch the game of my life!"

"You pitch it or I'll take it!" Scandrel snarled. "Get out there and put us over or I'll smack you plenty!"

Fishkin smiled.

"No, sir. Yes, sir!"

Once in the box it really looked as if Fishkin was going to turn in one of his best performances. He blanked the first two Pirates that faced his fire and hung two and two on the next batter up. Then comedy inspired by the stands' applause got the better of him and he began his grotesque antics. Red Bank ate this sort of stuff alive. The man at the plate promptly drove to left for two bags, the fourth man up whipped the ball over third for a base hit. With two down then the next Pirate lifted a towering fly that dropped deep down in right field. This passed in two runs.

Scandrel, foaming, ripped off his coat and would have headed for Fishkin had not two of the park police caught him in time.

"Leave me go!" he roared. "This jocko is double crossing me! He signed under false pretenses! He's a comedian—not a pitcher!"

Fishkin, noticing the disturbance at the bench, tried to get himself in hand but with poor success. He had laughed himself into a jam but couldn't guffaw himself out of it. A triple and two doubles were charged against him before the inning ended. After that the Red Bank clouters kept piling it up until, when the curtain fell, the count was fifteen figures to eight—all in their favor.

The instant the game was over Fishkin disappeared like a bank teller with a time-table in his pocket and the constabulary released the raving Scandrel.

"This is the end—finis, as they say in Florida!" he swore. "Either that nut quits Edgemont or I ride him out on a rail! If he stays here another twenty-four hours I'll be bringing shame to the gray hairs of my parents!"

Babe Benton put in an appearance, shaking his head sadly.

"Then you'll have to step on it, chief. I just now saw Sollie making a hasty get-away by the players' exit."

Scandrel licked his lips and lost some of his color.

"All right. Leave him go. I know where he can be found and that's at the dinner table when it's time to put on the bags. Take it from me, I'll shake him to the soles of his feet." He licked his lips again like a mountain lion. "I had Mike Rafferty on the telephone this morning. I got something up my sleeve and it ain't no freckle neither! Stick around to-night if you want to see Sollie go out in pieces! You don't know the half of it!"

With that he turned away and headed for the main entrance into the ball grounds. When I caught up with him he was halfway across to the parking space where at least three dozen or more motors were standing. Stopping only to throw a sneer at a three-thousand-dollar perambulator Ottie stepped up on the running board of a gigantic red bus with wicked lines to it that were similar to those of a Union Pacific locomotive.

"A deadly job, eh, Joe?" he murmured, climbing in under the wheel and leaving the door open for me.

"Where did you find it?"

Scandrel touched a titillating toe to the starter.

"Well, if you must know, it was like this. Wall Street and the Stock Exchange rolled me out flat, they surely did. But I told you there was more ways than one. I'm packing the dough again heavily. I—eh—if the truth must be known, I sold a half interest in the Tigers——"

"You must be out of your mind!" I in-

terrupted. "The team has been a gold mine. Who did you sell it to?"

Ottie unlocked the gears.

"Don't be using that tone of voice to me. I guess I know what I'm doing. I sold a half interest in the club to some picture man Miss la Grand dug up for me—at more jack than I could have got elsewhere. That's the kind of a gal *she* is—always looking out for my interests. But enough of this yelp. The company—including that foolish Romaine—are doing some knighthood stuff down at the river. I'll drop you at the hotel!"

With the greatest of interest the Edgemont Tigers waited for seven o'clock in the dining room of the Hotel Fiasco. Benton had passed the word there were to be pyrotechnics and when the gong sounded there was a rush to the board. The first man in—as usual—was Sollie Fishkin, who dove into a chair, tied a napkin under his chin and seized the nearest bill of fare.

"Ha-ha!" he laughed. "Herring soup again! I——"

Before he could complete the statement there was a slight commotion at the door of the dining room. Hurling two waiters aside Scandrel strolled in followed by a stout gentleman with a dangerous jaw on him and a pair of hands that looked like boxing gloves. One glance was enough for me to recognize the redoubtable Mike Rafferty, baseball scout extraordinary.

"Drop that knife!" Scandrel bawled at the startled Fishkin, while the team almost lost an eye trying to get it all. "You're planted—hands down!" He turned to Rafferty. *"That's* the Fishkin party I was telling you about on the phone yesterday morning.

Rafferty stuck out his jaw.

"I never seen him before in my life!" he growled. "Stand up and let me look you over! Ottie tells me you brung him a letter off me!"

Nonchalantly Sollie dropped an elbow to the tablecloth, turned around in his chair and giggled.

"Ain't it so? Sure, I got my brother Max to write that letter. Why not? What are you going to do about it?"

Half tearing off his collar, Ottie rushed forward. But before he could slam over a couple of swings Fishkin jumped to his feet and dragged a paper out of his pocket. There was something in his attitude and the pose he struck that stopped Scandrel like a twelve-foot wall.

"Let me knock him first!" Rafferty begged, elbowing a way to the front. "The nerve of the little crook!"

"Just a minute!" Sollie cut in blithely. "Business is business. Take a look at this paper and then go ahead and beat me up!"

Scandrel snapped at the document, gave it a slant and shrugged.

"This here is some kind of a contract. What's it all about?"

While the Tigers waited breathlessly Fishkin giggled again and fingered one of his absurd ears.

"In baseball there's good money," he said softly. "My brother Max seen that too. That's why I joined the club—to figure out if it would pay thirty-five per cent on an investment. When I found out it was a good proposition I got my sister Esther to help me out. Honest, she's got brains like anything. So she took my savings and bought a half interest in the club through a second party. It's all in the papers—give them a look!"

Scandrel reeled back against Rafferty who, in turn, looked slightly dazed.

"Your—sister?" Ottie panted.

Sollie Fishkin nodded pleasantly.

"Exactly! Fishkin at home—La Grand in the movies—Romaine in the future—mebbe next month! Go ahead—beat me up!"

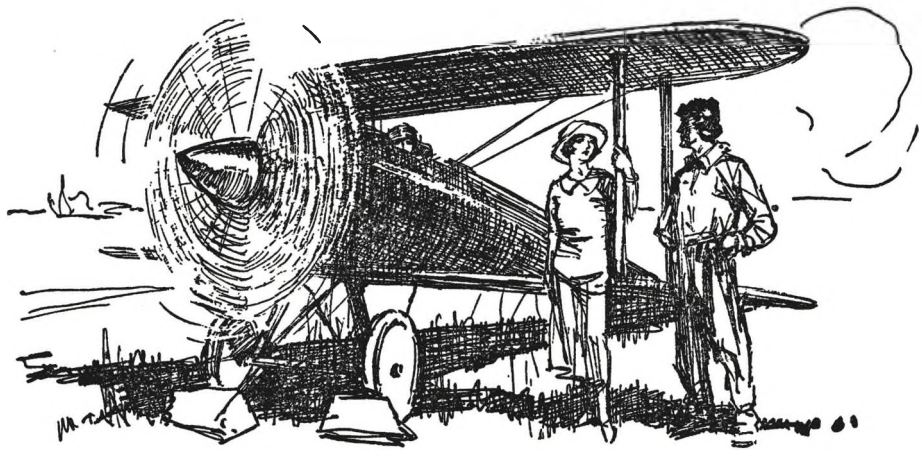
An hour later Ottie tottered out into the lobby and consulted with his watch. It was one thing his brokers had overlooked. He slipped it into his pocket and shot his cuffs.

"There's a poker game going on in Room 717," I said. "Unlucky in love——"

Scandrel sneered.

"Who said I was unlucky in love? Poker, hey? Them childish amusements don't get me. Er—I already got a date for this evening. No, it ain't with that Insipid Vivian, neither. It's with Ethel Hastings, a regular girl for the life of you—not no crook. We—we're going to the movies!"

Another Montanye story in the next number.



The Last Crash

By Kenneth Latour

Author of "The Sky Call," "The Vindication of Smith," Etc.

Most aviation stories are just good stories with airplanes in them. We have no objection to yarns of that sort. Those that we have published have been decidedly good reading. This aviation story is different—just how different you will realize as you read it. "The Last Crash" is something new in fiction—a real air story. Its author is a man who knows not only the technique of the airman's trade but also its spirit.—THE EDITOR.

JOHN NORRIS, whom you will remember as the man who flew the first straightaway from Langstrom Field to Cristobal, had a touch of the mystic in him, for all he was the sort of a man that good men favor. And in this, it may interest you to know, Norris wasn't different from most men of his calling. He was different, however, in this respect, that he was outspoken with his ideas about unearthly matters whereas most airmen keep their mysticism to themselves.

If Norris knew you and liked you he would tell you stories—stories to prove his conviction that "things do not *happen;* they are *arranged.*" He was a fatalist, you see.

Being a fatalist is one of the characteristic peculiarities of the flyer which he shares, perforce, in common with other men whose professions keep their spiritual elbows raw with constant rubbing against the harsh specter of sudden and violent death.

"There must be an explanation for the things that happen in the air," Norris once affirmed. "The papers call them 'accidents' but don't you believe it. They aren't accidents. They are consummations.

"I think this: A man is given a course to run; he runs it; and then he is wiped out. The manner, the time and the place of each man's last crash is already marked up on somebody's office tickler at Cosmic headquarters.

"Otherwise—why? Why should men like Hawker and Alcock, with all their biggest risks behind them, wash out on puny little expeditions that they undertook with no more thought than they would have given to drinking a cup of tea? Why should a ship running free and smooth catch fire in the air, for no good reason that is earthly?

"There is a reason, of course, but it has nothing to do with physical or mechanical flaws, if you ask me. The flaw is not the

cause. You've got to look for the cause in something behind the flaw. Did you ever hear of 'Last Crash' Cobb?"

The story of Billy Cobb, and how he came to his last crash, was one of Norris' classics. There is no denying that it points a moral —if you want to look at it that way.

This is what Halliday, the old crew chief, told the accident-investigating officer.

He was standing just outside hangar number three about six-thirty of that simmering August evening when Captain Cobb came in with *No. 59*. The pilot had executed his customary landing, a tight spiral directly over the field, followed by a spin and two accurately timed fishtails which brought the ship to ten feet where it leveled off up the wind and hovered swiftly to the ground.

Up to this point nothing unusual. Then the fantastic. A tire burst as the wheels touched. The crew chief heard the sharp report. A wheel crumpled. The right wing lurched sharply up and *No. 59* dove into a sudden cart wheel.

The crew chief was heading across the field, calling "Ambulance!" as he went, before the tangle of ripped canvas, splintered spars and tortured wires came to rest on its back, quivering.

There followed a significant stirring amid the mass of débris. The crew chief uttered a prayerful ejaculation of relief and stopped running. He saw a man emerge from the wreck of *No. 59*. It was Cobb—unrecognizable! His face was black with blood; his goggles—— But the rough preliminary transcription—slightly reconstituted—from the sergeant major's stenographic notes of the investigation tells the amazing incident in the words of the only close-up witness.

"Well, sir," the crew chief deposed, "like I said, I stopped when I seen the captain was starting to crawl out. I thought he was all right. I seen officers crawl out o' lots worse'n that, in my time, an' start cussin' as healthy as you please.

"But the minute I got a good look at Captain Cobb I knew different. You couldn't see his face for blood, an' by the way he put out his hands, kind o' feelin' ahead of him, I knew he was blind. His goggles, like you seen, was all crushed into his eyes.

"Well, sir, he staggered a step, or maybe two. Me, I was sort o' paralyzed. I just stood an' watched. The captain was a good friend o' mine an' it was my ship done it. I seen him stiffen up all of a sudden. Then he laid himself down careful, just like he was easin' into bed, you might say. He didn't fall, sir; he just laid down like he meant to be comfortable.

"Well, then he raised up a little on one elbow, an'—an'—— Now, sir, you says I got to tell you what I seen an' I'm tellin' you. You don't have to believe it, sir. But I wasn't more'n twenty feet away, sir, an' I *seen* this, an' heard it, too. Maybe it didn't happen that way, but I *seen* it that way!

"The captain he raises up, like I said. An' he appears to be starin' at somethin' just over his head. He hadn't his eyes any more but he was starin' just the same, *without 'em*. He kind o' rubs his free arm across his eyes—what was his eyes, that is —an' his sleeve wipes away the blood on his face. Then I seen that he was smilin', sir. Yes, smilin'! I ain't never seen no smile like that, an' I hope I never will!

"Well, sir, it might 'a' been a second an' it might 'a' been ten minutes the captain stays that way, propped up, starin' at nothin' my eyes could see, an' smilin'. Then he speaks. I could hear him plain. His voice was as strong as mine right now and I could tell by it he was awful glad about somethin'.

"This is what I hear him say: 'Hello, Jennie, sweetheart. It's the last crash and you kept your promise. Let's go!'

"He said that. You won't believe it. Nobody believes it. But he did. An' when it's said he lays down again, flat on his back an' —an'—reaches up with both hands. He seems to find somethin' to take hold of there in the air. For a minute I can't make out what he's doin'. Then I get it. He is holdin' somebody's head close to his face—at least he thinks he is—an' he is—he is—well, he is kissing somebody!

"After that, sir, his hands drop an' he lays there an' never moves again. When I get to him he is dead as far as I can see. He'd got the machine-gun butts in the head, the way they all do.

"I don't know nothin' more, sir, except that a little ways back from where the ship crashed I found a bit of wood with a big nail in it. Which might explain how that tire come to bust."

How much of the old crew chief's deposition actually found credence with the members of the crash board and the personnel generally of Langstrom Field, all of whom,

of course, came into possession of more or less elaborated versions of the story, cannot be definitely determined. Publicly the old mechanic was scoffed out of court. The C. O., who was worried for the state of his pilots' nerves, took occasion to call the talkative witness into private session and threaten certain unspeakable consequences if he let his tongue grow any longer.

So that the affair was a three-week sensation, with everybody talking about it and everybody proclaiming intrepidly that it was all damfoolishness and very bad medicine for a flying field. There are certain things that flying men always affect to disdain—and always take more seriously than anybody else.

There was one particular discussion of the case, on the night of the crash, in the lounge at the officers' club. But to appreciate what passed between the three, Norris, Weyman, and Crawley, who held that quiet conference you must know many things that went before.

II.

Three years intervened between Biliy Cobb's first crash and his last. He had three crashes in all—which, as any pilot will tell you, is not a high score for so long a time, particularly when you consider the amount of flying that Cobb packed into those years.

He was a man who originally took the dangers of his profession philosophically.

"Sure, there's always got to be a last crash," he would say when the question of hazard came up, "but it won't be to-day." Hence his sobriquet.

And having satisfied himself that all the cotter pins were clinched in place and the controls well greased at the bearings he would swing into the cockpit, buckle his safety belt, and command "Contact!" with the perfect assurance of the pilot who knows that barring an act of God he is safe in his own hands.

Some pilots fly on faith, others fly on nerve, but Last Crash Cobb flew on skill which was consummate and knowledge which was complete. It was no fault of his that tragedy entered his life by way of the air.

He was an aviator neither by chance nor by interest. He was an aviator by vocation. And fortunate it was for him that he first saw the light of day in a flying age for had he been of an earlier generation it is difficult to imagine what would have become of him. He had gone to flying at the first opportunity as the steel goes to the magnet.

There was something ascetic about his devotion to his profession. He wore his wings as a priest wears the cloth—reverently. What the air might bring him he never questioned. Advancement, power, gain he never considered excepting as they might be turned back to the profit of the air.

"I'll tell you what," he said one day to an heretical upstart who was talking about flying pay and trying to prove the candle not worth the risk; "this is no game for a brainy young business man like you who's going to be a major general some day. Clever boys don't thrive on the air. What we want here is men with hearts. Go back to the school of the line, sonny. You'll be a great man in a few years. But you'll always be a bum flyer!"

And again he was sent before a general court and deprived of ten files for bearding a lieutenant colonel of the technical section with the following sally:

"The asphalt is all cluttered up with kiwis like you. You ground grippers are set to make the conquest of the air if it costs the last flyer. Did you ever fly? No! Why don't you join the tank corps then?"

That was Last Crash Cobb. He was of the same breed that makes the sea leaders. Narrowed to his own sphere he was, without a doubt, as the sailor is; and indifferent to all that lay outside it, impatient especially of ignorant meddlers who tried to dictate and interfere. He could abide the man who was frankly not of the air and approached him without pretense, but the airfaring dilettante, the "expert" whose vicarious knowledge was always on parade, he could not tolerate, nor would he. However, that is beside the point excepting as it gives some vague index to the character of Cobb and his type—a type that will live some day in tradition as the type that won the sea now lives.

With airplanes he had a way and an understanding that might be likened to the way and the understanding of certain men with horses. To Billy Cobb an airplane was a sentient thing, with life and personality. The sailor has the same feeling about ships. He would appraise a craft at a glance

and in that glance instantly catalogue its faults and its talents, knowing with a knowledge that is not promulgated in the manuals of the technical section just what might be expected of that ship—whether she were sluggish on the level, fast, or very fast; whether swift on the climb, long on the glide, tricky on the turns, treacherous on the landings, and all the other points that a pilot must canvass in his ship before he may invest her with his confidence.

He never asked more of a ship than was built into it, either. And it outraged him to see anybody else do it.

"Hinky," he said to his roommate one evening—this was during his first detail as a tester at McCook—"if you treat that bus of yours the way you're doing any longer I'm going to lick you. It's fiendish cruelty. She ain't made to zoom like that. What's more, she's got spirit and she's going to take it out on you some early morning. You watch. You'll try her patience an extra degree too much and we'll have to pick the dirt out of your teeth before we plant the daisies on you."

And the records show that "Hinky" Morse did not live to get his licking. For he rode in a baggage car the next night, inside a long white box.

Billy Cobb, sitting on the floor beside the casket—he refused the comfort of a Pullman berth—blew his nose frequently, and to the baggage man pronounced Hinky's brutal epitaph, between stations.

"I feel pretty bad about this," said Billy. "I don't mind about him so much," indicating the pine box; "he asked for it and he got it. But you should see what he did to the poor little ship. It's birds like him that give the service a black eye. Gosh darn it all!"

He blew his nose eloquently.

"I've got a fierce summer cold," he explained.

"Oh, sure," said the baggage man tactfully. "This flyin's a mighty risky game, anyhow."

"It's a damn lie!" exploded Billy Cobb, and put his handkerchief away until the argument was over.

All of which may seem like a great deal of bootless rambling. And rambling it is—but not bootless. The only way to illumine a portrait properly is to light it from various angles.

The important thing to know about Billy Cobb is that he was intensely earnest about the craft of which he was a master. He loved it and revered it and lived for it only. If you believe that you may then understand better how the things that happened to him came about as they did, and perhaps—perhaps—you may think you perceive why.

It has just been said that Cobb lived only for his profession. That should be qualified. There was a brief period when he lived only for Jennie.

Until Jennie appeared Cobb had regarded women with the same indifferent toleration that bespoke his attitude toward everything else outside the level frontiers of the airdrome. But Jennie was of the air herself. She commanded devotion the minute he set eyes on her. He was born to Jennie just as he had been born to the air.

It was on a bright May morning at Langstrom Field—this was three years ago, remember—that they discovered each other and for all spiritual purposes were instantly merged into unity. Billy had just come from officers' call at headquarters where he had met the new C. O.—not for the first time in his life. The old C. O., a man named Weifer, to Billy's intense gratification had departed to a staff detail with the D. M. A. the night before.

"Staff is right!" mused Billy, reflecting on the demerits of the departed. "But cane or crutch would be more accurate. He needed one to keep his wings from limping. The big kiwi!"

Now a kiwi, "for the information of all concerned," as the technical bulletins put it, is the human counterpart of a certain type of training plane with reduced wing surface which roars like a lion but never leaves the ground.

Billy was still thinking anathema on the score of kiwis in general and Weifer in particular when he reached the hangar and was confronted with Jennie. His own scout ship was standing just outside the curtains with the blocks at the wheels and the engine idling gently. The crew chief, Hansen, was in the seat, holding back the stick. A little cloud of dust eddied in the mild backwash of the propeller and blew outward across the green expanse of the field. The little ship was straining at her blocks and vibrating just a trifle along her stubby fuselage as a whippet strains at the leash and trembles at the haunches on the scratch line. She was settled back taut against her stocky

tail skid, with her landing gear gathered in a crouch beneath her stream-lined belly and her nose lifted eagerly toward a perky white cloud that drifted temptingly across the blue of a tender spring sky. Her four varnished wings—she was a biplane—stretched out, it seemed to Cobb as he came up, in a pathetic gesture of appeal to be off.

Jennie was standing just by the right wing tip, a caressing hand curled lightly about the leading strut. She was drinking in the picture of the eager little craft with a wistful eye. Billy appraised her at a glance, much as he appraised airplanes. And it struck him suddenly that he wanted to know this girl—wanted to know her right away, and intensely. She was small—like a scout ship he thought. And her nose turned up, not arrogantly but eagerly—also like a scout. And she was lithe and taut and alert. A queer comparison flashed through Billy's mind.

"By golly," he exclaimed, half aloud, "she's stream-lined!"

Ordinarily Cobb would have resented the presence of a woman on an airdrome. In the first place he sensed an incongruity between most women and airplanes—a lack of understanding and sympathy. In the second place he was shy and uncomfortable in the presence of women anywhere.

But now without any of his usual gaucherie and diffidence with womankind he went straight to Jennie, slipping off his oil-stained helmet and exposing a shock of crumpled light hair that matched appropriately the viking blue of deep-set steady eyes.

Jennie, watching him advance, saw that he was not tall, but heavy for all that, a solid four-square pattern of a man, thick through and wide across, with stocky legs that had a suspicion of a bow. She guessed that he had ridden horses before airplanes, which was true.

Their meeting was singularly devoid of either form or reticence. They might have been childhood companions. Yet neither had set eyes on the other until that moment.

Jennie was the first to speak, forestalling the casual greeting and introduction that had risen easily to Billy's lips.

"Is she yours?" asked Jennie, patting the polished wing of the silver scout.

"Mine and the government's," grinned Billy. "But she minds me best. Like her, eh?"

"Don't you?"

"You bet!"

"Then for goodness' sake hurry and take her up top before she gets hysterics waiting. Her plugs will be all foul with impatience if she has to idle much longer!"

Billy shot a startled glance at the girl.

"Gosh," he said, "you know ships, don't you?"

"I love them," said Jennie.

"Well," said Cobb, "this little bus will stand a lot of affection, sure."

He slipped on his helmet and was fumbling with the chin strap as he turned to circle the ship's wing. Jennie laid a restraining hand on his arm.

"Let me fix that for you," she offered.

The gesture had the untaught spontaneity of twenty years of innocence. There was no art in it, nor coquetry. It was the purest act of friendliness. Which is probably why it was so deadly. Billy Cobb, submitting, looked down at Jennie's earnest face, her tightly pursed lips, the little wrinkle of concentration between her slender brows; he felt the small fingers working strap and buckle at his throat; and a new religion reared its altar in his heart.

He waved the mechanic from the cockpit and swung under the top plane and into the seat—but not until he had circled the ship twice with an eye to details like cotter pins and turnbuckles, and a hand to the tension of flying wires and fabric. Jennie could just see the top of his leather-sheathed head turning slowly from right to left as he ran his eyes over the cluster of dials on the instrument board. She heard the engine drop and pick up as he tested first one magneto and then the other. She saw the ailerons and tail surfaces fan the air tentatively as he swung the stick and rudder bar.

Hansen, the mechanic, fell back to the tail and propped himself on the empennage.

"All fast, sir," he bawled. "Let her out when you're ready."

Notch by notch the throttle moved forward. The engine speeded in a crescendo roar until it was screaming off a clear sixteen hundred r. p. m., and mechanic, airdrome, and the hills of the distant landscape disappeared from Jennie's view behind the choking veil of dust that billowed back whirling in the cyclone of the propeller stream. She did not flinch nor stop her ears.

Gradually the uproar subsided, the dust

cloud thinned, mechanic and landscape reappeared, and the motor resumed its drowsy, chuckling drone, like water bubbling in a giant boiling pot.

Jennie nodded a judicial nod of approval to herself. Nothing overlooked. Nothing hurried. Here was a pilot who gave a ship a chance, a pilot after her own heart! Billy had declared that the girl knew ships. She did—and pilots too. The colonel, her father, had swung in the baskets of the early army spheroids when the Wrights were still bicycle tinkers with absurd dreams. She had entered life in the shadow of the hangars. She had played dolls in the cockpits of old JN's. The song of the propeller and the blast of the exhaust had been her reveille and her lullaby since days she could no longer recall. She knew the ships of the air and the men that rode them, for they were her life and her people. She did not know Billy's name yet, but she knew Billy. He belonged, at sight, to the elect of the upper levels.

He was waving a brown hand from side to side above the cockpit now, the signal to clear away. The mechanic jerked the blocks from the wheels and hung back against a wing while Billy eased the tail and swung the ship around with gentle prods of the throttle, heading out for the field. His upflung arm saluted Jennie as he taxied away toward the line.

She watched the take-off. Nose down, tail flaunting high, Cobb drove the ship up the wind till it took the air cleanly without sag or falter. A line of blue showed between the far-off hilltops and the hull of the craft before he altered course or angle. Then the nose dropped sharply, just a hair but just enough, the left wing flipped up, wheels and undercarriage flashed into view against the silver of the ship's belly, and she was around in a vertical turn and heading full out along the back track and up in a thirty-degree climb with the needle on the altimeter registering, as Jennie guessed, a thousand feet a minute.

Back and forth above the field Billy shuttled the ship, his turns at the end of each soaring leg crackling with precision. At five thousand he caught the cloud, drove up under it, passed it, spun around on a wing tip, and shot downward. The wisp of drifting vapor engulfed the airplane for an instant. Then with gun cut and wires screaming the silver scout emerged, whooping groundward with flaunting tail waving the astonished cloud an impertinent Godspeed.

Billy's landing was a classic. At three thousand over the downwind limit of the airdrome Jennie saw him start his left-hand spiral. It began with a steady, majestic sweep. Twice around the spacious rim of an invisible half-mile funnel the silver airplane moved, her engine purring at an easy twelve hundred. Then the inverted cone of its course grew tighter. Higher and higher the flashing wings tipped as Billy inched back on the tilted stick. Faster and faster the shortening circuit ran until ship and pilot were whirling down the air like a chip in a racing vortex.

They reached a point where the diameter of the spiral was scarce two airplane lengths. That was the spout of the funnel. And through the spout they spun vertically, wings whirling in a silver disk about the eccentric axis of the flashing fuselage.

At five hundred Billy set the stick at neutral and nudged the rudder bar. The spinning stopped with calculated precision. Gently he drew back on the stick. The tail dropped. She sailed along on level keel. The grass came up to kiss her wheels. A procession of hangars shot past. She hovered, caressing the grass blades with tire and skid. A faint whispering answered as she touched the sod.

Another hundred feet she ran, the soil showing black in the torn wake of the guttering skid. She stopped.

Jennie, reaching out a hand, touched her polished wing, incredulous.

"I never saw anything so perfect," she breathed. "You brought her to my feet!"

Perhaps already Jennie dimly perceived something symbolic in the landing of Billy Cobb—at her feet.

She gave him her small firm hand to steady him when he heaved himself up from the cockpit and leaped to the ground. They walked off the field together and down the gaunt post street between bare rows of flimsy frame huts.

Jennie stopped before one of them larger than the rest that boasted a screen-inclosed veranda. Odd lots of weird furniture—the potpourri of outlandish home equipment that bespeaks the officer of many "fogies" who has gathered his store of household gods in all the ports of the seven seas—littered the minute grass plots on either side of the cinder path to the door. Sweating men in

dingy overalls and campaign hats were bearing it in, table by table, chair by chair, trophy by trophy, to a running fire of humorous comment.

"I live here," said Jennie.

"Oh," said Billy, "you're the new C. O.'s family, aren't you?" It was the first time he had considered who she might be or where she had come from, so completely had he accepted her on sight.

"I'm Jennie Brent, yes."

"Sure," said Billy. "Now I get why you're so—so—dog-goned—well, full out!"

She colored very pleasantly.

"Oh," she smiled—and in her smile there was a combination of pleasure and wistfulness hard to picture and harder to interpret —"you think that?" She turned wholly serious and wholly wistful. "Why?"

"Gosh!" he temporized, "I—I don't know. But anyway, Colonel Brent's daughter——"

She flushed with pleasure and interrupted:

"You know daddy, then?"

"You bet!"

"Then you've got to come in for tea this afternoon. We'll be all settled by then. I'll tell daddy you're coming. Oh, and I almost forgot—how shall I describe you to him?"

"But—but I was going to take a flying kiwi up for his pay hops."

"Why," exclaimed Jennie in mock astonishment, "I thought you knew Colonel Brent!"

It was Billy's turn to be astonished.

"What's that got to do——" he began.

"Don't you know what daddy does with flying officers who daren't fly without a nurse?"

"I—I'm afraid I don't."

"He lets them live on base pay until they're transferred to the infantry, where they belong. Daddy sees that they're transferred, too. So, you see, you're not going to fly a kiwi this afternoon after all."

"Hallelujah! What time's tea?"

"Five o'clock. Who's coming, please?"

"Bill Cobb."

"I thought so," declared Jennie.

"Hunh?" he grunted, taken aback. "How come?"

"I heard you were stationed on this post, and you check with the specifications, sir. You are not without honor among your own people, you know."

She turned up the cluttered cinder path, annexing a bamboo stool with one capable hand and a teakwood humidor with the other as she went. Billy stood shamelessly and stared after her until she disappeared in the house.

III.

It is told of Billy Cobb that he never had to woo the air.

The first instructor to take him up reported back to the pilotage office an hour later in a semihysterical condition.

"Say," he demanded of the senior instructor who had assigned him to introduce Cadet Cobb to the opening chapter of the flying primer, "what're you trying to do—kid me?"

"Kid you! How come?"

"This What's-his-name cadet—this Cobb! If he's a cadet I'm an ostrich!"

"What's the trouble with Cobb?"

"Trouble with Cobb? Trouble with me, you mean! He's been showing me how to fly for the last half hour. Come out to the line. You've got to see this!"

Of course it was weeks before Billy was officially turned loose and rated for his wings. The office of the D. M. A. is a stickler for preservation of the forms and appearances. But actually the marvel spread through hangar, shop, and barrack that day. Cobb was "over the hump!"

It was the first day, mind you, he had ever warped a wing or kicked a rudder bar. He had laid his hand on the airplane and the airplane in that instant had become his to do with as he willed. And this was so, of course, precisely because some occult well of sympathy within him taught the man exactly what he must will to do—and what must not be willed.

There was that same sympathy in him where Jennie was concerned. And he won her, as he won the air, instantly—without wooing. His spirit laid its spell upon her heart just as his hand had set its cunning on the airplane. The air and Jennie. Both became his in the hour of meeting. He was not then aware of it but when Jennie Brent had slipped the strap through the buckle of his helmet at that first encounter she already belonged to him. The gesture was the first signal between them of dedication on her part and consecration on his. Once again Bill Cobb was "over the hump."

In all their brief life together the analogy between Jennie and the air with respect to Billy Cobb holds true. Thus, it

was nothing but the idle matter of appearances that kept Cobb waiting those weeks succeeding his conquest of the airplane before his pilot's rating was bestowed. And it was the same matter of appearances that withheld for a space the open avowal of Jennie's surrender. A woman has need to be at least as jealous of the forms as the D. M. A.

Eight weeks to a day after Billy's first encounter with the air—in 'seventeen things happened faster in the service than they do now—his rating had come through. Was it blind coincidence, or was it a cunningly fitted fragment in that symbolic mosaic of analogy which made their relationship so remarkable, that Jennie's overt surrender should likewise have chanced exactly eight weeks after their first meeting?

June was passing in the farewell blaze of an incomparable sunset. A little wind wandered curiously into the airdrome bringing a breath of grassy freshness from the tablelands beyond the coastal hills to mingle with the acrid bouquet of fresh-burned castor oil and gas. It rippled the canvas curtains of the Bessoneau hangars where they stood in a massive row, shoulder to shoulder, silent, placid, like elephants chained and sleeping, long shadows stretched behind them. It quivered the flaccid form of the landing sock, hanging nerveless against its staff by the door of the pilotage hut at the end of the hangar line. But most of all it stirred the heart of Jennie, standing near an open Bessoneau, peering steadfastly into the gold and glory of the west, and waiting. For at the same time that it kissed and cooled her cheek it murmured in her ear a faintly intoned chantey—the song of a distant homing motor.

Billy was coming at last! He was an hour overdue, the longest hour Jennie could recall. But it was all right now. She could hear the singsong shouting of the full-out engine clearly.

"Billy is coming!" That was the burden of the engine's song that reached her down the wind. Jennie marveled at the sweetness of that music.

Her eyes confirmed the message of the wind. High above the purple summit of a rose-framed thunder head she made him out, a buoyant purple speck in a dazzling flood of wine-clear gold. She watched the speck until it grew to a flake, the flake until it became an airplane, the airplane until it roared above her head, crossed to the down-wind limit of the field, spun about with a flash of upflung wing and flirting tail, and shot for the landing with a sudden hushing of the deep-voiced engine.

The silver ship rolled up with friendly little snorts and chuckles and stopped beside her. Billy took her upstretched hand and jumped down. They left the plane to Hansen and his crew and walked away together in the twilight down the row of brooding hangars.

"Oh," Jennie sighed happily, "I am glad, Billy!"

"Glad? Why, particularly, Jennie?"

"I—I don't know. How was the ship today?"

"Better than ever, Jennie."

He paused, hesitating to voice the thought that followed, groping, too, for words to give it form. Then:

"Do you know," he said, "there's something about that ship and you, Jennie, that —— Well, what I mean is that when I am with that ship and when I am with you I sort of feel—the same way. Kind of comfortable and—and, well, happy, Jennie. Do you know what I mean?"

He felt her sway toward him. He felt her hand on his arm.

"Perhaps"—she answered, a little breathlessly, "perhaps I do, Billy—to-night!"

"Why 'to-night,' Jennie?"

"Because—because——"

They walked on with no more speech until they reached the pilotage hut beyond the hangars. It was dim and silent. They sat down, side by side, on the low step before the door. Excepting where Hansen and his crew were tucking the silver ship to bed by the flitting light of a trouble-shooter's lamp, two hundred yards away, no life appeared anywhere on the glooming expanse of the quiet field.

"Jennie," said Billy Cobb, "I know why that little ship reminds me of you."

"Why, Billy?"

"Because I love it, too."

There was just enough of the blue-gray twilight left for Billy to see the widening of her eyes at that and the accentuation of the wistful curve at either corner of her mouth.

She sat considering his face intently. Then she turned away, leaned a little forward, clasped her hands about her knees, and stared off at something he could not see —something in the remote distance, beyond

the faintly outlined crests of the western hills.

"You are sure," she asked at length, very softly, "that it is true—what you have said about the ship and me, Billy?"

"I am sure," he said. "It is true now, it will always be true, Jennie—till—till the last crash."

He thought she shuddered just a little. Then:

"Why do you always say that—that—about the last crash, Billy?"

"Why—why, I don't know. Just a habit—means something a long ways off, I guess."

"Oh!" said Jennie, a faint tremor in her voice. "I—I hope so, Billy."

"Why, Jennie——"

"Nothing, Billy—nothing at all. A foolish idea. It's gone."

She paused, looked away, then turned her face to his again.

"And just what," she questioned, a little timidly, a little eagerly, "did you mean, Billy, about—about the ship—and—and me?"

Billy Cobb drew a deep breath.

"I will show you—dear," he said.

At ten o'clock a single figure moved through the moon-cast shadow of the pilotage hut. At the edge of the shadow the figure paused. There was a little noise—such a noise as tokens the parting of close-pressed lips. The single figure became twain. Billy Cobb and Jennie Brent emerged reluctantly into the argent flood that bathed the airdrome and passed again along the row of canvas stables where the airplanes slept, under the silver benediction of the moon.

IV.

The wedding was set for late October. Jennie had sounded out the attitude of authority toward an earlier consummation.

"Any time you say, youngster," agreed the C. O. "But the service needs your bridegroom pretty badly this summer. Wouldn't October do?"

"Daddy! Over three months!"

Old "Full-out" Brent, tall and lean, keen-eyed, straight-nosed, straight-browed, square-chinned, and square-souled, looked down at his daughter. A whimsical smile twitched his short mustache.

"I remember a similar occasion," he reminisced slowly, "when a girl waited three years for me, because the service asked it."

Jennie studied her father's boots.

"I forgot," she pleaded. "I belong to the service, too."

Billy took it philosophically.

"Come to think of it," he acquiesced, "there is a lot to do around here this summer. And it takes at least six weeks to be decently married. October's a bully month, too."

During July Billy worked prodigiously. It was unreasonably hot, and the engineering section, which Billy directed, got the reaction in the shape of an endless procession of stricken motors.

The post was overrun, too, with visiting officers of every clan and nation of the army—officers of the line, officers of the staff, officers of the quartermaster and ordnance and signal corps, officers of the reserve, shavetails of the National Guard, and even a detachment of cadets from the Academy—most of them detailed to look on and grow wise, some of them detailed for technical work, but all of them crowding, elbowing and clamoring for a taste of the air.

And Billy did his bit with the rest of the post to satisfy them—so much so that five hours of grueling work with the stick, in heavy DH's, with the air a bedlam of cross-chopping heat bumps to make it more interesting, was an average component of his routine day. This, you understand, "in addition to his other duties" with the engineering section.

His working day started on the flying line an hour before reveille and ended, as a rule, in the repair shop, any number of hours after tattoo. He might have side-stepped the flying, in his capacity of engineer, but he would not. He knew that the ground lubber who has once made a flight talks about it with expansive enthusiasm for the rest of his life. And he made it his job to see that no ground lubber left Langstrom Field without a mouthful of nice things to say about the air. Smooth ladylike flights he gave them, ironing out the heat bumps to the limit of his ability with deft twitches of the stick, wheeling ponderously around the turns, emphasizing the ease and simplicity of flight, minimizing the intricacy and hazard.

"Propaganda hopping," he called it.

In one sense he welcomed the heavy program. It kept him too busy and too tired to dwell on the tantalizing weeks that stretched drearily ahead between him and the dazzling goal of October. But the grind told on him

heavily. Only his burning enthusiasm for the advancement of the flying idea kept him at it. No other pilot on the field—and there were other enthusiasts at Langstrom that summer—could have equaled the pace he set. The groundsman has no conception of what air fatigue can do in a few hours. Cobb grew lean and gray. The change was gradual but by August it had become distinctly noticeable.

And Jennie, watching him jealously, protested at last.

"Billy," she chided one steaming evening when, for a miracle, he had escaped the slavery of the shop—or rather repudiated it out of sheer weariness—"you are a wreck! I suppose you've got to keep the Liberties turning up but you might let down a little on the propaganda hops. Are they necessary, so many of them?"

"I think they are. Aviation is in a bad way, Jennie. You know that. It's crash, crash, crash, the way these barnstormers at the summer resorts and half-winged kiwis on some of the army posts handle ships. We don't crash on this field. Not since the colonel came and weeded out the duds, God bless him. We don't joy hop. We really do aviate. And the more of it we do, the better for the general average, don't you see? Why, we've scored a hundred hours a day with only thirty ships active since July first. And not a shock absorber sprained yet, excepting by some of these outside birds from the reserve and the guard. That's something to shout about. That's what makes the ground grippers take heart. It's the sort of thing we're doing here this summer that makes the good name of aviation, in the long run—not speed records and cross-continent flights. It's the good work, Jennie, and we've got to keep it up—keep it up till the last crash!"

Jennie drew a quick breath.

"But must you wear yourself out to do it, dear? Is it—is it quite safe for you to go on when you're so tired? Can't you ease off, just a little?"

"Really, I don't mind. I'm tired, maybe, but aside from that I feel great. And winter's coming. Lots of rest then. In the meantime, every outsider I take up top, Jennie, is going to head straight away from this post and 'tell the world.' Fly 'em sweet and often and land 'em safe. They never forget it! Keep at it everlastingly. That's the only way. Till the last crash!"

"Billy! You've said that twice to-night. Please—please don't!"

"Don't what, Jennie?"

"That gruesome phrase about the last crash! Please—I don't like it, Billy. It—it makes me think!" She shuddered.

Cobb was startled. He peered at her. They were sitting on the screen-inclosed veranda. Inside the house, where Colonel Brent was reading, a table lamp stood by a window and its shaded light, shining through ruffled chintz curtains, illumined Jennie's profile with a soft glow. The subdued radiance was just sufficient for Billy to apprehend the fleeting contraction that swept her wistful features like a black gust. Just sufficient, but more than enough to show him the thing which then and there unsettled and reversed the entire philosophy he had lived by until that moment.

For the thing he had seen on Jennie's face in that swift flash of revelation was more than distaste, concern, or anxiety. It was stark fear!

"Jennie!" he cried. "What——"

She bit her lip and looked away. The secret was out; the secret she had been trying to hide even from herself. She was afraid—terribly afraid—of the air. And she had spent her short life disdaining folk who were guilty of that same weakness!

But that was before she had met Billy. Then the air and the folk and the things of the air had been her chief interest. It had seemed to her natural and right that the air should be served with tribute of limb and of life, if need be. For that was the creed in which she had lived, under the tutelage of her father. Now she had a new creed, a new religion. The air had become a secondary faith. Billy Cobb was all that really mattered to her. He obscured all the old horizons she had known.

Yet, even as she realized this, she knew there was no alternative for what must lie ahead. It was Billy Cobb, the man of the air, that she loved, after all. As anything else, in any other rôle, she would not have loved him at the first. As anything else she could not think she might love him to the last. There could be no turning off or backing out. She must take him and the air of which he was an integral part together. She must either master her fear or live with and endure it.

Miserably she sat, with averted face, and stared into the dark, until she found the

answer. She felt his troubled eyes seeking and questioning and turned at last to face him—and the issue.

"Billy, dear," she said, "I am sorry—oh, so sorry—that I couldn't spare you this. I scarcely knew it was there, myself, you see; and it popped out to-night, and you saw it, before I had learned to handle it. But sooner or later it must have come out. I couldn't have locked it up inside me forever. So perhaps it is just as well we should have it out now, and over with."

"You mean you really worry—about my flying, Jennie?"

"You have seen it, Billy. A lie about it now would do no good—only tantalize you."

"But, Jennie, you never——"

"I know, dear. I never did, before."

"Then why now?"

"Because—because—oh, it's hard to talk of this, Billy dear! Because I never had anything quite—quite so—so precious at stake!"

"Oh, my gosh!" groaned Billy Cobb.

He hitched his armchair closer and took her hand in both of his.

"Listen, Jennie," he pleaded; "this isn't so. It can't be so, it simply can't! It's the —the heat. And this—well, this waiting—for October, you know. Your nerves—— Look here! If I thought this would last I'd —yes, by gosh—I'd chuck——"

"No!"

The word was scarcely more than whispered but it carried the intensity and arresting power of an outcry.

"Billy! That was just what I was afraid you'd try to say. Don't you see? You mustn't—you can't! Why, I wouldn't marry you if you did. I'd hate myself too much. And—yes, it seems impossible but I know it's true—I shouldn't love you, either, as I do now. It's so strange, so contradictory! I don't try to understand it but I feel it and know it. I am afraid for you when you fly yet I couldn't care for you, not wholly, if you didn't. There is a part of you that belongs to the air. And that is the part that I love best. With that gone ——" She dared not go on to the completion of the thought.

Billy Cobb drew a deep breath. He leaned far forward and kissed her. And when he took his face from hers there were tears on his cheek. But his own eyes were dry. He kissed her again and she clung to him forlornly.

At length they drew apart. Billy took her hand again and patted it.

"I understand," he comforted. "It's the same part of you that I love. The part that makes me think of airplanes way up top, and clouds, and the way an engine sounds, far off, when the wind is blowing. It may be hard on us to stick it out. Hard on you, because you worry, and hard on me because of you. But it would be a lot harder the other way. We couldn't stick that out—not together—could we, Jennie?"

"We never could, dear. We'd be ashamed to look each other in the face."

"It's settled then. We'll stay with it."

"We'll stay with it—with the air, dear—until—until the—the last crash!"

He gathered her up and folded her in his arms.

V.

As Jennie had said, her emotions, touching Billy Cobb and the air, were conflicting and contradictory. Yet they were not difficult to render into logic.

This girl who had breathed the atmosphere of the airdrome all her life must inevitably have done one of two things; either grown to hate and fear the element that exacted mortal toll of its servants or grown to worship it. And she had done the latter. For she had the intellectual stability to perceive that if men were killed by the air it was because of their own unworthiness, the imperfections of themselves and of their implements of flight, not because of any inherent malignity in the air. And she foresaw with clear conviction the coming of a day when toll would no longer be exacted, when man's mastery of the air would be at least as secure and complete as his domination of the sea and the land. So she did not hate the air. For she knew it a reluctant and involuntary killer, asking nothing better than to abandon its rôle of murderous tyrant and assume the benevolent part of the willing and faithful jinni.

Instead of hating the air she regarded it, therefore, as a deity more sinned against than sinning. And it was natural that, in Jennie's eyes, the early airfarers, the men who offered their lives to the cause of air conquest, should be glorified. She invested them with the romantic glamour that is the meed of the pioneer in every fresh field of hardship and hazard. She set them above other men. In fact, she considered the ex-

istence of other men scarcely at all. And when they did cross her thoughts she saw them simply as an alien race of animated lay figures that did not live on airdromes. She could not conceive of a complete, satisfactory and thoroughly real man who should be anything but a flyer.

It was inevitable, therefore, that her choice for the man of men should fall on a flyer. And it was impossible that the man who won her favor should hold the precious gift unless he kept faith with the air—as Billy Cobb would have phrased it—to the last crash. For she could respect none but the men of the air, the only men she knew and understood. And there is more depends upon respect in love than many folk suppose.

On the other hand, Jennie was a woman. She was a very complete and thoroughgoing woman. And she had her full share of the woman's primitive maternal instinct, which is the protecting and sheltering instinct. The primitive-woman part of Jennie was a quite distinct part. It was not a reasoning component. It was emotional solely and concerned with the fundamental realities, not with intellectual ideals.

The intellectual, idealistic part of Jennie Brent loved Billy Cobb the flyer, the pioneer, the potential martyr for a cause. But the instinctive-woman part loved Billy Cobb the man. And the maternal urge, the sheltering element in Jennie the primal woman demanded the protection of Billy the man regardless of ideals and abstract traditions. It revolted violently at the grisly vision of his crushed and battered body lying some day in a crazy pyramid of wreckage.

Which explains convincingly enough why Jennie Brent was at the same time afraid to trust her lover to the air and fearful of winning him from it. But this much, as she told Billy, was evident to her. Whether he flew or not the woman of her would always love him. While, if he turned traitor to the air, shed the romance of his calling, and became one with the animated lay figures who lived outside the airdrome, the intellectual ideal-worshiping part of her could no longer love him—even though his renunciation of the air were for her sake only.

And so, with rare understanding and insight, she made her decision. The protective urge which had come with love and bred fear must be dominated and stilled—or, failing that, the anguish borne patiently. The alternative was even worse than the vision of Billy in the wreckage.

Out on the screened veranda Billy held her close and long. Off in the dark, where the squat little huts of the post lay along in orderly, shadowy rows, lights in windows began winking out, one by one. Then a tremulous cry floated over hut and hangar.

Taps!

Billy released her. They crossed to the door. She put a hand on his arm.

"It will be all right, dear. I have been foolish. Don't mind me. I feel so much better already, now that I have told you! But you mustn't think of it any more—never. I can beat it. I am sure I can. And of course you will be safe! The air won't hurt two people who love it as much as you and I do. Now, mind! Forget all about this. I promise you I shall. Good night, Billy dear. And dream about—about October."

But Billy did not dream about October. He dreamed of crashes. That was something he had never done before. The horrible thing about the crashes he dreamed of was that they didn't hurt him—they hurt Jennie. She seemed always to be there watching when they came, looking on in frozen helplessness, speechless, anguished, mortally stricken, while shadowy figures dashed toward the wreckage to drag him out, dead.

Once his ship caught fire. And then he saw Jennie go white, sway, and sink to the ground, to lie there pitifully at peace until some fool revived her and brought back her hopelessness.

Cobb was not aware in these dreams of the absurdity of dying and watching himself die at the same time. It seemed quite natural and horribly real and vivid.

Some time before morning the dreaming stopped. And all that remained to Billy of that night of horrors when he opened his eyes in the gray light of the oncoming day was an oppressive sense of foreboding.

"What's the matter with me?" he muttered sitting up in his Q. M. cot and blinking questioningly at the recumbent form of his roommate, Norris, who was snoring comfortably in another cot. Norris did not answer.

Out on the airdrome some one opened a throttle. The sudden roar of an engine struck on Billy's ears with ominous impact. That gave him the answer. An icy cur-

rent coursed his spine and he was instantly aware of a panicky urge to duck under the bedclothing and shut out the hideous turmoil. Instead he swung his bare feet to the floor and sat there, gripping the cold frame of the iron cot and shivering.

He had heard of this thing before, this pilot's sickness, this miserable cringing and shrinking at the voice of an airplane. He remembered that Norris once——

But he refused to think of it. He got up hastily, shook himself, and hurried into his clothes. He went out into the chill of the pink dawn and headed resolutely toward the hangars.

His morning's allotment of propaganda hoppers were waiting for him, punctual with the punctuality of eagerness. They stood in an animated group discussing the mysteries of the lumbering two-passenger DH that squatted in readiness for Billy's coming, the engine idling patiently. It seemed to Billy that the bubbling of the exhaust manifolds had changed character overnight. Usually the engine greeted him in the morning with a warm welcoming pur. Now the pur held a sinister note. It sounded cunningly gratified instead of frankly glad, and there was a siren quality of oily venom, and a leering chortle in the voice of the engine.

Billy waved a passenger into the rear cockpit and made his accustomed round of inspection while the man was fussing with his helmet and goggles and fumbling with the safety belt. But he might just as well have foregone the tour for he did not consciously see a single cotter pin or turnbuckle. His vision was all of the inward-looking variety. He was acutely aware of Jennie. He saw her sitting as she sat the night before in the dim aura of the colonel's reading lamp on the screened veranda. He saw her humid eyes turned on him, pleading. He sensed the faint chill of her tears on his cheek. He felt the clinging warmth of her beseeching arms about his shoulders.

Those arms! They were the arms of Jennie the woman—protecting, maternal arms. He could feel them poignantly now, drawing him back, back from this treacherous monster of wood and wire and fabric with the voice of flame; back from the brooding hangars; back from the waiting air!

And he wanted to go. How he wanted to go! His feet itched to be off, to run with him to Jennie. If he could only do it—go to her now, without delay—and tell her he had renounced every service but hers. He knew how it would be with her this morning. She would be lying abed wide-eyed and fearful, listening to the hum of his engine, straining for the first sound of disaster, the little deprecatory cough, the sudden silence that would follow, and then, perhaps, the rending explosion of—the last crash! Not until he had come in from his final hop and given the ship over to Hansen would she relax and turn to her pillow to sleep again—perhaps. And if——

Billy stopped his pacing round the waiting ship. He realized that Hansen was eying him queerly.

"Hell!" he grunted to himself and swung up the fuselage and into his seat.

In the ship he felt better. The touch of the controls steadied him. The familiar dials, staring at him like great round eyes from the instrument board, reassured him somewhat. He tested the engine. The needle on the tachometer jumped obediently to fifteen-fifty. The engine didn't sound so badly now.

He fancied the attack was passing. "Must be something I ate last night," he told himself as he settled his goggles and waved to Hansen to clear away the blocks. Then he tried to swallow and it hurt. His throat was like parchment. He ran his tongue over his lips. They felt like crinkled cardboard.

He swore hoarsely under his breath and headed the ship for the starting line, allowing himself twice as much run for the take-off as even his conservative principles habitually dictated. In the air he was painfully conscious of being careful. He had always been careful but never consciously so. Now, on the turns, he found himself constantly twitching the stick to get the feel of the ailerons and make sure of his flying speed. DH's are not healthy in a spin, it is true. He had never spun a DH. But he had never been afraid of spinning one. Now he was afraid. If he should lose speed on a turn and she should drop into that eccentric corkscrew descent—and shed a wing——

He had a picture of Jennie sitting bolt upright in bed, paralyzed with horror as the echoes of the thud and crash reverberated through the post. Of the crash itself, what it would do to him, he never thought. It was Jennie alone, her tragedy, that fixed his troubled attention.

He circled the field and measured off the distance for his landing. He gave the matter of landing many seconds of intense calculation. Not even in his cadet days had he ever concentrated deliberately on the problem of bringing a ship safely to the ground. He had done it without thought, automatically, and always just right. Now he reasoned about it. Moderate speed, settling gradually with a swift rush, tail skid and wheels brushing the ground simultaneously—that was the best way, for the ship. And the danger of a blowing tire was so remote that it wasn't worth consideration. But Billy considered it. With the ship running free a blown tire might mean a crumpled wheel, a fast nose over, and—fire or a broken neck! Better to lumber in slowly, level off high, and drop to the ground with most of the headway lost before she touched. A tire was more likely to burst, but then there wouldn't be enough speed to hurt anything but the ship. Plenty of time as her nose went down and the propeller snapped to cut the switch and nip the fire in the bud. And a hand braced against the cowl would take up the shock. Yes, that was the best way to land—not for the ship but for Jennie. Clumsy, inelegant, unprofessional perhaps, but—safe, eminently safe!

And that was the way he landed. A turtle jumping from a table would have been equally graceful—and not half as secure. The big DH floated ponderously into the airdrome under Billy's restraining guidance, dropped its tail three feet over the grass tops, yawed along hesitantly for a hundred-odd feet, and then literally sprawled onto the turf with a thump and a bounce and a creaking and straining of struts and wires and longerons. She all but stopped in her tracks. It was a scandalous performance and Hansen, the crew chief, groaned with reprobation when he thought of the ship. He had been with Cobb for a year and had seen nothing to approach this for clumsiness in all that time.

"Holy smoke!" the mechanic snorted. "A major general couldn't have done it worse!"

But Billy was satisfied. He wasn't thinking of his reputation as a technician with the stick. He wasn't thinking of the DH. He was thinking of the girl who lay with straining ears in a chintz-curtained bedroom somewhere to the rear of a one-story hut fronted by a wide screened veranda. When the bumping and the creaking were over and he knew he was safe—for that time—he experienced a shameless sense of prayerful relief.

But what about the next time? He wished there were never another passenger on any airdrome in all the world. But there were nine more on this very one, all waiting for him, all ignorant of the girl who lay and listened. He cursed them all, severally and collectively. Then he gritted his teeth and taxied around to pick up another.

When that morning's propaganda hopping was over Hansen was ready to burst into tears. He spent the rest of the forenoon and part of the afternoon with plumb lines and a level straightening out the kinks in Billy's abused ship. But it did little good, for the same thing happened the next day, and the next, and the next, until Hansen was beside himself and almost ready to desert.

He thought his pilot had lost his eye. But he was wrong. Billy's eye was as good as ever. His hand was as cunning, his brain as quick. Physically there was nothing wrong with him. But he was in a bad way none the less. And two persons at Langstrom Field knew what the trouble really was. One of these was Norris, his roommate—who was also his confidant. The other, of course, was Jennie.

Billy Cobb, they knew, was becoming a very sick man, not in body but in spirit. Billy Cobb had "the wind up." Jennie knew this because she was Jennie. Norris knew because, watching Billy grow gaunter and more morose, day by day, and observing that he tossed about in bed at night and often lay for hours on end smoking cigarettes in a chain, he had asked him bluntly what the matter was. And Billy had told him. He trusted Norris.

"John," confessed Billy, "I've got what you had once, I guess."

"I thought so, Bill," said Norris. "Well, I beat it—more or less. You'll beat it too. But it's certainly hell, ain't it?"

"It's hell," groaned Billy. "And I won't beat it, John."

"Shucks! Course you will, Bill. Don't tell me anything I could do you can't!"

"I won't beat it, John. I've simply got to live with it till the last crash. There's no way out for me."

"Don't be a fool, Bill. You've just got nerves. Workin' too hard. Twice as hard as anybody on the post. And since you've

had the wind up you've worked harder still to ease your conscience. Let up, old-timer. Let 'George' do some of the work."

"John, I tell you I'll never hear an engine again as long as I live without getting the hoo-haws. And I'll tell you why. Jennie worries!"

"What? Not Jennie Brent?"

"John, she's worrying herself sick. You watch her eyes the next time you see her. And she's losing weight. Think I can beat a thing like that, John?"

"My God, Bill!" said Norris, "I don't know. But it's bad—bad! To think that Jennie Brent, of all——"

"And she won't let me quit, either. I've promised her to stay with it, whatever."

"Well, that sounds like Jennie, anyhow. All grit. Always thought so."

"But it's killing her slowly!" wailed Billy. "I can see it."

"Bill," said Norris, "damned if I know what to say. You're in an awful fix now, all right. And so is Jennie. But perhaps," he added brightening, "she'll get over it after a while—after you're married."

Billy shook his head.

"She won't," he denied. "It's getting the best of her by the minute. John."

Norris considered, puffing at the black brier clenched in his teeth.

"I give it up," he conceded at last. "But I'll tell you what I think, Bill. This is a funny game we're in. Queer things are always happening as if—as if they were made to order. You know what I mean. Take me. I had the wind up for six months—you remember? And nobody suspected a thing—only you. Then just when I was walking in on the C. O. to tell him I was through the adjutant stopped me and handed me my orders to fly the *XT-1* from Aberdeen to San Diego. I said I couldn't. But the C. O. and the D. M. A. insisted that I not only could but I would. Well, when I finished that hop to California alive I figured nothing was going to happen to me until it happened. I was cured. Something always turns up in this game, Bill. Something'll turn up for you. And remember this, Bill. Things don't *happen* in this world. It is my belief that they're *arranged.*"

"If I could catch the bird who does my arranging for me, then," exploded Billy, "by golly, I'd——"

"Bill," warned Norris, "that's sacrilegious!"

VI.

August dragged along its procession of heat-smitten 'teens and twenties. Billy Cobb grew thinner and more miserable. A ray of hope appeared to him, however. There was the "609."

The 609, in the parlance of the air service, is the rigid physical test that every army flyer must survive twice yearly. A man who can triumph over the 609 is verging on bodily perfection. There is no other examination so searching.

And Billy judged that he was a long way from physical impeccability. He prayed that he might not pass the test. It was the only honorable avenue of escape from the incubus of fear that was slowly breaking Jennie and, through Jennie, breaking him, too.

Of course he could have failed to qualify by deliberate deceit. It would be the easiest matter in the world to claim that his eyes were weakening and to prove his claim by false readings of the testing charts. And there were other possibilities. But deceit was a world away from Billy's code. He had to keep faith and a clean conscience for Jennie. He would do his honest best to qualify—and hope to fail honestly.

Late in the month he reported to the flight surgeon. He was feeling particularly rocky that morning. Which—paradoxically—made him almost cheerful.

"I'll flunk it sure," he told himself.

He watched the face of the orderly who took his pulse, blood pressure and temperature anxiously. But the man was an automaton. He was not interested in anything he might discover about Billy's condition. His face betrayed nothing but boredom.

The junior surgeon who put Billy through the nauseating gates of the revolving chair was professionally discreet.

On the eye charts Billy read a perfect "twenty-twenty" with either eye and then essayed a discouragingly successful "twenty-fifteen." But he had expected this.

"Not so bad—not so bad," commented the junior surgeon. "I'll hand you over to Captain Weyman. He wants to look at you before we turn you loose."

Billy undressed in the examining room. The dismal conviction was growing on him that he would qualify after all. Nobody had batted an eye or shaken a head. Still, hope was not entirely dead. Weyman might find something. Weyman was thorough.

The surgeon came in and set to work. He waived the minor preliminaries.

"You're thin," he said, "but that's nothing this kind of weather. I hear you've been overdoing the flying a bit. I'll look into that."

He went over Billy with a stethoscope. Billy could not believe that the excited pounding of his heart would escape comment. Finally Weyman put the stethoscope away. He misread the anxious light in Billy's eyes.

"Oh," he said, "you needn't worry this time. You'll do. But you've got to ease up. I've been looking over the reports on the other tests. Blood pressure pretty high. And your heart doesn't sound as good as the last time. But you'll do. Get more sleep. Cut down the flying by half. A rest will fix you up like new. You're taking a spell off in October. You'll be a new man after that. Well, come back here in February. See you at the club to-night."

He clattered out and Billy sat down suddenly. He felt very faint.

Then he remembered that he was to lunch with Jennie. He struggled into his clothes. He had been picturing to himself how he would break the good news of his disqualification. He had visioned the little play of dismay she would make when he told her. He had painted on his mind's eye the flush of happiness that would relieve the pallor of her cheeks, betraying her gladness in spite of pretended concern.

Now it would not happen. There would be the same mummery of pretense that had been going on for the past month between them, the same transparent mask of unconcern that covered up but did not hide. By tacit consent they would talk of casual things casually. They would smile brightly for each other's benefit. They would discuss some new phase of the plans for October with the colonel. But neither would be deceived. In the depths of Jennie's wistful eyes Billy would see the lurking specter of fear. In the deepening lines of Billy's haggard face Jennie would read the story of his yearning to ease her trouble. And in the back of their minds, while they mouthed inconsequentialities, would be the relentless query of their common obsession: "The last crash—when?"

Billy decided that he couldn't face Jennie now. It would be turning the knife. He would beg off, have a bite at the club, and bury himself in work. In the evening he would call. By then the edge of his disappointment would have worn off. He could dissemble better then. In the evening——

But would there be any evening?

There it was again! The obsession! He hurled the thought from him. But it would come back! In a moment it would be there dogging him again!

He thought bleakly of the years ahead that he must live with that leering, tantalizing demon mocking him from the back of his brain.

And then it was back, confronting him again! Years ahead? Perhaps only hours! He was scheduled to fly at five o'clock! He decided he would lunch with Jennie after all. It might be the last——

"God!" he choked, tugging at a boot.

She was waiting for him behind the screens on the veranda. She sat listlessly, staring off at distant things. She wondered if Billy suspected a tithe of the whole truth —that she had not slept seven hours in the past week; that she could no longer eat excepting under the compulsion of her father's watchful eye, or Billy's; that it was increasingly difficult for her to muster the strength to rise from a chair; that the sound of an engine made her faint and giddy.

She wondered how long it would be before she must give up, must go to bed, must stay there. It wouldn't be until the sheer impossibility of physical resistance forced it —but that might be any day. She dreaded the revelation the day would bring. She was afraid of its effect on Billy. But she held to her resolution. It was the air or nothing for them.

The crunching of Billy's boots on the path roused her.

She was standing at the door, holding it ajar, as he came up the two short steps. She was smiling—a pathetic, lying smile.

He led her back to her chair. It occurred to her that if he hadn't done that she must have sunk to the floor and been carried. She thought she would have liked that. Yet she had the courage to sit erect and smile at him.

"Did you pass all right, dear?" she questioned.

"Yes," he said dully; "I passed."

"Oh, Billy, that's good. I was afraid you might have been overdoing. I wondered.

I'm awfully glad, dear." It was a supreme show of pathetic courage.

He revolted.

"Jennie," he exclaimed, "I wish to Heaven I'd failed! You're going out on your feet. I can see it. I confess, I never in my life hoped for anything as I hoped to-day that Weyman would turn me down! I've told Norris about this—he's the only one that knows. And he said one night that something always turned up. I thought it might be true. I thought the 609 would be the thing. It only proves that Norris——"

"No, Billy dear. It only proves what I have told you—the air needs you, even more than I."

"It isn't so Jennie! I know it isn't so. I'm going to quit. You come first!"

"You are not, Billy Cobb!! That was settled a month ago. You know you're not. I understand, dear—how you feel. But it can't be. I won't permit it. Now come in to lunch and don't let's discuss anything gloomier than October. You promise?"

There was nothing else he could do. They went in silently. The colonel was already at table.

The red rim of the sun was just dipping out of sight behind the western hills that evening when Jennie, dressed in white of a crispness that belied the drooping state of her spirits, slipped away from the screened veranda and made painfully off toward the hangars. All afternoon the sultry air had screamed and reverberated with the voices of engines. But now only one ship remained aloft, doggedly circling the field in the falling twilight with throttled motor droning sullenly. The ship was Billy's. Soon he would make the field and taxi in to the hangar. Jennie meant to be there to meet him. She wanted to let him know in this fashion that she approved and that her strength was equal to the ordeal even of watching him fly.

It was hard going. She stumbled innumerable times. Once she all but fell. But she reached the hangar at length and pulled herself together for the benefit of Hansen, who was waiting with his crew.

Billy's ship was still circling. Hansen brought Jennie a folding camp stool to sit on while she watched. He never suspected how grateful she was for that small piece of hesitant courtesy.

The mechanic dug a heavy watch from the breast pocket of his oil-stained coveralls and consulted it.

"Been up twenty-five minutes on this hop, Miss Brent," he said. "He'll be coming in any minute now."

As he spoke Billy commenced a sedate spiral at the northern extremity of the field. He was coming in. Not a breath of air stirred. He might have landed equally well from the east, the west, or the south. But the "T" in the white circle clearly pointed the only right way. Billy never disregarded flying regulations. He would have landed the way the T pointed if there hadn't been another plane to cut his right of way within a million miles.

As a matter of fact there was another plane, but Billy didn't know it. A strange, battered affair it was, with patched and tattered wings, that came coughing along, low down, out of the west; a disreputable gypsy of the air, a mangy sky pariah, seeking lodging for the night. Just above the treetops it scuttled, driving heedlessly for shelter, its pilot intent only on reaching a safe field before his gas was spent. Without a thought for other traffic or regulations it cleared the last obstacle by a scant yard and shot for the landing dead across the monitory T, coming fast from west to east.

It was then that Billy first saw it. And he saw it as soon as anybody else, for it had slunk into port wholly unobserved under cover of the landscape, the sound of its puny engine muffled in the full-voiced note of Billy's Liberty.

"Hell and all!"

Hansen's fervid exclamation drew Jennie's eyes from their anxious vigil over Billy's landing. She saw the furtive gypsy shooting in at dead right angles to the course of the oncoming DH. And a rapid glance from ship to ship told her that the thing she had spent the last month dreading was at hand. There was going to be a crash. The gypsy and the DH had leveled off together. Both were losing flying speed. Neither could open out and pick up fast enough to gain the air and clear the other. They were going to meet—going to meet hard! And Billy was in the DH!

What Jennie saw, Billy saw in the same instant. And the next instant he acted. He could not possibly get over or around the stranger. He must stop or collide. And he

stopped. The maneuver was simple and instantly effective. Billy did nothing more than snap the stick back and to the left the full length of its course.

Have you ever seen a curveting stallion rear wildly, slip, and fall heavily on his side? The DH did just that. Its nose lifted ponderously, its wheels pawed the air, its left wing dropped sharply, it faltered and hung, and just as it swayed and slipped groundward Billy cut the switch. It struck with an indescribably sickening sound, a combination of thud, crackle and crash all rolled together in a terrifying, explosive snarl.

But there was no danger to speak of. Billy's cunning had provided against that. All the speed had been absorbed by the lift as the ship reared. She had stopped before she struck the ground. And Billy and his passenger were scrambling out when the gypsy slipped with a guilty swish across the shattered bow of the quivering wreck and ran out its momentum—safe with twenty feet to spare.

Jennie stood in frozen anguish until it was over. She saw the rearing ship. She heard the hideous outburst as it crashed. But she did not see Billy emerge from the heap of rumpled fabric, kindling wood, and junk. For by the time that happened she lay a pathetic heap of white on the oil-soaked ground beside the camp stool.

Billy made straight for the gypsy ship with murder in each knotted fist. But he never reached it. He was intercepted by a breathless crew man.

"Sir," panted the mechanic, "Miss Brent —is at—the hangar. She fainted!"

VII.

Billy dropped to his knees beside the silent heap of white. Jennie was breathing rapidly—short gasping breaths. Her eyes were closed. She did not answer when he spoke. She did not hear his forlorn ejaculation of grief. She was past all hearing, for the time. But even unconsciousness had not wiped out the set lines that the sight and the sound of the crash had drawn about her pale lips.

Hansen, seeing Billy's distraction, ventured a suggestion.

"I've sent a man for Captain Weyman and the ambulance, sir. They'll be here in a minute."

Billy shook off his daze and got to his feet.

"Never mind the ambulance," he said. "Ask the surgeon to come to Colonel Brent's quarters. We'll be there."

He lifted Jennie's limp body and made off with her in his arms.

He reached the house unobserved. The inhabitants of the post were still idling over late dinners. Dinner is always late on an active flying field in summer. Billy was aware of a mournful gratitude that he had been spared the sympathetic importunities that an encounter must have evoked. He struggled through the screen door, found Jennie's room, and laid her on her bed. He wondered where the colonel was. Then he remembered that Jennie's father had left that morning in answer to a hurried summons from Washington. He would be away overnight.

A hasty search of kitchen and bath provided a basin of water, a chunk of ice and a sponge. Billy assembled these at the bedside. But there was no need. He was dipping the sponge when Jennie's eyes opened slowly.

They turned on him blankly at first, then widened with glad incredulity. Jennie lay quite still, scanning the haggard face looking fearfully into hers.

Billy stooped and kissed her lips. She sighed gratefully.

"Billy dear," she whispered, "you're sure it's you?"

"Of course, sweetheart."

"Then—then it wasn't the——"

"The last crash? Yes, it was, Jennie. The first and the last!"

She understood and rolled her head feebly from side to side in brave protest.

"Billy! Don't, dear! You mustn't now. I can't——" Her eyes closed wearily.

But he persisted grimly.

"Never again, Jennie! Not as long as you live!"

She opened her eyes and smiled mournfully at that.

"Perhaps," she said, "that won't be very long, Billy."

He threw out a hand to steady himself.

"Jennie!" he cried. "Hush!"

She only smiled at him and went on gently.

"No, Billy. You may as well know now. My heart—I didn't tell you. I'm afraid, dear, this has been the last crash for me.

Perhaps—perhaps it is—better that way. Perhaps it was—meant to be—that way—from the first."

"Jennie! Don't—don't give up this way. It can't be true. Just one little crash couldn't—— You must try—try——"

"I won't give up, Billy. I'll try—as hard—as I can. But oh, Billy dear—I'm so—tired!"

The screen door slammed lightly. Weyman came down the hallway.

Billy met him outside Jennie's door.

"How is she?" the surgeon asked. "Her heart, you know——"

"I didn't know!" groaned Billy. "If I only had!"

"I'll see what's to do," said Weyman, and left Billy in the hall.

Out on the veranda Cobb fumbled for a cigarette and matches. The surgeon found him there a moment later, smoking furiously.

"Not so good," said Weyman gravely. "It isn't so much her heart as a general breaking down. Heart makes it doubly bad, of course. Looks like pernicious—— But never mind. Make yourself useful, Bill. Step over to Cahill's quarters and see if Mrs. Cahill can come in for the night. If she's not there get somebody else. Pull yourself together, man! And hurry up!"

He disappeared in the house and Billy stumbled off on his errand.

News of Jennie the next day was equivocal. The colonel returned at noon. When Billy collared him after lunch he pursed his lips and shook his head.

"Not too good, son," he said. "So far, no better and no worse. Weyman won't commit himself one way or the other."

He swung away toward headquarters, and Billy falling into step alongside followed into his office.

From his desk the colonel looked up.

"What else, son?"

"This," said Billy. He drew a white envelope from the pocket of his tunic and laid it on the desk.

"I imagine," said the colonel, "I can guess the contents."

Billy nodded.

"Will you approve it, sir?"

Colonel Brent leaned back and interrogated the ceiling with his eyes. Then he leaned forward and brought his gaze to bear on Billy.

"Boy," he said, "you've been having a hell of a time, haven't you? Now listen to me. I've been through all this, too. Perhaps I wasn't hit so badly, perhaps I was. But never mind. It was bad. Anyway, the thing that's worrying you killed my wife, Jennie's mother, by inches. At least, that's what I think. Perhaps it is killing Jennie now. We may as well face the possibility. If Jennie lives we'll let her decide whether I approve your resignation or not. There's time enough for that. But supposing——"

He paused and gulped painfully. Then he went on.

"Well, let that be. Put it this way. Without somebody like Jennie, where would you be if you left the service? Would you have anything remaining to live for? Flying was all your life until you and Jennie came to—an understanding. If—just for instance, mind—you had to do without Jennie, flying would be all your life once more. Isn't that about the way of it?"

"No, sir. I'll never touch a stick again. Not after yesterday. When I think of Jennie's face—brrr-r-r!"

The colonel considered at length.

"Very well, son," he decided. "I'll approve this. Maybe your case is worse than I thought."

He drew the inclosure from the envelope. Billy had already typed the indorsement of approval for his signature. The colonel read it over slowly, shook his head dubiously, and signed.

"There you are," he said and tossed the document in the outgoing-mail basket. "No more engines, no more ships, no more chasing clouds."

"And no more crashes!" said Billy fervently. "Amen, and thank you, sir. I'm not happy about it. It's a hard thing to do. It'll take me a long time to get used to being a kiwi. But I'll have Jennie—if she'll have me now. And if she won't, well, it's for her good, anyway."

"I hope so," said the colonel, with little conviction. "By the way, what will you do when you get out? Jennie will have to eat when she gets well, you know."

"I can manage. I know something about gas engines. The automobile business——"

"Of course. And that reminds me. You've got to keep busy until your discharge. I have a job that will hold your mind off things you won't want to think of. Washington is sending the *XT-6* in to-mor-

row from Dayton—McCook Field, you know. You'll take charge of her final conditioning for a nonstop hop to Panama. Norris will fly her down about the tenth if she's ready. I recommended him and his orders are out. He doesn't know this yet. You might tell him. Ask him to see me this afternoon."

The colonel was the C. O. again. He would be the C. O. until he left his office. Then he would be Jennie's father until another day.

Cobb pulled himself together, saluted, and went out to find Norris.

As the door closed behind him the colonel retrieved his resignation from the mail basket, slipped it into a folder marked "Hold" and put the folder away in a private drawer.

"He's too good to lose," muttered the colonel. "We'll wait and see. I almost did that once."

Into the work of conditioning the *XT-6* Billy Cobb threw himself with the fervor of desperation. There really wasn't much to be done, but he made things to do. Every nut and bolt, every cotter pin, turnbuckle, wire, pulley and bearing that wasn't spanking brand-new he took out and replaced. He pulled the motor, took it to pieces, and literally rebuilt it. He relined the entire ship with micrometric accuracy. He discovered a way that the McCook engineers had overlooked to enlarge the gas tank and add an extra two hundred miles' worth of fuel. The massive metal monoplane had been a new ship when she left McCook. She was new-plus before Billy pronounced her ready for the twenty-five-hundred-mile straight-away from Langstrom to the Canal.

Most of the things he did to her were gratuitous. She didn't need them, for at McCook, her home station, they are thorough before everything else. He did them to have something to do. Driving himself like a fury, driving his team of mechanics, up at dawn and in at midnight or after, he found that there were periods during the day, some of them as long as five minutes, when he ceased to think of the tragedy in the hushed bedroom at the rear of the colonel's quarters.

Jennie was failing steadily. He had been confident, at first, that his final renunciation of the air would revive her. But it hadn't. She had chided him as vigorously as her failing strength allowed and then relapsed into pitiable acceptance.

"I mustn't blame you, Billy," she had whispered at last; "it's because I was so selfish. I wanted you all for myself. It's my fault, dear. But, oh, I am sorry. And you will suffer for it more than I, I know. I should think you'd hate me."

He had turned away and brushed a sleeve across his eyes at that.

Weyman allowed him a scant half hour with her each day, and he had chosen the time just before sundown, between five and six, when his crew of mechanics were at evening mess and there was a lull in the work at the *XT's* hangar.

He would tiptoe into the room, in the failing light. She would smile her wistful greeting. He would sit beside the bed and lift her hand—which she could no longer raise herself—and hold it tight. Every day that hand grew more woefully thin, lighter, more transparent. And thinking of it at night, as he lay wide-eyed, Billy would grit his teeth in agony and groan softly, so as not to waken Norris, until the brief respite of sleep, which did not always come, stilled his misery.

During these days the voice of an airplane was sheer torture. It would break on his ears, a poignant reminder of the only two things he had cared for in life, the air and Jennie. And now he feared and had renounced the first; and the second was being swept away from him, under his eyes.

Once he had tried to vision what the world would be like with Jennie gone and the air denied him by his fear—for he scarcely doubted now that Jennie was doomed, and his present terror was too great to admit the supposition of a return to the air. He had revolted with a shudder from the bleakness of the prospect. He had a feeling that existence could not persist in the empty void of the barren future his brain conjured. His world must end with the passing of Jennie. He could perceive nothing beyond but interminable reaches of hopelessness.

Another thing added to the maze of troubles and questionings that enmeshed him. It was paradoxical, unbelievable, but he had discovered, now that the air was put from him definitely and for all time, that he wanted to fly again! Explain this as you will, it was so. And Cobb was by no means the first nerve-broken pilot to know that

strange contradiction of desire for the thing feared. Not a few of the men but all of the men whom the air has broken have carried, or are carrying, that same fierce longing for the blue remotenesses on with them to their graves. In some the longing has waxed, at length, even greater than their fear and they have returned. They are the happy ones. For in those whose fear has proven the stronger urge the suffering bred of conflict between their fear and their desire has been intense. It was so with Billy Cobb. He suffered intensely.

So, haggard and drawn, dead for lack of sleep, worked to exhaustion, a prey to grief and to this strange mingling of fear and desire, he wore along hopelessly, watching Jennie burning lower and lower, through the heat of early September.

On the ninth the *XT-6* was ready to the last safety wire. He told Norris, who was expecting it.

"Check!" agreed his friend. "God willing, I shall open a bottle of forbidden nectar at Cristobal, or vicinity on the eleventh. We hop to-morrow at four o'clock. Have the valet pack my toothbrush in the morning, Bill."

Billy shuddered at the prospect of what lay ahead of Norris. Once he would have leaped at the chance to lay such a course, himself. But no longer. He was amazed that his friend could face the undertaking at this eleventh hour with cheerful banter on his lips. He, Billy, dared not make one circuit of the airdrome off the ground. Yet Norris was talking carelessly about flying to Panama for a drink! It seemed impossible that he himself had been as Norris so short a time ago. Less than two months since, it was! Two months that were a lifetime long.

On the morning of the tenth a thin stream of civilians began trickling into the post and out onto the airdrome where the *XT-6* was drawn up before her hangar with heat waves squirming and flickering along the upper surfaces of her tapered metal wings. She was an unlovely, sullen-appearing brute, with a surly upturned snout projecting eight feet above and beyond the main spars of her thick-cambered gray pinions. She had wheels like millstones for size, and the V-struts of her undercarriage suggested the trusswork of a railway bridge. A banquet for ten might have been served on the ample stream-lined spreader board that hid her heavy axles. There was nothing birdlike about her. Rather she was reptilian, hideous, like the imagined flying monsters of the Mesozoic swamps.

Norris went up her ladder and into the pilot's cabin at the tip of the snout. Behind him, on either side of the fuselage, the twin propeller blades projecting from the motor housings on the wings whirled idly with a vicious whisper. He taxied out to the line and took off for a final air test. The steel-winged monster moved with no effect of speed whatever. She left the ground reluctantly. She climbed reluctantly, although her load was not yet aboard. She turned reluctantly. There was no spontaneity in anything she did. Decidedly she was a flying machine and no airplane.

Other ships were in the air, a small host of them; eager, nervous little scouts, steady DH'S, a pair of wide-winged Cardinals. The *XT* lumbered past them disdainfully like a dowager at a garden party.

"My Aunt Maria, what a tub!" commented a reporter, addressing Billy Cobb who stood toying listlessly with a spanner. "Can that thing fly to Panama?"

"I guess so," said Billy, without interest.

Norris eased the *XT-6* gingerly into the home stretch and floated her down smoothly for a perfect three-point contact.

"Cunning little mastodon, isn't she?" he grinned to Billy when he had coaxed her in and turned her over to the crew. "But she's going to make Cristobal for tea to-morrow—with rum in the tea, too. You've groomed her to the pink, Billy."

"Grin if you want to, John," said Cobb. "I don't envy you this hop."

Norris sobered.

"I suppose not, Bill. I wish to God you did! How is *she* this morning?"

"I haven't heard yet," groaned Billy.

At noon mess Billy struggled to consume a cracker and a glass of milk. He left Norris attacking a second portion of sirloin and baked potatoes, the last real food he would get until the next day's tea time at the equator.

On the club veranda, stretched wearily in a canvas chair, Billy lit a cigarette. He was vaguely disturbed. Something was wrong. Jennie wanted him. She was calling. A tightness at the throat, a clutching at the heart, a whispering in the ears, told him to go, to go now, not to wait. He ground out the smoldering stub of his cigarette with an impatient heel and left the club.

Jennie stirred a little and brightened when he tapped on her half-open door and tiptoed in. He drew a chair to the bedside and bent over her. Her wistful eyes seemed to him clearer to-day. There was a little of their old starriness back again he thought. His pulse quickened hopefully.

"I had a hunch you were lonely," he explained, "so I came early."

She smiled, almost happily.

"I was going to ask daddy to send for you," she confessed.

"It's funny," he said. "I had a feeling just now that I ought to come. I can't make it out. It was like——"

"Never mind what, dear. I wanted you and you are here. I wanted——"

She paused to consider how she should say what was in her mind. It would be difficult. But it must be said before—before it was too late.

"Billy, dear," she began, "lying here and trying to think things out an idea has come to me. I think I know why this trouble has visited us. Have you ever thought why?"

"I have thought of only one thing, Jennie, for so long that it seems like years."

"I know, dear, I know. And that is just it. It's wrong, wrong for people who belong to a—a—well, a cause—like the air, to think only of themselves, as we have done. And this is the punishment. It is, Billy. I am sure. We loved the air, we were dedicated to it, and then we turned our coats and were ready to desert it for each other. And we deserve to be punished! Perhaps I am light-headed from being sick. Perhaps this sounds very foolish. But I feel it so strongly, dear. I think it must be true."

Cobb sat silent, twisting his stubby fingers miserably.

"Does this hurt you—very much—Billy?" she questioned anxiously.

"Go on, Jennie. Never mind if it does," he said with an effort.

"Then I'll finish," she said. "It all seems to have moved along so inevitably. The air needed you. Then I won you away—even if I tried not to. And the air must have you back. So—so I am being—being put—out of the way."

"No, Jennie! No!" he cried.

"Perhaps not, dear. Perhaps not. But wouldn't it be almost better so? Have you thought what our life will be—if I do—get well? Either way, whether you live for me or for the air—suffering for both of us, Billy! I never knew my mother well. But daddy has told me. They suffered terribly. And in the end it came to—to this that has come to us."

"I don't care, Jennie—I don't care! I couldn't go on if you——"

"Yes, you could, Billy. You could. You would have the air again. It would comfort you after a time. You think not now, but it would, dear. And—and—Billy, do you believe in the—the Afterward?"

"I don't know. I only know——"

"I think," said Jennie slowly, "there must be an Afterward. I almost know it now. I used to doubt and wonder. But now I am sure. Because, Billy, the air won't need you always. There will be others, sooner or later, to take your place. But I shall need you, always—and there can be no others, ever. You will come to me—Afterward. It is only fair. It would be so—so cruelly futile and incomplete, otherwise. I have a certainty—something I can't explain—but a certainty, that when the air is done with you we shall find each other—somewhere—somehow! If I weren't sure of that I couldn't, I know I couldn't, go away, even for a little while. And if I do have to go, dear, you will remember—remember what I tell you now. It will only be for a little while. Try to believe. Try—try! And go back to the air, Billy. I shall be waiting—waiting for you—until—the last crash—Billy, dear!"

She stopped speaking. Billy saw that her eyes were closed and that she was panting with the effort of what she had said. She looked unutterably weary and yet, somehow, indescribably happy.

In a little while her eyes opened and her lips moved feebly again, more feebly than before.

"Isn't—isn't John hopping off this afternoon, Billy?" she asked.

"About four o'clock," said Billy.

"Daddy said something about it. You are helping him, aren't you?"

"I'm supposed to be."

"I am keeping you from what you should be doing again. John may need you. You mustn't humor me any longer. Come back—this evening—if——"

Billy's heart leaped violently and he started up.

"'If!'" he cried. "'If!' If what? Jennie!"

"If the doctor will let you, dear," she concluded. But that was not what had

trembled on her tongue. She had caught herself just in time. What she had barely missed saying was: "If I am still here."

His alarm passed. The merciful deceit worked. He bent and kissed her and went out to join Norris. He promised himself confidently to look in again that evening, if only to say good night.

He had not heard her yearning whisper as he passed the threshold: "Good-by, Billy. Good-by—oh, my dear!"

VIII.

The last reporter had asked the last question. The last photographer had snapped the last shutter. And the *XT-6* was turning her tail to the farewell group at the hangar and her nose to the line. She crawled painfully across the field, snorting protests from time to time when Norris jabbed the throttles to keep up the headway. A squad of sweating mechanics trotted about her like so many solicitous tugs escorting a liner down the bay.

There was no wind to help her off the ground. The day was passing in a bath of stagnant heat. Stripped though the big gray ship was of everything but the barest necessities—she was not even carrying radio—yet she was so heavily laden with fuel that there was some small doubt if she could clear the field. A little wind to blow her up would have been a welcome circumstance. But the only movement in the air was the dancing of the heat waves.

Norris was confident he could coax her off. There was a fair mile-and-a-quarter stretch available for the take-off, with no obstacles higher than a man's head for another quarter mile beyond. If the wind-speed gauge played true he could drop the tail when the needle read seventy and trust to the god of aviators to yank her wheels off the grass. Once in the air it would be a question of what the cellars of Panama could provide for a celebration. Norris was not concerned with anything that lay along the two-thousand-odd miles between the boundaries of Langstrom and the hangars of Cristobal.

The face of his companion, a likely enough youngster but with no considerable experience of record-distance work, was grave and a little drawn. Norris nudged him with his shoulder and grinned a reassurance.

"Buck up, bird!" he shouted above the synchronized beating of the engines. "In five minutes we'll be over the hump or out of the world."

But he was taking no chances. Every inch must count. He held on doggedly clear to the extreme corner of the field. Mechanics closed in when he finally shut the throttles down. They set their humid shoulders to the fuselage and swung the tail around.

Norris waved a hand.

"All clear?"

"All clear, sir," came the answer.

He drove the throttles home, shoved the wheel forward, nudged the rudder bar, and cocked an eye on the wind-speed gauge.

"It's cocktails in Panama or candles at Langstrom!" he yelled.

The *XT-6* moved a foot toward the Canal—two—three—ten. Her tail began to rise. She set her nose on the low horizon and charged heavily down the fairway, roaring with the voice of eight hundred horse. The needle on the speed gauge trembled. It began to climb. It made thirty at the quarter mile. At the half it pointed fifty-five and still rising. When it reached sixty it hesitated and Norris stopped breathing. Then it moved on upward—slowly—slowly.

A quarter mile more of grace.

"Cocktails or candles!" grunted Norris, and inched the wheel forward.

The last inch did it.

"Seventy!" proclaimed the needle.

"Cocktails!" answered Norris. He drew the wheel back lovingly.

The great gray wings tilted as the tail sank. They bit the air. The first low bush shot beneath the spreader board.

"I like Martinis best," said John Norris.

"Thank the Lord!" prayed the youngster on his left.

Two minutes later on Langstrom a red-faced mechanic burst from the armament stores with a stubby blue pistol in one hand and a carton of shells in the other. If Norris or his companion, Crawley, had looked back then they would have seen a red Very light burst, high above the hangars. The mechanic with the stubby pistol was loading rocket shells and firing as fast as his fingers could charge the piece. But the crew of the *XT-6* had their eyes on the road to Panama. The recall rockets were unavailing.

And between their eyes and the undercarriage spread broad wings. They did not know and they could not see that the *XT-6*

was minus a wheel. The rubber-rimmed disk had snapped the retaining cotter pin, spun to the end of the axle, and dropped off as the ship took the air.

It would be candles, not cocktails, at Cristobal, unless——

Standing with the colonel on the field, Billy Cobb had seen the wheel drop. He had ordered the recall lights. But he foresaw that they would do no good. Norris would not be looking back. And as for circling the field, that was out of all expectation. It would have been suicide to turn the *XT-6* with the load she bore under five hundred feet altitude. She would have laid twenty miles behind her ere that.

And so it turned out. Without a deviation to right or left she bore due south, floundering through the heat waves, and in five minutes had passed from view in the thick haze that hung on the burning air.

A picture flashed through Billy's brain; a picture of a great gray ship that floated down to Cristobal, circled the sun-bleached hangars, settled groundward, touched, dropped a wing, somersaulted mightily, crashed with a roar of rending steel, and lay still, a hideous mass of riven junk. He saw the broken bodies of two men pinned beneath that mass.

Norris must be warned. He must. If he knew, he could pancake in, stall, and save young Crawley and himself, though not the ship, perhaps. A dropped wheel was deadly if you didn't know. But if you knew, it could be dealt with.

He was trying to think. How could Norris be reached? Radio? The *XT-6* had no radio. Cable Cristobal? Obviously. But something might happen to the message. It might be delayed, or garbled in transmission. Not likely. Still, there was that chance and this was a matter of life and death. And again, if Cristobal got the message, what then? They would send men out on the field to wave wheels at Norris. That was the classic signal. Norris would understand, if he saw. But would he see? He might not circle the field. His gas might be out and he might drive straight in the moment he picked up the T. Cristobal would be notified by cable, of course. But that wouldn't be enough. It wasn't sure.

Norris must be reached before he lifted Panama. And he could be reached. Billy knew how. Then, with stunning impact, the conviction struck him. There was only one way to save Norris, and only one man to do it. He, Billy Cobb, was the man.

He tried to suppress the thought. Jennie! It would be the final blow to her. But she might not know. He would warn the colonel. And if all went well—— It wouldn't, though. He had the washed-out pilot's certainty of that. No flyer in Billy's condition of air nerves ever believes he can fly without crashing. That is one of the unchanging symptoms that make the disease. And Billy's plan to warn Norris involved flying. It involved not only flying. It involved landing—landing perhaps hundreds of miles from an airdrome, perhaps in swamps, perhaps in mountains, perhaps in the ocean, and almost certainly in the obscurity of night!

He racked his brain desperately for excuses. He found none excepting Jennie. Could he do it? Could he leave her? Could he so much as straddle a fuselage without swooning of dread?

Then the questions reversed themselves. Could he possibly escape it? What would she say if he did—when she found out, when she learned of John Norris' death, and young Crawley's, by the hangar lines of Cristobal—when she knew who had let them go to that inevitable ending? Was it possible that he could refuse this summons, that he could even consider refusal?

Yet consider he did for a split second longer. There were other pilots, good pilots, pilots without nerves, above all, pilots without the slender thread of a sweetheart's tenuous life tangled round their hearts and bound up in their actions. Why not let them—— But it was begging the question. Norris was Billy's friend a hundred times more than theirs. This was his own show. He could not put it off. And he knew what Jennie would say if he tried.

He became aware that the colonel was eying him. Then he felt the colonel's hand on his arm.

"Are you going to do it, son?" asked the C. O. quietly.

Billy did not stop to wonder how Jennie's father knew. It seemed to him that his thoughts must have screamed aloud to every ear on Langstrom.

He gulped, trying to force an answer from his parched throat.

While he hesitated an orderly drew the colonel aside and spoke some urgent message. The face of Jennie's father was a

gray mask when he turned back to Billy Cobb.

Billy made his decision.

"I'll go, sir. I've got to. But Jennie mustn't——"

"I think," said the colonel gravely, "Jennie will not know."

"I told her I'd drop in to-night. You'll fix up some excuse?"

"Yes—if she—asks for you—son."

"All right, sir." Billy swallowed hard. "Good-by—until—until——"

"Get going, son. Get going. You've lost too much time already. And catch them, catch them if it takes the last drop of gas! I'm taking other measures but I'm counting on you."

It was five o'clock when Hansen cleared the blocks frantically from Billy's DH. Other ships had started in pursuit already. But Cobb discounted them. They would fail one way and another. This was his show. His last show, he thought grimly. Strangely, it wasn't proving so hard, now that his mind was set to it.

If it weren't for Jennie—— Even Jennie worried him less than he could have believed. Gradually, as he checked the DH over minutely, supervised the fueling, tested the lights on the instrument board, and gave the engine a brief run on the blocks, a mood of exaltation took possession of him. Jennie would approve. She would have something to remember him by—something worth remembering. And he was going to fly again! Going back to the air! It would never be said of him that he had not stuck to the last crash!

Hansen broke in on his thoughts.

"Here you are, sir," panted the mechanic, and handed him a light wheel filched from his own silver scout—the ship he loved and had not flown for weeks. Hansen was gasping, dripping wet from the feverish exertion of getting the deserted DH in flying trim for the long route ahead. Billy tucked the wheel beside him in the cockpit.

"Engine O. K., sir?" queried Hansen.

"O. K.," confirmed Billy, his heart beginning to race as the moment for the take-off loomed.

"Shall I clear away?" said Hansen.

A last violent misgiving assailed Billy. He saw Jennie again, as he had left her a few hours since, feeble, pale, her face a wistful wraith against the pillow. He would not see that face again! A paroxysm of yearning seized him. To leap from the ship, to race to her, to kiss her once more, to lift her and hold her in his arms!

"Wait!" he gasped to Hansen. "Wait—I——"

What were those things she had said to him? "Back to the air—wrong to think of yourself—Afterward—After——"

"Let's go!" cried Billy Cobb. "Clear away!"

No rolling to the line, this time; no dropping of precious minutes in deference to flying rules. Billy opened out the instant the blocks left the wheels. He was off the ground and flashing into a turn before Hansen realized that the ship was gone.

"Gosh!" grunted the amazed mechanic spitting out dust as he watched Billy flip around a fifty-degree bank and scream off southward. "He's full out again, all right!"

Billy was far from full out as yet. But he was driving himself to a semblance of that attitude which looked very much like the genuine thing. The line of hangars streaked past as he bore on the stick, then some trees and a huddle of farm buildings. Swiftly the landscape flattened beneath him and in three minutes the world had lost its familiar contour of wood and hill and valley and was changed to a slowly crawling panorama, a giant painted map that rolled up out of the haze-dimmed horizon and slipped back into the haze.

At five-forty a blur of smoky white emerged from the veil ahead, and the glint of orange sunlight on water showed through the whirling disk of the propeller as Billy stared into the south.

New York and the harbor!

He tore past Manhattan at three thousand feet. The lower city looked as flat as Harlem, its jagged, towering sky line merged with the cable slots of Broadway, humbled and erased from that height.

The yellow stubble fields of Jersey began their steady passage far below. Off to the left a creamy thread of ocean beach slipped past, flanked by a vast expanse of gray-blue surface that ran out and up into the mist without a break. Little shreds arranged in parallels, north and south, were steamers and windjammers in and outbound on the bosom of the Atlantic.

A gray stain on the giant map appeared. Atlantic City!

Billy looked at his clock and began to calculate. The *XT-6* had left at four o'clock

or thereabouts. She was rated for a speed of eighty miles. It was half past six now. She should be two hundred miles along her course, somewhere south of the Delaware Capes. He was pulling up on her at a hundred and twenty an hour. Mathematically he should overtake her two hundred and forty miles out, at seven o'clock. She should be in the neighborhood of Cape Charles when he sighted her. If happily luck and his calculations coincided there was an even chance that he could signal Norris and cut off across Chesapeake Bay in time to make Douglas Field by the last glimmer of twilight.

But if he missed her, which was something more than likely, for the sky is an infinite hunting ground——

He wouldn't miss her! He would prowl her course until she showed up if it took the last whiff of gas in the tank. He dismissed Douglas Field from his mind.

The world below was going dim. Off in the west the haze-draped rim of the day still showed a pale yellow shot through with red and purple pencilings. Away to the east night already was screening off the edge of the ocean.

Stars began to show palely in the tenuous blue above as the DH thrust the capes of the Delaware behind her tail skid. And below there were more stars set in a gray-blue mosaic of vaguely hinted roads, fields and homesteads, with here and there a constellation of little luminaries that told of a shadowy town or hamlet beneath.

Steadily the mobile, twilit map of the East coast slipped northward, marching slowly under the speck that swung suspended between the fleeing day and the creeping night. Billy's engine sang a full-voiced vesper and the wires, quivering in the back draft, took up the burden on a higher key. Whipping the air behind her, a mile to every thirty seconds, the DH bore down the trail of Norris and the *XT-6* with all twelve plugs a-spark and a wake of red streaming spitefully along her flanks from the lips of the glowing manifolds.

Lower Delaware, the coast line of Maryland, and then the dim finger of Cape Charles!

Seven o'clock, the Chesapeake, and night drew on but not John Norris and the *XT-6*. Ten miles to the east or ten miles to the west they might be droning now, and still on their course. The highways of the air are something wider than the boulevards below. There is plenty of room to pass without a hail.

Off the tip of the Cape, Billy drew the throttle back. The *XT-6* must be somewhere thereabouts and he knew at what altitude he ought to spy her. Two thousand feet, Norris had said the course would be. Billy coasted down to fifteen hundred and circled round a ten-mile radius. If Norris passed above, and within eyeshot, he would catch the silhouette against the sky where some of the brightness of the departed day still lingered. He waited half an hour. But the black outlines of a southing plane that he raked the heavens for did not show.

He shook his head and opened out again, roaring with flaming manifolds head on into the black masses of piled-up cloud that towered now against the south, barring the road to Panama.

The storm closed in on him suddenly. It came with a stunning burst of blue-white light and a blast that drowned the shouting of the manifolds and the screaming of the wires. A giant hand reached down out of the gray cloud bluff ahead, clutched the DH in invisible tentacles and swept it irresistibly into the smother. The hand was the first cloud current. And there were more waiting. Billy knew them. The clouds are full of currents. They grapple with a ship. They hurl it back and forth from one to another. They thrust it up. They stamp it down. They fling it crazily from wing to wing. But there is no harm in them if you are not afraid. And Billy was no longer afraid. He let them have their frolic, fighting back with sweeping stick and swinging rudder bar.

Rain began to bite his face. It spewed back from the wind shield in a hissing sheet. He switched on the dash light and laid his course through the blackness of the clouds and the blinding of the lightning by compass and the bubble of the inclinometer. The engine yelled defiance through the turmoil as the DH tossed the spray of mist and raindrops over its heaving shoulders.

His head buried in the cockpit, Billy watched the inclinometer go mad. Between gusts he edged back on the stick, gaining fifty feet here, dropping twenty there when some spiteful gust thrust him down again. But the altimeter showed a steady average gain. And suddenly, on the crest of a mighty leaping spout of air, the DH shot

dizzily up into the calm of the clear night and rode easily in the starlight above the roof of the storm, a sea of gray-white billows stretched about her, beyond the span of eye.

"Now where am I?" muttered Billy. "And where is John?"

He circled the two-thousand-foot level, peering along the sea of clouds and up into the star-sprinkled bowl of deepening blue. Nothing! Clouds below, stars above, and somewhere between a shadowy monster forging toward the equator with two men in its maw—and in Cristobal a pair of yawning graves!

Eight-thirty! An hour, perhaps a little more, to go. Above the roof of the storm a waxing moon rode up and turned the gray expanse of cloud to gleaming silver. Higher it drew. And looking down Billy saw the moon-cast shadow of his own ship skimming along the bright cloud sea.

That gave him an idea. He began to peer restlessly from side to side and downward. The thing he sought would be plain to see now if it crossed his course. But was his course the right one? There was no way of knowing to within fifty miles. The world lay veiled beneath. There was not a beacon or landmark visible this side of the North Star. He could only hope.

This much was certain, at least. He must be miles ahead of the *XT-6*. He could stop the southward rush, now, and cruise the course at right angles. Norris must pass him somewhere. And if he passed near enough——

Nine-thirty! The engine sang a soft lullaby of twelve hundred r. p. m. Billy was hoarding fuel as he tacked above the silver sea.

Twenty miles east—twenty miles west, and the moonbeams flashed on the burnished wings as the DH swung the turns with a lazy dip.

Ten o'clock!

Twenty miles east—twenty miles west.

The moon rode high and the silver sea began to break into islands and headlands, with rifts of dusk between.

How much longer would the gas——

And then he saw it, the thing his weary eyes strained to catch! A scuttling black shadow it was that slipped out of a dusky channel, rode swiftly across the bright expanse of a fleecy headland, and disappeared back into the dusk again. That was it; the moon-cast silhouette of the *XT-6* snoring through the night to Panama!

Billy looked up and saw her, a great gray-winged ghost shouldering down the meridians with the dim stars in the moon-bright sky winking off and on as she passed them.

The DH woke with a roar. Streamers of flame broke from the trailing manifolds. She set her nose to the moon and spurned five hundred feet beneath her in one leap.

Perhaps a minute passed. Perhaps two. Then she rolled in like a nuzzling whale calf alongside the *XT-6* and dropped to the dogged pace of the larger ship.

Billy could see two pale spots peering out at him from the black cockpit in her snout, ten feet below. He guessed the amazement those faces must wear. And indeed, so bright was the light of the moon, intensified as it was by the reflected radiance from the clouds below, that he could almost make out the features of Norris and Crawley as they raised their eyes to question the import of his coming.

Floating along precariously with no more than bare flying speed Billy took the spare wheel tucked beside him and waved it overside. The moonlight drenched the form of a man who rose in the nose of the *XT-6* and flung a gesture of understanding back at him.

Then the DH coughed and spat. And Billy slipped her off with engine stalled. The gas was out. There was none in the emergency tank for the very good reason that he had been flying on that for the past twenty minutes.

Wheeling slowly the DH spiraled down the night. With the voice of the engine stilled the wind whispered forebodingly around her tilted struts. The wires sang a high-keyed dirge.

"It's the last crash now," said Billy Cobb. And then he thought of Jennie and his throat went dry.

Into the mottled light and shadow, under the isles and headlands of the breaking clouds, Billy and the DH coasted reluctantly. Below where the moonbeams struck he could make out in patches the silver blue of fields and the argent thread of a meandering stream. Far away down there a single ruddy star marked the lighted window of a farmhouse. A chalk-white road ran east and west. The road was straight. That meant level country.

There were fields, anyhow. They weren't

swamps, he judged. But they would be none too wide. At a thousand feet he circled one that promised some degree of safety. It looked a smooth clear surface. If there were no great amount of wind, there was an even chance. The black and white of light and shadow showed the run of the furrows which gave him his landing direction.

Once he would have made this landing with scarcely a qualm. But now, after all he had been through, with his nerve weakened and his muscles taut with fear, his judgment warped by overanxiety, could he do it? He held his breath as he made the last flanking leg along the ends of the furrows and turned in fearfully for the landing.

Roadside trees barred the way, and a string of bare poles with wires swayed between. He must clear them to a nicety, perhaps a yard to spare, no more, for the field was short in all conscience and at the far end he could see what looked like a stone wall—a barrier of some sort, in any case.

The trees reached up to clutch him down and barely missed their grip. He had done this before. It was still with him, then, the cunning he had thought was gone. Bare crosstrees strung with copper strands flashed by at either wing tip. Whispering gratulatingly the DH settled groundward, her tail dropping inch by inch as the furrows rose to brush the wheels.

She touched smoothly. And then Billy saw that fate was set against him. A crazy gray form lay dead ahead, a weather-beaten plow, waiting like a grim skeleton. He kicked the rudder bar violently. But too late. The ship ground into the obstacle with a snarl. Her undercarriage crumpled. She plunged her heavy nose into the rain-soaked earth, stopped with a crash of snapping spars, and quivered her upflung tail helplessly at the moon.

Billy felt his belt snap with the shock. Then he knew nothing more until he saw Jennie coming toward him, sweet and luminous, along the moonlit field.

She came to him slowly, picking her way across the furrows. He stepped from the shattered wreck of the DH and went to meet her. She held out her hands to him. He put his arms about her and kissed the smile that met his lips.

He heard her whisper something.

"Only for a little while, Billy, my dear. Just to say good night. But I shall be waiting—waiting dear, again—when the air is done with you—at the last crash."

She was gone. His arms were empty and aching. He raised his head and saw that he was not standing in the furrowed field at all. He was slumped on the flooring of the cockpit still, with a shoulder braced against a spar. Blood was trickling down his face from a cut on his forehead.

He pulled himself up unsteadily, clambered to the ground, got a handkerchief from the pocket of his leather coat, slipped off his helmet and bound up the flesh wound as best he could. Then he stumbled out to the road and staggered away toward a white building with one lighted window that gleamed comfortingly through the green haze of the ground mist in the moon's rays.

He knew now what the colonel might have told him—but mercifully withheld—five hours ago at Langstrom. Jennie had gone on to wait for him in the place she called the Afterward. And strangely enough he was not grief burdened. Rather happy instead. Happier than he had been through many anguished weeks.

He had returned to the air. And in the end the air would bring him back to Jennie.

IX.

A year slipped by. Then another. Billy Cobb was shunted from post to post and detail to detail wherever his talents were most needed. The third year saw him back at Langstrom again for the summer activities. And chance and the D. M. A. brought Norris and Crawley and Weyman there to meet him once more.

During those years since he had met Jennie that last time in the moonlight of a Carolina night Billy had flown early and late, in season and out, every trace of the old fear gone. And never a scratch to show for his pains. He had run chances that woke the headlines of a continent into vociferous black. He had flown ships that no one else would, or could; strange outlandish maunderings of the engineer's intemperate brain. He had been lost in the Black Hills of the Dakotas; he had landed with a stalled engine in the peaks of the high Sierras; he had drifted through a night of tempest in the Caribbean. But he had never spent a day in the infirmary to pay for his venturing. Death had stacked the deck against him

many times—and he had won regardless. The air that needed men like Billy Cobb was clinging to him.

This summer he and Norris were wearing two bars on their shoulders and rooming together again. Billy was at his old grind of propaganda hopping mixed with engineering, up at dawn and to bed just ahead of the first cock crow. He was gaunt again, but not haggard; weary, but not worried.

Norris was worried, though.

"Listen here, Bill," he said, one early August night with the crickets singing a sultry chorus outside the windows, "you've got to let up, bird. You may not know what I know, but you're killing yourself. That high-altitude work you did last summer with the Kite weakened your heart plenty. Weyman told me so. He had to stretch a point to let you by when he gave you your last 609 in February, down at Douglas."

"So?" said Billy, thoughtfully. "He kept that from me. Just mentioned something about going easy, that was all. But I can't go easy, John. When I slow up I think too much about Jennie."

"Well, you face another 609 in three weeks. It'd be worse than going easy if you were thrown out entirely, I guess. Better think of that and lay off. Give yourself a chance."

Billy smiled a queer haunting smile and peered at Norris.

"John," he said, "if I were a praying man I would pray morning, noon and night that Weyman might throw me out the next time."

"The hell, Billy! You——"

"Listen, John. Do you remember what I told you about seeing Jennie? And what she said? She'll be waiting. I haven't a doubt about that. And all I've been asking for in the last three years is a crash. Not deliberate, you know. A real one. The sooner it comes the better. But I know it won't come until the air is done with me. If I disqualify when Weyman gets at me it'll be the end. I haven't an idea how it will happen, but I know it will. What was that you told me once—about things being arranged? Well, that's all arranged. Jennie promised me. At least, I believe she did. 'When the air is done with you,' she said—'at the last crash.'"

"And you think that means——" mused Norris.

"Just what it appears to mean. When something happens to take me away from the air I'll go to Jennie. Maybe I'll crash with somebody else, as a passenger. Maybe I'll contract whooping cough and die. But I'll crash off, somehow."

"Well, Bill, perhaps. But that's getting pretty literal. I wouldn't be so sure."

"You would if you loved Jennie," said Cobb.

Norris gave over his exhortations to moderation and sat smoking silently. Billy rolled into his cot and fell off to sleep, in defiance of the drop lamp on the table and the heat.

His roommate put his pipe aside at length and rose to douse the light. Looking down he saw that Billy was smiling faintly in his sleep.

"You sure deserve to smile, old boy," said Norris, and snapped off the switch. "I wonder, now," he grunted as he stretched himself on the torrid sheets.

On August 20th Norris took a five-day leave. On August 25th he returned. Coming by the guard at the gate he headed straight for the club with a vision of sandwiches and coffee in his mind. He had missed his dinner in order to make train connections. As chance provided, Norris had met nobody from Langstrom on his way out to the post. What had happened on the field that day was still the secret of the field as far as Norris was concerned.

Weyman and young Crawley were sitting on the club veranda as Norris came up the steps and through the screen door. He nodded to them and went inside, dropping his suit case in the hall.

He had his sandwiches and his coffee and smoked a cigarette to top off with, letting his thoughts meander idly, glad to rest comfortably after the heat and the grime of the trains. Weyman sitting with Crawley crossed his mind. Weyman recalled something to him. Oh, yes. Billy's 609. It had been due that day. He must ask the surgeon how it turned out. He went out to the veranda and drew a chair beside the two who sat there.

"Where's Bill to-night?" he asked.

He heard the surgeon's chair scrape suddenly. Then he saw that Crawley was eying him with consternation written all over his smooth face.

"Hell!" exclaimed Norris, sitting bolt upright. "What's the matter with you two?"

Weyman cleared his throat.

"Haven't you heard, John?" he said huskily.

"Heard? Heard what? What should I hear?"

"Billy crashed, late this afternoon. He's dead, John."

"Good God! How——"

"Nobody knows," put in Crawley. "It was pretty late. There was only that old crew chief of Bill's, Halliday, who saw it. Everybody else had gone home or was back in the hangars or somewhere. He just floated in, Halliday said, and made a regular landing. Then a tire blew and a wheel buckled and it was all over. His head got the gun butts. Belt broke, they say."

"But that isn't all," Weyman took up the thread. "I think Halliday's brain is softening. He tells a yarn about Billy climbing out of the wreck and babbling to somebody who wasn't there and making weird gestures——"

"Wait a minute," Norris interrupted. "Somebody who wasn't there, you say? How do you know there wasn't anybody there?"

"Why, good Lord, man, there simply wasn't! Halliday saw nobody."

"You think it strange, then—Billy's babbling and gesturing before he died?"

"Strange, certainly. Unless old Halliday——"

"Well, I'll tell you something else that may sound strange, coming from me who haven't been near this post in five days. Doctor, isn't it true that when Billy went up for his 609 this afternoon you disqualified him irrevocably, unconditionally, for good and all?"

The surgeon gaped his astonishment.

"Good night!" he gasped. "How did you know that? It's a fact!"

"If I told you how I knew you'd disqualify *me*. You'd say I was crazy. I'll tell you some time—perhaps. But not to-night. I feel too low to brawl with a skeptic. But just to show you that I'm not simply a good guesser I'll tell you something else."

Norris paused impressively, then affirmed:

"Billy didn't know you'd disqualified him when he went out to fly. Something had interfered. You hadn't told him."

Weyman gaped again.

"John, you've got me going! It's so. I was trying to think up some way to break the bad news gently to Bill when a hurry call came in over the phone. An enlisted man's wife had convulsions. I told Bill I'd be right back. But I was kept away for an hour and he must have thought everything was all right, because he wasn't in the infirmary when I got back there. I sent an orderly to call him in but he was just taking off when the man reached the field. See here, John, how in hell did you guess that?"

"I didn't guess it," protested Norris. "It's simple enough. Bill wouldn't have hopped if he'd known officially he was disqualified. He never deliberately broke a flying regulation in his life."

"Yes, he did," recalled the surgeon. "I saw him do it. The day he went after you with the wheel he crossed the T on the take-off."

"Poor old Bill," said Norris. "That was like him. Somebody else's show was at stake then."

"Well," said the surgeon, "you've explained your second guess, anyhow. But I'm damned if I see how you figured so surely that Bill had been disqualified. Nobody knows that yet excepting the three of us here."

"Never mind how I figured it, doctor. I'll try to make it clear another time. But while you and Crawley are waiting for the explanation you might ask yourselves if the way events shaped themselves this afternoon wasn't a little—a little—awesome. In a minute more, doctor, you would have told Bill he couldn't fly—that the air was through with him. But something intervened at the critical moment. You were prevented. Then you sent an orderly. The orderly reached Billy just in time to miss him. *He* was prevented. That's twice running. Do you think those things were accidents, or were they *deliberately arranged?*"

"Don't be an idiot, John!" grunted the surgeon, who was careful to keep both his mental and physical feet on the ground all the time.

But young Crawley, who belonged to the air, stared wide eyed at Norris.

"Gosh!" he exclaimed. "Gosh, it certainly looks——" Then catching the skeptical eye of the man of science frowning on him he held his peace.

Norris lay on his cot, staring into the dark. He was thinking of the things Weyman and Crawley had just said, of their divergent reactions to the things he had said

to them, and of Billy. He couldn't sleep. Whether it was the heat or grief at the loss of his friend he did not know. He rather thought it must be the heat, because he had lost many friends in his time, and grieved, and slept for all his grieving. It would be cooler on the open airdrome. He decided to go out and have a smoke. He slipped into a soft white shirt, a pair of khaki slacks, and tennis slippers, and left the hut.

A great moon silvered the silent hangars and the sweep of the close-cropped grass across the broad field as Norris strolled with a cigarette in his lips. He was glad he had come out. It *was* cooler.

A sentry stopped on his beat and challenged sharply.

"Officer of the post," said Norris and continued his stroll.

He came to the end of the hangar line. Beyond was the pilotage hut with the flaccid landing sock drooping at its staff by the door. Outside the last hangar stood an empty gasoline drum beside a girder. Norris sat down on the drum and leaned against the girder.

He had not thought it would be so cool out here. Decidedly this was pleasanter than the clammy sheets inside the torrid hut. He closed his eyes contentedly. His cigarette dropped to the ground and went out.

A little noise startled him. He must have been dozing. He opened his eyes to situate the noise. Somehow it sounded like a kiss. Then in wonderment he stared toward the near-by hut where the sock was stirring just a little in a vagrant draft.

Somebody was standing there in the moon-cast shadow. Somebody was moving. Not a sentry. A sentry would not move like that. Then Norris saw that there were two people in the shadow, not one. They walked together. At the edge of the shadow they paused. And he heard that little noise again, the noise that had startled him. It was such a noise as tokens the parting of close-pressed lips.

The two at the edge of the shadow stepped a little apart. They emerged reluctantly into the silver light beyond. Then, so close they passed that Norris might have reached a hand and touched them, Billy Cobb and Jennie Brent walked for the last time along the row of hangars and disappeared together, vanishing into the moon mist as a silver ship might fade into a cloud.

The moon, looking down, saw a sentry pacing the hangar line. The only other life in sight from end to end of Langstrom Field was a man in khaki slacks, a white shirt, and tennis slippers, perched on a gas drum, his head thrown back against a girder, who slept with a smile on his face.

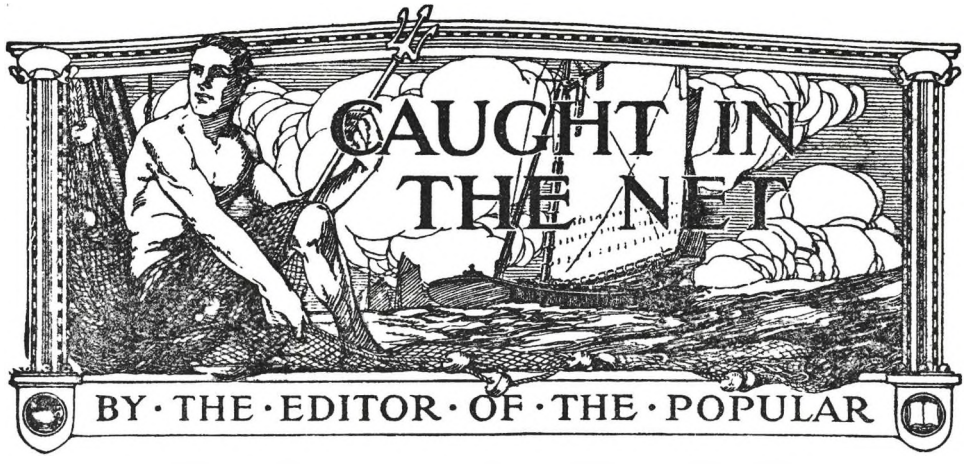
Look for Mr. Latour's story, "Home for Christmas," in the next number.

TWO WOMEN-AT-ARMS

IN the files of the pension bureau in Washington are the records of two women who served in the United States army in war as men and who were awarded pensions for their services.

The first of these women-at-arms was a soldier of the Revolution, Deborah Gannett of Massachusetts, who enlisted in 1781 under the name of "Robert Shurtleff," was wounded in a skirmish at Tarrytown, New York, and was honorably discharged at the end of the war. Later her real identity was disclosed and in 1838 Congress passed a special bill awarding a pension to her heirs.

In 1862 a blue-eyed, red-haired youth of nineteen enlisted in the Ninety-fifth Illinois Infantry under the name of "Albert D. J. Cashier." This soldier served through the Civil War, fighting at Vicksburg and in many other battles. No one ever suspected that "Cashier" was a woman named Hodgers who had been masquerading as a boy and man ever since her childhood in Ireland. After being discharged at the end of the war she became a farm hand, and later an inmate of a soldiers' home. An automobile accident led to the discovery of her identity. She died in 1915. Her name was placed on the pension rolls in 1900.



FOR LESS LAW AND MORE JUSTICE

TWO bills have been introduced into the Senate and the House of Representatives that should have the support of every citizen; especially every citizen who ever has been involved in a lawsuit. Their common object is the authorization of the appointment by the president of a commission to recommend to Congress amendments to the present Judicial Code tending toward the simplification of proceedings in the courts of the United States "so as to promote the speedy termination of litigations on the merits"—in other words, to make it possible for judges to administer justice regardless of legal hair splitting and long-winded battles on technicalities for which the unfortunate litigants have to pay. That such reformation of our legal code is necessary is proved by the facts. By actual count more than half the time of our courts now is taken up by proceedural matters that have no bearing on the merits of the cases being tried. The introduction of these bills into Congress is the latest act in the twelve-year campaign of the American Bar Association for the return to the judiciary branch of our government of the power to administer the law and to create the machinery for its administration; leaving to the legislative branch its proper function of law*making*. Some of the processes of law formulated by Congress have been so highly technical that even members of the United States Supreme Court have been unable to agree as to just what they mean.

Some people will say that the way to reform the courts is to start by reforming the lawyers. But England's experience has been that when the responsibility of the administration of justice was placed on the shoulders of members of the bench and bar they proved themselves equal to the burden and worthy of the trust. It took fifty years of hard fighting to induce Parliament to confine itself to lawmaking and leave to the legal profession the details of law administration, but since that result was achieved in 1873 the improvement of British courts has been so rapid and steady that now the British system is the admiration of the entire world. What English conditions were before this reformation is shown by the remark of a law clerk to *Mr. Pickwick* about an unfortunate bankrupt: "His affairs haven't been in Chancery quite four years yet, and I'm d—d if he don't come worrying here twice a week."

CHANCE

"TAKING a chance" has always made a universal appeal to mortals, for it provides an outlet for one of the strongest superstitions—belief in luck. If a man did not believe in his luck he would be far more chary about pitting his strength, his time and his money against the glimmering possibility of success. May we not say that, in the long run, civilization largely depends upon individual chance taking?

Down at bottom, competition is betting yourself against the other fellow. But that kind of betting is looked upon as praiseworthy. And so is that form of wagering called "insurance." Insurance bets on everything these days—on wind and weather, on burglary and accident, on earthquakes and fire, on the voice of an opera singer, on the hands of an artist, and a thousand other things besides duration of human life. Only the other day an insurance company took a chance on the right weather for an eclipse of the sun. It was negotiated with a body of scientists, the odds being $500 against $10,000.

But other forms of betting—the merely playful, personal sort—have come in for a great deal of critical attention lately, and the makers of righteousness are much disturbed by their insidious encroachments. We are solemnly warned that even school children are cultivating the habit. It is pointed out that British schoolboys put their pence on the races, while American children play automobile poker with the license numbers of cars.

And the garden variety of grown-up, we are informed, is hardly a model for the young in his flirting with Dame Chance. Abroad, the sweepstakes craze caught on like wildfire, especially among the poorer classes, and last year the Calcutta Sweepstakes prize of several hundred thousand dollars was won by a London shop girl.

The lottery idea is gaining ground also. France and Italy are noteworthy for the huge enterprises of the kind they sanction and conduct, Cuba enjoys her regular prize-drawing, red-letter days, and a year ago Russia established a state lottery on a gold basis. Rumor has it that among the Italians in America there are sundry imitations of their national lottery system and that stakes as high as $400,000 have been won.

Is there much difference, except in degree, between the foregoing practices and our own? Baseball and football pools are common in almost every business place, bridge and poker parties are most familiar sights, and the dice rattle on many a counter and table, just as they did in the days of Pericles. One of our latest phases is that of racing tips dispensed by corner news stands.

To some eyes and ears these things are reprehensible. What is to be done? Characteristically, Great Britain, with canny understanding of human nature, has decided to tax betting, and so turn it into government revenue, but the reformers in the United States are preparing for a war of extermination, after tobacco prohibition is an accomplished fact.

"AND GOOD IN EVERYTHING"

THERE is this much to be said for the things of which we disapprove; they help us to appreciate and cherish more highly the things which we are in the habit of accepting as a matter of course.

Take, for instance, bolshevism. Since that doctrine of political economy has been ravaging and pauperizing Russia it is very certain that many a man of mildly socialistic trend has turned in disillusionment from every kind of political experimentation and become a rock-ribbed conservative. There are certainly fewer potential extremists in the world since the advent of bolshevism than there were during the tyrannical sway of the czars. The immediate effects of bolshevism have been bad—for Russia especially bad. But in the long run the effect of bolshevism will be good for it has taught the world the danger and the futility of the purely communistic idea. The pudding had to be eaten by somebody to prove that it was of an evil flavor. The world had to see to believe. We have all seen, now, and it looks as though bolshevism had saved the world from bolshevism for a long time to come. No country will want to try it again until the tragedy of Russia has been utterly forgotten.

China, and the East generally, furnishes us a similar cause for congratulating ourselves that our own system of running a nation is not such a bad one after all despite the fact that China appears to be awakening. The Orient is the home of

ultraconservatism. It lies at the other political pole with reference to Russia. And in its own way it is furnishing the world with just as salutary an example of the way things ought not be done as is Russia. Between Russia, on the extreme left, and China, with her code of ancestral worship and her adoration of hoary precedent to the utter exclusion of common sense, on the ultimate right, we are able to see the approximate middle course of open-minded caution.

Extremes have their uses. Dangerous in themselves, they serve to point the way to security. The radical teaches us not to go too fast. The ultraconservative counsels us to maintain a fair rate of speed, notwithstanding.

What we are thinking of, just now, however, is not so much the political situation as the literary. For a long time we have been wondering what possible good there could be in the harvest of extreme writings that is flooding the literary market in this season of grace. The answer, of course, is as clear as a bell in the fog. The writer of morbid books serves as a goad to his contemporaries to write healthier and better books, and as a warning to the reading public to demand better stories and to support the pens that produce them.

Back in the 'eighties there was a flood of another kind of literature. For one bright and entertaining story that was written there were a hundred dull and interminable screeds that preached a prosy sermon every other page and let the reader's imagination supply the action. That school of literature stood on the side of China. It died of its own deadliness. And watching its demise, clever scribes with ever an eye to the main chance perceived the commercial possibilities in attaching themselves to the opposite literary pole. They wrote the shocking story, the sex story, the story of revolting morbidity, the tale of rampant vice. And for a time they were successful. But just as the public tired of the dry-as-dust saints who peopled the pages of many Victorian works, so they have begun to tire of the shameless rascals and the unblushing flappers who scorch their paths from cover to cover of much of the current scribblings. The era of the goody-goody story was over some time back. The knell of the vicious, the sordid, and the morbid tale is sounding. The one did little good and gave small pleasure while it lasted. The other has done a great deal of harm, no doubt. But both have had their share in teaching writers and readers alike that the kind of stuff old Shakespeare wrote—with a modern twist—is the kind of stuff to write. There is that much to be said for the dull book, and for the lurid book. But that's about all.

ARM, YE BRAVES!

THERE is a new grave being dug, right next to the one that holds the body of the late John Barleycorn. The new grave is for Lady Nicotine. The gravedigger is The Nonsmokers' Protective League, an organization that is ready—and, oh, so willing!—to act also as executioner and undertaker; to swing the ax and prepare the body for the grave. That large part of the American public which uses tobacco will be allowed to be present at the funeral, to weep bitter tears, and to wonder how it happened.

The battle against the Smoke Demon has been going on for quite a few years but to date it hasn't been oversuccessful. Some States and municipalities have passed laws against the use of tobacco—especially against cigarettes—but they have either been repealed or enforcement measures have been lax. Doctor Charles G. Pease, the president of the Nonsmokers' organization, broke his first lance in the cause sixteen years ago and is credited with bringing about the rule against smoking in New York's subways—a prohibition which even smokers agree is wise. Doctor Pease holds that nonsmokers should not be compelled to breathe tobacco fumes. We agree with him. But he goes much further than that. He says that "When we feel that our organization is adequately prepared we shall launch a campaign for legislation that will prohibit the growth, importation and sale of tobacco." This legislation, if enforced, undoubtedly would safeguard the rights of nonsmokers. As for the rights of smokers —well, crusaders are not expected to be concerned with the fate of the unrighteous.

To quote Doctor Pease again: "A tidal wave of protest against tobacco will inundate the proponents of it and will put our program into effect."

Just now the Nonsmokers' League is not an especially formidable body; it has only three thousand members. As three quarters of the men of the United States, and an increasing number of women, are smokers, it seems that Doctor Pease is leading a forlorn hope. At the moment Lady Nicotine is sitting pretty. The war did much to kill the prejudice against the cigarette; pipes have been admitted into the best society; the cigar remains the outward mark of prosperity and leisure. But smokers should not be too confident that this condition will last. The power of determined and well-organized minorities has been proved, and smokers, while being good enough sportsmen to regard the rights of nonsmokers, should be quick to resent any infringement upon their own rights.

The time to fight the Nineteenth Amendment is before it is made; not after it becomes law.

"MAN IS THE MEASURE OF ALL THINGS"

IT was Protagoras, the Greek sophist, who said that, we believe. This aphorism is often quoted, but so far as we have been able to find out, rarely if ever explained. What does it mean exactly? Emerson sees men as walking trees. Compare yourself with a tree and what do you find? There are many similarities. Our legs are transporting roots, our arms branches, our blood is the sap of life, and the trees and we have nerve systems and pores through which we breathe.

Other philosophers, like Bergson, see us as little whirligigs of cosmic dust that the blind motions of the universe have set going, and at least we know that the spectroscope reduces the stars and us to the same chemical compounds.

An interesting speculation has recently come to light regarding man and his achievements. According to this theory Nature has taught man how to feed, clothe and house himself and has guided him in the arts. Even his social relations may be seen in operation among the animals in degree. But mechanical invention, almost wholly, comes from within himself, his body and its parts suggesting everything from the steam engine to the telephone.

How far analogies can be carried we are not certain, but those we remember are quite suggestive. For instance, his hands served as a model for many implements —the spade, the hammer, the vise, and locking devices. His arm contains the principles of fulcrum and derrick. The first crushing machinery was teeth, and perhaps the saw found its model in them. Both legs and arms would suggest the piston. The eye is a wheel. His heart is a pump whose work is without equal. Models for both railway and telegraph systems may be seen in the arteries, veins and nerves. In the ear there is a minute apparatus, called Corti's organ, more complex and sensitive than harp or piano, and not unlike them with its strings. And so on, ad lib.

Still more interesting in connection with this theory is that with the infinite discoveries within his own body, man grows more refined and subtle. His earliest mechanical devices were the obvious ones, purely objective and physical. His later inventions are beginning to find the subjective or spiritual realm. This accounts for wireless and radio. According to the theory we are presenting, the inventions drawn from the spiritual are just beginning, and before another fifty years are run man will have entered and controlled a world that would now seem impossible fantasy.

POPULAR TOPICS

A STUDY of our oil fields completed recently by the Geological Survey shows that at the beginning of 1923 there were 284,880 active wells in the United States, producing an average of 5.7 barrels of crude petroleum per well per day. Of course there now are a larger number of wells, as drilling operations have been extensive in several districts. The total petroleum production for 1922 was over 550 million

barrels, as compared with 472 million barrels in 1921 and with 356 million barrels in 1918. In 1922 Oklahoma was the leading State in oil production, with 57,500 active wells producing an average of 7.5 barrels per well per day. Ohio ranked second in the number of wells, with 39,300 averaging one-half barrel per well per day. California, with 8,916 wells, showed the highest average production, 55.3 barrels per well per day, and Arkansas was second with 964 wells averaging 54.6 barrels.

ENGLISHMEN have grown very fond of grapefruit, a delicacy almost unknown to them a year ago, our consul at Birmingham tells us. Most of the grapefruit sold in the British Isles comes from California. Well, the monocle-wearing Englishman is safer than any other man while eating this breakfast starter—he risks only one eye

PROFESSOR A. M. LOW, an English scientist and inventor, has some startling ideas about the trade of war as it will be practiced a hundred years from now. One of them concerns the use of noise as a weapon. He says that during the last war many soldiers were incapacitated by the nerve-racking effects of noise, and suggests that in the future the radio may be used to subject populations to selected noises intended to break down their morale. Like a good many of the "new" methods of warfare, this one really is very old—just a modernization of the fearsome beating of gongs by Chinese fighters and the hair-raising war whoops of our own Indians.

MOST of these supermodern methods of fighting seem designed to strip war of its few remaining rags of romance and to make Mr. Mars the world's most confirmed nuisance. In that way they are good. They will help do away with war. The man of to-day is no more careful of his skin than were his forbears, but he hates to be inconvenienced. When mankind has fully made up its mind that war is a nuisance we shall have advanced a long stride toward perpetual peace.

SPEAKING of war, mothers-in-law are going to have a day all to themselves if the project of the newly organized Mothers-in-law Association is successful. This organization wants to send some time-worn jokes to the junk pile and to bring about a friendlier feeling toward mothers-in-law. Efforts are being made to have State legislatures set aside June 15th as "Mothers-in-law Day" and to establish the custom of those who have mothers-in-law wearing pink roses on that day.

DEEP as is our sympathy with the object of the Mothers-in-law Association, our idea of a good speculation would not be to stock up with a large supply of pink roses on June 14 in the hope of selling them at high prices the next day.

THE members of the French Academy have run into a snag in their work of revising the French dictionary. They have been unable to find a satisfactory definition of "youth." Some of the distinguished members—most of whom are between the ages of 60 and 70—suggested that persons between the ages of 20 and 35 might be regarded as young, but the majority voted for "about 35 years" and the question remains unsettled.

THAT reminds us of the remark of one of our most valued contributors, who dropped into the office one morning, performed a few sprightly jig steps and informed us that he was getting old. "Well," we said cheeringly, "you're only as old as you feel." Gloom settled on the writing gentleman's face and he shook his head sadly. "You're wrong," he said. "You're as old as you are!"

Lord of the Barren Lands

By Edison Marshall

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

WHAT HAPPENED IN PREVIOUS CHAPTERS.

He was a new kind of man in the experience of Ruth Acton, this trapper of the North. His gentleness, when he found her, lost and deserted, at the outset of the long trail to the Caribou country, puzzled her. So uncouth he seemed, and yet, withal, so gentle. Poor he obviously was. Yet she had never met a man with more native pride. His offer to abandon his winter trapping, to guide and care for her up the lakes and over the ranges to the remote Indian mission where Edward Fisherson awaited her with aching arms, scarcely surprised her. What took her all aback was his rejection of any payment or reward for the service. That was the kind of thing she would have expected of the man she was going to marry, Edward Fisherson, the cultured, the devout, the civilized, the trained and professed idealist. Coming from this half-barbaric woodsman, it passed her understanding. She had barely recovered from her amazement at John Carlson's primitive generosity, when another side of him was revealed to her. Serge Vashti, the poacher, evoked the revelation. Chance had wafted the canoe of the Northern bad man to their camp one evening. The coldness of Carlson's reception piqued the stranger. Words followed. And the primal brutality of the encounter that followed the words filled the girl with terror and disgust. She had just adjusted herself to Carlson's gentleness when he was revealed to her as a man whose fighting passion was no less ferocious and far more deadly than that of the timber wolf. This contradiction of character awed and troubled her. Yet as the golden autumn sped and the lakes dropped behind, one by one, she forgot it in the wonder of this first adventure into the heart of the unconquered wilds. There came a day when clouds began to gather and the norther to moan through the boundless tracts of spruce. There were flurries of snow. That night they landed hard by the cabin of a trapper. John had known the builder of that cabin, knew that he was dead long since. He fancied the place deserted. But as they came into the clearing where it stood he stopped and stared. There in the doorway stood a timber wolf waiting to welcome them. The wolf, startled, retreated indoors. Then John Carlson did an amazing thing. He laid his rifle aside, drew his knife, entered the cabin, and closed the door!

(A Four-Part Story—Part II.)

CHAPTER VII.

IT was not merely an act of foolish bravado for John to enter that twilit cabin armed only with a knife. He did it because he could not help doing it. It was a deep-seated impulse that was as impossible to disobey as it would have been to analyze. Someway, this was part of an old war that had been thrust upon him by the fact of his wilderness birth.

Not only his own vanity was to be gratified by the fight in the half gloom. The thing went deeper than that. It seemed vaguely a matter of basic principle that he should, this once, stake his might against this ancient enemy—and with no weapon

save the cold steel of his blade. For the moment the movement of events had made him the champion of a whole race that has always waged battle with the powers of the wild; he and this great gray pack leader had met for single combat.

Of course there were more personal reasons and these had been his conscious influence. Perhaps he had a feeling that he was thus avenging, in part, his own father's death. In addition he had known surely that the wolf must pay with his life for the insolence of crossing the dead trapper's threshold. And back of all, perhaps, there was the love of adventure that made him the woodsman he was; the sheer passion of battle from which he could never escape.

He scorned to kill this imprisoned creature with his gun. The rifle was a fair enough weapon when the wolf had every advantage of trail and covert; but it offered no test now. On the other hand he believed he was fairly entitled to the knife; man's natural weapons, their fangs, have been dulled and weakened from disuse, and besides, the steel was the symbol of his dominance. The wolf had several blades, scarcely less keen, arranged in order in his powerful jaws. Yet while John knew these things he did very little conscious thinking about them. He had acted largely on impulse and the powers of reason were in abeyance to it.

There was a small window at each end of the cabin; so he was not obliged to fight in total darkness. Very soon his eyes grew accustomed to the dim light and he could make out a gray, ominous shadow that lingered motionless in a dark corner. At first he seemed to be trying to avoid detection; but presently he began to skulk along the wall looking for a means of escape.

Perhaps in his wicked heart he already knew that this was the moment of reckoning. The wolf always is a coward—except when famine, the spirit of which he is the attendant, leads him and his pack over the snow wastes—and who knows but that he already felt the cold of death in the gaze that was bent upon him from across the room? As a killer he was feared from one end of the forest to the other; but this was no helpless fawn that stood so straight at the threshold; and perhaps he knew that the tables of death were turned.

John moved nearer. The wolf leaped frantically toward the little casement; but the stout logs of the frame held and again he fell back. And soon his clear, canine intelligence told him that escape was cut off, so he backed into the darkest corner, facing his enemy.

For an instant they eyed each other; two savage figures in the gloom. John was poised now, balanced on the balls of his feet; his knife felt ready for any onslaught. The sheer love of battle had hold of him now in all its fierceness; and the pale light from the window found an answering glitter in his eyes. He stretched his arms and slowly approached the corner where the wolf crouched.

Until now the two contestants had moved in a deep and eerie silence except for the impact of the wolf's body against the window frame. But now the animal fell back on the last hope of the cowardly—intimidation. His deep growl slowly increased in intensity until it seemed to fill the room, ringing from all its walls. The white teeth glittered in the half dark as the lips drew back. But John was too fully aroused to be frightened off by sound. He closed, looking for his chance.

The wolf was not conquered yet. With a leap such as only a wolf can give—almost too fast for the eye to follow—he left his corner, ducked under the man's arm, and scurried to the opposite side of the cabin. Instantly John whirled, cornering him again, and he struck at the long, dark body as the wolf tried to escape. The steel did not go home but the point ripped along the gray hide, inflicting the first wound of the battle.

This was not combat to the wolf's liking. Always before he had been the aggressor, snapping in savage bites while his prey struggled to avoid his fangs; but to-night the tables were turned. Yet every moment the fight was lengthened was to the wolf's advantage; John knew this fact only too well. Day was dying quickly outside and the man could not see in the dark. On the other hand the animal could leap straight to the throat in gloom impenetrable to human eyes.

But presently the contestants came to grips in earnest. Once more the beast leaped from a corner where John had forced him, and once more the knife had tasted blood; but now there was a different answer. Frenzied with terror and smarting from the blade the wolf leaped with flashing fangs into the man's arms.

There was no following individual maneuvers thereafter. The sound of battle be-

came a veritable storm; the snarling, snapping wolf, the impact of fighting, thrashing bodies against the walls and the floor, the wild howling of a blood-mad man whose battle lust had carried him back along the path of evolution a thousand thousand years!

In the beginning man was a savage fighter, with a fighter's build. No one can doubt this fact after studying the fighting prowess of the manlike apes. He has lost much in the centuries; yet a fighting knowledge as keen and sure as the wolf's own swept back to John as he stood battling in that darkening cabin. Almost at once it became apparent that this gray ranger had met his master.

His fangs could not prevail against those smashing, reaching arms; the thirsty blade. The knife was faster than his own leap and always the cruel blade drank deep before his own fangs could slash home. And soon the fight ended as swiftly, as savagely as it had begun.

The wolf had made a desperate effort to reach the man's throat, leaping with all the smashing power of his lean flanks; and his long body ripped the cabin gloom. That living flesh could gather such momentum and power from the mere flexing of its own muscles was almost beyond credence; it was part of the eternal mystery of the wild that is ever beyond man's ken. It looked as if that living missile would crash through the tough slabs of the roof if it were not checked. He snarled as he came, a fiendish, terrifying sound that is part of the race's very heritage of terror, a sound that has become a race memory to recall in unhappy dreams.

If that furious blow had gone straight home John would never have told of it on this earth. Not even a frame like his was constructed to stand up under the ton or so of shocking power behind it; and once down he would not have quickly risen again. The wolf's attendant fiends would have whispered exactly where to sink his teeth; the tender flesh under the jaw; and thus there would be one less white savage to get in the way of a spreading civilization.

But none of these things came to pass. John had not the least idea that any of them would. The room was almost in darkness now, yet his trained eye saw his lean foe gathered for the spring; and particularly he caught the flash of white fangs and yellow eyes as the creature leaped. On his part he was balanced like a dancer; and part of him moved out of the way. Part of him, a part that glazed those yellow eyes with terror, met the flying body in mid-air.

The part in question was a long, lean, hard arm, and continuing the arm, scarcely more hard, a bright blade. The point had meeting with a certain vulnerable part of the wolf's body just in front of the curve of the shoulder; and the creature's momentum was too great to be arrested by such a slender obstacle. It carried him on through, and only the broad hilt and the brown hand behind it remained uncovered at last.

The rending jar and shock almost broke the man's arm and for an instant he was shaken as if in a great wind. But there was plenty of time in which to steady himself. Only the darkness and the silence was left him now; the wild, frenzied snarl had been chopped sharply off as if by the same blade that had pierced the lupine heart. A shadow that was just slightly paler than the remainder of the darkness lay at his feet; and there was even a deeper shadow of fatigue on the lean, dark face.

He opened the cabin door with a hand that did not hold quite still, then laboriously dragged the slain wolf out among the young trees. The falling snow melted now upon the creature's still-warm body, but very soon it would deepen and whiten. He would gloat no more at the door of that empty cabin. There was a queer, chuckling sound lost and blended in the wind that swept here and there among the little, snow-wet trees, as if old Trotter had seen and was glad.

CHAPTER VIII.

Ruth had experienced a mixture of emotions when she had first seen the wolf, but only one was left when John had entered the cabin to do him battle. That one remaining emotion was fear; primitive, irresistible, unqualified. She would have stopped him if she could—at no matter what cost of her own dignity—but he was gone and the door was closed behind him before she could act.

At first her mind refused to grasp the truth. It seemed to her that John was deliberately going to his death. She respected his strength but it did not seem within the bounds of reason that his purely physical might, unaided except by a knife, could

prevail against this savage beast of prey. She did not know the animal's physical limitations, perfectly well known to John; she had never seen a living wolf before and her childhood idea of the animal had never undergone change. To her this was the same beast that had slain Red Riding-hood's grandmother in another cabin, in a far-off land of folklore. Only this time she did not believe the Woodsman could prevail against him.

In reality she had the popular idea of a wolf; a creature against which man's physical strength would have no chance. She did not remember that man is also an animal, differing mostly in that he has Heaven-sent powers of reason to help him in his battles; that he also is a creature of vibrant muscle and tough bone; that no other creature on earth except possibly the great apes that are of similar build has more natural advantages for fighting. Nature did not mean for man to run and hide; she set him on two feet so that he could use his arms and strike at any angle, and gave him ease of motion beyond any other animal. To her the wolf was not merely mortal flesh; he was some way supernatural—and irresistible. She thought about him exactly as she would have thought about a lion; and his name was as fearful to her as that of a grizzly bear.

She had simply shared man's general fear of animals—a fear that makes little discrimination between a wild cat and a puma, a black bear and a grizzly. John, of course, made no such mistake. He knew that he would last considerably short of a minute with any kind of a grizzly bear that was larger than a cub; but he also knew that he was greater than any lone wolf, particularly with the help of a keen knife. A tough, strong man, he could have battered out the brains of even a large lynx against a tree—of course at the risk of serious wounds—and armed with a knife he would have some sort of a chance against an average-size black bear; but a puma would likely rip apart his tender skin and reach his vitals before ever he could send home his blade to the creature's heart. He simply knew his own strength compared to that of his neighbors—and knew where to draw the line. If the girl had known as much she would have been spared many seconds of the most devastating terror she had ever experienced.

At the sight of that gray form in the doorway she was not in the least disillusioned; he seemed fully as terrible as her fancy had painted him. And true, he was a forest power not to be despised. As the door closed behind her comrade she screamed in horror and dismay; a sound that the wind caught and swept away into the savage, beating heart of the wild.

The first few seconds of silence that followed John's entry into the cabin gripped her with all the horror of a nightmare. Until now she had not been aware of the least personal interest in John; but oh, she could not deny it now. The time would come when she would ascribe her feeling merely to the fact that his death would leave her unprotected in an uninhabited wilderness—and thus lightly cast it off; but at the moment it was an emotion of great power. For interminable hours, it seemed, there was no sound from the darkened hut, as if John had already fallen and died in silence.

When she heard the first savage snarls of the maddened wolf she had screamed shrilly and without restraint. Then it was her fate to listen to all the frenzied sounds of the battle that followed—the snarls, the cries, the impact of heavy bodies against the walls—expecting meanwhile every instant to hear John's death scream; while she herself waited half insensible with terror in the sweep of the storm. It seemed to her incredible that the man had not already fallen; that she still heard him yelling in his passion. Surely the fountains of her own life would dry up and cease if he did not come out soon. And then once more the silence closed down, more deep, more portentous than ever before.

For long seconds there was no sign that either John or the wolf still lived. She must open the door now—she had stood the suspense as long as she could and she must learn the truth. Perhaps the cruel fangs had torn one of the aqueducts that carried the red water of his life; and she might yet with tourniquet and bandage dam the stream in time to save him. But before she could move the door opened and John himself loomed at the threshold.

Utter amazement checked the cry that rose to her throat. She saw him come stalking out dragging the dead wolf; and there were no black rents in his parka that was still wanly visible in the dense twilight, and there was no dark trail—except that which followed the wolf—behind him in the snow.

He bent and plucked out his steel; then she dimly saw his big shoulders lurch as he threw the carcass into the thickets. For all the storm of battle he now seemed perfectly his quiet, self-contained, untroubled self.

"Oh, aren't you hurt?" she cried when power of articulation returned to her.

Her negative question evidently astonished him. "Course I ain't," he told her, grinning. His breath was troubled; otherwise he seemed unscathed. "Better come in out of the snow. I'll have the cabin warm for you in a minute."

Still in the aftermath of her terror, almost afraid to speak lest she weep, she followed him into the darkened cabin. There was a heap of kindling left beside the crude fireplace—moving evidence that the old tradition of the North had commanded Trotter to the last—and bending, John started a fire. It was at this point that Ruth's violent emotion underwent a sudden and most unreasonable change. The fear that had almost killed her, the concern for her comrade's life, stopped short in her breast and a most unmitigated indignation took its place.

It was all caused by something the firelight showed her in John's face. He was not frightened, not humbled by his wild adventure. Instead he had a look that was suspiciously like exultation. His eyes were shining; he was manfully trying not to give way to a broad, unmistakable grin. She suddenly knew that he had *loved* that battle in the half dark, bloody and savage though it was. He was surely the happiest John she had seen since their meeting.

"Oh, oh——" was all she could say at first. "You *are* a beast, John Carlson!"

He did not have to fight now a desire to smile. His suddenly opening mouth and eyes made him look almost ridiculous there in the bright firelight. He got quickly to his feet.

"What do you mean?"

"Just what I said." Her voice was cold as the snow that was collecting on the roof. "You did it deliberately—you reveled in it. You're a bloody, brutal man, and I'll never think anything else. Oh, I thought I was mistaken in you! I thought you were changing——"

"Hey, wait!" John protested, rather feebly. "You mean you didn't want me to kill that wolf?"

"I could have forgiven you killing him if you'd done it like a gentleman instead of another beast." She was fully aroused now; capable of stinging speech. "I wouldn't have blamed you if you'd killed him because he was a menace—if he were threatening our lives. But you killed him just because you wanted to fight."

That she would so fail to understand any of his deeper reasons for his act sobered him quickly; and perhaps hurt him a little, too. But there was no anger in his voice when he spoke. Curiously enough, for all his savage life anger was an emotion with which he was almost a total stranger. He could be stern, remorseless; but anger and revenge had little part in his make-up. "Maybe I did, partly. I can't help loving a fight. But that's not all."

"Not nearly all," she interrupted quickly. "You couldn't use your gun on him. That wasn't brutal enough for you. You had to take your knife. You had to come here in the dark—like two animals meeting in their lair. You didn't think about me, what would happen to me if you were killed."

"There was no chance of me being killed. I can lick a lone wolf."

"If you knew that, there was nothing sporting about coming in here to fight him. I don't know that that helps your case. That makes it just slaughter!"

He suddenly stood before her straight and very grave and in that instant he had a dignity that she hitherto had been unaware that he possessed. "I don't know that I'm going to try to help my case, any more," he told her. "You don't seem much to get the idea. I don't deny I get a thrill out of things like that. But maybe a man's entitled to a few thrills, if they're fair. We're what we are; we can't be something else. I've always held that. And that *was* fair as I could make it—it wasn't just slaughter. A big wolf isn't a rabbit, and though I knew I could kill him I wanted to prove it. Maybe you don't know what it is to live up here and never be quite sure that all this—all this—isn't too much for you after all, that it isn't slowly squeezing the life out of you, and sooner or later you'll be gone. Pretty soon the wind blowin' through and not finding any camp fire to whistle around, and the snow laying with none of your tracks passing through, and those devils chanting and gloating on the ridge."

The girl had never seen this side of him before. Evidently the stress of this last

hour, and her whole misjudgment of him, had wakened a dark imagery that was his forest heritage.

"I'm making this as plain as I can," he told her. "I'm trying to explain how it is to live up here, and play the game, and never be quite sure but that the North's too big for you—and by the North I mean the cold, and the snow, and famine; the things we're trying to buck and which the whole race, always, has had to buck if it was going to hold on. A man feels he's bigger than those wolves—and the things that the wolf stands for—but he's never quite sure; and that's maybe why I had to go in and face him with nothin' but a knife—maybe to get a little new heart, a little fresh confidence. You say I didn't kill him in self-protection, but maybe I did. He wouldn't have tried to harm us now, and likely he'd never try to harm us, but remember he's famine, and he's death. He'd harm us if he dared and if ever he caught us at a disadvantage he'd be quick to swoop down on us. Miss Acton, the wolves have to go—everything they stand for has got to go—before men can quit fighting. Maybe you don't know it, but the farmers way down in Iowa and Kansas who are raising grain to feed the teeming millions in the cities are fighting wolves just the same as I am, though they never touch a blade or a gun, and the fellows making shirts in the factory to keep people warm, they're fighting wolves too, and the biggest statesmen, and the most noble-hearted philanthropists. I only hope and pray that some time you won't have to fight them too."

She blessed him for this hope. For a little while, at least, she understood something of his meaning. Her indignation had vanished now, swiftly as it had come, and her eyes were lustrous with tears. In place of anger there was only a dull ache in her heart that might have been disappointment, or longing, or any one of many other things.

"But even though you felt all that you shouldn't have risked your life," she told him. "If you didn't care for your own life, I should have thought that you would have remembered mine. I would have been left here helpless. You didn't care how frightened I was; you forgot all about me waiting out there in the snow expecting you to be killed."

She was speaking as a woman now, no longer concerned with abstract principles. She was a woman first and last and this was the woman's cry.

"You wouldn't have died. It would have been tough for you, but women must stand their part of the toughness when there's an enemy at the gates. Some of 'em seem to forget that. You would have made it through—you'd had all my grub—and in the spring some one would have picked you up and brought you out. Maybe you think that would be almost as bad as dying, but it isn't—and life itself, Miss Acton, is the stake in the war with the wolves. Not just comfort and happiness, but life! I'm sorry I had to leave you in the snow, but it was a small matter beside what was at stake. It isn't worth while speaking about. For the sake of old Trotter, because he was a man the same as me, I had to kill the wolf that dared to haunt this empty cabin—if for no other reason. I hope you'll try to understand."

CHAPTER IX.

Snow fell intermittently all night and in the morning the voyagers could hardly recognize their familiar wilds. Every little tree wore a mantle of snow, every twig and grass stem had its white accumulation, and the hills rose still and white on every side of the lake. It was only a shallow snowfall—to melt away in the first warm rain—yet it was a sign.

As they pushed on up the lake they found plenty of other signs of the dying season. One night the waterfowl that still lingered on the lakes seemed particularly uneasy, circling and crying and filling the night full of those weird calls that no man understands; and when the voyagers wakened in the morning the last flock had vanished as by magic. The canoe no longer flushed up flocks of canvasback and mallard and teal, and even the coots—the mud hens with ivory bills—had either flown south or stayed concealed in the reeds of the shore. The cries of the waterfowl are never cheerful, yet Ruth found the present silence poignant and strange. The lake looked bleak and gray, for never a little ruddy duck made grotesque signals with his fanlike tail and never a long-necked shag cast a black shadow. She missed even the loons that used to waken her with their cries of hopeless mania.

Perhaps it was only coincidence, that she seemed to see ever less wild life on the lake

shore. The beaver and muskrat—such respectable folk as build houses instead of burrowing in the ground—stayed closer within doors for all their cold-defying coats of fur; and seemingly the beasts of prey hunted farther on the highlands. There were few whispering voices about the camp fire. Often she could strain for long moments and hear no sound except the crackle of the flame. The little folk such as wood rats and chipmunks seemingly had stolen away into the darkness of their grottos.

The poplars and quivering aspen were no longer golden. The yellow leaves had fallen and lay on the snow like some ornate decoration on the white icing of a huge cake; and the trees themselves were skeletons that the wind lashed through. The ghost of the summer that had lingered until now in the shape of fairy fragrances of dead flowers was definitely laid by the first snowfall; and even the small springs—lovely, clear little jets that a man loved to see—were dying under gray ice. Quite often John had to break a hard, thin sheath of ice in order to push out into the open water of the lake.

The weather, as a whole, grew steadily less inviting. They saw the sun but rarely and its stay was ever more brief; and often they pushed through stinging sheets of sleet. To Ruth it seemed that the only joy left in this journey was the fact of its nearing end —and her meeting with her love. She did not complain when John paddled early and late and she rejoiced at every long mile that moved under the canoe. Her only happiness now was John's assurance that they were winning in their race with winter; and except by serious accident they would make it through.

He did not tell her this merely to buoy up her hopes. He meant it surely; even persistent snowfall could hardly close the passes over the ranges before they could push on through; and even though the lake froze tight they were near enough to their destination to go the rest of the way with hand sled. Only one lake remained of the great chain they had come through—a comparatively small body of water connected with the others by a swift-flowing shallow stream. Beyond that lake was the mountain range that must be crossed on foot; the divide to the Caribou River country. Seemingly only a few days remained of John's great adventure; then it must be forgotten among the other ghosts of his past.

They reached the shallow river that would bring them to the last lake in the chain one afternoon of a chill, clear day; and although it was not yet their usual supper hour John decided to make camp at once. This was merely the exercise of his natural caution, without which he would have come to an early end in this inhospitable North. The next available camp site would not be met until he reached the bank of the lake beyond; and he preferred broad daylight for the stiff paddle up the river. It was not a deep stream, but treacherous, and he did not wish to risk his precious cargo.

He cut fuel and built a roaring fire; then announced his intention of leaving Ruth in camp while he made a short expedition. "I'm going up this creek a ways, in the canoe," he explained. "There's a little backwater up there, and a marsh, and it's a likely place for moose. I'd like to pick up a calf."

"And I'll keep the fire bright till you get back," she promised. She glanced at the great heap of stores he had unloaded from the canoe. "Yet I can't for my life see what you want of more meat. The boat is full of it now."

"We've got a lot, sure enough." The man looked vaguely embarrassed. "But Miss Acton, if you've ever been hungry—in the North—you'll know that there's no such thing as having too much. I guess we'd make out this winter if we never saw another head of game—just on our dried stores —but I know where I can pack in another couple of hams and I want to get 'em. Somehow you get fewer and fewer chances at game as the winter advances, because neither you nor the game is doing much traveling; and you know, there's few moose on the Caribou side of the divide. You'll be glad for a moose steak after eatin' a while on caribou. I'll be back in camp in a few minutes."

He turned to the canoe, launched it, and unburdened except for his rifle paddled easily up the shallow river. But he had not told her true when he said he would be back in a few minutes. Night had fallen, dark and still, before she saw him again.

In the beginning it was only a little accident, this that met John on the swift, shallow river. During some hard going in a riffle his paddle had encountered a large rock on the river bottom and the blade had broken sharply off. He had a spare paddle among his supplies but it didn't help him now. In-

stantly he was at the mercy of the swift-racing stream.

In the space of a few seconds he could step from the canoe into the hip-deep water and wade the craft into shore; a few swift movements could accomplish his safety. But the North does not wait for seconds. It is sometimes swifter than the flash of a thought or the twinkle of an eye. The current caught the light boat, swung it around, and almost instantly sped it into the great tangle of sunken snags and driftwood that he had just paddled by.

The raging waters had washed out a great cavern under the sunken driftwood and now circled and eddied in a dark whirlpool of great depth. There was no chance to avoid it, and the water demons that lived in the swirling flood capsized the boat in an instant. The long craft flopped over as if a giant's hand had been laid suddenly on the edge, swiftly as a seal vaults in the water; there was no time of warning and no chance whatever to hang on. It was the same common disaster that most rivermen experience some time in their lives, and which many never tell of; one end of the canoe held in the whirlpool while the force of the current beyond administers a broadside.

There was a very strong chance that this little river adventure would be the definite end of John's trail on earth. It was only too possible that he would be done to death in those swirling waters, snagged perhaps in the dim passages between the gaunt limbs of an old treetop, his strong body struggling mightily a while, like a hopeless trapped thing, but at last stilled except perhaps for a regular tremor which the river's might passed ever through his frame. In spite of all that had come to pass the accident was so far only of a second's duration; and a few seconds more might bring it to an end.

Strong swimming was not of the least aid in the whirlpool. Mostly John's fate rested with the whim of the current. He was whirled into the driftwood and his strong hands managed to grasp a horizontal limb of one of the sunken snags; and although the suction of the pool drew his lower extremities down into the dark water cavern under the logs it could not break his hold. His fingers locked as if about a live wire of killing voltage, and bracing with his feet against the various projections of the sunken logs he was able to climb out to safety.

Of course he was wet through, and the dread cold of that icy water had already taken no little part of his living heat. But he could not at once return to the shelter of his fire. Certain responsibilities held him yet; he must make what effort he could to recover his property of which the river had despoiled him.

He saw at once that the canoe was safe enough for the present. It was jammed in an old treetop and it did not seem to be undergoing any great pressure from the current. He could stand in the hip-deep water beyond and work it out. But his rifle, his first trust that had leaned beside the stern seat, was out of sight in the river bottom.

The gun must not be lost without a fight. It was the only rifle he had; his only other arm was the heavy revolver, never a woodsman's weapon except in emergencies, and for this he possessed only one full magazine of cartridges. Of course they had considerable stores and could make through the winter some way even without additional meat, but it might mean careful rationing and certainly an actual disadvantage in their fight for life against the Northern winter. In the months to come John wanted the feel of his weapon in his hands. There were human and animal foes; and he had learned to put his trust in that three-foot length of steel. There might even be other accidents, to be weathered successfully if he had his gun, but which would be ultimate disaster to an unarmed man.

He crawled over the pile of driftwood on which he had drawn himself, and then to the land. Shivering violently with the cold he walked a short distance down the shore, then once more strode into the river. Wet though he was, the icy water crackled his nerves and hurt like a physical blow. Even the hard exercise of bucking that waist-deep current, fighting to keep his feet on the slippery bottom, could not warm him even dimly; but in spite of the growing cold, the sure feeling that life itself could not long be sustained in this icy stream, he began to make a minute search of the river bed.

He played the game desperately because he knew it was a desperate chance. He would duck beneath the surface, then open his eyes in an attempt to see the dark shadow on the river bed; he groped with his hands and he even advanced into dangerous proximity of the whirlpool. In the end he knew it was a losing fight. He searched as long as he could—until the dusk began to fall

over the river and certain warnings, not to be disregarded, were spoken in his being; but at last he had to face the certain fact that the rifle had been carried down into the cavern under the sunken logs and was hopelessly lost in the snarl of driftwood. With strange, dragging steps he worked the canoe out of the tangle, and walking along the bank, dragged it slowly down the river toward camp.

He had thought it only a few paces, but it seemed hopeless, tragic miles before he saw the flicker of the camp fire on the lake shore. But no matter how fast he walked the brightness seemed to be drawing away from him. And at this point the adventure ceased to be his and became that of the girl who saw his dim form come reeling through the twilight.

She failed to understand at first. Terror swept her but she tried to force it down until she could learn the truth, the reason behind the slow, dragging step that was usually so fast and strong. She hurried to meet him and she vainly tried to suppress tears when he looked at her—like a man waking from sleep. It was not in the end his wet clothes that made her realize the extent of this crisis. It was what she saw on his face.

In that unhappy instant she thought he would surely die, and then some hold that he had upon her, a strange tie that she was only aware of in moments of such crisis, would drag her into death too. The shadow of his end had already been cast, she thought; she saw it in his eyes, in the deep lines like brands, in the way he looked at her. Could his young, tireless strength on which she had learned to rely bring him back to her? Could his supreme vigor triumph yet? Surely he could not win without her aid. Instantly she began to fight for him as she had never fought for anything in her life before.

Mother-love was in the ascendancy now. She forgot everything else. She nursed this man as naturally and as tenderly as a mother nurses her child that comes home in distress. Somehow she got off his wet clothes, dressed him in the few dry things he had in his kit, and wrapped him in his warmest robes. It was strange what invention this necessity taught; a hot-water bottle out of an empty jar, a camp stove made from a bucket filled with stones heated red-hot in the fire, a powerful and bracing toddy of hot water and rum.

Hours sped away before she knew for sure that she had won that fight. When at last his violent chill subsided and he lay in easy sleep in his robes the mystery of midnight lay over the lake and the forest. It was nothing now that her arms ached from cutting fuel, that she was dangerously tired and chilled herself. It was enough that she had won. She tucked the blankets about her patient, left his bedside where she had knelt in tireless vigil, and for the space of a few moments stood alone beside the dying fire.

The lake glinted under a cold, white moon. The spires of the spruce trees were faintly silvered too, but the dense forest was black as ink below in contrast. She had never met the night in quite this mood before, so silent that itself seemed to be listening, without breath of wind—a silence that infolded the forest like an enchantment. The whole scene seemed bereft of life, as if no living thing ever had rustled the little branches into sound, or ever could, and she herself was beholding it as a disembodied spirit. It was like a place visited in a dream that never was and never could be true.

A coyote wailed and wept a long distance off, but it did not seem a living voice; and indeed the sound itself was not like sound but more like some weird aspect of the silence. It did not break the spell or bring those enchanted woods to life; it was like the voice of the dead that had never lived. The events of the night had wakened her to a new understanding of the wild. It had new meaning and thus all of life had new meaning, because the wild is just life stark and bare, raw and primitive. She feared it more than ever not only because of its physical dangers but for the changes it would bring to pass in herself, the lessons it would teach, the doubts that it would awaken.

The events of the night just gone were already like dreams. Her strange attitude toward John had been merely a dream too, born of her material distress and fear. Yet she felt it was some way fortunate that this journey was all but over and she would soon find readjustment in Edward's arms.

CHAPTER X.

In the morning John was well enough to discuss frankly the possible results of last night's accident, contending that they both had exaggerated its importance. "We ain't going to need a gun for the little journey

between here and Caribou River," he told the girl. "It's not winter yet, and even if it was, what would there be to fear? Not the animals—as I've often told you, animals are worse afraid of you than you are of them, and not once in a thousand times will they even dare look at a man."

"But you told me, once, that sometimes they take advantage——"

"They would if they dared but they don't dare. Old sour doughs I know never pack a rifle; they're all loaded up with picks and gold pans and they don't think they need one except for meat. One shot from this pistol would scare away even a wolf pack, unless maybe they were clean mad with starvation. We needn't worry about meat, either. We've got plenty, a winter supply along with trout and other small pickings, and in a few more days we'll be at the native village."

"The natives have guns, haven't they?"

"Some sort of guns, I guess. The trading company that brings them what little outside stuff they have has never been too generous with guns—the Caribou Indians are primitive cusses and the whites have been able to slip pretty near any old thing off on 'em. But I know they've got some tall old muzzle loaders, old Hudson's Bay guns. We've got our revolver if we should ever run up against human enemies, and once in a while a fellow can pick off a head of big game with a revolver, if he really needs it. So cheer up, Miss Acton. We're going to get there with flying colors."

He was willing to push on at once but she persuaded him of the wisdom of spending this day in camp. Thus he would be in better shape for the steep climb over the divide to the Caribou country.

The following day the two voyageurs left in the dawn, paddling and poling up the river, and that night they camped halfway up the remaining lake. It was only a short voyage over the last of the still water; and before noon he pushed into the mouth of a small river that came tumbling down from the divide. The paddle was useless now, but with the idea of taking advantage of every mile of water travel that was possible he "lined" the canoe up the cataracts far into the hills. Ruth tramped cheerfully behind him up the white river bank; and because of a sound physical make-up she was only pleasantly tired when they camped just before nightfall at the river's end.

This was almost the journey's end too, and no wonder John found her in a radiant mood. She looked up to the glistening divide that was the last barrier between her and the man she had come to wed. Her faith in her own love for Edward and his for her never was more strong than now; she was amazed that she had ever been uneasy. She blessed the wan sunlight that poured over the divide and down to him.

The mountain itself looked formidable, but John explained that it would be comparatively easy to surmount at this season. The snow had been crusted by the wind, the upper, most steep half of the divide was entirely treeless; and the distance was not so far but that they could tack up and over in one hard day's march. She would not resent the deep snows that would close the pass after she had crossed. There would soon come a time, John told her, when even snowshoes could scarcely traverse the great depth of soft, wet snow; but she would be in her husband's cabin and would cheerfully wait till spring.

As soon as he had pitched camp he cut young spruce and built a crude but serviceable sled. On this they would pack their food and such of their supplies as would be indispensable in the Indian village. Then he cooked the last supper of their exile.

They ate almost in silence, each busy with his own thoughts. Each found that his fancy traveled far to-night—Ruth's ahead, to the native village beyond the mountain, John's back along the course they had come. They had made it through; no matter how wild the storm to-night he knew that his great strength could carry her on the remainder of the way. The adventure was all but over.

It seemed fitting that this last camp should be built, like an altar, on the windswept hills. These were the high parks that the caribou loved; wide snow vistas now, cleft by an occasional deeply gullied rivulet and broken at intervals by small groves of spruce. Already the land lay deep in the winter silence, the spruce limbs bowed and stilled with snow, the rivulets moving silently under ice, and although the wind's arrows were sharp on the cheek there were no thickets for them to rattle through and they were almost as silent as they were unseen. Every moment without cessation the gale swept down the ridge, chilling and terrifying as it went, but it was like a ghost

army that marches forever on a battlefield of an evil war, its presence ever felt though the drums are still and the trumpets voiceless. The very magnitude of the vista was stirring to the imagination. They could not only see far away over the dim and starlit ranges, but they could look down over all the forest world spread out below them. Until the night darkened their eyes they could see the never-ending leagues of forest, hill and valley, ridge climbing onto ridge, an expanse in which the great lakes they had but recently passed became glinting dots of blue; and the wide snow-swept marshes, loved by the moose, were like small white flowers blossoming at intervals in the deep green.

The magic of this land increased as the night descended. The last pennants of cloud were blown out of the sky by the winds, and soon they saw the stark, perfect profiles of a few great trees in silhouette against a rising moon. Its light gave a strange effect of mist and unreality to the forests below, but it was incredibly beautiful on the distant snowy ranges. Shadows were long and strange and restless as ghosts as that silent wind swept the tops of the lonely trees; and the spruce clumps themselves looked to be dipped in liquid silver. It was such a night as mystifies every living thing; and the animals particularly, having only a darkness where men have souls, were disconsolate, tremulous, their wild hearts cold with a fear they could not understand.

Although it was a clear night both John and Ruth sensed the approach of winter as never before. It was foretold in the piercing glitter of the stars, in the cold sharpness of the moon, perhaps in the chilling blast that poured down ever from the distant glaciers. Ruth found herself struggling against a vague and growing uneasiness that was like the terror that before now had, without cause, gripped her in her bed. She could no longer buoy herself up with the dream of meeting Edward on the morrow; the fear of the Great Cold that is innate in all Northern people—the heritage of the centuries—is a dominant thing not to be dispelled by any ordinary mortal will. It was not that she had any physical fear. The fire warmed her, the creatures of the fastnesses had not yet been driven to madness by starvation; and to-morrow she would doubtless be lodged in a snug mission in the native village. Yet she could not regain her poise and she could not compose her spirits to rest.

The wind's sharpness increased and it roared at the fire as if it hated it, as if it would destroy the life-giving heat and let cold rule supreme. John piled on fuel; but often he paused in his work and stood looking with a grave face out over the snowy barrens. Sometimes a sharp gust raised the fine snow crystals in a great, dim cloud of white; and this, in the distance, might have been the wraith of winter itself.

"There aren't many tracks," he told her, speaking suddenly after a long silence.

"What—what does it mean?" She was a little ashamed of her ready alarm, her inability to speak in her natural tone.

"Nothing very much, but kind of queer at that. There's just an occasional caribou track in the snow, while there's usually a hundred. I'm afraid this is going to be a lean year as far as game is concerned. They happen every once in a while, you know."

"But why? What should become of the game?"

"It just seems to thin out. There wasn't a very big fawn crop this year—lots of the cows were barren. Maybe the late storms killed a lot of calves. Besides, the critters seem to know when they're going to have a tough winter, and they pike off down farther south—possibly clean down into the Cassiar. They're travelers, you know; they don't have to pack a sled full of grub. I noticed there was quite a movement along the old White Mountain pass; but that was weeks ago and I don't see how they could smell a winter that far off. But there's no cause for worry, Miss Acton. It might be a bit tough on the wolves; but even they'll pull through—they always do. And there's always plenty of meat for a man with a gun. They've not all gone, that's certain, and they won't; it may mean a little harder hunting, but there's always enough."

"But you—you haven't a gun."

"They'll be plenty of guns, such as they are, in the village."

She did not feel wholly convinced; yet this man had never yet aroused her with false hopes. What he had told her had so far proved true; what he had promised had been fulfilled. There was no cause for uneasiness—yet the after-image of his slow, grave speech rang a long time in her ears just as a light that is out will sometimes linger before the eyes; and it was still ringing when

the first note of that strange wilderness song reached her on the wind.

Both she and the man found themselves erect, looking into one another's eyes, as the song came clearer. John looked grave; Ruth's lips were parted, her clear eyes wide, her face waxen pale in the moonlight. Yet it was not terror that surged through her. It was a more complex sensation than that; it was almost the lonely, unhappy, uneasy mood of the singer himself; and with it came the stir and thrill that almost always follows wakened emotions. The identity of that singer John knew very well. He could never mistake this long, wild chant with the sob at the end. It was the same voice he had heard that long-ago night, the night that had been glorified by Ruth's coming. It was the song that no woodsman who knows his forest can ever quite disregard—the song of the wolf.

He had no more physical fear than at the previous hearing. Almost at once he smiled, partly to reassure the girl, partly because of a grim knowledge of this breed and the fastnesses over which it ruled. "It always gives me a little thrill," he told her. "Our ancient enemy!"

"Is he hunting?"

"I don't know—I don't think so. It sounded like a hungry cry to me—as if he was scared of the winter. He's probably upon the ridge, over half a mile away. Ain't it a queer sound over the snow? It's distance that makes it seem like music."

Before she could speak she heard a startling answer to that voice in the dark. It was almost an identical sound, yet it came, unmistakably, from a barren hill to one side rather than in front. The firelight showed quickening interest in John's face, and now both he and the girl stood almost breathless, waiting the further developments of this wilderness drama.

The first wolf called again, even more loudly; and there were certain overtones too dim to describe, certain variation in the treatment of the motif that John had never heard in a wolf's voice before. Almost instantly the second wolf answered. And now from the first wolf they heard a queer, prolonged singsong, rising and falling, that slowly, almost imperceptibly increased in volume.

The wolf was steadily drawing nearer and he was singing as he came. There was not enough light to give them even a glimpse of him on the wide snow field beyond, yet John could picture him vividly; his long shadow gliding over the snow, running easily, his savage form lean and black under the moon.

Ruth saw the growing gleam of excitement in the man's eyes. Yet she sensed that it was not fear; it was simply wonder at this wildwood drama behind the curtains of darkness. The running song seemed to have no beginning and no end; it was like a round that children sing and it trembled ineffably weird and strange over that silent mountain.

The second wolf began to run and sing too, in the direction of the first; but both songs presently came to a sudden, startling end. It was a long second before their listeners guessed the reason; they were listening so intently for the songs to begin again that at first they failed to hear a third voice that distance had dimmed almost beyond sound range of even the keenest ear. Except for the fact that the wind was favorable and the silence almost absolute they could not have discerned it at all.

It was just a tremor in the air; and yet they knew instantly it was some way different from the voices they had just heard. Rather it was a chorus, several voices raised in the strangest harmony Ruth ever had imagined. It was deep for all its dimness, increasing and decreasing in volume, strangely prolonged and wailing; it was one of the basic songs of life.

It died away at last, and both John and she stood breathless and intent as they waited the answer from the two wolves they had heard first. It was not long in coming; from one a sharp bark, from the other a long, meaningful howl. Then they both began to run and sing again. Far off the choristers were running and singing too. The sounds seemed to mingle as the two companies approached each other.

"Do you know what this means?" John whispered tensely.

"Not altogether." She saw that his eyes were simply glittering with excitement.

"It's the winter running. The wolves are gathering into their packs. It means that winter is here!"

"You haven't a rifle. Won't they attack us?"

"No danger of that. They couldn't be starving at this time of year. Besides, the fire would keep them away."

Once more the inscrutable, throbbing si-

lence dropped over the snow world. John guessed that the wolves had met and were performing their first ritual of friendship. Then one of them, a deep-voiced male, howled long and mournfully, a sound that came in a little stream in the wind. A second wolf joined him, and then a third. Then all of them howled together, a strange, wild chorus that filled the night. It was the choir of the wild.

No wonder thrill after thrill coursed through the girl's being. No wonder that this woodsman, knowing all the forest's moods, was stirred and aroused as she had never seen him. Neither could speak; they could not look except toward the snowy mountainside from where the song came; and all other thoughts paled away and died in their consciousness. They listened with the deepest concentration; for the moment unaware of each other, unaware of the moonlight that gave them vision and of the fire that warmed them. In their secret hearts they shared some of the awe and wonder that was born in every wild thing in range of the sound, from the old grizzly who knew no master, but yet who listened intently from a far-off valley, to the black fox that made a furtive shadow just beyond their vision. It might have been that the wild goat, the keeper of the high passes, paused in his night business to listen, and it might have been that the mountain ram himself stood with lifted horns.

"Arr-ree, arr-ree, arr-ree," the wolves howled, and then they would all join in a long-drawn minor note that shivered and throbbed as if it were alive. But soon the chorus changed to the running song; and this slowly died away as the wolves sped on into the heart of the ranges. At last only the silence was left, the moon and the starlit snow, and the fire burning down to embers.

Ruth could not have believed heretofore that any animal voice could ever move her except in pity; but she knew better now. She was not only thrilled and aroused; she felt as if the experience had had deep meaning for her, that it had let her see into the strange, wild heart of nature that no man can fully understand. It some way increased her knowledge of life—life in its broadest sense that will remain a mystery when the last book is written and the last lesson learned. This voice had more meaning than the clamor of any city; it expressed the basic things that are sometimes lost and hidden in the traffic's roar. Even in her dreams she would hear that strange *"Arr-ree, arr-ree, arr-ree,"* but the theme of the song she was not yet to know.

"It was worth coming into the North to hear," she told John.

But the man was not now in the mood of speech. He scarcely heard the girl's words. The strange song in the darkness had shown him nature's heart; and the far-seeing mood it had awakened now showed him his own heart too. He was fully aroused, his thought was clear and penetrative as it had not been for weeks; and he suddenly found himself face to face with a fact that for weeks he had tried to deny.

Ruth was sitting on a spruce log he had cut and dragged to the fire; but at first he did not look at the girl herself. He looked at her hand that lay catching the firelight against the dark spruce bark. It was a hand that he could lock and lose in one of his own; yet it could reach across great oceans, it could lift a man up from failure and despair. He found himself musing about her fingers, browned now by exposure; how their touch could buoy a man aloft in a troubled sea—how the feel of them in his would lift him above all fear! His own hand trembled at the thought of touching them. His young, strong heart burned at the thought of pressing them to his lips.

The truth was ringing in his ears, now. He could not deny it any more; even though he must lock it up forever a secret. He did not need to look to the girl's face, to the firelight on her wealth of hair. The magic of the night had lifted the veil from his eyes; and he could not draw it over them again.

The voice of the man's soul spoke within him. "My love, my love," was all it could say.

CHAPTER XI.

John Carlson was a man young in years; but something of the very age of the forest itself was in his spirit. This was not young, foolish love that came to him on this long trail; it was a man's love, deep and true, almost a religion, dwelling within him as long as he dwelled on the earth. It was the love that comes to a man once in a lifetime, usually in somewhat riper years when standards are established and youth's fire burned to embers, the devotion into which youthful

passion so often ripens. John Carlson could never change it any more than he could change his identity.

It had been his destiny from the first. It had been the inscrutable scheme of the circumstance that had brought Ruth to his lonely camp that lonely night weeks before. Why destiny should thus choose to jest with him he did not know—this strange dream did not dare to include dream of winning—but he was a steadfast man, intense, faithful to the death, brooding as his own forests for all his natural humor; and this jest must be his eternal reality. He knew this fact as well as he knew anything on this puzzling earth.

It was well enough for lesser men to forget their loves, to change from fancy to fancy; but the very qualities of his greatness kept him constant. The very life that is lived in the far cities is changed from day to day; but the forests never change in spirit and he was the forests' child. Now he accepted this great love of his with the same simplicity that he accepted the stars and the solitudes, greater than he; he accepted as he accepted his Deity, the God Who talked to Moses in the wilderness.

Along with the rest he accepted her inaccessibility. She was betrothed to a man of her own standards, one who could give her what she desired in life. Edward was not a crude woodsman, scarcely able to convey his thoughts in his native tongue; he was not only a gentleman in the sense that the girl used the word but also in all probability a man of depth and purpose, of profundity and character, or else he would not have likely devoted his time to social service. Would the girl look away from a flower to see an uncultivated weed? John knew that she would not and he resolved not to disturb her or make her unhappy by asking her to do so.

John was unlettered, uncouth, knowing only his woods and the bitter truths of life that they had taught. In all probability Edward was a polished man of the world, and these things mattered. John never made the disastrous mistake of believing that they did not matter. In one thing and one alone, John believed, he was Edward Fisherson's equal, and that one thing was fidelity. Fidelity to his simple faith. Fidelity to his one love. Fidelity to his manhood as he conceived manhood to be.

She had called him a savage and it was true. All he had known how to do was to fight—fight the winter, the hardships of his life, his human and animal enemies, the famine that haunted his winter snows. In this moment of clear vision it seemed to him that the latter dread spirit was close to him now, lingering just beyond the circle of his firelight, its fierce, yellow eyes close to his own. Probably it was just a dream born of his strange mood, yet this ancient, masterless enemy never seemed so real as now. Yes, he knew how to fight, and now he had learned how to love simply and steadfastly as in everything; but these could not win him his heart's desire. They could not make him, in the girl's eyes, the equal of her betrothed who waited beyond the ridge.

Besides, she loved the other man. This point would not have seemed of such vast importance to him until to-night, when he had learned what the word meant. She was a girl of character, depth, an earnest, womanly girl; and she had given Edward a woman's earnest devotion. John could not trifle with that fact. She had induced him to follow her into the North; she had adopted his dogma and his standards without question. Even if he himself possessed all the qualities that to-night he wished for John knew he could not likely overcome the girl's devotion to the missionary.

With that stern, grim justice that was one of his basic qualities he found he could not, in a sense, regret the girl's unwavering constancy to Edward. That quality of constancy made her the girl she was; for the sake of his own happiness he could not wish that she was less. He would not have her less, even if by such loss he could win her. Her characteristic of steadfastness had helped to waken his own love, a love that had the rock foundation of respect. This dark man never could have loved a trivial girl, a superficial, inconstant, inferior girl. He couldn't regret the girl's greatness even though it put her beyond his reach; his love was such that he could completely detach it from his own longings and desires, and make his prayers wholly from the girl's point of view; and no other thing could ever more clearly show how true, how real, how genuine this love was.

He would not regret it. He would thank his forest Deity that he had been given one dream worth while even though it could not come true. Besides, he had long weeks of happiness to be thankful for—days to look

back upon down all the long road that stretched before him. He was only a youth, but already his time was longer in life's school than many a middle-aged man, and such other pleasures that should be his lot could never efface the memory of these. The care he had given her, her dear presence by his fire, would bless him still. The very profundity of his character would keep him ever from forgetting, and that was a happiness in itself. There was no bitterness in his heart now, only yearning and wonder.

And of all things he knew, he knew most surely of all that he must not in the near present let her know. It was an instinct with him, a sure feeling that such a confession would only distress her, besides destroying the fine companionship she was beginning to have for him. He wanted her to remember his consideration and care with gratitude, even with some degree of happiness—an impossibility if he confessed an unwelcome love. He wanted to be able to turn her over to Edward on the morrow without ever once taking advantage of the accident of their companionship. He hoped to play the game fairly and decently all the way through; without giving her one moment's embarrassment.

No possible benefit would come of telling her now; so he would play the game. Some time, perhaps, when she was definitely separated from him, and her Northern experience all but forgotten, he would like to have her know, partly through the desire for self-expression that is innate in every one, possibly because it might be a satisfaction to her that she had possessed the qualities to waken this uncouth idealist's love; but the time was not yet. To tell her now would only shatter what further happiness he expected to gain from her friendship in case he decided to winter in the native village.

This was just a dream too; he recognized it as such in one moment of clear thought. He must not stay in Caribou. It would try him beyond endurance and keep him from peace. He and Ruth would be thrown much together and he did not believe he could bear to see her in Edward's arms. He had seen much in his time to chill the hearts of lesser men; but he did not want to see that. She would not need him; and his contract would be fulfilled, and no good would come of lingering. The dark forest in which he was born must hide him again, filling his days with battle and his nights with the deep sleep of fatigue. At intervals he might go to cities, perhaps to forget the poignancy of his dreams in fleeting pleasures as so many Northern men have done before him; but here, in his native woods, beside the leaping, ruddy camp fire he had the best chance for happiness and peace.

He went to his cot at last but he was too full of this new wonder to find sleep. He was not tossing or uneasy; he simply lay quiet, facing the heavens, and his thought moved in sweeping circles. He saw the fire burn down to ashes. He heard all the dim sounds that are sometimes faintly audible even in such snowy solitudes; the long, low rumble of a distant snowslide, the bark of a fox and the cry of some strange swift-flying bird that passed in darkness overhead. Sometimes his wakened imagination made him think that he heard the most secret voices of nature; strange sounds of frost and erosion that are hidden from mortal ears. He heard the low whisper of his breath and the beat of his sturdy heart. He dozed after midnight, but he was awake, rebuilding the fire hours before the first glint of dawn on the eastern sky line.

He gave no sign of his hours of wakefulness except, perhaps, in the hollowness of his eyes. He was always gaunt, his facial lines always deeply pronounced, and lack of sleep could change him but little. Besides, he had lain quiet and every part of him except his swift-flying imagination had rested, so he was not at all physically tired. He made one trip with the sled up to the crest of the divide before Ruth wakened. She went with him the second trip, and together they tacked up the snowy, treeless steep—deserted of all living things as far as John could see—till at last they stood at what seemed the very top of the world. They seemed to have entered into communion with the towering, majestic ranges that encircled them; in the thin, wintry air they looked near enough to touch. Here she waited, wrapped in her robes, while John went back for his last load. When he reappeared they repacked the sled and prepared to start down.

Ruth could ride during the steepest part of the descent; the snow crust was so firm, the fall of the grade so sharp that the sled moved of itself. They dipped swiftly down over the steep barrens, through the caribou parks where in gentler years the snow was

broken by a thousand crisscrossing trails, and encountered the Caribou River not far from its head springs. They followed the brink of its gully into the heavy spruce forest; and for a little time Ruth thought that the night would beat her home. But she got up from the sled and John added an extra inch to his step; and as twilight lowered over the forest they saw the first light of the village.

The girl cried out, a sound of happiness and fervent relief, and John smiled wanly into her radiant face. It was not much farther now. At ever lesser intervals they crossed human footprints. Ruth's love carried her faster than tired feet could ever follow; but she restrained the almost-irresistible impulse to urge John to haste. He had been faithful to her, giving her of his great strength without stint; and she owed him this kindness at least. But she could hardly curb her impatience when John paused, as if uncertain of his course, just at the edge of the village.

The sled came to an abrupt halt. She was walking a little way in front—in spite of a hard effort to keep to his slow, steady pace—and she turned to him with a question at her lips. She wanted to fly, not to hesitate here in the dusk. It occurred to her at first that John had merely halted because he did not know in which of the rude habitations Edward lived; yet it wasn't quite his way to pause and deliberate about it. The John she knew would have stamped into the first house he came to and inquired. And now, as she looked at him, a strange uneasiness—almost a premonition of disaster—crept through her, freezing her blood like a great cold.

She could just see his face in the waning light; and it had a strange, startled look she had never seen before. His eyes looked wide and puzzled; his motionless position indicated that he had been visited with a thought so moving and extraordinary that he had simply forgotten to go on.

"What is it?" she asked as quietly as she could. She tried not to seem alarmed. "Are you just wondering where we'll find Edward?"

He turned slowly toward her, almost too preoccupied to hear what she said. "We'll find Edward easy enough, if he's here," he replied. "Miss Acton, there's something wrong about this place. There's a funny air hangs over it—and a funny smell. And it's hellish quiet, if I may say so. Where are the dogs?"

"But the people are here, the people!" she told him, imploring in spite of herself. "You can see the lights."

"I guess so. There's firelight, I guess. But we'll push on."

They made their way up the snowy, silent slope that served for the village street, pausing at last before a well-built log structure, the largest and best of the shacks. John did not doubt but that this was Edward's mission. It was the end of the trail. There was a narrow, pale gleam of light under the door; and John turned to the girl, motioning with his hand. In the dusk she could not see there was any change in his homely face; he seemed the same patient, good-humored, faithful guide he had ever been—and he had guided her to her heart's desire.

She felt surely that Edward was in the cabin. It was a secret knowledge with her. It was the end of the trail; and the wild alarm John's curious words had wakened already was passing away. She moved to the door, not aware that John no longer watched her but rather was busy at his sled. He too for the instant forgot the strangeness that his keen senses had perceived in this strange village—forgot it in the poignancy of his own longing; and although it was not in his code to look away from the truth he looked away from that threshold where in an instant more the girl would find her happiness.

But that meeting was far different than either of them had dreamed. Before she could reach the threshold the door flew open and a disheveled man, his lips black with beard and his face above it a strange, stark white, came leaping toward them through the knee-deep snow. At the first sight of him Ruth caught her breath with a curious deep gasp; and John knew there was dread significance in the wide-open, staring eyes and reaching hands.

He did not at once take Ruth into his arms. There was no such lovers' joy in this meeting after long absence. But he did seize her hands in what was almost a frantic gasp.

"Ruth, Ruth, you've brought food?" he cried. "Food—have you brought food?"

"Edward! Oh——"

"Food!" His voice rose almost to a howl. "Tell me, for God's sake!"

"Yes! Of course we've brought food!"

"The Lord be praised! It is the reward of my piety! It is the answer to my devotion!"

CHAPTER XII.

For one long-drawn moment Ruth was lost in a great bewilderment that spared her the first rending shock of the bitter truth. The whole drama so far seemed hardly more real than a gray dream from which she would presently waken; the twilight itself was gray, just as dreamland is. Not so with John. This was a crisis, and as was his training, he was keenly awake to its every development. He was baffled only in so far that he did not know where this strange moment might lead, what fierce climax it might precipitate.

He saw Edward Fisherson kneel before the sled, gather one of its great bundles into his arms, and hurry with it into the cabin. Instantly he appeared for a second load; and John knew by his face that he was almost delirious with rapture at some great deliverance. He gave no heed whatever to the girl who watched him with such wide-open, terrified eyes, and evidently he had forgotten her presence; but sometimes he looked up almost furtively toward John as if he feared the latter's interference. But John too was forgotten in an instant. He came to an abrupt standstill as he saw a cabin door open farther up the street, and he cried out sharply in warning as several lean natives hurried out and came running toward him eagerly.

"Guard the sled with your pistol," he implored John. "Don't let them take anything off the sled. You've got none too much as it is."

John turned, rather gravely. "No one can have anything till Ruth and I find out what's up." It was the first time he had ever spoken the girl's first name aloud. "Go ahead and unload the sled if you want to—get the stuff indoors." He turned to the little group of natives that had gathered about him and spoke quietly, swiftly in the vernacular. He would see what could be done for them as soon as he was unpacked, he said. They would not attempt violence, because to do that would be speedily to die. When he was through speaking they made affirmative answers, nodding their heads earnestly. All of them seemed considerably encouraged; John was a type they knew, a strong leader, and they did not question but that he meant what he said.

Edward had meanwhile emptied the sled, and wondering, the girl followed him into the cabin. Indifferent to her presence he had begun to untie one of the packs of food; and presently he was cutting thick slices from one of the moose quarters that was John's principal supply of fresh meat. He only looked up, furtively and wolfishly, when John entered.

"How long since you've eaten?" John asked gravely.

"It's been a week since I've had a real meal, days since I've had a bite. My God, man, do you want me to die?"

The tears had started in the girl's eyes but her gaze was bright and hard when she stood erect and turned to John. "What does it matter, if he's hungry? If you refuse him you can refuse me, too." Then she touched a trembling hand to the unkempt man kneeling among the bags of food. "Don't ask him, Edward—my poor, dear boy. You have me and I have you, thank God."

"But what good can you do me, unless he helps?" Edward whispered softly. "For God's sake, Ruth, don't offend him!" Then aloud: "You needn't worry, Ruth. One gentleman doesn't refuse another at a time like this."

She heard him with a sinking heart; only the most desperate situation would cause Edward thus to humble himself before the woodsman, to flatter him with a term that had been the very theme of his old philosophy. And her heart welled with pity at the sight of the trembling hands, the wide, terrified eyes.

"I wasn't going to refuse him something to eat," John told her gravely. "You ought to know that. But you ought to know too that a man dies when he gorges himself after a long fast. I was just trying to know how much to let him have."

The girl was at once remorseful. "I hope you'll forgive me then, John," she answered earnestly. "I knew better—it was just this awful thing——"

Ruth turned to the work of frying the steak that Edward had cut off; John made investigations as to the condition of the Indians. He learned that the mature natives had not tasted even a morsel of food for several days; the children had dined once since on the last of the village stores.

The famine had fallen upon them rather suddenly, and since every one had fed well until about a week before the men were ravenous but not greatly weakened.

"It was a fool arrangement to feed the children and starve the grown-ups," Edward muttered. "We had to keep our strength to cut wood and so on—otherwise we'd all die. The dogs didn't even have pity on me, their teacher who has worked for months to civilize them! That's why I say don't give 'em a bite——"

"You'll feel differently about it when you've eaten, Edward," the girl interrupted him. "No one must go hungry whom we can feed."

John meanwhile had stepped to the door and once more addressed the natives. He already had sufficient understanding of the situation not to be reckless with food. Every ounce must be measured, just enough administered to sustain life. "You will go now and sleep," he told them in their language. "He who sleeps, eats. In the morning I will give you all something to eat."

Only one or two of the natives grumbled; and even these did not dare to attempt to take the stores by force. John had made it plain previously how such an attempt would be answered. The others turned quietly away, patiently and impassively as is the Indian manner—back to their huts. John closed the door, only to find Edward once more on his feet.

"My God, man, you can't give them food!" he said. "They'd clean you out in a week—and there's a whole winter to go. There's hardly enough to keep us three alive."

A dim echo of a smile flitted at John's grim lips. "Feed the hungry! Clothe the naked! You remember the words, reverend. There was nothing said about holding back in fear of going hungry yourself. Divide the last crust!"

Edward fell to his meat and both John and Ruth waited patiently till he cleaned his plate before they attempted to learn the exact state of affairs in this remote native village. He told them simply and mostly without passion; a story of disaster and therefore a familiar story in the North.

"A devilish fix," he began. "It started when the whole tribe—all the men and the squaws and children as well—were on a big caribou hunt on a creek about nine miles from here. There was quite a movement of caribou passing south and the whole village had taken their skin tents and gone out to get 'em. This here is of course their winter village—substantial huts, better equipment, and so on—and they run their trap lines out of here. I sometimes go on their trips, though it isn't necessary, but this time I smelled bad weather, so they left me here with enough grub to last till they got back.

"Well, they had a successful hunt and had laid in a lot of meat and were going to get a lot more—enough for winter, easily—when one night the top of the mountain rolled down. It was an immense avalanche and snowslide combined—right square down on their camp. They heard it roar quite a way off—otherwise the whole tribe would have been wiped out. As it was some of 'em—more than half of 'em—managed to get to a cliff behind the tents, but they only saved what they had on."

"Which meant—about all the clothes they possessed."

"Yes. But they lost all their tents, their meat, almost all of their guns."

"Almost all?" John interrupted. "If they saved any guns——"

"One gun—a muzzle-loader, and no powder for that. An old Indian named Wassegawin saved it, but it's useless as a stick. They lost everything except the implements and robes they had here in their winter huts and nobody knows how many people were buried under that snow and rock heap. Lots of 'em didn't even save their hunting knives.

"You know what that meant, don't you? This is one of the most remote villages in the Northwest—there's no trading post short of a journey of months and months. One native had some meat that he'd been jerking in the open, but he wouldn't divide it up, and so they had to take his own proposition; that he should go for help down to the trading post and take his meat to sustain him on the way. He went, but help can't possibly get through until almost spring. You know that."

John nodded grimly. "Only too well. The ranges can hardly be passed. It will take months to make the trip."

"The last boat up the Nenamanah has gone back—the trading ship where we get our flour and sugar. The natives thought at first that they'd build more boats and follow down the river, but the wiser heads knew it wouldn't do them any good if they did. There are several cabins on the Nena-

manah, but none of them have been occupied since placer days. There is no one to get help from even if they went clear to the mouth of the river, and besides, it would freeze up before they got there."

"But how about salmon?" John demanded. "They could fall back on that!"

"I'm coming to that. They wisely decided to come back here to their winter quarters and catch the cohos—always the best run on the Caribou River, and reserved by the Dominion government solely for the natives. Here they would have warm cabins, and they thought that with a big catch of salmon, and eating all the animals that they caught in their traps during the winter, they could make it through. It seemed the only idea. But the salmon run failed!"

"It couldn't fail—altogether."

"It did! The men waited. They grew impatient. It began to frost—hard—and look like winter—but still the salmon didn't come. I prayed as I never prayed before, and all these savages prayed too, but this time my prayers weren't any more good than theirs. They wanted to try some other tributary but I advised against that—if they didn't come one place I couldn't believe they'd come another. I thought sure they'd be here—every day I expected to see them—and there was hardly one! When we finally had to give them up it was too late to go anywhere else. I tell you, I lost faith when those fish failed to come. There didn't seem anything to do but die."

"Some of you went down to the mouth of the river—to investigate?" John asked grimly, "or did you leave it all to prayer?"

"We didn't go and investigate. What good would it have done?"

"A man doesn't only have to pray, up here. Prayer helps—more than most of us know—but he has to fight too. If you'd gone down to the river mouth you'd have had a fight on your hands, but that would be better than dying of famine without a chance to fight, as you will now. You'd found Serge Vashti and his gang with nets stretched all the way across the lower narrows—at the mouth of the river—and they caught and salted down every salmon that came up."

"No one seemed to think of it. No one knew they were in the country, but we might have expected they'd come to this lonely river where they'd have every chance to poach. Maybe we can catch them yet."

"They're not fools. They took their loaded boats down the river in time to get out before the river closes; you know they wouldn't wait with the goods on them and be holed up till spring. Down at the mouth of the Nenamanah they met a power boat to tug their barges over to Point Fortune—most of the gang went with them. On some business of his own Vashti himself went through the chain of lakes, perhaps to trap fox, probably because the police are after him. Well, every trail seems as prettily blocked as possible. It means——"

"It'll mean a hard winter for the poor natives, I suppose. Even if you are willing to hunt all the time for them, you can't get much more meat than they'll absolutely need—that is, unless you are a pretty fine hunter. There is some shortage of game this year; but of course you could take enough to keep them from actual famine."

"I haven't got a gun."

John's voice was quiet, almost commonplace; and Edward stared with widening eyes. "That's a lie," he said desperately. But the possible answer to that short word cowed him quickly. "I didn't mean that, Mr. Carlson. I simply couldn't believe that you'd start off without a rifle——"

"It's true, just the same. Our rifle was lost in a river. It *does* mean famine for the natives, certain—almost hopeless. And Fisherson, it means the same for their teacher."

With a strange gasp that was audible to them all in that silent room Edward sprang to his feet. His face was haggard, terribly drawn in the weird glamour of the fire. He did not disbelieve; it had been his dread all the way through that John would not divide his stores, precious as dear life itself. He faced the man in the courage of desperation.

"You wouldn't dare!" he threatened. "You wouldn't dare leave me out on your food." A look of cunning that was some way savage too relieved for an instant the drawn image of terror. "You haven't a gun—my natives will follow me and take all you've got and let you die yourself if you dare to leave me out."

More to prevent a fight than through any sense of need John reached quietly and got his heavy revolver. He examined it significantly and slipped it into his side pocket. Edward followed the motion with ill-concealed terror.

"You won't be left out entirely." He sighed, softly, and looked for an instant into the fire. "Fisherson, you were in charge here. That gives you certain obligations, even more than the general obligation of being a white man. Half my grub goes to Ruth—just enough to carry her through the winter alive on half rations, and with what she can pick up. She'll take it down in a boat to the cabin at the narrows, an easy trip she can make herself. With the other half you and I will stay here and do what we can to save these people—help 'em to buck the game. There's no place else for us to go if we wanted to. The grub goes share and share alike, over the whole village—and for once we'll do our best to carry the white man's burden."

CHAPTER XIII.

There was a long pause after John had spoken. The firelight played in the room, darkening and brightening like a pulse; the crackle of the burning spruce chunks was the only sound. John sat quietly, his dark face almost in repose. Edward, pale and terrified, stood opposite, Ruth at his side. Presently Edward dropped into one of the crudely fashioned chairs, and because he was her champion, Ruth moved behind him.

Edward was not without strength in certain ways, and he struggled manfully to get back his self-control. "Let's talk this over sensibly, Mr. Carlson," he said at last. "We'll let Ruth into it too. It seems to me a proposition that all three of us should decide."

John shook his head but did not raise his eyes. "No, Fisherson. It's my grub. I've already decided."

"I got the idea that Ruth had some claim to it." Edward turned to the girl who now stepped beside him. "Didn't he give you to understand that he would fit you out—as far as supplies went?"

"Perhaps he didn't say so, with so many words. But he offered to take care of me."

"And that is my contract—nothing more," John interposed. "In this world it ain't easy to say who should live and who should die, but surely man's first obligation is to take care of those who are dependent upon him." His voice unconsciously became solemn; John Carlson was speaking from his heart. "Ruth is dependent upon me; I agreed to take care of her. Beyond that first duty a man's obligation is to sacrifice himself, if need be, for the general good. That's been held a long time. I ain't able to leave these Indians to die as long as I have even a faint hope of getting them—some of them—through the winter. My first duty is to Ruth, my duty beyond that I can only do as I see it."

"But surely you don't mean to prescribe my duty?" Edward asked.

"No. You can go where and when you will." The man's face brightened perceptibly; but fell again at John's further words. "The only thing I say is—you can't go and share the portion of grub I'm laying aside to keep Ruth through the winter. That is for her, no one else—the fulfillment of my contract. Maybe you think you'll go anyway, but you won't, Fisherson. This is a deadly time, a desperate time; and I believe I'd kill you before I'd let you take one pound of that precious meat and flour away from her. She'll need every ounce of it to last through; and I'm going to see that she gets it if she has to stay here and have me deal it out to her a bite at a time."

"I'd rather die!" the girl responded simply.

"No, you wouldn't. You might think you would when you're not hungry, but you won't when the famine pains begin to come. I don't deny you'd split your last crust with him if I'd let you, but in the end you would fight for dear life the same as me or Fisherson. I'm just not going to let you give it up—every ounce you can spare will be needed to make this fight here. I've told you, Fisherson, that you'd be given the same chance as I take myself; by staying here, and fighting here together, we may save many lives, our own as well. We know how to plan, to conserve food; we've got white men's brains and power to organize."

"Then why can't I stay here, too?" the girl demanded. "I will, sooner than be separated from Edward."

"There's two reasons why it would be best for you to take a rowboat down the river. One of 'em is that it would be easier for you; you wouldn't want to be eating when you see us starving. The other is—I want to be delivered from temptation. This is a deadly, desperate game, fighting famine, and sometimes men go insane before it's over. Sometimes men forget they're men and turn into beasts. There'll come a time when you'll have all the food that's left; and

there's too many true stories of the awful deeds that men have done when they're crazy with hunger. I don't want to have to fight that, too."

Suddenly a cunning light crept into Edward's eyes. "But why should any of us starve?" he asked.

"Why? Tell me how we're going to beat the game and I'll bless you ever after."

"It's easy enough—for us three. Tonight we'll take the sled and go down the river, out of hearing from this camp. Before morning we can build a raft, the three of us, and be out of reach of them before the river freezes. Then the three of us can winter in some cabin way down the river. You've got enough grub for two—with your pistol full of shells we can pick up enough more to keep three—with no great hardship, either."

"And leave your converts here to die!"

"They're not my converts. They're savages—only half human."

John's voice dropped a tone. "Do they worship God?" he asked grimly.

"Yes, but that doesn't make 'em Christians in the way I understand the word. I haven't been able to convert them to decency, to cleanliness, to civilization—to any of the things I believe in."

"You don't believe they were made in their Father's image?"

Edward made an impatient gesture. "We're not discussing theology—we're trying to figure how we're going to live. I've done my best to save their no-good souls—I can't be responsible for their bodies. They're shiftless, or this would never have happened. They don't work except when they're hungry. They're just like most of our own poor—improvident, spending what they have like water when they have anything, wasting their time on their silly amusements, never looking one day into the future. What's the use of trying to be charitable to people like that?"

"I don't remember that the Lord made any such discrimination."

"Leave the Lord out of it; that is just common sense. You said a while ago that we've got white men's brains to think and organize, and it's true—and doesn't that make us worth more to the world? Should we risk our lives, probably die to help out so many animals? Our lives are worth more than theirs; theirs are not worth saving."

John's eyes glittered. "I don't know anything about that. If I was a missionary, like you—a devout man—I'd leave that to the Lord to decide—who was worth most in His sight. It may be that not one of us is as worthy to live as the humblest, dirtiest savage in the lot. I know that He said that the sick, not the well, needed doctors—when He said to give to the poor He didn't say anything about giving to the deserving poor and letting the others die—He didn't leave out the shiftless—and the improvident—and those that can't see a day ahead. The Christian creed is to divide your crust with the beggar—not to find out first if he spent his money like a sailor before he became a beggar."

"That's quixotic—criminal, too," Edward interposed. "I don't know that you're fitted to tell us these things. I should think you'd leave religion to Ruth and me, who have made a study of it. You're a woodsman, not a missionary."

"Thank God, if I had to be your kind of a missionary." John's eyes blazed. "I know the Missionary that came down from heaven saw fit to feed the hungry and clothe the naked. He taught that what you did to the littlest one you did to Him."

Edward whirled to the girl at his side. "Ruth, can't you persuade him? Can't you keep this madman from killing us all through his mistaken zeal?"

The girl's eyes looked wide and luminous. "I don't know that he is mistaken, Edward," she said quietly. "Everything doesn't seem so clear as it once did and it will take a long time for me to know."

Edward's lip curled. "Are you going to forsake me for this brute?" he demanded. "I might have guessed——"

"No, I'm going to stand by you." There was a flame in her face, no kinship to the lurid tongues that leaped in the crude fireplace. "I want you to live—and I'd gladly give my own life to save yours."

She meant exactly what she said. Both these men knew it. Yet Edward wasn't content; the hand of famine was already too heavy upon him. "That won't help, unless you can persuade him," he told her.

John's lip curled and showed his white teeth but he did not speak. He rose quietly and began to separate the food stores into two equal piles. One of them he piled in a corner; then laid out his sleeping robes immediately in front.

"The rest are yours, Ruth—flour and meat to last you through the winter. You'll have to eat sparingly, but it will last, with what you can pick up. They're not for Edward—just for you, for your own life. To-morrow you'll go in the rowboat to the mouth of the river—quiet water and an easy trip. If Edward doesn't play fair he'll have to make answer! if he tries to follow I'll bring him back. Let him remember that a man like me, of my strength, can follow him anywhere and overtake him in a little while—specially if he's loaded down. But to save me the trouble of watching I want you to promise that you won't divide with him."

The girl's eyes shone strangely; but not even Edward knew what this shining meant. "I won't divide with Edward."

"I'll believe you. I'm tired now and want to sleep. 'To sleep is to eat.' " He smiled slowly, almost the same boyish smile Ruth had learned to watch for. "You are both white people and you'll see this thing in the white way when you think it over. I'll bid you good night."

He lay down in his clothes, and tired from the long pull up the grade, sleep drifted over him almost at once. He slept uneasily at first, sometimes catching the murmur of low talk, but soon the heavy slumber of exhaustion enveloped him. Throughout that deep sleep he was secretly, subconsciously aware of Ruth's presence; her soft movements did not arouse him at all but he would have wakened instantly had she left the cabin. He had learned to stand guard over her in daylight and dark; and his watching, guardian subconsciousness lulled him deeply.

When he did awake, about midnight, he was not surprised to see her rolled in her robes on Edward's cot.

But he looked about in vain for the man himself. Evidently he had left the cabin; it did not seem likely that he had taken refuge in the small, cold storeroom adjoining the room. And almost instantly the dying firelight showed him even a more significant thing; the stores he had laid aside for Ruth's use had vanished too.

He could conceive of but one explanation. A hard light that few men would have liked to see flashed across the bright surface of his eyes. He sat up quietly, felt at his pocket to make sure that his .44 revolver was secure, then slipped on his shoe packs. From the open door he saw that the sled was missing too, but the snow that lay so wanly white in the moonlight showed him an easy track to follow. He turned back to get his parka.

But John paused when Ruth spoke to him in the darkness. She simply spoke his name, yet it brought him to a dead standstill; and her quiet tone moved him more than could any passion. Instantly he knew that she was wide awake and had watched all his motions; but he knew nothing else. The profundity of this strange situation so far escaped him.

"Yes?" he answered quietly.

"John, don't go. I gave him the things. He is going in my place."

He strode to her side and he could just see the white blur of her face. "I'm going after him, Ruth. I won't kill him but I'll bring him back. He can't escape me. Ruth, I meant what I said to-night."

"If you meant what you said to-night you'll let him go," the girl interrupted quietly. "It wasn't a trick, John—he's going. I'm to stay here and fight the thing through with you, just as you were going to have him do. I didn't divide with him—I gave him all, just as I have always been willing to give him all."

John experienced a strange, moving awe. "I believe that, Ruth," he answered her, speaking now as quietly as she had spoken. Their voices hardly dimmed the poignant silence of the room. "But what did I say to-night that justified this?"

"You said those things were for me, for my life. And John, Edward is my life. I am blind to everything else."

He gazed at her for some seconds without speech. Without knowing why she did so she reached up her hand to him; and for the first time since the beginning of their journey he took it in his. Strong though his hands were they trembled as they held hers. Through the rough, calloused skin she felt the beat of his inmost heart, the ebb and flow of the mighty forces of his life. Because it was of vital need, reaching into the man's soul, he pressed her hand to his lips. Then he laid it gently down and turned away. He took off his parka and hung it on the wall. He slipped off the heavy shoe packs. He laid down and drew his robes about him.

To be continued in the next number, December 20th.

Chochawee-ti

By Henry Herbert Knibbs

Author of "Once Across the Border," "When Carmen Sang in Sandoval," Etc.

The tragic idyl of a Navajo girl and a white man.

PHIL must have known that he couldn't last long when he started out on that ride. Laramie and I did our best to dissuade him from going, but we might as well have talked to the wind. Phil said he was going alone. We said he wasn't. He laughed and saddled up that big iron-gray horse he used to ride when he had strength enough to ride at all and swung up and out of Bart's livery into the worst storm we had had on the reservation for years. Laramie swore and stumped over to his room for his chaps and overshoes and sheep-lined short coat. I knew Laramie was going. It was in his eye.

The preacher at Farmington had asked me to have dinner with him that evening —which meant a pleasant evening, pipes, and yarns and solid comfort in front of blazing logs in the big fireplace. Phil had also been asked—and Laramie. And Phil had deliberately set out across the reservation without a word to us other than that he was going. Phil didn't say where he was going but I think he knew that it was his last ride. If we hadn't known him so well we would have said he was crazy. The wind was droning across the mesas, driving snow as fine as flour and sharp as fire. The afternoon light was almost gone. To turn from friends and the warm comfort of a fireside in such——

"When a sick wolf leaves the pack——" said Laramie, as he came, muffled to the ears, and waddling along like a grizzly.

"Just wait till I get my overcoat," I told him.

Laramie nodded. "I'm right glad to have you along," he said.

In the fading light we tracked Phil down to the river. We could see where he had crossed and plowed through the snow in the cut, on the other side. "To-Se-To," mumbled Laramie. To-Se-To is the first trading post south of town. We thought Phil was headed that way. After we crossed the river we kicked our horses into a lope. If Phil missed the trading post—well, we didn't like to think of what might happen. A man could get lost out there on the mesas in broad daylight—and we couldn't see twenty yards ahead in that streaking, fine snow and the night just about ready to close in. We *could* see Phil's tracks and we knew that he was also riding fast and south.

The snow was not deep, perhaps three inches of it on the frozen ground, yet the going was hard and treacherous. Occasionally we stopped to break out balls of snow

from the horses' hoofs. Once Laramie shouted, "To-Se-To." The sound of his voice drove down the wind. I nodded and waved my arm. Then we were in the saddle again and pounding along through the dark, with a faint, wavering line marking the direction which Phil had taken. Presently my horse threw up his head and swerving, stopped.

Laramie was on foot, peering at the vague tracks in the snow. I noticed that the wind bit harder and knew that we had been slowly swinging into it—slowly circling toward the west. Phil had deliberately urged his horse from the To-Se-To trail, heading almost directly into the storm. I got down and we stood close to Laramie's horse and bent our heads. "He's struck into the old Black Mountain trail—Chochawee-ti—but he'll never make it," shouted Laramie.

"You mean that Navajo girl—'Sky-blue turquoise girl,' they call her?"

"Sky-blue hell!" roared Laramie. "He'll freeze to death, or pass over in one of them coughin' spells. We got to find him."

"I thought that was what you were trying to do!" I shouted back. My hands were as stiff as a plaster cast and my face was numb and stinging, by turns. It was wicked weather. I felt irritable and powerless to battle against the thrusting cold and the keen, invisible whips of fire that occasionally awakened my pulses to protest.

Laramie heaved himself into the saddle and we swung away toward the west. Somewhere out there in the black night was the hogan of Chochawee-ti, the Navajo girl of whom much has been written in song and story in another place, and whose picture hangs in a noted gallery, signed by a great name among painters of the West. Once or twice I had seen Phil talking to the girl, in town. I hadn't thought much about it at the time. But now I recalled the many times that Phil had ridden out onto the reservation, disappearing for perhaps a week, each time—and it came to me suddenly that he had never taken a pack horse along—no provisions or necessary equipment for camping. Phil was beloved by all who knew him, yet even his great friend Laramie called him "queer." He wasn't, however. He was simply unconventional, natural, and as square as a die. Trust Laramie to choose a friend—and one could trust Laramie's friends.

When a man is told by the greatest physicians in the country that he hasn't more than a year or two to travel earth trails, when he must look to other and farther trails on which to continue the great adventure, he is likely to crowd all the living he can into the brief visit with his kind. Phil both worked and played hard. When he wrote a story and sold it he was the happiest man in America. When a rejected story was returned to him he was witty at his own expense. In fact one of the best things he ever wrote was about the adventures of a yarn that had been rejected so many times that it got the habit of returning to its author of its own volition—even without the necessary postage. "Good fun, this," Phil used to say after he had been hammering away at his typewriter for two or three hours. And once, while we were standing on the hill back of town watching the sun roll down into an evening pool of gold and amethyst and jade, Phil gestured toward old Shiprock, looming up like a black privateer stranded on the desert. "Great fun, this," he said. And Phil loved a good horse, finding a rare companionship in the big iron-gray that Laramie had purchased for him. But then, it was the same with any stray dog or burro that he chanced upon. And the children of our town—Phil went the Pied Piper one better; he didn't have to march down Main Street playing a tune to coax the youngsters after him. Phil simply appeared and his friends pattered out and followed—the youngsters, the dogs and the patriarchal burro that belonged to no one and belonged to every one. Yes, his friends followed him; Laramie, for instance.

Laramie was stooping over peering at something in the snow. He had dismounted. My horse had stopped, although I had not realized it.

I was too cold and stiff to shudder but I quivered inside. Laramie straightened up and stepped over to me. He held out his arm. I peered down. Laramie had found Phil's hat. He gestured ahead. I bowed my head to the wind and we plodded on. In a few minutes we reached the comparative shelter of the low hills west of the Shiprock road. I didn't see Laramie dismount this time—but presently, like one coming out of a deep sleep, I realized that there were three horses instead of two and that Laramie was manhandling somebody, and swearing whenever he could catch his breath. I moved over and took hold of Laramie's

arm. Then I heard Phil's voice: "I'm not frozen. You needn't shake me blind. I guess I must have gone to sleep."

Then Phil seemed to recognize me. I could hardly see his face, yet I knew that he smiled or tried to smile. "Great fun, this!" he said.

Laramie growled and grumbled and kept his arm round Phil.

The wind eddied softly round us in the hollow of the hillside where we stood. Across the crest of the hill above our heads it droned heavily like the prolonged note of a cathedral organ. Laramie, the practical, gave Phil a drink of whisky—bad stuff for a healthy man in cold weather but just the whip Phil needed. Then Laramie tied Phil's hat on with his bandanna and helped him into the saddle. "It's about three miles to To-Se-To," said Laramie.

"But Chochawee-ti is just over the hill," said Phil.

"All right, old-timer." Laramie's gruffness had evaporated. His tone was like that of a father to a well-beloved but wayward son. He didn't ask Phil why he had ridden out into the storm or where he was going. He simply rode along close to Phil's horse, his head bowed to the wind, his heavy shoulders forward. When the trail struck up the hillside and grew narrower Phil's horse went ahead as though he knew just where he was going. Laramie dropped behind. The snow was thin on the southern slope of the hill; points of black rock showed through. On the crest the trail was scoured clean by the wind. Beyond, toward the west, lay another low range and on the flat between glowed a light—not a twisting, wind-tossed flare, but a soft, steady glow like the light from a stained-glass window.

A Navajo hogan has no windows; then, I thought, if that is the hogan of Chochawee-ti the door must be open. And why should the door be open on such a night? Laramie and Phil had reined in and were talking. The wind was slowly dying down and thin whirls of snow were eddying round and settling. The storm was drawing back into the northwest reluctantly—ebbing away in occasional gusts that ran back to harass the hills, yet always retreating; and when we had reached the flat land below the snow had ceased to fall. The hidden valley was silent save for the sound of the horses' hoofs churning the loose snow.

We stopped in the glow of the doorway, sitting our horses and waiting to see what Phil would do. Laramie had dropped back beside me. "Three frozen fools," he grumbled. The edge of the storm had rolled back from the sky and stars were breaking out in the clean-swept spaces. Then the Navajo girl, Chochawee-ti, stepped from the hogan. Phil got down from his horse. The girl did not seem surprised nor did she offer a word of greeting. She came to Phil and reaching out touched his cheek with her hand. Then she took the reins from him and led the horse round to the corral.

Phil seemed to have forgotten us for the moment. Laramie shrugged his shoulders. "Now that you're located we'll drift over to To-Se-To," he said. Phil swung round. "No. This is my party. I want you to stay. There's something I want you to know, before——"

The Navajo girl came round the corner of the hogan like a shadow. Phil talked with her. Presently she came forward and offered to take our horses. Laramie wouldn't have it. "Come on, Bob," he said to me. I thought Laramie intended leaving and riding back to To-Se-To, but he swung round the corner of the hogan and dismounted at the corral bars. "We got to stay—till morning, anyhow," he said. He offered no explanation. I surmised that something Phil had said to the girl had caused Laramie to change his mind.

"If you think Phil really wants us to stay——" I began.

Laramie, unsaddling his horse, jerked at the cinch-tie viciously. "Can't you see that Phil is makin' the big fight to keep goin', and not bust down and quit till his light goes plumb out? He ain't the kind that goes draggin' one foot and moanin' on his way to the jumpin'-off place. He figures to make it in one swift flash. He'd 'a' been gone now if we hadn't followed him up and found him. And now he's got to get ready, all over again. That's our fault—if you want to look at it that way. It's up to us to stick—because Phil wants us to.

"Then we'll stick," I said. "But it seems rather a queer place for a white man to come to, under the circumstances."

"Not so queer as you might think. I savvied what he said to the girl and what she said to him. But it's up to Phil to tell you, if he wants to. It's not up to me."

"Oh, I'm deaf, dumb and blind," I told Laramie, resenting his tone which seemed

to imply that I was in some way responsible for the whole miserable adventure.

"Yes, you're all of that," retorted Laramie, "and you're supposed to be Phil's best friend."

We lugged our saddles to the lean-to and threw our saddle blankets over them. Then we shuffled through the light snow to the doorway of the hogan. Phil stood waiting for us. He stepped aside and gestured to us to enter.

The room was exceptionally large, the walls bare, the floor clean-swept. In the corner near the fireplace was a pile of cedar wood. The Navajo girl, Chochawee-ti, fetched blankets from an inner room and spread them along the floor farthest from the fire. Phil, who had been standing near the fireplace, came and sat down with us. His usually pallid face was touched with color. His dark eyes were quick and bright.

"Glad you chaps came," he said in his easy way, as though the adventure had been prearranged. "You see, Chochawee-ti expected me. The big men of the tribe are going to pull some kind of a stunt to-night. It's supposed to cure me. You have heard of the Fire Dance? Well, from what Chochawee-ti tells me this is not to be a dance but a sort of incantation and manifestation that'll make a fellow see things not ordinarily seen. She says the priests knew that this storm was on the way and that it would break about midnight. There's the chinook blowing now. It's hot in here."

Laramie rose and stepped to the doorway. He stood looking out into the night. "Laramie doesn't like this stuff," said Phil, turning to me. "He's a good, old-fashioned scout. Thinks white man's religion is all right but red man's religion is black magic."

"I didn't know that the Navajos allowed their women to attend any of the sacred ceremonies," I said.

"They don't, as a rule. But Chochawee-ti —well, you've read of the vestal virgins? Chochawee-ti is what we would call a priestess among her people. She lives alone and she will never marry. The Black Hills Navajos are jealous of her. Twice they threatened to get me for coming over here and visiting her. But they are also afraid of her and I think that is why they didn't bother me. Of course Laramie and you will think I'm a little touched because I believe these people know a little more about the supernatural, in some ways, than we do. Well, maybe I am touched. It doesn't matter."

"What doesn't matter?" queried Laramie, coming from the doorway. Then, "The chinook is blowing. The snow is going fast."

The girl heard Laramie and cast a quick glance at Phil. He noticed and smiled. It didn't call for any especial amount of discernment to realize that if there was anything in the world she cared for it was Phil. And according to Phil's story she was consecrated to some peculiar religion of her people. I began to feel uncomfortable, knowing how the Navajos regarded those who intruded upon their social and religious life.

"When does the show start?" queried Laramie abruptly.

Phil spoke to the Navajo girl, then turned to us. "When the snow leaves that flat rock out there, just beyond the doorway."

"Well, it's melting fast," said Laramie.

Chochawee-ti, who had been tending the fire, glanced up as though listening. I became suddenly and comfortably drowsy. I know that I closed my eyes, and I must have gone to sleep sitting there between Laramie and Phil with my back against the hogan wall. When I again became conscious of my surroundings the fire was blazing and crackling, the heat in the room was intense. Slowly I realized that there were several persons in the room besides ourselves. We three were sitting along the east wall of the hogan. Along the north, south and west walls were seated men of the Navajos—old men, with the exception of one slim youth who stood near the corner fireplace, opposite Chochawee-ti.

Immediately I noticed the girl, now clothed in a single garment of a material which looked like black velvet. About her waist was a woven sash of black and white. She was tending the fire and each movement she made accentuated her natural grace and litheness. I glanced at Phil. His eyes were closed. I did not like the peculiar pallor of his face. I was about to whisper to him when one of the old men got up and came to the middle of the room. He addressed his fellows in a deep and even voice and at the conclusion of his address each answered in turn, beginning with the old man who had taken what I surmised was the seat of prominence vacated by the speaker. The

men seemed to pay no attention to us, but stared straight ahead stolidly. Presently the harangue ceased and the speaker turned to the girl. She said something and immediately Phil started up, wide awake, and seemingly keen of interest.

As I did not expect to be credited with veracity in recounting what followed, I can simply state, to the best of my recollection, what happened in that isolated hogan far back on the big mesas of the Black Hills country, while the soft chinook swept the land of snow and the cedar flames leaped in the narrow corner fireplace. In fact I know what I saw, but I cannot believe it myself.

Standing in the middle of the room, with nothing to screen him from our gaze, that old Navajo buck held out his hands, straight before him, with the palms upward and cupped like a bowl. He began to chant. The men along the walls of the room took up the chant. Its low-toned, barbaric rhythm made me shiver. Presently he ceased chanting. The Navajo youth who stood opposite Chochawee-ti seized a small earthenware bowl and scooped up glowing embers from the fireplace. He gave the bowl to Chochawee-ti, who carried it to the old man in the middle of the room—but instead of giving the bowl to him she poured the live, red embers into the cup of his extended hands. I felt Phil twitch against me. Laramie was staring at the old man's hands and muttering. Then swiftly the young Navajo fetched a handful of green leaves and placed them over the embers that the priest held. Immediately a spiral of smoke rose and spread. The hogan ceiling was low and the smoke curled and pushed out until the head and shoulders of the priest were invisible. Slowly the smoke settled until the figures in the room became vague and were finally blotted out. I was for getting up and making for the doorway but Phil laid his hand on my knee. "Just a minute or two," he said thickly. "We ought to be able to stand it if *he* can."

Then something seemed to take shape in the heart of the smoke, something that moved and slowly assumed the form of a horse. I had heard of the Sacred Horse of the Navajos—the Turquoise Horse, as he is often called. And I had heard of the Sacred Hogan, which until that night I had believed was the sky itself, the turquoise sky of the mesa country. Call it what you will, imagination, superstition, black magic or an actual manifestation of the supernatural, I *saw* the smoke take shape and form and become as a living thing. But in what manner this was to cure Phil of the dread disease from which he suffered I could not imagine. Strangely enough the smoke did not seem to interfere with my breathing freely, nor did it affect my eyes as smoke usually does. I was too amazed to realize how I actually felt in regard to the phenomenon, or trick or whatever you may call it, but I did wonder, curiously enough, what Phil and Laramie made of it. Suddenly Phil started up and called out one word, "Chochawee-ti," and in that call was commingled hope and hopelessness, desperation and assurance beyond all description. And while I tried not to believe what it meant, I knew—and Laramie knew—and the girl, who appeared suddenly through the haze of smoke and seized hold of Phil as though to keep him from sinking down into the depth unutterably vast and dark and beyond the reach of all human voice or vision.

The smoke drew through the doorway. The fire became brighter. Outlines became distinct. The men of the Navajos—they had vanished. But four of us were left, or, perhaps, three; Chochawee-ti, Laramie and myself. Phil had departed down the dim trail to adventure among who knows what divine mysteries beyond the sand hills and the cañons of the after land. And I think he went as he had wanted to go—swiftly and painlessly and in the arms of Chochawee-ti, whom not even the scared duty of tending the priests' altar fire could keep from answering the terrible appeal in Phil's last word.

We stepped outside and stood looking at the stars. Presently Laramie spoke. "Did you see it?" he queried huskily.

"What?" I asked, needing his assurance that I had not imagined the spectacle of the moving horse poised above the hogan floor and wreathed with silver smoke.

"That thing that came in the smoke—that horse," he blurted.

"Yes, I saw it," I told him.

"Well, I ain't so curious as you might think," said Laramie gruffly. "Only I would like to know if Phil saw what we did."

"Perhaps more," I suggested.

"And the hell of it is, a fellow's got to believe it when he knows it ain't so," declared Laramie. "But if the thing was working all right what made poor old Phil

call for the girl that way? Seems like he felt himself slipping——" Laramie paused and turned back toward the hogan. "And her, too," he continued. "Listen! She's singing the death-song of the Navajos. That's real enough. I guess there's nothing can keep a fellow from going when the time comes."

The rest of it was real enough. We couldn't get Chochawee-ti to say much. In fact she wouldn't talk with me in English, although she understood the language. She did tell Laramie in her own tongue that she had broken her vow to the priesthood in leaving the fire and going to Phil; and that she was going away. That was all.

After we had reported to the proper authorities back in town and after we had attended to all the little affairs left at odds and ends by Phil, Laramie and I went our different ways. Convention swung us back into the old rut; and with me the memory of the hogan and the Sacred Horse grew vague as though it had all been a dream. Yet once, afterward, I met Laramie on the station platform at Holbrooke. I had stepped from the train to speak to an old acquaintance whom I had seen from the car window. Laramie happened to be standing talking to a Navajo, over near the baggage room. He saw me, strode over and grasped my hand. "Heap long time," he said, smiling.

"How is it with you, Laramie?" I asked him.

"Oh, about the same as ever. You're looking about the same, yourself."

We chatted for a brief minute or so. Then, as I was about to go back to my car Laramie took something from his pocket and handed it to me. It was a tiny image of a horse carved from deep-blue turquoise.

"Well?" I said as I examined it in the white sunlight of the mesa country.

"Oh, nothing, 'cept Chochawee-ti gave it to me when I was over to To-Se-To, about a month ago. She says it brings luck."

"Chochawee-ti!" I exclaimed.

"Sure. Guess you remember her, all right, even if it is ten years since you and me and —and her was in that hogan over there beyond the Shiprock road. Sure! You see, Chochawee-ti married the trader at To-Se-To, about five years ago. Seems the Black Hills Navajos didn't like her a whole lot and kind of drove her off their particular stamping ground. So she walks over to Wendell, who runs the To-Se-To post, and tells him about it, and pretty soon he marries her. Seems like she makes him a good wife. He seems to think so. Thought I'd tell you so you'd kind of get over them ideas you had that any of the Indians are different from ordinary folks, same as you and me."

"Of course Chochawee-ti is human—and a mighty good-looking girl—or she was," I said. "But I didn't think she'd ever marry, especially after what happened that night in the hogan."

"Well, you needn't to worry," said Laramie, smiling slowly. "You recollect that To-Se-To is the post nearest to where we—where Phil was buried. Every time Chochawee-ti comes into town she goes over there, alone, and stays till Wendell is ready to drive back to the post. Figure it out yourself. Did she marry him 'cause she cared a whole lot for him—or did she marry him so that she could be near where old Phil is asleep and resting up for the big journey? Don't ask a white man for the answer. Ask a Navajo—and he won't tell you, because he would know.

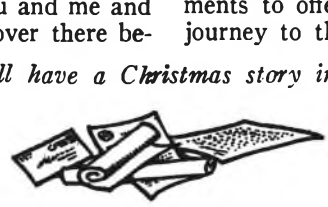
"I'd give it to you, only Chochawee-ti gave it to me," continued Laramie as I handed him the little turquoise horse. "Anyhow, it's only lucky for the one it's give to. I'll tell Chochawee-ti I met up with you. She'll be right glad, on account of Phil."

As I reëntered my car and took my seat one of those typical tourists who sees America first, last and all the time through a Pullman window leaned across the aisle and told me that the Indians were a peculiar people. He had seen one or two Navajos, evidently, from his window.

"Yes," I acquiesced politely. "Almost as peculiar as the people who seem to think that they are."

The typical tourist had no further comments to offer during the remainder of our journey to the coast.

Mr. Knibbs will have a Christmas story in the next issue.



The Unusual Adventures of the Texan Wasp

By James Francis Dwyer

*Author of "The Scarlet Jackals of Seville," "The Underground River of the Oasis," **Etc.***

VI.—THE LONE BANDIT OF VIZZAVONA.

Robert Henry Blane of Houston, Texas, alias The Wasp, finds himself beholden to No. 37 for the first time in his life. At the suggestion of the great man hunter he journeys to Corsica and becomes a bandit for a day.

THE wandering gaze of Robert Henry Blane, alias The Texan Wasp, was arrested by the statue on the square. A score of times during the preceding three days the gray eyes of The Wasp had given it a careless glance; now it clutched him, compelling him to study it with a curious intentness that was altogether foreign to his general tastes. Ordinarily statues of the great did not attract the adventurous Texan, but this rather amazing masterpiece of Barye had suddenly reared itself up before his eyes and demanded notice.

Robert Henry Blane was at Ajaccio, the capital of Corsica, famous as the birthplace of Napoleon Bonaparte, and it was the thrilling statue on the Place du Diamant that had suddenly gripped the attention of the handsome American. Riding out toward the Sea of Dreams is the emperor in the garb of a Roman consul, while at each corner of the splendid base walks a brother Bonaparte, similarly attired. A group of five, an emperor, three kings, and a prince born in the little sleepy town.

The Texan Wasp slowly examined the figures. The mounted Man of Destiny, a little short, but imperial looking; the four brothers who were taken up in the toga of genius worn by Napoleon and swept into the seats of the mighty. He stared for a long while at the strange group, then he uttered a soft comment.

"One thing that can be said about the little beggar," he murmured, "he did run with his pack. Always thought of the family when there were any crowns or thrones or secondhand togas to be given away."

The remark made Robert Henry Blane review his own family connections; and for an instant the sunny square was blotted out. A dreamy look appeared in the gray eyes, softening them greatly. The thoughts of The Texan Wasp had rushed out across the leagues of ocean to his home town. In that instant he had soared out across the Mediterranean and Atlantic, over the splendid

cotton fields of the South to the town on Buffalo Bayou that he loved.

He reviewed the Blanes—the Blanes that he knew. Uncles, aunts, cousins and second cousins. They paraded before his mental eyes. There was "Big Abner" Blane, his uncle, known as the best rider in the Panhandle. Men used to say that "cows didn't know as much about themselves and their calves as Abner Blane knew about them." There was "Handsome Kenney" Blane, the boss of Happy Valley, who rode like a centaur. The eyes of The Texan Wasp grew softer still as he thought of Kenney.

Other Blanes. Aunts and cousins. The mental eyes of The Wasp darted over the Lone Star State, halting for fractional instants at places on the Pecos and Red Rivers where lived Blanes; at San Antonio, Dallas, and El Paso where the name was worn by worthy folk. With a little twinge of regret he recalled a verse that had been written about his people. He remembered that he had chanted it to Betty Allerton on a summer night in Boston in the long ago. It ran:

"For ridin' straight an' ridin' fair.
For nerve an' strength an' for actin' square;
For throwin' a rope an' for shootin' quick,
Then a Blane from Texas is my pick."

A sudden moisture dimmed the eyes of The Texan Wasp. He rose, shrugged his shoulders and walked swiftly across the Place. The thoughts of his kinsfolk hurt. And years ago he had proudly recited that verse to Betty Allerton!

He reviewed with a little bitterness his reason for visiting Corsica. There had occurred in Milan a most amazing happening which the press of Italy had reported with flaring headlines. It was alluded to as "The Affair of the Three Marfiorios" and public interest in it was so great that two journals *Il Corriere della Sera* of Milan, and *La Tribuna* of Rome had each offered fifty thousand lire to any person who put forward a solution.

Robert Henry Blane was at Rapallo when the public interest reached its highest point. And to the adventurous Blane came a curious message. Beneath the door of his hotel room was slipped a note in pencil, a queer note. It was in a simple cipher which The Wasp decoded with ease, and it read:

In payment of a debt, "The Affair of the Three Marfiorios" is booked against you. Change your camp before night.

Mr. Blane took the advice given by the unknown. He left immediately for Pisa, and at Pisa he had the pleasure of reading in the *Gazzetta del Popolo* that the hotel he had occupied at Rapallo had been raided by the Italian secret service on the night of his departure.

On the second morning at Pisa a beggar shuffled up to Robert Henry Blane on the pleasant Lungarno and slipped another note into his hand. It was in the same easily read cipher and ran:

In payment of a debt. Move on and move quickly. Don't return to your hotel.

The Texan Wasp, surprised at the intelligence of the note writer, did not return to his hotel. He slipped down to Bocca d'Arno, where the Arno gurgles into the wine-colored Ligurian Sea. A square-beamed schooner carrying a great red sail on which was painted a crimson Lion of Venice was floundering seaward. The Wasp had himself rowed out to her, seized a rope and pulled himself onto the deck that reeked of pitch, olive oil, sour wine, and garlic.

"Where to?" asked Mr. Blane, as the barefooted skipper examined him with little eyes that hid like criminals behind brows of stiff hair.

"To Corsica, signore," answered the man. "Ajaccio."

"Then you have a passenger," said The Wasp. "My doctor has just ordered me to sea, and I'm a high private when it comes to obeying orders."

Robert Henry Blane walking away from the splendid statue on the Place du Diamant thought over the mysterious notes. Who had sent them? Who was in his debt? All sorts of queer figures stepped out of the cells of memory, but as he reviewed the forlorn pensioners to whom he had given charity he knew that the question remained unanswered. The unknown had information—definite, flat-footed information which he had given without making any stipulation as to a reward. The writer of the notes had given the tip in a careless, gentlemanly fashion. The Wasp thought that Big Abner Blane or the hard-riding Kenney Blane of Happy Valley might have acted in the same manner. Again his thoughts were of his relatives in the Lone Star State.

The Wasp followed the Rue St. Charles till he came to the Place Letitia, and there

he halted. In the Place Letitia there is an old house that has been visited by the great of all the world. A very extraordinary house. It was the home of a wonderful woman who was the wife of a small lawyer and who bore a son who was a genius. He left no home of his own, but over the door of the mother's house is an inscription running:

In this House on 15th August, 1769, Napoleon Bonaparte was born.

The Texan Wasp crossed the street. A little group of visitors was on the point of being escorted through the old residence by the daughter of the guardian. Robert Henry Blane joined the group. A soldier of fortune himself, he thought he would like to see the interior of the house in which the greatest soldier of fortune was born. And on that sudden resolve hinged a great deal. It led to a happening which linked Texas and Corsica.

Robert Henry Blane followed the guide through the house of dead memories. Through the music room, the salon, the bedroom of the wonderful mother where stand the fragments of the couch on which Napoleon was born. A strange house.

The group reached the study where great visitors' books, filled with the signatures of kings, princes, presidents, generals, and common folk are ranged on the desk once used by the father of the Man of Destiny. The guide suggested that the visitors should sign.

A giggling school-teacher from Maine wrote her name. An English officer painfully inscribed his rank with numerous cryptic letters that told the initiated he was a Knight Commander of the Bath and of various other things. The pen was handed to The Texan Wasp.

Mr. Blane, the epitome of courtesy, offered his place to a large boastful man immediately behind him. The boastful person suggested that the tall Texan should sign first, and The Wasp, in a bold, dashing hand, wrote: "Robert Henry Blane, Houston, Texas, U. S. A."

The boastful person followed, signed for himself and the overdressed lady who accompanied him, then, as the party drifted toward the street he addressed The Wasp.

"I noticed your name and home town," he said loudly. "I knew a Blane from your State."

The Wasp looked the speaker over. The big man carried those earmarks that tell of undisciplined wealth. The fellow was as common as a tree toad, but Fate had chosen him to wear a fragment of the golden mantle of Midas.

He went on speaking, indifferent to the silence of the tall Texan. "The man I knew was Abner Blane," he said. "That was many years ago. Any relation?"

"I have an uncle called Abner Blane," answered The Wasp.

"Then it must be him," said the big man. "I knew him quite well but then—then—then——"

He paused with a suddenness that startled The Wasp. Something in connection with his dealings with Abner Blane had come suddenly into the mind of the boastfully rich person. Caution, asleep for an instant, had suddenly awakened and told him that he was talking too much. Words, half born, fled gurgling down his fat throat. The sickly wash of fear crept over his flat face.

The overdressed woman who accompanied the big man supplied him with the means of retreat. She called, and with a spluttering apology he ran toward her, took her arm, stepped out of the door and hurried off.

The Texan Wasp, a little puzzled, lingered near the old house. He chatted with the guardian and the old man told of matters connected with the Bonaparte family. He showed the Texan the ivy tree that had grown from the sprig brought from the grave of Napoleon III. at Chislehurst, and Mr. Blane pretended that he was greatly interested.

"A friend of mine passed through here the other day," said The Wasp. "I'm wondering if he came here. I forgot to look for his signature in the visitors' book."

"Come back and we'll see," said the guardian promptly.

The two returned to the study. The Guardian dragged the big volume forward. "Monsieur can look for himself," he murmured.

The eyes of The Texan Wasp sprang at the page on which the big man who once knew Abner Blane had inscribed his signature. He pounced upon the name, and again, for the third time that morning, the thoughts of Robert Henry Blane went winging swiftly to the State he loved. The name

that he stared at hurled him through space. It swept him westward to the warm, sweet South that was the fountain of pleasant memories. In an instant he was transported to his home town, Houston. He was speaking to Abner Blane in the parlor of the Hotel Bristol. He saw his grim, sun-tanned uncle; he even saw himself—a tall, athletic college boy, a little awkward, ill at ease, and depressed. He had been hurriedly called home from college by the death of his father and Big Abner Blane was telling him what had caused the death.

The Wasp, staring at the name on the page, heard again the slow-spoken words of his Uncle Abner. They drummed in his ears in the quiet room of the Maison de Napoléon at Ajaccio. He was a little startled at the vividness with which memory flung the scene before him.

"Your father died of a broken heart," Big Abner had said. "He and I and Peter Tyrrel of Galveston were trimmed by a crook and your father couldn't stand it. He thought of you starting off without a red cent and it knocked him over. You see, we were trimmed so sweetly and so nicely that there was no chance to get even. If a man stole a hoss from us we could have plugged him, but this steel-fronted crook stole something from us that the old-timers knew nothing about, so that they made no laws as to how he should be dealt with. He stole oil! He stole a gusher! He grabbed from us by a low-down dirty trick a well that is spoutin' out millions of barrels of oil! Old-timers didn't know anything of oil thieves. They knew how to deal with a feller who stole a hoss but the oil thief wasn't around in their day. Besides, a hoss thief would stay close. He'd sneak into Oklahoma or New Mexico or some place handy where you could get a shot at him if you weren't too lazy, but an oil thief isn't game enough to stick around. He beats it to New York and farther. This yellow hound who robbed your father, Peter Tyrrel and me beat it to Europe. I went to New York to inquire. His name is Roswell A. Thatcher and if you ever meet him plug him on sight! I'll buy you the best lawyer that's in the country."

Robert Henry Blane jerked himself with an effort out of the dazed condition into which the rush of memories had flung him. He stared at the name in the book. It was Roswell A. Thatcher! He recalled with a grim smile the last remark made to him by Big Abner as he, The Wasp, was stepping aboard the train that carried him from the city he loved.

"I might have known he was no good," said the big cattleman. "His initials spell 'rat.' Seems as if his parents smelled him."

In a desire to keep himself completely out of the limelight The Texan Wasp had taken up his residence in the little Hôtel de France, a middle-class hotel in the center of Ajaccio, but on the evening that he found the name of Roswell A. Thatcher in the visitor's book at the house of Napoleon he arrayed himself in his dress clothes, called for one of the crazy carriages on the Place du Diamant and drove up the hill to the Grand Hôtel d'Ajaccio et Continental. The word "grand," as Robert Henry Blane knew, is used carelessly by the hotel keepers of Europe, but he also knew that Roswell A. Thatcher would pick the Continental and no other as his place of residence.

The Wasp's surmise was correct. Mr. Roswell A. Thatcher was in the dining room with a party of new-found friends, and, furthermore, he wished every one to know that he was there. The friends were English; they knew as much about oil as a head-hunting Dyak knows about table manners, and to them Mr. Thatcher was telling the romance of his life.

The Texan Wasp took a small table behind the oil man and listened. Mr. Thatcher was swimming in oil. He made the room redolent with it. He ran before the eyes of his listeners pictures of gushers, of million-barrel wells, of fields of inexhaustible wealth. The British guests sat with hanging jaws and listened.

"Why I—I——" chortled the English officer that had booked the alphabet behind his name at the Napoleon home that morning, "I thought that you—you had to dip the jolly stuff out of the ground with buckets, you know."

Roswell A. Thatcher placed his fat thumb on the lever of a soda siphon and pressed it. "My wells squirt it out like that!" he cried, as the aërated water foamed into his glass. "Toss the stuff to the clouds! Liquid gold! Why, my wells, gentlemen, are so rich that I could buy up this little island of Corsica and use it as a European home! I might do so. To-morrow I'm going to run over the place with my caravan of cars. Got four

cars over here. You see there's my wife and I, a boy, four servants, a governess and four shoffers."

There was a moment of silence. The hypnotized guests chewed stupidly, envy playing the mischief with their digestion. Robert Henry Blane, back turned to the oil king, ate slowly and listened. Mr. Blane thought of Big Abner and the story that Big Abner had told in the parlor of the old Bristol at Houston.

A timid little man plucked up enough courage to ask the oil king his route and again Roswell A. Thatcher stepped on the gas. He was going to do Corsica from Cap Corse to Bonifacio. The Thatcher cars guided by their four "shoffers" would leave their tracks on all the highways of the island.

The timid man lisped another question: "Do you go by Vizzavona?" he asked.

The oil man gulped his champagne and nodded. "I will go by Vizzavona to-morrow," he said. "Why?"

"The—the bandit," spluttered the little man. "This terrible fellow, Donati. He's—he's very active just now."

Roswell A. Thatcher laughed loudly. "That tin-pot Jesse James would bolt for the scrub if he saw my caravan!" he cried. "You see, sir, I'm an American, and small bandits don't like grabbin' Americans. Some time back, if you remember, a chap named Raisuli grabbed an American citizen in Morocco and we had so many war boats round that place in a few days that the fish hadn't room to exercise."

The little man, pessimistic to the last, gurgled something about the bloodthirstiness of the wild Donati who hid in a cave on the steep slopes of Monte d'Oro where the most famous bandits of Corsica, the Donelli brothers, had held out for many years.

Roswell A. Thatcher, a little annoyed by the small person whose remarks showed an inability to appraise the greatness of his entertainer, lit a fat cigar and spoke loudly from the smoke screen he produced.

"Gettin' oil is not a baby's game!" he cried, and the words rolled out and beat down the small talk at adjoining tables. "I've been in the toughest spots in the good old U. S. A. Uh-huh! Met men that could shoot the back molars out o' a buzzard, an' —well, I'm still here, ain't I? Ain't I here?"

The timid man was appalled at the tone in which the question was asked. "Why, yes," he stammered. "You—you—you are certainly here. I only mentioned Donati as a bad lot."

"Well, that's all right," growled the oil king. "I'm here, an' if your little Corsican Jesse James tries to hold up my caravan he'll find out that Roswell A. Thatcher is a cross between a seventy-five an' a mad hippopotamus! Get that!"

In the silence that followed The Texan Wasp called for his bill, paid it quietly and slipped out into the soft night. Mr. Blane seemed amused. He hummed an air from "Carmen," the music of which he had heard in golden Seville on the night when he and No. 37 raided the den of the Scarlet Jackals.

The Wasp walked down the slope toward the little town. His thoughts were of Roswell A. Thatcher, of Big Abner Blane, of his father. Now and then Betty Allerton danced into the conscious area as he remembered with a little feeling of uneasiness how he had recited to her the verse about the Blanes of Texas. He was filled with a momentary dislike to the lines. He wondered if Betty Allerton had remembered them. If she had remembered what would she now think of the couplet:

For ridin' straight an' ridin' fair,
For nerve an' strength an' for actin' square.

He entered the little hotel and found, to his surprise, a note addressed to himself thrust in the wire letter rack outside the cage of the concierge. He tore it open and glanced at it. In the same simple code as the letters that he had received at Rapallo and Pisa was another warning. It began in the same queer fashion as the others, the words, "In payment of a debt," prefacing a short warning that ran: "They're on your trail and might flush you at any moment."

Robert Henry Blane, a little puzzled, climbed to his room. It overlooked the Place du Diamant and the moonlight fell upon the statue of the Man of Destiny riding seaward with his four brothers in attendance. He thought that the Blanes of Texas had that same desire to run with their pack. Once Big Abner Blane had fought off a bunch of Mexican desperadoes while Kenney Blane and the father of The Wasp were disabled on the ground. And Big Abner had gone to New York in an effort to find Roswell A. Thatcher, the oil thief, who had robbed the Blanes and who was now motor-

ing around Europe in a fleet of high-priced cars paid for with money that he had swindled out of Abner, Pete Tyrrel, and the father of The Wasp.

Robert Henry Blane sat for a long time at the window. He was planning a route. He was considering his own safety and some matters of family pride. The statue of Napoleon and his four brothers helped.

The road between Bocognano and Vizzavona brings to the traveler the most wonderful scenery of Corsica. Deep down in the valley below the road flows the Gravone, while soaring into the heavens are the Col de Vizzavona and Monte d'Oro.

The *maquis,* the thick jungle growth of Corsica, creeps down to the highway, an impenetrable network of brier. Far up the slope are fields of round boulders, clinging like large bugs to the side of the mountain. Over all is the strange stillness of *La Corse,* the stillness that hints of ambuscades—the silence that suggests a glass ball waiting tremulously for the crack of a pistol.

A man sitting on the fringe of the *maquis* rose and surveyed the highroad that led to Ajaccio. A very picturesque and dashing person was the watcher. He wore a red shirt, corduroy trousers and large top boots. A big black sombrero covered his head, while his face, except for his cool and fearless eyes, was concealed by a brown silk handkerchief folded diagonally and knotted securely behind his head. He was tall and well built and when he moved to examine the serpentine road his movements suggested the possession of muscles that were more than ordinarily elastic.

Round a bend in the road, far down the valley, flashed the head of a caravan. A caravan of wealth. The morning sun licked the wind shield of a big touring car and heliographed the man on the fringe of the *maquis.* Running on the tread of the first car came a second, followed by a third and a fourth. Into the silent valley of the Gravone had come the petrol-driven battery of petrol-made dollars. Roswell A. Thatcher, the oil king, was, to use his own words, "giving the little island of Old Man Napoleon the once-over."

The watcher on the hillside amused himself as the distant caravan climbed the slope. He found a shady seat and watched a battle between two large black ants. One of the ants had stepped out early, found a grain of wheat on the highway and was manfully lugging it home. The other fellow, who looked as if he had just got out of bed, had met the worker and attempted to tear from him the grain that he had carried over all the dusty hummocks of the road.

The worker gave battle. He was a little tired after his efforts, but he was game. He dropped the wheat and fought furiously. The red-shirted man watched, glancing now and then at the procession of cars that slowly climbed toward him.

The loafing ant, more vigorous than the worker, upset the rightful owner of the grain of wheat, grabbed the prize and rushed off with it, leaving the other a little stunned, running round in circles looking vainly for his prize. The red-shirted man grunted. With the nose of a revolver he knocked the pirate ant away from the grain of wheat, then gently helped the rightful owner toward the point where it lay. The quiet eyes showed a little pleasure as the worker ant, recognizing the property that he had lost, seized it and carried it off with apparent delight.

The red-shirted man rose and stepped behind a clump of bushes. The soft throb of climbing cars echoed from the slopes of Monte d'Oro. The loud voice of Roswell A. Thatcher bludgeoned the silence. The red-shirted man hitched up a belt, took a firmer grip on the short-snouted automatics and stepped out into the road. The highway rested on a whittled-down shoulder of the mountain. Above the road rose the shrub-matted slope of the mountain, far below ran the river.

Redshirt gave a short order in French. *"Arrêtez!"* he cried, and the suggestion to halt was backed by a careless wave of the gun gripped in his right hand. He seemed perfectly at ease, and perhaps his rather nonchalant manner prompted Roswell A. Thatcher to attempt his imitation of a human who was something between a seventy-five and a mad hippopotamus. The oil king reached for his arsenal.

Roswell A. Thatcher had bought while passing through Paris on his way to Corsica the most expensive Panama hat in the city. At that instant it attracted the attention of Redshirt. He evidently thought it lacked ventilation so he promptly put two holes in the top of it. A third bullet struck the brim. The hat was whipped off the head of the oil king and tossed into the

dusty roadway. Mr. Thatcher promptly threw his hands over his head.

Redshirt glanced at the other cars. Four chauffeurs and two menservants looked as if they were in the throes of setting-up exercises, their hands thrust heavenward. Mrs. Thatcher, two female servants, the governess, and a boy of ten stared with unblinking eyes at the bandit.

The gentleman of the road, in soft-spoken French, ordered the four chauffeurs to put down their hands and drive their machines slowly forward. They made no movement to obey, and the governess, who seemed the least concerned of the party, made an explanation. "They do not understand you," she said softly, speaking in the tongue he had used. "Couldn't you tell them in English?"

For a moment the red-shirted highwayman stood irresolute. He seemed to be considering the advice given by the governess. He looked at her with his cool eyes. She blushed slightly under his gaze.

"Are you the only person who speaks French?" he asked, still holding the Gallic tongue.

"Yes, sir," she answered. "I am the governess for Master Percy and I also act as interpreter." She glanced at the road over which they had come. The bandit smiled at her evident belief that help would arrive.

"But mademoiselle is an American?" questioned Redshirt.

The girl bowed her shapely little head. "Oh, yes!" she cried. "I am an American out and out." For a moment she regarded the highway then spoke impulsively: "I'm an American from the Mexican border; that is why I am not afraid of you. If—if I had a gun I—I——"

She paused and the polite bandit urged her to further speech. "Go on," he said.

"I would shoot you!" cried the girl. "In Texas we would not allow a bandit like you to stick up people on the highroad."

The red-shirted man repeated her words softly. They seemed to have a strange charm for him. He said them aloud, then he asked a question. "Where did mademoiselle learn French?" he asked.

"In Barataria," answered the girl still sparring for time. "You possibly do not know of it. It is the country of the Cajuns and every one speaks French."

At this point Roswell A. Thatcher decided to interrupt the conversation. His arms, held high above his head, had assumed a weight that appalled him. Juvenile flies, seemingly aware of his helplessness, played leap fly on his bald head. The bandit, in walking toward the girl, had stepped upon the high-priced Panama hat. The soul of the oil king was ablaze.

"Miss Tyrrel!" he screamed. "Cut out the silly yap an' tell this road pirate who I am! Do you get me? What has Barataria to do with this? I heard the word, Miss Tyrrel! Now get busy! Tell him I've got friends in the cabinet at Washington, an' unless he pulls off an' lets me move along mighty quick the United States government will make him jazz at the end of a rope. Tell him what they have done to fellers o' his kidney! Serve it to him hot!"

Redshirt had listened quietly to the angry speech, then he surprised Roswell A. Thatcher. He turned to the chauffeur of the leading car and addressed him in suave English. "Move your car along slowly," he said gently. "Swing to the right after you pass that red rock then drive her straight at the bushes." To the oil king he murmured: "Keep your hands up! You are a long way from Washington at this moment, so be careful. By the time the U. S. government got help to you I'd wager you'd be doing nonstop flights between Paradise and the milky way. Now step."

Roswell A. Thatcher was moved nearly to tears as the cars, in obedience to the order of the highwayman, turned from the road and charged the matted briers of the slope. The thorny shrubs clawed at the varnished sides of the machines. Aggressive, discolored stumps horned the glazed sides of the caravan. Wild and anarchistic limbs smashed the wind shields, battered the lamps and laid hands upon the upholstery. The bandit was unmoved. When a chauffeur, startled at the crash of glass or the sound made by a gouging stump, halted for an instant, the nonchalant highwayman waved him forward.

Through the jungle plunged the caravan of Roswell A. Thatcher, the oil king himself walking with uplifted arms in front of the red-shirted road agent. Mrs. Thatcher, the boy, and the governess rode in the first car; two female servants occupied the second; the pair of pop-eyed valets sat up like statues in the third. The fourth and last car carried baggage and food, and the driver of this car, having visions of long imprison-

ment and torture, made an attempt to escape. He sprang from his seat and made a wild rush toward the highway.

Redshirt was prompt to accept the challenge. He wheeled and fired. The chauffeur squealed like a rabbit and dropped upon his face. He lay there, legs and arms spread-eagled, and the bandit grinned as he watched him squirming.

The laugh roused the ire of the girl. "You are a coward to wound him!" she cried.

The tall man spoke softly. "He's not wounded," he said, then after a pause he added: "Don't be too ready to think the worst of me. It's hard to get an idea out of your head once you get it in." In a changed voice he addressed himself to the squirming chauffeur: "Get up and come back to your car!" he ordered. "Next time you make a break I'll clip a few inches off your long ears."

The chauffeur, discovering that he was not wounded, picked himself up and hurried back to his machine. The caravan proceeded. Roswell A. Thatcher was certain that his arms weighed more than the Washington Monument. The sun beat upon his bald head; the small flies had told hundreds of their friends of the free recreation ground provided by the oil king.

The leading car, directed by the bandit, came to the opening of a natural corral made by unscalable rocks. Redshirt waved the chauffeur forward. "Move in and park your car," he said. Then, as the four cars swung into the inclosure he ordered the occupants to dismount and enter a disused shelter built of rocky shale, a place that had once been occupied by the timber getters on the mountain. All entered except Roswell A. Thatcher. As the bandit closed the rough door he gave his prisoners a little advice. "Make yourselves at home for a little while," he said cheerfully. "You won't be injured. I'm going to have a private chat with my friend here. Any one who tries to escape is liable to get hurt."

The red-shirted highwayman directed the oil king to step briskly before him up the side of the mountain. The perspiring magnate protested but the other was deaf to the stream of objections that were unloosed. He seemed to care nothing for Thatcher's threats regarding the indignation that his capture would rouse in the United States. He showed no fear of cabinet friends, ambassadors, consular officials and what not that the petrol prince trotted out. He simply waved his gun in a manner that Thatcher thought extremely careless and said "Step it out, son. The sooner you get there the sooner your troubles will be over."

Roswell A. Thatcher thought the remark ominous. He stammeringly inquired what was wanted of him. Redshirt ignored the questions. He thrust the oil man before him up the rocky slope.

Briers, cactus, second-growth pine and trailing creepers made the way difficult for Thatcher. He puffed like a winded buffalo. Perspiration streamed from him. He seemed to have an oil plant in his interior that was forcing a greasy fluid through every pore of his body. He begged now and then for a moment to get his breath, but the long-legged bandit, to whom fatigue evidently was unknown, denied him a rest. Up and up they went so that the highway lay like a twisting snake far below them. The profound silence was broken only by the heavy breathing of the oil man or his spluttered comments as the vicious creepers clawed at his clumsy feet.

They reached a shelf of red granite and the bandit directed his prisoner to follow it to the right. Thatcher did so, but after proceeding some twenty yards or so he gave a little yelp of fear and stopped abruptly. The shelf of rock led to a point where the mountainside had been ripped away by a tremendous landslide, and a straight drop of some hundreds of feet waited for the unwary pedestrian. The oil king's gurgling suggested that a hurriedly erected guillotine within his throat was chopping all the words that tried to pass it into small pieces.

And the horror of the place was increased in a curious way. The platform had been used as the starting point of a steel cable—a "timber wire"—which the timber getters who had cleared the slopes of Corsican pines had used in swinging their logs down to the road. To a rough drum, made from a huge tree trunk, one end of the rusted cable was fastened securely, and from this drum the wire sprang recklessly out over the cliff and soared away through space. A terrifying thing in its way. It swept out and downward, bellying slightly as its weight increased, defying the effort of the windlass at the receiving end far down the mountain

to hold it taut. At the foot of the cliff trees rose up and whipped vainly with their topmost branches at the thread of steel, but it rose clear of them, continuing on its way till it grounded with an artistic sweep on the lower drum, just discernible close to the white strip that represented the highway from Ajaccio to Vizzavona.

To Roswell A. Thatcher the timber wire had an awesome and stomach-disturbing appearance. It seemed medieval and dreadful. His mind recalled a cinema film of the Middle Ages where great ropes stretched across chasms. The film had been responsible for a dozen nightmares. He glued himself to the rocky wall behind him, moistening his lips as he stared at the unconcerned bandit. He, Thatcher, had two great fears, a fear of snakes and a fear of heights.

Redshirt gripped the wire with a strong left hand and spoke softly. "I was mooching round here yesterday and found this," he said quietly. "It pleased me a lot. When I was a kid they had little ones at county fairs. You could soar through space for a hundred yards or so for a nickel. This one here——"

"You—you are not a Corsican!" interrupted the oil king. "You—you said a nick—nickel!"

The eyes that showed above the cloth mask hardened. "Did I?" murmured the bandit. "Well it doesn't really matter what I am. The point just now is what I intend to do. I was telling you that I found this wire yesterday and it sort of made me feel like a kid again. I had a wild desire to put a loop over the cable and take a swoop down the mountain. I guess there's some of us that always remain kids while some of us grow old. Now this wire, shooting out like the trail of a swallow, would attract me if I was ninety years of age."

Roswell A. Thatcher's stomach rolled over and tried vainly for peace on the other side. Every nerve in his body became a fibrous Torquemada that grilled him exquisitely. A lifetime's horror of high places beat him flat against the cliff. When a little boy in Sunday school he had been made ill at times by the minister picturing a paradise higher than Pikes Peak with the godly carelessly winging it from one rosy cloud bank to another.

"One thing stopped me from doing a glide right then and there," continued the bandit. "Do you know what it was?"

"No, I—I don't," gurgled the oil king.

"Can't you guess?"

"I—I can't guess," stammered Mr. Thatcher.

"I didn't know if the wire would hold my weight," said the red-shirted person, looking longingly at the thread of steel that shot recklessly out into space. "You see, this part of the mountain has been cleared of timber for some time and this wire has been rusting here in the sun and the rain."

There came a long silence. Into the mind of Roswell A. Thatcher came a crazy impulse to rush forward and push the bandit from the edge of the cliff where he stood lovingly regarding the flying hawser. But the oil king found it impossible to move one inch nearer the cliff. The irregular rocks in the wall against which he pressed himself found soft beds in the mattress of fat with which he had cushioned himself.

The eyes of the red-shirted man took in the flabby figure of the oil king. They ran over the moonlike face, dropped down the staircase of jowls to the barrellike body with its stomach that showed the hatred of restraint that we connect with Balkan states. The legs were ridiculous members. A Parisian tailor had plotted and planned over their coverings and had wept when he saw Thatcher in the suit.

"What is your weight?" asked the bandit.

Roswell A. Thatcher took a gulp of the mountain air and gave an explosive answer. "Two hundred and four pounds," he gasped.

"I thought you went over two hundred," said the other softly. "I guessed you as fully that when I stopped your car. I thought then that you were my man for this little job.

"What—what little job?" cried the oil king.

For a full half minute the bandit let the question go unanswered. To the straining ears of the prisoner the query seemed to go echoing up against the rocks. He had a half-crazy notion that the wretched wire that leaped out into space was listening to the answer that the bandit would give.

"The job of testing this wire," said Redshirt calmly. "I would be a fool to tackle it without finding out if it would hold me. I run about one hundred and seventy. Thirty-odd pounds lighter than you. Now if it carries you——"

The oil king made a curious noise that suggested cardiac trouble. "The chauf-

feurs!" he cried. "The—the chauffeurs would—would test it!"

"They are not heavy enough," said the bandit solemnly. "It is your weight that makes you the ideal person for the job."

The ratlike intelligence of Roswell A. Thatcher made another effort. "Take two —two chauffeurs!" he whined. "I will pay them! I—I have plenty of money. Tons of—of money! They—they will do it! See, I—I have the money with me!"

His fat fingers clawed at the inside pockets of his vest. He dragged out two pocketbooks that bulged with papers. The horror of the heights had bit into his soul and the desire to protect his wealth had been swept away by the rusted hawser that soared away down into the valley.

One of the pocketbooks dropped from his shaking hands and rolled toward the edge of the cliff. The bandit caught it. Without speaking he opened it and coolly examined the contents. Roswell A. Thatcher was unable to make a protest. He was reduced to a state of fear that was pitiable.

Very slowly the bandit read and sorted out the papers in the wallet. He made them into various piles, placing little stones on each pile so that the wind would not carry them away. He seemed much interested.

"Give me the other wallet," he ordered. "Don't move from where you are. I just want to find out how you are fixed. These chauffeurs are costly chaps. They want an awful lot for their work. I know them."

"They—they will take a couple of hundred francs!" gasped the oil king. "They will! You—you ask them!"

Again a soft chuckle came from beneath the cloth that hid the face of the bandit. "Oh, we don't want to be pikers," he said softly. "You're buying substitutes, aren't you? Well, why be mean? You've got it. Let me just calculate what we can raise out of all this in Ajaccio. I can send one of the cars back to collect."

The bandit worked in silence on the mass of papers. He sorted out letters of credit, bunches of travelers' checks, wads of the large thousand-franc bills of France. He fingered lovingly some of the fine green "frogskins" of Uncle Sam that he found in the back section of one of the pocketbooks. The American bills seemed to thrill him.

With a stub of pencil he checked up the amounts of the travelers' checks and the letters of credit. He added the total to the actual cash and whistled softly. "Why," he murmured, "we can buy these ducks at any figure they bid! We have a pile of cash here! This is about the first time in my life that I could look a chauffeur boldly in the face and say, 'Name your figure.' When we pick up this change at Ajaccio we'll have fully half a million francs to bid 'em with. You have a pen?"

Roswell A. Thatcher made a protest. "You mustn't!" he cried. "That—that game won't do! I tell you I—I am an American citizen and—and I'll bring the whole caboodle of the United States around your ears. I—I won't sign anything!"

The bandit rose and advanced upon the oil king. A right hand went out like a flash and gripped the wet collar of Mr. Thatcher. A voice out of which all trace of humor had fled thundered in the ears of the terror-stricken fat man.

"If you bleat again I'll truss you up and hook you to the wire right now!" roared Redshirt. "One more whimper and it's all aboard for you! And don't say any more about the United States. Do you get me? I am also a citizen of the United States and I never heard of Uncle Sam losing his sleep over a real low-lived skunk like you! I'll bet there's some one at Washington that's got tabs on you and before they sent a battleship to Corsica they'd look up those tabs. Uncle is no fool and he's heard a lot of whimpers from crooks like you who are afraid to live in the places where they were born. Now sign up all these checks and do it lively. I'm in a hurry."

The red-shirted bandit led the governess and the youngest of the chauffeurs toward one of the cars parked in the corral. He had tossed the flabby oil king into the hut with the other prisoners. Redshirt carried in his hand a bunch of checks that Roswell A. Thatcher had signed.

Out of hearing of the persons confined in the shelter the bandit spoke, reverting to French so that his remarks would not be understandable to the chauffeur.

"I heard our friend, Mr. Thatcher, call you Miss Tyrrel," he said. "Is it possible that your father's first name is Peter?"

The girl swung swiftly upon him, her face flushing as she did so. "Why, yes!" she cried. "How did you know?"

"He lived once in Galveston," said the bandit. "Did he not?"

The face of the girl showed amazement and the quick eye of the red-shirted man thought that he detected a little fear. The slightest shadow of fear. "Yes, yes," she stammered. "He—he did live once in Galveston."

She had halted and faced her questioner. The chauffeur was attending to the engine of the car and could not hear what was said. The bandit put a question in English.

"Miss Tyrrel," he said softly, "I would like to know how it comes about that Peter Tyrrel's daughter is in the employ of Roswell A. Thatcher? It seems strange to me. Pardon my curiosity. You see I have a little task for you to do and I would like to know before I start you on the work."

"My father had no personal dealings with Mr. Thatcher," said the girl.

"No, but he was a partner of those who had the personal dealings," remarked the bandit. "He was the partner and was part owner of the property that our fat friend got away with."

The girl stared at the cool eyes of the red-shirted man. Her own eyes showed the astonishment and fear that had sprung upon her under the cross-examination. "Who are you?" she gasped. "Who are you? How do you—how do you know all this?"

"I am called The Lone Bandit of Vizzavona," said Redshirt. "How I know all this about your father would make a long story. Too long to tell here. The point I wish to know and upon which I am very curious, is how came you to accept employment from the man who robbed your father?"

"You—you are not a bandit!" gasped the girl. "You—you are an American! I know you are!"

The eyes of Redshirt twinkled under the accusation. "You haven't answered my question," he said. "How came it that you are working for Thatcher? What made you hire with him?"

"Hate," murmured the girl. "Just hate! Listen, I will tell you! I knew from the time I was at high school that Mr. Thatcher had robbed my father and his partner, Mr. Abner Blane. It had been told to me over and over again. My father could not speak of anything else. He told me day after day how rich we would have been if Mr. Thatcher had not stolen the oil field, and—and I had a curious desire to see this—this man who had ruined my daddy. Once I thought——"

She paused and stood with hands clasped, looking up at the tall man before her. "Go on," he said encouragingly.

"Once I thought if I saw him I—I could kill him!" she said softly. "I did! I dreamed of killing him! I went to New York to teach in a school and then I came to Paris to study. One day I read an advertisement in a morning paper. It said that Mr. Thatcher wanted an American governess to travel with his son. I applied for the position and was successful. You see I thought—I thought that some—some opportunity might turn up to even up the account. Down on the border where I was born we do not forget thieves!"

Her voice had died away to a soft whisper. The silence that followed her explanation was broken by the explosions of the engine. The throbbing roused the red-shirted man. Very slowly, and with an accent on the "I" he repeated her words. "Down on the border where *I* was born," he said, "we do not forget thieves."

The girl did not speak. She stared at the cool eyes that appeared above the cloth that covered the man's face. She seemed strangely fascinated. She was willing to do anything that he wished her to do. She could not tell why.

"Miss Tyrrel," began Redshirt, "I wish you to take these checks down to Ajaccio and cash them. There will be no trouble. They are all signed and here is a written order from Mr. Thatcher together with his passport and identification card. There will be no likelihood of a hitch. Take this bunch to the Banque de Commerce, these to Lanzini Brothers, and this lot to the Compagnie Frannot. If any questions are asked just say that you are employed by Mr. Thatcher and that he is waiting for you to bring back the money. And that is the exact truth. Do you understand?"

"Yes, I understand."

"And you will do it?"

Again she looked at the cool gray eyes that regarded her closely. "Yes, I will do it," she answered.

"Good," said Redshirt. "Now I will say a few words to this young man who will drive you down and back. I want the job to appear a profitable one to him. Chauffeurs are mercenary."

Redshirt spoke for a few minutes to the chauffeur, helped Miss Tyrrel into the machine, then led the way back to the highway.

He seemed perfectly unconcerned. He lifted his sombrero and waved a farewell to the girl as the car rolled from the shrub-covered slope onto the dusty stretch of roadway that led toward the birthplace of Napoleon.

"I will wait for you here," he said. "You will be back under three hours, I am sure. And remember always what *we* do on the border. We do not forget thieves."

The Lone Bandit of Vizzavona sat himself down in the black shadow that lay like a blob of ink around the bole of a small, thickly leafed tree. He watched the car as it swept down the hillside in the direction of Ajaccio. His thoughts were of the bundles of checks that the girl carried.

He took out a stub of pencil and a scrap of paper and began to figure. He turned half a million francs into American currency at the rate the dollar stood at the moment. He divided the amount of franc-made dollars into three parts and wrote initials before each. It seemed to please him. He smiled as he checked his figures, and then spoke softly to himself. "I could never see the value of arithmetic unless a boy was going into a bank," he murmured, "yet the thing is useful in these days of fluctuating money. How would an American who never studied arithmetic be able to travel around the Continent nowadays?"

A great peace was on the countryside—"The Peace of God," as the Corsicans say. Soft little clouds drifted in from the Mediterranean like white airships and touched the lofty peak of Monte d'Oro that reared itself up to nearly eight thousand feet. From far down the valley the smoke of a charcoal burner's fire hung like a league of white baby ribbon dropped from the counter of a heavenly department store. The caves on the hillside caught the echo of goat bells brought by the wind from soft pastures in the valley of the Vecchio.

An hour passed. Two hours. A third drifted away as the shadows lengthened.

The bandit watched the road. He fancied that his ears caught the purring of an automobile. He straightened himself, his eyes glued on the spot where the caravan of Roswell A. Thatcher had swung into view some hours before.

"If there is no hitch about the payments," he murmured, "the young lady should be aimost——"

He didn't finish the remark. The shoe of a person creeping on him from behind slipped on the pine needles and he turned. It was too late. The stalker had Redshirt covered by a revolver that seemed to have had early ambitions to assume the proportions of a Lewis gun, and in the harsh Italian dialect spoken by most of the country-bred Corsicans the newcomer ordered the roadside watcher to throw his hands up.

Redshirt obeyed promptly. He dropped the stub of pencil and the scrap of paper which he had been using in his calculations and jerked his arms above his head. The size of the revolver startled him. The appearance of the newcomer did more. The fellow was a terrifying person. He was bigger than a box car, he wore a black mustache and beard that, if reaped, would have stuffed the mattresses of a hospital ward, while two wicked little eyes planted deep between a trellis work of hair-covered forehead showed a violent desire to see the overgrown revolver explode.

The black-bearded ogre advanced cautiously. With a nonworking left hand he signaled his captive to tear the bandage from his face. Redshirt demurred. Now he was certain that an automobile was climbing the slope! He could hear it distinctly.

Redshirt begged that he might be allowed to keep the cloth upon his face. The black-bearded giant screamed with rage. In the corrupt Italian he shouted out questions and did not pause to obtain answers. Who was the vile pig who was poaching on his territory? Who was the masked dog who had got himself up to resemble the brave Donati, the Lone Bandit of Vizzavona? What citified hound from the little dirty alleys of Ajaccio had dolled himself up to resemble the terrible Donati, the pride of the hills? He foamed with rage. His little wicked eyes showed murder written in capitals. A forefinger as thick as a baby's ankle caressed the trigger of the young Lewis gun pointing at the head of Redshirt. The fellow's pride had been rubbed raw by the impudence of the interloper. He had built up a name of terror, and a nidderling from the lanes off the port of Ajaccio was attempting to grab the results of his rough stuff!

His anger made him deaf to the noise made by the approaching automobile. He confused it with the blood pounding through his big head. The impertinence of the pretender maddened him.

He leaped forward quickly and tore the

bandage from the face of the impostor. He sprang back again, and, as he did so, the automobile containing Miss Tyrrel and the chauffeur swept around the bluff that had hidden it from view.

The real Donati turned to glance at the car. The barrel of the overgrown revolver was deflected for a moment from its target. The wicked little eyes forgot for a moment the assassination that they desired to see. The terrible outlaw backed down the slope.

That moment of relaxed attention was sufficient for Redshirt. Around about 1912 a long-legged college student set up a record for the standing broad jump when his university competed in the amateur athletic championships at Franklin Field. The long-legged one covered nine feet and a fraction of an inch on that day, but the same college boy, grown to manhood, beat his own record on the slopes of Monte d'Oro!

A flying body struck the real Donati. It hurled him upon his back. There rose curses, grunts, yells of pain. Four arms flailed away madly. The two men rolled over and over. Now Redshirt on top, now Donati; again Redshirt, again Donti. The black-bearded ogre was the bigger man, but Redshirt was ambitious. He seemed to want to win badly. He was hitting on all cylinders.

In the road the girl and the chauffeur watched.

There were no rules. Everything went. A fig for the marquis! Shoes, teeth, knees, gouging—all in! Not pretty, certainly, but a time-saving method of fighting. No rounds, no seconds, no breathing spaces. Just two men trying to find out by the quickest method who was the better.

Donati clawed himself to his feet. Redshirt was after him. For a moment they were locked together. They broke apart. Donati staggered. Redshirt leaped in. A right fist ripped up from the hip and found the jaw on the black-bearded giant. He dropped in a heap.

Redshirt advanced toward the girl. He felt for the cloth that had covered his face, failed to find it, then smiled as he realized that his features were exposed to her gaze. The smile made him strangely handsome. It swept away the grim fighting look and enthroned the sprite of mirth in the gray eyes. A slight scar on the right jaw that had shown white and sinister during the battle was now hardly noticeable.

"How did you get on?" he asked quietly.

The girl handed over a large package without speaking. Her eyes were fixed upon the man's face.

"What is it?" he asked. "Did anything go wrong?"

"No, no," she murmured. "Everything is there."

"But you look startled?"

"You remind me of some—some one!" she cried.

"Who?" he asked.

"Some one who came once to see my father. He was a brother of my father's partner."

There was a moment's silence. Redshirt had torn the paper from the package and was looking carelessly at the close-packed bills within.

The girl spoke again. "His name was Kenney Blane of Happy Valley," she said softly.

Redshirt made no comment. He turned and walked to the spot where he had dropped the stub of pencil and the scrap of paper on the arrival of Donati. He picked them up, secured the big revolver of the giant, then addressed the owner of the weapon who was sitting upright.

"Beat it, bo!" he ordered. "Trek, son, and trek quickly!" He had spoken in English, but he remembered before the terrible Donati had time to think over the meaning of the words. In fluent Italian he urged Blackbeard to get up and limp for the horizon, pledging himself by the bones of Paoli and all the other patriots of the little island to rid Vizzavona of its scourge if the bandit stayed around.

Donati got to his feet, took one look at his conqueror and plunged without a protest into the *maquis*.

Redshirt spoke to the girl. "Will you please give me your father's address?" he said. "Is he still in Galveston?"

"No," she murmured. "He lives in New Orleans. The address is No. 609 Royal Street."

"Thanks," said Redshirt. "I will be writing him in a day or two. And I am grateful to you for what you have done for me. Now we must part. You and the chauffeur can go back to the hut and release our friends. I have emptied the tanks of the other cars, and I am taking this machine for my own use. I'm sorry that you will have to walk to Vizzavona, but it is only a

short distance. And there is a good hotel there."

He sprang into the car and threw in the clutch. He waved his hand as he backed skillfully and turned the machine toward Ajaccio. "Some day," he cried, "I might meet you in the Vieux Carré in New Orleans. Good-by."

Robert Henry Blane, alias The Texan Wasp, sat upon the Promenade des Anglais at Nice and watched the careless rich go by. Fat English new-rich; the men jowly and stomachy, the women overdressed and overjeweled. Toy dogs with most of the women. Wretched dwarf dogs as useless as their owners; liverish "Pekes," swaggering like bloated aldermen, clumsily built griffons blinded by their hair, boudoir "bulls" dragged off their cushions for the parade.

Adventurers by the score. Sleek gentlemen, spatted and barbered. Knowing birds. Full of information about "systems" for Monte Carlo and "good things" for the races at the Var course. In their pockets a list of the moneyed Americans at the Negresco and Ruhl. On nodding terms with imitation counts, grand dukes and barons who squat all day in front of the Savoy and sip the cheapest drink that will give them the privilege of the chair and the striped umbrella above it.

Females, scouting females; piratical craft. Beating up and down, hoping always that an American millionaire will be attracted by their high heels and high color. Most of their other possessions—reputation, clothes, vitality, et cetera, on the "low" side.

Here and there the honest "mug." Some fellow, either alone or with a wife, who had really accumulated his roll by his own efforts. The Wasp picked them out. They were folk who looked as if they were a little ashamed to be loafing. They lacked the impudence and conceit of the con men and the con ladies. One huge man, who looked like a cattleman from the West, reminded Robert Henry Blane of his uncle, Big Abner.

The Texan Wasp thought of Uncle Abner and handsome Kenney Blane. Five days before a girl in Corsica had told him that he resembled Kenney Blane. He smiled grimly.

A loud-mouthed youngster yelled the *Eclaireur*. The Wasp bought a copy and glanced over it. A paragraph headed from "Our Own Correspondent at Ajaccio, Corsica," caught his attention. He read it hurriedly. It ran:

> At Vizzavona yesterday three officers of the Italian Secret Police fought a battle with Donati, the outlaw known as "The Lone Bandit of Vizzavona!" Donati was wounded and made prisoner. It appears that the three Italian detectives had secret information that Donati was connected with the sensational happening at Milan known as "The Affair of the Three Marfiorios."
>
> Donati was brought into Ajaccio and examined. His statement convinced the detectives that he had nothing whatever to do with the Milan matter. The reason for connecting the bandit with the Marfiorio sensation has been withheld.

Robert Henry Blane whistled softly. He was a little startled. Up before his eyes came the crisp notes of warning that he had received at Rapallo, Pisa and Ajaccio. The Italian police evidently had been following swiftly on his footsteps. They had apparently heard in some mysterious manner of his impersonation of the bandit, and they had grabbed Donati under the impression that the impersonation had continued.

The Wasp wondered about the warning notes. Strange notes, he thought them. Who had sent them? What debtor of his could gather such inside information regarding the doings of the swift-moving Italian police? He pondered over the opening sentence in each—"In payment of a debt." What debt?

The feet on the Promenade attracted the eyes of Robert Henry Blane. He watched them as he thought over the mystery of the warning notes. He studied the shoes. Shoes always attracted him. He had a fleeting desire to write a book about shoes. With his soft Austrian velours pulled over his eyes to shade them from the glare upon the Bay of Angels he watched the countless shoes. A glance at each told him many things about the wearer. Sometimes he lifted his head and checked his impression by a glance at the face; other times he felt so certain that he did not look up.

Then, suddenly, the hunting gray eyes of The Texan Wasp pounced upon a pair of shoes that were moving along the center of the Promenade! Strong, definite shoes. Shoes built for honest work. He stared at them without lifting his head. His left hand went slowly up and pulled the velours hat lower over his eyes. Straight ahead went the shoes. Regular strides; perfectly

sure of themselves. No mincing steps. No faltering. They smote the pavement fairly and squarely. And into the mind of Robert Henry Blane came a mental picture of shoes that were awfully like those that fascinated him. There were the shoes of a sheriff in Deaf Smith County, Texas, and there were those that he had seen on the sill of a window in a back street of Seville! The shoes of the greatest man hunter in Europe, the shoes of No. 37!

An extraordinary morsel of information sprang into the mind of The Wasp. On that night in Seville he had performed a service for No. 37. "A big service," the man hunter had assured him. Then the little notes that had been sent in payment of a debt had come from the great sleuth! Why? Because No. 37 knew that The Wasp had no connection with the sensational affair at Milan.

Robert Henry Blane sprang to his feet. The broad back of the detective was some twenty yards away. His face was turned toward the sea. He was drinking in the beauty of the glorious bay.

The Wasp overtook him near the entrance of the Jetée Casino. He touched him on the shoulder. The great detective turned.

"I wanted to thank you for sending me those little notes," said Robert Henry Blane. "It was nice of you to think I was in your debt."

The cold, merciless eyes that looked like brown-tinted and hard-frozen hailstones examined the dashing Texan. For an instant a flash of pleasure showed within them, a fleeting joy at meeting the handsome adventurer face to face. It fled before The Wasp had time to register its presence, then the much-feared man hunter spoke.

"It's a pity that you and I are not friends, Blane," he said softly. "It's a great pity. I've got a liking for you. And just now"—he paused for a moment and looked out at the multicolored waters—"just now I've got a task that you would be useful at. A great task. The biggest task that a man could have given to him."

He paused and glanced at Robert Henry Blane. The Texan did not speak. For just a moment the two eyed each other as if appraising values, then the man hunter nodded and continued on his way.

The Texan Wasp returned to his seat and watched the shoes. He watched them till night fell on the queen city of the Riviera. He was thinking of the words of No. 37.

Another Texan Wasp adventure in the next issue.

MR. HUGHES' DILEMMA

LAST January, when Mr. Borah was threatening to develop an American foreign policy of his own and France and Germany had all the diplomats running around in circles, some of the Republican senators became distinctly miffed with Mr. Charles Evans Hughes. The secretary of state, they said, wouldn't tell them what was doing in Europe. He evinced no overpowering desire to glue his ear to their instructive lips and hear what they thought should be doing. In short, they resented what they construed as Mr. Hughes' evident intention to steer the diplomatic ship without asking them to assist in the navigating.

Senator David I. Walsh of Massachusetts, a Democrat, found a group of his Republican brethren in the cloakroom one afternoon muttering darkly among themselves without once flattering, complimenting or applauding their secretary of state. The scene gave him a good laugh.

"Has it ever occurred to you gentlemen," he blandly inquired, "that your Mr. Hughes may think he is able to handle the crisis best by himself? He is, it seems to me, like the clergyman who was going to address a Sunday-school class of little girls, and asked them what he should speak about.

"'What do you know?' inquired one girl.

"'My dear young lady,' he replied gravely, 'it is not a question of what I know, but it is a matter of how much of what I know can be imparted to you so as to result in as little as I hope for of the undesirable consequent actions that I fear.'"

The Red-coated Horseman

By Raymond J. Brown

Author of "A Corner in Champions," "Crab Doran's Haven," Etc.

What Benson Hedley saw at the old Lee farm he pretty well proved he had seen—but how he saw it he was never able to explain.

AS I stepped from the train I was conscious again of the strange feeling of loneliness and confusion which had oppressed me almost constantly since my return to America five days before. And this time the sensation came to me with poignant, painful force. I was actually a stranger, almost an alien in my own native land!

In New York, a city where I had passed but little time prior to my departure for Europe on what I had intended to be merely a little vacation jaunt of a couple of months but which the war and the work into which it had forced me had stretched out into a stay of nearly nine years, I had regarded it as scarcely peculiar that I should feel out of touch with my surroundings. The metropolis had changed. Well-remembered landmarks had disappeared or had been altered out of all resemblance to the places I recalled. The northward march of commerce had progressed perceptibly. Then too I suppose I had changed myself. I do not mean physically alone, for the nine years which follow the thirtieth birthday are bound to leave their mark on a man, especially on one who has passed through experiences so harrowing as those I had on the battlefields of Europe; but my long stay in foreign lands had undoubtedly given me habits of voice and demeanor as well as a viewpoint which served to place me farther out of concord with my fellow Americans.

Still, in New York, my sense of alienation, while distressing me in a way, caused me nothing like the pangs which seized me as I stepped to the station platform at Morrisville. For there too, I realized suddenly, I was a stranger; and Morrisville was—home! Within four miles of the spot where I stood, clutching my kit bag like a frightened immigrant lad, I had been born and reared. In Westwood, the great estate in the rolling country beyond the town, now occupied by my uncle whom I had come to visit, four generations of Hedleys had lived, and yet I, the only surviving member of the last generation, stood at the threshold of my own birthplace and strained my eyes to discover a single familiar object!

The station itself—ornamental brick, with green-tiled roof, bronze doors and rose boxes in its windows, raised above the road and supported by great piers of concrete—that was new; and I found the contrast it made with the tiny clapboard shed I remembered in its place little short of shocking. Beyond

the station too, on the "town" side of the tracks, where was the pretty park, maintained there since Revolutionary days to commemorate the camp grounds of Washington's Continentals? This ground, which I had been taught to look upon as hallowed, was occupied now by rows of squatty, new business buildings: a bank, two or three real-estate offices, an apothecary's shop, a meat market, a confectioner's, a green grocer's. Morrisville, whose individuality had always been the proudest boast of its residents, now differed in no particular which a casual scrutiny might disclose from the dozen "commuting" settlements at which the railway train had paused during my hour's journey from New York.

Striving to overcome the feeling of depression which had seized me, I walked through the waiting room and down the flight of steps which led to the street level. I was the only passenger who had alighted at Morrisville and at the foot of the steps a dozen hackmen pounced upon me eagerly, crying, "Taxi! Taxi, sir!" and endeavoring to snatch my bag from my grasp. None of them did I know. The venerable cabbies who had supplied conveyances at the Morrisville station during my boyhood and young manhood all seemed to have passed on.

I waved the drivers away. Surely my uncle to whom I had telephoned the time of my arrival had sent one of his motor cars to meet me. I scanned the little cluster of vehicles drawn up in orderly line between the columns which supported the station. All were obviously hacks; flimsy little motors or battered, weather-beaten larger cars which had been discarded for newer models by earlier owners. Even my uncle, my closest blood relative, despite his apparent cordiality during our telephone conversation of the day before, deemed my homecoming of not sufficient importance to accord me the courtesy which I would have expected him to display toward the least welcome guest who might darken his door!

For a moment I was tempted to retrace my steps into the station and board the first train which would take me back to New York. Then I realized that such an action would be merely a display of childish pettishness. Any one of several circumstances—an accident, the forgetfulness which was to be expected in a man of advanced age—might have prevented my uncle from sending a car to meet me. So I signaled the hackman who was nearest me.

The thin, round-shouldered youth with sharp features and shrewd blue eyes, caught my sign but hesitated momentarily before responding. Since my declination of his proffered services as I descended from the station he had been leaning against his car, regarding me with a cynical smile. Apparently he saw something vastly amusing in my bewildered face and vacillating movements. At last, however, he shuffled over to me and peered at me suspiciously.

I held out my bag and he took it from me.

"Take this to Westwood," I directed him. "You know—Mr. Hedley's place?"

"Yes, sir! Yes, sir!" he exclaimed in response. "Right this way, sir!"

"Wait," I commanded him as he started to walk toward his car. "I'm not going with you."

"Hey?" he ejaculated, stopping suddenly.

"I'll walk," I said. "Just leave the bag at Mr. Hedley's door."

"You're gonna—walk!" he cried, staring at me in amazement. "Why, say, mister, Westwood is——"

"It is exactly four miles from here," I interrupted coldly.

"But you gotta pay me the same for carryin' this grip," he began.

"Of course." I drew out my pocketbook. "How much?"

He studied me shrewdly for a moment.

"Four dollars," he said then.

It was an exorbitant charge but I paid it. Instead of being pleased by my easy acquiescence to his demand the hackman seemed to grow more suspicious of me as he pocketed the money. His thin face was screwed in a puzzled frown. He tested the weight of my bag and glanced at it covertly as though suspecting that it might contain explosives or some sort of loot or contraband. Then he shook his head doubtfully, shrugged his narrow shoulders and sidled toward his car. He did not enter the vehicle immediately, but called several of his fellow hackmen about him, and, as I walked under the station toward the town, out of the corner of my eye I could see them looking after me and talking spiritedly, probably, I surmised, endeavoring to find an explanation of the eccentric behavior of a person who preferred to walk after paying cab fare and who handed over without pro-

test or haggling an amount of money which was at least four or five times as much as any expressman in Morrisville would have asked for transporting one small piece of luggage from the station to my uncle's home.

Possibly there was reason for the cabmen to regard my actions as peculiar, although my determination to send my bag on ahead and make the four-mile journey to Westwood on foot was due to nothing more than a sudden whim to view Morrisville and its environs leisurely and at close hand and to determine whether the residential parts of the town had suffered so complete a change as the commercial section which adjoined the railway station.

I have always been a swift walker and my physical powers were impaired little, that I would ever acknowledge, by the half year I spent in a French hospital recovering from the combined effect of German gas, a fragment of shrapnel which grazed the left side of my head, and a temporary nervous affliction which the army surgeons ascribed to "shell shock." So I strode briskly off and I had traversed virtually the whole business block which had arisen on the site of the little park I remembered before the motor car which carried my bag caught up with me. The stoop-shouldered driver impudently sounded his horn as he passed by and looked back at me with a mocking grin on his pinched face.

Morrisville, I discovered as I trudged along, outside of the changes I had noted at the station, was practically the same as it had been on my last visit a year or so before my departure for Europe. The exercise and my realization that the necessity for modernization had not penetrated to the picturesque interior of the town acted like a tonic on my gloomy spirits. The feeling of loneliness and uncertainty left me entirely for the first time since my return. I found myself speculating happily on the nature of the amusements which my uncle might offer me during my stay at Westwood. Shooting? No, the hunting season in the State was still a month away. But surely they still rode to the hounds at Westwood. The Westwood pack, the hunters in the Westwood stables had been famous; my uncle's chief hobby and his choicest possessions. In fact the local hunt meets had come to be known among sportsmen everywhere as the Westwood Hunt. Even had the old gentleman —he was approaching seventy I recalled as the thought struck me—even had he retired from active participation in that thrilling and hazardous sport he certainly still kept up his stables and kennels. I imagined myself once again astride a lithe-limbed thoroughbred, bounding through the fields of Westwood and the adjacent estates. I pictured one of those glorious hunt breakfasts in the great oak-paneled dining hall at Westwood or at some other home in the countryside; congenial, sometimes boisterous gatherings of true sportsmen, who, unfettered by the bonds of narrow convention, gave themselves over joyously to hospitality, good-fellowship and cheer. They, friends of my youth, I decided, would furnish the link which would close the gap that now stretched between my present and my past.

I had passed through the town and reached the open country. The Hinton Turnpike, which led to the gates of Westwood, had been repaved with some hard, patent composition upon which my heels sounded like hammer blows as I strode along. Otherwise the country remained in all superficial particulars exactly as I remembered it. I espied familiar patches of woodland and tracts of open ground, irregular in contour and boundary, grown with stubble and covered with stone and inclosed by sagging rail fences. I had ridden over virtually every inch of the territory.

And there, a quarter mile down the road, was the old Lee farm, abandoned twenty-five or thirty years before, but with the sturdy old dwelling and the outhouses still standing and resisting the depredations of vandals and the elements alike. I quickened my pace and in a few minutes reached the farm. A four-foot wall of field stones surrounded the plot which contained the farmhouse and barn, and in that portion of the wall which fronted the road was a break, a dozen feet in width I should say in my time, but three or four feet broader now. Through this it had been our custom to guide our mounts when the chase led across the Turnpike. I paused before the breach and gazed out over the farm. The dilapidation of the buildings had progressed to a much greater extent than I had imagined when viewing them from the road, but they were still far from being in ruins. I noted too that, except for the fissure I have mentioned, the stone wall was intact, especially that part which lay behind the house. Over this rear wall the more venturesome of the

Westwood riders used to leap when passing across the old farm, preferring that dangerous method to use of the ramshackle gate which swung wide from a single rusty hinge behind the barn.

As I stood there taking in these details I was suddenly conscious that I was not alone. The realization brought with it an odd, disturbing sense of shock. I started—I had been inclined to be jumpy, easily startled since leaving the hospital—and I turned to find a horseman beside me, not more than four or five feet away. My first emotion, of course, was one of alarm at the other's silent, unexpected approach, but as that faded a feeling of joy suffused me. The Westwood Hunt must still exist, for the rider wore the conventional attire of its participants—scarlet coat, white breeches of whipcord, black boots, with russet tops—and his horse, a mighty, muscular animal, panted as though from a long chase, while its glistening, coal-black coat was marred with dust and mud specks. And all the joy I felt went into the glad cry of recognition that burst from my lips as my eyes fell upon the rider's face. For it was Rogers, Wilton Rogers, dare-devil leader of the hunting set, owner of the only hunters in the section which rivaled those in the Westwood stables; Rogers, the hero and model of my youth, whose reckless, often foolhardy exploits ahorse I had risked my neck a thousand times to emulate.

As I recognized him the thought came to me that the years had used him well. He could not be less than ten or a dozen years older than I—he was a grown man, I recalled, when I was a schoolboy—but he seemed not to have aged a day since I saw him last. There was not a hint of gray in his close-cropped brown locks, not a new line in the strong-featured, patrician countenance, no sign of increasing fleshiness in the slim, athletic body. And yet, as I studied him closer, I saw that he had changed. The ruddy, wholesome glow of his cheeks had become a pallor, not of ill health exactly; rather his coloring now was that of a man who passes most of his time indoors. And his attire was careless almost to the point of slovenliness. The scarlet of his coat was faded here and there in pinkish streaks. His breeches were marked with brown stains. There were cracks in his boots, his linen was soiled and rumpled. But the irreproachable fit of his garments, the proud tilt of his head and the perfect way he sat his mount screened in a measure the other defects, although conveying to me the impression of a man who, having suffered a cruel change in his fortunes, is making a brave, if pitiful effort to keep up appearances.

As I called his name, Rogers turned, surveyed me as though in puzzlement for a moment and then nodded to me with a slight smile. The greeting was as offhand and casual as it might have been had he been accustomed to encounter me on his rides every day. My heart sank. Rogers' attitude toward me was precisely that of the old acquaintances I had met during my recent stay in New York. Apparently my long absence, if it had not served to obliterate me entirely from the memory of those I had once called friends had impressed them so little that they declined to offer me even the show of welcome upon my return.

The elation which the meeting had caused in me disappeared swiftly. For several seconds I stood there ill at ease and embarrassed. Then:

"You've been well, Rogers?" I ventured at last.

He subjected me to a sudden, questioning stare.

"Quite," he said shortly. "Your uncle has told you the news?" he inquired after a moment.

"I haven't seen him yet," I said. "I'm on my way to Westwood now. You see, I returned only five days ago and this is my first visit to——"

"You've been away?" Rogers asked carelessly.

"Why, yes," I answered slowly. "Didn't you know?"

"I hadn't heard," said Rogers. "I've been rather busy of late."

"Busy of late!" I could not forbear exclaiming. "Why, man alive, I haven't been in Westwood in ten or eleven years! I was abroad when the war started. I enlisted in the French Ambulance. I was injured and invalided out of service, and I became engaged in relief work which has lasted until——"

I stopped. Rogers was not listening. Instead he had raised his riding crop and with it was indicating various points on the Lee farm as he talked.

"By combining your uncle's stock with my own," he was saying, "we shall have one

of the greatest breeding farms in the country. The timbers of the old Lee farmhouse are still sound; we shall remodel the building and use it as a home for our superintendent. Over there we shall build our barns. In that field we shall have a half-mile training track. But your uncle will tell you all about it. Ask him to show you the plans and sketches. And tell him, if you will, that I'll bring Bertram, the architect, to Westwood in a day or so to talk over those changes we've been considering."

"You'll be over with—Bertram in a day or so?" I repeated, anxious to ascertain whether I had caught the name aright, for Rogers talked rapidly.

"That's it," he said. "You won't mind delivering the message?"

"Of course not," I told him. "So you and Uncle Lester are to establish a breeding farm on the old Lee place?"

"We take title within a week," said Rogers. "Before the end of the month we'll be ready to let the contracts for grading and building. We're spending a quarter of a million, but it's money well used, even as a speculation. We're getting the place for a song and whether the breeding farm proves profitable or not we'll come out all right. For within ten years—mark my words, Hedley!—within ten years people will be clamoring to buy this property from us by the foot for home sites."

"I wish you success," I said. Then I turned from him. From behind me had come the roar of a powerful automobile engine, the screech of brakes and the repeated sound of a horn, insistently operated in staccato beats. A long, maroon-colored roadster, its nose pointed toward Westwood, was rolling to a halt in the road. The driver, a heavy-featured man of middle age, stopped pounding at his horn button as I faced him. He glanced at me curiously for a moment with an odd gleam in his eyes, then he inquired, pleasantly enough, if he was "headed right for Hinton Township."

"Straight ahead—about five miles," I told him.

He jerked his head in acknowledgment of the information, scrutinized me again with the suggestion of a smile and was off with a salvo and a dense cloud of smoke from his unmuffled engine. For some reason, possibly because they made an easy number to remember, I noted the numerals on the license plate at the rear of his car—200,000-J, issued by one of the New England States. It struck me as peculiar that the motorist gave not so much as a glance toward Rogers, although I would have ventured to say that a horseman in the garb of a huntsman was a sight he encountered rarely enough to make it remarkable. Neither apparently had Rogers given any heed to him nor had Rogers' horse been disturbed at all by the noise of the motor.

For several minutes more Rogers continued detailing to me the plans which he and my uncle had formulated for the improvement of the Lee farm. Then, suddenly, he broke off his talk and turned from me. I looked up and started in surprise; beside Rogers, on the opposite side from me, stood another horseman, like him attired for the hunt although in immaculate clothing. How the other could have approached without my hearing him I could not imagine, for the hard substance with which the Turnpike was paved should have recorded deafeningly the hoofbeats of his horse. Yet there he was, a long-limbed, bony man of forty, whose hawklike nose, jutting chin, thin, firm lips and dark eyes of piercing brightness made his countenance peculiarly striking. I had never seen him before, of that I was certain, yet such was the force of his personality that, when my eyes fell upon him, it was with difficulty that I restrained myself from blurting out some idiotic exclamation.

Rogers obviously knew the other well, for he saluted him familiarly with his riding crop, murmured something which I did not hear, and then to my utter astonishment both of them urged their horses forward toward the break in the wall. Rogers gave me no word of farewell nor did he glance backward as he and the stranger passed abreast through the opening. Once past the wall, as if by a common impulse they put spurs to their mounts and dashed at top speed for the rear wall over which the horses leaped like a team. Indignant as I was at Rogers' cavalier treatment of me, I watched the pair in fascination, applauding despite myself the careless unconcern and the skill with which they accomplished that dangerous leap. And as they leaped I thought I saw something drop from Rogers' hand. What it was I could not then determine for at the exact moment it fell my attention was distracted from the horsemen by an automobile horn which sounded behind me with such sud-

denness and intensity that I all but leaped from the ground. It was the stoop-shouldered station hackman, returning from Westwood after delivering my bag. He waved his hand to me, grinning offensively and studying me from head to foot as he passed. I turned from him swiftly and looked again in the direction in which Rogers and his companion were riding.

They were nowhere to be seen!

I strained forward, scanning the ground beyond the wall for sight of them, but, although beyond the wall there was a clear view of at least half a mile to the woodland that adjoined the farm, I could see neither horses nor riders. With an exclamation of puzzlement, I stepped from the road and crossed the farm to the spot at which I had distinctly observed them hurdle the rear wall. It was, of course, impossible that they had gained the woodland in the brief period which had elapsed; but where were they? The field beyond the wall was almost level. There was not a gully, a depression of any kind which might have hidden them temporarily from my sight. They had vanished as completely as though they had melted into the air.

Cudgeling my brain for an explanation of the strange disappearance of the horsemen I turned from the wall and started to walk toward the road. I had proceeded not more than a dozen steps, however, when I suddenly recalled the object which I was sure I had seen drop from Rogers' hand as his horse leaped the wall. Rushing back eagerly I began to search, and at last I found it, half hidden by weeds—Rogers' riding crop, a thick shaft of some tough, elastic wood with a long curved handle of horn to which was affixed a silver plate bearing the legend in engraved script, "Wilton A. Rogers—Westwood Hunt—September 25, 1909." As I examined the crop the thought occurred to me that its condition matched peculiarly Rogers' own look of shabbiness. The varnish was gone from the heavy shaft. The silver plate was tarnished to a blackness which made the engraving it bore all but indecipherable; but, strangest of all, the leather thong at the other end was so badly rotted that when I tested it between my fingers it broke as damp cardboard might under tension.

I placed the crop under my arm and walked slowly toward the road. A dozen questions tumbled confusedly through my brain. Why had Rogers carried—so badly damaged—so useless an article as that crop? Why had he, the man I remembered as an exquisite, been so shabbily dressed? It could not be poverty, for that did not jibe with the careless way in which he had mentioned large sums of money when describing his plans for the improvement of the Lee farm. Why, when he had dropped the crop, did he not return to retrieve it? Its intrinsic value, of course, was now practically nothing. Still, the inscription on its handle indicated that it had been a gift to Rogers from his friends of the Westwood Hunt, and the Rogers I had known valued and respected his friends far too much to toss away any gift from them so carelessly. Who was the horseman who had ridden off with Rogers? Why had Rogers, after talking to me with such friendliness, suddenly left me without a word of farewell? And, most puzzling of all, what had become of Rogers and the hawk-faced, striking-looking stranger after they had hurdled the stone wall?

My uncle was all apologies when he greeted me at Westwood. The old gentleman had aged, of course, but he was still robust, hearty and active, a splendid type of the elderly sportsman, with lean, sun-tanned face, keen eyes of gray, a heavy crop of waving snow-white hair, and stalwart, erect figure.

"Benson, my boy!" he cried, wringing my hand in a viselike grip and pounding me affectionately on the shoulder. "How glad I am to see you! But I'm ashamed to look you in the face! All my fault that there wasn't a car to meet you at Morrisville. Got the train time mixed up completely; thought you were leaving the city at two-sixteen instead of arriving here then. Was shocked half to death when that impudent young whelp drove up with your bag. Why didn't you ride in with him? Or why didn't you phone me from the station?"

"I enjoyed the walk," I said. "I was anxious to see whether things had changed much since I was here last."

"They have, haven't they?" he smiled.

"In spots," I answered. "By the way, speaking of changes, I've heard all about what you intend doing at the old Lee farm."

My uncle dropped my hand and his brow was suddenly knitted in a puzzled frown.

"I met Wilton Rogers," I explained. "He told me——"

"Wilton Rogers!" ejaculated my uncle, backing away from me and regarding me with a look of unbelieving amazement.

"Why, yes," I said, astonished and just a little uncomfortable at the strange effect produced by my words. "He rode up just as I was——"

"He—what!" cried my uncle, almost in a screech.

I gulped in perplexity and uncertainty. The feeling of strangeness and alienation, which had been dissipated entirely by my uncle's hearty welcome, returned to me with added strength.

"He rode up just as I was passing the old Lee farm," I said, shakily, I fear, for my uncle's eyes were boring into me like gimlets. "He told me that you and he were to establish a breeding farm there and he gave me a message for you. He will be here with Bertram, the architect, in a day or so to talk over——"

"Bertram!" breathed my uncle, his jaw dropping, his face a picture of bewilderment.

"I'm certain that was the name," I said. "I distinctly——"

"Bertram!" he repeated in the same hissing whisper. Then he rushed at me and seized my wrists with shaking hands. "Do you know what you are saying?" he demanded hoarsely, thrusting his face to within a few inches of mine and staring at me wildly.

"Why—why, of course," I stammered, utterly at a loss to understand my uncle's sudden change from a complacent, urbane country gentleman into this wild-eyed, shaking, excited man. "I repeated the name to Rogers and he——"

"But—but—Bertram!" cried my uncle. "It—it's impossible! Meeting Rogers—that is bad enough; but—*Bertram!* My God, Benson," he whispered, strengthening his grip on my wrists until his fingers seemed likely to crush the bones, "do you realize that Bertram has been dead for six years?"

"Dead!" I echoed, unaccountably stirred both by my uncle's emotion and by a sudden, vague terror, which, like the memory of a nightmare from which one has just awakened, seemed at once strangely close to me and yet beyond my reach or comprehension.

"Not only that," said my uncle unevenly, "but Rogers has not been seen—he disappeared eight years ago, and——" He broke off, let my arms drop and gazed at me searchingly and thoughtfully for a moment. "You are sure, Benson," he asked me then with more composure than he had shown since I first mentioned Rogers' name, "you are sure that what you tell me is—true? You actually met Rogers and——"

"Of course I met him!" I interrupted with some heat. "Why should I try to——"

"There, there!" interrupted my uncle soothingly. "Don't be offended, Benson. Of course I believe you," he asserted in a tone that lacked entirely the ring of conviction. "But what you say is so—strange. Tell me," he bade, suddenly, eagerly, "how did Rogers look? Had he changed? Was he in——"

"Just before I saw him," I said, "I had been wondering whether the Westwood Hunt still existed. His appearance furnished the answer to the question I had been asking myself, because he was dressed for the hunt —scarlet coat——"

"Why, great Godfrey!" cried my uncle suddenly, shaking his head in puzzlement. "I *know* that a cross-country rider has not appeared in these parts in years. In fact, I'm certain there is not a hunter in any barn for twenty-five miles around. I sold all mine after Rogers—after he disappeared. Rogers' horses went on the auction block. Ellison's stables were sold too. No, Benson, there isn't a hunter in the section."

"Nevertheless," I insisted, "Wilton Rogers and a man who joined him while he was talking with me rode across the Lee farm, jumped the back wall and disappeared in the field beyond not one hour ago!"

"Disappeared!" exclaimed my uncle. "What do you mean by that?"

"Exactly what I say. I saw Rogers and his companion leap the wall. I turned away from them for a moment and when I looked again they were gone."

"Do you expect any one to believe a preposterous story like that?" demanded my uncle, glaring at me with dark suspicion.

I shrugged my shoulders. "I am merely telling you what happened. Whether I am believed is a matter of entire indifference to me."

And so, with my uncle interrupting me constantly, I managed to tell him the whole story. For a full half minute after I had finished he stood in silence, his hands behind his back, his head sunk thoughtfully. Then suddenly he looked up. The frown faded

from his face. Into his eyes came a kindly, almost a pitying glint. He smiled half sadly as he walked to me and took me gently by the arm.

"There, my boy," he said in a tone which one might use to cajole a little child. "It's all right. Don't excite yourself, don't distress yourself any more. Don't think anything more about Rogers. Come," he directed, attempting to lead me away, "we'll find Aunt Margaret. She'll be glad to see you."

My uncle was lacking entirely in guile; a plain man of direct speech. The implication of his words was obvious—he believed that all I had told him was a figment of my imagination, an hallucination; and that this was his impression was proved beyond doubt when he spoke again.

"And you'll want to rest," he said. "You had some terrible experiences in Europe. The effects of shell shock——"

I laughed in his face.

"Uncle Lester," I said, "my 'terrible experiences' are things of the very dim past; they happened months before the first American troops landed in France. I assure you I'm quite cured of the effects of shell shock—and everything else that happened to me. Now, I can see why the things I've told you may seem incredible to you. It happens, though—fortunately for me perhaps—that I'm in a position to substantiate everything I've said by proof. The young man who brought my bag here passed by just as Rogers and the other rider were dashing across the Lee farm. There is no doubt but that he saw them. Also, while I was talking to Rogers at the roadside, a motorist stopped and inquired from me the way to Hinton Township. I recall the license number of his automobile. If we wish, we can get in touch with him and have him help me prove my story. Then, if I did not meet Rogers, how could I learn the details of the improvements you planned for the Lee farm?"

"But those plans were given up eight years ago," objected my uncle. "The Lee farm was sold not a month ago to a land company which intends opening streets through it and cutting it up into building lots."

"Rogers predicted that would happen," I reminded him. "It's all very puzzling," I admitted soberly, "but, besides what I've already told you, there is something else which proves that I met Rogers to-day." And I left him abruptly and walked to the great carved bench in the entrance hall upon which I had left the riding crop which I had found beside the wall on the Lee farm. "Do you recognize this?" I asked, placing the crop in my uncle's hand.

"Why, certainly," he acknowledged hesitatingly. "I remember well the day we gave it to Rogers. In fact, I myself purchased it and made the speech of presentation. But —the condition of it," he murmured, examining the crop curiously. "You're certain Rogers carried this to-day?" he asked, giving me another of his keen glances.

"Positive," I declared. "As I told you, he used it to point out to me the locations you had picked for your barns, your training track and the other improvements you intended making at the Lee farm."

"Well, it's the most extraordinary thing I ever heard of!" exclaimed the old gentleman, shaking his head in puzzlement. "I must believe you, I suppose, and yet—do you know why Rogers disappeared eight years ago?" he demanded suddenly. Then, before I could reply: "Rogers showed himself a scoundrel!" he growled fiercely. "That is one reason why your very mention of his name upset me so. Turning the Lee place into a breeding farm for hunters and racers was Rogers' own idea. He suggested it to me and I let him convince me that it offered possibilities for both sport and profit. You know what an enthusiastic, plausible talker he was? I agreed to go into the proposition with him on an equal basis. In fact, I turned over to him at various times a total of one hundred and twenty-five thousand dollars, he agreeing to put up a like amount. Then one day the scoundrel disappeared. He had had no intention at any time of doing anything with the Lee farm—except using it as a means of swindling me out of the money I gave him. Foolishly trusting him, I had drawn checks for the amount I just mentioned to his personal order. He had deposited them, and, on the day he disappeared, had drawn out the entire amount. Not only that, by forging his partner's signature he had looted the bank accounts maintained by his stockbroking firm, reducing Salmon, his partner, to beggary. Salmon has been fortunate enough to recoup his fortunes since that time, but that, of course, makes what Rogers did no less horrible. The police and detectives employed by those

who had suffered by Rogers' action scoured, I might say, the entire world without finding any trace of Rogers from that day to this. But," growled my uncle, raising his clenched hands and pacing the floor in sudden energy, "if you saw the scoundrel to-day —you are *certain* about it, Benson?—if you saw him to-day there is only one thing for us to do—summon the police!"

He strode briskly across the room where he had been talking, seized a telephone and called the Morrisville police. Apparently the police found my story as difficult of belief as my uncle himself had, for the old gentleman was in a violent temper from answering the objections of the person at the other end of the wire before he hung up the receiver. Then he phoned to Salmon—obviously the man he had mentioned previously as Rogers' partner—and to several others. Warned probably by his experience with the police he gave to the others he called no information other than that contained in the bald statement that Wilton Rogers had been seen at the old Lee farm that afternoon.

By the time he had finished telephoning a small runabout rolled up to the door of the house, and a few seconds later Martin, chief of police at Morrisville, was ushered in by a housemaid. He was an alert, intelligent-looking, physically powerful man in the early thirties, well dressed, composed; everything which one would have expected a rural policeman not to be. He shook hands with my uncle and with me; then he shook his head doubtfully.

"If any one but you had telephoned, Mr. Hedley," he said, "I'd have passed your story up as pure bunk. Of course," he added guardedly, "it's possible that Rogers is back. But this thing of riding around in a red coat! And disappearing as his horse jumps a wall! And saying he'll bring a man to see you who's been dead for years! You'll excuse me, Mr. Hedley——"

"I think I have the explanation of that," interrupted my uncle. "When Rogers realized that my nephew knew nothing at all about what he did in the Lee farm matter, he decided to have a little fun with me—add insult to injury, as it were. So he asked my nephew to deliver that absurd message to me, merely to show his entire contempt for me and his other victims and for our fruitless efforts to bring him to justice."

"That might be it," admitted the chief slowly. "Anyway, I want to have a look at the place where your nephew saw Rogers. If you'll come with me, Mr. Hedley?" he asked me.

"We'll all go," my uncle decided for me. "I'll have a car around in a minute."

He called his garage by telephone and a few minutes later the three of us were speeding along the Hinton Turnpike on the way to the Lee farm.

The chauffeur stopped at my signal before the break in the front wall and we alighted.

"This," I told them, leading the way to a spot at the roadside, just opposite the center of the break, "is where I was standing when Rogers rode up. I did not hear him approach but I——"

A sudden impatient exclamation from the chief of police cut me short.

"Say, what's the idea?" he demanded angrily as I turned to him. "Your uncle may stand for your kidding but I've got something else to do besides run all over the country on fool's errands! You'd better watch your step, mister man! Giving false alarms to the police is a serious matter. I knew this thing was bunk before I——"

"Why, chief," I stammered, "I——"

"Oh, stop it!" he bade wearily. "Come on, Mr. Hedley," he requested my uncle, "take me back to your house and let me get——"

"But, Martin," expostulated my uncle, "I don't see why——"

"Take a look around you!" snapped Martin, indicating the ground at our feet with a wagging forefinger. "This nephew of yours says two men on horseback were standing here within the last hour or so. All I want somebody to do," he declared derisively, "is to show me some place around here where a horse has been standing within the last week!"

We followed the line of his gesture with eager eyes. Then, simultaneously, from the throats of both my uncle and myself issued startled ejaculations. Although the ground from the roadway to the wall was soft and spongy from recent rains, nowhere was there to be seen the hoofprint of a horse! Except for the marks of my own feet the earth about us was entirely unmarred!

"I guess that settles it!" growled Martin, scanning me from head to foot in contemptuous appraisal. "I guess you're a day-dreamer, my friend. Only, take a tip from

me—be a little more careful in future who you pick out to tell your dreams to."

"Chief," I cried wildly, seizing him by the shoulders and preventing him from turning away, "as God is my judge, Wilton Rogers sat on his horse within three feet of where we are standing not more than an hour ago! I *saw* him—I *talked* with him—I tell you, I——"

"Sure you did!" chuckled Martin. "And his horse had wings! And you and him talked in your native language—Russian! Oh, I got you all right! Say, how did they come to let you out, anyway?"

His tone and manner were even more insulting than his words. Moreover, it was plain to see from the half-pitying, half-alarmed expression that suddenly overspread my uncle's face that he concurred entirely in the opinion of the chief. They thought me mad!

For a moment I was prey to a devastating terror, shaken, unnerved by a frightful doubt. I found myself distrustful of my own senses, my own memory. Had I actually seen and talked with Rogers, observed him and the other horseman speed across the Lee farm, or was the whole thing a—a daydream as Martin had called it? Certainly in view of the objections my uncle had raised, more than that, in view of absence of hoof marks around the wall, the tale I told was wild enough to be merely a fabrication of a disordered mind. And yet—why, I asked myself, should I doubt the evidence of my own eyes and ears? I *had* seen Rogers. Even then every detail of his person was vividly imprinted in my mind. I *had* talked with him; the tones of his resonant voice still seemed to ring in my ears; I could recall the exact words he had used as he described the projected renovation of the Lee farm.

I banished my doubts, mastered myself. Taking my hands from Martin's shoulders I addressed him as quietly and as pleasantly as I might have spoken to an old friend with whom I was discussing some slight matter of mutual interest.

"I admit my story may seem incredible, chief," I said, "but why can't you withhold final judgment until I have been given an opportunity to prove it?"

"Prove it!" he exclaimed. "How can you hope to——"

"I've already informed my uncle," I interrupted, "that there are two witnesses who passed by while I was here with Rogers. One of them is a hackman at the Morrisville station."

"You're right, Benson," asserted my uncle approvingly. "Don't let's be hasty, Martin."

"If you'd care to interview the hackman?" I suggested.

"Sure. Come along," grunted Martin, leading the way to the car.

The stoop-shouldered cabman looked up in surprise as the three of us approached his stand under the Morrisville station. Martin beckoned him out of earshot of the other taxi drivers, then, indicating me with a movement of his thumb, inquired:

"Do you know this gentleman, Joe?"

"Gosh!" exclaimed the other. "I knew there'd be trouble about that darned bag! It didn't look right to me when I took it! I ought to——"

"There won't be any trouble about anything," cut in Martin crisply. "Just answer my questions. Do you know this gentleman?"

"I've seen him," admitted the cabman.

"Where?"

"He come in on the two-sixteen this afternoon."

"That's the only time you saw him?"

"Well, he gimme a bag to carry out to Mr. Hedley's place. I thought it was funny, him walkin' after——"

"Never mind what you thought! Did you see him again?"

"Sure. I passed him on Commercial Street when I was goin' to Westwood."

"You saw him twice then?"

"Yeah; an' I met him when I was comin' back."

"Where was that?"

"By the Lee farm. He was standin' there—star gazin'. I spotted him from 'way up the road, an' I couldn't see anything to look at, so, when I passed him, I gave him a horn. See, I kinda had him down as——"

"There was nobody with him when you saw him at the Lee farm?"

"Nope. He was all alone."

"There was nobody near him?"

"Nobody that I seen."

"You would have seen anybody if——"

"I just told you," declared the hackman, "that I looked all around, from 'way up the road, to see what this guy was lookin' at—and there wasn't nothin'!"

"You looked in the same direction as he?"

"I'll say I did, and all I seen was the old stone wall behind the Lee house. He was just dreamin', I guess, because he didn't seem to hear me comin', and, when I give him the horn, he jumped a foot."

"Why did you give him the horn? Was he standing in the road?"

The cabman hesitated.

"No, he wasn't in the road," he admitted, "but—but——"

"But what?" demanded Martin as he stopped.

"Well, maybe I oughtn't to 'a' done it," said the cabman shamefacedly, "but—well, you see this guy had acted so funny that I kinda had him sized up——"

"Yes?" snapped Martin as he paused again.

"Oh, I dunno," mumbled the cabman miserably. "Nothin', I guess."

"What were you going to say?" thundered Martin.

"Well, he seemed queer. When he first come down out of the station he wandered around like he was lost. First he didn't want no taxi and then he did. And then, when he called me, he didn't want to ride but just give me a bag to take to Westwood and said he'd walk. And he give me four bucks just for carryin' the bag—well, you get me, chief? I sized the guy up as a nut and when I seen a chance to throw a scare into him by givin' him a horn I—I just done it."

"Do you mean to say," I demanded, "that you didn't see any one on the Lee farm when you blew that confounded horn?"

"You heard what I said!" snarled the cabman.

"You didn't see two red-coated horsemen?"

"Red-coated horsemen!" he exclaimed with a nasty laugh. "Gosh, no! An' I didn't see no red-white-and-blue striped horses neither!" he added with a meaning grimace at Martin.

The latter stifled a smile. "I guess we've wasted about enough time," he told my uncle. "Let's get back to Westwood."

We filed into my uncle's car and rode away in silence. My brain was in a turmoil. The failure of that insolent hackman to bear out my story had brought back all the doubts and fears which had obsessed me when Martin pointed out the absence of hoofprints at the Lee farm. I was occupying the front seat with the chauffeur. Behind me, above the rumble of the wheels, the rush of the wind and the hum of the motor I could hear Martin and my uncle talking in guarded tones. They were discussing me; of that I felt certain. Nor was it difficult for me to guess the conclusion they reached with regard to me. Even that ignorant station cabman believed me mad—and without hearing the weird, unbelievable story I had told my fellow passengers! Unbelievable? I realized myself that it was. Fantastic even in most of its details. But why was it so vivid, so real to me? Was that in itself proof of the madness which the others suspected? I shrank from answering the question that formed itself in my mind.

Far up the straight Turnpike I espied a car speeding toward us. As we neared it I was struck suddenly by something familiar in its outline and coloring. I looked again. Yes, there could be no doubt but that it was the maroon roadster which had stopped by me as I was talking with Rogers. Ordering the chauffeur to stop, I leaped to the road and waved my arms as a signal to the approaching motorist. He saw me even before he had come close enough for me to make out the numerals on his license plate and his long car came to a stop beside my uncle's motor. He recognized me, smiled and nodded.

"Hello, old-timer," he called out. "We meet again, I see. What's the matter—trouble with your car?"

"Tell me," I bade him anxiously, "you've seen me before?"

"Positively!" he declared. "You're the man who pointed out the road to Hinton Township."

"When you signaled me," I said in a voice that trembled, "what was I doing?"

"Why," he replied with a short laugh, loudly enough for my uncle and Martin to hear, "I don't get the idea—but you were standing at the roadside looking up in the air and talking to yourself."

"Talking to myself!" I breathed. "There was no one with me?"

"Not that I saw," he said, studying me in puzzlement.

"There wasn't a man on horseback?" I persisted. "A man dressed for the hunt, with scarlet coat and——"

"Great Scott, no!" he ejaculated. "Say, what's the notion, old man? You haven't stopped me here just to kid me, have you?"

I could not reply. I felt suddenly weak

and sick. My knees trembled. If I had not seized the side of my uncle's car for support I fear that I would have fallen to the road. Somehow I managed to pull myself into my seat beside the chauffeur, and, as I did so, I heard my uncle addressing the motorist I had halted—probably apologizing for interrupting his journey for any such absurd purpose as mine must have seemed to him.

Of the rest of our trip to Westwood I have scarcely any recollection. I was ill, dazed, prey to a hundred horrible fears. I seemed to stand at the edge of a pit into which an unseen but mighty force was drawing me irresistibly. Beneath me, beyond me—darkness—insanity!

The early hours of that evening were the most agonizing I had ever known. My uncle and his wife, the latter a sweet, gracious woman, refrained from any mention of the events of the afternoon and did everything in their power to entertain and please me; but there was a constraint in their manner, an indefinite air of suspicion which they were unable to mask. Their very kindness, their deference to me pained me immeasurably. It was quite obvious that they had conferred about me and had decided to use every effort to avoid crossing me or exciting me.

We had finished dinner—an elaborate meal which I scarcely touched—and had adjourned to the library when there came the sound of an automobile stopping before the house. A moment later a visitor entered, and, as my eyes fell upon him, I involuntarily leaped from my chair.

It was the horseman who had sped across the Lee farm with Rogers that afternoon!

There could be no mistake; that hawk face, those burning eyes, the straight lines of that bony figure had impressed themselves indelibly on my memory. And yet somehow the man seemed to have changed. He appeared years older. His hair was gray, almost white, while that of Rogers' companion had been jet black. There were deep fissures in his cheeks which had been absent in the face of the man I had seen that afternoon. And his dark eyes were sunken; around them were lines of trouble and worry; whereas the eyes of the man who had joined Rogers had shone with the light of physical and mental well-being. But that amazing similarity—it was more than mere resemblance, even such as might exist between brothers—there was only one way to explain it: the man who stood in the Westwood library and the man I had seen with Rogers at the Lee farm were one and the same! An impulse beyond my control drove me forward. I sprang at the man and seized him roughly by the arm.

"You!" I cried, glaring into his face. "You are the man—the one who rode across the Lee farm with Rogers!"

He shrank from me and seemed to tremble. His deep-set eyes stared as though in terror for an instant. His lean, lined face took on a grayish tinge. He uttered a muffled imprecation and attempted to break my grip with a swift movement of his arm.

From behind me sounded my uncle's voice, horrified.

"Benson!" he called. "What are you about?" Then: "Salmon! You'll pardon my nephew?" he requested brokenly. "He—he's not quite well. He was injured in the war—shell shock. You understand?"

"You were there!" I cried wildly, still clinging to the other's arm despite his frantic efforts to dislodge my fingers. "I saw you! You must have seen me! Tell them you saw me—and Rogers! Tell them that! They think me mad! Tell them that I——"

"You *are* mad!" he roared, struggling to wriggle out of my grasp. "I don't know what you are saying! Let me go, you fool, or I'll——"

He hesitated but a second, then, setting himself, swung his free arm and brought his clenched fist against my jaw. It was a powerful blow, and unexpected. For an instant it seemed to paralyze me. My fingers slipped weakly from his arm. I lurched backward, staggering, fighting for my footing on the waxed floor. Then suddenly my brain seemed afire, my faculties preternaturally acute. A mist seemed to dissolve from before my eyes, permitting me to view things that ordinarily were beyond my ken and understanding. I realized I was in the library at Westwood. I could see Salmon's pale, wrathful face and glowing eyes. His long body grew tense as though in readiness to repel me should I rush forward in attack. I saw my uncle, trembling, agitated, alarmed by the violent scene which had so unexpectedly developed. I heard him call out a warning, directed at once to both Salmon and me. And yet I knew, definitely and certainly, that I was also far away from

that library. I saw a level rectangle, inclosed by a stone wall in the front section of which was a break. Two horsemen were speeding across it. They reached the rear wall, which they hurdled, dashed through the green field beyond toward the woodland in the distance. And then——

"You *were* there!" I shouted at Salmon. "You and Rogers! Not to-day—it was *eight years ago!* The fifteenth of June——"

"What are you saying?" cried Salmon hoarsely. "Fool! Madman!"

"The fifteenth of June, nineteen-fifteen!" I roared, stepping forward to shake my fist in his face. "My unconscious body lay in a French hospital but *I* was *here*—at the Lee farm—and I saw you and Rogers——"

"Stop, you lunatic!" bellowed Salmon, although he retreated before me. "I——"

"I saw you, do you understand?" I went on. "Shall I tell you what you did?"

"You're raving! You don't know what you're saying!" sputtered Salmon wildly.

"You killed Rogers!" I charged. "I saw you do it—on the fifteenth of June, nineteen-fifteen, the day they said he disappeared!"

"Liar! Madman!" faltered Salmon. "You——"

"Come with me!" I bade him. "At the northeast corner of the barn we shall find proof of what I say. Come," I said, moving over and attempting to take him by the arm.

He shook me off.

"You lunatic!" he blazed. "You should be in——"

"Come with me," I insisted, again attempting to grasp him.

"Go—with a lunatic?" He recovered himself and laughed hollowly. "Really, Mr. Hedley," he told my uncle, "I'm afraid I must go."

"Stand where you are!" I roared. He had been cautiously slipping toward the door as he spoke. "Stop! Stop, I tell you! Murderer!"

I caught his wrist as his broad, bony fist was once again directed at my face. If I had not been mad before I became so when my fingers pressed into his flesh. My body suddenly possessed the strength of ten. I hauled him back into the room and sprang for his throat. He tried to push me away. He beat my face, gouged at my eyes, tore my cheeks with his nails. I laughed at his efforts. His face became purple as my fingers sank deeper into his throat. I locked my leg about both of his, gave a sudden convulsive twist and he fell backward, his head striking the floor. Terror-stricken, my uncle had seized the telephone and was summoning the police. I raised Salmon's head and banged it cruelly against the floor. How many times I did so I cannot say but I desisted only when I realized that he had gone limp in my grasp. I let him fall back; then, laughing wildly, I rushed from the house.

They found me an hour later—Martin, my uncle, two others whom I did not know. I was on the Lee farm, at the northeast corner of the barn. With a rusty crowbar and a broken shovel which I had found in the barn I was digging feverishly in the soft earth. They would have seized me; that that was their intention I knew from the cautious manner of their approach; but, as Martin stepped toward me, the rays from his electric flash light illuminated the pit I had dug, and they saw what lay in it—the skeleton of a man in the garb of a huntsman —Rogers. His rings, his watch identified him beyond question.

Salmon confessed. Sick and weak from the choking and beating I had given him, shaken and terrified by the amazing discovery of the buried Rogers, he was incapable of denying anything or of defending himself when Martin confronted him in the bedroom where they had placed him at Westwood. It was he who had committed the embezzlement of which Rogers had been accused. Forging Rogers' name, he had withdrawn from the banks all the funds that were on deposit to Rogers' credit, accomplishing the theft with the innocent assistance of an office boy who had been accustomed to act as messenger to the banks for him and Rogers in their brokerage business. He had shot Rogers on the Lee farm and buried his body. Then, claiming to have been ruined by Rogers' alleged villainy, he had disappeared for a year or so, returning to tell a story of having made a new fortune through war contracts in the West.

Of my own part in the solution of the mystery—all that I know of it for certain is what I have just told. Psychologists, alienists and other learned gentlemen, however, who evidenced a remarkable interest in me for a time after the story first became

public, offered a dozen theories purporting to explain everything satisfactorily. Some of their explanations were plausible, or, I possibly should say, credible under the circumstances; others were merely amusing. Some of them went so far as to assert that I had actually seen Rogers and Salmon as I walked to Westwood that day, and that they had reënacted the murder and the burial of the body as I watched. But the majority of them gave it as their opinion that, while I lay wounded and unconscious in the war hospital, by some psychic phenomenon, my—some of them called it my "astral body;" others used such terms as "subliminal self," "subconscious self"—found its way back to the Lee farm to witness the slaying of Rogers. When I regained consciousness recollection of the murder was blotted from my memory, to be brought back m part when I viewed the Lee farm again and fully by the shock I suffered when Salmon brought his fist against my jaw in the library at Westwood.

That is the epitome of their several opinions. I suppose I must accept it, for I accepted only too gratefully their opinion, based on a score of more or less complicated tests, that I was quite sane. And yet, if I actually *saw* nothing that day at the Lee farm, how are we to explain the shabbiness of Rogers' clothing, almost matching as it did the condition of the rotting, virtually colorless cloth which incased his buried bones? And that riding crop—was it dropped that day or had it lain for eight years beside the wall until I picked it up? The psychologists displayed a marked desire to change the subject when I mentioned these things to them. There are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamed of in their philosophy!

More stories by Raymond J. Brown in early issues.

THE KANSAN AND THE KING

HIS majesty King George V. of England rather fancies himself as a farmer. He is particularly proud of his achievements as a breeder of fine blooded cattle, and in all the fairy orchard of his cattle accomplishments the one sweet, juicy and delectable apple of his eye is his herd of Herefords. Mention Herefords to his majesty and the sovereign and royal chest swells with pardonable pride. That is, it did until the Herefords fell under the discriminating eye of Jake Southard, who is the Hereford king of Kansas, U. S. A.

Kansas, the United States and Jake Southard recognize Jake Southard as the world's leading authority on Hereford bulls, cows, calves and steers. He raises Herefords, sells Herefords, dreams Herefords and improves Herefords, and he is a walking encyclopedia of Hereford pedigree, pulchritude and prices. But he is always eager to add to his Hereford knowledge, and with this in view he went to Europe soon after the Great War ended. He went with letters of introduction from senators, millionaires, ambassadors and other Hereford enthusiasts which would insure his admission to every European field that pastured the beloved cattle.

Jake's first stop was in England, and his first visit was to King George's pet herd. He inspected those Herefords collectively and individually. His eagle eye took them in with accuracy, acumen and unqualified justice. As he concluded his inspection the king appeared on the scene and graciously had himself introduced to the American expert.

"Now," said the royal cattle dealer, "I want the benefit of your great knowledge of Herefords, Mr. Southard. Won't you accompany me as I walk about the field and take a look at each animal? I want you to tell me exactly what you think of my herd."

Jake went over the ground again, listening with every show of respect and agreeing to everything the king said.

"I think we've seen them all now," declared his majesty at last; "and I want your opinion. What is it?"

"Well, king," replied Jake, "to tell you the plain, unvarnished truth, you ain't got a first-class Hereford in your whole herd."

The Winning Number

By Talbert Josselyn

Author of "Salt that Was Sweet," "Finders Keepers," Etc.

What the jazz-suit swindlers of Lucky didn't know about Charlie Hanner's plans didn't hurt them—any more than they deserved.

MRS. McGURK, proprietress of the Good Eats Restaurant, wiped a towel over the table covered with oilcloth and slowly shook her head at two young men seated at the table's far side.

"But I haven't got the money to-night to make the payment. Now to-morrow, perhaps——"

"I'm sorry," interrupted the heavier set of the young men, with no expression of sorrow showing on his fleshy features, "but the agreement was that you pay the second hundred dollars on the car by the fifteenth. Now the fifteenth is about gone"—he glanced at a small alarm clock on a shelf at the back of the board-and-canvas room—"so if you can't make the second payment like you promised I don't see but what we'll have to take the car."

"I'm just as sorry as Claude is," said the other occupant of the table, with sharp-pointed nose thrust forward, "but you know, Mrs. McGurk, that business is business."

Mrs. McGurk stopped mopping with the towel and placed heavy hands on the oilcloth; middle-aged hands that were marked with trying to keep going a mining-town restaurant. Her red face took in one and then the other of her guests.

"Are you two meaning what you're saying? Or are you just trying to joke with me?"

"Joke with you?" The heavier set of the pair looked blankly at his questioner, meanwhile drawing a paper from his pocket and unfolding it. "Have you forgotten this agreement?" His eyes dropped to the sheet. "I can't see where there's any joke. The agreement plainly states that you were to pay one hundred dollars on the fifteenth of the month and the fifteenth has come and gone—it's now past midnight." The hands of Claude Smith lifted significantly, and fell.

Dismay came into Mrs. McGurk's eyes.

"But why didn't you come in some time during the day, before nighttime, and then I could have told you that I didn't have any money on hand, but could pay in a day or two, or I could have gone out and borrowed some?"

A stiffness of bearing went over the two at the table and they lifted their heads.

"I beg your pardon," said the sharp-featured Mr. Brennan, "but we've got something else to do than loaf around the town of Lucky all day, even though it is a booming and world-by-the-tail little burg. We've been away since daylight trying to sell cars

all over this forsaken section before we go back to the city. You knew that the payment was due and that you didn't have the money, so why didn't you scout around among your friends during the daytime and get them to lend it to you?" With a puzzled frown Mr. Brennan continued to stare at Mrs. McGurk.

Mrs. McGurk wadded and unwadded the towel. "Why, you see, I thought you were my friends," she said at length. "You came here without any money and I let your board bill run until you could kind of get on your feet, so I thought that perhaps a day or two wouldn't make any difference with the payment. I had the money all ready, but with sugar going up and an extra bill for groceries coming in I had to spend it yesterday. So I thought——"

"That's the way with you people that buy autos on installments," quickly cut in Claude Smith. "Now I don't mean to be personal, but by thunder—you'll do business with everybody else in a business way, but when it comes to an auto salesman, stick him for all he's worth—that seems to be the motto!" Mr. Smith's feet tapped the floor accusingly as he spoke; his head wagged and his eyes smolderingly went about the canvas walls of the room, now beginning to stir in the night wind.

Compressed of lip and incisive in manner, Healy Brennan produced a leather wallet and counted out a number of bills. He counted them a second time and shoved them across the table toward Mrs. McGurk.

"You needn't think that you're doing us a favor, madam. Here's our board bill to date. What with the money that we sent off this morning in living up to our own contracts and one thing and another, that strips us."

"More than strips us," said Claude Smith. "With other obligations coming due it puts us right up against it. But I don't want anybody in this town to think they haven't been getting a fair deal."

Mr. Smith's partner nodded. "With a quick resale of the car we may be able to break even, and maybe we won't. Depends on how hard it's been run in the last two weeks; rough country and all that."

"Is it still over in the galvanized-iron shed that this burg calls a garage?" queried Mr. Smith.

The proprietress of the Good Eats Restaurant left off gripping the towel. It slipped from her hands to the rough floor. "Yes," she said at length.

"All right," said Claude Smith to Healy Brennan. "We'll go and take it." He started to rise, then sat down, now looking at Mrs. McGurk. "We're city men, Mrs. McGurk, and do things in a city way, businesslike. It may be hard on some people but the sooner this town realizes that it's got to grow up the sooner it'll become something more than a hot-air point on the map. Just a tip to pass along."

He rose and Healy Brennan rose with him.

The two were in their middle twenties. Both wore the latest in jazz clothes. the coats high-waisted, broad-skirted, with a double row of buttons centered over the breast bone and looking as though they had been shot there by a nonscattering and self-stitching gun; the trousers were ample as to length and fullness over knee and ankle. Healy Brennan's hair was slicked back to perfection; Claude Smith's, being curly, ran across his head in great rippling waves, and was parted far down on one side; their neck shaves were high and complete. The nose of young Mr. Brennan, as has been mentioned before, was sharp-pointed; his cheek bones were prominent; and his mouth was as flat as a shingle. What his mouth lacked in contour Claude Smith's bulbous one more than made up for, being in complete accord with a protruding pair of yellow-white eyes. A disinterested observer, of an Æsop frame of mind, might have remarked that the fable of the fox and pig in partnership had indeed come down to date.

With a slight nod of the head the pair turned on the uneven floor and went through the flimsy doorway. Starlit desert night swallowed them. Swallowed them and their growing smiles. The affair had turned out quite as they had planned; separating Mrs. McGurk from her car had progressed according to schedule.

When people are too busy working to have time for thought there is always a rich field for those whose sole work lies in thinking.

Some time later Charlie Hanner, owner of the Lucky Smoke Shop, dropping into the Good Eats for a bedtime cup of coffee and piece of pie, found Mrs. McGurk vigorously cleaning the oilcloth covers to her tables and humming a sprightly air.

"Well, look who's struck it rich," said Charlie.

"Look who ain't," retorted Mrs. McGurk.

"Then why all the melody?"

"Because when a person's fool enough to drop a couple hundred dollars, if they don't sing, they'll bust."

The story came out over the pie and coffee.

"Oh, I ain't blaming them," said Mrs. McGurk heavily. "Business is business, I suppose."

"But if they'd been white men they'd have given you a chance to get the money tomorrow," protested Charlie, with slightly too-wide-set eyes gleaming. "Say, I'm sorry to hear that. I thought they were all right; maybe a little too flashy dressed and acting like they knew it all, but they were always good spenders at my place, even though they do have the devil's own luck with the dice. Now you listen to me; I've come to know them pretty well and I'll see what I can do in the morning."

"Do you think it'll do any good?" demanded Mrs. McGurk quickly, light again leaping in her eyes. "That car means a lot to me in hauling stuff up here from the railroad."

"Well, you never can tell," said Charlie, and fortified with a toothpick he swung through the door. When a young fellow comes into a mining town in the first rush, with not more than a sackful of supplies, and builds things up within six months until he has the best tobacco store in town, bar none, and all paid for, he has a right to feel that certainly one never can tell what's going to happen. But next morning, on accosting collarless Ed Harris, owner of the Lucky House, concerning the whereabouts of Claude Smith and Healy Brennan, the answer of that gentleman was so framed as to puzzle the questing Charlie.

"Don't have nothing to do with it," said a perspiring Ed, laying down a pair of pliers with which he had been attempting to take out slack in wires that held one of his sidewalk easy-chairs together. He looked quickly about. "Take it from me, the whole thing's phony."

Charlie scowled. "Phony?" Then burst out, "Phony nothing! They took the machine away from her because she couldn't pay 'em, and if they'd have given her any time——"

"Oh, I ain't talking about that. They took the machine away from her, yeah; but it's the raffle I mean."

"Raffle?" said Charlie, wide-set eyes blinking.

"Sure. They're going to raffle off the car this afternoon to raise some money, and I'm tellin' you"—here the collarless hotel keeper again lowered his voice—"and I'm tellin' you that the raffle's phony. Do you ever think that they're going to let that bus go for any hundred or even couple hundred tickets that they're sellin' at a dollar a throw? Not on your life. When that raffle's over you can bet they'll still have hold of the car."

Charlie Hanner's jaw came slightly forward; his eyes took on a certain rock hardness. "How they going to get away with it?"

"Oh, they'll get away with it all right if they're the same crowd I think they are. I heard about 'em the last time I was down in the city—two young fellows playing the little towns that look like easy pickings. Sell all the tickets they can, then blindfold some easy-going dumb-bell who stirs up all of the other halves of the tickets in a bucket and draws out just so many of 'em with the whole town looking on. The first numbers don't count for anything; they're just come-ons to stir up excitement and make everybody think they're getting a run for their money. The last number's the winning one, and when the blindfolded dumb-bell draws it out of the bucket with everybody gawping and hands it to the guy calling out the numbers—and this guy's the one that's running the raffle—this calling-out bird works hocus-pocus and slips over the phony ticket that he's been holding in his hand all the time. 'Number such-and-such wins,' says he, and out in the crowd somebody that can be bought for ten dollars comes forward with the duplicate number and drives off in the car. Within an hour the car's back in the raffle bird's hands."

The voluble Mr. Harris left off and again cast his eye up and down the rocky street.

"I ain't telling everybody this, Charlie. Those that want to get stung will get stung no matter how much a man talks to 'em, and from the way that the tickets are going like hot cakes this morning it sure shows that all the fools ain't dead yet. But you just take the tip from me. Well," and Mr. Harris picked up his pliers, "I'll go in and have a round or two with that new cook. If I don't miss my guess he's been hitting it up with the vanilla, and likewise if I don't miss my

guess, he's going to get hit up with a skillet."

For several minutes after the departure of Ed indoors Charlie Hanner continued to stand on the rough plank sidewalk, his jaw slightly forward and his eyes hard. Then he made his way back to the Smoke Shop, where a half-grown boy had been left in charge.

"Keep right on running the store for the rest of the day," said Charlie. "I'm going to be busy."

"Sure," agreed the youthful merchant. And added, "Say, there's going to be a raffle of a automobile this afternoon, over in front of the General Store. Old Mrs. McGurk's, what she couldn't pay installments on."

"So I heard," said Charlie and went out.

He drifted leisurely down Lucky's single street, and in the drifting stopped in the entrance way of a galvanized-iron garage where a number of men were watching the cleaning and polishing of a small close-coupled car with delivery body.

"Better take a chance on her," said one of the group to Charlie. "Looks like she's worth a dollar of any man's money."

"I'll say she is," heartily commented another. "I've got five chances on her. That's just how good I think she is."

Charlie studied the speaker. The possibility of big Al Coffey's having five dollars to spend was something worthy of thought. During his several months' sojourn in Lucky he and work had contrived to keep widely separated.

"Good-looking little car for hauling stuff and riding around in at the same time," said Charlie, and by roundabout comment and questioning learned that the sponsors of the raffle had gone out among the foothill mining claims to drum up trade.

"Wanted to give everybody a chance, I guess," hazarded Al Coffey, "so there wouldn't be no soreheads after the thing was over."

"Sure looks that way," said Charlie, and continued down the street.

At Joe Driscoll's board-and-canvas hotel he managed to kill time conversing with the proprietor of that establishment until two figures approached the galvanized-iron garage from the hills back of town. Charlie, again sauntering, passed the garage doorway coincidentally with the arrival of the jazz-suit wearers.

Under the arm of one was a small keg, once given to the holding of nails, but now reheaded and rapidly filling with the duplicate halves of tickets sold to purchasers.

"Well, look who's back," greeted Al Coffey to the duo. "Sold all the rest of the tickets, I suppose, just to make it that much harder for the rest of us to get the little snort cart."

He laughed heartily and the rest of the bystanders joined in. The ticket-selling Claude Smith and Healy Brennan smilingly showed their teeth, and under cover of their merriment flashed a look at big Al Coffey. A quick look; more the shadow of a look, and gone almost before it had begun; but it was sufficient for a watching Charlie Hanner. Two minutes later he was talking to collarless Ed Harris in the nearest approach to seclusion of the Lucky House.

"But I told you the thing was queer," protested Ed.

"Sure it is," said Charlie. "I just convinced myself of that. That's why I'm asking you to get me a ticket."

The hotel keeper again went through the motions of opening and closing his mouth.

"Now listen, Ed," said Charlie Hanner. "You go out and buy the ticket like I'm telling you; that's all."

And Ed, after using up his complete stock of expressions, went out and bought the ticket.

"What number do you want?" asked Healy Brennan, standing beside the keg on the running board of the raffle car, and drew from a voluminous pocket of the jazz coat a handful of double-printed pasteboards bisected by perforations.

Ed Harris fixed his eyes on the speaker. "One'll lose as quick as the next. You ought to know that."

"You'd be surprised," was the comeback, and ticket number eighty-seven was taken from its fellows and divided into halves; the upper was handed to Ed, and the lower thrust through a slot of the keg top to join a hundred other potential car winners.

Charlie Hanner, on Ed's return, carefully studied the grumpily proffered pasteboard.

"Number eighty-seven. That's good." He ran a thumb over the numbers and along the edge of the ticket. "Ordinary printing, ordinary cardboard. Could be done on any little press. Not bad at all. Well, I'll be seeing you later. Probably will be wanting you to do something else for me."

Ed Harris laughed shortly. "Sure. Hand you keys to get out of the asylum with."

Charlie Hanner slipped out of the Lucky House by the back way, and five minutes later without any fife-and-drum accompaniment opened the screen door at the rear of "Bud" Carrick's shoe-repair shop. The lean and grizzled Bud Carrick was an optimist. In readiness for the day when Lucky would grow to a size that demanded a newspaper Bud had brought along a small printing press on which he did odd job printing.

"Bud," said Charlie Hanner by way of greeting, "did anybody in this town ever set you up to a meal when you didn't happen to have the price?"

Bud Carrick looked up, a shoe between knees, repair hammer in hand and sole nails in mouth. "Why, I dunno," he mumbled. "Le's see." He spat out nails into a cupped hand. "Why, of course. Kate McGurk. Who ain't she give a meal to?"

"That's just it," said Charlie. "So I've kind of taken on a personal job to help her and I'd just as soon you wasn't around your printing office while I do it. Bud, I wouldn't be surprised if you went down to my Smoke Shop you'd find a box of the kind of cigars you like best waiting for you."

Bud Carrick got slowly to his feet. "What's up?"

"Come to the raffle this afternoon and you may see."

Bud Carrick ran knuckles over a chin.

"I was aiming to go out of town for the afternoon, and I don't see why I couldn't start a little early, along with a box of good cigars—and a promise to let me in on all the details when I come back. Not fixing up to let anybody get hurt or anything like that?"

"Not if they behave theirselves," said Charlie. "You'll get the details. Now you just show me where you keep your different sorts of cardboard and your type; type with numbers on 'em. You can be that much of a help."

Once more, at a somewhat later period during the morning, Charlie Hanner accosted collarless Ed Harris within the Lucky House.

"Well, here's the asylum inmate back again ready for more of your remarks." He held out the ticket that Mr. Harris had so protestingly purchased. "I guess I don't want it after all. So you go and give it to Kate McGurk. Tell her a friend dreamed that it would be the winning number but he didn't believe in playing raffles himself."

The collarless hotel keeper ran his two forefingers looseningly around the neckband of his shirt before giving way to speech. When only part way through, he was headed off.

"Sure, I know I'm crazy," admitted Charlie Hanner. "You can tell me all about it right after the raffle. From now till then I may be kind of busy."

On arriving at his two-by-four shack Charlie locked the door, pinned newspapers over the window, and after having scoured hands free from the last vestiges of what a close observer might have taken for printer's ink began the practice of a series of passes that looked for all the world like washing his hands with air. Kneeling beside an empty bucket, with his left hand on the bucket's rim, palm downward, he thrust his right hand into the bucket with fingers almost touching the fingers of the left hand as they passed. With a stirring motion, the right hand went around and around the bottom of the bucket, then was quickly raised, held head-high for a moment, then again shot into the bucket, once more almost grazing the left hand as it went by. After a certain number of times a sharp-eyed onlooker would have declared that the right fingers did touch the left ones in transit and furthermore that something white, like a square of cardboard, passed from the left palm into the right.

"Damn," said Charlie Hanner, and, flexing his fingers, began all over again. The time at length came when even the most lynx-eyed bystander would have been unable to say that fingers had touched or that a square of cardboard was in existence.

"Fair enough," said Charlie Hanner. "Damn their miserable hides for trying to bunco a woman. I wish it was a limousine."

At two o'clock that afternoon—it was Saturday—the undulating street in front of the general store was nearly as crowded as though the day were Fourth of July. From the buildings along the street, from the shacks and tents on the back lots, from the outlying claims, the town of Lucky had gathered for a look at Dame Chance; apparently half the town had taken tickets, and those who hadn't had come along to watch the luck of those who had. A workbench had been placed on the plank walk;

in front of it stood the washed and polished prize, going at one dollar a throw. On the bench top stood Healy Brennan, in the pride of his jazz suit and a fresh shave; in the little delivery car sat an equally royal Claude Smith, ready to relinquish the steering wheel to the holder of the winning ticket. On the bench beside Healy Brennan stood a small keg, once given to the holding of nails, but in which now lay all of two hundred tickets, its slotted top already removed; in the hands of an equal number of Lucky citizens gathered about bench and car were clutched the duplicates of the keg tickets; duplicates at which their tight-holding and jealously guarding owners every now and then took reassuring glimpses, apparently fearful that the numbers had become changed or lost to memory, and the car thereby lost along with them.

Healy Brennan raised a hand and the hubbub of voices died down.

"Ladies and gents," said Mr. Brennan. He smiled down at the crowd. "I guess that there ain't any use explaining why we're all here. From the way that everybody is looking at the little car as though it already belonged to 'em, we won't have to say a word. And so that the little car can belong to somebody, we're going to start right in. But first," and the young man of the foxlike nose again held up his hand, "in order that everybody'll know that this raffle is being run fair and square I'd like to have an officer of the law up here on this bench. Is there an officer in the crowd?"

There followed a moment of strained silence and then a hesitant voice was heard saying:

"Why, yes, I'm here."

From his place in the crowd Deputy Sheriff Rufe Hollingshead tried not to look self-conscious.

"Right this way, then."

Swallowing, Deputy Sheriff Rufe came forward.

"Atta boy, Rufe!" yelled the crowd, those in front giving him room.

With a tug Rufe heaved himself up on the bench and stood, boots wide apart, hands on hips, with a look of commingled authority and uncertainty straggling over his features.

Healy Brennan shook hands with him warmly.

"Glad to see you. Now what we want you to do," he said confidingly, "is keep your eye on the keg. I guess you understand."

Immediately Rufe Hollingshead's eyes became riveted on the mouth of the keg. His under lip thrust itself out; his boots squared themselves firmly on the bench top. The watchdog of the law was on guard.

"Atta boy," complimented Healy Brennan, pulling down the corners of his mouth and again holding up his hand to command attention.

"Now, if I can get somebody to come up and draw out the tickets we'll be all ready to go. Who'll come?"

Silence again fell, to be relieved by each man nudging his neighbor in the ribs and urging that he go. When the wait had become more than sufficiently long a hesitant voice was heard.

"I'll come up if nobody else will."

It was Charlie Hanner.

Healy Brennan sharply took in the advancing figure; then relaxed. So did Caude Smith. For pulling tickets out of the keg the guy that ran the Smoke Shop would be just the man; known all over town.

"Up you come," said Healy.

The grinning Charlie ranged himself alongside the watching Rufe Hollingshead. Casually his glance went over the upturned faces. It came upon that of collarless Ed Harris, over whose features, already set with an I-told-you-so expression, there now was sweeping a look of wild unbelief that the very man whom he had warned had been hooked into playing into the raffle birds' hands. The hooked one fought down a widening grin and sent his eyes roving farther. They stopped on the outskirts of the crowd. Big Al Coffey was leaning negligently against a post with just a shade too much show of indifference for a man who had bought five tickets. Charlie's grin went out. Then he sent his glance on, and brought it back to the bench, and to a handkerchief in the hands of Healy Brennan.

"We'll just blindfold you if you don't mind," said Healy, with a show of teeth meant to be ingratiating. "Not because you might look but because it's the thing; and we want to do this right."

"Sure," agreed Charlie. "You bet."

"Now we're off in a cloud of dust," said Healy. "But so that everybody can get all the kick out of this show that's coming to them, we'll draw nine numbers before we pull out the winning tenth. What's the use

of having a knock-out in the first round when you've paid to see a whole show? How about it, gang?"

"Fine!" came the chorus. To every ticket holder in the crowd the nine discarded tickets were going to be some one else's.

"Let 'er go," said Healy. "Dig up the first victim."

The blindfolded Charlie, now on one knee, groped for the keg. He found it, put his left hand on the rim, and plunged the right deep into the heaped-up tickets. Around and around he stirred them, stopped, and brought his hand out of the keg with a ticket held between thumb and forefinger. High he raised his arm.

With quick fingers Healy Brennan took the pasteboard from the upraised hand and swung it before Rufe Hollingshead. "Read the bad news, sheriff," he ordered.

Sheriff Rufe left off staring at the keg. He brought his eyes close to the card.

"Number forty-five," he announced brusquely.

"Hell," came a voice in the crowd. "I might have known it. That's always my luck."

Laughter welled up from those around the victim. They had escaped the first swing of the ax.

The blindfolded Charlie's hand again plunged into the keg.

"Anybody's number but mine!" begged a humorist. "Stir 'em deep," urged a second. "Keep that one till later," commanded a third.

Up came Charlie's hand. Again Healy Brennan presented the cardboard to Deputy Sheriff Rufe.

"Number one hundred and fifty two," boomed the official voice.

"Damn!" came a cry, followed by more relieved mirth.

Out came ticket number three—number four—number five; machinelike, Charlie Hanner's hand rose and fell. There was no laughter now. As Sheriff Rufe tolled out each fateful number the crowd pressed forward a little more, grew a little more taut; like runners of a gantlet they tensed themselves for the certain number of blows that lay between them and their goal. Ticket number nine, last on the proscribed list, followed number six, number seven, number eight. And as it was called and then dropped to the bench among its discarded fellows, something like a sigh went over the throng.

"Now!" said a chorus, and the crowd swayed and set itself for the climax. Out in it collarless Ed Harris heaved a disgusted snort and made ready to indulge in biting comment. From its outskirts big Al Coffey left off leaning against the post and squared his shoulders as though preparing for some inevitable happening.

Down came the blindfolded Charlie Hanner's right hand and shot into the keg; came down and went by his left hand that rested on the rim of the keg; palm down, as it had done on nine other occasions; as it had done, apparently, but not quite. It grazed the other hand in its swift transit. Into the tickets it plunged and vigorously stirred them around and around. And with the eyes of all on this moving arm, Healy Brennan shot a glance at a languidly seated Claude Smith and flexed the fingers of his right hand against his cuff.

Charlie's rotating hand stopped.

"Draw it!" barked the crowd.

The hand came out of the keg, winning ticket between thumb and forefinger. Healy Brennan, with fingers close-set, reached for it. Reached, but did not get it. Charlie had risen as his hand came out; and as he came to the top of his height he yanked off the blindfolding handkerchief.

"Darned if I ain't going to be in on the finish of this," he announced, grinning. "What's it say?"

"Hey!" cried Healy Brennan, and dived for the ticket.

Blinking, Charlie fended him off. "What's the bright idea? Read 'em, sheriff!" And he held out the ticket before Rufe Hollingshead.

"Number eighty-seven," announced Sheriff Rufe. "Eighty-seven wins!"

"Hey!" screeched Healy Brennan, face white and nose taughtened to a needle sharpness. "That's not the winning ticket. That's not——"

From two points in the crowd two people were surging forward, big Al Coffey from the outskirts, hand high, voice loud, "I got it; I got the winning number," and from close by the prize car a stout, red-faced, radiant woman, holding up a ticket and announcing: "Eighty-seven; I have eighty-seven."

At the sound of the latter voice Healy Brennan whirled, his pouncing arm in mid-

air, petrified. His face went the color of old ashes; his knees buckled under him. The woman was Mrs. Kate McGurk.

With a more furious lunge Healy strove for the ticket. But that piece of cardboard was no longer in Charlie Hanner's hand; it had been passed over to Deputy Sheriff Rufe —a frowning sheriff who was staring hard at the now almost insane actions of young Mr. Brennan.

The advancing Al Coffey, noisily elate, crushed up to the bench and started to climb upon it. On him Deputy Rufe turned his attention. He thrust out a boot heel. "Get down from here."

"But I got the number. I got the winning number!"

Deputy Rufe leaned forward and snapped the ticket from upraised hand. He scanned it, crumpled it—threw it as far as he could throw it. "One hundred and twenty. Get out of here!"

The hand of Mrs. Kate McGurk waggled directly below him. He grabbed the ticket and at the same time Charlie Hanner drove an elbow into a reaching Healy Brennan's side. Healy Brennan went off the bench.

"Eighty-seven," announced Rufe. "Lady, you win!"

Mrs. McGurk wheeled upon the prize car —her car—and upon a putty-faced Claude Smith.

"Get out of that and get out quick!" With heavy knuckles she rapped the gripping Claude's hands. "Leggo that steering wheel—take your paws off that car before they're used for thumb prints in some jail." In at one door of the car she launched herself; out the other door she launched Claude.

Healy Brennan, advancing to the rescue, was met by her with a straight-arm blow in the chest. He staggered against the bench.

The motor roared; the horn sounded. Noisily the McGurk car signalized its redemption.

A roar from the crowd answered that from the motor. The plaudits grew as the drama of the situation unfolded. The crowd welled in to congratulate. Her own car won back!

Tenantless save for Sheriff Rufe the raffle bench now stood. Charlie Hanner had disappeared. So had Al Coffey; considering his bulk, most wondrously had this latter gentleman slipped away. Gone also were the two finest jazz suits in all that region. With full knowledge of certain things that any number of people might know equally well at any moment, and act on accordingly, Healy Brennan and Claude Smith had athletically dusted themselves into the horizon.

Collarless Ed Harris, standing rooted, once more beat fist upon open palm. Gapingly, admiringly, he took in all that was to be taken and waggled his head. Hoarsely he breathed.

"What do you know about that?" he demanded. "Say, *what* do you know about that!"

Mr. Josselyn will have stories in future numbers.

THE GENTLE REBUKE

DWIGHT F. DAVIS, now assistant secretary of war at Washington, is the man who established the Davis Cup international tennis matches, and although he was born far back in the twilight of 1879, he is still a streak on the courts. He is an authority on etchings, paintings and music. He is, or has been, a director in a multitude of corporations, and he has served his native city by promoting public parks, public baths, playgrounds, better housing conditions for the poor, cleaner politics and the prevention of tuberculosis.

Go-getter that he is, he likes to have some of his favorite pictures on the walls of his office, and when he went to Washington he had several prize etchings hung in his room in the war department. This inspired a newspaper reporter to write that Mr. Davis was extremely sensitive to his environment, that he did his best work only when he was surrounded by works of art and that, when he played tennis, his game was affected by the colors of the women's gowns in the grand stand.

The morning this story was published, little Miss Davis read it, and, turning to the distinguished man with a contemptuous toss of her head, she exclaimed:

"Father! Why on earth do you let them print things like this about you? It does make you seem a dumb-bell!"

Red Medicine

By Clay Perry

MacRea and Lescaut birl the cedar for something more than fun.

"In the spring the red gods make medicine."

IT is said that whoever steps over the threshold of the Northland when the Red Gods make medicine always will return. As for those who call this land their home, no matter to what other land they stray, they come back if only to die.

Maillard, the trader at Dey Swishee had spent years away from his home, gathering wealth and culture in New York, and then suddenly he came back to the old store at the top of the hill overlooking the river and revived the dying fur trade.

Maillard would doubtless laugh if one were to speak of the Red Medicine to him. But Maillard saw nothing strange in the sudden return of Angevine from Montreal where she had been sent to school.

Angevine had learned many things at the school; how to wear bright, smart clothes, to sing jingling jazzing tunes and to dance to the music of the phonograph. But among the records she brought home to be played on the phonograph which her uncle, Maillard, had bought, was one of a certain sad-sounding tune of the North which, she said, she had heard an old voyageur sing beneath her window at the convent, at the Pont Royale, one night—the night before she left. It was called "A la Claire Fontaine."

The phonograph helped to make life merry at Dey Swishee. Maillard had sent for an attachment which caused a record to be repeated, automatically, for the dancing in the big storeroom.

The phonograph played this Sunday morning, a bright, sunny day tingling with the fresh breath of a breeze from up the valley of the White Ottawa. As it played an Indian came and sat on the broad open platform in front of the store. He carved figures on a maple stick. He was a Montaignais from the far woods, come to trade furs —and come on a Sunday because of what was to take place at Dey Swishee this day.

Angevine came out, a charming figure in her Sunday best. Color was in her clothing and her face, a perfect oval that is to be seen only in the young girls of Quebec province, curiously suggestive of the fragile beauty of the Creole of the far South—yet not the same. Her color was that of the russet peach, her hair so black that it held purple shadows in its loops and coils like the shadows of the Laurentians in the sunset. Deep red lips as if stained with choke-cherry juice, deep black eyes glowing beneath a silken tangle of lashes. She was excited, now.

From afar came the throbbing blast of a whistle.

"Bateau de fer," muttered the whittling Indian as the girl shaded her eyes with an

olive-skinned hand and peered down the Black Ottawa. "'Leetle Bird!' Eef de bateau had wings eet could not fly so fas' as de heart of Leetle Bird to meet eet."

Little Bird—Angevine—flung up her head with a saucy move of her lips but more color rushed to her cheeks.

"Chief 'Whittle-stick'"—she named him, as easily as he had named her—"what do you at Dey Swishee on Sunday? It is not the mission you come for. Perhaps you come to roll the log? Where are your shoes with steel teeth?"

"Um. No got," chuckled the Indian, unabashed. "Bring plenty castor of beaver for trade. Many day journey. Hurry um up. Wait to Monday. Um. Expec' one come from down river to roll log wit' one from upriver to-day. Him bot' lak to win —for Little Bird to see him. 'Blue Eye,' him come on *bateau de fer.* 'Swift Foot,' him come on *bateau de bois,* on white water."

"Many men of blue eyes come on the steamer," retorted Angevine, "and many will come in wooden boats on white water. All come to roll the logs. The upriver gang will try to beat the down-river gang. It is the birling day."

With this she withdrew, head held high, but her cheeks burned and her heart beat fast. The Indian in some mysterious fashion had divined a secret which she thought was known to her uncle alone and perhaps to his crony and intimate, Captain Tessier of the steamer *Oiseau*—and also to two young men whom the Indian had characterized as Blue Eye and Swift Foot.

These two were to meet as champions this day in the birling match, and as rivals. They were MacRae, foreman for the Colonial Lumber Company, who would be on the *Oiseau,* now threading the narrows of the Black Ottawa; the other, Lescaut, from the White Ottawa country, a slim youth of black eyes, long straight hair bound with a beaded leathern fillet—not an Indian any more than Angevine. French as Angevine Maillard and from the same wild country.

The jam had formed across the White Ottawa just above the point where it tumbled into the deeper channel of the Black Ottawa. It rose like a wooden glacier and behind it a troubled, swirling pool of wood-stained water formed the birling pool. The steamer whistled for the wharf. It seemed to rouse the whole countryside. From the wood roads and the tributary streams and from across the Black Ottawa, in bateaux and canoes and in tiny calèches and afoot came men of Quebec, habitants, trappers, timberjacks.

Angevine and her uncle emerged from the store to watch the *Oiseau* being warped alongside the rickety wooden wharf; waved at Captain Tessier who saluted them from the pilot house, and saw the drivers from down river swarm ashore. They leaped from the rail before the gangplank was run out, men in checked shirts that were tucked snugly inside their leathern belts and who seemed slim and agile compared to the upriver men who lined the bank in their clumsy cruiser shirts which bagged out, having no length to tuck inside. These also wore different headgear; the upriver men, toques or toquets of bright colors, some red sashes, some buckskin jackets; the down-river men jaunty little felt hats with close-trimmed brims set at cocky angles on their heads. All wore high-laced boots with the trousers cut off just even with the tops, "stagged" for the drive. All carried peaveys with iron drive points or pike poles with hooks of twisted steel. Every man showed the soles of his shoes studded with bright steel points, driven in rows or circles.

The two groups mingled at the wharf. Gayety rose in their husky voices. Old friends, old enemies, met after months of separation. Rivermen clasped hands with woodsmen, still ragged and weathered from the camps of winter. Indians grunted brief greetings and exchanged deerskin trifles for cheap cigars and tobacco. Their squaws hung back against the row of old buildings which formed the tiny settlement along the river's edge, and behind them in doors and windows gaped white women and children. The squaws made a frieze of gay colors against the dull background of weathered boards with their calicoes and silks and patterned blankets and shawls.

Angevine's bright eyes picked out one among the crowd that came ashore from the steamer. He was tall and straight and he carried no peavey or pike. It was MacRea. Lescaut was not there.

The throng, perhaps one hundred in all, moved slowly toward the birling pool. Wild cries of delight went up when the rivermen glimpsed the sporting hazard of deep, boiling water swirling madly between the long booms which had been laid parallel, thirty

feet apart, stretching out from the bottom of a high sandy bank to the tail of the great jam. Boomers who had arranged the course were clearing out loose logs, piling them against the jam, walking the floating timbers as easily as if pacing a plank road.

Maillard and Angevine went down to the steamer and were joined by Captain Tessier, huge, broad-faced, brass-buttoned child of the river, whose face spelled "Casey" and whose tongue spelled Tessier, as was fitting in one whose province was the watery boundary between the two great provinces, Ontario and Quebec.

Captain Tessier was to be referee of the contest. Maillard was the announcer and starter.

The spectators crowded along the top of the sand bank, a large log being reserved here as a seat for Maillard, Tessier—and Angevine.

But Angevine refused the seat.

"It is not for me to be seated with the judge of this contest," she murmured in a low tone to Captain Tessier.

"Ah! That is so."

Angevine Maillard had given her word that after the birling match this day she would make her decision between "Blue Eye" MacRae and "Swift Foot" Lescaut. It was to be the down-river man or the up-river man for her mate.

Curiously, each one of these two was a part of her different life, Lescaut of the Northland far beyond Dey Swishee, which is but the threshold of the North; MacRae of her life at Montreal, the threshold of the South. She was torn between the two of them, and it was not strange. She was a woman. Angevine was not quite eighteen years of age, but she was in full bloom. In the Northland the daughters of the Montaignais French mature early; they make quick decisions, for the blood flows swiftly.

Truly, Angevine told herself, she did not know which of these two she loved. She had chosen to allow this annual contest of the log birling to decide for her. Angevine was of the blood of the women to whom a duel for love was not strange.

She withdrew a little way from the abrupt brink of the bank and found a seat on the bending trunk of a growing birch, one of a clump of ghostly skinned trees, and behind the frieze of Indian women, sitting cross-legged in the grass.

The hunting Indians crept closer. The spectacle below was of curious interest to them. These steel-shod men of the logs had developed a display of skill even greater than that of the expert canoeist in the rapids. A good riverman can handle the trickiest thing afloat, a spruce, hemlock or cedar log, and can "do more tricks with it than an Injun in a birch boat," can ride it through rapids without even wetting his feet, standing erect, and if he is *good* he can do it without even a peavey or pike pole for balancing rod. Such men were MacRea and Lescaut.

Lescaut? He was still missing. The booms were cleared of all save the chosen contestants, twenty on a side. Little Bird fixed her gaze upon the flying froth which swirled about Poplar Point, a half mile upstream. From there he must come—if he came at all.

MacRea, though he was the cynosure of all eyes, managed to slip off the boom and climbed by a roundabout way up to the birches. Concealed there, crouching behind Angevine, he called to her.

"Angevine! I am here. Lescaut has not come. To-day you will make the decision."

She had known he was coming but she affected to be startled when he spoke her name. She made a quick dab at her nose with a handkerchief. She did not look around but bowed her head and dug the sharp heel of a shiny slipper in the sand.

"I hope he comes," went on MacRea, his blue eyes shining hard. "I wish to win off from him. Lescaut and I will birl against each other at the finish—if he comes. You will decide—then."

"I do not remember—I don't theenk I said—anyway, how could I tell, then, how I should feel to-day?"

Her voice was vibrant, troubled, almost husky with a tremendous indecision.

"Ah! How do you feel—then, to-day—Angel?"

"I—I cannot say. I—I did not promise anything, m'sieu', I am sure. I only said I might—I—may——" Her tripping tongue and halting speech seemed to encourage MacRea.

"It is right the better man shall win," he declared. "I shall win. And I shall come for you. If Lescaut does not come to-day it means he is afraid he cannot beat me—and surely you would not decide for such a one."

"I shall decide to-day," broke in Ange-

vine hurriedly. "Yes! If you beat him then shall I know how I feel."

MacRea's blood was in his face as he descended to the boom, careless now who might see him. He ran out to the jam, with a peavey clawed off the face of it a dozen logs, sent them streaking one after the other toward shore. As the last one floated he jumped upon it and then ran it end to end and leaped and landed on the next one. He ran them all, from end to end, without once touching water with sole or peavey.

On the last log, close to the bank, when the water swirled in a mighty eddy, he stood and see-sawed, rocking the timber until each end dipped under, dancing nimbly so that water did not wet his boots. He sent his peavey hurtling into the bank, where it stuck like a lance.

"The skinning stick," he shouted.

A sharp-pointed, barked stick of seasoned hickory was tossed to him and with this he nimbly stripped the log on which he stood, ripping the bark off with thrusts of the hickory point the while he birled the log about and about and when the log was bare he trod it so fast that water flew up from the ends in spray.

"Whoopee!" came the yell from his mates, the down-river men.

This was byplay, sheer fun in advance of the grim work of the birling contest. It brought others onto the logs to try their tricks with the result that six who tried to "raise the river" actually did so by falling into it, and were eliminated as contestants before the match was begun.

Little Bird observed every move with intent eyes. There was admiration in them for this primitive display of skill by the blond youth—but she kept a corner of her eye for the bend at Poplar Point.

"I have not seen Lescaut since last spring," she murmured to herself. "He is late."

It was not so much the desire to have decision made for her by this birling as it was the wish to see MacRea and Lescaut together, in contrast.

Maillard announced the opening of the game. The pool once more was cleared. Now two rows of muscular, agile rivermen faced each other, flashing their peaveys and pikes like knights ready for the jousting. There were eighteen down-river men on the south boom and but fifteen upriver men on the north boom, for four eager "bobtails" had tumbled in the byplay and a place was left, also, for Lescaut.

Maillard stood and announced the simple conditions of the contest. Pike and peavey could be used for balancing and to grip the log but no tool or foot must touch other wood than the one log being birled. If any man on the birl log discarded his tool his rival must also. No one must touch his opponent with hand, foot, body or steel. None must cross the middle line of the log.

"Number for places," Maillard instructed.

"Light" Larry and Labiche were matched for Number One. Larry, down-river man, called the turn of the coin Maillard tossed and ran out to the jam. He rolled off a smooth, round spruce. He chose his end, carefully, leaped on and sent the log head-on toward Labiche, on the north boom.

Before the log got near Labiche ran and leaped, pike pole clasped across his chest, his feet ready to strike in the position necessary to counteract an expected maneuver, and he met Larry's jump in the air by landing easily, barely touching before he was in air himself, and the log did not sink beneath him as Larry had intended it should. Labiche was safely set and ready when Larry landed again on his end. He won cheers for his maneuver. He took the aggressive, eyes bulging watchfully, fixed on his opponent's, body poised forward for turning this way or that.

Labiche suddenly shifted his feet and whipped the log into swift revolutions, treading like a fly on a revolving globe, climbing. Larry kept time with him. The smooth spruce spun and raised a sheet of water from the river all along its sides. Larry "dragged" and brought the log to a stop. An instant, motionless, then both men went into air together and toward the middle. They grinned at each other, there, and a roar went up from both booms. Labiche leaped backward and turned about as he did so. When he struck his feet were crosswise and birling fast. Larry countered with a quick twist in the same direction and Labiche was overbalanced. He slid helpless into the icy water, his body lying across the spruce and was ducked head down by the log's momentum.

Down-river men roared their victory. First blood had been drawn for them and they now outnumbered the "bobtails" by four—even with Lescaut in reserve—and Lescaut nowhere in sight!

They were jubilant, confident; but the birling game is a gamble. The expert, unless he is as sure-footed as a fly, may go off with a ludicrous lunge and be beaten by a greenhorn.

Pierre Lontaine, nicknamed "The Beaver," for his long white teeth, sent Light Larry "sopping," met another down-river husky and ducked him, too; which gave him the right to choose his own log. He selected a "cork stick;" that is, one so light and buoyant that it bobbed this way and that like a cork. It took three men to dislodge him and the third went off with Lontaine.

Half an hour of furious birling passed and honors were even. Six men were left on a side, counting Lescaut. The "bobtails" had made good their losses.

Angevine sat no longer on her birch bough. She crept close to the bank's edge. The squaws had hitched themselves forward and huddled shoulder to shoulder, guttural in their excitement. The Indian, Whittle-stick, was squatted near to Maillard, busy with his knife and maple billet.

Captain Tessier regarded the Indian with wise eyes. Tessier "savvied Indians." He could read their sign language as no other white man along the river, save perhaps Maillard.

"MacRea will be in luck if Lescaut doesn't show up," he said in a low tone to Maillard.

The trader shook his head. "MacRea is a Scot. He wants to beat Lescaut before the eyes of Little Bird," he said.

He missed Angevine and Tessier drew his attention to where she sat close beside a young squaw. The pair had struck up a "trade friendship." They were exchanging trinkets. Angevine passed over a string of glittering blue beads for the squaw's handsome doeskin jacket which hung to the knees with its tassels of leather, tipped with red.

Maillard laughed. "She is a trader's niece," he chuckled.

It seemed curiously feminine, to him, this trading between the two girls, while the exciting contest raged.

Captain Tessier saw another exchange. Angevine took off her shiny high-heeled slippers and gave them to the squaw who whisked off her moccasins and handed them to the other girl. The whittling Indian also paused in his work to watch this and Tessier saw him turn his maple stick about, shave off a half-finished figure and calmly begin another in its place.

A "bobtail" touched the boom with his pike handle as he was birling and Captain Tessier was called on to rule him out. Chief Whittle-stick chose to arise.

"Lescaut him need to come," he remarked to Maillard. "Him need hurry um up now."

"Suppose Lescaut comes—and wins?" queried Tessier, suddenly of Maillard.

The trader's fine face was thoughtful.

"She has been in the town; she came out of the woods," he said, almost as if he were making a proverb. "She is a woman and must choose her man. Let the better man win. Lescaut, if he is the better man, should win."

Angevine had got to her feet, was poised in an attitude of listening, lips parted, eyes half closed, her head bent to the wind. She had donned the doeskin garment for a try-on, the moccasins with it. In this garb her dark face seemed still more brown.

Captain Tessier sought the white water with his keen eyes that could detect a floating "deadhead" many yards ahead of his steamer, but he saw nothing at Poplar Point. He did see Whittle-stick polishing his totem in his hands, with sand, then saw him pass idly back of the row of women, near Angevine. After he had passed, Little Bird held in her hands a bit of newly carved maple.

Captain Tessier smiled. He said nothing to Maillard of this, for it was his rule not to interfere in what was not his business. He had read the sign, however. He knew that out of the northwest wind Whittle-stick had caught a message, that he had given it to Little Bird and with it the maple totem stick—and that the giving of that was of significance and her acceptance of it more significant still.

A cry of inquiry came from below. MacRea wanted to change his number for that of a mate. Captain Tessier nodded permission but the other man objected. He wanted to birl.

"MacRea will knock down the whole show," he spluttered.

There were four on the south boom, five on the "bobtail" side, and an undefeated white-water man on the birl log.

"If you can't agree, let go," Captain Tessier demanded. "MacRea, give the lad his turn."

"I can birl the six and Lescaut, too, if he

comes," cried MacRea. He yielded with a frown, boiling with lust for action. He raged when two more of his men went keeling to one of the "bobtails." The last but one, "Jigger" Burns, a bandy-legged, hard-boiled river rat with a huge quid in one cheek, proved a doughtier birler than any of three white-water contestants. He came to Lemoir, a gorillalike Canuck, the last but one on the upper boom—and birled him off.

It came down to Feather Head, a "river Indian" who had become proficient in the white man's tricks on the logs. He wore a black crow's feather in his hair. His feet were incased in shoe packs of moose hide to which had been fastened stiff soles to hold the calks. The footgear looked clumsy. Black-water men jeered at him as "bear-paw"—but he triumphed with his flapping, clicking old shoe packs. An Indian stood victor! An Indian stood ready to meet "Birling" MacRea!

Both gangs gave Feather Head roaring encouragement. He was an Indian, but the scorn of the men of farther south for "buck" and "breed" has never found echo in these Northern hearts, particularly those of Gallic blood.

MacRea was scornful not because it was an Indian he was to meet but because he felt victory would be ridiculously easy and he saw that Feather Head was the super-champion of the north boom. Lescaut still was missing and MacRea wanted to meet Lescaut.

Feather Head chose to retain the knobbed end of a huge hemlock. He poled it toward MacRea. A hush fell as the Scot poised for his leap. He cast a quick glance up and met Angevine's gaze.

And even as he jumped her eyes swept away and to the rapids upriver and she cried out in French words which were caught up by many throats:

"V'là Lescout! V'là Lescaut!"

MacRea, hearing it, set himself swiftly to the job of disposing of Feather Head. He leaned forward, bending one knee. The Indian waited, bandy-legged, his trick the defensive play. MacRea lunged forward—then back—then quickly forward again and so abruptly that he jerked Feather Head off his balance without even a flip of the log.

Feather Head, swimming to the boom, tore his feather from his hair, fixed it to a pike point and presented it to MacRea. MacRea, in response, tossed the Indian his drive hat.

Lescaut's arrival was dramatic indeed, for he came standing erect in the prow of a sharp-keeled bateau, poling through the rapids which piled up furiously on the tail of the jam. Two other men rowed with heavy oars behind him.

MacRea chose his log. It was a cedar, lightest wood of the North. It rode water like a bubble. Its bark was loosening. MacRea finished the job with a few quick strokes of a skinning stick. The red wood glistened in the sun, smooth, slippery, hard and beautiful. Its odorous perfume rose all about. It was a rare log, for it was straight and round. The cedar grows mostly in curves and crooks, with pilastered trunk. As MacRea leaped upon it, well toward the middle, it wavered and trembled like mercury in a float. MacRea kept his balance with no visible effort. He had spent much time practicing on cedar—and he had searched the jam for this log. He knew it would give him advantage over any white-water man.

Lescaut and his oarsmen brought the heavy-plunging bateau to a halt beside the north boom as MacRea poled near. Lescaut, leaping out, seemed to take in the situation with a single sweep of his piercing black eyes.

He was dressed a trifle differently from his mates. He wore instead of a cruiser shirt a buckskin garment, close-fitting, belted, and corduroy trousers tucked neatly into his boot tops which were almost to the knee. He had dressed for this occasion, that was plain. His white teeth flashed a gleam of appreciation as he turned for a pike pole.

But MacRea, within ten feet of his rival, sent his pole clattering across the boom and folded his arms. Lescaut whipped his long hair back from his eyes and with a graceful spring landed with his calks clamping the cedar, legs bowed slightly, knees bent. The impact forced MacRea to do a jig to keep his balance. The cedar was forced down more than half its bulk beneath the surface. It was not a large log, less than fifteen inches in diameter. Only cedar, of that size, would hold two men.

Lescaut began with a quick birl. Indeed, it was easier to ride the log in motion than at rest—if its uncertain trembling could be called rest. A breeze would have rocked it. Beneath swift-moving spikes it seemed alive.

Lescaut's dark face was wet with perspiration from his long voyage. He had come more than thirty miles without pause, since daybreak. But the exertion had been good; he was warmed up, ready for the birling.

The pair moved like cats facing each other on a fence. Lescaut kept his smile, his eyes fixed on MacRea's feet. The "drag" failed to surprise him though MacRea was an adept at assuming to be "pounding her down" when he was really "dragging" or braking against the roll.

Lescaut even found the time to cast a glance to where Little Bird was poised right at the edge of the bank, on her heels, as Indians sometimes sit by a camp fire. He shot up one hand in salute. The wind cast his hair in his face and he seemed galvanized by the very spirit of that northwest breeze.

No one saw her go, but there were those, afterward, who said Angevine must have left her place before the contest ended. One riverman who was seeking out an Indian woman in the group above him said that he saw a girl in a doeskin jacket—a young squaw he thought—glide through the bushes before the match was well on.

It began amid a babble of voices, cheers, hoarse "whoopees" from the river rats, calls of encouragement to each champion. But gradually silence fell save for the swish of wind through trees and the rush of the stream and the prickling snap of steel calks in wood. The play was too swift, too absorbing for any one to watch it without being stilled.

It was as if neither man recognized any danger of being dislodged from the teetering cedar. They kept their feet with the apparent ease of a pair doing buck and wing on a floor.

A burst of speed, four feet flying together, spinning the log on itself like a wheel; then the drag, sheer test of leg muscles and balancing, then the leap in air, a turn halfway, a turn all the way around while off the log, to try to catch the other in the half turn, a sidelong dance, calks stabbing wood in tune, a jerk, a lunge, a backward spring, a turn on one toe with the other foot flung out for balance—thus it went.

Once the crazy "traveling" of the log by reason of its spinning sent it against a boom and it rebounded so that both men were forced to crouch and touch wood with finger tips and this brought a cheer, for touching wood in this manner is, unlike touching leather, in a broncho-busting contest, an accomplishment.

MacRea tried the back roll, allowing the log to revolve from beneath his heels, and Lescaut matched him, out of bravado, when he had the chance to whirl and surprise him with the forward tread—*possibly* to birl him off.

Another time—and that sent hearts into throats—Lescaut went on one knee and a foot swung close to water, but did not touch. The log, fortunately, was not rolling then. It was merely wabbling from side to side, and MacRea had gripped it so hard with his calks that he could not release his feet in time to dislodge Lescaut.

Now they faced each other, knees bent, rocking the log back and forth, jerkily. Then the tactics changed to flying feet. MacRea jumped in air and landed hard near the middle. Lescaut met him, with the same movement.

Without halt, rest or respite the furious duel went on for five, ten, fifteen, twenty minutes. Sweat streamed from both men's faces, darkened their shoulders. Their breath came in gasps—and still Lescaut smiled.

It seemed as if he felt he would win.

MacRea kept close to the middle of the log. Lescaut found the cedar so buoyant that he could stay out at his end and not wet his feet. MacRea stilled the whirling cylinder and wiped sweat from his forehead —and seemed to waver. But it was a feint. He leaned forward, then stepped back, swung one foot free—and as he swung it he kicked in air. The jerk sent the log backward. Lescaut, facing MacRea, bent back, had to step back. His calks caught on the end of the square-sawn timber. The log rolled. Lescaut reeled, clutched at the air, bent backward in a supple half circle, balanced for an instant on one foot—and then slid off into the boiling black water.

MacRea did a desperate dance to keep himself on the suddenly lightened log which seemed to leap with new life as Lescaut's weight left it. He poised, at length, and rested.

Lescaut swam to the north boom, refused the offer of pike handles thrust out to him, paralleled the boom for a distance, striking for shore.

Something flew through the air and struck directly in front of him. It might have been

a leaf, a bit of bark from an overhanging limb. It disappeared beneath Lescaut's overhand stroke.

MacRea was first to reach the sun-warmed platform of the trader's store. His swift dash, his escape from the congratulatory crowd, hastened when he did not find Angevine at the birch grove, was made more hurried when he reached the bottom of the hill at the wharf, and his ears caught the sound of music.

He was running when he got to the door. There he halted, hesitated. It was because of the tune. From out of a rich-voiced machine came the tenor of a man's song, and what a song that is!

"A la claire fontaine,
M'en allant promener,
J'ai trouvé l'eau si belle,
Que je m'y suis baigné.
Il y a longtemps que je t'aime;
Jamais je ne t'oublierai."

An old song of Quebec. It is sung mostly in log cabins, in tepees, in bunk shanties, at far Northern posts, on the trails, on the rivers and lakes of the Northland. A song of the open world, caught and imprisoned in a polished music box—and let loose here, again. How odd it seemed! How sad. And to MacRea, suddenly, how ominous!

It was the song of "white water," the lyric of wild rivers dashing over age-polished rocks in the flecked sunlight of forests. It said:

"To the white water stream
I am going back again,
It is so beautiful!
I plunge myself deep down.
I have loved thee for so long,
I never can forget——"

It was only when Maillard and Captain Tessier came up that MacRea could enter the dim, cool recesses of the long storeroom.

Maillard was laughing.

"It is only a phonograph," he said.

And that was sure. There was no one there. The instrument sang on, alone. MacRea had heard it for a long time. Over and over it sang, the same song.

And Angevine?

Maillard came down from the stairs where he had climbed to the living room.

"Little Bird! Angevine!" he called.

The phonograph alone answered him:

"A la claire fontaine,
M'en allant promener——"

Maillard, with an impatient gesture, went over and reached out his hand to stop the whirling disk with its automatic repeater, but Captain Tessier called out to him.

"Wait! There is a sign!"

He pointed to a bit of newly polished maple wood in a curious position on the top of the cabinet.

"Ah!" breathed Maillard, and he nodded, for he too knew the Indian symbols. The maple totem stick was laid on a bit of birch bark, curled into a cylinder, and stood on its end. The maple stick rested with its sharp end just on the edge of the cylinder. This end pointed to the northwest.

"You see?" asked Captain Tessier.

"Yes, I see. 'A long journey to the northwest!' But the totem says something——"

Maillard had not looked at MacRea. The young man had eyes only for the bit of carved wood.

Captain Tessier still did not seem to wish to remove the stick. The wood was wet as if from the river.

"I'll ask the Indian who made it," he said and went outside.

MacRea followed, silently. Maillard placed a hand upon his shoulder and walked beside him, thoughtfully.

Chief Whittle-stick at first was noncommittal. Finally he grunted an answer to Tessier's insistent demand for an explanation, but it was cryptic.

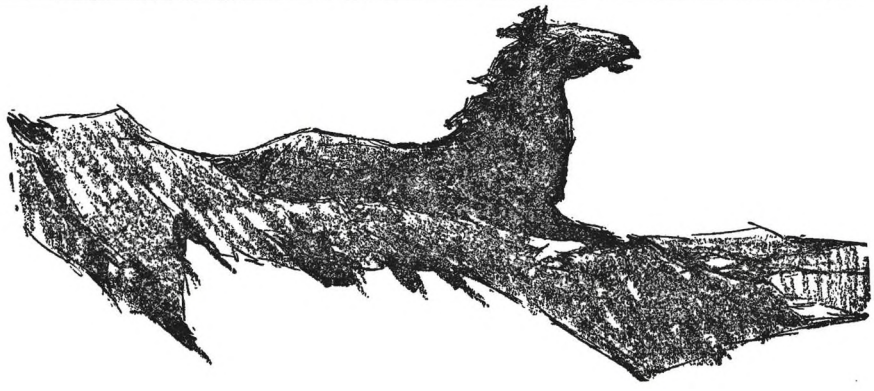
"Me give totem to Petite Oiseau," he said. "Totem make strong medicine for man in rivaire. Him can't drown."

MacRea turned away suddenly, and plodded down the crooked hill road to the wharf:

"Il y a longtemps que je t'aime;
Jamais je ne t'oublierai——"

The ceaseless song pursued him.

"In the spring the Red Gods make medicine."



Legend of Navajo

By HENRY HERBERT KNIBBS

DARK in the herd they found him—and there were few to know—
The legend horse of desert land,
Where framed in turquoise twilight stand,
The hills of Navajo.

Bright as a silken flame outflung, more beautiful was he
Than woman's wanton loveliest;
God, laughing, shaped his mighty crest,
Arched like the breaking sea.

His proud feet shod with silver from blue Tusayan's height;
His mane the black surge of the pines,
Tossed by the wind when no star shines,
And thunder shakes the night.

The sharp hills melted into space, the desert winds were still;
With head upreared in challenge swift,
The legend horse, Tusayan's gift,
Trumpeted wild and shrill.

Down the dim reaches fled the herd, a far wind-driven dust;
Alone he held against their fear,
Like a grim warrior's trenchant spear,
Poised for an instant thrust.

The swart priests, circling, chanted prayer, naming a tribal need
Learned at the hidden hogan fire,
Where fasting and high hope aspire
To touch the sacred steed.

Yet never plaint nor prayer could hold that sire of lineage high;
Intolerant his scornful stride,
Spurned the dull earth; his image died
Against the desert sky.

And he the beautiful was gone. . . . Still faces, silent men,
High on the hills of Navajo,
Watch the wild horses come and go,
Yet he comes not again.

Thirty Pieces of Silver

By Albert W. Tolman

Author of "The Sentence," and other stories.

There are circumstances in which the wealth of Crœsus is worth no more than thirty pieces of silver.

HE really was the originator of the serum cure for tuberculosis. Doctor Sylvanus W. Murgetroyd had spent twenty years in working up to his great discovery. Yet Doctor Sylvanus W. Murgetroyd is the only one of the hundred-and-fifty-odd thousand physicians in the country who is unable to practice his cure on an invalid.

This is because he had his price. He sold himself for thirty pieces of silver; and he did not get the silver. Instead, he got forty-nine thousand-dollar certificates of the Universal Serum Company.

At Doctor Murgetroyd's twenty-fifth year-stone on the highroad of medicine the way split in twain. To the right it ran straight, narrow and very rough; clouds overhung it but beyond them shone a bright light. The left branch wound smoothly through a pleasant land, but plunged at last into gray vapors.

Beside the right-hand road stood a woman in flowing robes, like a Greek goddess. She extended a laurel wreath; otherwise her hands were empty.

By the sinister road crouched an undersized man in a gabardine, swarthy, aquiline-nosed, with averted eyes and features unutterably remorseful, proffering a bag that clinked. His head drooped sidewise and a rope mark ringed his neck. His face was among those in Da Vinci's "Last Supper."

It is more than probable that Murgetroyd's eyes were veiled, so that he saw neither the figures, nor the light at the end of the first road nor the murky clouds over the second. Undoubtedly, however, he beheld the laurel and the bag of silver; and he knew that if he chose one he must leave the other. He could not take both.

He made his choice, or rather it was made for him by the man, molded by hopes and ambitions cherished for twenty years. All that time, as he experimented in his little laboratory, he heard the sputter of his bubbling test tubes swell and deepen to the roar of London and Paris and Vienna; in the steam he saw the Alps and the Appennines, castles, cathedrals, minarets, a fast yacht, a country house, honors, medals.

It was because he continually envisaged those things for himself, instead of picturing health and life for others, because he preferred his own personal unit to the grand human total, that the thing chronicled hereafter happened to him.

Not lightly should a man desire to solve

vital problems. A great discovery means a great responsibility to the race; and it is not always a pleasant thing for the discoverer. He who delves into the mysteries of life and death should be content with the laurel wreath. When he demands more, when he seeks to coin profit for himself out of human suffering, he does so at his peril.

In the year of our Lord one thousand nine hundred and twenty—— Sylvanus Murgetroyd, M. D., found himself in a most peculiar and unpleasant situation. He was damnably hard up, in fact so harassed by debt as to be incapable of his best work, being on the crumbling edge of bankruptcy. Yet he had in his possession a secret whose value was inestimable. Though he had secured it honestly by dint of hard, patient investigation, he was forbidden by a tyrant called Professional Ethics from using it for his own benefit. He was like a drowning man, who, while having all he can do to keep his head above water and swim for the shore, is suddenly presented by some ironic fate with a heavy bag of gold.

Murgetroyd was an able, clear-headed, money-loving bachelor with a large general practice. His two hobbies were his laboratory investigations and his desire to make a good showing. His courtesy was outside polish, veneer. He had few close friends. He was strong on the intellectual side but weak on the human and spiritual.

If his will had been stronger he would have faced the bankruptcy court; if weaker he would have put a pistol to his head or taken an overdose of morphine. But in either case he would have first given his discovery to the world.

His family was aristocratic and had once been wealthy. He had supplemented his university and medical course by finishing off at London and Leipsic. He started in practice with the idea that at any cost he must keep up appearances. In pursuance of this ideal he had hung round his neck a miscellaneous assortment of millstones: an expensive suite of offices; membership in two exclusive clubs; a high-priced automobile and colored chauffeur; and other minor desirables. He learned early that blueness of blood could not make up for fewness of dollars.

Needing much money, he naturally became involved in speculation. Before he realized it he found himself off the solid road and on the morass that paralleled it, following the stock market, leaping from tussock to tussock, labeled "Copper," "Rubber," "Oil." Every time he lifted his foot to extricate himself, he put it down in a softer spot and sank a little deeper.

The figures in which he could write his check had steadily decreased. And all the time he had in his pocket a priceless jewel, which he could neither mortgage nor sell.

One morning Murgetroyd got a lawyer's letter. It was the first legal dun he had ever received and it sent a cold shiver down his aristocratic spine. Somehow he had felt himself different from the common ruck of men. He had sued; but he had never been sued. Now he understood something of the feelings of his debtors and a sense of dismay came over him. He read the communication through from "Dear Sir" to "Yours truly." It demanded immediate payment of a bill of one hundred and thirteen dollars for repairs on his automobile. Otherwise something vaguely terrible would happen.

One hundred and thirteen dollars! Murgetroyd laughed mirthlessly. Why, he had only thirteen dollars and twenty cents on his checking account and the month was not half over. He could not send out any bills to patients now. He felt angered, insulted, stung to the quick. Of course the amount was a long time overdue; but that did not matter.

Yet what should he do? He could never afford to let suit be brought. He got out his accounts and figured up the amount needed to put him on his feet. The total astounded him. It was nearly five thousand dollars!

Five thousand dollars! For ten minutes he stared at the blank wall, but saw nothing. Then, suddenly, he thought of George Nelling. Yes; perhaps Nelling would help him out.

Nelling was a wealthy wholesale grocer, one of Murgetroyd's patients, and almost his only intimate outside the profession. It was a strange friendship, hardly more than a mental association; for the two men were utterly unlike. Yet Nelling appealed to something in him and he to something in Nelling.

The grocer had come up from the bottom round of the financial and social ladder. He had started thirty years before, candling eggs and ripening bananas by gasoline in the basement of a little produce store near the water front. Now he rode in his limousine,

and could write his check in six figures. He knew the pedigree of every dollar he had.

That evening after office hours, Murgetroyd, dressed fastidiously as was his wont, with tall silk hat and pink in buttonhole, went over to Nelling's house fully determined to lay his difficulties before the grocer and ask for a loan. In his immediate need he had entirely forgotten his great discovery.

Nelling welcomed him cordially in his library. He was shrewd, bluff, good-natured, coarse-grained.

"Have a perfecto, Murgetroyd! Gonzales, who sells me bananas, has a plantation outside Santiago. Always sends me a dozen boxes Christmas. Nothing like 'em round here!"

They *were* good. The two smoked, the physician biding his time. In Nelling's presence he realized the delicacy of his errand and the importance of striking at the psychological moment.

They became quite confidential. Nelling bragged of his successes. Murgetroyd adroitly led him on. He complimented the cigars, and asked for another. He smoothed Nelling the right way until the grocer had purred himself to the height of good humor. The doctor told of his hopes and ambitions, while Nelling smoked and smiled indulgently.

At last the time was ripe, at least as ripe as it ever would be. Murgetroyd pulled himself together and launched a blow straight from the shoulder for the point of the business man's jaw.

"Nelling, will you lend me five thousand dollars?"

The grocer had just been laughing at one of his own jokes. The jolt jarred him speechless. He glared at Murgetroyd in hurt amazement, a look, almost of fear, in his eyes. Unexpected wrinkles creased his tallowy jowls. Then he understood: Murgetroyd was joking. He exploded in relief.

"Lend you five thousand? Ha! Ha! Ha!"

But Murgetroyd's face remained serious. Nelling saw. Speculation, distrust, hardened his features. The doctor was in earnest; he was no longer a friend, but a suppliant. Nelling grew quiet; his boast, his bluff, were gone. Friendship was one thing, business another. He never mixed the two. His voice was brassy.

"What security can you offer?"

Murgetroyd named the stocks, mines and patents into which he had poured his money. Pitying contempt crept into Nelling's eyes. He disposed of the lot with a wave of his hand.

"Rubbish! No earthly good! What's your practice worth? What are your expenses?"

The doctor went into detail, red-faced. It was humiliating but unavoidable. Nelling shook his head.

"H'm! H'm! Looks to me as if you wouldn't be any better able to pay five years from to-day than you are now. Sorry, Murgetroyd, mighty sorry! But I'm afraid I can't think of it. You're a good fellow, a darned good fellow. But that doesn't get you anywhere with a bank."

The prospect of his only hope slipping away almost nauseated the physician. Then he remembered his discovery. He had not intended to say anything about it at present. But he must summon every resource; that is, if he hoped to raise the wind. So he told Nelling.

The grocer was interested. Decidedly. His little eyes twinkled. He put Murgetroyd through a searching cross-examination. Any failures? Only in the most extreme cases. Good! H'm! H'm! And what was he going to do with it?

Throw it open to the profession! Nelling's lips parted incredulously. What! Give it away for nothing? After spending so many years of work! The grocer scowled. It offended his business instincts.

He brought his hand down on the doctor's knee.

"Murgetroyd, you're a fool! Here's your chance to make a killing. Why don't you keep your formula a secret, advertise its results to beat the band, start a private hospital and take patients from all over the world? If you do that in a few years none of us'd have anything on you."

Murgetroyd explained painstakingly that the ethics of his calling forbade it. A physician who had made a discovery was supposed to give it freely to the profession. Nelling snorted disgustedly.

"Yes!" he exploded. "For others better situated than you are to increase their piles while you go to the wall! Bankrupt and giving away a gold mine! Murgetroyd, you must be crazy!"

He started to his feet, and began pacing the room.

"Your gush about professional ethics

gives me a pain in my appendix. Why, there's more jealousy among you doctors than there is among the singers in a country church choir. Most of you'd a good deal rather not have a new cure found at all, unless you could discover it yourselves. The profession! Huh! A hell of a pile they care about you! What did they do to the man that invented ether? Let him die in the poorhouse, didn't they? The public! Friends! Your best friend is your bank account."

Stopping before Murgetroyd, he emphasized his remarks with his index finger.

"Five thousand dollars! No, sir! Not five thousand mills! Even if I had been inclined to help you, what you've told me about that cure would put a stopper on me. Hard up as the devil and ready to throw away a fortune by letting everybody else into it! A man with as little judgment and common sense as that'd never be able to pay the interest on a loan, let alone the principal. No, no, Murgetroyd! Not for mine!"

He spoke more deliberately.

"But I'll tell you what I'll do. Guarantee to keep this cure secret for ten years, and let me and some of my friends in on it, and we'll organize a corporation and finance a private hospital with you at its head. That'll put you on your feet. There's your chance. What do you say?"

Again the doctor pleaded professional ethics. Nelling pooh-poohed his objections.

"Why shouldn't you reap the reward of your labors? Men do in other lines. Doesn't the government grant patents to inventors? Keep it secret until you've got enough back to make up for the time and expense you've put in. Then throw it open. What's wrong in that?"

Murgetroyd still objected, but more weakly. Nelling brusquely cut him short.

"Don't turn down your only chance. It looks to me as if the referee in bankruptcy'd be holding a coroner's inquest on you before long if you don't grab this plank to swim ashore on. Take a few days to think it over. Meanwhile I'll sound my friends."

The physician did think; and the longer he thought the stronger grew the temptation. It was impersonal ethics against personal bankruptcy. He thought of Nelling's limousine and his power to draw six-figure checks. Before this he had looked down on the new rich. Now he realized keenly that even new money was preferable to none at all. His own bank account had reached the vanishing point. He was in the last ditch.

On the morrow came another bill, this time for ninety-seven dollars for an antique mahogany chair. The first dun was still unanswered. Others, he knew, were impending. A panic seized Murgetroyd. He saw himself sinking, overwhelmed. There was only one way to safety.

All that night he battled with himself, lying awake with staring eyes trying to read the future. The next evening he went to Nelling's house.

The grocer eyed him sharply as he entered the library. Murgetroyd refused the customary perfecto. The crisis was too serious for smoking. He came abruptly to the point.

"Nelling," he blurted with an effort, "I've decided to go in with you on that hospital."

"Good enough!"

Nelling wrung his hand heartily.

"You've got some sense after all. I was afraid your foolish ideas would keep you out of a good thing. Now we'll get down to business. I've already mentioned this to some of my friends; and it appeals to 'em, though it's a new kind of gamble for all of us. They're mostly five-figure men, though at pinch two could go higher. I'll have 'em here to-morrow night."

At the appointed time Murgetroyd met the financiers at Nelling's house. Including their host, they were seven. It was a different gathering from any the doctor had ever attended before. Instinctively he felt himself in the atmosphere of money.

"Now, Murgetroyd," exhorted Nelling briskly, the formalities over, "we're from Missouri. Show us."

Murgetroyd did. He went carefully into details, told what he had done, what he could do. His audience listened breathlessly. Then they began questioning him. The searching keenness of their queries, their evident distrust, their determination to reduce everything to a dollar basis was somewhat irritating to the physician.

Nelling smoothed his ruffled spirits.

"No offense, Murgetroyd! Don't be so touchy. It's business; that's all. We measure things with a different yardstick from the one you've been in the habit of using. My friends only want to be sure we're not handing 'em a gold brick. I'd do just the same with them."

Murgetroyd swallowed his vexation and kept on. His hearers listened intently. Their eyes glowed, not at what the discovery would mean to the world but at the prospect of personal gain. The doctor sickened but he dared not stop, for he remembered how much he had at stake.

Nelling condescended to act as his advocate.

"Boys, it's a dead cinch! Consumptives'll come from all over the world to be cured. It'll be better than a gold mine."

Murgetroyd answered their questions. Then the capitalists discussed the project in dollars and cents. Nelling talked profanely, the others more smoothly, but by circuitous routes all arrived at the same objective—how much was there in it for them?

To the wealthiest man, Bonner, the doctor took a particular dislike. He preferred Nelling's blunt, outspoken profanity to Bonner's smug hypocrisy.

What would his professional friends, Snow, Wilberforce, Cannell, think, if they could hear this conversation!

Bonner licked his lips.

"Yes, Murgetroyd, I guess you've got the goods. It ought to be a big thing. What interests us is how much it'll cut up for. Before we back you, we must be sure of that."

Then he outlined what lay in the brain behind his steely blue eyes.

"Doctor, I want you to treat five consumptives, previously examined by some physician unknown to you. If at the end of three months he pronounces these patients cured or markedly improved it's a deal. Otherwise not. Agreeable?"

Obedient to a wink from Nelling, Murgetroyd forced himself to smile assent.

"Perfectly fair. That suits me."

But secretly he felt a sick panic. Three months! He would go bankrupt in less than one.

The conclave broke up. Nelling's meaning touch on his shoulder detained the physician.

"I believe you'll make good, Murgetroyd," said the grocer. "Will two thousand tide you over?"

Relief robbed the doctor of words. He could only gasp and stutter. Nelling grinned understandingly as he wrote the check.

"Here's your life preserver."

Three months soon pass. Among his many new patients Murgetroyd had no means of identifying the five test cases. At last the two thousand dollars were gone. He was sinking again. Doubt tormented him. He knew he had succeeded; but could he convince the others?

When almost at the end of his rope, he received a phone from Nelling.

"Come to my house to-night."

Somehow Murgetroyd found the way. His legs trembled as he climbed the granite steps. All the financiers were present, and with them a stranger.

Bonner acted as spokesman. Like a prisoner listening to the verdict of a jury foreman, the physician hung on his words.

"Murgetroyd," announced Bonner, "you're a winner. Our doctor has pronounced your cures marvelous. We're ready to tie up with you. Mr. Feinberg," indicating the solemn lawyer, "will draw the papers."

The transaction was gone over microscopically. In consideration of Murgetroyd's conveying to the Universal Serum Company all rights of every sort in the cure, and of binding himself never to use it without the corporation's consent—a detail insisted on by Bonner—he was to be paid ten thousand dollars in cash and to receive forty-nine per cent of the capital stock. The remaining fifty-one per cent was to be allotted to the men who furnished the money. Murgetroyd was to be surgeon in chief at a salary of ten thousand dollars a year. It was decided to be the better policy not to patent the formula but to keep it secret.

"One thing you want to realize, Murgetroyd," said Bonner. "We're going to plank a hundred thousand down on your word. It isn't like real estate. You could let this cure get out if you wanted to. We might make it unpleasant for you; but we couldn't stop others from using it. So we're in your hands."

The meeting adjourned. Apparently everybody was well pleased. Only Murgetroyd felt uneasy. He foresaw what would come when his medical brethren learned about the sanitarium.

The next day he received his check for ten thousand dollars. He repaid Nelling two thousand and deposited the remainder on his bank account. He experienced the luxury, long unknown, of paying all his debts and of meeting accruing bills with spot cash. He even went so far as to invest in a limousine as good as Nelling's.

Meanwhile Nelling and his friends, forming with Murgetroyd the board of directors of the new company, carefully mapped out their campaign. The doctor soon found that as a director he counted but little. It was made plain to him from the start that the venture was to be run on financial principles, not in accordance with medical ethics.

The terms of his contract put him absolutely under control by the board. He was directed to perform all the cures he could during the next six months and then to stop taking personal patients and to treat only through the hospital. He was to talk freely with newspaper men on all points except the composition of his serum.

Some things about this program displeased Murgetroyd. So much advertising was sure to get him into trouble with the other members of his profession; also, keeping the serum secret would expose him to unfavorable comment, especially after it became noised about that his cures were sure and permanent.

He ventured to remonstrate on these points with the grocer, but found cold comfort. Nelling rebuked him sharply for meddling.

"You're not a business man, doctor; I am. Stick to your pills and powders and let us handle the dollar end."

Murgetroyd subsided, though far from satisfied. The collar galled his neck; even though of gold it was still a collar. But he saw no way to throw it off. So he consoled himself with the dream of European trips galore and the prospect of being able to draw checks in six figures.

Patients thronged his office. He was obliged to engage the services of two younger physicians. Nelling grinned delightedly when he called one day on Murgetroyd and saw the waiting crowd.

"Just what we want! Keep at it. We'll rush our end along."

And Murgetroyd hated himself all the rest of the day.

The fame of his cures was spreading, as it of necessity must under the vigorous advertising campaign inaugurated by his associates. He writhed at the huge black headlines under which his fame was paraded before the country. At last he hardly dared to take up a newspaper.

A good place for a sanitarium had been purchased and was being fitted up on a large scale. It was an old estate near the city, with a spacious house and plenty of land for extra buildings and cottages. No expense was to be spared, as it was desired to draw a wealthy class of patients. It would cost considerably over a hundred thousand to equip the institution. The required sum was loaned the corporation by its directors on a mortgage of the property.

"When are you going to give your serum to the profession, Murgetroyd?" asked his friends.

Murgetroyd put them off evasively. He needed more time to experiment, to make sure. He was not quite ready. He did not wish to be too hasty, to raise unfounded hopes. His friends looked askance at the advertising and the crowds of patients and shook their heads.

He noticed a growing coolness on the part of his fellow physicians. Some actually cut him. He tried to cheat himself by attributing it to jealousy. He took long spins in his automobile. He enjoyed the pleasure of dipping into his bank account without fear of touching its bottom.

One of his old professors in the medical school remonstrated kindly with him.

"Murgetroyd, you must remember that your serum is based on the work of hundreds of obscure men, each of whom has contributed some one thing without which you would have been unable to do what you have done. Had these men kept their discoveries secret, instead of throwing them open to the world, you would never have been able to develop your cure. It is your plain duty to give it to the profession. You have no right to coin suffering into dollars."

The old man almost pleaded with him, then went away sadly, shaking his head. The interview left Murgetroyd ill at ease. He was really sorry he had signed that contract; but it was now too late for regret. He took a longer ride than usual to recover his poise and was held up by the police and fined for speeding.

The International Sanitarium went on to completion. One thing Murgetroyd was thankful for; the institution was not to bear his name. His associates had seen to that.

One day a former friend thrust a pamphlet contemptuously into his hand. Its cover bore the hospital's name in large letters, and he himself was exploited in numerous places as the discoverer of the cure. Testimonials from his patients were included. Murgetroyd writhed. He understood now why

Nelling and the others had been so eager to secure a duplicate list of all his cases.

Murgetroyd sought Nelling.

"No," replied the grocer to his angry remonstrances, "we thought it better not to say anything to you about this advertising. We figured that a hospital can't be run successfully unless the people to be reached know something about it. We had determined to put the thing through and we didn't care to be bothered by any foolish objections."

Murgetroyd protested; he grew red in the face; he swore. Nelling only laughed; then he too became angry.

"No use, doctor! I'm busy. Let's cut this short."

The hospital was now nearly finished. The directors held a meeting one evening at Nelling's. Murgetroyd was there by request, though he would much rather have stayed away. He had the sense of being a mere puppet. He felt a growing hostility to the others, and they to him. They belonged to different types. At any time smoldering dislike was liable to flame into open conflict.

Friction developed early in the meeting. Murgetroyd differed from his associates on the charge to be made the patients. The doctor favored setting it at the lowest reasonable figure; the others insisted that it should be made as high as it could be without frightening patients away, "as high as the traffic will bear," as Bonner phrased it. To Murgetroyd the attitude of his fellow directors seemed callous even to brutality. They cared nothing for human weal; they were looking only for profits.

During the discussion the doctor used the words, "My cure." Bonner took him up.

"Drop that 'my.' It isn't your cure any longer. It belongs to the company. So far as you are concerned, when this six months is over you won't have any more right to practice it personally than the Sultan of Turkey. You own just forty-nine hundredths of it, not a fraction more."

Murgetroyd was not used to such talk. A sharp retort rose to the doctor's lips. Bonner anticipated it. He rejoiced in a chance to take the other down.

"What are you kicking about, anyway? Who's paying for that new automobile of yours? Wasn't it our money? We're not in this for fun or philanthropy. It's a hard, square, clean-cut business proposition. We've invested in it just as we would in any other business and we intend to run it the same way. We haven't even got to hire you after the first year's up unless we want to. Any other doctor would do as well. Of course you've got your stock; but we can outvote you and handle the thing just as we please, and we're going to do it. When it comes to that, the rest of us are a unit. We've thrashed it all out among ourselves and we've decided to stand together. Sentiment's one thing; business another. You didn't have to accept our proposition or our money. You could have given this to the world if you'd been fool enough to."

"I wish to God I had!" interjected Murgetroyd.

"Well, you didn't; so there's no use whining about it now. Play the game like a man. Before we get through, the rest of us may be as sorry as you, and a sight sorrier. We've got more at stake than you have."

Relations were strained during the remainder of the meeting. After it broke up Nelling took the doctor aside. The grocer was evidently disturbed.

"One word to you, Murgetroyd. We're all in the same boat. Don't rock it."

Murgetroyd went home, his brain boiling. He hated his fellow directors. He loathed the hospital. He was heartily sick of the whole enterprise. He longed even for his debts. Freedom, purchased at such a price, came too high.

He found waiting for him at his office a letter bearing the seal of the County Medical Association. He suspected what it was as he tore it open. He was not mistaken. A brief note from the secretary informed him that he had been expelled from the organization for unprofessional conduct.

To deaden his feelings, Murgetroyd threw himself into his practice, finding some consolation in the scores whom he was sending away, practically cured. But soon this solace would be taken from him, for his six months were almost up.

Another directors' meeting was held at Nelling's. The hospital was almost ready to open its doors. Its staff had already been engaged. After a discussion of routine matters they were almost ready to adjourn when Murgetroyd threw a bombshell among them.

"I suppose of course we'll have a free clinic for the poor."

The free clinic was something he had taken for granted. It was his only hope of

preserving his self-respect. He had not specified it when the contract was drawn, for he was in no position to make terms; but had not supposed that the directors would object. Should no such provision be made he knew the howl that would go up from the profession and the press.

There was a dead silence. Three or four of the directors frowned and glanced toward Nelling. An uncomfortable flush covered the grocer's face. He squirmed uneasily.

"H—m! H—m! The board have decided that for the present it will be inadvisable to start a free clinic. In view of the amount that has been invested, it seems wise that the institution should first bend every energy toward getting some return. After we are on a solid basis, and in the judgment of the directors the time is ripe, we shall undoubtedly be in a position to take some charity patients. Until then, not."

This was too much. Murgetroyd went off the handle.

"Then I wash my hands of the whole matter——"

Bonner interrupted him, a cold smile on his face.

"Hold on, Murgetroyd! Listen to me. It isn't the clinic we care so much for; it's the principle. Either you're going to run this hospital or the board of directors is; and I've a hunch it'll be the board. We've got to settle that now and settle it right. We're going to hold you to your contract, Murgetroyd. We paid something to have it drawn water-tight; and it's copper-fastened, double-riveted and headed. Two things we've decided on flatly: you've got to serve, at least for a while; and at present there'll be no free clinics. If you refuse we'll brand you round the globe for a welsher. You've assented to our terms, taken our money, and now decline to fulfill your part of the agreement. You don't dare to squeal."

His jaws clicked together. He looked defiantly at Murgetroyd. The doctor rose, pale and quivering with wrath. He cast an inclusive glance about the board, and shook his fist.

"Damn you all!" he said, very low, and started out.

Bonner replied for the others.

"Thanks! The same to you, and many of 'em. Give us back our hundred thousand and we'll call it quits."

Many lives go out in six months—millions the world over. One week before the term expired, when the hospital was almost ready to receive patients, and Murgetroyd had received orders to take no more private cases, he came alone to Nelling's house after a sleepless night. Dark circles ringed his eyes. His nerve was gone.

"For God's sake, Nelling," he begged, "give this back to me so that I can give it to the world. I've had the same dream again and again of thousands coming to me, praying, beseeching, fathers, mothers, little children, holding out their hands to me to save them. I can see their faces now, their eyes and hollow cheeks. I can hear them coughing. I'll go crazy if I have many more nights like the last few. I feel as if I were lying off a sinking ship in a lifeboat and selling chances to drowning men. Every day I put off turning this over to the profession thousands of people are dying who might have been saved. God! It'll drive me mad!"

Nelling eyed him with cold disgust.

"Come, come, Murgetroyd! Cut out the hysterics! Don't go into theatricals. They won't get you anywhere with this bunch. Your conscience wasn't so tender until after you got our money. So far as the free clinic goes I'd be willing; but Bonner won't listen to it. He doesn't like you and he swings the others. Remember my friends and I have put a clean hundred thousand into this. You couldn't pay it back in a million years. The only way we'll ever see it again is by going ahead and getting our hospital running. Pull yourself together. *I* haven't lost any sleep yet."

Murgetroyd continued his protestations. Nelling became angry.

"If I'd realized you were such a piker, I'd never have touched the thing. You got us in and now you want to scuttle the ship. All right! Put us ashore first. Give us back our hundred thousand."

Murgetroyd shut up. He felt the force of the argument. He could do nothing. He determined to send in his resignation, to go away, to bury himself; then he remembered he could not. His contract! He was bound to work for the Universal Serum Company ten years, unless the directors should release him sooner. He must let the thing drag out to its bitter end.

The iron was eating into his soul. Thirty pieces of silver!

The hospital was to open Thursday; the directors were to hold a final meeting

Wednesday evening. The doctor was now barely on speaking terms with his associates. On Tuesday night he did not close his eyes.

Free clinic, or no free clinic? The question would not down. He fought it over with himself. From either point of view the situation appeared hopeless.

Suppose he buckled. Suppose he bowed his neck to the yoke. He would have no independence. He would be a mere house doctor, absolutely sold into bondage, a paid official, a cog in a dividend machine, his brain, his hands, the property of the corporation. A slave for ten years! He did not own the hospital; the hospital owned him; and there was a vast difference between the two things.

But what if he stood out? What if he refused to serve, unless some provision were made for free patients?

The directors wanted him at the start; they might yield temporarily but in the end they would win. They were fighters, every one. What could he do against them? They had the whip hand, money, votes, legal power. What had he? Only his will.

They would dispense with his services just as soon as the institution could run without him. They had the formula of the cure in Nelling's safe. Even now he was not absolutely necessary. At a pinch some other man could be engaged to fill his place.

And if they dropped him—what then?

His reputation was gone. He had lost caste with the profession; not a doctor would have anything to do with him. His general practice had dwindled to nothing. His contract even forbade him to use his own cure outside the hospital.

Financially, too, he was on the rocks. Looking ahead to a good salary and salving his conscience for what he was about to do at a high charge in the sanitarium he had treated his own patients for six months at a ridiculously low figure. Although he had no debts, his bank account was almost as small as it had been before he approached Nelling.

What should he do? He came to the meeting Wednesday night in a state of miserable indecision.

Unexpectedly as a flash from the blue, the bolt fell.

Hagan, one of the directors, came in a little late. His face was pale and anxious. He threw an evening paper on the table.

"Look at this!"

In flaring headlines it was announced that a Polish physician had discovered a serum for tuberculosis and had given it freely to the world!

There was a moment of breathless silence.

"Read it to us, Bonner," said Nelling.

In a voice that rang hollow Bonner read. The article chronicled the life of the discoverer. It told of his persistent industry, his heroic endurance of poverty, his triumphant sacrifice of self for the sake of humanity. The climax of his labors postdated Murgetroyd's by three months.

The room rocked around Murgetroyd as he listened. A sharp pain lanced his brain. Yes, the treatment was identical with his own. He saw plainly what that meant. His years of painstaking investigation were gone. His name was gone. He was leaving off at the end; the other man was just beginning.

He had betrayed his profession; he had sold himself for thirty pieces of silver; and now he was about to be cheated out of the silver. The laurel that might have decked his brow had gone to another, more deserving.

If he claimed the credit for the discovery he must reveal his connection with the company; and he would become an object of contempt, of derision, a laughingstock for future generations, as a man who had sold himself for money and then failed to get it. No; his lips were forever padlocked. He bowed his head. His doom was just.

As Bonner finished there was a moment of silence while the directors digested the unwelcome news. Then came a babble of angry talk. Evidently it was no use to keep on with the hospital and try to charge a high fee for what every country doctor would in a short time be able to do for his own patients without expense of travel and at a tithe of the cost. They must wind up the business and dissolve the corporation before it got in any deeper.

Bonner had his last conflict with Murgetroyd.

"You? You? What do we care about you! Where do we get off? That's the only thing that interests me. Our stock isn't worth a red cent and we've lost thousands of dollars. Serves us right for being fools enough to butt into a scheme like this. Damn that Pole!"

Murgetroyd rose, leaving the others to fight it out, to salvage what they could from

the wreck. Nobody but Nelling said a word of farewell. The grocer followed him to the door.

"Some of the boys suspect you may have put that fellow wise to get even with us. But I know better. You're in too tight a place yourself to do that. Well, it's every man for himself now. We've got to swim ashore the best way we can."

As Murgetroyd went down Nelling's steps for the last time, and struck northward through the rain, he almost laughed. The Polish physician's discovery spelled ruin to him. It spelled disaster to his associates; but Murgetroyd was not exulting over that. They had adventured their money freely, understandingly; they had lost. They were entitled to little sympathy.

In the thought of the countless lives that would be saved he disregarded his own misfortune. For the first time in months he could forget self and be glad. He was stripped; but there remained for him years of service, free, uncollared. He must build up a practice again in a strange city, working not for self but for the happiness and advancement of humanity.

A great gladness filled his heart. A great light shone round him. He did not damn the Pole. In the last six months he had grown in human sympathy, he had learned that he had a soul.

And this is how Doctor Sylvanus W. Murgetroyd chose the thirty pieces of silver instead of the laurel, and got neither the silver nor the laurel.

THE WINNING THOUGHT

HERE'S good news for the men who want to put more speed into their rush to the top. It has been demonstrated by the scientists that you can marvelously increase your all-round efficiency by schooling yourself to think constructively. By constructive thinking is meant thought about the cheerful and profitable things. The failures in life are those who think dismally and disagreeably. Your thoughts and feelings regulate your ability.

A guinea pig has been killed by being inoculated with a drop of perspiration taken from the forehead of a man when he was in a towering rage. Infants have been poisoned to death by being at their mothers' breasts when the mothers gave way to great anger. Fear has often produced jaundice, apoplexy and death. So great is the destructive effect of sorrow that in a night it has given a woman heart disease and turned a man's hair white. Even momentary anger frequently causes nausea. An angry word to a horse from his trainer has increased the animal's heartbeats ten a minute. A French scientist tells of healing a lesion by autosuggestion, and autosuggestion is nothing but teaching another how to think along prescribed lines. A well-known journalist cured his daily headache by overcoming his jealousy of a fellow writer.

These examples are enough to illustrate the profound psychology in the inspired pronouncement, "As a man thinketh, so is he." Sickly thoughts and feelings produce sickly bodies and fettered spirits. The dominion of the mind over the body is lordly and unbounded. Learn how to think effectively and you have your feet in the path that leads to victory. The extent of your success depends alone on the courage and grandeur of your wishes and ambition. The poet who wrote that he was the captain of his soul was merely predicting what the psychologists and scientists were to discover in their laboratories in these early years of the twentieth century.

The money you will make, the influence you will exercise over your fellows, the greatness of your reputation, all these can be regulated by yourself. Your whole career comes from within you, from the storehouse of your thoughts. Realize your power, expect nothing but ultimate success, think always of the bright, brave side of life, wrest your thoughts away from the dark and discordant the moment such an idea is given you, and the result is certain. You will make a success of your job and of your life.

A Chat With You

A MAN who works on a daily paper has one advantage over us. He may put the final period to his efforts long past midnight and, if he is keen enough about it to sit up and watch, may see the early risers, or the late ones as the case may be, reading his stuff about two or three a. m.

This is peculiarly true if he has been covering a big fight, a noisy divorce case, or a murder in which the principals are apparently respectable. If he writes editorials, or book reviews, or things like this he won't have the thrill. The first page and the sporting page are for the eager ones who read in public. Those who read book reviews, editorial chat and selections of this sort, do so, apparently, in the secrecy of their chambers and by stealth.

* * * *

FOR us, the stuff we write has long grown cold and frozen before any one begins to read it. The country is large and it takes a considerable time to print and distribute a magazine of national circulation. Just now the haze of an unusually late and warm Indian summer still haunts the air. "The mountains," as Harry Knibbs has put it, "are hid in silver mist, the valleys are like amethyst, the poplar trees they turn and twist, oh silver, silver green!" By the time you get this magazine in your hands over most of the United States and all of Canada stern winter will be closing down with his iron hand, there will be no more mist and amethyst, but hard clear-cut blues and grays, and there will be frost in the air and in the ground

THIS is why getting out the Christmas number of a magazine is somewhat of a problem. The obvious time to begin would be in mid-July or August. But at that season of the year, when the author's high forehead is beaded with perspiration, is it fair, is it right to ask him to tell of biting cold nights and of snow-clad landscapes? How can a man who has just dined on a frigid salad and a glass of iced tea be expected to really put the punch into the description of a jolly dinner for a cold night, with a roast whole sucking pig, with hams stuck with cloves, with brown turkeys stuffed with oysters and chestnuts, with mountains of steaming mashed potatoes and turnips, and with rich, incredibly rich and incredibly hot, plum puddings? While slapping at the mosquitoes and batting away the flies it would be hard and cruel to be forced to describe the frosty, ghostly radiance of the northern lights, and the crisp sound made by the runners of the sleigh as they slide over the hard-crusted snow.

* * * *

NO! There is a better way of getting out a Christmas number, a way not only kinder to the authors but more humane as regards the readers. It is to take Time by the forelock and grasping that forelock tight, to vault nimbly upon his back. It is to get a whole year ahead of the game, to begin in the December of one Christmas to get ready for the one a year hence. Prudent housewives start their Christmas shopping in July and an editor should be even

more forehanded. It is not a compliment to a friend to grasp hurriedly at any gift for him, in the last hour the stores are open on Christmas Eve. This is our theory. How does it work?

* * * *

YOU are to judge for yourself. The Christmas number for 1923 is out in two weeks after you read this. We think that you are going to read it through. We hope that you get the same snap that we got out of it for we honestly liked it all. The complete book-length novel with which the number opens is called "Share and Share Alike," and is by George Parsons Bradford. In the sense that it concerns things happening on the holiday itself, it is not a Christmas novel, but in the sense that it would make a suitable Christmas present for any one who likes to have a good time while he reads—the sleigh of Santa Claus should be piled high with copies of the number containing it.

Here you have the lure of the tropics, red-blooded youth and adventure, a mystery that intrigues and stimulates. Perhaps, like Sam Jefford, the hero of the tale, you have known what it was to stare dully through the same window every day at the same monotonous vista and wish you might be somewhere else, looking through other windows at different scenes. If so, your wish comes true in the enchantment of this swiftly moving story. Here, for Christmas, is your ticket to Martinique, where orchids bloom; here is your passport to the land of romance.

* * * *

SPEAKING of Christmas presents we received a year ago a present of a novel. The giver assured us that it was one of the most delightful books she had ever read. She had paid two dollars for it. We cannot quite describe our feelings as we looked at the title and author's name. It was partly irritation, partly gratified pride—partly a feeling that it was no use to explain things anyway to people. The novel was one we had read before. It had appeared, exactly as it appeared in book form, in THE POPULAR. Should we have told the lady the truth about it? Once or twice we had suggested as modestly as is consistent with our nature that she might find good reading in the magazine. Anyway we didn't tell the whole truth, although what we said was the truth. We said that we knew it was a good story and that we would enjoy reading it. And we did—the second time.

* * * *

BESIDE the novel, there are six out-and-out Christmas stories in the number. The authors are Lynde, Percival Wilde, Latour, H. H. Knibbs, MacLean and Rohde. There is also a funny "Najib" story by Alfred Payson Terhune, a story by Hesketh Prichard, a "Texan Wasp" tale by Dwyer and a baseball story by Montanye.

The number goes to you with our sincere wishes for a Christmas that shall be bright, merry, interesting, stimulating and in every way satisfactory.

The men who are hardest on shoes will tell you why—*Nothing takes the place of Leather!*

MAN has never learned to compete with nature in the manufacture of leather. To-day's leather is far superior to that of even a few years ago—methods of tanning have improved, the fashioning of shoes and other articles of leather has progressed. *But* leather—nature's product—always has been and is to-day supreme. There is nothing like it.

This is what the host of those who are on their feet most will tell you. The veteran policeman, the mail man, the farmer, the soldier, the street-car conductor, the saleswoman, the structural steel worker who depends upon his footwear for a perfect grip on narrow footings far in the air—ask any of them.

They will tell you that for real economy *nothing takes the place of leather.* That for cool comfort and ease—there is nothing like leather.

A veteran police officer, Jacob L. Buchanan, of the Philadelphia city police force, says about shoes of leather:

"New shoes last me five or six months, and then I have them resoled and they are good for the rest of the year. Generally I have them rebuilt once more, and that means another five months' hard wear. When you tramp a beat for hours like I do, you want your feet to feel comfortable, and you don't want to feel the pavement through them. So, I make sure that they have solid leather soles and heels. Nothing else is near so easy on the feet. I have tried other things once or twice; but I stick to leather now."

It is only natural that these men should find, through their practical experience, that "nothing takes the place of leather" for them. Leather is composed of thousands of tiny elastic fibres, tunneled with pores. Muscles can move under leather. Feet can breathe—yet, they are kept warm. That is why leather-shod feet are comfortable—comfortable after hours of walking. And that is why leather wears and wears as nothing else can. Leather is nature's product, nothing can take the place of it.

The Old Shoemaker says:

"A-course, I may be prejudiced. I suppose I am. Ever since I was knee-high I've been working with leather in one way or another and I know there's nothing in the world like it.

"It doesn't seem so long ago that most of my business was making shoes—every stitch, thread and heel-peg was my own.

"I know that I'm out o' the runnin' so far as shoemaking is concerned. I come in on the repairs. Put new soles and heels on them. Leather soles and heels that'll outwear any substitute you can name.

"Yes, I've tried all sorts of things for soles and heels and I've come to the conclusion that when you try to imitate nature or go her one better you're getting in over your head and hands.

"Well, come in again. Will those soles and heels wear? Why, friend, they're leather—real honest leather. There's real comfort in those shoes now and they won't come back to me again for months."

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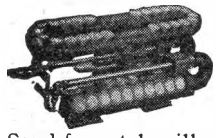

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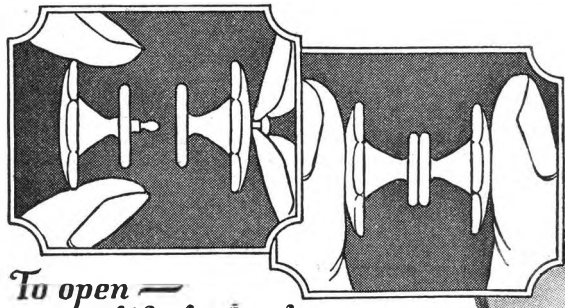

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HE'S hoping for a pair of those popular new Sta-Lokt Links. The kind that press together, lock and *stay locked* until you lift the knob. Then they open easily—instantly. Sta-Lokt is the *perfected* separable cuff link. There are many two-piece links, but only one Sta-Lokt. Be sure and ask for it by name. From $1.50 to $7.00 a pair. Your jeweler will be glad to show them to you. Write for folders of Sta-Lokt designs, including the new Cuff-Line shape.

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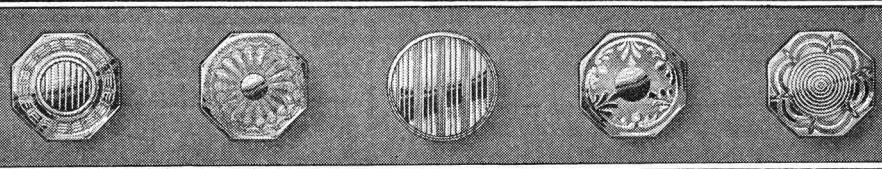

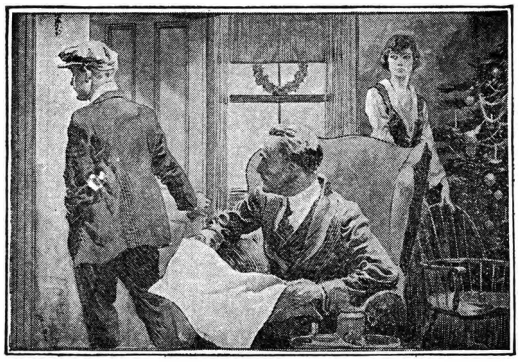

Break down that wall between you and your boy!

That baby whose first smile was directly into your eyes, that toddler who took his first steps with his little hand gripped round your fingers, is he growing away from you?

Now he is weighing, judging, making his own conclusions. Each careless rebuff cautions him to build a wall of reserve against ridicule. Each misunderstanding builds the wall higher and thicker.

Between the ages of 10 and 20, what boys most need is association with fellows and men of strong character, who understand them and whom they understand.

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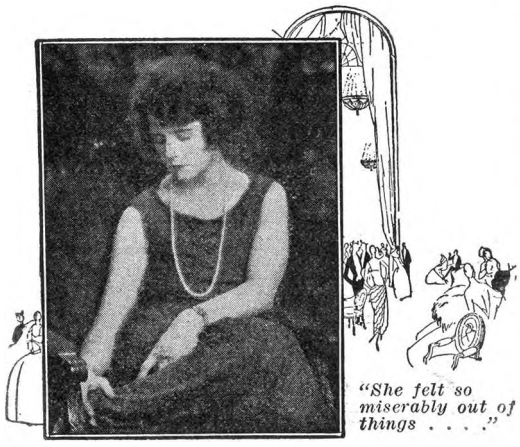

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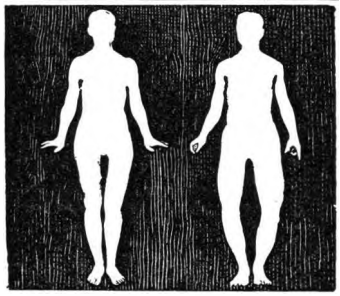

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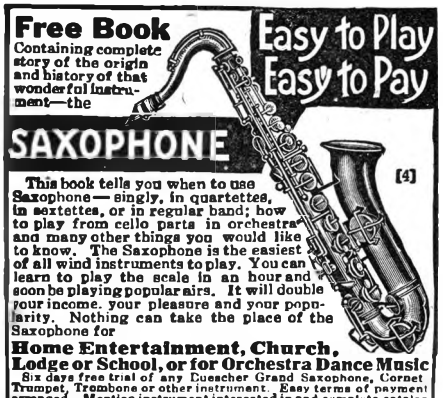

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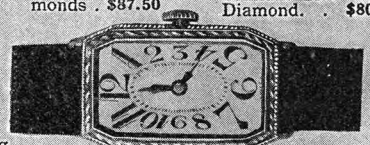

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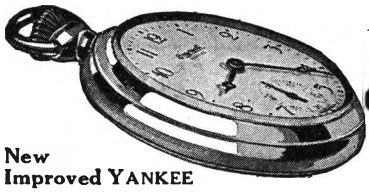

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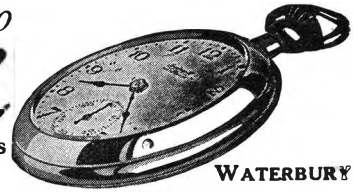

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