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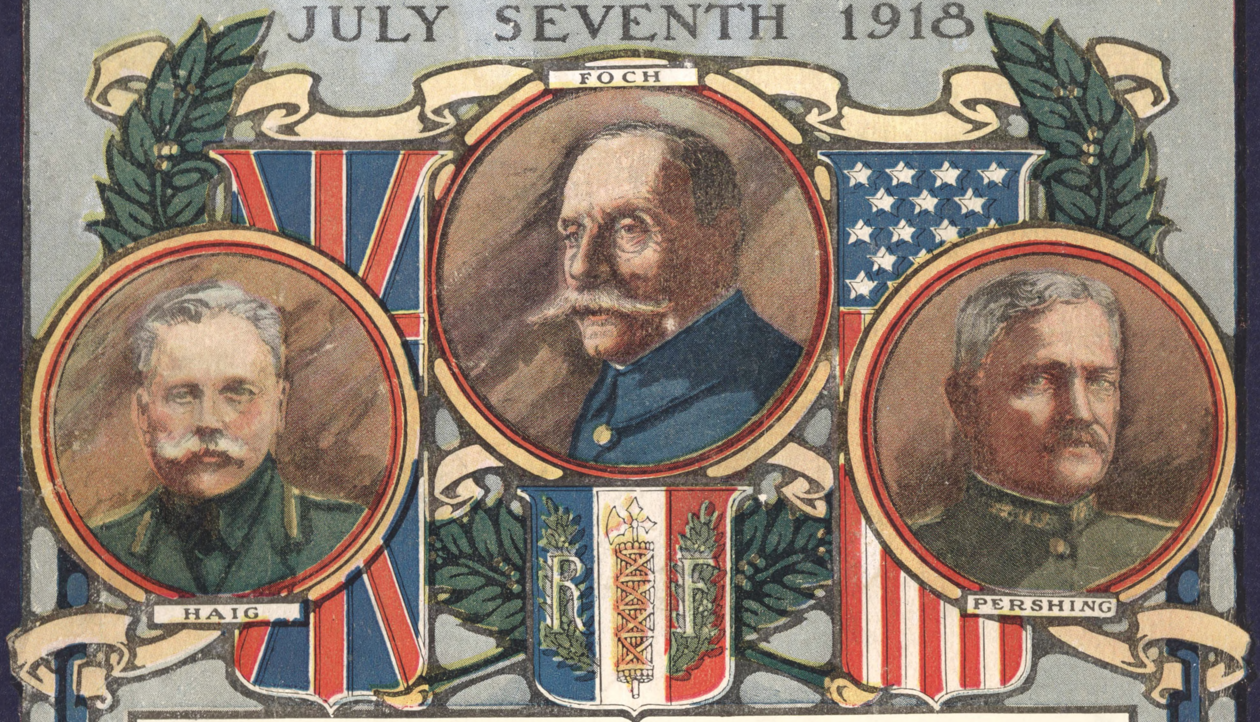

IN THIS NUMBER
NOVELS BY

Bower - Robbins - Haskell - Fraser -

SHORT STORIES BY

Knibbs - Rowland - Byrne Bronson-Howard and others.

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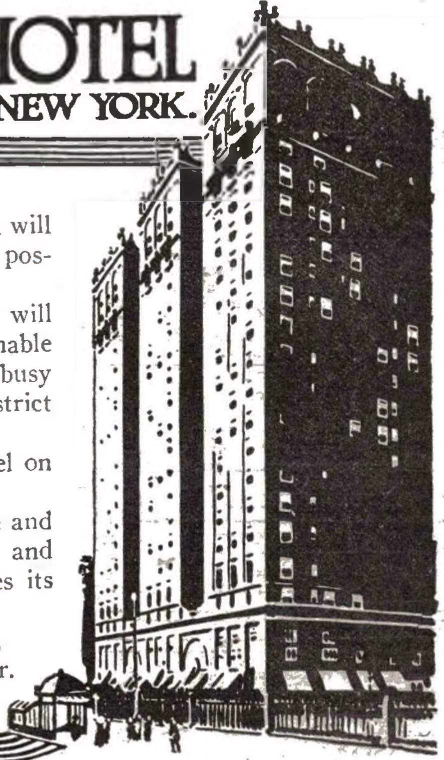

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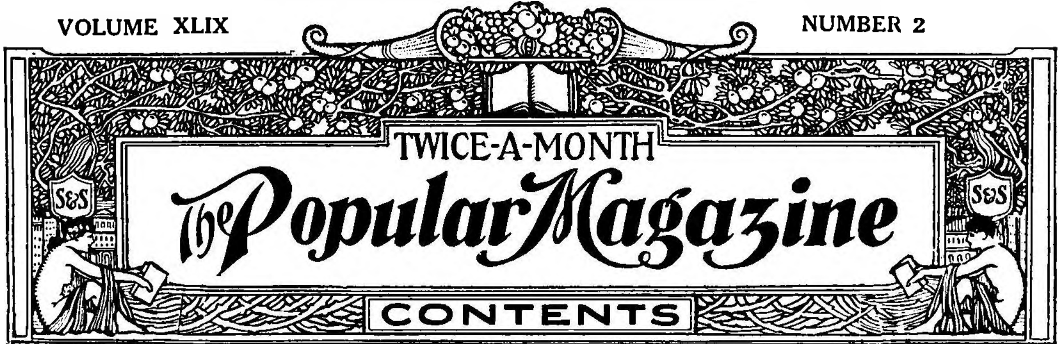

JULY 7, 1918

WATER POWER. A Complete Novel, ... **L. H. Robbins** 1
Political power, and the power of public opinion, and of a righteous cause, and the power of love and devotion, too, are reflected in this tale of a college professor's campaign for the governorship.

VIG. A Short Story, ... **Henry Herbert Knibbs** . 65
About a wonderful dog who was descended from the companions ot kings.

THE PATENT-LEATHER SHOES. A Short Story, . . **Katherine Mayo** . . . 77
The all-round abilities of Corporal Fairservice of the Pennsylvania State Police are brought into play.

EXEMPT. A Short Story, ... **Henry C. Rowland** . . 85
Her face may be a woman's fortune, but with a man it's different.

THE LAUGHING MASK. A Three-Part Story. Part I., . **H. E. Haskell** . . . 101
The author of "Odor of Musk" comes back with a story of jewels and of the strange consequences of a struggle for the possession of a certain famous one.

CAUGHT IN THE NET. Editorials, ... **The Editor** 130
Uncle Sam Turns Junkman. Nebraska Leads in K20. Who Will Be the First Woman President? Free Ports in the United States. Sport? Popular Topics.

THE SKY RIDER. A Four-Part Story. Part II., . . **B. M. Bower** 135
Johnny Jewel gets his air plane, only to find that his troubles have barely begun.

THE PURLING BROOK WHICH IS BOW SING LOW'S. . **Donn Byrne** . . . 158
A Short Story.
A tragic tale, camouflaged by some beautiful color effects.

THE BLACK BOOK. A Series, ... **George Bronson-Howard** . 167
IV.—His Country or His Life.

THE SILVER FOX. A Short Story, ... **E. Albert Apple** . . . 184
Some very human persons, including Indians, are introduced to you along the far Northern trails.

THE THREE SAPPHIRES. A Four-Part Story. Part IV., **W. A. Fraser** . . . 192
The end of one pro-German plot in India occurs amid picturesque surroundings.

THE GRAND REVIEW. Verse, ... **Berton Braley** . . . 220

ROPES ACROSS THE BOYNE. A Short Story, . . **Thomas McMorrow** . . 221
Just another kind of story by a versatile writer.

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THE POPULAR MAGAZINE

VOL. XLIX. JULY 7, 1918. No. 2.

Water Power

By L. H. Robbins

Author of "Prisoner of Peace," "The Merlin-Ames Torpedo," Etc.

Looking around for a nice, quiet dummy to meet his political requirements, the State boss decided on amiable, inoffensive Professor Benton for governorship. But he reckoned without his host. The professor was mild, but he was not meek, and he had a quality of unexpectedness about him that gave the shrewdest politicians jolt after jolt. They knew he was harmless, yet the fear he inspired among the wirepullers was unaccountable. The State boss soon realized that his lamb was in reality a new species of lion. Hence the commonwealth was a scene of tragic farce for standpatters during the unique campaign. And although Professor Benton was supposed not to know a water-power-grab bill from a fountain pen, he knew enough to upset alike his enemies and sponsors. The story is a most entertaining companion for summer weather.

(***A Complete Novel***)

CHAPTER I.

HAUNTED.

MAGNOLIA AVENUE, in Hanover, is considered by its residents to be the most fashionable thoroughfare in the city. In Magnolia Avenue two houses are for sale. They face each other, one on either side of the way.

The house on the west side of the avenue is justly described by the sign on the lawn as "This Elegant Mansion." The house opposite has no such flattering advertisement. It is to be sold merely "to close an estate." The most glowing words in the agent's lexicon would not disguise the fact that it is nothing but a house; an old-fashioned, dilapidated, frame cottage, an eyesore in a handsome neighborhood. Thus mansion and cottage face each other, both on the market.

The mansion, only the other day, was the home of Colonel Tom Darliss, uncrowned political autocrat of half the State; and people who used to make it a point to take off their hats to the colonel now smile knowingly when they see the sign on his lawn.

The cottage has stood tenantless and neglected for many years, and the people in the avenue know little more about it than that.

Its paint has peeled off in big patches. Its windows have been broken until few panes are left whole, even as high as the gable window in the attic. Its steps have fallen down, its porch railings have sagged under the weight of luxuriant honeysuckle vines, and the grass grows rank and unkempt around the

trees in the dooryard. Apartment houses have risen on either side, as if to wall from sight this ugly relic of a forgotten time. Still the cottage holds its place in the avenue, staring across at the Darliss mansion.

The neighborhood children say the cottage is haunted. They tell of mysterious noises that come out to them through the broken windows. Small girls, peeping in, have seen rocking-chairs rocking. Small boys, venturing near at night, have seen lights within and heard footfalls on the floor and the creaking of stairs. One bold youngster, who entered through a cellar window and advanced through the house as far as the second story, heard distinctly the slamming and locking of a door and the groaning of a man. The children believe that a murder was once committed in the house, but their elders explain the strange sights and sounds by saying that the place is probably a rendezvous for tramps. Grown-ups believe in Santa Claus and that sort of thing, but when it comes to haunted houses they are crass materialists.

The children's parents point to the fact that holdups are not infrequent in the vicinity. They recall that the watchman on a building operation a block away was beaten one night and left for dead, and that burglaries along the avenue are of common occurrence. Indeed, the old place has a bad name with the police, for once or twice a year the patrol auto stands in the street while bluecoats prowl about the premises, always fruitlessly.

Thus, on a certain August evening, Police Officer Daly and Plain-clothes Man Tobin, summoned to the perennial duty of spook hunting at the old house, forced an entrance through a first-floor window—not a difficult job—and searched the place thoroughly, stimulated to greater pains than usual because the complaint had been turned in from the Darliss mansion, over the way.

As they stood listening in the darkness on the second floor, Daly said:

"It was the old man himself that phoned the captain. He saw lights moving."

To the police and to all other persons interested in politics in the city of Hanover, Colonel Tom Darliss was known as "the old man."

"It's queer for the likes of him to be scared of ghosts at his time of life," said Tobin. "I'd like to oblige him by nailing somebody or something. But shucks! There hasn't been a living thing in this house in twenty thousand years, unless it might be us; nor a dead thing, for that matter."

At his last word, a scurry and a thump sounded overhead. Both men shuddered, gripping their revolvers tighter.

"What was that?" whispered Daly.

"A rat," said Tobin. "I hate rats. Come on away."

By the light of their flash lamps they found their way down the dusty stairs and climbed out through the window. In the avenue in front stood the police car, its headlights casting a glare on the pavement. Beyond the auto rose the shapely outlines of the Darliss mansion.

"The old man must be giving a party," Tobin remarked, looking across at the lighted windows.

"The place is sure lit up," responded Daly. "Who's that at the door? Ain't it——"

"It is," agreed Tobin. "He's coming over."

Down the lighted steps came Colonel Darliss himself, bareheaded, and crossed the street to the police car, where the bluecoat and the plain-clothes man met him.

He was a little man in stature; his body was too stout for his legs, so that his gait was ducklike. Over his left eye he wore a black patch, which was visible to Daly and Tobin now, even in the dark. By his black patch and his funny way of walking, no less than by the high silk hat which he ordinarily wore, the colonel was recognized afar off by the Hanover public.

"Evening, boys!" spoke the colonel.

For a little man, his voice was big and deep. Some people called it unctu-

ous, but a friendly biographer would say it was mellow with urbanity.

"Evening, colonel!" responded the policemen respectfully, as men should speak in the presence of power.

"Find anything?"

"Never a thing but a rat," replied Tobin. "There's nobody inside there at all, colonel. You can take our word for it. The dust on the front stairs is half an inch deep, and there's no tracks in it."

"A ghost wouldn't leave tracks, anyhow," said Daly.

"What about the back stairs?"

"If there's a back stairs in that house I don't know it," answered Tobin. "Maybe you'll come inside and show us where them back stairs is, now."

"The colonel doesn't want to be getting himself all over dust and cobwebs, man," said Daly.

The colonel didn't. "Anyway, boys," he said, "I saw a light. It moved across the four windows on the second floor and then flickered out."

"Was it kind of a blue light, maybe?" asked Daly, who had learned all about spooks from his grandmother and understood their tastes in illumination.

"No," said the colonel, "it looked to me more like a match that somebody had lit."

"How long ago was this?" asked Tobin.

"Half an hour ago, just before I telephoned."

"There's nobody in there now, colonel. We'll guarantee that."

"Unless it might be a ghost," said Daly. He liked to be scrupulous in matters spiritual.

"All right," said Darliss, not at all satisfied. "But I'll tell you this, as I've told the department before, that the place is a thieves' nest and ought to be better watched."

He waddled back to his mansion and the police car rolled away.

In the precinct station house, at the thoughtful hour of two o'clock that morning, Tobin said to his father-in-law, Captain Haggerty:

"Pop, what's the reason that haunted house in Magnolia Avenue has never been torn down? The property would bring a fortune."

"Don't you know about that place?" returned the captain. "But you don't, of course. You were only a kid when they put Bill Eads away."

"Bill Eads? Is that where Bill Eads lived?"

"That's where Bill lived till they got him for the Merkle Street murders."

"And him being in the pen, I suppose his heirs can't sell the property?"

"No, that ain't the way of it. When a man has been put away for life, his heirs can get a court order to sell anything of his they can find. The trouble in this case is that there's no heir to do the selling. At least, she has never shown up."

"She, you say? Then Bill Eads had a daughter?"

"He had. She was a lass of sixteen or so when the trouble came to him. In the middle of all the scandal about him she ran away from the convent where he had her in school—up at St. Margaret's it was—and that's the last anybody around here has ever heard tell of her. Some say she drowned herself for the shame of it, but I don't believe that. My theory is, she's alive and her relatives know she is, because if they thought she was dead, wouldn't they claim Bill's property? I've heard it said that somebody out in California pays the taxes on the place regular every year."

Tobin pondered the story; then he said:

"The old man says he saw lights in the windows. It seemed to worry him."

Captain Haggerty blotted a report upon which he had been laboring, wiped his pen carefully, laid it down, then bent across the table and said:

"The old man's got a right to be nervous about that house."

"Why do you say that?"

"Because I know the insides of what happened in this town twenty years ago. They made a goat of Bill Eads to save the old man."

"I never heard that before. Do you mean——"

But the captain had said more than

he intended, and now he shut up. There are subjects never discussed by holders of public office in the city of Hanover, even with their sons-in-law.

CHAPTER II.

SAM HILLWAY.

A busy man Colonel Tom Darliss had been in the two or three months preceding the August night when he thought he saw lights in the old house. His rush of business may be said to have begun on the first day of June, when he went to call upon Sam Hillway.

Puffing up the stairs to the westbound tracks of the M. & B. Railroad, the colonel shook the dust of Hanover off his feet—or caused a Greek to brush his boots, which amounted to the same thing—and boarded a train for Merrill County. Arriving in Merrill, the county seat, he hired a public flivver to drive him out to Sam Hillway's farm.

Hillway had no difficulty afterward in recalling the date of the politician's visit, for it was the day he made his last planting of Country Gentleman corn, and it happened also to be his twenty-ninth birthday, of which fact his mother reminded him at breakfast.

Sam was not on hand to welcome the colonel. He was over the hill, on the side of the farm that looks down at the railroad, and the sound of three taps on the farm bell, thrice repeated, which was his signal to come to the house, found him engaged in shooing his biggest Holstein cow out of a green alfalfa patch.

The Holstein was a notorious fence breaker, but the trouble she caused Sam was as nothing to the trouble Sam caused Colonel Darliss—for Sam, in politics, was a fence breaker, too.

When he had chased the cow out of the field and repaired the barbed wire temporarily and threatened the cow with a hobble if she sinned again, he obeyed the call of the bell and strode homeward. Tossing his wire stretcher into the tool house and heading for the flivver in the driveway, he wondered what new swindle had been sent against him. Most of the strangers who drove out from Merrill in Peter Hemming's flivver were swindlers of one sort or another.

Sam raised live stock that won first-premium ribbons at the State fair, and Sam himself was as fine a specimen of animal as his farm produced; nor did his rusty flannel shirt and his baggy blue overalls conceal the fact from public notice. His neighbors admitted that he was all man and a first-class farmer; they called him "Hayseed Hillway" and sent him to the legislature to fight their battles against the Hanover Creamery Trust. Such neighborly esteem means much when the object thereof is a chap whose farming is done for the fun of the thing, as Sam's was. Sam's father, be it known, had built the Great Northwestern Railroad, the stock of which is now quoted around three hundred and twenty-five.

To Sam's relief, the stout little gentleman in the flivver had not come to try to sell him maple-walnut trees or lightning rods or seed produced through crossing Winnipeg wheat with Bolivian breadfruit. The stout little gentleman was only the chief engineer of the State Democratic machine.

"Hello, there, colonel!" cried Sam hospitably.

"Hello, young man!" The colonel submitted his knuckles to the grip of Sam's big hand. "Sit in here with me a minute and let's talk. Mr. Jones, or Smith, or whatever your name is, suppose you take a walk around the lawn and admire Mr. Hillway's roses."

He addressed his last sentence to the driver of the flivver, who replied, with dignity: "If you mean me, sir, the name's Hemming."

"Hemming, then," said the colonel. "Get out and stretch your legs a while, Mr. Hemming. I want to talk to Mr. Hillway about his farm. How's the chicken business, Sam?"

"Bully!" said Sam. "I contracted last week to sell my entire output of eggs to a hotel corporation in Cleveland at seventy-five cents a dozen the year round."

"That's fine," said Darliss. "How much do you lose by it?"

"Only thirty-three cents a dozen," Sam replied proudly. "All they cost me is a dollar-eight."

"Congratulations!" said the colonel. "First thing you know, you'll actually make your farm pay expenses."

Sam saw that Darliss was doing his best to appear jovial, and wondered how much of his good nature was put on. He and the colonel had collided head on in the legislature at Dalton the winter before, and Sam had not heard from the old fellow since. As a leader of the new insurgent movement in the Democratic party in the State, Sam viewed the words and acts of Darliss with keen suspicion.

"You'd better come indoors, colonel. There's to be food soon."

"Thanks, no, Sam. I must catch the one-o'clock train back. What I want to see you about won't take long, because you'll fall for it, I know."

So Hillway settled down beside the party leader to listen.

"Sam, I'm tired of being beaten by the Republicans every election."

"Same here, colonel."

"I know what you youngsters think, Sam. You think I throw the elections. In fact, you accused me of it to my face at Dalton last winter. What was it you called me?"

"A traitor," said Sam. "I told you that a man who played into the hands of the enemy year after year had no right to hang on to the State leadership."

"So you did, Sam, and I guess you spoke the truth. Well, it has soaked in. I've thought things over and I've decided to retire from the game."

"When?"

"After next election."

"Why not retire before election, colonel? There's a governor to be elected this year."

"Precisely. There's a governor to be elected, and I believe I can put a Democrat across, provided I can find the right man to get behind, and provided also I can rely on your help."

"You can always rely on my help if you get behind the right man, colonel. But no more wooden dummies, please, set up for the other side to knock down. Frankly, if you don't pick a real man for governor this year, we intend to find one ourselves and run him against yours, and I think we can nominate him."

"Perhaps you can, Sam. But how about electing him afterward? You can't do that without the machine to help, can you?"

"At least we shall take the party control away from you. That will be something."

Darliss fixed his good eye shrewdly on the young man's face and saw that Sam was in earnest.

"Who's in your mind, Sam?"

"Jeffrey Benton."

"Now, it's an odd thing, Sam, but I was thinking of putting Benton forward myself."

"You?" Sam laughed.

"Why not?"

"You don't dare to, man! If you offered Jeffrey Benton to the people of the State, they would elect him as sure as shooting; and what would you say then to Fowler and that Republican bunch that you sell us out to every chance you get?"

"Sam, this is unkind of you. It's darned unkind."

"But isn't it true?"

"Listen to me, Sam. Suppose I confided to you that I hate strychnine poison less than I hate the notion of quitting politics without one rattling big victory to remember in my old age, would you believe me?"

"I'd certainly have to believe you if you nominated Jeffrey Benton."

"You're fond of Benton, aren't you, Sam?"

"As fond of him, I think, as I'd be of my own father, if my father were living."

"Your father was a great man, Sam, a power in the State, and you'll be another like him, I shouldn't wonder. Now, if I—if we, meaning you and me, Sam—if we run Benton, it will put you in position to take the State leadership when I drop out, won't it?"

"Yes, though I mean to take it, anyway, if possible, whether you drop out or not. As I've told you, colonel, we are tired of your everlasting trading with the other side and serving Fowler as his pin boy. We want a leader who is one of us, not a Republican masquerading among us in Democrat clothing. That's rough on you, perhaps, but it's how you look to us."

The old man's mournful face would have drawn pity from a Sioux Indian. The kindly hearted Sam, seeing that he was hurt, desisted.

"Have you sounded Benton on this?"

"I haven't," the colonel answered humbly. "I want you to do it for me. I want you to go to Jeffrey and offer him the support of both factions of the party, your crowd and mine, if he will let us back him for the governorship. Will you do it?"

"Will a duck swim?" cried Sam.

"Shake!"

Old man and young man clasped hands.

"You'll attend to this right away?"

"To-morrow."

"And the hatchet is buried?"

"Buried, sir, and the place of its burial forgotten."

When Darliss, driven by Mr. Hemming, had disappeared down the road, Sam Hillway draped himself over a farm gate and reflected.

So Darliss, against whom he and the other young Democrats of the State had arisen, wanted to put up their man Jeffrey Benton for governor. "It's dreaming I am," thought Sam. "I suppose his motive is that he doesn't want to lose his grip on the party helm. That's plain enough. I wonder if he thinks he can control the party with Benton in the governor's chair?"

The colonel's talk of retiring from politics Sam regarded as camouflage. He decided that Darliss had read the handwriting on the party wall and made his choice between defeat in the September primaries and trusting the party for four years to the hands of a man whom he might or might not be able to dominate. To Sam it looked like a losing proposition for the colonel either way. But that was the colonel's own concern.

Next day Sam traveled to Judson, where Jeffrey Benton lived. Glad of an excuse was Sam to make the journey, for he had a notion that Jeffrey was not the only member of the Benton household whom he should see. Indeed, it was Benton's daughter Ann who opened the door for him, so Sam's trip was successful in that respect as well as in the less important respect that Jeffrey Benton consented to meet Colonel Tom Darliss to consider with him the interests of the Democratic Party in the State.

CHAPTER III.

THE FOX.

Colonel Tom Darliss sat in his office in full view of the busiest portion of Russell Street. No man to hide his light under a bushel of false modesty was the colonel. His office window was wide and transparent, and through it any passer-by who cared to raise his eyes to the second story of the Darliss Enterprises Building might read the colonel's busy life as an open book.

He was a democratic sort, was this monarch. He liked the human touch; he liked to be considered a member of the crowd. He liked the thriving city of Hanover to class him with the post office and Memorial Park and the city hall as one of its institutions. Indeed, he was a greater institution than the city hall, for he owned that establishment from flagstaff to steam boiler. The Fowler bunch might run the State, but they left the city to Darliss.

On this sunny morning in early June he sat with his dapper back to his mahogany desk and his face toward the pair of white carnations that lifted their pure petals to the light in his window. In his hand he held a gold-mounted penknife, with which he trimmed his nails.

But his one good eye was not concerned with the manicuring, nor did it linger to admire the chaste carnations. Past the flowers at the pane he looked, and over the heads of the crowd in the

street to the portal of the Consolidated Street Railways Building opposite, and there his gaze remained until he saw a massive, an elephantine gentleman, strut down the steps and stride toward him.

Then he closed the knife with a snap, dropped it into a pocket of his flowered waistcoat, whirled round to his desk, and took up a handful of letters. His eye was still fixed upon the letters when his personal secretary announced:

"Mr. Fowler to see you, sir."

"Very well, Mrs. Townsley," answered the colonel in his most impressive tone of voice. "Show Mr. Fowler in."

The elephantine gentleman stood before him, casting a side look toward the door as the personal secretary retired. A mighty handsome woman was that personal secretary. Some poet or other has described her type as "stunning."

"Sit down, Fowler," said the colonel, waving his disengaged hand toward a chair beside the desk. "I'll be through in ten seconds."

"You'll be through in one second if you want to talk to me," instantly replied the massive gentleman. "Who do you think I am to wait on you?"

Darliss looked up with an air of grieved surprise.

"Fowler, at your age you shouldn't give way to your angry passions like that. You should respect your arteries."

"Respect my foot! What do you want that's so important you can't come to me with it? Why do I have to trot over here to you?"

The colonel put aside his handful of correspondence. "Sit down, Fowler," said he, and the big man obeyed, more to relieve his feet of two hundred and fifty pounds' weight than to please Darliss.

To a student of natural history the colonel might have suggested an exceedingly sly and capable old fox. Mr. Fowler's likeness to a well-known circus animal has already been remarked. Just now the elephant, to his indignation, seemed to find himself uncomfortable in the presence of the fox. Perhaps it was the tone in which the fox said: "Sit down, Fowler." Still, the fox is notoriously a bluffer. The elephant smiled.

"Fowler," said the colonel, pulling out the sliding leaf of his desk and resting his elbow upon it to bring his face close to his visitor's, "Fowler, I feel all cut up over what I've heard about you in the last twenty-four hours."

He saw the elephant's eyes gleam suddenly with alarm, then soften with cunning.

"What have you heard?" asked Fowler calmly.

"I have heard," said the colonel sadly, "that my lifelong friend and ally has digged a pit for big game without a word of invitation to me. I can't tell you how hurt I am, Fowler."

"Oh, that!" answered the elephant. "You'd have heard about it in due time, colonel. We've counted you in, of course. So that's what's worrying you, is it?" He forced a laugh. "Good joke on you, Darliss. I must tell the bunch. Old Darliss smelled graft and thought he was going to be left out. Ha, ha!"

To the ridicule of the elephant, the fox remained impervious.

"When you're done ha-haing, tell me what's up."

Fowler glanced uneasily at the window through which the business world of Hanover could look in upon their conference. The *Daily Blade* and other newspapers of the State had lately talked a lot about the close understanding that seemed to exist between the leaders of the two rival party organizations.

"No," said Darliss, reading his thought. "That window shade is never pulled down. But if you think——"

"I do," said Fowler.

"Come with me."

Darliss led the way into a corridor and along to the rear end of the floor, past a half dozen offices occupied by the subalterns of the Darliss enterprises. At the end of the hall he opened a sliding door and ushered his visitor into a fireproof, soundproof, and windowless

room walled with shelves of ledgers and filing cases.

At a little table under the electric light they sat down when the colonel had closed the door.

"Now let's have it," said he.

"Likely you know all there is to tell at present," said Fowler, relaxing into confidence. "But who told you about it?"

"None of your business."

"I supposed everything was air-tight. Has it gone any further than yourself?"

"Not an inch."

"Good! I'll be frank with you, colonel. We are going after the water-power rights in the Grenada County hills. That's all."

"You haven't lost your nerve, Fowler."

"Nerve? That don't take any nerve. The rights are going to waste. Some day they'll be worth millions. Nobody wants 'em now. Why shouldn't we grab them while we can? It's legitimate enterprise."

"You can't get away with it."

"What's to hinder? We're on the edge of a war and we'll be in it deeper before we are out of it. People are looking at Europe, not at Grenada County. It will be five years before anybody discovers what we've done."

"I can't let you do it, Fowler. If you had come to me in the first place, I might have said yes. But under the circumstances, nothing doing. That's what I've called you over to tell you."

Fowler snorted impatiently: "Come, now; save your posing for the front office. What's your objection to the scheme?"

"The objection of a conscientious citizen."

"Conscienceless crook! Name your price, Darliss. I can't sit here all day and be an audience for your dramatics."

"Fowler," said the colonel gravely, "I have played second fiddle to you for twenty years. I've let you have your own way at Dalton. You've elected your own State governments and your own majorities in the legislature——"

"Thanks to your good help," smiled Fowler.

"——and people are getting sore—your own people as well as mine. They demand a change, and I mean to give it to them. This is to be my year. I'm going to put up a strong ticket and I'm going to try to elect it. When we expose this treacherous water-power scheme of yours, I don't think you'll carry a county in the State. Do you think so yourself?"

"Stop your spoofing!" ejaculated Fowler. "Why don't you come out with your price, you old devil?"

"Your language, Fowler, is not the sort I should expect from a gentleman."

A play actor could not have been more dignified than the colonel.

"Candidly, Fowler, I'm tired of being pointed at as the leader of a party that has lost every State election in twenty years. My young men feel the disgrace. They're getting fractious."

"And you're in danger of losing your leadership?"

"Exactly. Let me remind you that I have invested a good many thousands of dollars to hold that leadership through these lean years."

"But we let you have Hanover right along, don't we?"

"Control of the city is no satisfaction to the fellows up the State. Seriously, Fowler, I can't hold my organization together another four years without giving the boys a taste of blood. They'll throw me overboard sure. I'll leave you to judge whether you'll be able to form an alliance with them after I'm gone. You know the kind they are."

Fowler drummed on the table with his fat finger tips.

"I suppose the fellow you're most afraid of just now is that young what's-his-name up in Merrill County."

"Hillway—Sam Hillway. 'Hayseed Hillway,' they call him."

"Can't you get him somehow?"

"He can't be reached. His income from his father's estate must be a quarter of a million a year, and his private life is as clean as a monk's. He's a farmer, besides, and who'd ever

believe evil of a farmer? Oh, I've had him watched, you needn't worry. But it's no use. He's growing. He hasn't bloomed yet, and when he does bloom—good night!"

A long silence from the elephant. Then——

"Your proposition is that you are to elect a governor and a legislature this year?"

"By your leave, if you like, and without your leave, if necessary. If I have to fight you for the State, I will beat you by showing up your water-power deal. Take your choice."

"If we consent, the water-power deal is safe?"

"As safe in my hands as it would be in yours. I'll attend to it personally."

"You'll pledge a majority in house and senate?"

"Certainly."

"The bill will need the governor's signature."

"That's easy."

"But how easy? Who's in your mind for governor?"

"I have thought some of young Hillway."

"He won't do," said Fowler promptly. "Too young. You'd never elect him. Besides, he's got money. The labor vote would call him a capitalist and refuse to support him; and if he should win out, his money would make him independent and you couldn't control him."

"Those objections have occurred to me also," said Darliss. "The other man on my list is Jeffrey Benton."

"Jeffrey Benton!" laughed Fowler. "Good land, man, Jeffrey Benton couldn't be elected alley inspector!"

"Couldn't he?"

"The whole State would howl him down. That is, the business interests would."

"And the rest of the State would elect him. Name a Democrat who would make a better stalking-horse for the popular vote."

Said Fowler, reflecting: "I can hear the bunch laugh when I tell 'em."

"And you can hear the people cheer," said Darliss.

"It was my personal pleasure, six months ago," said Fowler, "as chairman of the board of trustees of the People's Institute, to kick him out of that establishment. Now I'm asked to turn around and kick him into the governor's chair. Colonel, you make me laugh."

"You must take into account," said Darliss, "that Jeffrey Benton has risen a thousand per cent in popular esteem because it was you that kicked him out. In presenting Professor Benton to the electorate I shall expect to make capital out of the fact that you hate him."

"Colonel, you're as shrewd as they make 'em," said Fowler. "I don't know but your idea's a good one. The State is getting restless, I know. We have troubles in our own camp, and some of our own newspapers are whining for a housecleaning at Dalton. Well, let's give 'em one."

"We will," said the colonel, beaming. "We'll sweep up a lot of dust in their eyes, at least."

"But what makes you think Jeffrey Benton will sign our water-power bill?"

"My dear Fowler, if I guarantee it, what more do you want?"

"Guarantee rats! You can't guaranteee anything about that man. A year ago I'd have guaranteed that he would crawl from here to Canada for a hundred dollars to keep his darned institute going. But when we took him the half million that old 'Patent Medicine' Kessup left us in his will, look how he acted about it! Wouldn't have it. Said it was money made from poisoning the poor. Said he'd resign from the institute before he'd use a cent of it. So we accepted his resignation. Do you expect a man like that to close his eyes to the biggest burglary that has been pulled off in the State since the time you stole the perpetual traction franchises for us twenty years ago?"

"In the first place," Darliss answered, "Benton will be absolutely under my thumb. In the second place, he has spent his life lecturing and educating and that sort of thing, consequently he knows less about practical affairs than any man his age in Amer-

ica. He wouldn't know a water-power grab if he saw one all lit up and labeled. And in the third place," continued the colonel significantly, "I'm tired, as I tell you, of being a political joke in the State. My manhood and my self-respect demand that I win a campaign before I drop out. So I intend to run Jeffrey Benton for governor and I intend to elect him. Whether I do it with your help, freely given, or whether I have to depend on the help of what I know on you makes no difference to me. It's up to you to say."

"Darliss, you're a wonder!" cried Fowler. "Sometimes I have to admire you. I'll spring your proposition on the bunch and let you know what they say."

"Let me know by three this afternoon, please."

"I can tell you this much now," Fowler added. "We won't lie down and let you walk over us unless you accept a directorship in the new water-power syndicate. We shall want it in writing, Darliss."

"I think," replied the colonel, smiling, "there will be no difficulty about that."

Napoleon Fowler, first consul of the Republican machine of the State, slipped away from the entrance to the Darliss Enterprises office without looking to right or left, and walked down the street half a block before turning to cross to the Consolidated Street Railways Building. Colonel Tom Darliss, the "old man" of the State Democratic organization, sat again at his desk in the front office. A sheet of note paper lay before him, and upon it, under the monogram, he wrote:

My Dear Professor Benton——

CHAPTER IV.

THE CANDIDATE.

On such a morning in June as would help people to forget three hundred and sixty-four days of rain and fog and cold, the steam yacht *Koto* passed eastward under the Hell Gate bridge and settled down to the pleasant business of making Harbor Island before dark.

Close at hand were the gravel beaches and the wooded points of Long Island. Farther away, on the opposite side, stretched the dim blue line of the Connecticut shore. A lonely little drab of a ferryboat, seemingly lost in the middle of the Sound, saluted the passing yacht with three maudlin whistle blasts, which the *Koto* deigned to answer with an equal number of dignified toots from her tuneful siren, much as a society lady might say "How-de-do" when greeted by her next-door neighbor's scrub woman.

A blue sky flecked with beauty spots of white cloud to bring out its perfection beamed down upon the yacht. A little breeze came running from behind and a flock of gulls wheeled above the bow to welcome the graceful, gliding creature to their playground.

The spirit of the day had imparted itself to the people on board; to the brisk and deferential stewards no less than to Colonel Tom Darliss, their master, and to his guests, in their chairs under the deck awning.

Apart from the rest of the company, a burly, black-haired, blue-jowled passenger leaned on the rail. This person was Gus Deegan, who managed the city of Hanover for Colonel Darliss, and Gus felt a little out of place. Addressing him, the owner of the vessel asked: "How do you like it, Gus?"

"Pretty well, colonel, pretty well," replied the burly passenger. "Now is the winter of our discontent made glorious summer. That's poetry, you know."

"Be sure you spout some of it to the professor," Darliss rejoined, with a jovial wink.

The owner of the *Koto* looked jovial this day; Jovian, too, in everything but size. A *deus ex machina* in politics was Tom Darliss, and there was a godlike quality in his smile, in the cut of his Prince Albert coat, in the silk hat that, even on a yachting cruise, topped his head. Stubby and insignificant in stature, large and impressive in manner, "little but oh, my!"—that was Darliss.

Gus Deegan once said of him that, for his height, he was the most important-looking man in the United States and the most important-feeling man in the known world.

Leaving the burly Deegan, the colonel toddled aft, where the rest of his guests were assembled. Upon them he beamed benevolently, as befits a prosperous host.

"Miss Benton," he said to a pretty girl in a deck chair, "I hope you're as contented as you look."

"I have only one sad thought," replied the girl, smiling up at him. "That is that this voyage can't go on forever. I can see that it has done papa good already."

She laid a gentle hand on the arm of a slim, scholarly-looking gentleman beside her, whose neck and shoulders were wrapped in a shawl.

"He has needed this holiday for ever so long."

She beamed her gratitude upon the colonel, who rubbed his hands in an exuberance of good nature. Nothing makes a man happier than to do a deed of kindness. As he passed along to greet the other guests, the girl followed him with curious eyes, trying to read him through his urbane exterior.

This was Ann's first trip east of the Alleghanies, and her first glimpse of the Atlantic Ocean. But she was less interested in the large Atlantic than in this little politician who had come so startlingly into her father's life within the fortnight. She saw his benevolence of manner, his placid smile, his almost consecrated look as he chatted with the dashing Mrs. Townsley, whom he had provided to be Ann's chaperon on the trip East, and with Sam Hillway, Benton's admirer. Surely there could be no guile in the colonel's make-up. Yet she said to her father: "I don't quite understand him."

"No more do I," Jeffrey Benton answered. "But this is a pleasant human adventure, don't you think? Let's follow it through. We can always turn back."

"I'm not sure about that," said Ann. "Suppose we wanted to turn back from this voyage. So long as we are his guests we have to go on with him to the end, don't we? Won't you be just as helpless in his hands on the political voyage he proposes?"

"My dear," answered Benton, "when plain men go for trips on the sea of politics they have to travel in whatever vessel offers. If they don't like the way the ship is run, they can always mutiny."

"Is that fair to the owners of the ship, papa?"

"As fair as it was for the so-called owners to take the command of the ship away from the plain folks in the first place. If there is any other way for us to regain control of our own property, meaning the party ships, I have not discovered it in a good many years of searching the history books."

The girl gave her father a trusting smile. "I know you would be safe in the hands of the Old Nick himself," she said. "But I doubt if you could get away with a mutiny. Mr. Deegan, there, could eat you alive."

That burly, swarthy passenger approached them.

"Good morning, professor," he hailed. "What is so rare as a day in June, eh? Now is the winter of our discontent made glorious summer, as the poet says."

"Beware of the political boss who quotes poetry," thought Jeffrey Benton. But aloud he replied: "This is a day and a half, Mr. Deegan. This is some day!"

"Beware of a highbrow who talks lowbrow," thought the burly Gus, as he settled into a chair. But the face that he turned to Benton was pleasant enough, considering that it was Gus Deegan's.

People said that Gus Deegan's face was somewhere inside him and that the semblance of a face which he turned toward the public was only a mask. It was an unexpressive, listening mask. On the morning of Election Day and on the evening thereof, at a clambake or at a funeral, Deegan wore the same impassive, noncommittal look that

caused his friends to call him "Gloomy Gus."

Jeffrey Benton scrutinized the man now with interest, as did his daughter. City bosses were a little out of their line.

As the two men talked, Ann saw that, imperturbable as Deegan's face remained, his hard gray eyes bored like diamond drills into her father's countenance, searching there, it seemed to her, for a sign of weakness, for the vulnerable point that common credence expects in every man. She knew that her father was undergoing an inspection as ruthless as if he had been a horse that an army purchasing agent considered buying.

In her heart she wished that he might fail to pass the test, fail to meet the requirements that would cause him to seem desirable in the eyes of this practical politician.

Gay and smiling, however, she rose in acceptance of Sam Hillway's invitation to walk the deck.

To the bow Sam led her. They rested their elbows on the rail. The spray from the cutwater sparkled in rainbow hues below them, but the young man looked aloft at the tapering foremast and said:

"I wonder where he flies the Jolly Roger."

"The Jolly what?"

"His pirate flag."

The girl laughed.

"This is a queer voyage, Ann."

"And a queer company," she added. "A queer mixture, I mean. Not that you and I and papa and Doctor and Mrs. Guthrie are any less queer than the colonel and Mr. Deegan and Mrs. Townsley and their friends. But put the two crowds together, and it's like mixing—well, I don't know what."

"Birds and fish," Sam suggested, pointing across the water.

"Thank you," said Ann.

Their eyes followed a fish hawk in its flight. The great bird flew slowly toward a dead tree on the shore, bearing its gleaming, struggling prey.

Some of the doubts that had troubled the girl may have occupied the young man's mind, for he asked:

"What do you think of the colonel by now?"

"I shall need to know him better before I risk an opinion."

"You'll have to wait a long time, then," said Sam. "The colonel is always as you see him to-day—a masterful, magnificent little man with the air of a saint."

"But behind the scenes——"

"Colonel Darliss never permits intelligent young daughters of Chautauqua lecturers to peep behind the scenes, Ann. You may look up at his window in the Darliss Enterprises Building and see him at his desk, with two white carnations bending toward him in a cut-glass vase, typifying purity and uprightness. That is the only view the public gets of the man. I doubt if Gus Deegan himself ever sees Darliss in any other setting."

Ann had listened to only a part of Sam's good-natured satire.

"I know what his nose looks like," she said.

"What?"

"I've been trying all morning to think. It reminds me of the beak of a hawk."

"He has devoured many suckers in his day," Sam admitted. "But if people will be suckers——"

"Tell me, Sam. Do you think he will find papa a—one of those fish you mention?"

"Perish the thought! He will find your father the worst——" The young man hesitated between "shark" and "devilfish," and decided to recast his reply.

"This is what I think, Ann: Big politicians like Darliss and Gus Deegan know the A B C of politics, and that's about all. To the easy-going public their kind of politics looks air-tight and hard to fight. But it isn't. Their minds are the minds of ten-year-old boys playing marbles. Your father has the mind of a chess player. His long suit is history, and he knows that history is nothing much but a record of bosses kicked overboard. Your father knows poli-

tics clear back to Babylon, while Darliss' notion is that political history began the year he was elected alderman."

"Then you think——"

"I think that the hawk in this case will find himself consumed, beak, feathers, and toenails, before your father is done with him."

"Your blind admiration for papa makes you say that," laughed the girl.

"No, nor yet my blind admiration for his daughter," Sam retorted. "Say, Ann, have I ever told you about the first time I laid eyes on you?"

"No. Tell me now."

"It was at the assembly grounds at Cedar Mills, fourteen summers ago. Your father was president of the assembly association that year, and he lectured twice a day in the big tent."

"That was the year he started the People's Institute," said Ann.

"You lived in a pretty cottage at the edge of the grounds. Do you remember?"

"Yes."

"And a big maple tree stood about halfway between the cottage and the river. Do you remember that?"

"I do. I used to play under it."

"Well, I sat down under that maple tree one day to learn to smoke a pipe; and while I was still there, half an hour afterward, you came past, wheeling a doll carriage and holding a little toy parasol over your dolls to preserve their complexions."

"And you looked so dreadfully ill that I ran home frightened and told papa, and he went to look for you, but you had vanished. I remember it as well as if it had happened yesterday. I'm sorry," she added, "that your first glimpse of me affected you so disagreeably."

"On the contrary, it cured me; there must have been some medicinal charm in the sight of you, for when I tried the pipe again next day it did nothing worse than burn my tongue. Now shall I tell you something else?"

Her brown eyes dared him.

"Well, I was at Cedar Mills this spring—we're having a pavilion built, you know, to take the place of the big tent—and I paid a visit to the maple tree and patted its old trunk."

"On account of the pipe, I suppose."

"No, ma'am. On account of a small girl in short dresses, holding a pink parasol over a little carriage filled with dolls."

Ann gave him a wise young look and rolled her brown eyes skyward.

"Tell that to the maple tree," she said.

"I did," said Sam, and would have become intensely serious if a white-clad steward had not appeared at the top of the companionway and sounded a more or less merry blast on a silver bugle, thereby indicating to Colonel Darliss and his guests that luncheon was ready to serve.

"Food!" cried Ann joyously.

Jeffrey Benton and Ann, Sam Hillway, Mrs. Townsley, and the Guthries descended to the snug and luxurious little cabin, where the luncheon table awaited them. At the head of the stairs stood the gallant little colonel, bowing like a head waiter and waving his guests downward to his hospitable board.

As Gus Deegan approached, bringing up the rear of the expectant company, Darliss handed him a slip of paper.

"This came a minute ago by wireless," the colonel explained. Deegan read:

820 disappeared yesterday noon. No trace. WIGGINS.

Deegan handed the paper back to the colonel.

"Eight-twenty," he reflected. "Isn't that old Bill Eads?"

"That's Bill. For twenty years he has threatened to do this, and now he's gone and done it."

"Don't let it spoil your summer," said Deegan.

"But this particular moment is a hell of a time to hear about it, you'll have to admit."

The two exchanged glances of understanding. Then, as if nothing had happened to upset their serenity of soul, they descended the stairs and took their places at the table.

CHAPTER V.

EIGHT-TWENTY.

It was locking-up time in the State penitentiary at Dalton. From the prison shops, where the rumble of machinery had ceased a minute before, snakelike lines of brown-clad men moved in lock-step across the prison yard toward the cell houses.

As each of the prisoners passed a table in his cell-house entrance, he picked up a tin pan heaped with a sloppy mixture of beef ste[illegible]d, and potatoes. Then the li[illegible]ntinued down the stone-and-iron corridors, each man turning in at his proper place. Cries of "Right!" rang out from the guards, a fat deputy warden threw his weight on a lever, and the cell doors closed with a clang.

The guards passed along the tiers and peered into the gloomy cells. Most of the prisoners had fallen to eating. A few ate not at all, but flung themselves on their bunks. A dull hum of animal sound filled the place. The air was heavy with the prison odor, which is like no other smell in the world.

"Hey, Pete!"

A guard had halted before cell No. 280. In response to his call, the fat deputy warden approached. They pressed their faces close to the steel bars of the door and stared. Then the fat deputy shuffled away.

In the adjoining cells the prisoners had stopped eating to watch. Now from these cells came chirps and chuckles, a weird whistle or two, a smothered cry. The noise spread down the corridor, it sped into other corridors. In a few seconds the cell house was a bedlam of shrieks, hoots, catcalls, and maniacal yells. The roar of sound reached the warden of the prison at supper in his living apartments far removed from the cell house.

"Shut up!" cried the guards, running up and down the passageways. But the hullabaloo would not be stilled. A prisoner was missing, and this inferno of howling was a Godspeed to him from his fellow unfortunates.

"What's wrong?" demanded Warden Harrison, as the fat deputy came puffing into his presence.

"Convict gone," panted the deputy. "Number Eight-twenty."

"Start a search."

The fat deputy departed. The warden pressed a button and a trusty entered.

"Fetch Mr. Williams," said Harrison.

Williams, the prison-record keeper, appeared.

"Eight-twenty's missing."

"The devil you say!"

"Get busy!"

The warden snatched a long-distance telephone book from its hook on the wall and opened it at the Hanover pages. Making a pencil note, he hung the book back in its place. He paced the floor, scowling. A bell rang. He picked up the private phone connecting with the various prison departments.

"Well? Nothing in the machine shop? All right, Perkins."

From the broom factory, the boiler rooms, the stockrooms, and the stove foundry the reports came in until every corner of the institution had been searched. If Number Eight-twenty was hiding within the walls, no sign of him had been found.

Williams entered again, accompanied by a turnkey and three convicts.

"These fellows were the only ones who went outside to-day," said Williams. "They delivered two truckloads of brooms to the D. & B. freight station—one at ten o'clock this morning, the other about three this afternoon."

Said Harrison: "Did you fellows help Eight-twenty to get away?"

"Not us, sir," answered the eldest of the three trusties. "You can ask the turnkey."

"I inspected both loads," said the turnkey. "Nothing left the gate to-day except them two loads."

The warden eyed the trusties. "Go back to your cells," he commanded the first and second. "You," he said to the third, "stay here."

When the two lucky ones had slunk out of the room, the warden whirled

upon the one who remained. "Now let it come. No hedging. What do you know?"

"I don't know anything, sir, except that we stopped on the second trip, going in, and got a drink."

"Where did you stop?"

"Just beyond the bridge."

"What did you drink?"

"Whisky."

"Where did you get the money to buy the whisky?"

"We didn't buy it, sir. A guy gave it to us."

"What guy

"The one we ran into. He was in a flivver. We helped him get unbent and he offered us drinks."

"In a saloon?"

"No, sir; in a house—one of them little brick houses along River Street."

"All three of you went in at once?"

"Yes, sir."

"Leaving the truck with nobody to watch it?"

"Yes, sir."

"Was the load all right when you came out of the house?"

"As far as I could see."

"Who loaded the truck before it left here?"

"The three of us, sir."

"Notice anything odd then?"

"No, sir."

"Did you see every bundle of brooms go into the truck?"

"No, sir, only them that I loaded in myself. We had to carry 'em out from the storeroom."

"Who was on guard where you loaded the brooms?"

"Kinsey, sir."

"Was Kinsey there all the time?"

"Yes, sir—that is, except for a minute when the big nigger had the fit down by the boiler house. He ran over there to see what the row was. He wasn't gone but a minute."

"You say you collided with a flivver?"

"No, sir, the flivver collided with us. Smashed its mud guard off. It looked to me like the guy done it a-purpose."

"What sort of a guy was he?"

"Just a young guy. A garage helper, maybe."

"What became of him afterward?"

"I don't know, sir."

The warden scowled. "Go to your cell," said he. When the trusty had departed, Harrison called the prison physician.

"Doc, what was the matter with the coon this afternoon? Faking, eh? Thanks."

On the long-distance phone the warden got Hanover 1000.

"Hello! This is Warden Harrison, at the State penitentiary at Dalton. I want to get in touch with Colonel Darliss. Gone East, you say? Who's this I'm talking to? Well, listen here, Wiggins. Get word to the old man for me as soon as you can, will you? Tell him that Eight-twenty broke jail this afternoon. Yes, we're doing everything we can. Say, Wiggins, wait a minute. If the old man's in the East he's in no danger, so hold that message till you hear from me again. I'll call you in the morning. We may find our fellow to-night. See?"

Warden Harrison returned to his interrupted supper, but he ate little.

That night a gigantic negro was taken from the hospital ward and locked in a dark cell, where he roared profane songs until a guard thrust the nozzle of a hose through the hole in the sheet-iron door and drenched him. Next morning three trusties were deprived of their good-conduct privileges and sent to work in the stove foundry.

CHAPTER VI.

WARNED.

Jeffrey Benton and his daughter Ann had the golf course to themselves on the afternoon of their last day at the summer estate of Colonel Darliss. Upon a breezy hilltop they lingered to admire the view of land and sea around them. In the distance the waters of Sound and bay gleamed in the sunlight. Near at hand spread the bright green of the golf course, fringed with woods. A beautiful place was Harbor Island, which the colonel had chosen for his playground.

"The week here has made you look

ten years younger, papa," said Ann. "Sometimes I wish, for your sake, that you had been born acquisitive instead of wise. With a summer home like this, you would stay young a hundred years."

"My dear," Benton replied, "let's comfort ourselves with the thought that we have had more enjoyment out of this golf pasture in a week than the unfortunate owner can get in ten summers."

Though he spoke in jest, he voiced the truth. Colonel Darliss did not go in for golf. His fat was too abundant in the region of his anatomy where he needed room to swing a club.

"You and he and Mr. Deegan had a long talk on the veranda last night," Ann hinted. "I heard your voices after I went to bed."

"Yes," Benton admitted. "I may as well tell you that we have chosen you to be the first lady of a sovereign State for the four years beginning next January."

"Goody! But do you think I can be elected?"

"I have to take their opinion for that," he laughed. "The colonel and Mr. Deegan say you will sweep the State."

She hung to his arm affectionately, looking up into his face. "I'll be so proud of you," she said. "Have you given your consent really and finally?"

He nodded.

"Governor Benton!" she exclaimed. "How fine it sounds! It is a lot more of a mouthful than Professor Benton or Orator Benton or even Chancellor Benton. But why," she added, as a shadow crossed her face, "why have they selected you? Why do they go outside their own class to pick a candidate?"

"Because they want to win."

"Then you're to be only a figurehead for them. Is that it?"

"I can't say what they think I shall be, Ann. I have told them plainly that I shall remain my own master after election as now. If they can't understand the lucid English language, that is their loss."

"I'm not so brave as you are," she said, after a pause.

"Have I ever failed yet?"

"You haven't failed, papa. But you couldn't stand up against old Mr. Kessup's half million; you had to resign from the institute."

"But I resigned, my dear; I didn't bow down and worship."

She thought of the struggle that had filled his last years as head of the People's Institute. Their State was a backward State; its system of public education stopped at the high schools. Benton's People's Institute, an outgrowth of the Chautauqua movement, was aimed to do the work that a State university should have done.

Ann recalled how her father's efforts to supply plain folk with learning had met with discouragement from influential men who might have helped; how Napoleon Fowler had been made chairman of the board of trustees in the hope that his standing among men of affairs might help the institute to the recognition it lacked; and how her father's outspoken words against public wrongs had brought him Fowler's enmity. When she looked up at Benton again, there were tears in her eyes.

"Sam Hillway thinks you are the greatest man in the world," she said, "and so do I."

"Then you and Sam mustn't be afraid for me. Let's think of the situation this way: If we find a half million dollars blocking the road we hope to follow, we must seek another road; and if the new road is hard and strange, maybe it will be all the more interesting. Perhaps it isn't the sort of road we like, but what do we care about that so long as it leads to a chance to serve?"

Benton could speak to his daughter as to no other person. She was his chum and adviser; she had taken her dead mother's place in his life. She knew that his dream of service was as ardent and sincere as another man's dream of wealth or power.

Darliss and Deegan thought, no doubt, that his attitude toward life was only a pose adopted for the sake of what it might get him. They measured

him by their own inch rule. Ann could guess that when he told them, in that midnight conference on the veranda, that he should expect to remain his own master even if elected through their help, they had put their tongues in their cheeks and winked to each other in the darkness, fancying that he was winking with them. To them his declaration of independence had seemed a bit of play acting, done for the looks of the thing. They had dealt with "respectable" men before.

The pair on the golf course had strolled down the hill to a stretch of turf bordered by thick woods. As Ann bent forward to address her golf ball, something fell at her feet and bounded a little way on the grass.

She looked around quickly for her father. He was chopping his ball out of a sand bunker. No one else was in sight except Colonel Darliss, down by the house at the lower end of the course, a quarter of a mile away. He was waddling toward them, unmistakable in his high silk hat.

Ann looked at the object that had startled her. It was a bit of stone, and around it a scrap of paper was tied with a cord. Curious, she picked it up.

There was writing on the paper; she could see pencil marks, and she saw a gash where the pencil point had pushed through, as if the writer had used the ground or the rough bark of a tree for a desk. Breaking the cord, she spread out the paper and read:

Miss B——: I am your friend. T. D. is up to the biggest game of his life. When the time comes for your father to get T. D., count on me to help. More later.

The writer seemed to have broken off before he had finished what he had to say. Ann saw the stubby figure of Colonel Darliss approaching and thought that she understood. She glanced toward the woods. Whoever had thrown the stone had hidden in the underbrush there, waiting for a chance to speak with her father or with her.

Mystified and a little indignant, she slipped the paper into the pocket of her sweater coat as Darliss came up.

"Well, professor," said the colonel, with a familiarity that seemed to Ann to imply proprietorship.

"I was thinking, just now," said Benton, "that a little of this would be good for you, colonel. Where's your tools?"

Darliss lifted his hat and mopped the sweat from his brow. "No golf for me," he panted. "I'm not a young man any more, professor. I'd never have walked even this little distance, only I wanted a word with you in private—if Miss Ann doesn't mind."

Miss Ann picked up her golf bag and sauntered toward the edge of the woods, resenting the business that was too important for her to hear; troubled, too, over the mysterious note. Through the shadows of the trees she peered for a skulking form, but the only living thing that met her gaze was a blue jay.

Benton and his host sat down on the grassy side of a bunker.

"Professor, I want to ask you a question, man to man."

"Ask me a dozen questions, colonel."

Darliss wound his heavy gold watch chain around a fat forefinger, and Benton saw that the gold pressed deep into the flesh.

"Between ourselves, professor, out here under the blue heaven, with nobody in hearing, I want to know one thing from you."

Benton waited.

"Professor, if I give you the nomination, do you intend to play the game on the square?"

"Just what do you mean by that?" Benton smilingly parried.

"You know what I mean. Are you safe?"

The question was as blunt as a blow in the face. The eyes of the two men met; it was the colonel's gaze that wavered, possibly because he had only one eye to gaze with.

"I think we understand each other, don't we?" said he. His finger was white where the watch chain wrapped it.

"I hope we do," said Benton, a flicker of humor in his eyes.

"Why I ask you point-blank," said

the colonel, "is that a few of my—of our friends are coming out here this evening to meet you."

"To look me over?"

"That's the plain English of it. They will have questions to ask me and I want to be able to tell them facts."

"Just tell them what I told you and Deegan last night," said Benton.

Darliss stole a look at his face. The smile that he saw there gave him reassurance. He chided himself for suspecting this mild and bookish educator of being deep.

"All right, then, professor. Let's say no more about it."

In the library of Darlissmere, late that night, the colonel looked up from some letter writing he was doing. His personal secretary stood at the door.

"Come in, Townsley," said he. "I thought everybody was abed but me."

Mrs. Townsley drew a chair to the table. In the fireplace remained a few embers of the hickory log that had blazed cheerily through the evening.

"What's kept you up?" Darliss asked.

"I've waited till now for a chance to see you alone," she said. "While you men have listened to the professor's chin down here, I've been kind to Ann, and this is my reward."

She spread Ann's mysterious note on the table before him. He read it, then read it again.

"What the devil's this?" he asked.

"Some one in the woods threw it to Ann on the golf course this afternoon. It was tied around a stone."

"Has she shown it to any one else?"

"To her father."

"What made her show it to you?"

"I don't know. I suppose she had to confide in somebody. Young Hillway has gone, so I came next."

"Damn!" muttered Darliss. "Push that button, will you?"

She obeyed as one used to his commands. A sleepy-eyed servant appeared.

"Tell Mr. Deegan," said the colonel, "that I want to see him. If he has gone to bed, tell him to get up."

He studied the note under the light of the table lamp. Mrs. Townsley gazed into the embers of the dying fire. Deegan entered, and Darliss handed him the note without comment. When Deegan had read it he sat down and concentrated his attention upon the brass foot of the table lamp.

"Well?" exclaimed the colonel, vainly waiting for any sign of expression in his lieutenant's face.

"It's no more than you expected," said Deegan. "What's the history of it?"

Darliss nodded to the woman. She related the incident of the golf course. The men were silent until the colonel said: "We don't need you any longer, Townsley."

"I promised to return the note in the morning."

"That'll be all right."

She bowed and withdrew. Deegan's eyes followed her to the door.

"Pull down the blinds," said the colonel.

Deegan complied. The lawn of Darlissmere lay bright under the full moon.

"What do you make of this thing, Gus?"

"It's plain enough," Deegan replied. "Your old friend Eight-twenty has started to get hunk with you after these many years. Anything new from Harrison?"

"Nothing since the wire this morning. They've been hunting the man for a week now."

"The man's probably here on the island."

"You're a hell of a comforter, Gus."

Even as Darliss spoke, something cracked against the window nearest the woods. The colonel jumped in spite of his godlike nerve. Deegan sprang to the window and raised the blind. The shadows of pines, rose clumps, and box hedges lay black on the lawn. Nothing moved.

"Only a June bug, colonel. Cheer up!"

"I wish to thunder this had happened yesterday," said Darliss, pointing to the note on the table.

"You can turn back yet," said Deegan.

"After I've brought Moyer and Crane and the rest down here to look the man over? He made a hit with 'em to-night. How can I turn around to-morrow and tell them I've decided to sidetrack him?"

"You've got first-class reasons to give 'em, haven't you? Still, you can't give your reasons, can you?"

Deegan paced the floor. The colonel drummed on the table. At the sound of a tiny avalanche of soot falling from the chimney into the fireplace, the old man started.

"I told you from the first to be leery of him," said Gus. "There's a bad light in the man's eye. I never knew a man to be safe with that kind of an eye in his head. You've been fancy in your taste, for once in your life; you've picked a highbrow candidate, and now you'll have to pay the price."

"Oh, go to bed!" shouted Tom Darliss. Deegan left the library, almost smiling. Halfway up the stairs, he turned and came down again.

"What made the Benton girl show that note to Mrs. Townsley?"

"Search me," said the colonel.

"I'll ask you another," said Gus. "Is it likely she'd have done it if her father hadn't put her up to it?"

The last sparks in the embers had winked out, the hands of the clock had moved around to half past one, and still Colonel Darliss sat at his library table, studying his problem. It was a surprising problem to him. He had moved a single pawn and found himself in check, nor could he see how he could move the pawn back and begin again without losing the game.

He thought back twenty years to the time when men said that he carried the State in his pocket. He recalled the scandals that had arisen. He saw himself in later years still powerful in the State, the head of an ousted and dormant party whose machine remained strong enough to claim its share of the spoils.

He saw his machine and the opposition machine working in harmony for their mutual advantage—a bipartisan union that mocked Republican and Democratic ideals alike. He had to smile as he thought of the private arrangements between Fowler and himself; the sham battles on Election Day, the results of which were foreordained by him and his friends on the other side. Those had been satisfying arrangements for him. Why hadn't he taken Deegan's advice and let well enough alone?

In Colonel Tom Darliss' hard nature was a soft spot of vanity, and in that soft spot lay the answer to his question, as the old man had to confess to himself before he turned out the light and went to bed.

He would sleep, and, waking refreshed, perhaps he could find a way to get rid of Jeffrey Benton.

CHAPTER VII.

A POLITICAL RUNAWAY.

The news of Jeffrey Benton's probable selection by the machine to be the standard bearer of the Democratic Party was old news before Colonel Darliss returned to the city. For Sam Hillway, whose father had managed Grover Cleveland's campaigns in the State, the news was too good to keep, and Sam was doubtless the one to blame for robbing the colonel of the pleasure of issuing the first announcement.

To his friend, Ken McClintock, political reporter of the Hanover *Blade*, Sam gave the tip.

"I don't know what the old man's game is," said he. "Nobody knows but the colonel himself. But for some reason he has set his heart on coming back into power this year."

"He has to," said McClintock, "or lose control of the party. He's afraid of you fellows up the State."

"Maybe so," Sam admitted. "Whatever his motive is, he will have us all trailing behind his band wagon if he puts Jeffrey Benton on the front seat. If we bolted the organization and put up a man of our own choice, that man

would be Benton. So Foxy Quiller has us lashed to his chariot wheel."

"I wonder if he has Benton tied up as well," said the reporter.

"That's the point," said Sam. "I've been watching the pair of them for half a week, and the old man is a little shy of the professor yet. He can't quite make him out. He sees what a drawing card the professor's name will be at the head of his program, and that makes him covetous. He wants so much to think Benton an easy mark that he lets his wishes influence his judgment. Yet he's afraid of him, and I believe that for two cents he would discard him even at this late hour."

"I see," said the newspaper man. "You think the colonel needs a little help in making up his mind?"

"You are an adroit young man, Mack. A little judicious publicity at this time——"

McClintock was adroit. Before the end of the week the Democratic papers of the State had hailed the news of Benton's candidacy with glad acclaim. "Colonel Darliss is to be congratulated," declared the Hastings *Herald*. "Again Democracy comes into its own," screamed the Malvern *Eagle*. "If anybody in the State can turn the rascals out, Jeffrey Benton is the man," shouted the Riverton *Free Press*. And the weather-beaten Dalton *Banner*, which had fondly clung to its belief in the integrity of the party leaders through twenty starving years, waved itself to tatters over the hint of a sincere fight and a probable victory.

In serious vein the Hanover *Blade*, Independent, discussed the rumor. Colonel Darliss was a statesman, after all. An old-school politician though he was, he was not so badly obsessed by the outworn notions of a departed era that he could not respond to the demands of the new spirit of the times. The *Blade* observed that the Democratic Party in the State seemed to have emerged from its twenty years of oblivion in a condition of praiseworthy purity. It had seen a great light and repented. With such a man as Jeffrey Benton at the top of the ticket, it could command the confidence of the electorate.

So it happened that Colonel Darliss, on returning from his innocent little holiday at Harbor Island, found himself the man of the hour. His progress down Russell Street to his office was a sort of ladies' chain of handshaking, both of his hands being in use at once, so numerous were those who congratulated him.

Grave old gentlemen, sad-eyed from twenty years of brooding over the ill fame of the party they admired, came out of hiding to tell the colonel that he was a great man. Party workers passed in and out of the Darliss Enterprises Building in a steady procession. Radical Democrats who had fought the colonel for years came running now with promises of support.

In the Park Club, which is composed of elderly plutocrats like Napoleon Fowler, the colonel's move was discussed as the shrewdest piece of political engineering he had ever undertaken. Justice Regan said to Fowler: "The old man has put one over on you, hasn't he, Nap?" Thus the graybeards flattered their own political insight.

In the Tower Club, frequented by rising young business men, the colonel's name was mentioned respectfully for the first time in the history of that progressive organization.

Any whisperings of doubt that lingered in the colonel's mind were drowned out by the enthusiastic noise that greeted his return to Hanover. To Gus Deegan he said: "We're in for it now."

"We sure are," said Deegan. "The landslide is on. What do you think of yourself?"

"We can handle it somehow," said Darliss.

"We'll have to," said Gus. "It's five months till election, and a good many automobile accidents can happen in five months. We'll have Benton campaign in a motor car. The roads are bad in the western end of the State—out yonder where the water power is."

As he said "water power," he closed his left eye.

Darliss frowned. "How in blazes do you know about that?"

"I have the gift of second-sight," Deegan chuckled.

"Well, you see twice too much. You'd better buy yourself a pair of blinders," the colonel growled. But he said it without any fear of Deegan. An easy boss was Darliss, and wise in allowing his serving men to have minds of their own. "Spiritless men, spiritless work," was one of his maxims.

At the office door Deegan stepped aside with a bow and a stare to make way for Mrs. Townsley. Through the closing door he heard the colonel say: "Ah, Townsley, glad you've dropped in. I was about to send for you."

The personal secretary was presumably engaged in outside work for her employer to-day, for she wore hat and gloves and carried a parasol and a shopping bag. Tall, handsome, fashionably attired, she stood looking down at the little magnate. In her eyes there might have been a glint of dislike for the magnate to see, if his mind had not been busy with matters weightier than a woman's scorn. When he looked at her at last, her face was passive.

"Sit down," said he. She obeyed.

"Townsley, what made you suggest Jeffrey Benton to me as a candidate?"

"If you credit me with the suggestion you do me great honor," she replied, in mild surprise. "People say that your tying up with Benton is the smartest thing you've ever done."

"You haven't answered my question."

"Did you ask me a question?"

"I did. Who put you up to wish Benton on me?"

"In the first place," she answered sharply, "nobody has ever put me up to suggest anything to you. In the second place, the original mention of Benton for the governorship came from you. I recall the conversation distinctly. It was here in this room. You asked me what I thought of the man, and I told you what I thought and still think—that to be able to get such a man on your ticket is like finding money in the road."

"I remember that talk," said the colonel, playing with his watch chain. "But somebody put the Benton notion into my head before that, and I can't think who it was unless it was you. Do you know anything about hypnotism?"

"I wish I did," she laughed.

He softened into confidence. "I'll tell you just how I feel about this Benton business. I'd hate to have anybody else hear this, but I have to talk to somebody about it, and Deegan would horse the life out of me if I told it to him. So there's only you."

"Woman's rôle is to comfort the sorrowing," said she, with a smile. "I presume you are sorrowing over your entangling alliance with the professor?"

"I am, Townsley, I am. I feel as if I had just wakened up from a nightmare to find the nightmare still riding me. For a whole month I've been walking in my sleep, and now see what I've brought home with me!"

Mrs. Townsley's eyes twinkled.

"Somebody must have hypnotized me," he fretted on. "Somebody put me to sleep and planted the fool suggestion in my fool mind, and I went to it like a chump. Now I've got a white elephant on my hands, and the whole State is carrying water to it."

"White elephants have been known to trot in harness," the woman hinted.

"This one must be made to," Darliss declared. "But so far I haven't a blessed line on him. I haven't got the bit in his mouth. I haven't even got a halter on his head."

"Has he given you no pledge?"

"He has promised me to play the game on the square. What kind of a pledge do you call that?"

"From a man like the professor, it is not so much a pledge as a threat," said she. "Is there no other way to bind him? Can't you lend him some money?"

"He has enough to keep him from starving, and he says that's all he wants. I've tried. It was like offering a ten-cent tip to the Statue of Liberty."

"Why not present him with a block

of stock in the water-power syndicate?"

"I could get it to the man in the moon a darn sight easier. No, my dear, we shall have to be more subtle."

Here Colonel Darliss bent forward a little and fixed his solitary eye upon his visitor's face. He spoke with some difficulty.

"We can't get an ordinary rope around his neck," he said, "but I think we could hold him with a single strand of dark-brown hair, if I could find the woman who cared enough for me to fasten it on to him."

Having delivered himself of the delicate hint, he sat back in his chair and smiled, rubbing his hands expectantly. Mrs. Townsley looked down at a pattern in the rug at her feet. It was a pretty pattern, made in Persia. Darliss gave her plenty of time to admire it.

She raised her eyes at last, but not to his face, for she looked out past the pure white carnations to the life in Russell Street. Her profile was perfect, and he gazed upon it with the eye of a connoisseur. Moreover, her look, when he viewed her face from the side, reminded him pleasurably of some one he had known and liked in bygone years, though who that some one was he did not trouble his memory to recall.

"You have nothing to lose, my dear," he said gently. "Few people in Hanover know you. You are a business woman and this is a business proposition."

Her eyes came back to his face and were entirely businesslike as she said: "I have heard no offer."

"Name your own terms, my dear. A thousand, shall we say?"

"People have told me you are a piker, colonel. I have always refused to believe them. But——"

"My dear Townsley, say no more. This sort of game is strange to me. Perhaps you know more about it. Quote me a price."

"A job like this," she answered, overlooking the slur, "is worth ten thousand if it's worth a dollar. After I have posed as an adventuress for you I shall have to go away and begin life again somewhere else."

"I can readily see that, my dear. Your usefulness here would be ended. You would no longer be in a position to bring me water-power tips, eh? But I have no fear of losing your services, Townsley. Nothing will come of this except that we shall have the professor where we want him."

"You will pay cash in advance?" queried the business woman.

"I will not," replied the head of the Darliss Enterprises, Incorporated. "Five thousand down and the other five at the completion of the job."

"Very well," said she, rising. "When shall I begin?"

"The sooner you begin, the quicker my agony will be over. I have invited our friend to play golf at Glen Ayr to-morrow afternoon. Can you arrange to go with us?"

"I shall be charmed," she laughed.

"I hope the professor will be, too. By the way, if you could——" The gallant colonel hesitated. "I know it is not a man's right to dictate fashions to a woman, but if you could manage to wear something that would be visible for several miles, it might be a good idea."

A stout pedestrian, looking in past the white carnations a few minutes thereafter, saw Colonel Darliss rubbing his hands contentedly and smiling to himself. The door opened and the stout pedestrian entered.

"Hello, Fowler! Sit down."

"Thanks, no. Say, colonel, you've certainly started something, you have!"

Darliss acknowledged the compliment with a sober nod.

"Some of us are worried. Before this joke of yours goes any further, we want to know where we are at. There's talk, Darliss, that you are the victim of a political runaway and that you have dropped the lines over the dashboard. How about it?"

The colonel puffed out his cheeks in his famous manner.

"Nothing of the sort," he replied. "Nothing of the sort. I hold both the reins tight in my left hand and the

buggy whip in my right, and the skittish steed that you are afraid of is sitting down on his haunches and looking around to me for further orders."

"We want to know more than that," snapped Fowler. "We won't take chances."

"Then listen."

The colonel whispered, and Fowler's eyes opened with understanding.

"Drop out to Glen Ayr at three tomorrow afternoon and see for yourself," said Darliss.

"I'll have some one there," said Fowler.

CHAPTER VIII.

FOUND WANTING.

Jeffrey Benton's home looked not greatly unlike any other modest home in the suburban town of Judson, except in the fact that its flower garden was a little better kept than most flower gardens. The garden was personally conducted by Ann.

Sam Hillway, swinging up the street from the railway station and arriving in sight of the Benton home, was reminded of a painting that he had seen somewhere. The place had an old-fashioned, homy air, and this effect, on this evening in July, was enhanced by the vision of a young woman in a white frock, who stood at the gate with a handful of freshly picked nasturtiums in her hand. Above the girl's head was an arch of climbing roses, and behind her for a background were the white pillars of a colonial doorway.

Sam's honest face lighted up at sight of her, and her smile of greeting was a fine reward for his railway journey from Merrill on a hot day.

"Hello, farmer!" said she.

"Hello, florist!" he answered, as their hands and their eyes met. She opened the gate. "Father's expecting you. Have you had supper?"

"I had something on the train. Here, let me carry your bouquet."

"Then you must let me carry your satchel."

Exchanging burdens and glances of mutual admiration, they turned toward the house. At the door Jeffrey Benton met them with a handclasp for the young man.

"You're all dusty," said Ann to Sam. "Wouldn't you like to wash up?"

"There isn't time," said he. "I have to run on into Hanover to-night. Let's sit down and get right to talking."

"It is cooler out here," said Benton, leading the way to the screened porch at the side of the house. They sat down. "Your telegram promises something interesting."

Ann arranged her garden blossoms in a glass bowl on a porch table. Sam glanced toward her and then back to her father questioningly.

"She is my confidential secretary," said Mr. Benton. "She is perfectly safe."

"What I have to say may not be pleasant for her to hear," Sam hinted.

"Don't mind me," laughed Ann. "In politics we never allow ourselves to have feelings."

"You are wise, then," said Sam, "because the news I bring wouldn't make your feelings feel good. Do you know, professor, that Colonel Darliss has decided to maroon you and leave you to your fate?"

"I've known it for some time," replied Benton quietly.

"We've known it for a week," said Ann, still busy with the flowers.

"Has the colonel told you in so many words that he is done with you?"

"He has asked me for the second time whether I am honest in my intentions," Benton answered, "and for the second time I have told him that I am. That was a week ago yesterday. Since then I have not heard from him."

"I'd like to compare your definition of honesty with his," said Sam.

"It wouldn't be a comparison," said Ann. "It would be a contrast."

"Tell us what you've heard," said the professor. "I supposed that you were quite out of the reach of rumor, up there on your farm."

"The first hint I had that things were not going right," said Sam, "was in this anonymous note."

He spread a sheet of letter paper before them. In the twilight they read:

Hanover, July 5th.

MR. HILLWAY: If you are a friend of Jeffrey Benton's you ought to know that he will never be governor while Tom Darliss has anything to say about it.

ONE WHO KNOWS.

"That's cheerful," said Ann.

"It is so cheerful that I laughed at it," said Sam. "But the rural free delivery brought another note next day. Here it is."

His second exhibit in the case read thus:

Hanover, July 6th.

MR. HILLWAY: If you are as much of a politician as your father was before you, you will get something on Tom Darliss and force him to stick to Benton.

I. M. WISE.

Benton compared the handwriting of the two notes. "It is plain," said he, that "One Who Knows and I. M. Wise are the same person, and that the author of these notes is the man who wrote the message that fell at Ann's feet at Harbor Island last month."

"My father detested anonymous letter writers," said Sam, "and I have inherited his feeling. But these letters are undoubtedly warranted by the facts in the case. The colonel is up to some game. Although he has practically acknowledged you as his candidate for the governorship, he intends to shelve you. He's afraid of you. I can see now that he has been afraid of you from the first. At Harbor Island his eye was on you all the time. He knows by now that you won't stand without hitching, and he can't find any way to hitch you, so you have ceased to be of any use to him. I know this is true, because Gus Deegan has told me so."

"Gus Deegan?" cried Ann.

"Yes. Gus Deegan came to see me yesterday. He ran out to Merrill on the night train, and I had him on my hands all day. He took me into his confidence, which is a good deal for Deegan to do to anybody. He says the poor old colonel is heartbroken over his bargain with you. They want me to go to the rescue by getting you to withdraw. In return for this service I am to be nominated in your stead. So I have left my haying and rushed down here to-day to urge you with all the urge in my power to tell the colonel to go to the dickens."

"They offered you the head of the ticket, did they?"

"They offered me more than that. Deegan took me up into a high mountain and showed me the whole world at my feet. The governorship was only a detail in the foreground. Beyond it was the United States Senate, and, still farther in the picture, the White House. He assured me it was the opportunity of a lifetime."

"I hope you considered it, Sam," said Benton.

"I did," Sam confessed. "I told him it was an opportunity I had waited for a long while—an opportunity to tell him what I thought of him and his methods. When I was through telling him, he went away."

"May I inquire," said Benton, "what the colonel's objection is to me?"

"He says he discovers that he can't elect you. The business interests of the State have balked at his selection and notified him that you won't do. This is to be his last fight, and he wants to win it. At least, that is the tale of woe Deegan brought me yesterday. If I will help the colonel out of the hole by discouraging you and taking the nomination myself, he will bequeath the State leadership to me when he quits the game. He will be happy, he says, to lift me into the position that my father held in Cleveland's time."

"But, Sam, you see through the scheme, don't you?" asked Ann.

"Certainly I do. Darliss doesn't want me for governor any more than he wants the State to go for prohibition. I should be defeated worse than any other poor goat he has put up in twenty years. The Republican nominee would have a walkaway as usual, and as usual it would be a victory for the colonel. That's the way he wins his victories—by betraying his party into the hands of the enemy and defeating his own candidates. No, Professor Benton, the only way we can beat the

colonel is to drag him to our own kind of a victory, if we have to do it with a cable. With you for his leading candidate, the party can't help winning, and Darliss will never recover from the blow."

"For an academic and impractical theorist in politics," said Benton, "your perception is very keen."

"Who called me that?" Sam demanded.

"Colonel Darliss."

"Funny," said Sam. "That's what Deegan called you yesterday. If you were governor, Gus says, you wouldn't know what to do with the office. Designing people could put anything over on you and you would be helpless to prevent. That's why the business interests are afraid of you."

"I wonder what business interests Deegan and the colonel have in mind," said Benton. "I have been encouraged by many business men to think that my nomination would be looked upon by them as a deliverance from the gang that now runs the State. There seems to be a difference of opinion among the business interests."

"We know who it is the colonel has in mind when he talks that way," said Sam. "He's thinking of Fowler and the traction crowd. Has it occurred to you, professor, that those fellows were possible partners of Darliss in booming you for office?"

"It has, though what they are after has not yet been brought to my attention. I have projected my mind from one end of the State to the other to try to discover what it is they want, but they seem to have grabbed everything already."

"Whatever their game is," said Sam, "your nomination in the September primaries will spoil it, and I'm going to see that you land the nomination. They have played horse with my father's party long enough. I'm going to Hanover to-night, and I'll see Darliss to-morrow and tell him so to his face. The old Judas!"

"Can't we get something on him," said Ann, "as the man advises in this letter?"

"That isn't necessary," replied her father. "If I have to fight Colonel Darliss, I prefer to fight him in broad daylight and in full view of the audience. Besides, it will be hard to get anything on him that will hurt him. The breath of scandal means nothing to a bad egg."

"Trust me to find something that will get home to this bad egg through his shell," said Sam. "Shall I tell you what I have in mind?"

"Do," said Ann.

"I've been going through my father's papers, looking up Darliss and his beginnings as a boss. If you know the history of the party in the State you will recall that when my father fell ill after the Cleveland campaign of 1892, Darliss and a partner of his named Eads practically stole the State leadership away from him. My father was too sick to care much, and he died soon after, but he left some interesting memoranda on Darliss."

"Perhaps your father hoped that some day you would avenge him," Ann suggested.

"I don't think that was his idea; but it's mine, and that's what I meant when I told Guss Deegan that I had waited long for the opening he gave me. I'm going after Darliss and his gang for old time's sake, as well as for reasons more personal and up to date."

Here he winked to Ann, and, although she was a young woman of culture and refinement, her arch look in return said plainly: "Aren't you the jollier!"

"What I shall try to bring to the colonel's recollection," Sam continued, "is the matter of the Merkle Street murders on Election Day in 1894. Do you remember that affair, Doctor Benton?"

"Distinctly. It was in that election that the Democratic Party went out of power in the State."

"Did Colonel Darliss have anything to do with the murders?" asked Ann.

"That's for us to find out," said Sam. "My father thought he did. When I see you again I hope I'll have something to report."

He rose to take his departure. Ann protested:

"You aren't leaving so soon? I wanted to tell you about Mrs. Townsley."

"What about Mrs. Townsley?"

"I think," said the professor, before Ann could reply, "that we had better leave Mrs. Townsley out of our talk."

"Very well," said Ann. "Only she's a queer one."

"Thanks for the tip," said Sam. "I'll be warned against the lady."

"Oh, I don't mean that at all," said Ann. "I think you'll find her a very good person to advise with, if you ever need that sort of thing. Really, papa, I ought to tell Sam about her."

"Go ahead," said Benton, smiling.

"She has been awfully friendly with us since we came back from Harbor Island," said Ann. "But the funny thing is that she has asked me never to let her be seen alone with papa. So whenever they go motoring or golfing together, I go along with them, like Mary's little lamb, to act as their chaperon. Isn't she the queer one?"

"I should call her a very good friend of yours," said Sam.

They had entered the house and moved toward the door. Sam took his hat and his satchel.

"In whatever you do," said Benton, "please remember that I have no ambition in the governorship affair beyond seeing that my name is not used as the cloak for any crookedness."

"I understand," said Sam.

Father and daughter watched him from the doorway as he strode down the street. They did not see a dim figure creep out from the shadow of a syringa bush under the side veranda and slink away across the lawn.

CHAPTER IX.

DEFIANCE.

At the door of the Darliss Enterprises Building next morning Sam Hillway waited for the lord of the establishment to appear. Ten o'clock was the colonel's hour for getting down to business, and punctuality was one of the sterling old virtues that he affected.

Shortly before the hour Mrs. Townsley passed in at the door, bestowing a startled glance upon Hillway and following it with a smile.

"Handsome woman," thought Sam, and reflected upon what Ann had told him about her.

At five minutes to ten Ken McClintock sauntered up. Where a political story was about to break, there was McClintock.

"Allah be with you, Sam," said he. "How's farming? What do you know? And lend me a match."

"Mack," said Hillway, "tell me about the colonel's fascinating lady friend."

"The queenly Mrs. Townsley?"

"Yes. Who is she?"

"Inquire within," the reporter advised, "or consult a clairvoyant."

"What do people say about her?"

"They say," replied McClintock, "that it is said that there are rumors to the effect that it can be stated on good authority that she came from out of the West, like young Lochinvar, it is alleged. Further than that, deponent wotteth not. She began to be observed passing in and out of this Corinthian portal about a year ago. At the last session of the legislature she graced the lobbies of the statehouse at Dalton with her attractive presence."

"I remember her now," said Sam.

"There were reports that she influenced the passage of one or two bills not exactly detrimental to the Darliss Enterprises, Incorporated. Presumably the old man finds her services profitable, for he retains her in his entourage. In conclusion it may be stated that the lady hangs out at the Y. W. C. A. boarding home, where her behavior is above reproach."

"Thanks," said Sam. "Have another match—or haven't you eaten that one yet?"

"I'm dieting, and enough is as good as a feast," said McClintock. "Which leads me naturally and easily to the question whether it is true or not that the old man has had enough of Jeffrey Benton."

"He may have had enough of Benton," Sam answered truculently, "but he's going to have a lot more of him before he gets through with him."

"There is gossip," remarked the reporter, "that the old man went out for to snare a safe and soft candidate and caught a Tartar, and that the Tartar has since acted upon him as an emetic, so that the colonel would fain crawl under a bush and be ill."

"The diagnosis is correct," said Sam. "The patient is critically indisposed and I guess there's no cure for him."

"How did he come to announce Benton as his candidate before he was sure of the man?"

"The colonel has never announced Benton as his choice. Let me remind you that you and I made the announcement for him."

"So we did," mused the reporter. "The plot thickens. But hush! Who comes?"

In high silk hat and Prince Albert coat, little Colonel Darliss drew near; his manner was impressive and sanctified as usual, but there was a look of care on his face. Flattering hands touched hat brims along the way; smiles and friendly words greeted him on all sides; but he came along in gloomy thought, heedless of sidewalk civilities. Confronted by Sam Hillway, he halted.

"Are you waiting to see me?" he demanded.

"Yes, I am."

"Then keep on waiting and be damned to you!" the colonel thundered, and stalked majestically into the building.

In a stride Sam overtook him and laid a swift hand upon his arm. The little colonel turned like a revolving statue of righteous dignity.

"I said——" he began, but Sam cut him short:

"I don't give a hang what you said. Who the deuce are you to damn better men than you are?"

The colonel glared into the young man's eyes a second.

"Come in," he said.

McClintock watched them up the stairs. Then, chewing his match, he sauntered over to the *Blade* office and was presently in consultation in the quietest corner of the noisy shop with the publisher, the editor in chief, the managing editor, the first editorial writer, the city editor, and two copy readers.

Colonel Darliss' look, when he turned from closing the door of his private office, was one of mournful reproach.

"Why did you make a scene with that reporter around?" he demanded.

"Rats!" answered Hillway.

"No matter what your personal feelings are, you should have more consideration for the welfare of the party." The colonel's voice was gently sad. "It will be all over town to-night that you and I have quarreled."

"Well, it'll be true," said Sam. "I'm here to quarrel with you and to declare war on you, and I notify you fair and square that the war won't be over till I have your scalp."

The colonel hung up his silk hat and sank wearily into his chair.

"You young Indians will be the death of me," he complained. "I've tried to be a good leader, a kind leader to you all——"

"And a dickens of a wilderness you've led us into," said Sam. "The very crows laugh at us."

"I've tried especially hard to help you, Sam. I've brought you out. I can say that I've made you. Only this week I offered you the highest honor in my gift, yet you turn and rend me. When the old bull is full of years the young bulls kill him. I gave you credit for a little gratitude, Sam."

There had been a time when Hillway would have reached for the old leader's hand and entreated him to forgive and forget. But Sam was fighting now for Jeffrey Benton and Ann, not for himself.

"Colonel, you pretend to think that I want to strip you of your power and take your place as the State leader. Well, I don't, and you know it. You know what I want."

"Sit down, won't you?"

"No, thanks."

"Yes, I know what you want, Sam. You want me to go on to the bitter end with this idiotic idea of backing Benton. You want me to make the last fight of my career with a hopelessly impossible candidate. You ask me to put something across that can't be done. When my foresight warns me to balk before it's too late, then you ask me to go counter to my best judgment and betray the party that looks to me for guidance."

"You say Jeffrey Benton can't be elected. He can," declared Sam. "He will go into office with the biggest popular vote in the history of the State. The whole State wants him."

The colonel lifted his hand. "You youngsters let your enthusiasm run away with you. The whole State doesn't want him, Sam. A few of you radicals and hotheads are shouting for him and you make a big noise. But the noise won't count when the quiet ballots fall. This is a conservative State, Sam, a substantial State. It won't be rushed off its feet by any glib visionary like your professor. He makes a fine speech and people like to hear him, just as they like to hear a talented singer. But when it comes to voting, they want a solid man, a man of experience in affairs. I'm afraid your friend can't qualify."

"You didn't think this way a month ago."

"A month ago," said Darliss, "I was under the spell of the man's personality. I was magnetized, hypnotized, paralyzed. My eyes are open now, and I intend to keep them open until the party's fortunes for the next four years have been placed in the hands of a practical, reliable, level-headed, everyday man. It's a great mistake, Sam, for a party to run after highbrow candidates. We live in a democracy, and, much as we may admire class and excellence and brilliance in private life, we must seek men of the average for public office if we hope to suit everybody."

"Rot!" exclaimed Hillway so suddenly that Darliss, who had been carried away with his own philosophy, jumped and looked startled.

"Rot!" said Sam again. "I won't waste my time debating with you, because your arguments are absolute rot, and you know it. Let's can the comedy, colonel, and get down to plain speaking. Do you or do you not intend to support Jeffrey Benton for the nomination? Do you intend to give him a square deal before the primaries and back him with the full force of the party machine after he wins the nomination? Or do you intend to sell him out to the traction crowd across the street, the way you sold out poor Dan Washburn last time?"

The colonel waved his hands deprecatingly.

"Under the new direct-primary law which you fellows forced on us last winter, I am not permitted to have a candidate before the primaries. My privilege is merely to try to elect any candidate the voters of the party select. If the professor aspires to the nomination, let him go to it. This is a free country. I'll tell you this, however, that there will be somebody else in the field, and if that somebody else happens to have the support of my loyal followers—I said *loyal,* Sam—then the professor's chances won't look very bright, will they?"

"You gave Jeffrey Benton to understand that he was to have that support," said Sam. "Now you tell me you have withdrawn that support from him—for what dark reason you've done it I don't know. Well, sir, I'm here to tell you that you are going to change your mind once more. You're going to carry out your promise to Benton and nominate him."

Darliss had risen. His air of forbearance had gone, and in its place was a look of anger.

"You young fool," said he, in a tone a lion might use toward an impertinent pup, "take this message to your professor from me, that the State Democratic organization will under no circumstances support him either in the primary or in the election."

"I tell you you *will* support him!" cried Hillway, his fists clenched.

"I tell you I won't!" retorted the colonel, slamming the desk with his pudgy palm. "I'll be damned if I will."

"You'll be damned a damn sight worse if you don't," said Sam. "I'll force you to support him with all your might and power, and after you have nominated and elected him, then I'm going to drive you out of the party. You think I can't find a way to make you, don't you? That's where you fool yourself."

He bent forward across the desk.

"Colonel, did you ever know a man named Eads?"

If Tom Darliss had at that moment been posing for a time-exposure photograph, his involuntary start would have spoiled the plate. But his recovery was swift.

"Get out of here, you blackmailing whelp!" he roared. "Go dig up your dead scandals and see what good they'll do you—you dashed ingrate, you!"

Sam laughed in the red and wrathful face of the old man.

"Day after to-morrow, at ten o'clock," said he, "I'll be back here with what I've dug up. Then we'll see what kind of a tune you'll sing. I'm going to give you every chance to do the right thing. Day after to-morrow at ten, remember."

Before Hillway had reached the street, a clerk entered the colonel's private office in response to the frantic call of a buzzer.

"Just going down the stairs," gurgled Darliss. "Trail him. Phone me."

"Right, sir."

Alone, the colonel reached for the telephone, placed the receiver to his ear, and jiggled the hook. When a girl's voice answered, he shouted, "Never mind!" and hung up again.

He whirled halfway round in his chair and looked out at the street, past the customary carnations, which might have been cauliflowers to-day, for all he saw of them. At a sound behind him, he swung round again to see Mrs. Townsley at the door.

"Are you busy?" she asked.

"Yes," he snapped. "Don't want to see you. Get out!"

For a moment she stood looking at him, a strange little smile playing around the corners of her mouth.

At the B. & L. station, Sam Hillway said to the ticket agent:

"Dalton and back."

A young man next behind Sam at the window dropped out of line and watched Sam as he strode through the waiting room to the train platform.

Then the young man stepped into a telephone booth.

CHAPTER X.

THE STOOL PIGEON.

Gray and gloomy, the tower-topped walls of the State penitentiary rose before Sam Hillway's eyes as he descended next morning from the trolley car that had carried him from his hotel in Dalton.

A sentinel, with gun on shoulder, looked down at him from the top of the wall, and a white face looked out at him through a barred window in the prison office. At either side of the walk beds of geraniums and foliage plants did their best to brighten the entrance, and a fat trusty in convict brown knelt before one of them, stirring the soil with a little rake.

Warden Harrison, at his desk, frowned as Hillway entered, but turned the frown into a smile that was almost cordial.

"Good morning, Mr. Hillway," said he, rising and extending his hand. "I suppose I ought not to tell you that I'm glad to see you here, yet it's the truth."

"A nice, genial chap," thought Sam. "Good man for the job." Aloud he said: "You have a first-rate memory for faces, sir."

"I need to have," said Harrison. "It's part of the business."

"As I recall, we've never met but once before."

"On the day, two years ago, when you came here with the legislative investigating committee. Investigations always linger clearly in the mind, Mr.

Hillway. You're not investigating to-day, I hope?"

"No. It's a private errand this trip. I want to have a talk with one of your prisoners."

"I guess that can be arranged all right," said the affable warden. "Any particular prisoner you'd like to talk with?"

"Bill Eads."

"Bill Eads?" The warden seemed to be trying to work his memory. "They go by numbers here, you know."

"You ought to know Bill Eads by name. He's here for the Merkle Street election murders in 1894."

"Oh, yes!" said Harrison, suddenly recollecting. He pressed a desk button and a convict messenger appeared.

"Ask Mr. Williams to step here."

The messenger ducked his head and disappeared. Presently entered a cadaverous man in an office coat, with a pen behind ear and a blotter in his hand.

"Mr. Hillway, meet Mr. Williams, our record keeper."

"Pleased to meet you, Mr. Hillway," said Williams. "Are you the one they call 'Hayseed Hillway?' "

"Guilty," said Sam, blushing modestly.

Very sociable and friendly were Williams and his chief.

"Mr. Hillway wants to see Bill Eads," said Harrison. "That's Number Eight-twenty, isn't it?"

"Correct," answered the record keeper. "Shall I hunt him up?"

"Fetch him here to the office," said the warden. "Or would Mr. Hillway prefer to see him in his cell?"

"Any way that's convenient," said Sam. "I shall want to meet him without witnesses, if possible."

"We can fix that for you," said the obliging Harrison. "This is not an attempt at jail delivery, of course?"

"I give you my word that I'm not here to aid in the escape of any murderer," Sam laughed.

Williams returned with startling promptness, bringing with him a fat convict, cap in hand.

"Eight-twenty," said the warden, "here's a gentleman who wants to talk with you."

Leaving Sam and the convict in sole possession of the office, the warden and the record keeper withdrew.

The convict looked at Sam with eyes of fear and craft. Sam could see that he was on his guard.

"Let's sit down and be comfortable. You're Bill Eads, are you?"

"So they called me in the old days," gruffly answered the convict. "That was long ago. I've most forgotten. I'm only Eight-twenty now."

"Eads, when you were a free man, did you ever know Herndon Hillway?"

"Knew him well," said the convict. "I took orders from him in Grover Cleveland's last campaign. He could tell you a lot about me if he was alive."

"Herndon Hillway was my father."

"You don't say! Then I'll bet I've seen you playing around the lawn up there at Merrill, where I used to go to see your old man. You were just a little tad then."

"Mr. Eads, your political career ended rather suddenly, didn't it?"

"Yes, sir. I put my foot in the mud on Election Day in '96 and I've been here most of the time since."

"Wasn't it in '94?"

The convict looked annoyed. " '94 or '96—all years are alike to me now," he whined.

"In running through some of my father's papers the other day," said Sam, "I came across a memorandum or two about you. My father seemed to think you had a dirty deal when they put you behind these walls. I think he meant to help you get free, but he died before he could carry out his purpose."

"A dirty deal, you say? I guess I did have a dirty deal! Here I've been for twenty years, the same as dead, while other men that were just as deep in the crime as I was have gone free and made fortunes. But I'll get 'em yet!" the convict cried. "They've forgotten me for twenty years—they that promised me a pardon after I'd served a year! But I haven't forgot them one minute. My time's coming, don't worry!"

"You were friendly once with Tom Darliss, weren't you?"

The convict ripped out an oath that almost made the windows rattle. Sam smiled.

"Eads, if you saw a chance to get square with Tom Darliss after all these years, would you take it?"

"Would I take it! But what can I do, locked up here?"

"You can work through me," said Sam. "I am on the old man's trail, and I mean to stay on it till I get him. It's open warfare between us and he knows it. Do you want to help me, Eads?"

The convict's eyes twinkled.

"Give you what I know on him, do you mean?"

"Yes."

"Not on your life!"

"Why not?"

"You'll take my information to him and swap it for something you want out of him. Nix! What I know I know, and nobody can get it away from me till my time comes."

"Perhaps I can convince you that your time has come."

Pulling his chair closer to the side of the obstinate lifer, Hillway sketched for him the absurd political situation into which vanity had lured Colonel Tom Darliss. As the story progressed, the convict's face brightened.

"So, you see," Sam concluded, after a ten-minute appeal, "your opportunity to soak your ancient enemy is here, knocking at your door. Will you help me?"

At the mention of a door, convict Number Eight-twenty glanced uneasily at the portal through which Harrison and Williams had gone.

"I would if I dared," he whispered. "But they'd kill me if they knew, and they'll know, all right, if I do. Can't you see, youngster? They're part of the system. We'll have to work it low down on them. Suppose, now, I was to jump up and slam this chair around and yell out loud that I wouldn't have nothing to do with you. And suppose that beforehand I put you next to where you could go, outside, to get the goods that I'm scared to give you here? Would that be all right?"

"Sure it would."

"Then listen," the convict confided huskily. "I've got a married daughter that nobody here knows about. She lives in town—you passed her house coming out on the trolley car this morning."

"How do you know I came out on a trolley car?"

Number Eight-twenty swallowed hard, then answered: "I was outside, tending the flower beds, when you got here."

"All right," said Sam. "Tell me about your daughter."

"The name is Pearsall—Canal Street, Number 14. I'll get word to her today. Oh, I've got ways they don't know about. I'll tell her you're the friend she and I have been waiting for all these years. Ask her what you want to know. She'll tell you. She's got the documents. But don't go there in daylight. You want to remember that these devils"—he jerked his head toward the door—"are all a part of the game. Tom Darliss will know by tonight that you've been here, and you'll be shadowed the rest of the time you stay in Dalton. I guess I know."

Sam took a card from his pocketbook.

"Write your name on it," said he, "so that I'll have something to introduce me to Mrs. Pearsall in case you fail to get word to her."

Number Eight-twenty dipped one of the warden's pens in ink and scribbled under Hillway's name: "O. K. W. E."

"Now," said he, "we'd better adjourn with a row. We've talked too long already."

Leaping up, he seized his chair and rattled it on the floor.

"No!" he shouted. "No! I'll be damned if I'll tell you a thing! You can't play any game on me, dang you!"

"But listen!" cried Sam, entering into the spirit of the occasion. "Listen to me a minute."

"I tell you I won't listen to nothing!" roared the convict, and thumped the warden's desk with his fist. Sam

slipped to the door and flung it open. Williams was just rising from a kneeling posture. He seemed embarrassed. Harrison stood close behind him.

"What's the trouble?" demanded the warden, entering briskly.

"Our friend has gone violent," Sam explained. "I've been trying to get some information out of him that might lead to his release from prison, but he thinks I'm an enemy."

The convict fumbled with his cap and glowered at the floor before the challenging look of the warden.

"Take him away, Williams," said Harrison. The record keeper led the obstreperous Eight-twenty out of the room.

"So you had your trip for nothing, Mr. Hillway?" said the warden. "Too bad. But they often get that way in here. He may need a strait-jacket before night."

"I'm sorry if I've made you trouble," said Sam, "though it has been in a good cause."

"That's all right. We're used to trouble and not much else. Won't you stay for a look around and take lunch with me afterward?"

But Sam had had enough of the prison smell, which pervaded even the sunny quarters of the officials. As soon as politeness would permit, he departed.

When the trolley car had carried him out of sight of the prison windows, Williams and the fat convict reëntered the office, rushed to a coat closet in a corner, and threw open the door. Gus Deegan stepped out, and the four men joined arms and executed a war dance until all were breathless.

"Pete," gasped the warden, flopping into his chair at the desk, "you missed your calling when you got a job here. You belong in the movies."

The fat convict had taken Deegan's place in the closet and was now divesting himself of his prison garb and substituting therefor the gray uniform of a deputy warden.

"I took my part well, don't you think?" he asked, pleased with himself. "I made it so real that I half think I'm Bill Eads yet."

"It worked all right," said the cadaverous Williams; "but I hope we don't hear from it."

"You'll never hear from it," said Deegan, "after what's going to happen to the poor boob to-night."

CHAPTER XI.

DEEGAN.

Sam spent the afternoon in making calls at the statehouse, where he had sat as a member of the Democratic minority in the two preceding legislatures. As the State senator from Merrill County, he walked through doors and gates that barred the common herd, and, passing through rooms where clerks sweltered at their desks, he made himself at home in the private offices of such of the State's chosen great as were pleased to look after the State's business in July. The governor's door was closed, and the attorney general's. Even Jasper Kingsley, the hard-working clerk of the supreme court, had fled to a cooler place than the State capital; but the men still on duty welcomed Sam with glad hands, Republicans though they were.

Among them was Fredericks, the State surveyor.

"What brings you to Dalton in fine haying weather like this?" asked Fredericks, setting his drawing board in a corner and producing a cigar box from a drawer in his desk.

"I'm looking after my fences," answered Sam, lighting one of the State surveyor's cigars. "What do you know?"

"I know that you need to be on the job about those fences."

A round little man with a rosy face was Fredericks, and his eyes were merry.

"Because why?" asked Sam.

"Because Deegan was here around noon to-day, tearing them down for you."

Sam waited patiently.

"You know the program, of course?" asked the surveyor. "Hoskins of Harwich is to beat your man at the primary election, after which Pingree of our

side is to beat Hoskins in November, and Hoskins is to be pacified with the vacancy on the supreme bench."

"Hoskins is a good fellow," said Sam, "and so is Pingree. I hate to disappoint them, but there's nothing doing for either of 'em."

"Then it's true, and you and the old man have come to the break?"

Sam nodded.

"I'm glad to hear it."

"How many of your people will support my man, if I nominate him?"

"Forty per cent—maybe fifty—if you nominate him. But there's the rub, Sam. How are you going to do it?"

"I shan't do it. Tom Darliss will."

Fredericks laughed a cloud of cigar smoke halfway across his office and out at the open window to nourish the verdure on the capitol lawn.

"Laugh, dog-gone you, laugh!" said Sam. "But I tell you that Tom Darliss will not only put my man across at the primaries, but also get out the full machine vote for him on Election Day."

"You're dreaming," said the surveyor.

"Am I?" retorted Sam. "So was Christopher Columbus."

"Fools rush in, Sam. But good luck to you, anyway!"

On the wall before Hillway hung a large profile map of the State. Sam studied it idly.

"Sam, has it ever occurred to you that there's a lot of valuable water power running to waste out there in Grenada County?"

Hillway noted the jumble of mountains and valleys that filled the lower left-hand corner of the map.

"Some day that water power will be worth millions of dollars to the people of the State, Sam."

"I guess you're right, Fred."

Sam continued to look at the map, unconscious of the smile that Fredericks hid behind his cigar hand.

"When you become the power behind the throne, Sam, you might start something in the way of a big State-owned development down there."

"I don't believe in public ownership," said Hillway. "Private enterprise for mine. My father was a railroad builder."

And Fredericks smiled again.

Sam was thinking of more pressing matters than Utopian water-power schemes just then. The tip that Fredericks had given him regarding Hoskins and Pingree was a distinctly valuable bit of advance information. It was not the first that Sam had received from the surveyor. The two young men had been fraternity brothers in college, and there existed between them a tie stronger than the ties of political partisanship, or even of political bipartisanship, which latter are the strongest ties known to the Darlisses, the Fowlers, and the Deegans.

But Fredericks had another tip for Sam this afternoon.

"Deegan expected you to drop in at the statehouse to-day."

"He doesn't know I'm in Dalton."

"Yes, he does. He left word with my stenographer to let him know if you showed up."

"I wonder why," said Sam.

At supper in the Dalton Inn that evening he was still wondering why Deegan had left that request with the surveyor's secretary. But the sight of Ken McClintock entering the dining room drove the question from his mind. Beckoned to, the *Blade* reporter sat down at the vacant place at Sam's table.

"What do you know?" he began, as usual.

"You're a long way off your beat, Mack. What brings you to Dalton tonight?"

"One of my hunches," answered McClintock, reaching for the water jar. "I had a hunch that a story was to break here to-day. But everything seems placid so far."

"Do something for me, Mack. Cast your eagle eye carelessly around the room and see how many people are watching us."

"Three," said the reporter, after a minute. "The first is your old playmate, Gus Deegan, behind the palm in the corner."

"I hadn't seen him," said Sam. "Who are the others?"

"One is a cigarette fiend with a collar too high and hair too long for this time of year. I assume that his habit is cigarettes from the fact that his finger tips are yellow. The other is a heavy-set person with a low and rakish brow. The two are together and they appear to be fond of the sight of you, for they take turns in looking this way. I have never seen them before."

"Thanks, Mack. Now would you mind telling me what you make of this?"

He handed the reporter a telegram. McClintock read:

> One who knows advises beware of traps.
> J. B.

"J. B. would be Jeffrey Benton?"

"Yes."

"There's where I get off, Sam. If I knew what you were up to in Dalton, maybe I could do better."

"I can't tell it yet, even to you, Mack."

Hillway's mind ran back to his interview with the convict and ahead to the expected interview with the convict's daughter. Jeffrey Benton had been advised to warn him against traps, so the mysterious letter writer must have bobbed up again.

Sam's nature revolted against being helped by an anonymous friend. It was almost as bad as being harmed by an unseen enemy. Politics would have been an open game if he had invented it, but he had to take it as he found it.

"Have you talked with Deegan?" he asked.

"Yes."

"What's he doing in Dalton?"

"Looking for a candidate for governor."

"Did he mention me?"

"As a candidate for governor? No such luck, Sam. I'm sorry to disappoint you. He did ask me if I had seen you, though. He said you were around town to-day."

"That's twice he has advertised me as being in Dalton. What's his game?"

The burly object of their discussion had just passed out of the dining room, sending a sidelong glance toward their table. In a few minutes Hillway followed him. The Hanover boss stood at the cigar counter, picking his teeth. Sam walked up to him.

"Deegan, they tell me you've gone around town to-day asking people if they've seen me. If you're looking for me, here I am."

"I'm not looking for you just now," answered Deegan. "Can't you see that I'm picking my teeth?"

"You'll be lucky to have any teeth left to pick," said Sam, "if you don't let my name alone. What's the idea of all this curiosity about my movements?"

"You have to allow us a little curiosity about the movements of our enemies," drawled the imperturbable Gus. "You, in particular, are such a dangerous enemy that——"

"Go to blazes!" said Sam.

CHAPTER XII.

THE TRAP.

McClintock was chinning the hotel clerk across the registry desk at half past eight o'clock that evening when Sam Hillway stepped out of the elevator. Sam drew him outside, and they sat down in a pair of comfortable chairs on the old-fashioned piazza that adds to the renown of the Dalton Inn.

"Mack, answer me a question."

"Shoot!"

"At the State penitentiary, in the outskirts of this fair city, are murderers under life sentence trusted to go outside the walls to do such work as tending flower beds?"

"No, they're not. I happen to know, because once, when I contemplated killing a copy reader on the *Blade*, I looked the matter up. A lifer is inside for keeps."

Sam considered the information; then he said:

"Mack, in a few minutes I'm going to walk into a trap, contrary to advice."

"What sort of a trap?"

"If I knew, I'd not bother to walk into it."

"When the late Caliph of Bagdad went exploring around town after dark he always took along his vizier," Mack suggested. "If you need a trustworthy master of horse, a Captain Geraldine, to linger in the offing and rush forward when you yell for help, speak the word, Prince Florizel."

"Do you feel reckless to-night?"

"Lead on," replied the reporter. "When do we begin?"

"Right away. I shall now start for the house at number fourteen Canal Street. If your nerve is as colossal as it usually is, follow me a block behind."

"Fourteen Canal Street," the reporter echoed. "The number sticks in memory. I'd not go there, Sam, if I were you."

"Why not?"

"Do you recall what happened to Denny Curley, the dashing young prohibitionist, at the last session?"

Sam remembered vaguely that Dennis Curley, a rising reformer from the progressive city of Harwich, had strangely dropped out of public view in the middle of the last meeting of the legislature. There had been a story that the sly and slimy Jim Skelton, panderer to the weak-natured among the elect of the State, had lured Dennis away from the path of rectitude at a time when Dennis' services were needed by the proponents of a local-option bill obnoxious to the distillery interests.

"That's where it happened to poor Denny Curley," said McClintock. "So soon his political life was done for, he wondered what he had begun for. Be warned, Sam."

"I've got to go there to get certain information that I need. I don't care what sort of a place it is."

"Slip me your pocketbook with a thousand dollars or so in it and let me go ahead and impersonate you," the reporter suggested, grinning. "If I find there's nothing crooked on foot, I'll whistle for you."

"Thanks, old man," said Sam, "but this is a job I'll have to do myself. Trail after me and wait at the nearest corner."

Through the lighted business streets of Dalton Sam Hillway strolled, following the trolley tracks over which he had ridden to the penitentiary earlier in the day. Soon the stores and office buildings gave way to rows of dwelling houses, uniformly mean and cheerless, where the Dalton factory workers sat upon the doorsteps in the heat of the July evening.

When a dingy sign under an arc lamp told him he had reached Canal Street, he began to look for house numbers, but he walked two blocks before he saw one, and that one was the number he wanted. A painted "14" looked out at him from the glass of a door, behind which a light burned dimly.

Sam walked past, crossed the street, and tried to read the secret of the house, but the only thing that distinguished the place from its neighbors was the easily read "14" on the door. The house was three stories in height, and dark save for the light in the front hall.

A small boy came along the street, toting home a pail of beer from the saloon at the upper corner of the block.

"Buddy," said Sam, "do you live around here?"

"Uh-huh!" responded the boy, who needed treatment for adenoids.

"Who lives over there in number fourteen?"

"Go on!" the boy answered, though it sounded more like "Garn!" He scooted away into the darkness, turning at a safe distance to send back a derisive whoop.

Sam recrossed the street, mounted the steps, and fumbled at the door casing until he found a bell button. Presently a slatternly girl opened the door part way. Her hair needed brushing, and she chewed gum.

"Does a Mrs. Pearsall live here?" he asked.

"Mrs. Pearsall?" the girl repeated dully.

From somewhere in the shadows of the stairs a woman's voice whispered: "Tell him yes, stupid."

"Yes, sir," said the girl, chewing harder on her gum. "Step in, won't yer?"

"Is Mrs. Pearsall at home?"

"Just step in, sir. I'll go see."

The girl closed the door behind him. Sam found himself in a hall that was furnished better than the lowly neighborhood warranted. There was rich and heavy carpet on the floor and paper in imitation of carved leather on the walls. Portières of indisputable velour hung in the wide doorway beside him—a doorway which led presumably into the parlor—and curtains of similar stuff swung in a narrower doorway farther along the passage under the stairs. The lamp on the newel post was a costly piece of brasswork, as he could tell at a glance.

But he had no longer than a second to admire the newel lamp, for the girl raised her hand toward it and the light went suddenly out, leaving the hall pitch dark.

"There! I turned it the wrong way," the girl complained. "Stand right where y'are, mister, till I get a light."

"Wait," said Sam. "Here's a match."

"Just a minute, sir."

As she spoke, Sam heard the rings of the velour portières beside him jingle on their brass rod overhead. The air filled with a burst of blinding light, accompanied by a violent detonation. Then all was inky darkness again.

Half stunned, Sam put out his hand and touched a round, bare, warm shoulder and drew his fingers away as if he had touched a rattlesnake. There was a smell of scented talcum. He heard a scuffle, a sound of whispering and giggling. Far away in the house a door slammed. Then dead stillness.

An acrid odor came to his nostrils, the fumes of magnesium powder, reminding Sam of the times his photograph had been taken at banquets.

He called out: "Hello!" There was no answer. Hastily he struck a match. The velour portières beside which he had halted on entering the house had been pulled wide apart. He looked into a parlor expensively appointed, its air gray now with smoke. Just inside the doorway and barring the entrance to the parlor stood three straight chairs in a row, their backs to him.

"Hello!" he shouted again, and, as before, got no response. He lit the gas in the hall. Kicking one of the chairs out of the way, he entered the parlor and lighted every jet in the chandelier. A score of furniture details greeted his eyes—a piano, a music cabinet, cut-glass vases, oil paintings, easy-chairs, a divan, a plate-glass mirror in a gold frame over the mantel, and rich, soft carpet as in the hall. But he took no time to look.

From the parlor a wide doorway opened toward the rear of the house. Through its draperies he plunged into the room behind, tripped over something on the floor, and fell sprawling upon a table amid a crash of breaking glass and china. Regaining his balance, he flung back the curtains, letting in the light from the parlor.

Somewhere in the house an electric bell began to ring. He stood, listening.

Angrily rang the bell, and now to its noise was added the sound of thumping at the front door. He stepped into the hall. The pounding at the door was renewed in violence, and a voice outside called: "Sam! Sam! Open up!"

Hillway opened the door. McClintock tumbled in.

"Beat it, Sam!" the reporter gasped, seizing Sam's arm. "It's a frame-up! The cops are coming!"

Outside a woman's voice screamed: "Police! Police!"

Sam, boiling with rage, turned to the parlor, picked up one of the chairs in the doorway, and hurled it into the plate-glass mirror over the mantel. Another chair bounced upon the table in the dining room and smashed the glass front of a china closet.

"Sam! Don't be so darned artistic," pleaded the reporter. "Come along!"

With regret Sam left his work of destruction incomplete and followed his friend down the steps into the street. "Murder! Police!" shrieked the woman's voice—it came from a third-floor window. Down the way from the saloon corner heavy footfalls rang on the

flagstones and police whistles screeched from one end of the block to the other.

"We're surrounded, Sam. They've got men at both ends of the street. In here, quick!"

They turned aside through a gate, stole along the wall of a house into an evil-smelling back yard, scaled a high board fence into a factory inclosure, felt their way across heaps of cinders to a barred gate, which they found they could open, and slipped out into a railway yard. Following the tracks, they came to a switch light.

"Where's your hat, Sam?"

"Blamed if I know. Did I have a hat?"

Under the switch light he examined a slash that his hand had sustained when he collided with the glassware on the dinner table at fourteen Canal Street.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE NEGATIVE.

In his room at the Dalton Inn, Sam washed and dressed the wound with McClintock's help. Then the two adventurers returned downstairs to the comfortable chairs on the hotel porch.

"How do you like caliphing?" asked the reporter.

"Mack," said Sam, "politics is dirty business, yes?"

"I have heard it so described, Sam."

In a few words Hillway made clear to McClintock his purpose in visiting Dalton, his interview with the fat convict at the penitentiary, and the reason for his call at the Canal Street house.

"It's plain enough, Sam. Somebody knew you intended to come here to see Bill Eads."

"But I told no one. Unless——"

Sam remembered his parting words with Colonel Tom Darliss the day before.

"I did give the old man a line on how I meant to get him," he confessed.

"There you were indiscreet. Darliss and Deegan have put one over on you, Sam. The Bill Eads you talked to at the pen this morning was a stool pigeon. His sending you to the Canal Street place was a frame-up. If you hadn't been such a guileless hayseed, you'd have known better than to walk into that strange house in the dark. You ought to spend more time in studying political history. What happened in that house to-night has happened before. To-morrow Gus Deegan will have in his hands a photograph that wouldn't do to hang anywhere but in the back room of a saloon. It will show the estimable Samuel Hillway, farmer, reformer, idol of the horny-handed sons of toil of Merrill County, and it will show, seated in a row in front of him—well, we can only guess at that part of it. But we can guess, all right."

"What do you mean? What will the photograph show?"

"Don't embarrass me, Sam. Didn't you see anything out of the way before they shot you?"

"Not a thing. I tell you I was in pitch darkness. I did think I felt a naked shoulder, but just at that instant the flash went off and I didn't push the investigation. I still don't see how a flash-light photo of me would do me any harm."

"You're a hopeless innocent," McClintock laughed. "We were speaking a while ago of poor Dennis Curley, you remember. Well, I happen to be one of the select few who saw the photo that Denny Curley posed for in that same house. It was worse than any lingerie ad you ever saw in a Sunday newspaper, Sam. It showed the virtuous Denny surrounded by three plump and comely ladies of leisure who wore stockings."

"My Lord!" cried Sam. "You don't think——"

"I do," said Mack, enjoying his friend's consternation. "They will have such a photograph of you to show to your loving friends to prove that you lead a double life."

"Dash them! They'll never dare use that picture!"

"Oh, yes, they will. They'll only need to show it once or twice, Sammy, my boy. Word-of-mouth advertising will do the rest. Your old-lady neighbors will be talking about it at the Red

Cross sewing bee at Merrill before the week is out. Everybody will understand that it was a put-up job on you, of course; they will believe in your innocence, and all that; but they will laugh at you for letting yourself be framed up by the Darliss gang, and I'm afraid that your usefulness as a campaign manager for the scholarly Professor Benton will be impaired. Don't you think so yourself?"

"But, dang it, Mack, you can testify that I knew I was walking into a trap, can't you?"

"Possibly the colonel won't give me a chance to testify," said the reporter. Then he touched Sam's sleeve to direct his attention elsewhere.

The sturdy Gus Deegan, accompanied by a heavily mustached person in police uniform, stood at the hotel door.

"That's Chief Hollister," Mack whispered.

Deegan glanced toward the pair in the chairs, then nodded to the chief of the Dalton police and returned indoors. Chief Hollister approached.

"Which one of you is Samuel Hillway?"

"I am," said Sam. "What do you want?"

"I want you to take a little stroll with me," said the police official. "Sorry to disturb you, but a little formality of the law, you know——"

"Be clear," said Sam.

"There was a row in Canal Street to-night," said the chief. "I'll not detain you overnight, you understand, but you'll have to give bail for your appearance in court to-morrow. If you'll just come along with me——"

"I'll be back in a jiffy," said Sam to Mack. "Stick around, will you?"

"Sure thing," replied the reporter, grinning. The news hunch that had brought him to Dalton in the middle of the summer had not been a false alarm.

When Hillway and Chief Hollister had gone up the street toward the station house, McClintock sauntered the other way and drifted in at the editorial office of the Dalton *Morning Banner*. As legislative correspondent of the Hanover *Blade*, he was always welcome in the *Banner* shop.

Pullman, the city editor, looked up. Both of Pullman's hands were full of copy and his mouth was full of lead pencil, but he dropped everything and held out a hand in greeting.

"Hello, there!" said he. "When did you blow in?"

"This afternoon," said Mack. "What do you know?"

"Funny thing happened to-night," said Pullman. "Big story, maybe, if we dare to use it. You know that reformer guy, Hillway, from Merrill County?"

"Sam Hillway?"

"Yes. Well, Sam figured in a rough-house at Maggie Hickman's place in Canal Street to-night. Doesn't it beat all how our prominent young reformers gravitate to Maggie?"

"I know more about this particular rough-house than you do, Pullman. I know so much about it that I'd hate to own the newspaper that printed a line on it. Who gave you the tip? Gus Deegan?"

"How did you know he did?"

Mack looked wise. "Take my advice, old man, and let the story alone, unless you want to be walking the street to-morrow. This sheet of yours is committed to Jeffrey Benton, isn't it?"

"Yes, it is."

"Well, then——"

"Much obliged, Mack," said the city editor.

Sadly he gathered up the copy he had just been editing, chucked it into a drawer in his desk, and locked the drawer.

"It made a corking yarn," he sighed.

A tall youth swung through the office. His collar was high and his hair was long.

"Who's the gink?" asked McClintock.

"Isn't he the beauty?" responded the city editor. "That's our new staff photographer."

Mack strolled away. The tall youth descended a stairway. At the foot of

the flight Mack saw him dodge in at a door marked "No admittance." The *Blade* man followed and pushed the door ajar. Electric lamps shed cones of light down upon trays of running water and vats of chemicals. The odor of acid filled the air.

Quietly Mack entered the room just as the tall young man lifted a glass negative out of a rack in front of a buzzing electric fan and held it under a light to examine it.

"Is it dry?" asked McClintock.

The young man turned round with a jump.

"I'll take it, please."

Before the tall young man could protest, the *Blade* reporter had tucked the negative under his arm and walked out.

"Who—who the deuce are you?" stammered the staff photographer, running into the hall after him.

"I've just come from Deegan. Thanks," said Mack, and left the young man speechless.

It was after midnight when McClintock and Sam finished discussing the events of that quiet summer day at Dalton. As a conclusion, Sam spread a newspaper down on the floor of his room, placed the negative on the paper, and ground the glass to bits under his heel.

The negative was nothing that a gentleman would care to keep. It showed Sam emulating the example of a sultan, resting his hand affectionately upon the shoulder of a blushing young thing of forty whose clothes were scanty even for a hot July night. There were two other fair charmers in the picture, neither of whom could be described as overdressed.

"Promise, Mack, to say nothing about this," Sam pleaded. "I have foozled my shot and made a mess of things generally. Besides, what has happened to-day is hardly decent for Benton to know."

Mack promised readily. He could guess that Jeffrey Benton was not the only member of the Benton household whom Sam did not care to shock with this tale of "practical" politics.

CHAPTER XIV.

HOODLUM HELP.

On the farm at Merrill Sam Hillway was busy stowing his second crop of alfalfa in his barn. Sam drove the team that took the loads of hay from the wagons and lifted them by means of rope, pulleys, and traveling carrier to the sweet-smelling loft overhead. As he worked he thought.

Within a week of his failure at detective work at Dalton, such newspapers of the State as Colonel Tom Darliss controlled began to speak enthusiastically of the merits of Attorney Wilbur W. Hoskins of Harwich. Mr. Hoskins, they said, was safe and sane; he was no visionary; he was unsentimental; he was all business. He had no doubtful ideas, no program of revolution. His record was blameless, and around him, as a candidate for the gubernatorial nomination, the Democrats of the State might rally without fear.

From a dozen counties arose a spontaneous demand for Attorney Hoskins of Harwich to lead his party to victory. Like Colonel Darliss, the machine editors had awakened from their dream and inquired: "Benton? Did anybody mention a man named Jeffrey Benton? Who, pray, is Jeffrey Benton? Never heard of him!" Sam Hillway understood that his faction in the party was to be ignored and that his candidate had been dismissed from consideration.

Between loads of alfalfa Sam came to his decision and took time to telephone a message to the railway station at Merrill, to be sent by telegraph to five men in the State.

Next day the five men showed up at the farm. They were Chalmers, once a cook, now the millionaire owner of a hundred restaurants; Dougherty, the fire-eating mayor of Williamsport, who for years had fought Colonel Darliss for the love of fighting; Doctor Guthrie, the sedate country physician who commanded the granger vote of Sutro County; Bob Hamer, editor of the Walpole *Wasp*, which stung the Darliss-Fowler combination six days a week; and Jess Bilger, who owned the

biggest coal pockets in the city of Hanover and subscribed five thousand dollars a year to the Hanover Y. M. C. A.

Men of few words they were, all of them except Bob Hamer. They ate the luncheon which Sam's white-haired mother served under an apple tree on the lawn. They listened to Sam's proposal and they nodded assent.

"Will Benton make the fight?" asked Doctor Guthrie.

"He will if we can get his mad up," replied Sam. "I think I can promise that."

"It's up to him," said Jess Bilger. "If he will do the talking, we will do the rest."

They put their heads together over a map of the State and charted a tour which, in the few weeks that remained before the September primary election, would carry their man within speaking distance of the greatest possible number of citizens. Not a high-flown word was uttered, not an emotional thought expressed in their conference, reformers though they would have been dubbed by Colonel Darliss and his crowd.

The colonel had turned politics into a business in that State, a business of barter and sale. Sam and his friends would meet business methods with business methods. Other men might be dazzled by the glamour of success that surrounded the colonel; other men might accept his party rule without question. But these men in the little group under Sam's apple tree saw the colonel as he was—a hollow plaster cast of power that would crumble at a blow if the blow should be intelligently directed.

In so quiet and unpretentious a way the campaign began. The first of the Benton meetings, held at Walpole by special request of Bob Hamer, got little notice except in the Walpole *Wasp*, although the Hanover *Blade* commented upon the fact that Benton intended to make the race, after all, and that Colonel Darliss was not to have things entirely his own way in the party. But Bob Hamer shoved the war to the inside of his four-page paper and gave Professor Benton's rally the whole first page.

"Confound it, though!" Bob complained to Hillway, after the meeting in the Walpole Opera House. "I wish he had said something. That old stuff about the time-honored principles of the Democratic Party would have gone all right twenty years ago, but it won't get him anywhere to-day."

"Just wait," said Sam. "We know what we're doing. The professor is only warming up now."

Sam's masterful skill in placing the second meeting at Henderton bore fruit in a double sense. Henderton was controlled by the Darliss ring, and various roughnecks among the professor's auditors threw elderly bananas at him as he discoursed on the time-honored principles of the Democratic Party; and certain persons in the back of the hall interrupted the candidate's remarks by shoving, scuffling, yawning loudly, and bursting into song.

Jeffrey Benton took the abuse with a patient smile; though Ann, who sat in a box at the right of the stage, looked big-eyed with alarm.

"Isn't this dreadful!" she whispered to McClintock, who scribbled shorthand beside her. "Why doesn't papa call the police?"

"This is fine—just what we want," said Mack. "Let them go the limit."

His newspaper in Hanover gave his story of the meeting the leading position on the first page next day under the headlines:

HENDERTON HOODLUMS ROUGH-HOUSE BENTON.

Gangsters Deny Candidate a Hearing, but the Professor Smiles Serenely.

Pleads for Respectable Politics.

Not once in the story did McClintock mention the colonel by name, nor his local leader at Henderton, State Senator Hardwick, owner of the Hardwick Bottling Works. But innuendo is permitted to the just and the unjust alike under the libel laws of most States in America, and the readers of the *Blade* were left in no doubt as to the source

of the insult with which the city of Henderton had greeted Benton.

Editorially the *Blade* inquired whether the gentlemen responsible for the Democratic machine could expect the thousands of honest and fair-minded Democrats of the State to stand for that sort of tactics. The *Blade* reminded the gentlemen in power that they could no longer presume to dictate nominations to a voiceless and helpless party; that the new direct-primary law had taken the privilege of making nominations out of their hands and intrusted it to the majority of the party, and that they should have to learn to cater to the respect of that majority if they wished to retain their grip on the party steering wheel.

Colonel Darliss and Gus Deegan read an early edition of the *Blade* that afternoon in the colonel's private office, and the result was a swift booting by long-distance phone to Senator Hardwick, and a warning to Lou Strauss, who looked after the colonel's interests in Falls City, where Benton was to make his next stand.

Lou Strauss' answer came back: "You're too late, Gus. The son of a gun spoke here at noon to-day at the concrete works, and the boys put him on the bum."

"What!" cried Deegan. And the colonel, at his elbow, bent lower to listen.

"He spoke from the tail of a dump cart," Strauss explained. "The boys horsed him good and proper, and somebody pulled the lever and dumped him into the road."

"Why in thunder did you let 'em?"

"Because," said Strauss, "I took it for granted you wanted it done."

"You're too bright," said Deegan. "After this, don't take things for granted. What's that you said to me? Oh, all right. Only it sounded like something else."

As Deegan hung up, a newsboy under the colonel's office window shouted: "Extra! Extra *Blade!* Jeffrey Benton mobbed!"

With the extra before them, Deegan and his chief read McClintock's brief dispatch telling of the political doings at noon that day in Falls City. It occupied a quarter of a column, double-spaced, alongside the story from Henderton, and the caption read:

BENTON AGAIN MALTREATED.

Taken in connection with the Henderton story and the editorial, it was a black eye for the Darliss management, as the colonel and his handy man recognized at a glance.

"Do you see the fine Italian hand of that Hillway cuss in this?" asked Deegan.

"It will blow over," said Darliss confidently. The short memory of the American public is the best asset the corrupt politician has.

But the minds that had engineered this bit of free advertising for Candidate Benton were not to throw away an advantage so easily gained. The Walpole *Wasp* buzzed fiercely over the unparalleled affront to the glorious principle of free speech and called upon the Democratic newspapers that retained a spark of American independence to denounce the outrage and flay the outragers.

"Gunman Methods Go No Longer," was the heading over the editorial which the Dalton *Banner* printed on the subject. That newspaper reminded its readers that the thing that had put the Democratic Party out of business in the State for a quarter of a century had been the gunman methods used in the Merkle Street polling place in 1894. Nor did the Hanover *Blade* permit the public to forget the Henderton incident and the Falls City affair.

Thus, within a week or two, the name of Jeffrey Benton came to be mentioned hundreds of times in print, while the name of Hoskins of Harwich, favored of the Darliss crowd, was forgotten. The colonel and Deegan noted with growing disgust that the professor was always mentioned respectfully, and that the State took his candidacy seriously—a thing that had seldom happened before in the case of a man who went out to buck the machine. Such men were usually regarded as jokes.

It was a new and interesting idea to people that a man might win a party nomination without the consent of the party management, and they seized upon it joyously, and the Benton meetings increased in attendance.

At Ardsley an overflow meeting was necessary to accommodate the crowd. But Hoskins of Harwich, when rushed to Ardsley two days later to speak safe and sane and unsentimental words that should dam the Benton tide for Colonel Darliss, was unable to fill more than half the seats in the hall.

All of these matters were faithfully reported to the *Blade* by McClintock, and as faithfully discussed on the *Blade's* editorial page; and timid-hearted editors out in the State, reading, were emboldened to say what they pleased, which was usually something complimentary to Benton.

Napoleon Fowler, Republican dictator, lumbered into the colonel's office one day with a scowl on his massive face.

"Well, are you proud of yourself?" he asked.

"You're frightened by a lot of newspaper noise," said Darliss. "I thought you had more nerve."

"I've got a right to be frightened. Do you pretend that you can see this Benton landslide coming at you and not be scared?"

"Let it slide. We know how to stop it, you and I, when the time comes."

"Then you expect Benton to beat Hoskins?"

"It looks that way now. But what do we care? Your man Pingree will beat this professor person to a frazzle in November, so you should worry."

"I don't guarantee that I can hold my people for Pingree if Benton's up against him."

Darliss opened a drawer in his desk and took out a typewritten sheet of paper, which he handed to his visitor.

"This," said he, "is the next legislature as it will probably be composed. Fifty-two representatives, twenty senators, seventy-two in all. To pass our bill over the governor's veto we shall need a three-fourths majority of both houses, or fifty-four. Check the men that you own. Mine are already marked."

For a minute Fowler was busy with a pencil.

"Now count the checked ones," said the colonel.

"Fifty-eight," said Fowler.

"There's your answer," said Darliss. "Let the fools have their governorship."

The big boss chuckled. The little boss beamed. Somewhere in the State Professor Benton went on telling the people, in his calm and scholarly way, about the time-honored principles of the party of Thomas Jefferson.

CHAPTER XV.

PSYCHOLOGY.

Safe and sane and blameless, Hoskins of Harwich went to defeat in the Democratic primaries on a bright day in September. It was well for him that he was unsentimental, for he had need of that negative quality to sustain him now. Out of eighty thousand votes cast by the Democrats, he received less than twenty-eight thousand. On the same day, in the Republican primaries, Asa Pingree, running without opposition, rolled up a total of eighty-eight thousand for himself.

At the Benton home in Judson the victory over the Darliss machine was not celebrated with any great enthusiasm. Ann studied the figures and shook her head.

"I'm afraid it will be all up with papa in November," said she to her father's campaign manager. "Mr. Pingree will have eighty-eight thousand votes of his own and the twenty-eight thousand Democratic votes that Colonel Darliss will throw to him, making one hundred and sixteen thousand in all. Papa will have his lonely little fifty-two thousand. I wish it was over."

Sam laughed at her discouragement.

"It isn't so bad as your arithmetic makes it look," said he. "The Republican fell forty thousand votes behind his normal party strength. In other

words, forty thousand Republicans were not interested enough in him to come out and vote for him. Add them to your father's score, and that gives you ninety-two thousand, or four thousand more than Pingree got."

But Ann refused to be comforted. "You haven't counted the twenty-eight thousand Democratic-machine votes that Mr. Pingree will get from Colonel Darliss," said she.

"Perhaps Mr. Pingree won't get those twenty-eight thousand votes," said Sam.

Before the end of primary week, Gus Deegan honored Jeffrey Benton with a visit. Uncomfortable was Deegan as he sat under Benton's quiet eyes.

"I come from Colonel Darliss, of course," he began. "The old man wants to make peace with you. He's sorry for things that have happened—things he was forced into and couldn't help. He didn't think you could do as well as you've done, and he thinks now that he can elect you if you will let bygones be bygones and invite him to come in out of the wet. He's an old man, professor, and he hates like blazes to lose his last fight. He is going to retire from politics, you know."

"So I've heard," said Jeffrey Benton dryly.

Gus overlooked the dig and went on:

"I suppose you can read the meaning of the primary figures. You see, don't you, that the old man holds the balance of power with his twenty-eight thousand votes that Hoskins got?"

"Yes, I see."

"Those twenty-eight thousand votes will elect you, professor."

"If they don't," said Benton, "I shall have to look for an equal number somewhere else."

"I hope you won't be foolish about this, professor. You're not in a position to turn down a generous offer of help. The colonel——"

"The colonel has helped me greatly so far by withholding his support from me, and I hope he will continue to do so. Please tell him this for me, with my thanks and compliments."

"All right," growled Gus. "It's your last chance."

Gloomily he departed. While Benton still reflected upon this overture from the gang, Ann came in from a walk.

"Has that dreadful Deegan man been here?" she asked.

"He has. Why?"

"I passed him down the street. What did you say to him, papa, that made him grin so hard?"

"Was he grinning?"

"He actually was."

"At you?"

"No, papa; he didn't see me."

So the professor had more material for reflection. He was still busy with it that evening when Sam Hillway and Doctor Guthrie arrived for a council. To these two advisers Benton reported the interview with the colonel's right bower.

"I'm inclined to take his offer at its face value," said Sam. "I believe the old man is sincere in wanting to get in line for you. He stands to lose if he doesn't."

But Doctor Guthrie shook his head. "It was bluff," said he. "The colonel doesn't want you elected. He doesn't want to support you. Deegan's coming here to-day was a piece of very smooth psychology—trick psychology. The colonel wants to give you something to think about while he is busy at something else. He wants you to think that you have chucked him over the rail and that his only ambition is to knife you with his twenty-eight thousand machine votes on Election Day. While you are engrossed with that conception of him, he will be up to something you don't suspect. I know Tom Darliss."

"He means to knife us on Election Day, that's a cinch," said Sam. "I had it all nicely planned to compel him to help us, but my plans went to smash. I'm sorry I dragged you into a losing fight, Professor Benton."

"My boy," smiled the candidate, "you seem to share the colonel's idea and Deegan's that the bosses and the machines do the electing. I give you and the doctor, here, credit for helping a

lot to nominate me with the little machine that you improvised. But it was the votes of the people, after all, that did the business, and there are still plenty of votes to be had between now and November, though we have to beat the machines of both parties to get them. From what I've heard, I shall have more support from the Republican side than the Republican managers guess; but frankly the victory looks too easy to be worth much except as a personal testimonial. What I'm afraid of is that in winning the governorship we shall lose something more important, though I don't know what that something is. That is my feeling, gentlemen—that while we are beating the colonel and his friends, they will beat us a good deal worse in some way that we can't see now."

Sam looked blank, but Doctor Guthrie nodded gravely and said, as he wiped the train dust off his spectacles:

"From something I have heard, I suspect that the two machines don't care a whoop who is elected governor. They are after bigger game than honors."

"What have you heard, doctor?" asked Benton.

Doctor Guthrie drew from his pocket a letter. Benton and Sam stared as they recognized the handwriting. They read:

DOCTOR GUTHRIE, Hamilton.
Fifty-four men will be wanted in Dalton this coming winter to handle a piece of work for Tom Darliss and Fatty Fowler. Jacob J. Jones of your town is one of the fifty-four. Ask him. INSIDE.

"I didn't pay much attention to it," said the physician. "But I happened in at Jake Jones' shop yesterday, and I jumped him. 'Jake,' I said, 'they tell me you're going to do a job for Tom Darliss and Napoleon Fowler at Dalton next winter. How about it?' Well, poor Jake blurted out, 'Who told you?' and turned as red as a piece of beefsteak. That was all we said, but I let him think I knew everything. To-day he traveled to Hanover on the same train with me, though he didn't let on he saw me."

"Who is Jacob J. Jones?" queried Benton.

"Our leading butcher in Hamiltonville, a friend of mine for years, and a rooter for you, sir, in the late unpleasantness. We shall send him to Dalton this year as our senator from Sutro County."

"Fifty-four men!" Sam exclaimed. "It's a three-fourths majority in joint session of the legislature! If it means anything, it means that they are packing the house and the senate against the governor's veto power. Now you can see why they don't care who wins out for governor."

"That is the way I figured it," said Doctor Guthrie. "The question is: What are they after? They've grabbed everything worth having already."

"Just as I remarked to Sam the other day," Benton chimed in. "They have cornered all the public utilities; they've built all the roads and asylums and other State improvements the people will pay for. There's nothing left for them that I can see."

"Except one thing," said Sam.

His memory had run back to his talk with Fredericks, the State surveyor, and he recalled a note from him, received since, in which Fredericks had said:

I hope you haven't forgotten what I suggested to you about that water power. It's going to be worth a lot to somebody some day.

"What is it they have overlooked?" asked Benton.

"Water power," said Sam. "There's millions of dollars' worth of energy running to waste down in Grenada County. Other States are talking a lot about water power just now. Do you suppose——"

"I do," said Doctor Guthrie.

"Doubtless that is it," said Benton. "I wonder if the people of the State wouldn't like me to talk to them on the subject—provided we can get any definite information. You don't know who sent you that letter, do you, doctor?"

"No more than you."

"May I interrupt?" Ann Benton stood in the doorway, flashing a smile

to Sam. "There's a man in the front hall asking for Doctor Guthrie—a Mr. Jones."

CHAPTER XVI.

JACOB J. JONES.

Doctor Guthrie excused himself from the company for a minute and went to his caller. His minute dragged out to a quarter of an hour. When he returned he brought with him a red-faced and reluctant stranger.

"Professor Benton, Miss Benton, and Mr. Hillway, this is Jacob J. Jones, of Hamiltonville. You have heard me mention Mr. Jones as our next State senator from Sutro County. He's a friend of mine."

Benton and Sam shook hands with the man, and Ann gave him one of her best smiles. Those smiles of Ann's had done much for her father in his primary campaign. The women of the State were not permitted to vote, but there was no law to prevent them from talking about the beautiful friendship between Benton and his daughter; so they talked, and it was all good advertising.

"Mr. Jones," said Doctor Guthrie, "has been telling me some very interesting things. I have prevailed upon him to tell them to you."

The butcher politician of Hamiltonville fixed his eyes on the floor at Benton's feet and began his confession, nor did he look up until his story's end.

"I feel like a fool to be telling you this stuff," said he, "and I reckon I look like a fool, too. But the doctor says it's all right, and I hope you'll understand that I'm trying to do the square thing."

"That goes without saying, Mr. Jones," spoke Benton. "We are all friends here."

"Well, Mr. Benton, Gus Deegan came to see me the other day, up at Hamiltonville. He said he came from you. That was the only reason I listened to him, because, as I told him, I'm a Benton man first, last, and all the time. He said he was glad I was, because it would make it easier for him to talk plain to me. He said that while you and the Darliss people were supposed to be on the outs, you had made peace with each other, only it wouldn't do to advertise the fact because it would queer your standing with the independent voters. But he said you saw that you couldn't be elected without the help of the machine, and that you and the old man had patched up your quarrel so that you could get the machine vote."

Benton smiled, but Ann gasped.

"Deegan told me," Mr. Jones continued, "that you had made a dicker with the machine like this: That if I and a few other friends of yours that'll be in the legislature next winter would agree to stand for a little water-power bill that Darliss expects to introduce, Darliss and his crowd would jump in and elect you governor in November. Deegan said to me: 'This proposition comes from Benton, but of course he can't make it to you himself and you can see why.' I said to Deegan: 'Why doesn't Benton send it to me through his friend, Doc Guthrie, then? Doc Guthrie is our leader in Sutro County, and a Benton man.' But Deegan said, says he: 'Benton dassen't trust Guthrie in this thing, so Guthrie don't know about it. This is a little personal bargain between Benton and Darliss. Anyway, Doc Guthrie is slated for the shelf. He's too yellow even for Professor Benton, so he's to be put away and we're to have a new leader up here in Sutro County—and it might be a fellow about your size, Jake.' That's how Deegan went after me, Mr. Benton."

"I don't wonder you were taken in," said Benton sympathetically.

"Oh, I wasn't taken in all at once," replied Butcher Jones. "I told him I wasn't born yesterday, and he would have to give me something better than his word to make me believe you had gone in with the gang on any proposition like that. So he brought out a letter from you to Darliss and showed it to me. I read it careful, so I can tell you almost word for word what was in it."

"Let's have it," said Benton.

"As near as I can recollect, it went like this:

"MY DEAR COLONEL: The arrangement you propose will be quite acceptable to me, and you have my permission to mention the matter to the gentlemen you have named. *More power to you.* Yours very truly,
(Signed) JEFFREY BENTON.

"That was the letter Gus Deegan showed me, and I fell for it, I'm sorry to say, though I guess there was a low-down trick in it that I didn't see at the time. It was what you said about 'More power to you' that Deegan called my attention especially to; them four words were underscored with a pen, and they did the work with me. I says to myself: 'Jake Jones, you never had no advantages, you're not an educated man, so who are you to judge a man like Professor Benton? If this Darliss deal is good enough for him, it ought to be good enough for you.' So I gave Deegan my promise."

"What was the date of the letter?" asked Benton.

"I looked for the date, but there wasn't none."

Benton turned to the others in the room. "I wrote that letter to Darliss last June, in answer to a note from him asking me if I would consent to make a trip to Harbor Island with him as his guest for the purpose of being looked over by some friends of his."

"I remember it very well," said Ann.

"In politics, never write letters," chuckled Doctor Guthrie.

"Well," said Jacob J. Jones, "he is using the letter now to make some of us think you're tied up with him in his water-power deal. It fooled me, all right; and when Deegan put it to me straight that your election depended on whether your friends in the legislature would fall in with the scheme, I hadn't anything more to say except that I would still want to have a personal understanding with you. But Deegan said: 'Jake, you don't get the point. Benton can't talk about this or be talked to about it. If you go to him with a question, he will deny everything. A governor has got to save his face, don't you see?' That's how Degan put it to me. 'You'll have to be discreet as the devil,' he says—I beg your pardon, Miss Benton—'or the whole business is off and Benton is done for,' he says. I forgot to tell you that Deegan promised me a thousand-dollar bunch of stock in the water-power syndicate at the end of the session if things went through all right. I told him I didn't want his blamed stock, and that the only reason I would sign up to the proposition was to help you win out."

"This is valuable news," said Benton. "We guessed something of the sort, didn't we, Sam?"

"Was my name mentioned in your talk with Deegan?" Sam asked.

"Yes, it was," answered Mr. Jones uneasily.

"Did Deegan have me shelved along with Doctor Guthrie?"

"No, sir; he said you were in the deal as deep as anybody. He said all the talk was bosh that you were financing the professor's campaign for the sake of principle. He said you were one of the chief movers in the water-power scheme."

Here Jones hesitated.

"What else?" demanded Sam.

"I'd rather not say any more with the young lady present."

Ann moved toward the door, but her father drew her back to his side.

"Miss Benton is one of us," said Sam. "What else did Deegan tell you about me?"

"Well, Mr. Hillway, if you insist, he said they had you right where they wanted you. He said you balked at the water-power proposition until something happened at Dalton last summer."

"Go on," said Sam.

"There was a police case down there —they raided a joint and found your hat there, you having left in a hurry. I hate to repeat this before the lady, but that's what Deegan told me. He said they had the goods on you and they weren't afraid of you any more."

Sam looked at Ann, but her eyes were turned away from him. He met her father's instead, and Benton's were a little hard and questioning. Doctor

Guthrie hastened to change the subject.

"The best part of Mr. Jones' story is yet to come," said he. "Go ahead, Jones."

"After I gave Deegan my promise," said the honest butcher, "I worried about things a good bit, wondering if the old man and his gang had put one over on me, the way they've been doing to us country politicians for twenty years. While I was worrying my hardest, along came the doctor, here, and told me he'd heard that I had gone into a deal with Darliss. Well, sir, that sure knocked the wind out of me, because Deegan had told me the doctor didn't know a thing."

Guthrie grinned.

"So," Jones continued, "I chased down to Hanover to-day and went to see Darliss, and him and I had it hot and heavy. When I told him that Doc asked me questions about it, the old man flew the handle and stormed around his office till I thought he'd break the furniture. He cussed you, Mr. Benton, and he cussed Hillway and the doctor and me, and politics in general and Gus Deegan in particular. I was sorry Deegan wasn't there, because he'd have heard something about himself that he's been a long time needing to know."

"What you said to the colonel is more important, Jake," the doctor suggested.

"I told him," said Jones, "that I considered the thing had been a frame-up on me, and that I was going to turn the whole State upside down about it. At that he calmed down all of a sudden and tried to get me to promise not to say anything till he'd had a chance to see Deegan. But I had a notion I could find Doc Guthrie here and I came straight out from the city. I wanted to square myself with him, because him and I have been good friends for thirty years."

His confession made, Jacob J. Jones rose to go.

"If I was a fool for a minute," said he, "I hope I've mended things a little."

Jeffrey Benton rose, too, and gripped the butcher's hand.

"I congratulate you, Mr. Jones," he said, "and I thank you for coming to us so frankly. Just before you arrived we were wishing that we had something interesting to talk to the people about, and you have given us our text. You are not afraid to stand by what you've told us?"

"Not me, sir!"

When Sam, Doctor Guthrie, and Jacob J. Jones had gone, Benton returned to the living room to find Ann saddened and silent. He sat down and drew her to the arm of his chair.

"A penny for your thoughts, my dear."

"I wish that we had never gone into politics," she answered. "It's no game for clean people."

"Perhaps politics in this State will be a little cleaner if we take a hand in it."

Still Ann's face showed that her heart was troubled.

"Are you thinking of what Mr. Jones told us about Sam?"

She nodded slowly.

"What Deegan told Jones about Sam was probably a falsehood, like everything else he told him."

"But Sam didn't deny it."

"There are some things a gentleman doesn't need to deny, my dear."

"All the same, it's a mess," said Ann. "It's a mess of lies and trickery until you can't believe anything or anybody, and I wish we were out of it, and I wish Sam was out of it, and——"

Here came the tears. Benton took her into his arms.

"Cheer up, my dear. We shall all be out of it in a few weeks, if Darliss and Deegan have their way."

After a while, Ann said: "Are you going to let them have their way, papa?"

"Ask me to-morrow at breakfast," said Jeffrey Benton.

CHAPTER XVII.

DEEGAN MUTINOUS.

Colonel Tom Darliss reclined on a day bed at a window on the second floor of his mansion in Magnolia Avenue and groaned with the gout. His left foot, stretched out before him, was

swathed in bandages to twice its normal size, and he moved it with great caution when he changed position to ease his muscles. The air of the room was fragrant with hartshorn and wintergreen.

"Ouch! Damn it!" he groaned.

Mrs. Townsley, knitting beside him, kept her eyes on the work in her hands.

"Don't you think you can note an improvement over yesterday?" she asked.

"No, I don't. There won't be any improvement for a week. I've had this infernal thing before."

After a while, he said: "I wish you wouldn't work those needles where I can see you. It makes me nervous."

Obediently she laid her knitting aside and sat with folded hands. Their window faced the weather-worn cottage across the way—the "haunted house" of the neighborhood. She looked at it dreamily.

"Does no one live in that old place?" she asked.

"No," he answered. "What were you doing over there this morning?"

"Gathering a bouquet of honeysuckle blossoms. There it is on your dresser."

By and by she returned to the subject: "I should think somebody would buy the old place and tear the house down. It spoils the neighborhood."

"I've tried a dozen times to buy it," he answered. "Some dark night I'm going to burn it."

"Isn't it for sale?"

He made no reply, for his attention was taken up with a taxicab that had stopped at the door.

"Here's Gus at last, confound him!" said he. "You'd better vanish."

Ushered by a servant, Gus Deegan entered to meet the sick man's explosive question:

"Why didn't you get here sooner?"

"I got here as soon as I could after your telegrams reached me. They chased me through four counties."

Deegan sat down in the chair Mrs. Townsley had vacated.

"What's wrong?" he asked.

"Everything's wrong. The beans are spilled and the fat's in the fire, thanks to you!"

"Why to me?"

"Jones, of Hamiltonville, has talked."

"Jake Jones, the butcher?"

"Jake Jones. Why in blazes did you tell him so much?"

"Look here," said Deegan, "I don't intend to be panned for carrying out your orders. I told Jones as much as I had to and no more. He was all agreeable when I left him."

"He's all disagreeable now, anyhow. He came to see me day before yesterday, and it upset me so that this is the result." The colonel pointed to his swollen foot.

"What did he say?"

"He said he had been pumped about the water-power business by Guthrie, that busybody doctor up there—Benton's friend."

"How the deuce does Guthrie know about it?"

"That's what I want to ask you. Either you've talked too much, Gus, or else——"

"Or else there's a leak in your office, as I've warned you time and again. Somebody is playing you, colonel, and you know who I think it is."

"Townsley?"

"That's the bird. Who else knows about the deal except her?"

"She's safe enough," replied Darliss, wincing as his foot pained him. "I'm not afraid of her. It may be somebody on Fowler's side. It may be Fowler himself. Townsley's all right, Gus. You want to remember that she brought us the warning that came to the Benton girl on the island."

Gus glanced at a knitting bag on the floor and shrugged his burly shoulders.

"Have you told Fowler about Jones?"

"I've waited to talk to you first," said Darliss.

His hand clasped a piece of paper in the pocket of his dressing gown, and he wanted to draw the paper out and show it to his lieutenant, but fear restrained him.

"Gus, why do you suppose they

haven't rounded up Bill Eads yet? What's the matter with them?"

"Are you still worrying about Bill Eads? Quit it. It's four months since he got away; he's probably in South America by now. The important thing to-day is Butcher Jake Jones. What's Jake going to do?"

"It isn't what he's going to do; it's what he's done. He made a bee line from me to Benton and spilled everything he knew. Benton is wise now."

"How do you know all this?"

"Young Hillway told me yesterday. Came up here to the house where I was lying sick abed and told me they're going after us next week with an affidavit from Jones."

"Why did Hillway tell you?"

"To save the party from a scandal, if he could. He said it was his father's party and all that. But he made a very fair proposition. We are to drop the water-power deal and elect Benton, in return for which Benton will keep his mouth shut. It means throwing Fowler down, but——"

"What was your answer?"

"I asked them for a week to think it over."

Deegan's eyes had a hard glint in them as he studied the face of the old politician. There was a flabbiness in the colonel's look, a hint of weakness and uncertainty. Deegan had expected this moment. Accusingly he said:

"You've got cold feet."

"Haven't you?" Darliss retorted.

"Not I," Deegan sneered. "I've gone too far in this thing to back out now. If you want to turn quitter, that's your affair; but I'm going ahead. I'll tell Fowler so."

The colonel understood Deegan's thought as well as if Gus had voiced it.

"Don't talk biggity, Gus. You know who pays your wages, I suppose? You know whose money supports the organization?"

"There's plenty of people willing to finance a new machine," said Gus.

"Fowler, for instance?"

"Judge for yourself, colonel. You've made a lot of trouble for Fowler in the last four months. Isn't it a safe bet that Fowler would like somebody reliable to deal with?"

To Darliss, chronic traitor to his party though he was, the idea of a Democratic State machine supported with Republican money was repulsive. Mrs. Townsley had warned him to expect some such move as this from Deegan, and he would have liked to kick his henchman downstairs for the fellow's insolence. But he was not kicking anything to-day. He chose to dissemble.

"I've been kind to you, Gus," he whined. "I've helped you to a fat living for years. I didn't think you'd treat me this way."

"This is business, not sentiment," Deegan reminded him. "Here's a job offered to you, and you quit in the middle of it. All right, if you don't want it I'll see what I can do with it myself. You expect to drop out of the game after this year, anyway."

"If I give the word to go ahead with what we've started——"

"Suit yourself."

In the old man's mind was the most distasteful thought a politician can have—the thought of yielding up ill-gotten power to a younger man. His imagination showed him a picture of himself stripped of authority in the party councils and pitied as the has-been who had side-stepped for the superior wit and nerve of Gus Deegan. It was not a pleasant picture. The anger of the State, should Benton and Hillway publish their threatened disclosures, would be easier to bear than an overthrow at the hands of Gloomy Gus.

"Let's go ahead, then, Gus. Let's fight the muckrakers."

"Just as you say, colonel." Deegan could afford to bide his time a little longer. The active field work he had then in hand would make his hold on the country politicians all the stronger.

The colonel, having made his decision, returned to his manner of old.

"We must reach that Jones cuss," he said. "Find out his banking connections, if he has any. Maybe we can head off that affidavit yet. Buy up any of his notes you can. Inquire about

him. There's something to be gotten on every man, if you look hard enough for it. You'd better think about seeing Hillway, too. Ask him if he wants us to bring out that Dalton story against him. Without the young fool and his money, Benton will be stalled. How many lawmakers have you landed?"

"Fifteen."

"Make it thirty. Fowler will get the rest. Let's have the thing cinched before Benton starts. There's one word more, Gus."

"Well?"

"You keep away from Fowler. See?"

"All right. Now I've got one word more for you."

"Say it, Gus."

"Watch Townsley."

A faithful servitor again, Deegan departed to execute the commands of his chief. When he had gone, Darliss drew the paper from his pocket and read it for the tenth time that day.

It had been torn out of a notebook, as the roughened upper edge showed, and the writing on it was in pencil. The colonel's butler had brought it to him that morning.

"I found it fastened on the front door with a pair of push tacks," the butler said. "I suppose it is some boy's joke, but I thought you'd want to see it."

This was the message the paper bore:

Hello, Tom! I am getting you where you live, ain't I? Well, I am going to get you good before I'm done with you. How do you like it? Faithfully yours, BILL.

In the butler's presence the colonel had laughed at the message—as well as he was able to laugh, considering that the gout was also getting him where he lived. But now he read it again without any sign of amusement.

Then he looked out of the window at the tumble-down house across the street—at the home that had once been Bill Eads'. His brow wrinkled as he looked. Nobody had lived there since poor old Bill went to prison, yet some one was certainly there this summer. On three or four nights he had seen lights in the windows—flashes that lasted but a moment and might have been signals to some one on his side of the street. Once he had sent for the police, and they had searched the place without result.

"If I could walk," Darliss muttered, "I would go over there myself. I'd nail the son of a gun and find out what he wants of me."

But he knew that it was not the want of a good pair of feet that kept him away from the old house. It was the want of nerve. That Bill Eads was hiding in his old home the colonel felt certain, but to face the man who had suffered in prison twenty years for the colonel's sins required more courage than the colonel possessed, brazen though he was.

"If he's over there, let him stay there," thought Darliss philosophically. "If he wants to haunt me, let him go to it. What can't be cured must be endured."

He called, and Mrs. Townsley came in.

"My dear," said he, "I wouldn't go gathering flowers around the old shack yonder any more if I were you."

"Why not?" she asked.

"Because the place is a roost for jailbirds. It isn't a safe place for a woman."

"Jailbirds! Goodness!" exclaimed the lovely Mrs. Townsley.

But after the colonel had gone to bed that night and the servants had followed their master's example, she slipped out of her room and down the stairs, lifted the chain off the latch, and crossed the street.

A door at the back of the old house yielded to her hand. Entering, she called softly:

"Daddy!"

"Here, dear," answered a man's voice in the dark. A groping hand found hers—a hand hardened by toil.

In the dark they whispered a long time. Then a pair of strong arms gathered her into a tight embrace and an unshaven face pressed against her cheek.

"My poor little one! My dear little one!" spoke the man.

"Good-by, daddy," she told him, and kissed him on the forehead. "It's only a little while longer, daddy, dear."

From her window, before she went to bed, she looked across the street. The old house was dark. To see it clearly she had to brush tears from her eyes.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE OPEN GAME.

A magazine writer once described the State as "corrupt and contented." But the description did not apply. Corrupt were the men of the little group that controlled politics, and contented were the favored few who "stood in." But the citizens were no more corrupt than the people of any other State, and they were contented not at all.

They saw their rights invaded by farseeing combinations of shrewd promoters. They rode packed to suffocation in the trolley cars and wondered why the service was permitted to remain inadequate. They suffered high taxes and public mismanagement, bearing their ills more or less meekly and seeing no cure.

Elections had become a farce. The citizen was allowed to choose between John Crook and Peter Scamp, and that was all the choice he had, so completely the Fowler machine and the Darliss machine, working in harmony, controlled the machinery of government. Now and then an unhappy citizen kicked over the traces and was properly and easily squelched. Once it was Bob Hamer, editor of the Walpole *Wasp;* and when he applied for the renewal of a loan, the president of the Walpole State Bank told him bluntly: "We don't care to do business with you." Again it was Jess Bilger, the coal man, who found himself unable to sell his coal to any but one-ton customers because of his activity in demanding cheaper gas from Fowler's gas company.

Through fear and favor the combination known as the "Fowler-Darliss bunch" held lesser men in line, and through them their employees, deluding them into believing that their self-interest required their submission to the rule of the "system."

People knew that things were wrong and wrote letters to the papers or organized protective associations. But they were laughed at for their pains; and the poor, the people who suffered most, were taught to jeer at them as "knockers." Reform talk had about as much show in that State as peace talk at Potsdam. Yet people prayed for it, even many of those who, for self-protection, sided with the gang.

Jeffrey Benton's appearance on the stump in the primary campaign awakened interest because he was a new sort of candidate; and fifty-two thousand Democrats voted for him, not with the idea that he could later be elected, but for the sake of variety. Benton was popular; the State had heard his voice for years, demanding that the sons and daughters of plain folk should have equal educational advantages with the sons and daughters of the well to do. But a voter in that State did not need to be astute to know that the powers would never allow him to reach the governor's mansion at Dalton.

When Benton began his second speaking tour, however, the State sat up and noticed, for it appeared that the man had undertaken the quixotic task of beating not only the Republican candidate but also the Darliss organization in his own party. "A fight!" rang the cry, and men ran to see the fun, for all the fights in that State for twenty years had been mere boxing matches, their outcome determined in advance.

Here was a man who dared to attack bold wrongs and who meant business in what he said; a man, moreover, whose only retinue in the campaign consisted in a very pretty daughter, a brisk young millionaire farmer, and a quiet young newspaper reporter. And Benton differed from other candidates people had known in that he did not ask them for their votes.

"I am an educator, not a politician," he said. "I have no hope or expectation of being admitted to the circle of the elect. But as an educator and a student I should like to discuss with

you certain things that ought to be discussed publicly because they concern the welfare of every one of us.

"Those of you who follow football know that the game has not been interesting to the spectators until lately, because they could not see what was going on. They could not see the ball. They saw a group of players bowling over another group of players; but they wanted to see what it was all about; they wanted to see the ball. So the rules committee has changed things, and to-day we have the open game, where every move is as clear to the man in the top row in the farthest corner of the stands as it is to the coaches on the side lines.

"In politics we have had the closed game, and we still have in this State. You and I may long to see the ball, we may want to know what is going on down there in the field, but we are not allowed to know. The gentlemen who play the game find it inconvenient to let us have a look-in. A few of them, behind closed doors, arrange our politics and our public business among themselves, and it is a dull game to the rest of us, though a very pleasant game to them. I don't suppose it will do any good to ask those gentlemen to change the rules and open up the game of politics so that we all may see the ball, but at least it will do no harm, so I invite you all to join me in picturing the open game of politics as we should like to see it played."

In such gentle and persuasive words, always good-humored, Professor Benton won the ear of the State; and thousands of people, attracted by his personality, by his eloquence, or through sympathy for his political loneliness, remained to become his loyal followers.

It was in his speech at Kingsburg that he touched upon the thing for which Darliss was listening. Here he left generalities and got down to cases. Naming no names, he told the story of Jacob J. Jones of Hamiltonville. "It means political death for me to tell you of this matter," he said, in conclusion, "but I suppose I'm a dead one, anyway, so——"

"You're not!" shouted a man in the audience. "You're the livest one we've had in a coon's age, old Professor Benton; and, by heck, we'll elect you governor! Won't we, neighbors?"

The roar of assent that filled the hall could have been heard throughout Kingsburg, and should have been heard as far away as Hanover, where Darliss, Fowler, and their colleagues racked their brains for plans to stop this spectacled freshman in politics who "talked so much with his mouth."

From Kingsburg the Benton party drove by motor car to Summersworth to keep another speaking engagement that evening. Ann, in the tonneau beside her father, squeezed his arm.

"I'm afraid to have you say those things about them, papa."

"Why, my dear?"

"Mrs. Townsley told me early in the summer that big politicians have ways of doing great harm to people who cross their path. She said that murders have been committed at their order, even in this State."

"The gentlemen in charge of politics are more discreet than they used to be," he replied. "The worst they do now is to knife their enemies at the polls and cut them in society. I noticed to-night, for instance, that not one prominent Kingsburg Democrat attended our meeting."

"And you are their party's nominee," said Ann.

Sam Hillway, in the seat beside the chauffeur, had observed the same conspicuous absence of the leaders of the Kingsburg Democracy. None of them had seen fit to honor the party candidate by coming out to help welcome him.

Mayor Seeley, slated to preside, had been "unavoidably detained" at the last minute, and his place on the platform had been taken by a reckless young lawyer who had nothing to lose. General Bumstead, himself a Democratic candidate for governor in a bygone year and a sacrifice on the altar of the Darliss-Fowler system, had been expected to entertain Benton at his home and conduct him to the assembly hall,

but had found it convenient to be summoned to the bedside of a dying relative. As Sam ran his mind over the list of Democratic notabilities in Kingsburg, he could not recall one who had attended the Benton rally.

He would have spoken of the circumstance to the professor, but Ann was present, and Sam and Ann were not on the old friendly terms just now. Since the evening when Butcher Jake Jones blurted out Deegan's slander in her hearing, Ann's manner toward her father's campaign manager had cooled the least bit. The drop in temperature was too slight for her father to detect, but Sam felt it, and, being a proud young man, he made no effort to set himself right in her eyes.

Once or twice he had caught her looking at him in a strange, speculative sort of way, with sadness and wonder in her eyes; and once or twice he had been on the point of mentioning the Canal Street episode to her father and offering explanations that would have smoothed things out once more. But he gave up the idea, feeling that Benton had a right to ask about the matter if he were interested, and shrinking, too, from posing as a martyr in Benton's sight.

In a big touring car whose headlights glared upon them from behind, McClintock and his fellow reporters—there were many of them now—discussed the snub which Mayor Seeley, General Bumstead, and the other big guns of Kingsburg had handed to the professor that night.

"It's worth a story by itself," suggested the *Blade* man, and the others agreed with him.

So it happened, when the news of the night was printed, that the silent and scornful rebuke administered to Benton by the Kingsburg leaders became a boomerang. The Democratic chieftains of the State had bolted the party, according to the *Blade's* editorial, in refusing to abide by the decision of the party's majority as expressed at the primary election. It was a new kind of revolt.

All sorts of people began to praise Benton, not for his theories of right and wrong, which were only hollow words to most of the downhearted citizens, but for the enemies he had made. Democracy, like death, loves a shining mark. It elevates its Mayor Seeleys and its General Bumsteads only to heave bricks at them later—and the Kingsburg people fell in love with Benton because he had helped them to dent the idols they had reared.

Sam Hillway was the busiest man in the State, which may have been one reason why he let Ann go on looking at him in that doubting, reproachful way of hers. Doctor Guthrie, Jess Bilger, Chalmers, the restaurant king, Fire-eater Dougherty of Williamsport, and Bob Hamer of the Walpole *Wasp* were busy men, too. If the machine of the party that had nominated Benton would not support him in his campaign, then he should have a machine of his own. Sam's lieutenants went ahead through the State, appointing local committees, composed mostly of young men, who saw to it that the Benton meetings lacked nothing through the quitting of the Darliss organization.

Alongside the political eight cylinder that Darliss drove, their machine was a flivver; but flivvers have been known to run rings around eight-cylinders, and the Benton-Hillway flivver, though hastily put together, performed its work admirably. The Darliss leaders might hold aloof and behave as contemptuously as they pleased, but the halls where Benton spoke were filled to the doors with plain folk, every man of whom had a vote to cast on the fourth day of November.

Of the estimable Mr. Pingree, Fowler's candidate, little was heard in that sad October. At appointed times he was exhibited to the people under brilliant auspices, surrounded by men of influence, played to by high-priced brass bands, and advertised on the billboards with expensive lithographs. Unfortunately Mr. Pingree was no orator. Though he had made himself a millionaire in the soap business, he was uncertain of himself when he stood upon his feet before a crowd; and, to

make sure that he should say nothing not eminently safe and sane, he read his speeches—a proceeding never likely to stir up the enthusiasm of an audience.

Fowler growled, Darliss gloomed, Gus Deegan went quietly up and down in the land, and the time rolled on to the night of Benton's mass meeting in Hanover, when the outspoken professor should beard the political lions in their den.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE GRAND ASSAULT.

At the Hanover meeting Benton's grand assault began. Up to that time he had merely felt out the enemy, telling the story of Butcher Jake Jones and particularizing no further. In this he had played it low down on the Darliss-Fowler bipartisan machine, leaving its sponsors doubtful of his knowing much and giving Gus Deegan plenty of time to pledge the complete number of votes in the coming legislature necessary to pass the water-power bill over the veto of the next governor.

But now Benton sprang his mine, and the jar of the explosion reached every village in the State.

Fifty-five gentlemen running for seats in the legislature, Benton declared, had agreed to help a certain influential group of money-makers to steal a vast natural resource from the people of the State. Fifty-five of them, enough to make a three-fourths majority, had pledged their word of "honor" to obey their masters' voices in betraying the taxpayers into the hands of the spoilers.

He was sorry for the fifty-five. He was so sorry for them that he would not name them—yet. They were victims of the system of political brigandage no less than the taxpayers themselves. To them had been offered such a choice as the bandit chiefs of Mexico offer the peon. "Join us in robbing your neighbors," said the bandit chiefs, "and you will prosper. Refuse, and that will be the end of you." For the fifty-five peon bandits in this enlightened commonwealth Benton had nothing but sympathy. He believed that many of them would see the error of their way and withdraw from the shameful compact while yet there was time.

He felt that many of them had gone into the deal under a misapprehension, and he offered them the assurance that political success depended no longer upon subservience to the predatory powers of other years. He would say no word in disparagement of any man, but he suggested that the voters of the various counties might take upon themselves the duty of inquiring among their legislative candidates as to which of them expected to go to Dalton free men, bound by no secret promise to the private government that ruled the State for its own advantage.

"I had hoped," Benton concluded, "that what I had to say of our self-appointed political guardians might be spoken to their faces here to-night, for many of them are citizens of Hanover. I am sorry that not one of them seems to be present."

The crowd roared its delight, for neither on the stage nor in the boxes nor in the audience anywhere could one of Darliss' friends be seen. The Hanover meeting, like the Kingsburg rally, had to struggle along without the patronage of the mighty, though in brains and heart and soul it wanted nothing for their absence.

McClintock, in his description of the candidate's progress from the theater to the Hanover Hotel, refrained studiously from calling the street demonstration an "ovation," but that is what it was. Thrice the crowds stopped Benton's car and obliged him to make a speech. A hundred enthusiasts leaped upon the running board and clasped his hand, and the regular business of the hotel stood still for an hour while the mob poured through the corridors to greet the "next governor."

It was midnight before Sam Hillway could rescue his candidate and his candidate's daughter and get them away to their rooms. Then he dropped groundward to the rathskeller, where he

dodged a dozen detaining hands and made his way to a private alcove. There Gus Deegan awaited him.

"Have one?" asked the swarthy boss, pushing a bottle across the table as Sam sat down opposite.

"Not to-night," said Sam. "What do you want to see me about?"

"I want to warn you that this thing has gone too far. It has got to stop, Hillway."

"Who'll stop it, Deegan?"

"You."

"Huh!" Sam grunted. "Do you think I'm superhuman? I can't stop this landslide, Deegan. No man can. Benton will be elected twice over."

"That's all right; he can have the election, and welcome."

"You were always generous, Gus."

"What he's got to do is to let up on this talk of a water-power deal. There's nothing in it, I tell you."

"Deegan, old man, you give yourself away. I have heard every word the professor has spoken in public since the campaign began, and he has never yet called it a water-power deal by name. He has talked about a plot to corner a natural resource, but he hasn't mentioned water power in any way, shape, or manner."

"The whole State knows what he means, anyhow."

"Not unless you have been more confidential with the State than Benton—and that, if you'll allow me to say so, is not likely."

Deegan poured out a drink of brandy and fairly threw it into his throat.

"Anyway, he mustn't talk anymore the way he talked to-night."

"Were you at the meeting, Gus? I didn't notice you."

"Of course we know," said Deegan, "that it's all a bluff, his talk about the fifty-five pledges. He has made a good guess, maybe, but it's only a guess. He can't produce the evidence if we call him for a show-down, and that's what we mean to do. How will he like to go into court and confess that he has been guessing, pretending, lying about us, and that he's only a four-flusher, after all? A man can't make charges like he made to-night, Sam, without paying the price. That's what I wanted to tell you. Have a drink?"

"Is that all you have to say to me?"

"No, it isn't. Don't go yet."

They were alone in the alcove, screened from sight of the bar by a curtain.

"I know you believe in Benton, and all that, Sammy, my boy; but there's things about him you don't know—things that would run him out of the State if people heard them."

"I don't understand."

"You think you know his inside life, don't you?"

"I think I do."

"Well, you don't know it all."

"Who's the woman? Mrs. Townsley?"

Sam saw the dark face twitch.

"I'm surprised, Gus, that you haven't sprung this on us sooner."

"There's two weeks to spring it yet. The story will kill him in one."

Sam yawned. "But you won't tell it, Gus. You know very well you won't."

"Naturally a story like that don't shock you as much as it will shock other people," said Deegan, with a leer.

"Will you please tell me what you mean by that?"

"You get me without a map, all right," said Deegan. "Any man that hangs around fourteen Canal Street, Dalton, will know what I mean."

"I suppose I do understand you now," said Sam.

He rose leisurely, took off his hat and coat, and laid them on a chair.

"Deegan," he commanded suddenly, "stand up!"

Nothing loath, Deegan obeyed, sending his chair with a bump against the wall of the little room. Sam swept the curtains apart.

"Step outside here."

Willingly the big boss of Hanover followed. He had begun his public career as a bruiser in a river ward; he had slugged his way up to leadership in the city horde that did the bidding of Darliss at election time, and nothing would have pleased him better than to plant his knuckles in the face of this

farmer who had muddled affairs so badly for him.

But the sight that he saw in the rathskeller caused him to halt in his tracks and stare.

McClintock was there, and seemingly all the other reporters in the world. They had formed a sort of ring in front of the alcove and appeared to be waiting for just what had happened.

"Now, Gus," said Sam, "go on with those things you were saying to me. Tell the newspaper boys. They'd like to hear."

Instantly Deegan perceived that the scene had been set for him, and swiftly he rose to the situation.

"You——" he roared, and lunged at Hillway with all the force of his two-hundred-pound body. Sam sidestepped and let his burly assailant wind up against the rail of the bar.

"Hi! Look out what you're doin'!" yelled the bartender.

In the moment when Sam waited for Deegan to recover his balance, Gus saw his mistake. Instead of returning to the attack, he swung round and elbowed his way toward the door.

"Hold on, Gus!" called Sam. "Stay and let's have this thing out here and now. Don't go away mad."

"Go to hell!" Deegan snarled over his shoulder.

The reporters swarmed around Hillway as he put on his coat.

"You have certainly got his number, Sam," said the Dalton *Banner* man. "What happened? Tell us."

"Was it the flash-light business, Sam?" asked McClintock.

"Yep."

"Shall I tell the bunch?"

"Tell them if you want to," said Hillway. "But not for publication."

Around a rathskeller table McClintock imparted to his fellow newspaper men the story of the trap that had been set for Hillway, one hot summer night in the capital city of the State—and the information he gave them was never published, of course.

But the Dalton *Banner* man told it next day to Pullman, his city editor, who told it to Mrs. Pullman, who told it to her friend Miss Hyssopp, the Dalton music teacher, who told it to her friend Mrs. Jasper Kingsley, wife of the clerk of the supreme court, who told it to her husband, who repeated it to old Chief Justice Winklereid, who enjoyed it so well that he passed it on to his crony Justice Regan, who took it home with him to the Park Club in Hanover, where it reached the ears of Colonel Tom Darliss, who laid it on the shelf to use as a club over Gus Deegan when that aspiring henchman should need humbling.

Nor did the story stop there in its wanderings, for Mrs. Regan heard it from the justice and repeated it to her friend Lydia Smollett, the busiest old-lady philanthropist in the United States, who went to Judson one day to make friendly overtures to Ann Benton with a view to securing the interest of Professor Benton in a State hospital for superannuated work horses.

"Politics is a dreadful business, isn't it?" said Lydia Smollett. "I'm sure you will be glad, my dear, when the mud slinging is over."

Ann thought, naturally, that Lydia alluded to the pertinent things Benton had been saying about the Darliss-Fowler machine. All the organization people in the State were calling her father a mud slinger.

Lydia saw that she had been misunderstood and hastened to make it clear that she had not intended to knock the professor.

"I mean, my dear, such things as wicked people have been saying about poor young Mr. Hillway. You know all about it, no doubt?"

"No, not all," said Ann.

"Then you ought to hear it all," said Lydia, "for it is too good a joke on the rascals to keep."

Forthwith she told Ann the story that McClintock had told the reporters in the rathskeller.

"And when Sam dared him to speak the slander before witnesses," she concluded, "Deegan slunk away like a whipped dog. He knew that Sam could have jailed him for conspiracy and criminal libel, and goodness knows

what all. But now, my dear, I must stop talking scandal and tell you about my work horses, because it's certain that your father will be the next governor and I want him to know about my pet charity."

That night Ann looked at Sam with eyes that had lost their questioning and beamed now with kindness. But Sam was too busy to see that the temperature had risen.

CHAPTER XX.

MRS. TOWNSLEY.

The people of the State had been taught in the years before to hate the game of politics and leave it alone for the gang. But they discovered now that they liked it very much. Benton invited the whole State to come in and have a good time, and the whole State came, except the negligible few who were the slaves of the Darliss-Fowler steam roller. In the game as the professor had opened it up, the professional players sat gloomily in the bleachers and watched the joyous spectators kick the ball around the gridiron—as if the ball had been public property!

Benton's suggestion that the one hundred and forty-four Republican and Democratic candidates for the legislature might be investigated by their constitutents had produced enthusiastic activity in every county. Committees of citizens called publicly upon the gentlemen whose names appeared on the party tickets, and challenged them to declare whether they were owned or not.

In Lancaster County some one had a bright idea, and, acting upon it, went further than mere interrogation and demanded that as many of the local legislative aspirants as desired consideration should pledge themselves to represent the common interests and no others. The idea spread to the rest of the State. Only a few of the candidates refused to swear fealty to their neighbors, and they were consigned to oblivion instanter. The rest bowed before public opinion and gladly signed away any priority claims that either of the machines might have upon them.

If any of these candidates had the notion that they might later repudiate with impunity their pledges to the people, they were speedily relieved of that notion; for, as Benton pointed out, the men who sat in the next legislature would be known to the folk at home. They had been dragged into the light of day, where all could see them, and they would be marked men the rest of their lives. In previous years an ordinary legislator, particularly if he came from such congested parts of the State as Hanover or Henderton, could sin against the people at home without punishment, sheltered behind his inconspicuousness. Now all the candidates were visible. Their future credit in business and society would depend upon their behavior at Dalton.

Such a deplorable state of affairs had the impractical, theoretical, visionary, and sentimental Professor Benton brought about.

Colonel Tom Darliss, at his desk, stabbed a pen viciously into his blotter. Fowler settled down in the visitor's chair and glared scorn at the little colonel. Gus Deegan stood near, glumly awaiting commands. He had just then pulled down the window shade and shut the white carnations from the view of the passing throngs in Russell Street. Not in years before had that sight been denied to the people of Hanover.

"You'll admit that you're an ass, I hope," Fowler growled.

"I admit nothing of the sort," Darliss retorted. "This accident was not humanly preventable. It was an act of the Almighty."

"Almighty idiocy!" said Fowler. "A nice hole you've put us in!"

"Election is still four days off," said Deegan.

Fowler scowled at him.

"What do you mean, Gus?" asked Darliss. "We can't do anything in four days."

"All sorts of things can happen in four days," said Gus. "You were speaking of accidents."

"Gus," said the colonel, "have you been drinking?"

"I have. Do you blame me?"

"Tell us your idea, Deegan," said Fowler.

"I can't," said Gus. "But maybe you can tell me this: What good is a ship without a rudder?"

"I get you, I guess," said Darliss. "Go on home and stay there till you're sober. And put that idea out of your head. It's foolish. I told you yesterday."

Gus lumbered to the door and threw it open. Then he turned with a boozy leer and said:

"Here's the fascinating Mrs. Townsley to see you, colonel."

The woman stood at the threshold.

"Come in, Townsley," called Darliss. He hated to be left alone with the savage-tongued Fowler.

"You are engaged," she answered. "I'll wait."

So the colonel had Fowler on his hands, after all.

"What did Deegan mean?" asked the Republican boss.

"You heard what he said."

"I'll have nothing to do with any foul play. I hope you will make him understand."

"Gus is not himself to-day," said the colonel. "Don't you be afraid of him. He's got sense."

"I know what's in his mind," Fowler insisted. "You'd better put a ball and chain on him."

He rose. "I can think of a thousand insulting things to say to you, Darliss, but I'll save them till later and not keep your lady friend waiting. By the way, let me ask you something. It was from your lady friend outside that you learned about our water-power scheme, wasn't it?"

"It was not," lied the colonel.

Fowler's eyes rested upon him contemptuously.

"You may like to know," said he, "that the water-power project was her idea from the start. The suggestion came to us from her. We've just found it out."

"Good Lord!" cried Darliss.

"At first," continued Fowler, "we gave the credit to Boggs, our publicity man. He claimed to have picked up the idea while looking at a map in the State surveyor's office in Dalton last winter. Last week he confessed, just before we fired him, that it was Mrs. Townsley who put the scheme into his head. It was the dirtiest thing you ever pulled on us, Darliss. We shall remember it till the day of your death."

"Bless my soul, Fowler, I don't know what you mean. Do you think the idea was mine from the beginning, and that I sent Mrs. Townsley to get you started on it?"

"That's what I mean exactly."

"So help me, I'm innocent!" cried Darliss. And Fowler, well as he knew the colonel's powers of deceit, had to own that the old man's gaping mouth and wild eye bore witness to the truth of his words.

"Then," said Fowler, "somebody has made everlasting fools out of us all, and a particularly everlasting fool out of you. Good day, and be damned to you!"

Mrs. Townsley found the colonel in a state of partial collapse. Fowler's information had left the old man stunned. In his helplessness he groped for some one to steady him, and Mrs. Townsley was handiest.

"My dear," he said, "Fowler tells me that you put his outfit up to hankering after those water-power rights."

She laughed in ridicule of Fowler.

"You told him he lied, I hope?"

"I told him nothing, Townsley. I didn't know but he might be truthful for once."

"Listen, colonel; why should I have put them up to the scheme and then told you about it and helped you to compel them to let you in on it? What would be the sense in that? It's perfectly absurd!"

"That's what I want to believe. Sit down, my dear. You're the only friend I have in the world. Sit down and help me now."

She patted his shoulder caressingly and perched on the edge of the desk. "What's the trouble?" she asked.

"Deegan. He's gone crazy, I think. He has the idea that he can win the election for us yet by——"

He paused, searching her face with his sharp and single eye. He read there nothing but sympathetic attention.

"——by putting Benton out of the way."

"Oh!"

"You must help me hold him down till the trouble's over. He admires you. I've often seen him watching you. Can't you waylay him and keep his mind occupied till he gets over this brain storm of his?"

"Why don't you go after him yourself?"

"Because I—I'm afraid of him, Townsley, that's why. I have no influence over him any more. I'd only make him worse. But you——"

She saw his hands begin to tremble, and turned her eyes away. She alone, perhaps, of all the people in Hanover, knew that Colonel Tom Darliss had broken.

"His idea, I presume, is that with Benton out of the road, the legislature will belong to anybody?"

"That's it. You can see for yourself that Gus must be out of his head. The whole State is watching Benton, and a good part of the country, besides. If anything happened to him, it would raise the deuce."

"Murders have been committed before now for the sake of political advantage," said she. "There was the affair in Merkle Street years ago."

"How do you know about that?" he demanded. "But, shucks! That's ancient history, and we're wasting time. You'll find Deegan for me, won't you?"

"I will find Deegan," she said. "Don't worry."

CHAPTER XXI.

DEEGAN WATCHES.

Gus Deegan arrived at Riverton on the five-o'clock train Saturday evening and carried his suit case across the town square to the Eagle House, where he registered as Ambrose Barrister and retired to a room which the clerk assigned to him on the second floor.

His windows looked down upon the hotel driveway and the automobile parking space at the side. When he had closed the shutters he could still command a view of the hotel entrance and the street beyond the lawn. A poster on a billboard facing him advertised:

JEFFREY BENTON,
RIVERTON TOWN HALL.
Saturday Evening, 7:30 Sharp.

Stretched between two of Riverton's famous elms, farther up the way, was a Benton banner. At sight of it Deegan muttered an oath, cursing the professor body and soul. In Deegan's estimation, Benton was a burglar and worse. Benton had played the bull in the political china shop. He had violated every rule of civilized political warfare. He had betrayed the kindly gentlemen who had brought him forward out of his obscurity. All of this, no doubt, was true, if Deegan's point of view was the right one.

Opening his grip, the Hanover city boss unwrapped a flannel nightshirt from around a long-necked bottle and pried the cork out of the bottle with his jackknife. After a pull at the bottle, he sluiced his throat with a glass of water from the washstand. Drawing a chair to one of the shuttered windows, he sat down to watch.

People rolled up to the hotel in motor cars, held conversations with other people, and rolled away. Three or four bustling gentlemen in Sunday clothes and high silk hats conferred at the hotel entrance, turned their eyes eastward along the State highway, and frequently looked at their watches. A small boy arrived with a large basket of chrysanthemums and was hustled indoors by one of the silk-hatted persons, who then returned to the watchful group in front.

Presently Deegan saw the gentlemen in the silk hats begin suddenly to bustle about, to lift their hats and replace them on their heads, to pull down their cuffs, and to stand erect. From a dis-

tance a cheer sounded. Two motor cars came in sight.

On the front seat of the first car was Sam Hillway, alert and businesslike, as he pointed the way to the chauffeur. In the tonneau were Jeffrey Benton, Ann Benton, and Doctor Guthrie. As the party descended into the arms of the reception committee, the second car arrived. Deegan recognized in it the detested McClintock and his brother reporters, two of whom were asleep. It was a swift pace that Benton had set for the newspaper men in the closing fortnight of the campaign.

When the hotel had swallowed up the newcomers, Deegan turned to the long-necked bottle. Outside in the dark, more autos arrived and departed. Somewhere in the hotel an orchestra struck up "The Star-Spangled Banner," and a roar of patriotic song came up the stairs to Deegan. The hated candidate and his Riverton rooters would be sitting down to dinner. Benton would be bowing to the adulating banqueters, while the man who had helped him start on his road to glory sat alone in an upper chamber, friendless and forgotten.

Not without reason had Deegan's intimates dubbed him "Gloomy Gus." He loved to brood, he reveled in melancholy, and nothing gave him more pleasure than to play the martyr, with himself for an audience. On these occasions the long-necked bottle sharpened rather than dulled his heartache. He referred to it several times in the hour in which the Benton party broke bread with the Rivertonians belowstairs. With his elbows on the table and his head between his hands, he meditated upon his wrongs. By and by he fell into a doze, from which he awoke to discover that the hotel was silent.

He opened his door and looked out over the stairway banister. The crowd that had lately filled the hotel office had gone away, presumably to hear Benton speak at the town hall. The clerk at the desk was talking with a woman, and Deegan heard his words:

"You can see for yourself, ma'am, there's no such person registered here. You might inquire at the Railroad Hotel, across the square."

As the woman turned away, Gus saw her face. A moment later he descended the stairs, looked around the office, and walked out. Down the street half a block went the tall form of Mrs. Townsley and the stubby figure of Colonel Tom Darliss. Deegan hastened in pursuit.

"Hi!"

At his hail the pair turned.

"Thank the Lord!" exclaimed the colonel.

"What are you doing here?" Deegan demanded.

"Looking for you, you darn fool," Darliss answered. "Come out of the light where we can talk."

They stopped in the dark doorway of a vacant store. Across the square were the lighted windows of the town hall. Over there people were cheering.

"I tried every way to reach you by wire," said Darliss. "They told me you weren't in Riverton. At last Townsley and I drove down by motor. The last train had gone. Where's your overcoat?"

"At the hotel."

"Get it and come on with us."

"Come on where?"

"Back to Hanover."

"Back to perdition!" said Deegan. "Go back yourselves. You've no business butting in on me here."

"You don't understand," said Darliss, his voice shaking. "It's all off, Gus—what you came down here for. It's all off, I tell you. Somebody has given you away. Here, take this to a light somewhere and read it."

Gus struck a match and held it over a bit of paper which Darliss handed him. Darliss blew the flame out.

"You fool! Take it down the street to that lamp."

Under the gaslight Deegan read:

> TOM DARLISS: I know why Deegan has gone to Riverton to-day. If anything happens to Jeffrey Benton, you probably know what will happen to you. Your old pal,
>
> BILL.

Underneath was drawn a rude

sketch of a prison window, with a face not unlike the colonel's looking out.

Twice Deegan read the message. The stuff out of the long-necked bottle had not deprived him of his power to reason. He turned back to the couple in the doorway.

"When did you get this?"

"Late this afternoon. You see, don't you, Gus, that——"

"I see that there has been treachery, as usual, and now I know for sure where it comes from. I've always warned you, Darliss, but you wouldn't listen. You went right on playing into the hands of this smooth, slick, sneaking she-devil——"

Out of the dark a gloved hand smote him across the mouth a blow that brought water to his eyes.

"You dog!" muttered the woman. "You cad! Say another word about me if you dare!"

"There, there, Townsley!" said Darliss, drawing her away from Deegan's reach. He had never known Gus to beat a woman, but knowing the man's temperament he took no chances. "Don't let's have a fuss here in the street. Gus will feel better to-morrow."

"Nobody on earth knew I started for Riverton but her," said Deegan. "Can't you see that we've got her? She has been the snake all along. I've known it ever since the Jake Jones business. Who knew about that but you and me and her? Who blabbed to Guthrie? Was it me, do you think? Was it you? Or was it her? Take your choice."

The colonel felt the trusting pressure of Mrs. Townsley's arm in his and took his choice.

"We can wrangle over this to-morrow, Gus. Meanwhile, you've got to come back to Hanover with us. The car's yonder in front of the hotel."

He would have taken hold of Deegan's arm, but Gus broke away.

"I can't go back to Hanover just yet, colonel. Don't try to understand, because I can't explain now. But disappear—get out of town yourself and leave things to me."

"But, Gus——"

"Oh, the devil! Don't argue about it. I know what I'm doing. Go on back to Hanover and forget it. Nothing's going to happen, I tell you."

Abruptly he left them, and there was no use in pursuing him, for he went on the run.

"Is it all right, do you think?" asked the woman.

"Gus is no fool," the colonel replied. "I don't think anything will happen now."

"I wish we could be sure. I don't trust him. From what he said yesterday, I know he is here to make trouble."

Darliss had overstated his confidence in Deegan's good sense. He knew that Mrs. Townsley's fears were well grounded.

"What more can we do?" he asked. "Whatever we do will have to be done right away."

The prolonged cheering that came to them from the town hall indicated that the Riverton rally was over. In a few minutes Benton would enter his motor car, waiting before the door, to drive to Farmingdale, ten miles away, where the last meeting of the campaign was scheduled for nine o'clock.

"We might have Deegan detained by the police," Mrs. Townsley suggested. "I suppose they have police in Riverton."

Darliss sent his fancy ahead to consider the consequences of such a move, and his fancy returned to advise: "Nothing doing." To arrest Deegan might accomplish the colonel's purpose, but it would be bad for his self-interest. There would have to be explanations.

The crack of a backfire in front of the hotel jarred the old man and set his thoughts in sudden panic.

"You're trembling," said the woman. "Listen. I have an idea. Benton is a gentleman. You know that, don't you?"

"Yes."

"If you gave him a friendly warning, he would treat it as a personal confidence, wouldn't he?"

"I suppose he would, but——"

"In another minute it may be too late. Why not——"

"It's the only decent thing left to do," agreed the colonel.

"It might be the means of patching up your quarrel," she suggested. "You'll want a friend at Dalton many times in the next four years."

"Will you come with me, Townsley?"

"I'd better wait at the hotel."

Colonel Tom Darliss limped across the square to the town hall, where the audience had begun to swarm out. Mrs. Townsley returned to the Eagle House. At the entrance she thought she saw Deegan in the rear seat of a motor car that sped away down the State highway toward Farmingdale.

She sat down in a quiet corner of the hotel office and waited, dividing her time between looking at the people who flocked in after the meeting and looking at a split in the palm of the kid glove on her right hand.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE STATE HIGHWAY.

At the edge of the platform in the town hall, Jeffrey Benton reached down to shake the hands that stretched up to him from the audience. Doctor Guthrie waited in the background with the candidate's hat and overcoat, and Ann stood chatting with him.

Sam, at Benton's side, looked at his watch and frowned. They had ten minutes to do the ten miles to Farmingdale. Already the people there would be listening to the time-killing speeches of the local orators and wondering when Benton would appear.

Guthrie saw Tom Darliss first. Leaving Ann in the middle of a sentence, he stepped to the candidate's side. At the same instant Sam saw the colonel, and, swinging his hand swiftly behind him, he gripped the back of a chair. Both Guthrie and Sam looked belligerent.

Darliss nodded to them and waited humbly at the top of the platform steps. Sam pulled at Benton's sleeve, and Benton, yielding to the importunity of his campaign manager, straightened up.

"Hello!" he cried, as his eyes lighted upon the figure of the little boss. "If here isn't Tom Darliss! I'm glad we've got you out to a meeting at last, colonel."

He offered his hand to the defeated leader, who took it eagerly.

"Professor, may I have a word with you?"

"There's no time, Doctor Benton," said Sam, still keeping his hold on the chair. "We ought to have started a quarter of an hour ago."

He glared at the colonel, as did Guthrie.

Benton laughed. "You and Guthrie have bossed me long enough," he said. "I don't like to be bossed, as the colonel knows; so if the colonel wants a word with me, let him have it."

Darliss limped after the candidate to a corner of the platform. Sam never took his eyes from them nor his hand from the back of the chair. What Darliss said was audible to no one save Benton, but the others heard Benton say in reply:

"It's mighty good of you, colonel, to drive all the way down here to tell us this. We had another warning of the same sort before we left home to-day, and we are looking out a little. Thank you very much."

They shook hands again and Darliss limped away. In the Eagle House he found Mrs. Townsley awaiting him.

"Benton had been warned already," he told her. "What do you make of that?"

"We seem to be living in a glass house," she answered.

They went outside. A dozen autos made the roadway bright with their headlights. As Darliss settled down in his big car beside Mrs. Townsley and suffered her to wrap the lap robe around his feet, their chauffeur suddenly stood up.

"Listen!" said he. "What's that?"

Other persons around them had given ear to the sound of a wildly shrieking klaxon that came wailing up the State highway from the direction of Farmingdale.

"Somebody's in trouble," said the chauffeur.

A pair of glaring headlights flashed

into sight and came up the Riverton street at breakneck speed, the horn behind them filling the night with alarm.

"Whoever's driving must be drunk," said the chauffeur. "Look at him hit that crosswalk!"

With a jamming of brakes the noisy car stopped in front of the hotel. The driver jumped down and flung open the door of the tonneau, shouting:

"Here, everybody! Come here, for God's sake!"

He dragged something limp and heavy out through the car door. The crowd pressed around, hiding the car from the sight of Darliss and his companion. Their chauffeur ran to see. In a moment he came back, his teeth chattering.

"It's Gus Deegan!" he cried.

The crowd shuffled across the hotel lawn, carrying something heavy. Some one shouted: "Fetch a doctor!"

"Gus Deegan!" the colonel gasped.

"Murdered!" said the chauffeur. "Anyway, somebody tried to murder him. He ain't dead yet. Shot him out of the bushes, the fellow says, halfway between here and Farmingdale. Filled his head with buckshot!"

Darliss escaped from the lap robe and toddled after the crowd. Mrs. Townsley huddled down in a corner of the car out of the night breeze.

A touring car swept past toward Farmingdale, followed by a second car. In the glare of the headlights of the Deegan car, which no one had thought to turn off, Mrs. Townley recognized the familiar slouch hat and upturned ulster collar of Jeffrey Benton.

After a minute's absence, Darliss came back to her.

"There's no reason for us to wait around here," he said. "Everything's being done for Gus that can be done."

Here the colonel lowered his voice so that the chauffeur could not hear:

"He must have gone out there in the woods to stop the thing—whatever it was that he planned—and I guess he ran into his own trap."

"Will he live?"

"Live?" snorted the colonel. "Sure he will. It will take more than a load of buckshot to kill Gus Deegan. Let's go home, Oscar."

Later that night, observant citizens in the main street of Farmingdale saw three touring cars enter the town over the State highway from Riverton. In the leading car rode Jeffrey Benton. In the car at the tail of the procession rode Colonel Tom Darliss, once the State leader of his party, now retired from politics.

The Benton car stopped in front of the Odd Fellows Temple, where a brass band struck up "Hail to the Chief." But the Darliss car cut around the cheering crowd and passed on through town toward the cold sky glow above the distant city of Hanover.

CHAPTER XXIII.

BILL EADS.

On Sam Hillway's farm in Merrill County there is a hired man who does more hard work, perhaps, than any other hired man in the country, and of whom less work is expected than of any other hand on the place.

He is a little, bent old fellow, shy when strangers are near, but talkative when his employer or his employer's pretty wife are the only persons around.

With the Hillways to listen, he will put down the mower knife he is grinding, or the hoe he is repairing, and converse for hours upon the ins and the outs and the undergrounds of political life, in which subject he seems to be an authority. His knowledge of such matters has been of help to Sam in piecing together the chapter in the political history of the State intervening between the death of Sam's father and the time when Sam began to take an interest in public affairs himself.

The little old hired man is useful, too, at the farm forge. He understands ironworking better than any blacksmith in the county, perhaps because he took a twenty-year course in that subject in the machine shop of a well-known State institution in the outskirts of Dalton.

But if you suspect the hired man of

being Bill Eads, at whose order the 1894 election in Merkle Street, Hanover, was marked with bloodshed, you have another guess coming. The man's first name is Bill, it is true, but his last name is Bailey—an easy name to remember if you think of Honolulu.

Mention has been made that Sam is married now, and there is something to be said about that.

When the votes were counted and all was over, including the shouting, and the safe and sane Mr. Pingree had returned to his soap factory, vowing that politics was no pursuit for a self-respecting citizen, Jeffrey Benton said to Sam:

"My boy, what can I do for you? What office do you want? Name your reward for all your fine help."

"Well," replied Sam, "I don't want to be selfish or greedy or overappreciative of my part in the campaign, but I'd like you to appoint me your son-in-law."

"Sam," laughed Benton, "you seem to think the powers of a governor are unlimited."

"But if I can get myself elected to the office, you'll not order a recount, I hope?"

"Far from it, my boy. I'll recommend a motion to make your election unanimous."

Unanimous it was, and Sam's inauguration followed Professor Benton's by one week. Thus ended the campaign of Jeffrey Benton for the governorship—a campaign still bragged about by the plain people of the State and mentioned in horrified whispers by the little group of shy, retiring gentlemen who used to run the State as a money-making institution for their own particular benefit.

These gentlemen sit around the Park Club in Hanover and shake their heads over the populistic, socialistic, demagogic times, or they look at maps of the hilly section in the southeastern corner of the State and sigh. The other day they read with pain and sadness that State Surveyor Fredericks had devised a State-controlled water-power system in Grenada County that would benefit the State millions of dollars' worth.

Of the fascinating Mrs. Townsley nothing has been seen in Hanover since Colonel Darliss retired from politics. Ken McClintock has heard that the lady has charge of the welfare work in one of the largest department stores in far-away New York City, a position which her quiet dignity and ready sympathy should enable her to fill with credit.

Sometimes she visits Mrs. Hillway at Merrill; and always on these occasions the little old hired man, William Bailey, takes a vacation from his forge, dresses up in his other clothes, and goes for long rambles with the visitor, helping Ann, like a good soul, to entertain her.

Once the pair drifted into Hattie Purdy's little ice-cream parlor in Merrill, and Hattie distinctly saw the handsome woman put her smooth white hand over the little man's brown, rough paw and pat it affectionately. But immediately after that demonstration, before Hattie had recovered from the shock, she heard the handsome woman call the little man "father;" which satisfied Hattie, as it should satisfy the rest of us, that everything was all right, after all.

The ramshackle old house that has stood idle in fashionable Magnolia Avenue for so many years, reproachfully staring across at the handsome mansion of Colonel Darliss, has a "For Sale" sign on it now, and the colonel might purchase it if he so desired. But it happens that there is also a "For Sale" sign on his own property opposite.

The only real estate in which Darliss takes an interest nowadays is a bungalow in Florida. Some people might call it a palace, but the colonel likes "bungalow" better. When it is finished, it will make a fine place for an old gentleman to rest from his labors, to study his gout and his diet, to watch the sea and the islands and the palmettos, and to dream long dreams of other days.

The colonel received a letter the other day from Gus Deegan, but he has no intention of answering it.

Vig

By Henry Herbert Knibbs

Author of "Waring of Sonoratown," "Sunny Mateel," Etc.

Vig was a great, shag-haired Irish wolf dog with the royal blood of ancestors that had mourned at the cairns of Gaelic kings in his veins. He was faithful to his friends, and would rather die than submit to a foe

WENTWORTH, whose days were numbered, had nerved himself to undertake the journey from Plaintalk, in the valley, to Stinson's cabin in the Horseshoe Range. His flickering strength flared up as he saw the mountain man's homestead against a blue background of spruce—a tiny habitation set squarely at the end of the ragged trail. He knew only too well that it was his last ride, yet he sat straight in the saddle, gazing eagerly across the lateral valleys of the high country, drinking in the thin mountain air, and telling himself that he would ride down that trail again some day. With the peculiar optimism of those stricken as he was stricken, he borrowed strength which he knew he could not repay, offering as security the worn promise of to-morrow to a body indifferent to all promises save that of eternal rest.

Stinson, the mountain man, knew this. He had seen such men "go out" suddenly, buoyed up to the last by hope, pride, or by a surging fear of the beyond. Stinson had salvaged the effects of one or two of these men with profit to himself. Wentworth had paid in advance for a tentative lease of life in the hills, with Stinson's promise of service given too readily for a Westerner; because Stinson knew that the service would not be long and the pay for six months' board and lodging would be earned in less than a month. Wentworth had paid willingly, feverishly, as a gambler stakes his last bet against impossible odds, hoping to prove that he is the solitary exception to the unalterable rules of the game.

Vig, Wentworth's great, shag-haired Irish wolf dog, padded slowly behind the riders. When they paused to breathe their ponies, Vig drew close to his master's horse and stood motionless, with head lowered as though listening to some faint, far voice that whispered of impending mysteries. Vig listened, for his blood was the royal blood of wolf dogs that had mourned at the cairns of Gaelic kings—kings who had gone down in the fierce rush of battle, or who had sunk to the long sleep through silent treachery of blade or cup, leaving some lone and ghostly wolf dog to pad the dim and echoless halls, listening, wondering, waiting for a voice to call from out the black silence of night and desolation.

When the ponies moved on again, Vig dropped back and followed, his huge flank muscles working with tireless rhythm. This mountain trail, this indolent plodding pace of the ponies, was play for Vig, who could run down and kill a timber wolf alone.

At the cabin, Wentworth turned in the saddle and gazed down into the afternoon valley. A thin shimmer of silver marked the course of the distant railroad. That black dot amid clustering green was the desert town of Plaintalk.

"It's a long way——" Wentworth began, then caught his breath. Stinson, unsaddling his pony, nodded.

Wentworth dismounted and stepped to the cabin doorway. His strength

had died down, leaving him weary and indifferent. He had arrived. There was nothing to look forward to except a vague to-morrow—and rest. The interior of the cabin was a faint blur. A stove, a saddle hanging from a peg, a rifle, some blankets—and the two bunks, one above the other. Wentworth crawled to a bunk and lay down. To-morrow he would go out and sit on the bench in the sun, with Vig at his feet. They would gaze out across the great purple tides of forest rolling down to the shores of space.

The mountain man, Stinson, tough-sinewed, tireless, was chopping wood. Presently he would bring water—clear, cold water—from the spring near the trail. Wentworth was thirsty, but he would wait.

He smiled as his fingers touched Vig's rough coat; Vig, who lay with forelegs crossed and nose between his paws, listening, waiting, parched with thirst, yet too loyal to leave his master and too proud to whimper.

Waking from a black dream of chasms immeasurable, terrifying, starless, Wentworth gazed through the open doorway at the midnight stars. He had slept heavily and long. He was thirsty. He called to Stinson, who rose and brought water in a tin cup.

Wentworth thanked him and apologized for waking him.

"That's all right," muttered Stinson. And: "Here, you!" as he heard Vig lapping water from the bucket.

"He's thirsty," said Wentworth, and his voice was tinged with apology. "Did you give him water after—after I turned in?"

"Nope. Spring's right handy down the trail."

"Yes; but perhaps he didn't want to leave me. If you don't mind giving him some water in a pan——"

Vig had ceased lapping. Wentworth heard him pad slowly to the doorway and sniff the night.

"It's all right, Vig. Go ahead!"

The big dog half turned, then stepped royally into the outer darkness. At the spring he drank with hot greed, driving his long nose through the cool water and shaking his shaggy head. Slowly he strode back to the cabin. The men heard him come in and heave his huge bulk down on the creaking floor with a heavy sigh of relief. Wentworth put out his hand. He felt Vig's cool muzzle and the twist of the dog's head, inviting a caress. Vig's far ancestor, Morna, had starved beside the body of her soldier master, after the battle of Aughrim—starved until a pitying villager shot the great, faithful beast, then too weak to challenge his approach. As he thought of this, tears welled to Wentworth's eyes and burned down his fevered cheeks. He bit his lip.

"Are you awake, Stinson?"

"Yes."

"Well, I don't want to anticipate, but Vig has acted queerly to-day. He knows something that we can only imagine. If anything should happen, I want you to take Vig to Boyd Finn, the guide down at Plaintalk. I promised to give Vig to him in case anything happened to me. Finn is out with a hunting party now. You see, Finn is a Celt, and Vig seems to know it. The dog never made up to any one else. It sounds foolish—but I want Finn to have him. My books and rifle and rod are at the hotel. Those and the few things I brought along are yours if——"

"You'll be all right in the morning," said Stinson. "I'll see that Finn gets the dog. I sure don't want him. He eats more'n two men."

Wentworth made no reply. Instead, his hand again sought Vig's shaggy head. It was comforting to feel the mute companionship of this one creature who cared for him with a loyalty beyond all human praise.

Again Wentworth drowsed and prayed that he might live to see the morning sun on the ranges—live to gaze once more upon the wooded valleys and the far, flat spaces of the distant plain. Vig's loyalty and the loyalty of his kind had brought tears to Wentworth's eyes, yet there were no tears of self-pity commingled with Wentworth's prayer for himself.

A wee bird shrilled in the first gray

of dawn. Wentworth wakened suddenly. Stinson was snoring in the bunk above. Vig rose and shook himself. Wentworth's eyes were fixed on the dawn. The thin, gray veil of mist, hurtling across the uplands, was split by a keen crimson lance couched in a notch of the far hills. Wentworth shivered and sat up. The crimson light spread and softened. The golden rim of the sun pushed up from behind a black, rugged barrier of rock. Wentworth lifted his hands in a mute appeal to the Invisible. Then he sank back and fumbled in the gathering dusk. Dimly he realized that Vig had risen and was nuzzling his hand. Then it grew dark.

Stinson slipped down from his bunk. "Are you all right?" he queried.

There was no reply. Wentworth lay with his left arm across the wolf dog's shoulders. From Vig's shaggy throat came the deep, melancholy answer to Stinson's hesitant question.

Plaintalk was not surprised by Stinson's early return with a led pack horse. Nor was the coroner, who finally came to an official understanding with Stinson and later arrived at an unofficial understanding with him, indorsed at the bar of the Plaintalk hotel. The coroner made a careful report, which he mailed East. No mention was made of Vig. Stinson claimed the dog as Wentworth's gift. And while the mountain man knew that the dog disliked him and that he heartily hated the dog, he perversely determined to own him that he might break his pride.

The wolf dog, puzzled by the strange disappearance of his master, followed Stinson from store to saloon until late that night, when the mountain man swung to his horse and rode toward the hills. And because Vig had followed without command, Stinson thought that the dog did so through affection.

The cabin window shone like burnished steel as Stinson dismounted in the raw dawn. Vig, standing a pace behind the pony, turned his head from side to side and sniffed the cool air. He was restless, yet too dignified to show impatience. The hotel at Plaintalk was no longer his home; and this cabin was not his home, nor did he seek a home or a new master. Self-exiled, he mourned in silent dignity.

As Stinson stooped to loose the cinch, his pony, sensing the man's condition and remembering former abuse, shied nervously. Stinson seized the bridle and kicked him. Vig's crest bristled, wolflike; but he stood motionless, a silvery-bronze statue in the mountain sunlight. His fit of fury spent, Stinson hobbled the pony and slashed him across the flank with his bridle. Then he lurched to the cabin, singing. He was hungry. After eating he would sleep. But first he would feed the dog. In his drunken perversity, that was the one thing that he would do. Wentworth had told him that Vig would take food from no one but himself. Stinson would see about that. He would break that quiet pride—make the dog eat out of his hand. The mountain man fried bacon and made coffee, occasionally glancing out at Vig, who lay in the sun, gazing across the valley.

Vig rose and sniffed at the crumbled bread and scraps of bacon, but refused to eat. Gravely he returned to his vigil, asking for nothing, wishing for nothing save the sound of a voice and the touch of his vanished master's hand. He all but knew that he would never hear that voice again, yet his stubborn loyalty held him a faithful slave to that beloved memory.

"So that's your game, eh? Well, it ain't mine! Too a'mighty proud to eat with plain folks, eh? All right! I'll show you!"

Vig barely turned his head. He knew that he had been spoken to, insulted. His kin had been companions of kings. The dog's large dignity stirred Stinson's anger.

"You won't, eh? Well, I say you will!"

Still Vig lay gazing across the valley, indifferent of attitude, yet alert in spirit. This man thing was mad! Mad because Vig knew that with one lunge he could crush him to earth, and with

one crunch of his long, heavy jaws he could silence forever that raucous, drunken voice—the voice of the brute who abused horses and who kept no faith with men.

Stinson shuffled across the cabin and returned to the doorway, a headless ax helve in his hand.

"Now eat, damn you!" he commanded.

Vig rose. So this man thing wanted battle? A greenish-red light glinted in the wolf dog's eyes. Stinson lowered the ax helve.

"Come on, old boy!"

Vig, huge, stiff-legged, and gaunt in the morning sunlight, raised his head and blinked up at the man. All the scorn of a thousand fighting ancestors was in his gaze. Stinson grinned.

"Come on, old sport!"

Treachery edged the loose-mouthed invitation. Vig's sturdy soul rebelled. He turned his head away as though ashamed both of himself and the man thing that lied in its voice. Misjudging Vig's attitude, Stinson thought the dog was afraid of him. His voice was rough with husky triumph as he again commanded the dog to eat.

Vig trembled forward a step and then stopped, his great haunches curved like a taut spring. He was desperately hungry, yet he would have starved himself to death rather than eat at the command of this brute. Stinson, blind to everything but his perverse obsession, laughed.

Vig strode a pace forward stiffly. Stinson's face went blank. The dog had stepped past the food. Another step and he would be within leaping distance. Threatening with the ax helve, Stinson stepped inside the doorway. Vig strode forward another pace. Stinson backed into the cabin. The dog would not dare follow him in there. But Vig had made his choice. He would kill. Not the man thing that had commanded him to eat; not the man thing that had lied in its voice, nor yet the man thing that had threatened to beat him; but the man thing that had laughed, laughed at him, Vig, whose kin had been the companions of kings.

Step by step Stinson backed toward the far wall where hung his belt and gun. Then Vig knew that the man would not fight as the brave fight, but that he would kill quickly with a stinging flame.

As Stinson's clawing hand touched the holstered gun, Vig's body bent like a drawn bow, and like the twang of a bowstring he loosed himself in a great arc. Stinson crashed back against the bunk, slid to the floor, and lay clutching feebly at the hairy throat. Vig leaped up, poised for a second lunge, but there was no need. Borne back by the hurtling, live thunderbolt, the man's head had struck the sharp rail of the bunk. Vig sniffed cautiously at Stinson's open hand. He knew that the man thing was not dead. Turning, he padded from the cabin to the broad light of the mountain morning. He paused, blinking in the sun. Then he shook himself to a new alertness, and, trotting to the spring, drank deeply. He returned past the cabin, tracking the horses to the mountain meadow beyond. His great heart was lonely.

The old pinto pony saw Vig coming and raised his head, standing stiffly in the hobbles. Vig ran in circles, drawing nearer to the horse. It was his invitation to play, to run, to leave the meadow and seek some new adventure, some valley far from the man thing that had laughed. The old horse turned round and round awkwardly, following with curious eyes the circlings of the big dog.

Finally Vig drew near and flung himself down at the pony's feet. Dog and horse sniffed of each other. Their noses touched. Vig, the silent, had chosen a friend.

All that day the pony grazed knee-deep in the meadow grass, and all that day Vig padded here and there, restless, sniffing the infrequent breeze and peering through the dim woodlands. Toward nightfall the deer would come down to drink. And toward nightfall he hunted and made his kill—a fawn that he ran through the timber until an

opening gave him his chance and he leaped and broke its back.

Returning to the meadow, full fed and heartened, he found the old pony standing in the faint starlight. They touched noses in token of friendship. Then Vig did a strange thing. Stretching himself at the pony's feet, he smelled of the hobbles, mouthed them softly, and, with wise caution, gnawed them apart, the old horse, gently inquisitive, sniffing at Vig's great shoulders.

The hobbles off, Vig leaped back. The pony jumped stiffly, found that he was free, and drifted to the edge of the timber and on through the starlit arches, sniffing occasionally at the tracks of Vig, who led the way deep into the farther ranges, where the deer fed in the mountain meadows and where no men came.

Together they found water at mountain spring and cañon stream. Together they drifted from range to valley and from valley to range, the old pinto stopping to feed in the meadows and Vig hunting wide but always returning to the pony at night. Vig was the leader, the adventurer; the pinto a companion willing to follow, no matter where, for the sake of companionship. A week of lazy adventuring brought them to the southern rim of the Horseshoe Range, where the forest rolled down to desert, where the sere foothill bunch grass shriveled in the ceaseless heat.

Near the foothills lean cattle grazed in a faint mirage. The old pony, gazing down on the wavering spaces, saw tiny riders moving in the blue haze, and old habit asserted itself. He would seek his kind. But Vig knew that where there were horses there were men. When the pony worked stiffly down the foothills toward the plain, Vig the silent lifted his deep voice in stern disapproval. Still the pinto sidled down the slope. Trembling, Vig launched himself. Halfway down the hillside, he turned the pony, snapping at his heels. Again and again the pony dodged, but Vig was always below him, his long fangs bared and his neck ridge bristling. Finally the pony, tired of the game, gave it up and plodded back toward the timber. Vig, lying between him and the rim, watched him with an eye which said plainly that he would have no more such foolishness. Surely the pony knew enough to keep away from men!

And all that night Vig kept a vigilant ear on the other's whereabouts. Next morning the pinto turned to his grazing as usual; but Vig, fearing to lose his companion, went hungry, not daring to hunt. Time and again he approached the horse to renew their friendship, but at each advance the pony shied away. At last the hunger pinch grew so keen that Vig left the meadow. Far back in the ranges he made his kill. Returning to the rim of the Horseshoe, he found that the pony was gone.

Across the wooded plateau, down a steep hillside, and up a narrow valley he went, and finally came to a spring where the horse had stopped to drink. From the spring Vig tracked the pony to a rock-walled cañon, and along a narrow ledge that climbed the western wall. At each angle the dog stopped and gazed ahead. The ledge grew narrow and narrower till Vig realized that there was not room to turn and retrace his way. Suddenly round a bend he saw the pony coming toward him. Vig whimpered and moved cautiously forward. They touched noses. Vig's heart was glad. They were friends again. Yet there was an immediate matter to attend to. Neither could turn on that perilously narrow ledge. The pinto, mild-eyed and placid, seemed content to stay there forever. Wandering up the natural trail, he had come to its ending at the head of the cañon, where he had found room to turn and retrace his way. But now neither could turn, although Vig twisted his huge body in a desperate attempt.

The afternoon shadows lengthened. A chill touched the air. Vig rose and shook himself. The pinto stood patiently waiting for Vig to find a way out of the difficulty. The dog whined, and from his throat came rumblings as though he were trying to tell his friend what to do. Finally the dog lay down,

and, drawing himself along on his belly, he crept close to the pinto's forelegs, where he lay obviously waiting for the pony to step over him. The pony sniffed at him, hesitated, and then stepped over Vig, placing his feet with exceeding care.

Vig glanced back. His friend was safe. The big dog trailed ahead, on up the narrow ledge, until he came to where the pony had turned. He backtracked swiftly. In the valley he overtook the pinto near the spring. Vig lay down and watched the horse until night drew in and new stars shone in a velvet sky.

Free to go where he willed, the old pony grew hard and active. Instead of drifting slowly through the timber, with Vig padding ahead, the horse now trotted or ran beside him, head up and tail afloat. Charging into some mountain meadow, they would stop short and gaze about as though challenging any chance interference with their growing freedom, the pony snorting his defiance to the world at large while Vig's deep-set eyes ranged from cover to cover before he threw himself down to drowse while the pony grazed. Or together they climbed great lateral ridges, threading their lone way among the rocks, often stopping to gaze at some distant vista or blue range or green-cupped valley, standing as rigid as though carved from the very granite of their mountain stronghold. And now Vig hunted as he willed, never fearing to lose his friend. The wilderness was reclaiming them. Dog and horse were slowly reverting to primordial ways; yet Vig, faithful to his blood, ran ever with the pony, even as the half-wild wolf dogs of Uisnech ran with the war horse Sron when Dierdriu's beauty was a living song.

Yet it was not destined that the wolves should find their bones in some lost cañon of the Horseshoe Range, else the story of Vig would not have been told by Finn, son of Finn, who because of his quaint grimaces, quick laughter, and quick tears, was called "Puzzle Face."

Boyd Finn claimed descent from the kings of Ireland. On that one subject he was invariably serious, even to the point of battle. Otherwise he was a good-natured Western guide, much prized by men of the East who hunted mountain lion and grizzly in the Horseshoe Hills.

That day, Finn's party had made a long and ineffectual hunt on the southern slope of the range. They had hunted on foot with the dogs. Several times they had found what promised to be a warm trail, but had treed no lion. Among the Eastern hunters was Featherstone, who had got his sheep, goat, and moose in the Canadian Rockies; Marcus, the quiet, blue-eyed photographer, who honestly confessed to being a tenderfoot and shot the only lion treed on that trip; Bartley, whose hands and feet were tender on his first trail; and big Joe Neelan, the genial Irishman, to whom the Western trails were almost as familiar as the high-walled streets of his parent city.

Tired, hungry, and on edge, the hunters forgathered at the fire while Finn and his cook and wrangler filled plates and cups and whistled with deliberate cheerfulness. None of the hunters had complained of ill luck, but Finn rather wished that they would. Continuous silence among seven men in camp is a bad sign. And Boyd Finn believed in signs—when he knew what they portended.

After the first cup of coffee, things were not so bad. Some one sighed and stretched. Featherstone cursed cheerfully as he spilled hot coffee on his leg. Bartley laughed, and for once it was not a mean laugh. Finn winked at Joe Neelan as one of the packers began to sing a ribald cow-camp song. They heard the faint click of hobbles, and a pony nickered in the dusk.

"An' it's about time!" asserted Boyd Finn.

"For what?" Bartley could always be depended upon to ask the fool question.

"For some horse to laugh. Sure an' he's showin' us how to be human."

"Which a good dog or a horse can

show all of us at times," said Joe Neelan.

"I would be lovin' them," said Finn.

Featherstone and Neelan nodded. The others were silent, lulled to lazy indifference by the food and tobacco. Finn pushed his hat to one side of his head—a sign that he had something to say. But he changed his mind and sat gazing into the fire.

"What was it?" queried Neelan.

Boyd Finn smiled. He had sat at many a camp fire with his city friend.

"Oh, nothin' to bring the tears—or worth the tellin' to them wid oyster shells for ears, sp'akin' impersonal and for the binifit of the horses. It was a sport I was guidin' once in the Cañon. We was in for lion, but me Eastern fri'nd continted himself wid murderin' the scenery. Faith, an' he could hit the side of the Cañon three times out of sivin widout missin' once. I would be tellin' him by day and by night to l'ave the goin' ahead to me. But he would be foldin' his ears like the shells of a Lynnhaven oyster whin you put your finger in it, to me good advice. He would be pokin' along ahead of me, wishful to try out his new Mannlicher on anything from lizards to the Elephant Butte, and hittin' neither, till I was scared of me life he would be steppin' off into hivin widout ringin' the doorbell. An' he did it."

"Did he fall far?" queried Bartley.

"Well, not what an aviator would call far. But some would be callin' it that. He shlipt off the rim rock an' lit about a half mile below, wid six feet to go and shtrike bottom. As I climb down I was thinkin' what to say to his fri'nds in me letter of how he did it; but whin I shtrike bottom and see him shtickin' to the wall of the Cañon six feet above me head, I am thankful, bein' no hand to write letters. I tells him to jump. He would have none of it. An', bedad, there he was, holdin' to nothin' an' holdin' on tight. Sez I: 'L'ave go!' Sez he: 'There is nothin' to l'ave go of.' An' there he was, phlastered to the rock wid his legs danglin' an' his arms wavin like hurrah boys and down wid the cop."

Finn paused, leaving both his subject and his auditors in suspense.

Neelan nudged Featherstone as Bartley leaned forward. "But that would be impossible, you know. You can't string me like that. Of course he may have been caught on a snag."

"That rock was as smooth as the front of a dress shirt widout shtuds," asserted Finn.

"Then what on earth held him up?"

"'Twas nothin' on earth, Mister Bartley. 'Twas the fear of it. 'Twas his gooseflesh kep' him from shlippin'. Bedad, an' his back was sore for a week."

"You're the sweetest liar in this country," laughed Neelan.

"Indade an' I am that! 'Tis the man who lies sour and sinful I'll be watchin' whin I'm ashleep. A good, sweet, blushin' lie has saved me face many's the time."

Bartley thought he saw his chance to recoup. "Well, if I owned it, it would be the last thing I'd think of saving."

No one laughed. Finn's weathered face reddened slowly. "By the same token, Mister Bartley, havin' two, ye would have no need to save but wan of them."

"That's a dirty insult!" flamed Bartley, rising.

Finn gazed quietly up at him. "'Tis man and man in this country, Mister Bartley. An' it would be no bronk of mine that would take the iron promiscuous and not pitch."

"Sit down, Jack," said Neelan. "You earned what you got."

Bleek, Finn's wrangler, began, with some tact, to sing a popular range song:

"'Way high up in the Mokiones, among the mountaintops,
A lion cleaned a yearlin's bones and licked his thankful chops,
When who upon the scene should ride——"

Featherstone had risen and was pointing toward a low ridge in the moonlight. Finn got slowly to his feet and shaded his eyes. On the ridge stood a horse, silhouetted black and sharply against the low, full moon.

And behind the horse stood a gigantic dog, a huge black phantom, the werewolf of the sagas translated to the West. Neelan seized a pair of glasses and focused them.

"Gad!" he whispered. "They're real! They're alive!"

Bartley laughed and rushed to his bed roll for his rifle. Featherstone's hand was on Bartley's arm. "Don't be a fool, Jack. We didn't come out here to kill dogs or horses."

Neelan lowered his glasses and handed them to Finn. "What do you make of it, Boyd?"

Finn gazed long, then turned and shook his head. "'Tis bad! 'Tis bad! 'Tis Vig, the dog of me fri'nd Wentworth. An' by the same token, me fri'nd is dead."

"Oh, come now! That's your Irish imagination," said Neelan.

"Do you see thim?" queried Finn in a queer, wailing tone.

"I do."

"Would they be imagination, Joe Neelan?"

"Not the horse and the dog; but as for your friend——"

"'Tis the dog of me fri'nd. 'Tis the great Vig of Morna, runnin' wild in the brush since his master has gone beyant. But the pony—I dunno."

"Perhaps there's a camp over there——"

Finn shook his head. "The horse has no hobbles and the dog no master. I know by the stand of thim." And Finn's hand dropped to his side and came up. He fired into the air. At the report of the gun, horse and dog leaped from the ledge and vanished as though one had swept a black brush across the edge of the ridge. "'Tis no camp," said Finn. "They be as wild as the country they run in. 'Tis the nature of the breed of Morna to run wid the horses. It was me ancestor Finn of Fiann that rode wid sivin of thim whin Ireland was the home of the stag and the wolf. I look to find a strange pony wid the cayuses in the mornin'."

"And the dog?"

"Not him! There be no man livin' that could put his hand to the head of Vig—savin' it would be meself. I have the Gaelic to tell him. It is a song."

"A mighty queer sight—out here," commented Featherstone.

"Wonderful!" exclaimed Marcus, the photographer. "I'll never forget it as long as I live. The horse with head up as though he challenged the stars to shine on a more beautiful world; and that immense dog, black against the moon, sniffing the night and poised as though his feet scarcely touched the earth! It's worth the trip to have seen that."

"You'll have many a long ride before you'll see the like of it again," said Neelan.

"You fellows make me tired, fussing like a lot of old Biddies about a stray dog and a horse." And Bartley thrust his rifle under the bed roll.

Finn took no exception to what Bartley had said, save that the Easterner had accented the word "Biddies" with deliberate intent. Finn stepped to Bartley and spoke in a whisper that the others might not hear: "Between man and man, Mister Bartley—and ye can tell Joe Neelan to fire me in the mornin' and wilcome—if ye had shot the dog I would have killed ye in your tracks. Vig of Morna is me own dog, by the death of me fri'nd Wentworth. I have his word. 'Tis no understandin' ye have of man or of baste at all, at all."

That night the dogs of the camp were restless. Finn's cook said it was the moon, but Finn shook his head. He knew that out there somewhere behind the low ridges a giant wolf dog prowled in the moon-flung shadows of brush and rock. He knew it because the coyotes had ceased to yip round camp as they had been doing each night until Vig appeared. And Finn himself was restless, rising with the first hint of dawn to count the horses in his outfit. He had gone in with eleven animals. Now there were twelve.

Bleek, the wrangler, picked up a rope. "The stray cayuse is in our bunch, all right. I'll go look at his brand."

The old pinto allowed Bleek to get

near enough to read his brand, a ragged "S" on the hip, and then ran in among the other horses.

Finn was helping the cook when Bleek returned. "One of Stinson's hosses, Boyd. Don' know what he's doin' over in this country."

"Any sign of the dog?"

"Nope. No tracks."

"Well, catch up the stray. We'll take him back wid us."

The old pinto made no effort to escape when Bleek walked up to him and flipped a rope over his head. The horse had cast all four shoes. His mane and forelock were matted with burs, but he looked exceedingly hard and fit.

The camp was interested in the stray pony and Neelan asked if the wolf dog had been seen.

"No," replied Finn. "But he'll be comin' in close some night. Don't be takin' a shot at him for a wolf. 'Tis me own dog. I have John Wentworth's word for it. 'Tis Vig, son of Morna—and it is like that he'll be talkin' to us the night, tellin' us in his own talk that we got little to do seducin' his fri'nd the cayuse to livin' dacint wid folks ag'in."

But no phantom wolf dog appeared on the ridge that night, although Finn watched long after the others had turned in. Vig, too crafty to show himself a second time, prowled in the shadows, watching the dim figures of the grazing ponies. Hour after hour he waited, until the fire died down in camp and the changing air told of approaching dawn. Then he rose and padded to the draw. The hobbled ponies snorted and rocked stiffly toward camp in a clumsy stampede. But the old pinto, unafraid, grazed on placidly. Vig, crouching and cautious, crept nearer and whined. The pony raised its head. Vig rose to his full height and stalked up. Horse and dog touched noses. Again Vig whined softly, but the pony resumed his grazing. Vig dropped to his belly and crawled forward until his nose touched the pony's forefeet. The pinto sniffed at him, standing with awkward patience until Vig had gnawed through the soft rope hobbles. Then Vig leaped back, frisking from side to side, coaxing the pony to follow. But the pinto only lowered his head and grazed leisurely across the draw. Here was good grass and water and the companionship of his kind.

Vig, tired of coaxing, circled like a wolf and snapped at the pony's heels, trying to drive him toward the hills. But the pony wheeled and dodged, loping toward camp. Vig saw a shadow rise near the fading camp fire. Turning, he slunk back toward the foothills. The moon drew down to the edge of the world. The first faint glow of dawn touched the eastern ranges.

Leaping to a low rock, the wolf dog faced the distant camp. His friend had forsaken him. The fire flared up and figures of men moved about. Deep and prolonged rose Vig's farewell to the friend he had twice liberated—the friend that he had served as best he could.

With hunger pinching his gaunt flanks, the dog turned and trotted toward the uplands, where the deer fed in the mountain meadows and where no men came.

"I knew it!" said Finn, with a finality which invited no further comment.

Bleek, the wrangler, had risen to see what had stampeded the horses. Bleek had just returned to camp with the severed hobbles in his hand.

"'Twas Vig. He would be after loosin' the pony to go wid him. The hear-rt of him! I would know his voice in me sleep. 'Tis now that he'll take to the hills where no man can lay hand on him—savin' meself. I have the Gaelic to tell him. But 'tis a long way to his ear the day. Is the ole pinto wid the bunch?"

"He's alone—down the draw."

"I misdoubted he would l'ave thim. 'Tis the nature of the cayuse to run wid his kind. An' 'tis the nature of a dog to be wid men—and sorry the day whin a dog will none of thim. I'll be l'avin' ye in char-rge, Jimmy. Ye know the dogs an' the country. Whin the boys do be awake, tell thim that Boyd Finn is ridin' the high country on busi-

ness havin' to do wid a lone dog. Let thim curse, let thim laugh, I have done."

"What the——"

"Spake soft or ye'll wake Mister Bartley. 'Tis as I say."

"Well, you're the doctor, Boyd," and Bleek pushed back his hat and rumpled his hair. "Don't ride me if the hunt busts up right here. You stand to lose money if those Easterners get sore and quit."

"Money, is it? 'Tis not the money would be holdin' me when I hear the call of a fri'nd. Would ye see me a livin' disgrace to me name, Finn, son of Finn, when Vig of Morna is runnin' the hills widout fire or fri'nd—and him as is fit to ate from the hand of a king? 'Tis the blood callin', Jimmy. 'Tis the blood! May me eyes turn to wather and me right hand to a shakin' leaf if I come back widout the dog. I have done."

And the little Irishman saddled his big roan horse, slipped his carbine in the scabbard, and rode away with a song in his heart to seek the lost wolf dog and restore him to a place more befitting his high lineage than the wild and timbered fastnesses of the Horseshoe Range.

Vig, the silent, hunting through the afternoon, tracked a buck to the timbered plateau where he had turned the pony, and, running with nose to ground, came suddenly upon the buck feeding along the edge of a meadow. As Vig shot into the clearing, the buck saw him and jumped for the timber. Vig, running easily, cut down the intervening distance until close enough to make the final upward lunge and drop that would crush the deer to earth by the sheer force of impact. But each time Vig gathered himself to leap, the buck, old and wise, swerved and flashed close to a tree, breaking Vig's chance to make the kill. Angling across the plateau, they raced, the buck with head back and leaping stiffly over logs that Vig cleared in a flying curve. Through a cover of whipping brush crashed the deer, gathering himself for a leap; but in midair he buckled and turned, bounding away to the left. Vig, clearing the brush with a mighty leap, saw, too late, why the deer had swerved. Too late, he crooked his huge body as, rolling, struggling, tumbling, he plunged down and down.

Stunned, he lay outstretched on the shale at the cañon bottom. The chill of late afternoon revived him, and he tried to rise. Grimly he fought to his feet and hobbled to the cañon stream, where he lay and drank. Pulling himself up with a fierce, quick effort, he limped down the cañon and out to a broadening valley. With the reaching shadows he vanished in the dusk of night.

Noon of next day, Stinson, riding in search of the stray pony, saw a gaunt shape slink across an opening ahead. He thought it a wolf and reached for his gun. But that shadowy shape was too big to be a wolf. Suddenly the mountain man reached for his rope and took it down.

Vig, with no thought of flight, bared his fangs as Stinson rode toward him. The mountain man saw that the dog was injured, all but helpless. He swung the loop. Vig tried to dodge, stumbled, and the rope choked tight on his throat. Stinson caught up the slack and turned his pony toward home. Fighting back until he could fight that burning rope no longer, Vig was half dragged, half led to the cabin. Tied to the corral bars, he lay with eyes closed, too exhausted to resent Stinson's approach. Vig expected to be beaten, kicked, perhaps shot, but instead the mountain man brought water. Vig lapped feebly, but kept an unblinking gaze on the man, knowing that some treachery threatened. And when Stinson reached to touch him, Vig snapped. The man jumped back, dragging the rope with which he had meant to tie the dog down.

"Got to kill you to show you I'm boss, eh?" And before Vig could turn, he kicked him. Vig tried to get to his feet, but his bruised and battered body refused to obey his will. Stinson stood back, jeering at the helpless dog. Tired of that, he strode to the cabin, and re-

turned with the ax helve balanced in his hand. Starving, half strangled, one foreleg useless, still Vig faced his enemy with no quiver of fear. The ax helve crashed down. Vig shuddered, but no sound came from his close-locked jaws. "I'll make you talk, damn you!" and Stinson raised the club—and held it in mid-air.

" 'Tis meself'll do the talkin'," said a voice.

Stinson turned to confront Finn, and he saw that in Finn's steady hand which was more eloquent than speech.

"First ye'll take your rope off the dog's neck." Finn spoke softly, as though asking a favor of a friend.

Stinson was not without courage of a kind, yet he knew that Boyd Finn never pulled a gun unless he meant to use it. He slipped the noose from the dog's neck and stepped back.

"An' now ye'll scratch the sky wid your dirty fingers," said Finn sweetly.

Stinson put up his hands. Finn dismounted, and, jerking Stinson's gun from its holster, flung it across the corral.

"I come far and I come fast to talk wid ye, Jimmy Stinson. 'Twas the matter of the dog there that is kapin' me here till ye tell me wid the truth on your face the whereabouts of me fri'nd John Wentworth. I would be askin' ye—is he livin'?"

"Wentworth cashed in—in the shack there, about three weeks ago."

" 'Tis as I thought. And he would be givin' ye the dog?"

"He sure did."

"Ye lie, and ye know it! The last word he said to me, l'avin' town wid me outfit, was: 'Boyd Finn, me time is not long in the valley nor in the hills —but I would die in the hills. When I'm gone, 'tis you that will be takin' Vig. An' ye'll be kind to him for his sake and the sake of a fri'nd.'

" 'Tis the murder in me hear-rt keeps the tears from me eyes the day I see Vig of Morna in the hands of a baste like yourself. Would ye look at him now! 'Tis your work. An' ye walk like a man! The pride of him! An' he knows ye. Would ye look at him blinkin' at ye and slaverin' to set his clean fangs in your throat! An' him wid no strength to stand to his feet! Did he whine to your stroke? He did not! There's your shtick. Would you shtrike him wance more, wid me eyes on ye?"

"Take the dog and be damned to you! You're crazy, Finn."

"I'll do that. Save your curse for yourself, Jimmy Stinson. An' it's crazy I am? L'ave that be. 'Tis right here forninst the hut and wid the blue sky lookin' down on your shame that ye'll go to your knees and beg that I let ye live! To your knees, ye scut! Me hand is sick wid itchin' to kill ye where ye stand."

If ever sudden death spoke from a man's eyes, it spoke from the blue eyes of Finn, son of Finn. Stinson, hypnotized by the mad Irishman's voice and shaken by a fear that no brute anger could steady, dropped to his knees on the beaten ground, and there in the silence of the hills mumbled an apology to the great wolf dog.

"The Finns live long and die hard," said Boyd Finn, as Stinson shuffled to his feet. "An' it may be that I'll live long enough to forgive ye this day's work. But the dog, he will not. He has ye marked wid his eye, and the curse of his kind is on ye. Ride wide when ye be comin' to Plaintalk, Jimmy Stinson; ride wide of me door. I have done."

Vig's head came up as Finn knelt by him and felt of his shoulders and flanks. "The strength of him!" Finn muttered again and again. Something in the Irishman's tone and touch awakened a memory in Vig's lonely heart—a memory reaching back to the days when a Finn of Fiann had so caressed and crooned over Morna, wounded in a battle of the marshes.

"Mil-chu, Mil-chu: Na buail do choin gan chinaid," crooned Finn of Finn. And Vig the silent raised his head and gravely licked Finn's sunbrowned cheek. The hot tears welled to Finn's eyes. " 'Tis bad! 'Tis bad!" he whispered. "An' ye could ride, now." Vig swayed to his feet. Finn

laughed. And at his laughter Stinson shrank back, shaking to the threat of it.

Boyd Finn had forgotten Stinson, the cabin, the stray pony. He was living in a far country where the grass grew green to the doorstep and the sweet dew of an Irish dawn glistened across the morning meadows of June. He was for the hunting and he called to his hounds.

Down the steep trail he walked, leading his pony, and beside him strode Vig, buoyed up by pride and the secure knowledge that he had at last come to the hand of a master who understood the heart of a dog.

In the far foothills they made a lean camp beneath the stars. The pony grazed on the sparse bunch grass and Finn offered Vig food from the saddle pockets. Vig ate eagerly, munching the dried meat and stale camp bread that Finn gave willingly from his own need.

Finn, with his head on his saddle, slept with the great wolf dog curled beside him.

Bleek, the wrangler, returning from the hunt with his party, reported to Finn at his cottage in Plaintalk. Belt-high to a man, Vig stood beside his master, sniffing with spread nostrils the presence of a friend. Bleek had little to say.

"You got him," completed his first greeting. Then: "Neelan is at the station, waiting for the Overland. He handed me this for you."

And Bleek produced a check.

Finn glanced at the check. "I would be seein' him."

On the station platform Vig was formally introduced to each of the hunters. If the big dog showed any preference at all it was for Neelan. Finn drew Neelan aside.

"'Tis too much ye would be payin' me, Joe," he whispered. "An' me l'avin' ye to the tinder mismanagements of me wrangler. An' ye got no lion?"

Big Joe Neelan put his hand on Finn's shoulder. "We had a good time. I'll not say that I didn't miss you, but I know why you left. I don't know what you said to Bartley, but it did him good. He's made no more noise than a rubber heel on a feather bed since you left. And about that check—I paid you what we had agreed upon because"—and Neelan hunted round in his heart for a reason that Finn would accept—"because——" But before he could speak Vig, son of Morna, thrust his huge muzzle between them, wedging them apart with slow dignity and taking his place beside his master. "That's why," said Neelan, with Celtic quickness. "But money can't buy that."

HOW THE GERMANS TREAT EACH OTHER

WHEN William G. Shepherd, the war correspondent, came back to this country a few weeks ago for a rest, he was explaining one day that the civilian population of Germany was slowly starving to death while the soldiers had plenty to eat.

"There was the case," said Shepherd, "of an old German woman who went to a doctor for a certificate which would enable her to buy a little milk. The Hun follower of the gentle art of healing looked her over casually, asked about her symptoms, saw that she was practically in a dying condition, cleared his throat, and said:

"'Yes, you're sick, all right. But you can't have any milk. Milk is for the babies. Anyway, you're sixty years of age, and therefore no good to Germany. Go home and die, and remember what a glorious thing it is to give up your life for the fatherland.'"

The Patent-Leather Shoes

ANOTHER TRUE STORY OF THE PENNSYLVANIA STATE POLICE

By Katherine Mayo

Author of "Between Two Days," Etc.

AN enormous blue-black sky, full of sharp, shimmering stars, contained the ethereal earth. The cloudlike banks of the Alleghanies, deep with new-fallen snow, rolled on and away forever in pearly heights and shadows. Their very forest tracts, overspread with a fleecy mantle, sank into the even pallor of their waves. Silence and peace fulfilled an immaculate world. And cold —clear, bitter cold.

Up in the western center of Pennsylvania, where the hills rise high and snow falls heaviest, the tiny farming village of Sharman lay like a fairyland town, each roof and fence and rosebush crowned with its mound of white. And because it was almost midnight and quiet beyond all telling, the place was sound asleep.

One man there was, however, who had been on a journey, and who now at this untimely hour was breaking his homeward path. Till his coming, not a creature had set foot abroad since the snow had ceased. Hill, plain, and highway, the place was as trackless as the flowing air. With joy he discerned his first familiar landmark, and as he reached that last rise that lifts the road into the village he stopped to draw breath and to look about him, glad.

How still it all lay—how white, how still! Slowly he made out the rooftrees scattered hither and yon below among the ghost-pale fields, and was half aware of a sort of awe—a sudden loneliness. It was as though all his friends were dead—long dead; as though even their day and time had passed away, enshrouded in old eternity.

No sign of life, no spark of light showed anywhere. The pall of snow, smooth, faintly glittering under the stars, held the world to itself. How still! How pale!

And then, as he looked, his hushed heart gave a sudden leap and all his man's wits sprang alert within him. For there, around the side of one snow-thatched cottage, came licking a tongue of orange flame. He could not be mistaken. No! There it leaped again—that sinister flash of color, sole in all this spectral world. That must be Ellen Bower's little home. That lone woman, with her young daughter and the six little children, all sound asleep, of course, in the rooms above! They would be burned in their beds.

The traveler flung himself forward, plunging heavily across the drifted fields. "Fire! Fire!" he shouted, making a trumpet of his two hands. "Fire!" and his voice tore through the night like the slash of a sword through flesh.

Windows flew up, then down with a bang, as neighbors, wakened by horror echoing through their dreams, saw the danger and sped to help. One poor woman, a girl, six little children, perhaps asleep in their beds, and their cottage in flames! The thought flailed the men on. Each snatching a pail or a blanket, they plowed through the drifts, rushed the ditches and fences, and jumped into work, as they found it, with all the speed and strength in their power.

With buckets, with axes, with branches of evergreen, with heart, with hand, with all their might they attacked the beast. Valiantly toiling, by rapid

play together, they prevailed at last to beat it down. To their heartfelt relief, it was over before any great harm had been done.

Then, having quenched the last spark, they returned to their several homes in well-earned peace of mind to finish their broken night's sleep.

But Ellen Bower could not finish her sleep—did not want to finish it, for the reason that she and hers had been close to death, that her mind was full of suspicion and chilling fear and her head of common sense.

"So it's come at last!" she muttered, as she turned from watching the last good, charcoal-smudged neighbor go his way. "So it's really come at last! Well—now's the time, then! This very instant—now! Thank God, there'll be nobody stirring yet for hours!"

She was a big woman, Ellen Bower —tall and heavily built. But her hands shook as she pulled on her rubber boots and snatched her shawl from its peg, and her heart was hammering with more than physical exertion as she hurried out and away to the nearest trusty telephone.

"State Police!" she responded to central's sleepy "What number?"

"State Police," a firm, alert man's voice in a moment rang over the wire.

"I am Mrs. Bower," she panted. "I live in Sharman. My house has just been afire. It's out now. But the house all but burned up. I think it was set on purpose. And I think I know who did it. I wish a trooper could come straight over to see me *now*."

"All right, Mrs. Bower. You're about seven miles away from us. We'll get there just as soon as we can make it."

"You'll know my place without asking, because it's on the skirts of the town as you come, and because it's nigh sure to be the only one with a light. Oh, hurry all you can!"

In less time than seemed possible, two soldierly young figures in the uniform of the State rode up to the gate —Corporal Richard Fairservice and Private Beltz. And Corporal Fairservice, late sergeant of the Fifteenth United States Cavalry, honorably discharged, "character excellent," is the sort of a man with the sort of a face that people trust on sight and believe in. Ellen Bower, guided by a pertinent question or two, without hesitation laid all before him.

Her young daughter, she said, had been annoyed by the attentions of a worthless fellow whose people lived in the immediate vicinity. The man was a barroom porter in a neighboring town —vicious, ignorant, and with far too much money to spend for any proper explaining. The girl disliked him, and she, the mother, restrained his intrusion.

"I am a poor woman," she broke out in the midst of her tale, "but we are decent, honest people, and my girl is an honest girl and I won't have her name besmirched with such company. So I ordered him to stay away and to leave my daughter alone. And she herself refused to speak to him.

"Then he was mad. And many's the time we've had notes from him stuck under the door or tied to a stone and thrown over the fence, saying he'd make us regret it. And several times he's met one or another of my little children outside and sent the child home crying, with the message that he'd 'fix' us all some day.

"So now, when this thing happened —when we were snatched out of our beds to-night with smoke and flames around us—I said to myself:

" 'It's come at last. This is McDonald's work. Now I'll go to the State Police.' But I didn't say one word to the neighbors, for fear he should get wind and run. I had sense enough for that. And because, too, I wanted 'em all to clear out quick, just as soon as ever the fire was killed, so they shouldn't muss up the trail for you troopers.

"There! I've done all I can. I believe McDonald set the fire out of his grudge against me. This time he failed. But how can I live with fear hanging over my head? I can't look to my neighbors for help. This is such a

weak little place. And who wants the ill will of a rogue? Oh, I don't mind work and common hardship. I can stand a heap of that, for the children's sake. But this fear for them, day and night, will be killing me. *Lads, I have no big boys of my own—will you boys help me?*"

Big as she was, her lips twitched as she spoke, and the hard-wrung tears stood in her honest eyes.

"We'll do our very best," said Corporal Fairservice. "And thank you kindly for letting us get here before the trail was cold. That's worth everything to us—everything. Come on outside, Beltz; we'll set to work."

A rapid investigation made clear the incendiary nature of the fire. A part of the outer rear wall of the cottage and the floor of the porch as well had been soaked with coal oil. And this porch, inclosed as is common in the region, contained the only stairway leading to the sleeping rooms above. Had the fire once gained access to the stairway, the widow and her children would have had no chance to escape whatever. None at all.

"Here's the can he brought the oil in!" exclaimed Private Beltz, holding aloft an object that he had just pulled out from under a snow-veiled bush.

"And here's his track, to the best of my present belief. Take the can and come along." Corporal Fairservice was passing down the back of the garden, his flash light turned on the snow. "There's only this one trail from the rear, and it's not the natural road for any of the neighbors going home from the fire. Yes, here it runs, out through the back-garden gate. But what little prints! Come along; we've got to see this through."

Walking on either side of the track—a single line of man's footsteps, clear in the virgin snow as ink on the printed page, and very small, the troopers followed it away over farming land and fences, through brush and brier and ditches, for three good miles and more. Then it led into heavy woods.

On into the faintly fragrant darkness the two still traced their man, one on either hand. Here also bright crystal covered everything, making each withered fern stalk, each laurel bush, each shrub and vine and creeper a wand or tent or wreath of shining fleece. But the great boughs spreading overhead bore such wide canopies of snow that they shut away the stars, and the rays of the troopers' searchlights seemed to reveal, in their little spheres, a frost king's ebony-pillared cave, vaulted with glittering white. Once and again a branch creaked or a bough came crashing down with the weight of the snow upon it. But otherwise the place was as still as the ever-vocal woods can be.

It was evident now that the maker of the trail had tried to confuse it. Here he had jumped from tree to tree, and from tree to tree again, in the endeavor to break and multiply the track. In and out he had wound, and then run back again, describing a maze of loops and overlapping tangles. Patiently, rapidly the searchers followed on, unwinding half a mile of labyrinth, to find themselves in the end on the farther side of the woodland.

Here the trace shot straight ahead for a considerable space, then sharply returned on itself part way, shot forward again, and again returned as before. Thrice was the maneuver repeated. The third time the line struck finally off in a new direction. One on either side of the footprints, the troopers traced this fresh departure for a full mile, when it led to a farmhouse, completely around it, and so in a circle around the barn.

At that point the recent passage of a horse and sleigh had effaced the mark. Briefly the hunters scouted at loss. Then, farther down the road, they picked it up again where it left the highway and broke across the fields in a straightaway course to the McDonald house.

It was in the midst of the wee hours now. The house was dark and still. Corporal Fairservice rapped on the door with the firm and measured rap of sure authority.

In a moment a window abovestairs creaked.

"Who's there?" a gruff man's voice called down.

"Officers of the State Police. We want to come in to see Mr. Ed McDonald."

"Well, Ed McDonald ain't here, and you ain't comin' in, either." The voice swelled with defiant bluster.

"If you don't let us in at once," Corporal Fairservice quietly replied, "I shall break this door."

Suddenly changing tone, the other began a protest. "Don't do it! Don't break it!" he cried. "I'll come right down. I'll open the door."

Which he forthwith did, candle in hand.

"Where is Ed McDonald?" the corporal demanded of the disheveled and chilly figure in the entrance hall.

Every member of the McDonald family lived in the shadow of a dubious fame, and the attitude natural to all of them before the law was that of mingled hostility and fear.

"Ed ain't home," the barelegged one made answer, sullenly lying.

"That," said the corporal, "is not true," and, regardless of the other's noisy disclaimers, ran up the stairs.

In the first chamber, under the comforters of a broad, old-fashioned bed, some one lay huddled down, apparently deep in slumber. The corporal, turning his flash light full on the face, recognized his man. But that sleep proved strangely persistent. The eyelids, quivering under the strong white ray, remained fast shut.

The corporal swung his light around the room—the usual minor farmhouse chamber in all respects but one; it seemed to contain a quite unusual quantity of clothing.

And the garments, instead of reposing in closets and drawers, were spread about as if in a sort of shop. Here hung a pair of bright purple trousers, capped by their waistcoat. Next the purple coat, extended on a hanger, as though to make the most of it. After that a gay plaid Mackinaw jacket; a black suit; two gaudy waistcoats; a watch and some jewelry ranged along the bureau top; a string of brilliant neckties, and so on through a considerable wardrobe.

"What's the meaning of this?" thought the corporal. He glanced at each several garment—at each several piece of jewelry—more particularly at the watch. Then his eyes fell on a chair near the bed. Over its back hung a lilac shirt, evidently taken off that night, and on the floor by its side stood a pair of small and brand-new patent-leather shoes. The corporal, picking up the shoes, scrutinized them well.

"Incidentally," he thought, "this little chap's a dude." Then he laid his hand on the sleeper's shoulders and gave him a bit of a shake.

"Get up!" he said. "I want to talk to you."

The possum opened his eyes slowly, vaguely, as if emerging from the deeps. He yawned, stretched, then concentrated his cloudy gaze in a long, puzzled frown, as if to question the reality of the figure standing over him.

"Come," said the corporal, "that will do! Dress yourself!"

"Why the hell should I? Who are you?"

"You know this uniform, Ed McDonald. *Move!*"

Grumbling petulantly, the possum assumed raiment, and so shuffled before his visitor, even as that visitor suggested, down the stairs.

In the sitting room, where the air-tight stove glowed red, some one had lighted a lamp. Before the stove stood the man who had disputed the troopers' entrance, half clothed, unbrushed, and glumly bristling. By the stove, on twin haircloth rocking-chairs, huddled two sour-visaged women, yellow-skinned and shrew-marked, their heads spurred with curl papers, unashamed. By the door, aloof and entirely non-committal, correct as a dandy regular on parade, stood Private Beltz. To this group entered Corporal Fairservice, preceded by his reluctant friend.

"Sit down!" said the corporal.

The possum sat down.

Said the corporal, after a swift, appraising survey of the audience:

"To-night an attempt has been made

to burn the Bower house, over in Sharman village. Ed McDonald, I think you set that fire."

"I did not! It's a lie!" affronted innocence declaimed, while all the household joined, indignant, virtuous.

"How did you spend this last afternoon and evening?"

Minutely, volubly, McDonald detailed his afternoon. "And then," he finished, "right after supper—it was snowin' hard still, but I put on my big boots, and I didn't care; I wanted company—I went over to the neighbors, over yonder, and passed the evening visiting, and then I turned around and came straight home to bed."

"So there!" ejaculated a triumphant feminine choral.

Corporal Fairservice, during the recital, had been standing in the doorway with his hands behind his back. Now he brought his right hand forward, dangling the patent-leather shoes.

"Whose are these?" he asked.

"Don't know. Never saw 'em before," McDonald affirmed.

"I got them in your bedroom. *Whose are they?*"

"Oh, I remember now. They belong to some one who was staying here and who went away quite a while ago."

"These shoes," said the corporal, "have been worn to-night. Inside and out they are wet with snow water."

"Can't help it," the possum nonchalantly tossed back. "They ain't none o' mine. And I had my rubber boots on when I went out to-night."

"Sh'd think *any* fool'd know no *man'd* ever wear things like that—let alone in winter weather!" snapped one of the ladies by the stove. "Them's *my* boots. Our visitor give 'em to me. I wore 'em out when I went to feed the hens to-night."

The corporal was looking at her curiously as she spoke. "Madam," said he, as she finished, "will you do me the favor just to slip this shoe on?" His manner was faultless, and no one could say that he smiled.

The woman glowered. But this, as she realized, was no time to refuse. Trooper Beltz stood over her with the shoe. She snatched it out of his hand. She kicked off her heavy slipper. With a do-or-die expression on her face, she thrust her toes into the thing and began to tug. But the effort was utterly vain. Short of the sacrifice of Cinderella's stepsister, nothing could persuade that shoe to admit that foot.

The corporal turned with urbane seriousness to the other curl papers. "Madam, *your* foot, I see, is small. I am sure *you* can put it on."

Half mollified, half afraid, the woman made the attempt. But the shoe, size five and a half, stuck promptly. Obviously enough, no condition of wetness or dryness could have changed the result in either case. The shoe was numbers too small.

"Now, Mr. McDonald, will you try this?"

"What do you take me for? A girl? *I* can't get those things on!" Stalwart manhood repudiated the motion.

"Why, then, just let me see if I can do it for you. I never was a shoe clerk, but sooner or later we troopers have to turn our hand to lots of things." The corporal, most affable, knelt before the seated man.

As he did so, Private Beltz moved quietly over and stood behind him. In the force they do not offer to the enemy unnecessary advantage.

The little patent-leather shoes slid over McDonald's feet with only such slight sticking as their soaked condition and the man's original vanity explained. The trooper laid the buttonhole flaps in place. They met the buttons easily.

"McDonald," he said, rising, "you are under arrest. Mr. Beltz, you will hold this man here while I look about outside."

Five minutes later, Fairservice reappeared in the sitting-room door. "Come!" he summoned the prisoner. "And, Beltz, *bring that oil can, too.*"

In the fresh snow on the porch, and again along the walk between the steps and the road, the line of footprints stood out clearly. And the little patent-leather shoes fitted them to a hair's breadth. But all led into the house.

"These," said the corporal, "are the tracks that brought us here."

"Yes," agreed Beltz, "and from here *to* the neighbor's there should be no tracks. According to the story we've just heard, the snow would have covered 'em."

Nor were any outgoing footprints visible.

Escorting their prisoner between them, the two troopers tramped off toward the house of that neighbor with whom, as McDonald asserted, he had passed the evening before. More and more sulkily the little man waded the starlit, untrodden fields until, as they reached the neighbor's door, he achieved an obstinate speechlessness.

At the first announcement of the identity of the callers, the neighbor came hastening down to give admittance. "Come right in, gentlemen! What's the news? What—you too, McDonald? Why, what brings you out this time o' night? Come right into the kitchen where it's warm." And then, raising his voice to reach upstairs: "Hurry, wife; hurry down! Let's get the news. Here's State troopers come to see us."

The good woman promptly descended, hastily clad in a wrapper, huddled in a shawl, bringing her little girl with her. Visibly this extraordinary event touched the whole family with a lively and cheerful interest. Far be it from them to wish ill to any one; but when adventure came of its own accord, why, then, praise be to the chance that granted first view of it!

"I want to ask you, sir, whether Mr. Ed McDonald was here in your house last evening?" the corporal asked, his inflection bare of leading.

"Why, yes," said the householder. "He was here. He came and set a while, and then he left about bedtime—just after it stopped snowing."

"That would be about what hour?"

"Oh, 'long about eight or quarter after."

"Can you recall how he was dressed?"

"Why—let's see." The farmer pondered a moment, then gave an account of his late visitor's costume that corresponded essentially with McDonald's own statement.

"Do you remember what he wore on his feet?"

The farmer hesitated, but his wife helped him out with quick decision:

"He had on a pair of black, shiny shoes."

"Yes, yes! That's right. I reck'lect now," the husband agreed.

"No!" exclaimed McDonald, jarred out of his silence by sudden alarm. "No! You've forgot. I had my rubber boots on, didn't I?"

"You did *not*, Ed!" affirmed the wife, unshaken. "You had on a pair of patent-leather shoes, and they were new."

Then up spoke the little girl, big-eyed and breathless with the whole strange event, and with the excitement of bearing testimony. "Yes," she piped, "awful new they were. Awful new and bright and shiny. I was lookin' at 'em all the time. And they squealed so funny whenever you walked across the floor!"

"Like these?" the corporal asked, producing his treasures.

"Just like them *exactly*," cried the family in chorus.

The corporal looked at McDonald critically. McDonald, speechless again, stared at his rubber toes. But unyielding defiance stood out all over him.

"We thank you very much for your courtesy, and we're sorry we had to disturb you. Good night!" said the corporal.

Once again in the arctic open, with the friendly night, their ally, still keeping folk abed, it was only a matter of steady persistence to do the rest.

"Here, dear one," observed Private Beltz to the possum, "is where we first strike your outward-bound course. Haven't you the cutest little paddy-paws, though!"

Clear still and unconfused, the trail of the patent-leather shoes led away from this house across the fair snow till it reached the intersection of two roads, one of which made toward the village of Sharman. This road it followed—followed for some five hundred yards.

Then, switching off to the left, it jumped the ditch, wallowed up the bank, and stopped flush against the hither side of a fence.

"See where he stepped on the rail! See where he leaned across and knocked the snow off the tops of these bushes! Just let me have a look!" said the corporal.

He himself was hanging over the fence now, searching the ground with his pocket light.

"Here it is!" he proclaimed triumphantly. "Take a look, Beltz!" and he straightened up to turn an eye on the prisoner.

Close under the lee of the fence, sharp-edged in the lesser snow, a round, firm hole appeared.

"Ah-ha!" exclaimed Beltz. Then over he swung and carefully lowered into that hole his precious oil can. It fitted precisely.

"So *that* is what I've been toting you for all night, you dirty little beast!" he mused, regarding the can with unfeigned affection. "You remember, corporal, there's an oil well just in there behind those trees? I reckon our friend filled little 'Maudie' right at that very well, and left her here convenient, some days ago. Didn't you, darling?"

But the possum held his peace.

Once more the troopers resumed the trail, which still persisted toward the town. Occasionally it showed that the traveler had stopped; and then, always beside the prints of stamping feet, stood the clear impression of the can.

McDonald, as the troopers already knew, had worn no gloves that frigid night. The tin bale must almost have frozen his hands. His stops might well have been to set the can down and beat life into his stiffened fingers.

And each time that the circle appeared, Trooper Beltz conscientiously placed his can within it. "Just to be able to say we bore you out," he explained to his friend, the prisoner.

"This, too," the corporal added, as, producing a shining shoe, he dropped it into a companion footprint.

Presently now the track struck off to the railroad bed, thenceforward pursuing the steel to the very skirt of the village. But there, where the rails run under a viaduct, the footsteps veered again to mount the bridge. On the summit their maker had stopped once more, setting his burden down beside him.

"What a complete little beau you are, McDonald! When you go out to call on the ladies you simply *have* to dress up in your best, don't you? Purple boiled shirt and shiny shoes and all—even when the weather's at zero and the snow three feet deep—even when your mission to the ladies is to burn them alive in their beds. What a little beau you are!

"See!" the corporal went on. "There is the Bower cottage, right down there below. You could throw a stone from this very spot and hit it. And you climbed up here—didn't you, McDonald?—just to get a good look around—to see if any one had gone to bed—to see if any one was on the road at that hour. And there wasn't. So, after you'd warmed your hands and feet again, you picked up your can—this very can—and you came along, just as we'll go now, always following your footprints."

Those footprints led to a point some hundred yards above the widow's cottage. Then they turned, entered the little garden, and were lost among the tramplings of the fire fighters.

The case came up for trial in the December term of court. In the interval Corporal Fairservice, having fully and duly completed its preparation, did a little quiet investigating of the career of Edward McDonald during the past year. This investigation proved the man's guilt in a wide range of petty offenses, including the theft of the very watch that the corporal had noticed displayed on his bureau at home.

At his trial for felonious arson, however, McDonald continued to assert innocence, and from some obscure source was supplied with ample means to prolong the fight. It was toward the end

of a four-day struggle that counsel for the defense saw fit to make use of the patent-leather shoes.

"My client," said he, "is threatened with conviction by a pair of shoes—those very shoes on the table before you, gentlemen of the jury—shoes of a type made by the hundreds of thousands and distributed around the globe! It has been assumed that the man who wore those shoes set the house afire. Very well, let it be so. *I affirm that those shoes fit the foot of Corporal Fairservice of the State Police.*"

The courtroom caught its breath, sat up suddenly, and stared. What could this mean?

The counsel for the defense was surveying his effect. Now he concluded, with neat insinuation in his smile:

"I suppose that the officer of the State Police can have no objection to trying on the shoes?"

"Certainly, I will try them," replied the officer questioned.

Corporal Fairservice is six feet tall, broad, and well proportioned. In the sight of court and jury, he unstrapped his high uniform puttee, pulled off his heavy boot, and thrust his foot into the little patent-leather gimcrack. It slid on easily.

Counsel for the defense looked about in triumph. This was magnificent. He braced himself for a flight of oratory.

But the corporal was whispering to the district attorney. Now he put his foot on a chair.

"May I ask," said the district attorney aloud, "if the counsel for the defense will kindly do us the favor to step over and fasten this shoe?"

A little warily, his opponent drew near—looked at the raised foot and the boot upon it—ventured to touch it to draw buttonholes and buttons together. They refused to meet over the corporal's high-arched instep by a good bit more than an inch.

"No flat feet on our State force, sir," observed the district attorney cheerfully.

The court sentenced Edward McDonald, found guilty in manner and form indicated, to a term of not less than three and not more than seven years in the Western Penitentiary. While he stays there, Ellen Bower and her little family will sleep of nights in peace.

WHERE BRYAN WEARS THE CROWN OF THORNS

ON the day that prohibition was having its last great round in the House of Representatives—the day which culminated in the "dry" amendment to the Constitution being sent to the States for ratification—William Jennings Bryan, former secretary of state and always the uncompromising foe of liquor, watched the proceedings from the press gallery. He had a seat there because of his being the editor of a magazine.

While absorbed in the debate on the floor of the House, his attention was called to an editorial in a Washington newspaper in which he was roundly denounced for his position on the temperance issue. In the editorial there was a facetious reference to the increasing girth of the Bryan stomach. It was suggested that the growing waistline was due to the great man's consumption of custard pies. Turning suddenly to a reporter in the gallery, Mr. Bryan said, with considerable heat:

"You have known me for a good many years. How do I look?"

"Fine, colonel! Never saw you look better," the newspaper man answered.

Disregarding all the balance of the attack on him, the Great Commoner pointed to the reference to his waistline, and, shaking the paper for emphasis, demanded:

"Well, then, what does this editorial writer mean by this statement?"

Exempt

By Henry C. Rowland

Author of "The Arbiters," "Dicky," Etc,

Though he had the face of a philosophic billy goat, and the social disadvantage of a cleft palate, Artemus Prouty was a man of rare ability and character, and he set about proving it in a way that is an example for all of us

I CAN well imagine the disgust of Jacob Slook when the selective draft became a fact and he realized that his wife's stepson, Donald McComb, would have to serve. Up to this time Donald had been kept with difficulty from volunteering, and then only by the persistent, tearful entreaties of Mrs. Slook, for whom he cherished a certain amount of affection and an even greater sentiment of gratitude for what he thought to be maternal love.

Slook quite realized that for Donald to be called meant the extreme probability of his being quickly converted into cannon food, as he knew the lad's mettle and capabilities. Donald had graduated from a well-known military school as adjutant of the student corps, and was now in his junior year at college. He would have no difficulty whatever in getting a commission, in which event he would undoubtedly make application for service at the front and have such application approved.

Jacob Slook no doubt considered it a much more serious business for himself than for Donald; and I, the family friend and physician, quite understood his point of view. If Donald were to lose his life, it would be because he chose to take the chance; but Slook had no desire whatever to take a similar chance of losing the twenty thousand a year which, according to the terms of Archibald McComb's will, were to be remitted to his widow "for as long as my son Donald shall continue to live." Besides this behest, Mrs. Slook had no more than she could legally claim, and this was not enough for Slook. Donald and his two married sisters had inherited the rest of the estate, and it was known that his own will had been made—subject, of course, to subsequent change—in favor of his small nephews and nieces.

Donald's most intimate friend was a freakish young man named Artemus Prouty, who had been a classmate at school and on graduation had turned his talents to the pursuit of natural sciences. Being possessed of a sufficient independent income, he spent his time in wandering up and down our Atlantic coast in a sort of auxiliary sail and motor house boat constructed from a Chesapeake "bugeye." His simple needs were served by a capable Norfolk negro and a colored boy.

The selective draft held no interest for Artemus. Any sane examiner would have turned him down on sight and sound, if only through pride in our army. Artemus' physical and featural defects were several. He was flat-footed, had an outward oblique cast in his right eye, and a cleft palate, though the harelip was not pronounced. His general build was also a departure from the normal, though without actual deformity. His body was very thick in depth and breadth, so that his arms and legs looked spindling in comparison, though possessed of an uncommonly great and tireless strength and in actual measurement greater in length and circumference than the average. His face was long and narrow, with a kinky tuft of red hair over the high forehead. To

me it was not without a certain attractiveness, but to most people it suggested the face of a philosophic billy goat.

Artemus had all his life been a conspicuous butt for the silly pleasantries of cruel or thoughtless fools, seldom availing himself of his great strength to resent any but those which took a grossly offensive form, when his retaliation was singularly ruthless, though usually attended with a sort of sardonic humor. For instance, once, being assailed on the street by a band of young toughs, he had seized two of them by the scruff of the neck, clashed their heads together, and thrust them down the manhole of a street sewer, the workmen having adjourned to the corner saloon. He had then screwed down the lid and dropped the crank through the cellar grating of an unoccupied house and gone his way without further molestation.

Artemus' eccentricities of mind and body were condoned at school, partly owing to his rare outbursts of savage whimsicality and partly because his thick body, piston-rod legs, and pointed, thickly domed head made him such a battering-ram as the school had never played in the position of center rush. His apparent lack of sensitiveness also saved him to a great extent. But there was one physical defect on which he would tolerate no levity whatever, and that was the impediment in his speech due to the incomplete union of his palatal bones. Nothing could convince him that his diction was not absolutely normal, and he had indeed acquired the ability to make it so when he kept his mind on the task. But in moments of excitement, and especially when, as sometimes regrettably occurred after his graduation from school, he overindulged in the matter of mint juleps—his favorite beverage at all times and seasons—it required either an old friend or a skilled "lip dropper" to interpret him.

By the law that "like poles repel; unlike poles attract," it was a foregone conclusion that Artemus and Donald should become devoted friends. Artemus was attracted by Donald's physical beauty, high-spiritedness, gayety of heart, and inborn kindliness; while Donald was drawn immediately to Artemus first through the warm sympathy of his nature at first sight of Artemus standing stolidly alone as the object of tittering schoolboy witticisms by no means veiled. By virtue of his year's seniority in the school, Donald had immediately made friendly advances affecting to ignore anything odd in the novitiate, and thus a strong and lasting affiliation had been made.

It happened that in our city I was appointed chief of the board of examiners for Donald's district, and several days before the work of enrollment began Jacob Slook called at my office. Slook was not aware that I was acquainted with the terms of Archibald McComb's will. As a matter of fact, McComb himself had told me of his decision the day after my telling him that he was suffering from an advanced aneurism and might die at any moment from a sudden shock or involuntary muscular effort. Archibald McComb was the sort of fearless, craggy Scot to whom one could tell such a thing without danger—unless it was that of his going out immediately and lifting a full beer barrel above his head to test the warning. He explained to me his peculiar will in the Scotch burr which he had never lost.

"My son Donald is too promising a lad to be cut off in his youth by reason of some breakneck recklessness," said he. "Sine a wee bairn he has ever been for experimentin' in dynamics and physical forces, such as the action of gravity, the combustion of gases, the supportin' qualities of deep water and thin ice, together with the resistance of the human body to heat, cold, and electricity, and the depressin' influence of a dumdum bullet on the greater carnivors and herbivors. The callant is thirsty for danger as a bride for kisses. Recently it has been racin' cars and now aëroplanes, and I am in no mind to have him fling away his young life foolin' with imperfected inventions. Now he is fond of his stepmother and she has no small influence upon him,

but she is young and bonny, and between you and me and yon pill box, of a none too constant nature, and it is more than likely that she may marry again. So I am leavin' this bit annuity as a delicate reminder of her promise to do her utmost to keep my boy from the runnin' of foolish risks."

McComb had never really loved his second wife, who was a woman of thirty and very beautiful in a profuse, voluptuous way. The attraction had been principally a physical one on both sides, I think, with a bit of *convenance* on hers, as Archibald had made his fortune early in life. But they had been fairly happy and she had proved herself an affectionate, if somewhat temperamental, stepmother to Donald.

Why she had married the penniless and slinking Slook I could not imagine, and this became even more of an enigma as he came into my office rubbing his predatory talons—he was a real-estate lawyer—and smirking at me in a sort of confidential way. Having instincts of my own, I guessed his errand, which was to assure me that, while a physical examination might fail to reveal any pronounced flaw in the bodily economy—those were his words—of his stepson, yet those who had observed him closely for a period of years, such as Mrs. Slook and himself and their old coachman, James, a bibulous Sinn Feiner, and, perhaps the most important witness of all, Mr. Artemus Prouty, who had been Donald's most intimate school friend, could testify that Donald was very far from being a sound young man. He had suffered since childhood from a functional disorder of the heart; had been known to faint in the dentist's chair, and once or twice when he had cut himself with a pocketknife. James could testify that he had once found him behind the barn in a state of collapse after being stung by a bee when attempting to smoke out a hive. "After a first attempt to smoke himself," I thought. But, more important still, Mr. Prouty—and here I pricked up my ears—would testify that the school physician, now deceased, had laid off Donald from all violent exercise during his last term at school.

To this I answered that most highstrung children had symptoms of heart irregularity from time to time, partly due to nervousness and partly to the fact that the heart as an organ sometimes failed to keep pace with the rest of the body in its growth; that it was no sign of cardiac weakness to faint in the dentist's chair, and that many physically sound recruits fainted on being vaccinated; that James was a liar to my positive knowledge, and in this case biased through hatred of the English, and that Donald had probably been smoking a domestic cigar, and that Mr. Prouty was a rank socialist and sworn enemy to militarism, and as for Donald's being laid off from athletics the last term, his father had so instructed the doctor through fear that Donald might flunk his college exams if he played baseball. Slook tried to outweigh these objections by the testimony of personal observations made by Mrs. Slook and himself, only to find these also set aside. I was getting tired of the whining jackal and beginning to feel my patience slipping a cog when, despairing of other means, he had the stupid cheek to try to sound my reservoir of honesty with his own gauge. First intimating that it seemed my obvious duty to a dead friend to keep his only son from an untimely decease, he added that if by any chance Donald should be exempted by his physical examination the gratitude of Mrs. Slook would be so great that she had expressed the intention of asking me to dispense personally the sum of five thousand dollars as I saw fit among the suffering poor of my large city practice.

At this covert offer of a bribe my righteous wrath exploded and Slook departed hurriedly with wailing protestations of being misunderstood. I was struggling to recover my composure when the buzzer rang and my servant ushered in Mr. Artemus Prouty. It was the first time that I had seen him for about eight months. He was very tanned, rather stouter, and wore his

customary expression of abstracted indifference to all men and things. He was also, as usual, stylishly and immaculately dressed in costly textiles of British manufacture, and, with his long, narrow face, green eyes, curved nose, and suggestion of a harelip, looked rather like a brown billy goat arrayed for the circus ring in baggy shepherds' plaid. However, looking at him from another angle, he might have been taken for a certain type of inborn British nobility, goat-headed not only in appearance, but cheverel in appetites.

"Well," I snapped, as he stood goggling at me, "what do *you* want? To testify that Donald should be exempted from service for blue, very coarse veins, I suppose?"

"Oh, no," he answered, "nuh'hn the mah'er wi' Donald. I jus' dropped in to tell you tha' I've registered, too, and to convince you tha' I'm fit for service."

"The deuce you have!" I answered. "Why didn't you register where you vote?"

"I dohn' vo', an' I didn' register because I was in th' Evergla's. Wha' th' odds, anyhow? Besides, they wu'un pass me back home."

"So you really want to enlist?" I asked. "You want to fight?"

"No. I dohn' give a damn about enlistin' 'uhn I dohn' wahna fight. I wahna go wi' Donald. 'Ahs all."

Artemus spoke dispassionately enough, but I knew from the exaggeration of his vocal defect that he was agitated within, as otherwise this would have been scarcely noticeable. Realizing this, perhaps, he gave a gulp and said with perfect distinctness: "Don't make any mistake, doctor; I have no ambition to be a hero. But since there's no chance of Donald's being exempt ——"

"How do you know that?" I interrupted.

Artemus gave his sardonic grin.

"Slook just told me so. I was waiting outside. What I can't dope out is why the man should be so crazy to get him off. It certainly ain't from love, so why is it?"

I did not see fit to enlighten him, but merely remarked: "Your reason for wanting to enlist is a perfectly good one, Artemus, but the chief surgeon would order our removal if we were to pass a man that couldn't sight a gun."

"I shoot left-handed," growled Artemus.

"Well, there are your feet without any plantar arch," I said, "and one shoulder is at least two inches higher than the other." I made no mention of his cleft palate, though I could see that he was waiting with a sort of belligerent expectation to have me do so.

He used an expletive which I must not repeat. "All right," he grunted. "Don't know, anyhow, as I care to fight for the fools that are selecting this army. Nothing personal, of course. But I notice my physical defects didn't keep me from playin' center rush for two years on my school team and collectin' the boxin' and wrestlin' belts. What are they tryin' to give us, anyhow? An army of good fightin' men, or a beauty show?" And he lurched out with no word of polite farewell, which I did not resent, as I guessed that he was sharply stung beneath his gruff indifference and I felt sorry for him. Also he had the right of the business.

Although as attached to Donald as if he had been my own boy, I was, of course, pleased and proud that he should serve his country, and wished only that we had a few more millions like him. I was therefore much upset when, a few days later, I learned indirectly that he was laid up with a serious case of blood poisoning from an infected foot, the result of an unnoticed abrasion while bathing or possibly a nail in the shoe, and that the Slooks had engaged the services of another surgeon. Slook evidently resented my speech at our last meeting.

A little later I met Artemus on the street, and it seemed to me that he was overstimulated alcoholically and the malicious leer of his vagrant eye more goatlike than ever.

"Huhn," said he, "glad now you sawbones turned me down. This quack

that's tending Donald says he won't be able to set foot to the ground for another two months. He's hashed it all up."

I did not like the business, and was very glad when Donald himself, either suspicious of his treatment or merely dissatisfied with his progress, peremptorily dismissed his surgeon and sent for me. He was at the Slooks' house, his home in fact, but there was nothing for them to do about it; and it was not long before I had him on his feet again, as sound as ever. Meantime, Artemus had hung about the place, making bicycle excursions into the country with his bird glasses and notebook and visiting Donald daily. At his invitation I visited him on his boat, which was a Chesapeake "bugeye" with a high cabin house the length of her, the usual leg-o'-mutton sails, and a twelve-horse-power motor. Her complement consisted only of Artemus and his two colored henchmen.

"You might take Donald for a little cruise," I suggested. We were then in a stifling heat wave on Long Island Sound, and I thought that some real sea air should hasten his convalescence. "He's fretting about his delay in joining up, and the sooner he gets in uniform the better."

"All right," Artemus growled, "I'll drag him off aboard."

So the *Pelican*, as the "bugeye" was named, sailed away and eventually fetched up in the sheltered bight of a fair-sized island somewhere off the North Atlantic coast. Artemus had visited the place several years before, and it had appealed to him because of its shell heaps and the fact that it was inhabited only by the lighthouse keeper and his daughter, whom he remembered as a shy and pretty little girl of fourteen. At that time he had remained a fortnight, digging for pottery and things in the shell heaps.

His disgust was therefore extreme when, on approaching the shore under power against a damp, chilly east wind, he discovered a community to have sprung up a little back from the beach. At first he thought that the island had been appropriated by the coast artillery and batteries constructed, as there were long, rectangular patches of green where formerly there had been only scrub, and there was a row of neat cottages in orderly alignment, which suggested a military reservation. In their midst was a larger building, and through his powerful bird glasses he discovered its broad veranda to swarm with khaki-clad figures apparently engaged in eating and drinking. It was four of the afternoon.

"Must be the canteen," said Donald, taking the glasses from Artemus' hand. "But there's something about it all that doesn't look regulation. It certainly ain't right for a defense station. There's only that dinky little steamer tied up to the landing and those lobster boats. A government post would have some sort of a tender. And that flagpole ain't right. It ought to have crosstrees and a topmast. Besides, I don't see any wireless gear. Maybe it's a summer camp for boy scouts or something of the sort. They've got a lot of land under cultivation and seem to be burning off more, to judge from those smokes."

"They're not boys," Artemus objected; "they're big, husky fellows. Well, let's go ashore and find out. We need some fresh vegetables, and maybe we can get some lobsters."

So the *Pelican* was brought to anchor; and, leaving Godfrey to prepare supper, the two got into the dinghy and spun ashore, landing at a float beside a substantial jetty which looked to be quite new, and went out under the brow of some low, projecting cliffs. A road had been freshly cut through a fissure, leading up to the broad plateau which rose slightly to a median longitudinal ridge, like the very low-peaked roof of a house. Artemus and Donald, who now walked without a limp and was in fact the picture of health, though his kidneys still showed traces of the violent septic poisoning through which he had passed, followed it briskly, and, on reaching the top of the ascent, looked out across a broad expanse of cultivated land which was planted partly in

tall, ripening grain, partly in what appeared to be potatoes, turnips, beets, cabbages, and the like. The areas growing these low plants were plentifully studded with the blackened stumps of trees, and from various points rose the heavy smoke of fires which hung beneath the low fog drifting in from the east and which filled the air with a pungent, acrid odor, combining pleasantly with the smell of brine.

But all of this served merely as a background for that which focused the attention of the two young men. Pouring from the large square building on the summit of the flat ridge came a battalion of khaki-clad figures, racing down the slope of sward in open order. They were armed with hoes, and as they struck the first line of the strongly intrenched potato patch a shrill yell burst from their ranks. They brandished their weapons and flung themselves upon the enemy ranks of weeds and tares. In a twinkling the ten-acre patch was dotted with the brown, stooping figures of these soldiers of industry, while walking up and down behind the lines, sword or stick in hand, strode what appeared to be the commanding officer of the battalion, surveying its evolutions.

Artemus fastened this erect figure with his glass, which seldom left his person, then shifted it to sweep the scene of operations.

"Ho'y h'moke!" he grunted, relapsing to his inarticulate speech in the surprise of his discovery. "H'ey're aw'h Jh'hanes—every dar'hn wun'h of 'em."

"All what?" Donald demanded.

"Jh'anes—skirts—girls!" snapped Artemus, controlling his diction again. "Just look at 'em!"

He handed the glass to Donald, then removed the large, yellow-tinted, shell-rimmed goggles he always wore partly to protect his eyes and partly to conceal their squint, and wiped the moisture from them. Donald stared, then gasped.

"Good Lord, what a chance for a German raider! Let's beat it!"

"Too late!" groaned Artemus sepulchrally. "They have spotted us."

"That's right," muttered Donald. "There's a picket on the first line, wigwagging our position to the C. O., and she's coming up on the double-quick with her staff. We can't retreat now without it's looking like a rout."

"Then let's make it look like a rout," growled Artemus. He was as fond of feminine society as a dog of a soap bath, and when trapped was apt to cloak his diffidence in the sardonic grouchiness at which he was an adept. Little girls and old women, however, found him adorable, the former, as is the way of children, immediately ignoring his lack of physical charms.

"No," said Donald, who had never had reason to fear the fair sex, which, in spite of, or, more likely, because of its indulgent treatment of himself, he held in light esteem, "you said we needed some potatoes. Well, here's our chance."

Artemus would have preferred to slip ashore under cover of the dark and steal them, thus being under obligations to nobody, but the fear lest his valor might be in question led him to stand fast. As the commanding officer with her two aids approached, the young men observed that she might have been Ceres herself, cornucopia in hand, so far as was indicated by her serene and bountiful beauty of face and figure, while her right-hand aid could readily have posed as Proserpine, who, as the erudite reader remembers, was the daughter of Ceres and borne off by the devil to cheer up hell, as has since happened to many a rustic beauty. This Proserpine was built as trimly as a tern, and gave the same impression as of being poised in mid-air to swoop, a bosom filled with the rush of free wind, and the same light-amber, eager eye. Artemus fastened her with his own deflected orb and shivered. The other aid looked intelligently harmless.

"Good afternoon," said the C. O. briskly. "Who are you and where did you come from and why? I hope that you are German spies, as I should like to show you how we American women

are doing our bit in this beastly war which your kaiser started just to try his new tin sword. But you don't look like German spies." She gave them a critical stare from her intensely blue eyes, then glanced out at the *Pelican* at anchor close to the shore and Godfrey up forward preparing a flounder, which he had just caught. "I certainly hope that you are not *slackers.*" Her expression grew suddenly austere and she eyed them with stern suspicion.

"Why should you assume that we are slackers, sir—I mean ma'am?" Donald asked.

"Because you are certainly between the ages of twenty-one and thirty-one and you are not in uniform. Also, your coming to this out-of-the-way spot in a house boat looks very much as if you were hiding out. Besides, you are too young and prosperous looking to be exempt for dependencies. And you must surely admit that you are both the pictures of physical efficiency."

A swarthy flush had been gathering under Artemus' baked-in tan, but at these last words his expression changed from that of the angry satyr to a beaming bucolic. He could scarcely believe his large, pendulous ears. It was probably the first time in his life that he had ever heard a word of praise for the impression conveyed by his physical appearance. He did not pause to reflect that the outward squint of his right eye was concealed by the yellow specs; the hint of a cleavature in his upper lip covered by a thick, reddish, "toothbrush" mustache of recent growth, that his short bowed legs which looked thin in proportion to his girth, but measured a good fifteen inches around the bulging calf, were a mere matter of conjecture in his baggy duck trousers, and that the contours of his torso were disguised in a yellow oilskin coat which he had slipped on because the cold, driving mist held a penetrating chill to one shortly up from the sunny South.

No; poor Artemus, whose innately sensitive nature had suffered from early childhood through the cruel or thoughtless jokes inspired of his bizarre appearance was now conscious only that this radiant goddess of a girl—she could not have been more than twenty-two or three—had actually praised his carnal envelope. Despite her cutting words, he was shot with a sudden stab of gratitude. Here at last was a woman with clear-seeing vision. And as though further to bind him to her chariot wheel, she surveyed them for a moment with a full red lip inclined to curl, and added to her last scathing words: "Yes, indeed. If our army could only boast twenty-five per cent as good physical specimens as you two men, we might have something to be proud of. Unfortunately we are learning that in regard to our masculine sex a fine body is not always inhabited by as fine a spirit." And she thrust out her firm, pretty chin and eyed the pair combatively.

Donald, quick of temper and entirely unaccustomed to this sort of talk from a girl, was irritated. Pride forbade his attempting any explanation of their position, while Artemus, on the other hand, was so delighted at this warm praise of his personal appearance as to be quite indifferent to any aspersions on his spirit, of which he had no reason to feel dubious. He would rather have had a millstone tied to his neck and been cast into the sea than admit to this lovely and intelligent girl that even while waiving exemption he had been rejected physically by an examining board because of flat feet, cleft palate, divergent squint, color blindness, incoherent speech—aggravated at the hour of test by reason of a nervousness which three strong mint juleps had only served to augment—and a slight lateral curvature of the spine which had been congenital and no longer detracted in the slightest degree from his health and strength. No, a thousand times preferable that she should consider him a pusillanimous Adonis than a courageous troll.

But Donald saw it differently. *His* decorative features had never been questioned, nor had his courage and patriotism, and he took the C. O.'s contumely very hard. It was bad enough to have let himself be persuaded by his

stepmother not to enlist at the first call, and worse to have suffered disability from a foolishly infected foot when finally drafted. But to be insulted by this superior young person in command of a potato brigade when on a cruise of convalescence which might fit him for immediate service at the front was a bit too raw. So, instead of frankly stating the case—which, by the way, would have infuriated Artemus—he answered stiffly:

"Permit me to correct your hasty and erroneous suspicions. We are neither German spies nor slackers. My name is McComb, and I expect to receive a commission as first lieutenant, U. S. army, very shortly. My friend is Professor Prouty, the well-known naturalist and"—a streak of mischief inspired by his gold-laced speech flashed out—"agricultural expert. Professor Prouty visited this island some years ago and has been interested to see the result of its productive possibilities."

The effect of this speech upon the C. O. was immediate and striking, especially as it was delivered with Donald's crisp military manner acquired from six years' training with the student corps of a big school. The intense blue eyes of this very young commander in chief of the forage division lost their stern, court-martial expression; the precise lips, which seemed fitted for kisses rather than commands, appeared to melt about the corners, and a dusky flush spread about her small and exquisite ears. The very contour of her shoulders seemed to soften as she glanced from Donald's erect military figure to the more squat and solid one of Artemus, who, with his long, narrow face and head thrust slightly forward and held at a slant as he peered through his enormous yellow-rimmed goggles, was the absolute exponent of a scientist. But before the embarrassed young lady could express the apologies which were brimming on her pretty lips, the tall, dark nymph alluded to as Proserpine asked, with a charming smile:

"Don't you remember me, Professor Prouty?"

"Why, of course," said Artemus, and clapped his large hands softly together. He examined her more closely, and the appreciation of her ripening charms struck him with a sudden embarrassment, or perhaps merely augmented that caused by Donald's statement. As usual, this confusion affected his utterance. "Why, upahn my whur', you mus' be eh yittle gir' f'om the yi'-house!"

"Of course," she answered. "I am Elsa Moore." She looked smilingly at Donald, whose haughty expression of offended dignity had crumbled at Artemus being thus confronted by an acquaintance. But, contrary to his guilty fears, their position was immediately strengthened, for the young girl said to her superior:

"Professor Prouty and I are old friends, Miss Dalrymple. He came here in a little cabin catboat about four years ago to dig in the shell heaps, and papa and I helped him, and we dug up a lot of pottery and spearheads and things. But you weren't a professor then, were you?" she added, turning to Artemus.

"Nah," he growled, "no more than I am now, except when some fool"—he glared at Donald—"wahnts t' kid me. I'm nu'uhn but an independahn' na'ur'-ist, thah's all."

He lowered his heavy head still more, giving it an added tilt as he drew a bead on Elsa with his divergent eye, which, despite its squint, was clearer of vision than its normally directed mate. Now, as he peered over the top rim of his spectacles, this defect became apparent, as had that of his speech. Also his peculiar attitude and the red, kinky, front hair gave him precisely the attitude of a belligerent goat organizing for action.

But nobody felt the slightest inclination to laugh, while Miss Dalrymple's regret at the mistake caused by her militant spirit increased tenfold. Being a college graduate, who, as though anticipating a national crisis, had taken a two years' course in agriculture, she held science and scientists in profound respect. So she made her apologies very prettily, and with a sincere note

in her voice which caused Artemus' eyes to kindle and brought a blush of shame to Donald's cheek. As it was growing late, she then invited them to make an inspection of the station the following day, and sent them off aboard laden with gifts of a leguminous character.

II.

Donald described to me their experiences of the next few days. The island farm was known as The Stackpole Agricultural Station, and was a partly charitable, partly patriotic institution; or at least it had become partially the latter since the war. It was financed by a very wealthy and philanthropic Boston lady, who possessed a heritage of New England thrift and knew quite well what she was about. For a great many years, centuries perhaps, the island had been thickly wooded, principally with tall white oaks, under which, as the island was plentifully supplied with springs, sprang an abundance of undergrowth. Early proprietors having utilized it for raising large herds of swine, it had taken its name from this industry. Finally some childless heir sold the timber to a lumber company which razed the island from end to end. Thereafter it remained desert for a number of years until the lighthouse keeper discovered the nutritive qualities of the ground in his garden and demonstrated the fact to Mrs. Stackpole, who had visited the spot while becalmed off its shores in her schooner yacht.

Mrs. Stackpole had bought the island for a song, after having it examined by government experts. Men laborers had been employed to break ground, and thereafter all work but the plowing was done by young women, who were lodged, fed, and clothed and paid a dollar a day for an eight-hour day. There were one hundred of these workers and a large waiting list. There were city girls and country girls and shopgirls and factory girls and many students. The work was light, the care most excellent, and there was diversion for recreation hours. They had breakfast at seven, dinner at noon, tea at four, and supper at half past six. Intensive farming and various experiments were carried on, and progress was inspected once a month by an agricultural expert. Every bit of the island was made to produce, and even the shores and adjacent waters were not neglected.

The beauty of the enterprise lay in the fact that it was conducted at a decent profit, which at first had gone to charity and since the beginning of the war to relief and Red Cross funds. Such of the personnel as desired to remain through the winter were instructed in lace making and embroidery and paid by the piece. The official staff consisted of superintendent, housekeeper, physician, head nurse, and the heads of the different industrial departments.

"Helen Dalrymple is head of the market-garden department," said Donald, "and, take it from me, that young person has the goods on any ground grubber from a chink or dago peasant to a Smithsonian highbrow. All the same, old Artemus put one over on her. He showed her how to build a rock-and-clay limekiln to calcine the stuff from the shell heaps, and how to mix phosphate and kelp ash that would grow beans on a bleached bowlder. I've seen some acute cases of love at first sight, doctor, but never anything that was a patch on the professor. He simply rolled up his wall eye and reached for the ensign halyards. And the funny part of it was that she seemed to cotton right up to Artemus from the start. Whether it was because she hadn't seen anything but old shellbacks for a couple of months, or because he dragged so much scientific agriculture out of his fore peak, or because she was sorry for him, or——"

"Or because she had sense enough to know a man when she saw one," I suggested.

"Well, there's something in that," Donald admitted. "He's nobody's dam' fool, either. I had no idea the old badger was such an encyclopedia. He keeps a set on the boat and spends all his idle moments reading up on scien-

tific stuff. Then he's a good artisan, too, and that fetched her. He rigged up a forge and showed her how to weld iron and mend garden tools, and she hung around while he worked and got herself all grimed up admiring him. Venus and Vulcan stuff. I never saw anything like it."

From Artemus I learned that Donald had not escaped the glamour of "The Isle of Girls," as they named the place, preferring that to its official name of Hog Island. Besides, there are hundreds of Hog Islands all up and down the coast, due, no doubt, to the early industry of raising hogs on these remote sea islands to trade with the pirates for unmarketable loot. There was considerable of this traffic by our early Puritan ancestors.

"Donald wehn' nutty over Elsa Moore," Artemus told me. "Cahn' b'ame him for 'aht." He seemed to awaken to the fact that he was slurring his words and went on more carefully: "Elsa's as pretty as a Maltese cat, and some girl any way you take her. Never could make out her father, but he's a gentleman and well educated and a hard student of some sort, though what I could never find out. Even Elsa doesn't know. I'll tell you something, but don't give it away. Donald and Elsa are engaged."

I was not altogether pleased at this information, and perhaps my face showed it, for Artemus said:

"Dohn' let it worry you, doctor. Elsa's a dam' fine girl and due to graduate next June from Smith College. Donald's got money enough for both, and she'll make him just the wife his system needs. He's 'fessed up, and she won't marry him until he's got his commission, but that won't bother him any."

"Not unless he has another accident," I said.

Artemus shot me a quick look which I was unable to interpret. It was the look of a wise and distrustful goat.

"Yehs," he grunted, "nah' unless he has anuh'er accident." And he was silent for a moment.

"Well," I asked, "haven't you anything to report on your own account?"

He gave me a saturnine stare, then suddenly appeared to soften. I guess he knew, poor chap, that I looked deeper than a man's husk, be it rough or smooth. Then a deep crimson flush burned its way through his tan.

"I'm up against it, doctor," said he. "Helen Dalrymple is the only girl I ever met that don't seem to look on me as some kind of a freak, and I believe she'd marry me like a shot if I was in uniform. She as good as told me she wouldn't marry any man that didn't join the colors at a time like this. I'm ashamed to tell her that I've been turned down by the physical examination for the army. It's a damned shame, husky as I am and with my military training. I've let her think I'm after a scientific government appointment, but that don't satisfy her. She wants to see me with a sword on my hip."

"Oh, well, if that's the case, come up again and we'll pass you, anyhow," I said.

"No," he answered; "much obliged, but I've got a better plan than that. More romantic and quicker action. Quicker finish, too, maybe, but I'll take a chance on that. Mutilation can't hurt my beauty much, and if I get croaked I won't want to marry——"

This was the day after their return from The Isle of Girls, and they had dropped in to see me at different times. Donald had insisted on Artemus stopping on with him at home, and, very much to my surprise, as well as Donald's, I imagine, Artemus had accepted the invitation. It was probably the first time since childhood that he had slept under a roof without paying for the privilege, as beneath his brusqueness of manner he was as shy as a bull moose and preserved a naturally defensive-offensive attitude toward society in general and his friends in particular. Family he had none, and no relations that he cared to cultivate. So I was much interested to learn that he had broken his established principle never to accept hospitality, particularly as I

knew that he held the Slooks in most indifferent esteem.

If Jacob Slook was disgusted at Donald's complete recovery, he did not betray it in any way. He appeared also to welcome the presence of the two young men in the house. We had been having a bit of a burglar scare in the town, and Jacob went about observing that he would sleep much easier with two such stalwarts in the house, which was rather isolated with lawns and big trees surrounding it and known to contain a good many rare and valuable bibelots and *objets de vertu*, as Archibald McComb—who, as everybody knows, was the head of McComb, Reed & Bright, architects—had in the later years of his life taken a fancy to picking up little gems of buhl or vernis Martin or Russian enamel, jade, onyx, and the like, and the drawing-room cabinets contained quite a collection of gold and silver snuffboxes. It was, in fact, what might be called a rich house, and one might have expected that its remoteness as well as its propinquity to the water would have made it attractive to burglars, but so far it had been unmolested.

Donald's first day at home came very near to being the ruin of his efficiency as a guardian and incidentally as a soldier. He was a very keen shot, both in the field and at the trap, and kept his hand in by half an hour or so of almost daily practice. Artemus, on the contrary, was useless with a shotgun at either trap or flying birds, but managed very well with a rifle, which, owing to the divergent squint of his right eye, he aimed left-handedly. But he enjoyed watching the display of Donald's snappy doubles and crosses, and so the afternoon of their arrival he went out into the meadow with him as spectator and to operate the trap.

It happened that Donald was trying a little .16-bore English-made gun which he had only used once or twice, and some cartridges that were rather old and which he desired to be rid of.

"If I can bust 'em with these old shells the gun's all right," said he to Artemus, and began his practice. He had broken eleven without a miss when there came such a peculiar report that Artemus instinctively shoved his head up over the shield to see what had happened. He told me afterward that it had a flat, tinny sound, accompanied by a sort of hiss.

What he saw was the smoking gun lying on the ground and Donald staggering back with a bleeding, blackened hand clapped over his eyes. Artemus, guessing that the gun had burst, and fearing the worst, rushed to him as he lurched back against the trunk of an elm. A swift examination showed that Donald was not seriously injured, having suffered only a pair of gashed and scorched knuckles and a powder burn of the face, which had miraculously done no greater damage to his right eye than to inflame the conjunctiva, the left eye, which was closed, having borne the brunt of the flash from the split breech.

Artmus tied up Donald's hand, washed off his smarting face with some cylinder oil—perfectly good treatment —and, putting him in the car with the gun and cartridges, drove him immediately to my office. Later in the day he dropped in to see me.

"What do you think about that accident, doctor?" he asked.

"It's very odd," I answered. "Those are the ordinary nitro shells adapted to such a fowling piece. This is an expensive and beautifully made gun, and such arms are all tested to many times higher combustion pressure than they are ever subjected to in firing the maximum charges for long-range efficiency. You can see that it is a well-made piece from the cleavature of the breech. If it had been a cheap arm, Donald would probably have lost his left hand and his right eye."

"And maybe his life," Artemus suggested.

"Not very likely," I answered. "Shotguns exploding from overcharging or mud and the like in the barrel don't often kill the shooter, though they might get somebody standing near by. The piece is held so high in firing that the heavy breechpiece protects the head

and the explosion is upward and outward. Among Indians and other savages who have traded for old muzzle-loaders there are quantities of such accidents. Or, at least, there used to be when I was a youngster. The Indians that used to come down to the Bay of Fundy to shoot porpoises were usually shy a finger or two, and sometimes an eye, their theory being that the harder the gun kicked the stronger it must shoot. It never occurred to them that they were firing half of the unburned charge out of the muzzle."

Artemus appeared to reflect for a moment, then asked:

"Don't explosives sometimes increase in force through chemical changes on their getting stale? Being kept a long time? Like that 'powder B' that sank some of the French warships a few years ago?"

I answered to the best of my ability that while an explosive might get poor and unstable on being kept and often did deteriorate, I did not believe that its combustive force ever augmented, and that in my judgment Donald's accident must have been due to some flaw or negligence in the testing of the gun. Artemus shrugged.

"Donald don't need to go to war to get 'trench foot' and powder burns," he grunted. "He might even have been a 'left-hander,' as they call the yellow guys that maim themselves."

I did not answer, this observation having given me food for thought. When I looked up, Artemus had fastened his oblique eye upon me with a singularly compelling stare.

"I wah'n' you to tell me sum'hn, doctor," he began, then corrected his speech and continued: "To the best of your knowledge, could Slook profit in any possible way by Donald's death?"

"No," I answered. "Quite the contrary. As you are Donald's most intimate friend, and devoted to him, I don't mind telling you something which is known only to the trustees of Archibald McComb's estate, the Slooks, and myself——" Whereupon I put him in possession of the details of McComb's will. Artemus' long face cleared as he listened, though not, as it struck me, with an expression of relief. On the other hand, its expression became singularly ruthless and baleful and his amber eyes more goatlike than they were habitually. He made no comment, however, beyond asking me if I thought that Mrs. Slook was really fond of Donald, to which I answered in the affirmative, adding that I had heard rumors to the effect that she and Slook were no longer getting on with unmarred felicity and that the man had practically nothing beyond what she allowed him. Artemus nodded as if to himself, and a moment later took his usual unceremonious departure.

III.

Donald went around for a few days with his lacerated hand in a sling, and during that time I shame to say that my own modest house was entered by the silly burglars, who probably knew that I was absent on a maternity case, and plundered me at their leisure of a few articles of no great value. Rather to my amusement, they stole Donald's burst gun, which Artemus had left there in its case, also the sack of cartridges.

The date for Donald's physical examination came before his hand was out of the bandages. Such a superficial, healing wound was, of course, no impediment to his being called, and Donald was in high spirits. The boy was fretting at the delay, and told me that he felt mean and ashamed every time he met a lad in khaki.

The day before he was to come up, Artemus dropped in during my afternoon office hour, from five to six.

"Got anything on to-night, doctor?" he asked, to which I answered that up to the moment I was free.

"Well, then," said Artemus, in the most casual tone and with perfect enunciation, "you might slip over and lend me a hand at the Slooks'. I happen to have got hep to a burglary that's due to be pulled off there to-night, or at least about two in the morning. Mrs. Slook and Donald are to be there all

alone, as Slook left for Boston on business this morning, and I am supposed to be going to Chicago, leaving at eight p. m."

"What makes you think there is going to be a burglary?" I asked skeptically. "And if you have good reason to, why don't you report it to the police instead of wanting to risk the cutaneous integrity of an overworked practitioner?"

"My thinking so is a secret which I am not at liberty to divulge until after the round-up," Artemus answered, "and my reasons for calling upon your assistance instead of that of the police is because I suspect the burglar to have a tipper-off on the force, while you, as a protector of the public weal and friend of the family, are also a victim of the plunderer and should therefore be extra keen. If you will meet me to-night at eleven in the lilac bushes at the north end of the tennis court, we can slip in by a basement window which I shall leave unlocked and ambush ourselves at the foot of the main and back stairways. The burglar knows that Donald carries up the silver and some of the more valuable ornaments to his room every night and that he turns in early and sleeps hard. Bring your pistol and a pocket torch, but don't shoot unless the man shows fight. I don't think that he will, but if he so much as lifts a hand plug him, and plug him quick."

"But he will naturally stick up his hands when you spring your trap on him," I objected.

"No, he won't," Artemus retorted, "because the trap I spring will land him down and out. It's ten to one he'll try to sneak up the back stairs, as he knows that he would have to pass Mrs. Slook's room if he went the other way, and that the floor creaks. I shall be behind the pantry door and nail him before he can bat an eye. But if he should go your way, flash your light on him and tell him to stand still. If he so much as twitches a finger, plug him as quick and often as you can. He's not big, but neither is a rattlesnake, and this bird is just as poisonous. And he works masked."

"Why don't you put Donald on?" I asked. "He'll never forgive you."

"Oh, he's been sick, and the excitement might make that athlete's heart of his perform for the examiners," Artemus answered. "He *has* got a nervous heart, you know. Besides, we don't need him, and too many might gum the game. Well, I'll look for you at eleven. North end of the tennis court. So long."

This proposed adventure appealed to me with gusto, not only through the opportunity of performing a public service, but because I was still sore at the looting of my slight effects while absent on a charity case. What particularly irritated me was that the thief had gone into the little laboratory where I made my blood and sputum and other analyses and helped himself to a very good microscope and several vials of my acid reagents, the latter no doubt for the sake of testing precious metals. Then, finding the microscope of inconvenient weight and bulk after carrying it a few hundred yards, he had unscrewed the eye and objective lenses and thrown the instrument into the gutter, where it was found and restored to me quite worthless.

The day dragged through as days do when there is something interesting and exciting after their conclusion, and at twenty minutes to eleven I got in my car and ran down to the point of land where the McComb house was situated. Leaving the car in a lane, I stole along the edge of the woods to an arbor-vitæ hedge, where I squeezed through and kept in the shadow of the trees to the *massif* of lilacs behind the back net of the tennis court. Artemus was already there; had been there for an hour, he told me. Donald's window was dark, but Mrs. Slook's light was still burning. It went out presently, however, and, after waiting for half an hour, we slipped around to the other side of the house and entered the basement by the window in the latch of which Artemus had loosened the screws.

Then came a long and weary wait, during which I had some difficulty in keeping awake, a mere burglar hunt with the odds all in favor of the hunters having no piercing thrills for one who had done as much adventuring as myself and formed the habit of sleeping with one eye open against the approach of a slinking, savage enemy. And then, after an interminable period of waiting, I became suddenly tense and alert at a thin, scraping, metallic sound from somewhere in the rear of the house. After that, long minutes seemed to pass, with nothing audible beyond the sighing of the damp east wind through the big firs and the distant murmur of the waves on the beach.

Then suddenly through these came a series of muffled, thudding sounds—the expression of violence intense but of a sinister quiet. I stole softly through the dining room and butler's pantry to the door of the back stairs which was next the kitchen. Nobody was there, but as I tried to penetrate the murk the outer door of the kitchen swung softly open and I saw a big, uncouth mass dimly silhouetted against the gloom outside. Guessing what was going on, I crossed the kitchen and followed it to the driveway beyond, and here I came upon Artemus standing with his hands on his hips, panting heavily and staring at a dark, huddled figure at his feet.

"Well," I muttered, "you got him."

Artemus gave a grunt. "Huhn, I gah' 'im, ahn right. Hohp I hav'hn' ki'id him; thah's ahn'." He leaned over, gave the limp form a shake, then turned to me. "Leh's carry him to your car and rush him to the office," said he, speaking with an effort.

We picked the man up by the feet and shoulders and started back to where I had left the car. When we had gone about a hundred yards we set him down to rest. He was regaining consciousness and gave a low moan. Artemus bent over him.

"Shuh' up, you 's'whine, ohr I'll s'aughter ye!" he muttered, with such fierce savageness that I was startled, the more so as his arm was drawn back to strike.

"Oh, come, Artemus!" I protested. "He's only a poor devil of a burglar, after all."

"He is, hey?" snarled Artemus. "He's a hehl ova sight worse'n thahn'. You wait an' see."

The man's mask had been torn off, but it was too dark to see his face. He was evidently conscious by the time we got him to the car, but too terrified to speak, as Artemus cursed him savagely when he so much as whimpered. And then, as I snapped on my lights, Artemus seized his victim by the shoulder and flung him roughly into their full glare.

"Now take a look at him, if you want to see hell's own darling," he grunted, and I stared with amazement at the pallid face and terrified eyes of Jacob Slook.

Artemus conducted the drumhead court-martial which held session when we got to my office. Slook was by that time sufficiently recovered to follow its procedure, Artemus having merely stunned him for the moment by a blow on the base of the jaw.

There was no impediment in Artemus' speech as in cold and measured words he formulated his invective, charging the pallid wretch between us with about as filthy an attempted crime as it is possible to conceive, and that for the very lowest of motives—money greed.

"We've got our heel on you at every twist, Slook," said he grimly, in summing up. "Your wife can and would testify that you knew the terms of McComb's will. So can the trustees. The doctor can testify that you tried to persuade him to get Donald exemption, even hinting at a personal bribe. I've got the shoe that gave Donald his infected foot, and can demonstrate the curtain tack slipped under the lining in a spot where no shoemaker ever puts a nail. The laboratory examination can testify what it was impregnated with—the culture showed that. Of course you didn't want tetanus or anything that was apt to kill him; amputation was what you were after.

"Then that gun business. I've got the empty shell, and the rim shows by comparison how it has been twice crimped. Also it's the only one split the whole length. No doubt a laboratory analysis of the carbon residue would show the evidence of the nitroglycerin or guncotton or dynamite or whatever it was you put in it. And I know where that gun is right now. It's in your secret cabinet. Your game was to blow off Donald's hand or blind him. You took a sporting chance on killing him, having learned that such accidents were seldom fatal.

"But this last try was the worst of all. To wake a sleeping man under the impression that there was a burglar in the room and then shoot a syringe full of fuming nitric acid into his face is worthy of the Medicis or Borgias. Former failure did not discourage you; it only made you more ambitious. First you were satisfied with a foot, then you wanted an eye, and then both eyes with a little disfigurement thrown in."

To me it looked pretty black for Slook. Artemus now proceeded to explain to him that he could look for no support from his wife, who would promptly divorce him and lend her voice to his undoing. Slook had neither friends nor money of his own, and, left thus defenseless, it was easy to guess what a judge and jury would do to him for his attempts to deprive the country of a soldier by cruelly maiming the son of the most widely beloved citizen and philanthropist the town had ever possessed.

"How old are you, Slook?"

"Thirty-seven," Slook answered. He was in fact three years younger than his wife.

Artemus nodded. "Right in your very prime, ain't you?" said he. "And you look healthy and strong in a sort of coyote way. Well, Slook, although you don't deserve it, I've got half a notion to give you a chance to win back your freedom and your fortune and the respect of your wife and the manhood you've never had so far."

Slook started to whine out something about accepting any terms offered, and glad of the chance, but Artemus cut him short. I actually believe the man was more afraid of Artemus than he was of a life sentence.

"Look here, Slook," said Artemus, quite pleasantly, "they've turned me down for the United States army because they think I'm not good lookin' enough for an American soldier, so I've made up my mind to go to France and enlist in the Foreign Legion. If you will do the same you'll have nothing more to fear from me, once I learn from headquarters that you're with the regiment. Now here's a choice for you to make character with your wife and the community at large, or to finish your life in the pen—if the boys don't lynch you first. I must say I'm not makin' a very handsome present to the Foreign Legion, but the chances are they'll accept it with thanks, while I've got to have an operation on my eyes before they'll pass me. Well, there's no accountin' for tastes." He looked at me. "What do you think of that for a proposition, doctor?"

"It's sound," I answered, "and it gives Slook a chance to win his manhood. But how are you going to manage it?"

"The French consul will look after that," Artemus answered. "I've talked to him already. All right, Slook. You can paddle off and think it over. But God help you if you try to beat it!"

I drove the dazed and whimpering Slook back to his house, where he told his wife that he had finished his business and returned by an evening train. Then I hurried back to the office, where I found Artemus spraddled out in my desk chair, reading up on the treatment of divergent strabismus.

"Too bad I haven't had this bum lamp of mine set back in its gimbals long ago," said he.

"How the deuce did you manage it, Artemus?" I demanded.

"Oh, it was congenital——"

"I don't mean your blooming eye. Nailing Slook——"

"Huhn, that was easy. I smelled a rat from the very first. That's the reason I stuck on here. When I examined

Donald's shoe and found that curtain tack, I knew that he hadn't put it there himself. And that gun business convinced me. You see, it wasn't hard, because I was goin' on the assumption that Slook's motive was murder so that he and his wife would get the McComb fortune. I wasn't sure but what she might be cahoots until you told me the facts of the case. And that made things even clearer. I knew that Slook would have to act mighty quick if he wanted to get Donald before he was mustered in, so I never let the skunk out of my sight. I followed him the night he broke in here, and when I learned the next day that he'd swiped some of your concentrated acids I made a guess at his sweet little scheme. You see, this burglar scare gave him just the screen he wanted. Donald's cut hand made it safer, too, that being his pistol hand and all bandaged up. When he gave it out that he was going to Boston, I fixed the ticket agent and learned that he had bought a ticket for Bridgeport. Then I knew that he had things fixed for tonight."

Much to my surprise and to the astonishment of the community at large, and Mrs. Slook in particular, Slook spread the news that, deeply wounded and depressed by the constant reproaches of his wife at his dependency upon her, and what she claimed to be his lack of manliness, he proposed to show her the stuff of which he was made. He was going to do the same thing as his and Donald's friend Artemus Prouty—go to France and enlist in the Foreign Legion, that famous and heroic regiment known formerly as the *Chasseurs d'Afrique*.

And go he did. Artemus took care of that. From last accounts, Slook was on the firing line, and his destiny is now in the lap of the gods, with that of many better men and possibly some few meaner ones. Let us hope that the great smelter, war, may discover in him some grain of gold.

Donald passed all examinations with flying colors and was assigned as first lieutenant into a regiment shortly to sail for France. Elsa, to whom he was married on receiving his commission, is to follow him soon to work under the Red Cross.

And Artemus! Well, here are the facts of his case, and they fall quite opposite to the man's *sui generis:*

I sent him to a skilled specialist to get his eye put straight, and, although my confrère shrugged, he performed the operation. Artemus, his head swathed in bandages, then went posthaste to Helen Dalrymple, told her for the first time of his plan for enlisting in the ranks of the romantic *Chasseurs d'Afrique* now that he would be able to look the enemy squarely in the eye, and found no difficulty in persuading that lovely and capable girl to marry him upon the spot.

But alas for unselfish patriotism! The first forty-eight—or maybe it was less—hours of wedded bliss completely revolutionized Helen's determination that Artemus should serve the Allied cause with the colors and under arms. In fact, she desired that he should not serve anything nor anybody except her delightful self. But Artemus was adamantine. He walled up his unbandaged eye and gave his adoring bride the "I could not love thee half so well loved I not honor more" sort of thing. He owed the sacrifice to his country, to his manhood, and to her.

And then the anticlimax. With Helen dissolved in tears, the bandages came off—and the old squint eye was squinty as ever, for all the nicked tendon of its muscle. The condition had persisted too long; was practically inoperable. Artemus was still exempt.

Of course he cursed his luck, with a sardonic grin tucked away under his red, scrubby mustache, while Helen sang jubilantly and showered kisses on his satyrlike features. He dropped in to see me some time later and I commiserated his disappointment.

"Huhn, yehs," Artemus grunted. "Dahm shame, ainh'n it? Cahn't serve wi' ei'er Donald or deah ol' Slook. Oh, heh', I dohn need to serve. I've sehnt a substitute!"

The Laughing Mask

By H. E. Haskell

Author of "Odor of Musk," Etc.

On a hot August afternoon, Timothy Seward took his way to the public museum that he might gaze upon a marvelous diamond on exhibition. Unfortunately, Timothy was a victim of shell shock, the result of fighting at the front, and his own identity might fail him any moment. Given this condition, anything could happen to the young man—and something strange and startling occurred in the museum, which threatened to upset his life as well as his equilibrium. The author has woven a baffling mystery into the tale, with the same touch of the eerie and occult that marked the former story, "Odor of Musk," which won applause from many of our readers.

(A Three-Part Story—Part One)

CHAPTER I.

TIMOTHY.

IT was on a Friday afternoon at four o'clock, in late August, that Timothy Seward made up his mind to take the bus to the public museum and see the pasha's diamond. Now Timothy did not look like a man who would be interested in diamonds, however big or famous they might be, for nature had fashioned him in the mold of a plowman. But Fate had laid a finger upon Timothy long before he was able to look after himself, and decided that he should be a jewel broker. It was a vocation much too nice for Timothy, who was six feet in height and built on a big scale with heavy bones and muscles.

When he spoke his voice rumbled from his chest, and his laugh was hearty and full-throated, winding up with a grin that was a shamefaced apology for boisterousness. Even in features Timothy did not fit the rôle of jewel broker, for his mouth and nose were large and irregular, his chin alone denying the uncouthness of his general make-up. This was fine and firmly molded. It saved him from grossness.

But, in spite of his ugliness, Timothy had a clean, fresh-skinned look, and, in an unobtrusive way, he was well groomed. He had also an air of good breeding, having been brought up in a self-respecting way by middle-class, well-to-do parents. Always slow, he had graduated from the high school in the small Southwestern town where he was born, a year behind his class, and had then matriculated at a New England college with mechanical engineering as his goal. Here he had managed to stick, in spite of a stiff curriculum, until the beginning of the second year of the war, when he had gone to the other side and joined the Foreign Legion.

He had remained abroad for two years, coming back at the end of that time haggard-eyed from shell shock, the phalanges in his left foot patched up with silver, and with some rebellion in his big heart because they refused to let him go back and fight under his own colors.

And then Fate, who had let Timo-

thy think for a number of years that he was having his own way with life, laid hold of him. In the first place, she unloaded a jewel business upon him. Then she wound him round in a web of adventure and mystery from which poor Timothy found it almost impossible to extricate himself. Why the jade should have picked him out as the central figure in her evil machinations it would be difficult to say; for, in spite of height and bulk, a more unarresting person it would be difficult to find. But apparently she had had an eye on him from childhood, presenting herself first in the form of a visit from his Great-uncle Irwin, a dealer in precious stones, who had seated young Timothy astride a pair of scantily padded thighs and told him the story of the pasha's diamond.

It was the effect of this story, part fact and part fiction, which had determined Timothy's future. Yet it was a poor enough story, and only a sharp-nosed old person like Fate would have found in it anything with which to overturn the life of a sturdy little boy with tanned cheeks and a pocketful of marbles.

But Fate knows her business. She spun her web during the half hour that Timothy listened, open-mouthed, to his Great-uncle Irwin's recital of how he had traveled into Egypt to find and buy the pasha's diamond in order that it might adorn the bosom of a vain but beautiful woman.

According to the tale, Timothy's great-uncle, after numerous hair-raising adventures, had secured the stone only to lose it again to a band of robbers, whom he had later pursued over the desert mounted on the back of a snow-white camel and accompanied by a caravan of trusty Arabs. After traveling for two days and two nights the caravan had overtaken the robbers. There had followed some hard fighting, during which Uncle Irwin had wrested the jewel from the thieves. He and his caravan had then returned to the city, from which they had set out by easy stages, as Uncle Irwin, being unaccustomed to riding on the back of a camel, was very sore and lame.

At about this place in the narrative, young Timothy had become unpleasantly aware of the paucity of upholstering on the thigh bones of his uncle, and when the raconteur confessed to a similar discomfort as he trundled over the desert on the back of his camel, Timothy felt that the two had reached a state of mutual understanding and friendship.

"I would fight for the pasha's diamond, Uncle Irwin," he announced bravely as the story ended. "Even if the camel's back was thin and hurt like everything."

Uncle Irwin, without stopping to explain one's position on the back of a camel, beamed approvingly. "Then you, too, love precious stones?"

"Yes, sir," said Timothy, and pulled a glass alley from his bulging pocket.

"That," said Uncle Irwin, "is a tawdry bauble."

"Yes, sir," said Timothy because he did not understand. "We just call it an alley for fun. I wish I had the pasha's diamond."

"It is a shame that you were not named for me," said Uncle Irwin.

"Your name is Uncle Irwin, isn't it?"

"Yes, Timothy."

"My name is Timothy Uncle Irwin," said Timothy, and in rechristening himself on the spur of the moment gave Fate her hold upon his leading strings.

Great-uncle Irwin remained for five days a guest in Timothy's family. Then he departed, much to the relief of his plain hosts, who, in spite of a desire to be hospitable, had felt ill at ease in their intercourse with the prim and fastidious collector of gems.

Uncle Irwin never again visited the West, but on the following Christmas there came to his nephew a bulky package addressed to Timothy Uncle Irwin Seward. Timothy, who was being properly brought up, acknowledged the receipt of the package in awkward schoolboy way, and because he knew no other ground on which to meet his great-uncle wound up his stiffly worded

acknowledgments with a boyish allusion to the story of the pasha's diamond.

When, nineteen years later, Timothy's great-uncle died in the old-fashioned apartment house where he had lived for twenty years, it was found that he had left his entire property to his nephew, Timothy Uncle Irwin Seward, who, he explained, both loved and understood precious stones. There followed a clause with the stipulation that Timothy, as heir to his uncle's business, should continue to conduct it as it had been conducted since its beginning, with neither advertising nor ostentation, but with that dignity and reserve with which a gentleman conducts his home.

The phrasing of this clause frightened Timothy as nothing but dancing school had ever before frightened him. But he had just returned from France, and his future was uncertain. He had left the school of technology before earning his degree, and now feared that his slow wits would find it difficult to pick up the threads of study where he had let them drop. The will of his Uncle Irwin seemed to clear a way for him. He could perhaps learn, in time, to conduct a business in the dignified way that a gentleman conducts his home.

Faith in his ultimate success was bolstered up presently by the receipt of a primly worded letter from a Mr. Edwin McMahon, who explained that he had served Timothy's lately demised uncle as secretary and manager for the past thirty years and who expressed a willingness to continue in this capacity with Timothy.

For two weeks now Timothy had been the nominal head of the business that had been unloaded upon him. During this time he had learned how to tell a precious stone from paste and he had grown used to having afternoon tea served in what he felt ought to have been a showroom for stock. But it had been a part of his uncle's system to have nothing that suggested barter and trade in the establishment of Irwin, and Timothy, always humble, accepted things as he found them, and neither made suggestions nor interfered with the conduct of the business.

It was at the close of Timothy's second week in New York that the Finch jewels were displayed in the gold room of the public museum. These jewels represented a fabulous amount of money. The Finches had spent twenty-five years in getting them together. Now, in a burst of splendid patriotism, they were dumping their treasures upon the market. The jewels were to be sold the following week at public auction, and the proceeds from the sale devoted to the purchase of farm lands and tractors for the raising of food for America and her allies.

Almost coincident with the announcements concerning the sale of the jewels there came an order to Timothy's firm. Mr. McMahon, who opened all of the business mail that came to the house of Irwin, laid the letter containing the order on the blotting pad of Timothy's desk.

"It's from Mrs. Fairchild," he announced nervously. "She commissions us to bid as high as one hundred thousand dollars for the Egyptian pendant."

Timothy picked up a sheet of thick blue paper.

"And what is the Egyptian pendant?" he asked carelessly.

"Do—do you mean, sir, that you have not read of the Egyptian pendant?"

Mr. McMahon did not stammer ordinarily. Timothy's ignorance had surprised him into it.

"I'm afraid that is just what I mean, Mr. McMahon," confessed Timothy, flushing.

"It has been in all of the newspapers, sir. It belongs to the Finch collection, which is to be sold at auction on Monday. It will be on exhibition at the public museum until that time, with the rest of the Finch collection of jewels."

Timothy turned over the newspaper which he had folded back to the baseball news. He felt ashamed of himself.

"As you see, Mrs. Fairchild has inclosed a certified check for fifty thou-

sand dollars, written to our order. She wants to make sure that there is no slip through lack of sufficient funds. She is one of our oldest clients, and has been very considerate at—at various times. She helped your uncle out on several occasions when Irwin's was a trifle—ah—pressed for ready money."

Timothy was staring at a piece of yellow paper attached to the sheet of note paper by a metal clip.

"It seems impossible." He detached the yellow slip and frowned down at it. "Impossible!"

"May I inquire just what you mean by that, sir?"

"That anybody would think of paying one hundred thousand dollars for a string of diamond beads."

"But this is the Egyptian pendant, sir. A prehistoric stone. Pure white with a rose cutting." Mr. McMahon ran the top of his tongue across his dry lips. "It weighs ten carats and ——"

"Is it, by any chance, the pasha's diamond?" questioned Timothy with unexpected eagerness.

Edwin McMahon raised his eyebrows. It was the first time since becoming the head of the firm that Timothy had shown the slightest knowledge of jewels.

"That is exactly what it is, sir—the pasha's diamond. But it has not been so called for many years. Where, sir, did you hear of the stone?"

"Uncle Irwin told me about it when I was a little boy." Timothy's eyes wrinkled in amusement. "It is associated in my mind with human anatomy."

"And why is the pasha's jewel associated in your mind with the human anatomy?" demanded Mr. McMahon with a puzzled frown.

Timothy's color swept to the roots of his hair.

"As a youngster I supposed one straddled the back of a camel as one straddles a horse, sir. Uncle Irwin told me of how the diamond was stolen and of how he recovered it by pursuing the thieves on the back of a camel. He was very sore and lame in consequence."

"In his youth your uncle was something of an adventurer, I fear," replied Mr. McMahon.

"So I judged, sir, from the story of the pasha's diamond."

Mr. McMahon drew his shoulders up and back. "Nevertheless he was a cultured gentleman in his later years. We should not dwell upon the weaknesses of his adolescence. Have you seen the pendant?"

"No, sir."

"Then," said Mr. McMahon, "I should advise your visiting the museum at your earliest convenience. You will feel repaid. And now, if you will kindly indorse Mrs. Fairchild's check, I will take it to the bank myself. It will strengthen our account."

CHAPTER II.

THE PASHA'S JEWEL.

It was late in the afternoon of the same day that Timothy made up his mind to visit the museum and see the pasha's jewel. With this in view he knocked off work an hour earlier than usual, and found himself stepping from a Fifth Avenue bus just as a cloud burst in a terrific downpour of rain.

He made a dash for the museum entrance, almost upsetting a chap in olive drab who swung his club and savagely admonished the young man to mind where he was going.

The next moment Timothy had brought up in the entrance of the building, and, while shaking the water from his Panama, grinned apology at the drab-clad one who had forgotten home-defensing for the time being and was crowded into the stone corner opposite Timothy.

"Didn't mean to get your wind," rumbled Timothy, resetting his hat on his head and taking up his cane. "The bus was in the way. I didn't see you until I had done the damage."

"No damage," returned the guard, fixing his eyes upon Timothy's left foot, which was two sizes larger than his right, owing to those silver inserts.

"I'm a clumsy ox," returned Timothy.

Having learned at the desk that the Finch jewels were being shown in the gold room on the second floor, he started upstairs. At their head, he turned to the left and passed, without pausing, through a series of galleries, deserted save for their guards.

In the Herron gallery there were several artists at work painting copies of masterpieces.

Timothy, like most laymen, had a profound respect for art, about which he knew nothing. Also he had a curiosity about artists. But he was too shy to stop and watch them frankly, so he planted himself before one of the larger canvases in the room and assumed an interest in it while surreptitiously he watched a young Jewess in a smutched linen smock who was making a too-pink reproduction of a portrait of George Washington. Presently she turned and encountered his eyes, whereupon Timothy flushed and hurried on to the Italian room, which opens directly into the old one.

The Italian gallery was unoccupied save for a lanky-limbed guard and a long-haired young artist, who stood with hands clasped behind him, gazing raptly up at Giovanni's "Assumption of the Virgin."

Again Timothy's curiosity intrigued him into stopping. Hesitatingly he approached the young man, and, standing a few feet from him, stared up at the Giovanni canvas. The painted figures struck him as unlifelike, not nearly as well done as the pictures on most magazine covers.

From the tail of his eye he looked at his long-haired neighbor.

He was dressed in the unconventional manner, which, among artists, is the conventional, with flowing tie and rolling collar. His hair was long, straight, black, and glossy, and so thick that it made his head seem abnormally large.

Timothy had heard that most artists were poor, and this one certainly looked impecunious. He wore a shabby black overcoat, yellowish trouser legs bagged at the knee, and oversoft, low-heeled shoes.

Timothy, who had found New York a particularly lonely and reserved place, wondered what would happen if he should attempt to make friends with the fellow by asking him to explain the fine points of the painting. But before he had mustered courage to speak his companion turned his head suddenly and shot him a glance from a pair of eyes as black and shiny as his hair. It was both sharp and challenging, and it had in it none of the dreamy, speculative quality that Timothy had anticipated from the man's attitude and general make-up.

"I beg your pardon," rumbled Timothy, and, more than ordinarily conscious of his uneven gait, hurried on to the gold room.

"Are the Finch jewels in here?"

His husky inquiry seemed to profane the sacred silence of the place. He wondered that the stocky guard did not hold up a warning hand. Instead he smiled genially and made his reply in a natural voice. The vaulted galleries held no awe for him.

"In the case at the end, sir," he said, and turned his back.

Timothy passed a long case filled with Japanese orders and coats of arms, then—stopped short.

For before him was the pasha's diamond! He knew it could be no other. It hung in a shadow box lined with peacock-blue velvet, and by means of some electrical contrivance swung continuously half around and back again, shooting off rays of rainbow light from a hundred glistening facets. It was twice the size of any diamond he had ever seen, and it was at once full of fire and cold. Its size and radiance somewhat overwhelmed him, for even a dull and indifferent man acquires some respect for precious stones after two weeks of constant and intimate association with them.

He stood for a full minute staring at the jewel. He had expected to find it inclosed in some sort of a steel cage, behind a grille, perhaps, like the money in a bank window. Yet here it swung,

a hundred thousand dollars' worth of glistening carbon, protected solely by a pane of glass!

The case contained a number of other jewels set in necklaces, rings, bracelets, and tiaras. Timothy gave them but a casual glance; then, with a final long look at the swinging pendant, turned from the case. As he faced about he met the eye of the stocky guard who had turned his back upon him. The man had been watching him in a mirror, so arranged at one side of the entrance that it commanded the whole room.

Timothy nodded to the guard, and the next moment discovered a girl. She must have entered the gallery and come up to the shadow box while he was studying the gem. But he had not noticed her until now, when he saw her in the mirror. Strangely enough, her back was turned to the pasha's diamond, and she was looking down the room and into the mirror at the end. Her eyes were fixed upon Timothy, yet she seemed to be looking beyond him. She was smiling, but absently, as if at her own thoughts and not at him.

Timothy, usually timid in the presence of women, stopped beside the case containing the Japanese orders and stared into the mirror. There was something about the girl's expression that arrested his attention. It was rapt and very earnest. She seemed unaware of her surrounding. He felt that he understood her mood. Her thoughts were miles away from the gold gallery and the Finch jewels.

"She's wandering in daisy fields," he said to himself. Like most shy men, he was a romanticist. He, too, had his rapt moments.

As for the girl, aside from her remote expression, she was like any other ordinarily pretty girl in the early twenties, fair-skinned, with wide-set gray eyes, and straight, finely penciled black brows.

She was dressed modishly enough in blue cloth with a white collar outlining the V of her throat. Her hat was a black sailor, such as equestriennes wear. From one hand swung a roomy blue silk bag, gathered at the top and embroidered in colored beads. She might have belonged to any status in life, as all girls, of whatever station, dress alike in these days.

Suddenly she started forward, looked squarely into Timothy's eyes, then whirled round and faced the case containing the Finch jewels. At the same moment a woman's shriek cut the vaulted silence of the room. It came from the direction of the Herron gallery, and it was so full of stark terror that Timothy felt the hair on his head rising as, without stopping for another glance at the girl, he fairly bounded into the air, rushed past the startled guard, who also headed instantly toward the Herron gallery, passed the long-haired artist, who seemed frozen in his tracks, at the farther end of the Italian room, and then brought up short.

For the young Jewess in the smutchy smock had appeared unexpectedly from around the corner, and, seeing Timothy, had made a running broad jump that had landed her, George Washington and all, squarely in that young man's astonished, though outstretched, arms. From here she endeavored to climb up the front of his shirt, clawing at it until she had detached it from his collar, while George Washington transferred his too-pink complexion to the lapels of Timothy's coat.

"What's the row?" demanded Timothy, managing to get hold of the girl's wrists and to shove her off.

"Snakes!" she gibbered, and went limp, dropping her canvas as she crumpled to the floor.

By this time the guard from the gold room had rushed up. Others appeared from various adjoining galleries.

But before they or Timothy had time to question the girl coherently another student, who had been at work in the Herron gallery, careened, shrieking, into the Italian room, jumped upon one of the four cane-seated chairs arranged in front of the "Assumption of the Virgin," went through it, and, without stopping to extricate herself from the wreck of the first, climbed up on a

second, where she stood precariously balanced, with her feet on the rigid edges of the chair, wringing her hands and moaning:

"Help, help! Can't somebody do something? Oh, can't somebody do something?"

Then suddenly her cries were drowned by the heavier voices of guards:

"Here! Here!"

The young Jewess gripped Timothy's trousers. Timothy reached down, and, putting his hands under her armpits, pulled her to her feet.

In the next room the shouts continued:

"Bring a club, somebody!"

"It's a rattler!"

"No such thing. Cobra! Look out!"

Timothy, seeing that his self-imposed charge could stand alone, hurried in the direction from which the voices came, but stopped short just within the entrance of the Herron room, then backed against a case of blue-and-white porcelains, springing away from it with a startled ejaculation as his hand touched the cold glass.

For, a few feet away from the wall, in the very place where the young Jewess had stood before her easel a moment or two before, there was now a snake. Its head and the anterior part of its body were reared in the air and waved slowly from side to side. The back of its neck was dilated, and from its mouth its forked tongue darted in and out terrifyingly.

Physically, Timothy Seward was almost fearless, whatever might be said of him socially, but the sight of the serpent, which he recognized at once as a hooded cobra, started a cold perspiration all over his body.

If he had come upon the thing in its native environment, he would have probably attacked it with whatever weapon was at hand. But the abnormality of its appearance in New York, indoors, in a building which stood for the apex of civilization, deprived him momentarily of his wits. With eyes searching the floor, cabinets, side walls, and ceilings, he sidled mincingly toward the corridor that would take him to the main stairway. And all of the time he kept muttering interrogatively to himself: "What next? What next?"

Never before had he so completely lost his self-control. And everybody else was in the same condition.

A dozen or more guards had rushed into the gallery at the first terrified shriek, only to become as senseless with shock and fear as Timothy. Like him, they backed away from the slimy, glistening reptile, their eyes seeking, as his had done, other crawling things. There was a pandemonium of shouts. And from the distance came faintly the sound of shattering glass, as if somebody had fallen into one of the cases and smashed it.

One guard, the long-legged one, who had been in the Italian gallery, had lost his self-control utterly, and was demanding over and over again hysterically:

"Any more of them? Anybody see any more of them? Any more?"

The stocky guard, who had watched Timothy in the mirror of the gold room, was the first to regain a semblance of self-control. He produced an ugly-looking black revolver, and, shouting to the people to stand back, took shaking aim with it. This only increased the terror. The girl art students now began to cry, and a woman visitor, who had come in from some other gallery and had stopped, as if frozen in her steps, folded up like a jack-in-the-box, settling into a heap on the floor and then toppling over sideways.

The stocky guard in a peculiarly squeaky voice called to her to stand aside, although it was evident enough that the poor soul was incapable of free movement.

Timothy supposed that she had fainted, but with incredible gentleness and deliberation folding up in slow installments. He looked about him to make sure that it was safe to change his position, then took a long step forward, for, even with a venomous snake waving its anterior part in the path that lay between him and the woman

who had swooned, he felt in duty bound to do the decent thing and to render whatever assistance he was able.

It was at this moment that the girl in blue, whom he had noticed in the gold room, passed him. She was walking rapidly, and was apparently oblivious to danger.

"Look out where you are going!" Timothy exclaimed, reaching out involuntarily.

She turned her face toward him, and as her gaze met his smiled and moved her lips. But she kept on. She certainly must have seen the serpent, yet there was no fear in her eyes. Something in her calmness reassured Timothy. He forgot the woman in need of first aid, and in a step overtook the girl.

"I beg your pardon," he said. "Did you speak to me?"

Again she turned, but her eyes seemed to have fixed themselves on something beyond.

"It will do you no harm," she said.

Timothy stopped short and looked around. For a moment he thought that somebody else had spoken, as the girl's voice was entirely different from what he had anticipated. It was rough, almost masculine in its quality.

"It will do you no harm," she repeated emphatically, and with the words quickened her steps, fairly skimming by Timothy, who hurried awkwardly after her, having now entirely forgotten the lady who had crumpled up so neatly, but with an eye askance at the snake and a curving detour as he approached it.

The girl continued in a straight line. She would fairly brush the reptile in passing.

"Madam," called Timothy, irked in spite of his excitement at a language which supplied no more fitting word with which to address a strange young female, certainly unmarried. The girl neither turned her head nor slackened her pace.

"Madam," again shouted Timothy, "look where you're going! It's likely to strike you."

Still she went on without apparent hurry, but swiftly.

"Good Lord!" cried Timothy, and, plunging toward her, caught her arm and pushed her out of harm's way. "Don't you see that snake?" he scolded, still holding her arm and frowning down at the crown of her hat.

The girl, without stopping, craned her neck and looked past him at the serpent.

"He is harmless. You may pass close to him with perfect safety," she said simply.

Then, before Timothy realized what was happening, she slipped her elbow from his grasp and went swiftly on.

Timothy hurried after her.

"One moment," he began.

She glanced at him over her shoulder.

"The main stairway leads directly to the front door," she said as he overtook her. She spoke deliberately and as if directing a child, at the same time quickening her pace. Timothy continued beside her. Suddenly she spoke again:

"People are more dangerous than serpents. I must neither speak to anybody nor allow anybody to speak to me. And I must make all possible haste."

She gazed up at him. Her lips, which were pink and prettily modeled, parted enough to show the edges of her teeth.

"Good-by!"

There was something definite and cold both in her words and smile.

Timothy realized that she wanted to be rid of him. He stopped, chagrined. Without intention, he had annoyed her. He had taken what had probably seemed to her undue advantage after she had spoken to him. He had been rude, boorish. But it isn't every day that one encounters a cobra in a public building. The girl should realize that there had been some excuse.

He hesitated. Behind him there was still the racket of excited voices. Should he follow the pretty girl with the hoarse voice and attempt to apologize, or should he go back and find out if they had disposed of the cobra, and how?

The disappearance of the young woman around the corner at the end of the room decided him. She was so swift-footed that he could hardly overtake her now before she reached the street, and she had said that she must allow nobody to speak to her. Only a cad would follow her after so frank a confession.

Timothy turned regretfully, and went back to the Italian room.

CHAPTER III.

A SHABBY SNAKE CHARMER.

The snake had moved but a few feet from the spot in which Timothy had first seen it, but it was making frantic efforts to progress. Timothy knew enough about natural history to realize that the comparative smoothness of the cork floor deprived the reptile of free movement, although the feet of thousands of visitors had made some irregularities and roughnesses in its surface, and the serpent was using these almost infinitesimal projections as supports for the scales along its belly, and so was managing to wriggle and squirm its way toward the Italian room. Its tortuous progress made the venomous thing doubly fear inspiring.

Meantime, the stocky guard, who had gained his self-possession, had taken control of things and was doing his best to get the crowd out of range, so that he could use the revolver which he still held.

"Here! Everybody get to the right!" he shouted. "I'll put a bullet through his head. Madam! Get to the right! I am likely to hit you if you stand where you are."

Nobody moved.

"Out of the way, everybody!" added the lanky guard, taking the cue from his companion. "You ladies will get hit if you don't step lively."

"Don't shoot! Oh, don't shoot!" squealed one of the women who was in direct range of the guard's gun. "There's maybe a nest of them. You'll stir them all up. Oh!"

The guard dropped his revolver to his side.

"Everybody get out of here! If you are not out in twenty seconds I'll——"

He did not have the chance to say what he would do, for suddenly the seedy artist with the long hair and penetrating eyes stepped from the group gathered at the left of the serpent.

"Don't shoot!" he commanded, and, raising and extending his arms, waved his hands slowly up and down. "Naja—Naja!" he called in a loud but soothing voice, at the same time approaching the serpent, whose raised fore part and dilated neck showed that it was holding itself in readiness to strike, forward or sideward, at anybody who came within striking distance.

A trickle of cold ran the length of Timothy's spine as the long-haired young man continued straight toward the cobra, hands still raised and moving rhythmically.

"Naja is frightened," he intoned. "Naja is helpless. But a friend comes to care for him."

By this time the fellow was within easy striking distance of the snake. A hush fell upon the crowd.

"Naja," repeated the artist soothingly, and, drawing still nearer, knelt and ran his hand along the reptile's back.

The crowd watched the scene in dumb horror.

"Naja," crooned the artist, caressing the serpent's neck. Then, without turning his face, he addressed the spectators:

"Do not be afraid. Naja is frightened, but if you do not interfere with him or anger him he will do no harm. In India he lives with us, a friendly neighbor. He brings us luck. We shelter him as we shelter our little ones." He stroked the serpent while he talked, and gradually the dilated hood contracted and the slimy thing lowered its head until it rested on the artist's knee. At the same time its forked tongue ceased its darting.

"See!" called the artist triumphantly. "Naja is at peace." With the words he lifed the reptile and coiled it around his shoulders. "Rest, my Naja!" He pressed the head of the serpent against

his chest, covering it with the lapel of his coat, while the crowd looked on, thrilled and breathless.

Suddenly the man laughed, flashed his gleaming eyes over the circle of onlookers, and brought them to rest on Timothy.

"Come, caress him, big brother!"

Timothy's color mounted as the eyes of the crowd turned in his direction. A woman tittered. Then a man's voice took up the artist's challenge:

"Yes, pet him."

Timothy would sooner have run his hand into a blacksmith's blazing forge than to have limped into the limelight with all those eyes bent on him. But he was very young, and he had never taken a dare. He flung up his head and stepped out from the crowd.

The artist laughed and ran his hand along the cobra's back.

"Do not fear him. He is harmless. He likes petting. Come, brother, make friends with Naja."

Timothy might have gone on, but the young Jewess, who had covered her canvas, and, heedless of soft paint, was holding it to her breast, seized Timothy's arm with her disengaged hand.

"Don't! Please don't!" she shrieked.

The red in Timothy's face deepened. He felt hotly embarrassed. He disliked the young Jewess. He disliked being stared at. And, more than all else, he disliked being challenged in this public way, and regretted his height that had made him conspicuous.

Meanwhile the young woman clung to him frantically.

"It'll sting you. Don't do it!" she wailed, while Timothy tried gently to free himself.

The scene relieved the tension. Some of the men laughed, and there was a movement toward the stairs. The guards, too, recovered their senses, and, paying no more attention to Timothy, began making suggestions as to the disposition of the snake.

"Strangle him, mister, while you've got the chance," the stocky one called, keeping out of harm's way and again showing his black-nosed revolver.

"Strangle Naja?" exclaimed the artist, turning his profile to Timothy. "No, no! He would understand immediately should I attempt such a thing and would protect himself."

"The thing to do is to get a box and put it over him," one of the bystanders suggested.

"Yes," agreed the artist. "That's better. But have a care. He feels our thoughts. See!"

The reptile had withdrawn its head from the sheltering coat, and was again darting its forked tongue in and out between its fangs.

"Gently, Naja," crooned the artist, and laid his hand on the snake's flattened neck. Then to the guards who had gathered in a group a few feet from him: "The idea is good. Bring a box quickly. He is frightened again. I may lose control of him. Hasten! A strong box with a good cover."

The man's face had grown livid. His nostrils dilated with each breath. But he was still self-possessed, the leader, developed by the need of the moment. Gently, and still stroking the serpent with one hand, he uncoiled it from about his shoulders and placed it on the ground. Then he pursed his lips and whistled a few measures of weird, strangely sweet Oriental music.

Instantly the serpent's head stopped swinging. Its long body stiffened, straightening out like a rod.

The man looked around like a pleased child.

"Ah, he obeys me!" He slipped his hands beneath the serpent and lifted it from the ground. The sinuous thing remained stiff and rigid.

The fellow smiled delightedly.

"Naja sleeps at my wish. Lest he should awaken and again try to defend himself, I will roll my coat about his head. Wrapped in it he will be safe enough until some one has brought a box, a strong box, in which we may carry him away."

As he finished he slipped out of his coat, and, kneeling, wound it about the cobra's head. The reptile, meantime, remained as motionless as if dead.

Timothy pulled out his watch. The

hands pointed to twenty-five minutes after four.

It was less than half an hour ago that he had collided with the home-defense guard in front of the building. It seemed like half a day.

"Well," sighed the young Semitic artist, holding out her canvas and looking at the smudged face of George Washington, "I guess everything's over." She glanced up half shyly at Timothy. "I don't know what I should have done if you had not been so awfully nice about taking care of me. I suppose I'd have fainted."

"That would have made it a bit easier for me," returned Timothy, grinning.

The cobra disposed of, Timothy turned his back upon the wistful-eyed young woman and proceeded rapidly, if in a somewhat zigzag course, in the direction of the main stairway. As he walked he buttoned his coat, for he had an unpleasant, squirmy feeling and could have easily believed that slimy things were crawling over him. He longed to come to the end of galleries and to get into the open. Heaven only knew how many more deadly reptiles the museum contained!

As he started down the wide main stairs, he took pains to keep well away from the walls, and more than once looked up at the marble busts in the various niches above. They would furnish excellent points of support for dangling, wriggling creatures.

Approaching the outer doors, he noticed that a somewhat motley collection of people was gathered in the dimly lighted room on his right, and that two guards had taken up stations behind the office rail. Without a glance in their direction he hurried on to the revolving stile and laid a hand on one of its glass panels. It did not respond.

He was about to try pushing it from an opposite direction when somebody touched his arm. Turning, he confronted a guard.

"The museum is closed, sir."

"You mean the front entrance. How do I get to another exit?"

"The museum is closed for the present. Will you kindly step into the room behind the desk?"

"I don't understand. Do you mean we are locked in?"

"For the time being, yes."

Timothy frowned and pulled out his watch. "It is only a quarter to five. I didn't know you closed so early."

"We have to-day, sir. Will you kindly step into the office and wait? Everything will be explained there."

"It's about the snake, then?"

The guard motioned toward the office, and when Timothy made no further remonstrance turned from him and spoke to a couple of women on his left. Another guard had detained the young art student, who still clung to her ill-fated canvas. The girl was arguing with the fellow impatiently, and twice she attempted to twist the stile. It remained fixed, although she made frantic efforts to swing it around. Suddenly she began to cry, at the same time yielding herself to the unsympathetic officer.

"I've an engagement," she whimpered as she passed Timothy. "And they've locked us up in this jungle. I'll make a complaint to the directors. The way this place is conducted is a fright. Snakes running around loose and everything else. It's an important engagement, and I'm late already."

"I'm sorry, but I suppose they have orders from higher up," rumbled Timothy, who saw that the outer doors were closed and bolted and that just inside them was stationed the home-defenser in olive drab.

CHAPTER IV.

THE DIRECTORS' ROOM.

The directors' office is a windowless little room, lighted artificially. It is furnished with a big table supporting a reading lamp, big chairs, and several large pictures. Although a dozen men and women were gathered there when Timothy entered in the wake of the young Jewess, none of the chairs were occupied. The girl established a precedent. She leaned her canvas against the table leg and sank into one of the

armchairs, only to pop out of it again with a petulant exclamation, directed toward Timothy, who was standing stiffly erect in the bare floor space at the left of the table.

"Even the upholstery reminds me of those awful jungle things. I'm too tired to stand, and I'm afraid to sit. It's an imposition keeping us here. A perfect imposition!"

"Inquisition, more likely," uttered a silky voice behind them. Timothy whirled and discovered the snake charmer.

"And they've the nerve to hold you up, too, after your having saved all our lives?" scolded the girl, who had also recognized the snake charmer.

Timothy grinned. He was inclined to take the matter good-naturedly. "I wouldn't mind," he said, "if I had some bicycle clips for my trouser legs." He slipped his hands under his cuffs until they bound his wrists. "I don't like leaving any open spaces that the things might use for cover. My skin creeps. How do you feel?"

He addressed the question to the long-haired young man.

"A trifle shaken naturally," the fellow replied, with a smile that lighted up his sallow face. "One does not play with the most dangerous serpent known to science without misgivings."

"You were splendid, perfectly splendid!" cried the Jewess.

"You were!" agreed Timothy.

"It would have been nothing had I known the snake or if I had approached him before he became frightened and antagonistic. As it was, I confess to having experienced some squeamishness while handling the creature. And the guards were the usual idiots."

While he was speaking, the stocky guard, who had been in the gold gallery during Timothy's visit, entered.

He was accompanied by a scholarly looking man with a close-cropped white mustache and a woman who was apparently some sort of stewardess or matron. Following the three were two men. One was a burly, brute-faced creature with features not unlike Timothy's, although his complexion was blotchy and he lacked the finely modeled chin which redeemed that young man's ugliness. The other was pink-faced and chubby, with diamonds on his hands and in his cuffs and shirt front. The group paused just inside the doorway. The guard's glance swept the gathering and came to rest upon Timothy and his companions. He indicated them with a gesture.

Immediately the burly man, who had the bearing of an official, although dressed in ordinary clothes, detached himself from the other newcomers and approached Timothy's group.

"We'll know in another minute just why we are being held here," murmured Timothy.

"Yes," agreed the artist, straightening his shoulders. "And it looks as if we were going to have the center of the stage."

As he finished, the burly man joined them and addressed himself to Timothy:

"You were in the gold room this afternoon, I understand, when the commotion over the snake was started."

"Yes, sir, I was about to leave when the racket began."

"Were you alone in the room?"

"The guard was there."

"Anybody else?"

Timothy hesitated.

"Anybody else?" repeated the questioner, drawing closer to Timothy.

"Why—m—yes. One other person."

"Point him out!"

"She isn't——"

"She? Was it a woman?"

Timothy recoiled. He could have bitten his tongue out for having spoken.

"M—yes. That is—yes, a woman."

"Which one?"

Timothy glanced around the room, then shook his head.

He had known from the moment he crossed the threshold that the girl in blue was not among the women herded in the office, for he had looked for her when he came in, selfishly hoping that she, too, had been detained. Now he experienced a sense of relief that she had managed to get out of the

museum before the alarm had been sounded and the door closed.

"She's not here," he said.

"It wasn't this young lady, then?" snapped the man, turning upon the young Jewess.

"Oh, no! She was the one who gave the alarm."

"Yes," chimed in the girl, "I saw the horrid thing before any one else did. It was on the floor at my feet, and ran its tongue out at me. I almost dropped. Ugh!"

She shivered, and drew closer to Timothy.

"What's your name?" The question was popped at Timothy so suddenly that it took him a moment or two to adjust his wits and to reply:

"Timothy—Timothy Seward."

"Hard to remember it?" The officer had suddenly changed his bullying tactics. He winked at Timothy, and at the same time smiled on one side of his face.

Timothy laughed. "I've forgotten it once or twice," he acknowledged.

"Only name you ever had?" The man was getting facetious.

"Yes, unfortunately the only one I ever expect to have, being a male," returned Timothy with clumsy humor.

"What's your business?"

"Jewel broker."

The officer opened his mouth with a smacking sound. Then closed it, and, reaching out, touched the arm of the fat man who had entered the room with him and who was questioning the artist.

"Say, boss," he whispered huskily, "this young man's in the jewelry business."

The man addressed turned his head and looked Timothy over from head to foot. His eyes were a babyish blue, and, like spheres of painted porcelain, screened whatever thoughts lay behind them.

"Guess you'd better comb his hair and get him ready for the water," he said enigmatically. "And, Charley, you'd better take a valet along with you. It's likely to be more than a one-man job."

"Just as you say, boss," replied the man who had been questioning Timothy. "Who'll it be?"

"If you'll wait a minute or two I'll be with you. I've found some interestin' readin' in my own precinct."

"All right, boss."

"What's up now?" rumbled Timothy. He was annoyed at something in the manner of the two men and at a disagreeably insinuating tone in their voices.

"Nothing; nothing whatever. But we've concluded that we three'd better have a séance somewhere in private."

Again the fellow winked at Timothy, and this time his eyelid remained closed over his eye for several moments. Timothy felt something blaze up inside of him. Instinctively he bowed his big elbows and clenched his big hands.

"What do you mean?" he growled. "What are you accusing me of?"

"Everything you're thinking of, bo. Nothing more. Don't get excited."

"All right, Charley. I'm with you."

The chubby man with the china eyes now crowded up on the other side of Timothy. "I'm leaving his nibbs over there"—he jerked his thumb toward the artist—"to chin with his lady friend and one of the guards until we finish with your man here." He addressed himself suddenly to Timothy. He had a light, almost womanish, voice. "What's your address?"

"Sixty-four-A Twelfth Street," responded Timothy promptly.

"That your house number?"

"No, my business number. I live at 909 Eighth Street."

"Get over into the corner, out of the crowd," whispered Timothy's new inquisitor, and then, as Timothy complied: "What brought you to the museum this afternoon?"

"The Finch jewels," repeated Timothy patiently. "I'd a commission to make a bid on the Egyptian pendant."

The man rolled his red under lip with the tip of an immaculate forefinger. When he spoke it was to Charley. "We may be barking up the wrong tree entirely," he said softly. "What's your lead?"

Charley hunched his heavy shoulders.

"No especial lead, boss. But I've a pretty good guess. Our party was the last one out of the gold room, except for a disappearing young lady."

"What do you mean?"

"There was a young lady in the gold room when he came out, but she isn't among those present." He raised his eyebrows and smiled knowingly.

"She probably left the building immediately. She passed us while we were watching the snake," explained Timothy. "She went by it with hardly a glance. She seemed to be the only one in the crowd who wasn't frightened."

"And she was in the gold room with you a moment before?" demanded the chubby man.

"Yes."

"Looking at the Finch jewels?"

"She was standing with her back to the case when I saw her. She was not looking at the jewels."

"Was she in the room when you left?"

"Yes."

"Was the guard there?"

"Yes. He was facing the mirror near the door. When the racket began I ran out, passing him. He must have followed immediately."

"Leaving this young woman alone in the gold gallery?"

"I suppose so."

"That's a likely tale," muttered Charley.

"Later, did you hear any—ah—unusual noise?"

Timothy laughed. "Everything was unusual. Everybody was shouting. One woman went through a chair. We fell against cases and upset things generally in the excitement."

"Do you know what the Finch collection is worth?"

"Something like a half million dollars, I presume, to anybody who cares for precious stones. But what has that got to do with my being here?"

"Oh, I was just curious to know if you were hep to its value." He smiled at Timothy.

"You get me now, boss?" demanded Charley.

"I do," replied the plump man, and laid a pink hand on Timothy's sleeve.

"Mr. Murphy and I would like a chance to talk with you for a few minutes in private if—if you don't mind," he said suavely. "I'm Donohue, of the firm of Donohue & Co., private detectives. We look after the business of the museum."

"I see," said Timothy.

But he did not see. He was really bewildered at having been picked out for a private interview with what fiction had taught him were a couple of supermen.

"I see," he repeated, then added with an attempt at unconcern: "I am at your service, Mr. Donohue. Do you suspect me of carrying concealed cobras?"

Mr. Donohue indicated the door with a gesture. "We'll go into that upstairs."

CHAPTER V.

SEARCHED.

A few moments later Timothy and the two detectives entered what seemed to be a private office on the second floor of the building. The man named Murphy led the way into the room, sidling through the doorway and keeping an eye on Timothy, who followed him. Donohue came in last, closing and locking the door behind him.

Once the door closed the attitude of both men changed.

"Out of your clothes!" commanded Donohue, gripping a lapel of Timothy's coat with a suddenness that almost sent the young giant spinning.

The roughness of the attack roused Timothy's fighting blood.

"As I understood it, this was to be neither a hazing nor a lynching," he said, squaring his chin. "It was to be a private interview."

"Keep your hair on, my friend, and get out of your clothes," returned the detective, going through Timothy's coat with the dexterity of a pickpocket. "We've got your number."

Timothy peeled off his silk shirt and tossed it to Murphy. Then suddenly he laughed. The situation was ridiculous.

"I usually carry a couple of little ones in my pocket," he said.

"Little what? Diamonds?" asked Donohue, running his forefinger into the corners of an upper pocket in the garment he held.

"Little cobras," grinned Timothy. "Aren't you looking for cobras?"

"Guess you know what we are looking for. What'd you do with 'em?"

"Do with what?"

Donohue shrugged. "I like your innocent and rustic pose," he sneered, snapping open Timothy's cigarette case. "But I cut my wisdom teeth more than a year ago, young man."

"Help yourselves, gentlemen." Timothy smiled and indicated the open case, then suddenly turned serious. "What's it all about? Do you fellows suspect that I sneaked the snake into——"

"Drop the front! It's of no use to you," interrupted Donohue, taking a cigarette. "The question as to who brought the snake to the museum is neither here nor there—yet." His pink cheeks crowded his eyes as he smiled at Timothy. "It served its purpose well enough. But we are not considering that just now. What we want is to locate——" He paused, then snapped the conclusion of his sentence into Timothy's face. "A few trifles that disappeared during the excitement."

Timothy backed away from the man in surprise.

"You surely don't suspect me of—of thieving!" he exclaimed, looking from one to the other of the detectives. "Good Lord!" He hesitated, then burst out laughing, at the same time flinging out his arms. "Supposing you go over me?"

The men fairly jumped to the attack, with Timothy rendering what assistance he could, too astounded to resent indignities and as anxious as either of them to have the search over.

"What are you expecting to find on me—marble statuary or an oil painting or—or the whole Finch collection?" he inquired presently, his voice muffled by the undershirt which was being pulled off over his head by Detective Murphy.

"I suspect you've a pretty good guess about what we're looking for," piped Donohue, slapping Timothy's coat between his palms to make sure that nothing was concealed in its lining. "Although it isn't likely you've got 'em on your person. More probably cached 'em, expectin' to call around later——" His voice faded out at the conclusion of the sentence. He had pulled a card from Timothy's bill fold, and was frowning down at the thin pasteboard, engraved chastely with the young man's business address.

"This your card?"

"Yes."

"You representin' Irwin, the jeweler?"

"I—I own the business," acknowledged Timothy, and flushed. In his own ears the simple statement sounded boastful.

But its effect was magical. Donohue's pink face turned red.

"You own the business?" he squeaked. "You own Irwin's? What's become of old man Irwin?"

"Mr. Irwin was my great-uncle. He was good enough to turn his business over to me at his death a little while back. I've been running it, or rather looking on and trying to learn the ropes while my uncle's former executive kept things moving, for two weeks now."

"Murphy," wheezed Donohue, "give the gentleman his clothes! You've done it again! Put the kibosh on the wrong man! How'd it happen?"

Murphy dropped the shoes he was examining.

"He says himself that he came here to look at the Finch collection," he grumbled, still eying Timothy suspiciously. "And he had trouble remembering his name."

Timothy laughed again, and in his relief over the changed situation came to Murphy's defense.

"Yes, I'm that way. Likely to lose track of myself when I'm excited."

"What do you mean?" demanded Donohue.

Timothy turned red. He disliked talking about himself, but he recognized the need of explanation.

"That ever since I was laid up over

there—in France—I've been, well, sort of absent-minded at times."

"You've been on the other side?" demanded Donohue, surprised.

"Yes. It—it's where I got this." Timothy indicated his left foot. "And I've had what they call touches of amnesia, from shell shock, off and on, or did have while I was in the hospital. But I've been all right since coming home, or seemed to be until Mr. Murphy startled me—knocked the wits out of me for a minute."

"Timothy Seward," muttered Donohue, studying Timothy's card. "Seems as if I'd seen your name somewhere. And your face, too. Didn't they print your picture in the papers?"

"I—I've heard so. But I never saw them."

"I—I recollect 'em perfectly now. Murphy was too hasty. It was unfortunate."

"He acknowledged bein' in the gold room——" began Murphy, but Timothy interrupted:

"I'd been commissioned to bid on the Egyptian pendant, and Mr. McMahon, our manager, thought I ought to have a look at the stone, since we'd been told to make the sky our limit, or so it seemed to me, seeing that we'd been instructed to let the bids run up to a hundred thousand dollars before we pulled out. It was natural for him to think I should give the stone a once over under the conditions."

"Perfectly, Mr. Seward." Again Donohue glanced at the card he held. "I've known your firm for years." The man's acerbity had mellowed wonderfully. "We—we made a bad blunder. The guard pointed you out as bein' in the vicinity of the room from—from which certain valuables disappeared, and Mr. Mason, one of the directors, thought we'd better question you. I hope you don't bear no hard feelings on account of it."

"None at all," returned Timothy, shrugging his big shoulders as he looked at his possessions scattered over the floor. "But you haven't told me what you suspected me of making way with."

Donohue moved his plump hand back and forth in a silencing gesture. The folds of fat on his cheek bones almost obliterated his eyes as he smiled at Timothy.

"That's something we can't talk about just yet. Things of this kind have to be kept quiet for the sake of the institution. There are always half a dozen or more valuable loan exhibits in the building—paintings, bric-a-brac, tapestries. We have to keep the confidence of the public, especially the big bugs who send in their treasures so's to let poor folks get a look-in on what they do with their million-dollar incomes. Us detectives do everything we can to safeguard the collections, and a thing like this wouldn't happen naturally once in a lifetime. Not once in a thousand years. Isn't that a fact, Charley?"

Murphy, who was still surly and apparently unconvinced, nodded his head.

"Nobody's ever managed to get away with anything from the building in my time. No, sir," he growled, picking up some of Timothy's garments and passing them to him. "Who was the long-haired chap you was talkin' with, Mr. Seward? They tell me he was pretty intimate with the snake."

"I never saw him before to-day." Timothy was fastening his garters. "He seemed to——"

"He's all right," interrupted Donohue. "He's one of the artistic bunch that comes here to study. Some sort of foreigner—Russian or dago—and used to snakes. But I've told 'em to hold him. You might's well take him into one of the retiring rooms and go over him while Mr. Seward gets into his clothes."

"Just as you say, boss," returned Murphy. "Somebody in the building is guilty. The guards punched in the order to close all the doors less'n five minutes after the snake was discovered."

"Five minutes was time enough to do the job and get out of the building," said Donohue.

"And it was more likely ten or fifteen minutes before the doors were closed," vouchsafed Timothy, reaching for the garments Murphy held toward him.

"Everybody's attention was pretty well concentrated, and I didn't notice that any of the guards were pulling out their watches during the snake-charming exhibition."

Donohue picked up Timothy's coat and brushed it with a ringed hand.

"Go down and run over the rest of the bunch, Charley. I'll take care of Mr. Seward."

"All right," growled Murphy. "You're the doctor."

As the door closed upon his back, Donohue again turned to Timothy.

"If you'll be good enough to give me your house address and your telephone number, Mr. Seward, that'll be about all for to-day."

Timothy complied good-naturedly.

"Now be kind enough to describe the young woman who was in the gold room with you when the commotion began." Donohue waited with a jewel-incrusted gold pencil poised above the notebook in which he had jotted down Timothy's full address.

"I don't know that I can do that. I —I didn't pay particular attention to her. She—she seemed to be just a regular sort of a—a girl," stammered Timothy.

"Young?"

"Y-yes."

"How was she dressed?"

"Little black hat and blue suit with a white collar," said Timothy's memory, but torture would not have drawn the description from him.

"In something dark," he said.

"Would you know her if you saw her again?"

Timothy shook his head mendaciously. "I'm afraid not, Mr. Donohue."

"When you're ready we'll go down. I may have to keep you a moment or two longer. I want to talk with the guard, find out if he remembers this young woman."

Timothy felt that he was changing color, and to conceal it bent and flicked some dust from his trouser legs.

"And it will be necessary, of course, to verify what you have told us, make sure that you are Mr. Seward, of Irwin's, as you have claimed. Just a matter of form, you understand."

"I'm at your service, Mr. Donohue," said Timothy, relieved that he was to be tormented no more with questions about the girl. "Mr. McMahon, our manager, would know me, but he will have started home by now. And——"

"I'll send down for the officer who is on your beat. That will be the quickest way."

As Timothy knotted his necktie the detective unlocked the door leading to the corridor.

When Timothy had finished dressing, Detective Donohue turned him over to a waiting guard, who escorted him back to the directors' room. In his absence the crowd had been reduced to half a dozen men and women. Among these was the young Jewess, looking more disheveled than ever. She had evidently been put through a course of sprouts since Timothy had last seen her. She was red-eyed and tearful, and sniffed continually. But she had lost or overcome her aversion to upholstered furniture, and had taken one of the easy-chairs by the table.

The seedy art student was also there, seated a little distance from the girl in a hunched attitude, his elbows on his knees, his face in his palms. His long fingers were thrust through his shock of black hair, lifting it away from his head until this looked more abnormally large than ever.

Timothy crossed the room and sat down beside him.

"Been searched?" he asked abruptly.

The fellow sat up.

"Yes. Have you?" he growled.

"I certainly have, and pretty well rough-housed as well."

"What did they find?"

"Nothing. Not even a jimmy."

The artist thrust his hand into his overcoat pockets and turned them wrong side out. They were empty. He pulled a bunch of keys and a coin purse from his trousers pocket.

"Extent of my possessions," he sneered. "It took them about two minutes to go through me, and I had to

remind the brute who did the job that we were not in the prize ring."

Timothy laughed and stretched his legs. "Same here," he said. Then: "What's become of the rest of the crowd?"

"They've been released."

"Searched first?"

"I suppose so. But they evidently managed to satisfy his nibs, the director, of their harmlessness before they were mauled over as you and I have been. There were half a dozen schoolboys and their master, who, it seems, come here regularly to study architectural forms, and there were some women who'd been having tea in the restaurant. They were gone over in a hurry and dismissed. But poor Miss Cohen, over there"—he pointed to the young Jewess—"was taken off by the matron, searched, and put through the third degree. The girl is indignant, and no wonder."

"Have you any idea of what they suspected us?"

Timothy's companion shrugged and threw out his hands, palms upward.

"They didn't let on to me."

"Nor to me. But I gathered from their questions that some valuables had disappeared during the excitement over the snake."

"No wonder. There was chance enough for one to walk out with anything he could carry," chuckled the artist. "I was never before in such a pandemonium. What was taken?"

"I don't know."

"Why do you suppose they focused their suspicions on us?"

"It was natural. You were rather chummy with the snake, and I couldn't think of my own name for a second or two."

"You couldn't think of your own name!"

Timothy shook his head, laughing. "I've forgotten it before. Right after being discharged from the hospital over in London I found myself in a cellar with a stoker from a ship, taking notes on the construction of eel traps and drinking a vile kind of ale. My companion was calling me Hubley. I wanted to know why, and he produced a card that I had given him when he asked my name. It was the card of a nurse in the American hospital over there and was engraved, 'Frances Hubley, R. N.' He thought the letters R. N. stood for some sort of an honorary degree. In a way they did—registered nurse."

"What was the matter with you?" demanded the snake charmer when Timothy had finished. "Were you hypnotized?"

"Oh, no. It was the effect of shell shock."

"Then you've been over on the other side?"

"Yes. Have you?"

Timothy's companion shook his head, frowning, as if the conversation had become suddenly distasteful. Timothy changed the subject.

"What became of the cobra?"

"I don't know. They took him away from me after I had put him to sleep. He's probably done away with by now." The fellow sighed. "It's too bad. He was harmless—or would have been if they had not frightened him."

"The thing had me going."

"Why? He was helpless. There were no projections for him to grip. A snake can make no headway over a smooth surface."

Timothy remarked that the fellow spoke of the snake affectionately, as one would speak of a pet dog or even a small child, and invariably he used the masculine pronoun in referring to the noisome thing.

"If it was helpless, as you say, how did it get to the Herron gallery? And where do you figure it came from?"

The man drew his beetling brows together. "Those questions I am unable to answer," he said. "My surmise is that he was brought here in some of the recently acquired collections of Egyptian mummies. The Egyptian rooms are very near to the Herron gallery. How he got as far as he did I cannot say, unless the contents of the packing cases gave him means of locomotion. Later he was probably frightened, and concealed himself be-

hind one of the cabinets or in some receptacle, or he may have lodged himself behind one of the big canvases. As you saw, he is capable of elevating his anterior part, and, by stretching and clinging to various projections, he would be able to move with ease and rapidity from canvas to canvas. I should say that was what happened, and that, in trying to reach from one to another, he slipped and fell at the feet of Miss Cohen, who made the commotion. Where were you when you first saw him?"

"Coming from the gold room, where the Finch collection is being displayed."

"What's the Finch collection?"

"Some jewels that are to be disposed of at auction next Monday. They are being shown here for a few days previous to the sale. I understand that there's been a good deal about them in the newspapers for a week past."

"I pay no attention to news of that kind. I have neither the time nor the inclination to read of jewels while the world rolls toward annihilation and—hell."

Timothy sat back and crossed his legs. As far as he was concerned the conversation was ended. He had no desire to go into argument with a chap who was so evidently a rabid pacifist.

But his companion seemed bent on continuing their talk.

"Well, what of the jewels? Are they very valuable?"

"Enormously. Among them is a diamond pendant valued at more than a hundred thousand dollars and a string of pearls said to be the most perfectly matched in the world. I believe it once belonged to the former Czarina of Russia. I came here to look at the pendant."

Again the fellow's eyes blazed into Timothy's. "Are you interested in—in jewelry?" There was a sneer in his tone.

Timothy stumbled into explanation. "I have to be. I'm in the business."

"You are in the business?"

"Yes, I sort of happen to be, although I hardly know one stone from another. And I'm ashamed to say that I can't feel much interest in them. I may later."

"You're new in the game, then?"

Timothy nodded. "But my firm is an old one—Irwin's."

The man shook his head. And then: "You don't look like a jeweler's clerk."

Timothy flushed. "I—I'm not. That would imply that dealing in jewels was my choice in occupations."

"Isn't it?"

"No; I own the business."

"You own it?"

"Yes. Inherited it from an uncle."

"And naturally you came here to see the Finch jewels. One loses track of the fact that even jewelers must study the masterpieces of their line." There was a sneer in his voice that plunged Timothy into explanation.

"Our firm had been commissioned to bid on the Egyptian pendant; that's what brought me here to-day. I'm afraid I'm not a serious student of jewels."

The artist beat a tattoo on the arms of his chair. "So," he said, as if speaking to himself, while his eyes fixed themselves upon a couple of women who had just entered under the wing of the matron, "the plutocrats still buy their baubles. How much were you expecting to pay for this lump of stone, this—this Egyptian pendant?"

"We'd been told to bid a hundred thousand dollars."

"A—a hundred thousand dollars!" gasped his companion, facing around sharply. "Why, that's—that's stupendous!"

"So it seemed to me at first."

"Where are you going to get the money?"

"Half of it has already been deposited to our account."

The statement was surprised out of Timothy. He felt like an idiot the moment after he had made it. He glanced at his companion, expecting that the fellow would lash him with more of his sarcasm. Instead the man shrugged his shoulders. His humor seemed to have suddenly changed. His face lighted up, and he smiled at Timothy.

"I didn't know there was that amount

of money lying loose in the whole world," he said genially. "And here I discover that I'm talking like a brother to a chap who has such a sum at his command—a hundred thousand dollars."

Timothy liked the man in this lighter mood. But the mood went, suddenly as it had come.

"Ahi! Ahi! What a world!" he muttered, shaking his big head. "A peacock without a heart commissions you to pay a hundred thousand dollars for a trinket—a piece of stone—when half the world is starving."

"I know; it struck me that way at first," placated Timothy. "Yet it is to supply food that the jewels are being disposed of. The proceeds from their sale will be used to buy farm lands and tractors for plowing. So, you see, these particular baubles stand for food——"

"Piff!"

Timothy's companion laid a forefinger across his lower lip and spat over it in pantomime. "Your jewels will be turned into food! And for what purpose?" He leaned toward Timothy. "That the slaughter and misery over there may be continued! That this murdering may go on so much longer!"

"You are a pacifist!" Timothy drew back. He was getting disgusted again.

"Pacifist, if you like the word. Yes. At all events I want peace—that and the triumph of civilization so that the world may get back into the harness and achieve."

"That's what we all want. That's why America is in the war—for the triumph of civilization."

"For your kind of civilization, which—isn't my kind."

The fellow stopped speaking suddenly, for Detective Murphy had come up and touched Timothy's shoulder.

"You may go, Mr. Seward," he said. "The man from your precinct has just come in. He says you're all right." He smiled familiarly.

"Thank you," said Timothy, getting to his feet.

His companion also rose. "Would you be kind enough to give me your address?" he asked, and again his smile was disarming. "I should like to continue our argument at some later date."

Timothy hesitated, then pulled out his bill book. He was from the West; also he was by nature easy-going and affable. He could see no reason for refusing the young man's request.

"After our mutual experience as suspected criminals we certainly ought to be friends," he remarked with an amused glance at Murphy as he picked out a card. "And we may find topics for discussion that will prove more agreeable than war. Good afternoon."

Until Timothy disappeared the long-haired young man remained standing, looking from the card he held between his thumb and forefinger to the retreating figure and back again.

CHAPTER VI.

INTRODUCING TIMOTHY'S HOUSE MAN.

It was Saturday morning. The old Willard clock in the hall was striking eight when Timothy opened his eyes, blinked at the steel engraving of his Uncle Irwin, which stared at him benignly from its narrow margin of black frame, then yawned sleepily with a stretch that threatened to disrupt the footboard from the rest of the four-poster, and closed his eyes again.

This business of getting up to a day in which there was nothing more exciting to look forward to than McMahon and some scattering orders for gems had become difficult. But on this particular morning his eyes did not remain closed. For suddenly Timothy remembered. Things might happen even in New York. They had happened.

"Ugh!" shuddered Timothy, and grinned at his uncle's likeness. "It was certainly some little old snake!" The grin faded into a retrospective smile. "And she was pretty—very pretty. But this old numskull wouldn't have a chance in a hundred with her—not one in a thousand."

Timothy stretched again until the footboard made raucous remonstrance. Then he threw off his bed covering, his

feet swept round in a parabola, and he was on the floor.

In the living room, Montgomery, the house man who had been handed down to Timothy by his Uncle Irwin, together with the jewelry business and the apartment with its contents, was moving about, muttering to himself.

This habit of talking to himself the boy had acquired during the past two or three days. Timothy listened for a moment, then smiled at the young man with the tousled mop of hair which his mirror gave back to him.

"His liver's cutting up," he murmured as he opened the bathroom door and turned on the shower.

While he shaved there was silence in the adjoining room, but a little later he heard Montgomery again, although this time his voice came from the end of the hall and was less monotonous than before.

"He's certainly bilious," muttered Timothy as he bent to tie his shoe laces, adding, as he pulled down his trouser legs: "Or in love." A girl's face had flashed into his mind for the second time that morning. "I wonder what became of her." He knotted his necktie and got into his coat. Then softly to his reflected image: "I'd better forget it. There's no chance of my ever seeing her again, and it's my own fault. I took advantage like a street-corner loafer."

The hopelessness of his sigh as he opened the door was mitigated by the expression in his eyes.

At one end of the living room a gate-legged table was laid for breakfast. But Montgomery was nowhere in sight. Timothy laid a hand on the back of his chair, but before he had pulled it out a woman's voice arrested him. It came from the hall.

"Lord-a-massey, he cain't be more reservin' than Mistah Irwin was before him, and he done helped me right smart when Parallee was down with bronchial affection of the lungs."

Timothy recognized the voice. It was that of his laundress.

He turned from the table and limped into the hall.

"Good morning, Edmonia!" he called, looking beyond Montgomery at the mountainous black woman who blocked the doorway. "Somebody ailing at your house?"

His hand was already in his pocket.

"Good mornin', Mr. Seward," returned Edmonia, bobbing a curtsy. "It's nothin' serious enuff to delay you-all from your breakfast that Mr. Williams says is done set out for you. Just Parallee ailin' again with bronchial affection of the lungs. I'll wait until you-all are finished, and I hope you'll take your leisure."

But Timothy had already produced his bill book. "Might as well get through with it right away." And then, looking at the piled-up basket that stood in the hall beside Montgomery: "What's the tariff?"

"Two dollars and fifty cents for this week, thank you kindly, and two and a quartah for the last time," replied Edmonia, her eyes on the flap from which Timothy was extracting some greenbacks.

"That's four eighty," said Timothy, pulling out two bills and holding them toward Edmonia. "Keep the change." He started to turn away, but the woman stopped him.

"You done gib me seven dollars, thank you kindly," she chuckled, tucking the bills into a black bag and bobbing a curtsy that agitated her huge body. "I've been missin' Mr. Irwin somethin' terrible, but he's got right smart of a fine young man occupyin' his position, he has."

"I'm rattling around in it," said Timothy. "I hope Parallee will be as well and husky as ever in another day or two. Good morning."

He went back to the living room, sat down at the breakfast table, unfolded his morning paper, and ran his eye over the headlines. Then, with an exclamation of amusement, he doubled back the sheet and began to read.

For an insignificant block head at the foot of one of the columns on an inner page had attracted his attenion. It referred to the appearance of the snake in the public museum. Beneath the

headlines, in a single paragraph, there was a facetious account of the commotion caused by a garter snake which had been smuggled into the building by some mischievous small boy.

"A garter snake!" murmured Timothy, thrusting a spoon into his grapefruit. "I'll eat my head if that was a garter snake!"

"Did you speak to me, sir? Did you speak to me?" asked Montgomery, who had come in with the coffee tray.

"I didn't," replied Timothy. "I was talking to myself, as seems to be the custom around here." He smiled into the black face bent above him. But Montgomery's features did not relax. "That will do for the present. I'll pour my own coffee."

Montgomery snapped on the switch that heated the electric toaster, then left the room. Through the door leading to the pantry Timothy heard the thud of his rubber heels beating a padded accompaniment to the mumble of his voice.

Timothy went back to his newspaper and read the account of the commotion at the museum. There was no mention in it of any missing articles.

"They must have recovered their valuables," he mused, turning the paper back to the first page, where his attention was presently riveted upon a sensational report of the destruction of a chemical factory in New Jersey.

"Confounded Germans again," said Timothy, and moved the foot patched up with silver restlessly back and forth under the table.

Meantime Fate dexterously spun her web, trapping in it one from here and another from there, until the cobra in the museum, the black man in the kitchen, the girl whose eyes seemed set on daisy fields, the mountainous black woman, and the artist with the glistening hair were all drawn from their devious ways and headed toward its center, where sat simple Timothy, unwittingly ensnared, reading of the destruction of a chemical factory and forgetting for the time being all about the pasha's diamond and the string of pearls upon which he had been commissioned to bid on Monday morning.

He was still engrossed in the story when Montgomery came in with the eggs.

"Shall I open them?"

Timothy looked up. Until this morning his house man had never omitted the respectful "sir." Timothy missed it chiefly because Montgomery had accustomed him to it. Montgomery's eyes were fixed upon the paper Timothy held. His thick lips were slightly parted. He was breathing quickly.

"Yes, open them, please," said Timothy amiably, and, curious to discover whether the omission of the "sir" had been intentional or an oversight, asked if there were any anchovies in the pantry.

Montgomery started. "What—what did you say, s—Mr. Seward?"

Timothy repeated the question, while Montgomery's eyes shifted back to the newspaper.

"No, sir." Then, as if to correct himself: "No, Mr. Seward. We-all used up the last of them yesterday."

It was evident that Montgomery and "sir" had parted company.

"You're acquiring Northern manners fast, Montgomery," commented Timothy, pouring a cup of coffee.

The boy turned away and started toward the pantry. Timothy's eyes, following him, discovered an inch of gay lavender silk showing between his turned-up trouser legs and his highly polished, tan-colored shoes. Timothy's lips quirked, and he picked up his paper. Save for his white jacket, Montgomery was dressed like an overfastidious man about town.

Timothy had finished breakfast and left the table before Montgomery returned to the living room. Usually he was on hand to draw out his master's chair. Timothy felt that this part of the customary breakfast routine was being intentionally omitted. But he was content to have it so. He could do with much less service than Montgomery usually rendered. Like most big men, he liked being left alone.

But, five minutes later, when he was

leaving the apartment, he found his house man beside the door leading to the public corridor with a raincoat folded over his arm. His manner was at once surly and obsequious.

"Better wear your mackintosh, Mr. Seward," he said. "It's misting."

"All right," agreed Timothy, and thrust his arms into the sleeves of the coat.

"Will you have your umbrella, sir—Mr. Seward? It looks luguberous."

Timothy shook his head. "I'll be all right with the raincoat," he replied, then added with mock severity: "Don't spend too much time studying the Declaration of Independence."

As Timothy crossed the street diagonally he glanced up and back toward the windows of his apartment. Between the curtains was the craned-forward head of the black man. His thick upper lip lifted as Timothy's glance caught him. There was a flash of white teeth, then the curtains fell together and the face was gone.

Timothy continued on his way, but the eagerness with which he had awakened was dulled. There had been something both sinister and triumphant in his house man's expression. Timothy pondered over it as he crossed Washington Square and turned north at Fifth Avenue.

CHAPTER VII.

TIMOTHY MAKES A FRIEND.

The firm of Irwin does not house itself in an ordinary, commercial-looking building. It occupies an old-fashioned residence with a red brick front. The vestibule is painted white, and the door is colonial, with a fanlight above it. There is a brass knocker, and a polished plate on the jamb is engraved with the firm name, and under this, in smaller lettering: "Founded in 1859."

On the first floor of the house there are three high-ceiled rooms, all of which open into the entrance corridor. The largest of these is in the rear and is used as a reception room. At the end of it, in front of windows which look into an old-fashioned garden, is a Venetian table which Mr. McMahon, secretary and manager of the business, uses as a desk, sitting with his back to the windows in a carved chair upholstered in faded tapestry.

This room, originally the dining room of the old house, connects with what was once a butler's pantry, but which is now equipped with stools, desks, and an ordinary safe, and serves as an office for Miss Marshall, the bookkeeper, and a small lad in buttons who responds to the infrequent clanging of the knocker, runs errands, and answers a telephone installed at the head of the basement stairs.

The head of Irwin's has always used the drawing-room of the house for a private office, and Timothy followed the established precedent. In general this room is a duplicate of the rear one, although it looks out upon an old-fashioned street instead of into a garden, and has but two doors leading from it, one into the reception room and one into the corridor.

Years ago the upper rooms in the building were sealed on the Irwin side and leased to the owner of the neighboring house, who broke doorways into them and fitted them up as studios. In the basement are the vaults for jewels and other valuables.

It was a trifle after half past nine o'clock on Saturday when Timothy reached Irwin's. He hung his coat and hat in the hall closet, and, assuming an ease of manner which he was far from feeling, opened the door that led into the reception room.

Mr. McMahon was already at his desk. He half rose as Timothy entered.

"Good morning, Mr. Seward," he said precisely.

"Good morning, sir," returned Timothy; then, with an effort, brought his big voice into subjection: "Anything new?"

"There is a gentleman waiting to see you." Mr. McMahon indicated the end of the room by bowing in that direction. "Mr.—ah—I believe you did not send in your name."

Timothy twisted his head just as a young man rose from a high-backed Gothic chair.

"I did not," said the young man, and clicked his heels together, at the same time bowing from his hips.

His manner was as stiff and formal as Mr. McMahon's, but it effected Timothy differently. It was spontaneously military. Before he realized what he was doing, Timothy threw up his right hand in salute.

"This is Mr. Seward, sir," said Mr. McMahon. "The head of our firm."

The young man acknowledged the introduction and Timothy's salute with another stiff bow which, in spite of its formality, put Timothy at ease.

"If you can spare me a few moments of your valuable time, Mr. Seward, I should be gratified." Each word, as he pronounced it, was marked with abrupt, sharp emphasis. But each was given its full value. "I am here to see you about a small diamond which I am anxious to match." He paused and glanced at Mr. McMahon. "Although this gentleman offered to do what he could for me, I decided to wait until you came in."

"Ha, ha!" rumbled Timothy. "You would have done better to have let Mr. McMahon take care of you. I'm a greenhorn in the business."

"I shall be able to decide that later on."

Again the young man inclined the upper part of his body, then straightened and stood at attention, apparently waiting for Timothy either to dismiss Mr. McMahon or to lead the way to some other room.

"My private office is over there," said Timothy, and turned to Mr. McMahon, who stood beside his desk, an attenuated exclamation point in a frock coat. "You will excuse us, I hope, sir."

"Certainly." Mr. McMahon nodded jerkily. "Our clients' wishes are mine."

Timothy pulled out his handkerchief and wiped his forehead. It was an agreeably cool morning, but Mr. McMahon always made him feel warm.

The young man brought his heels together and bowed to Mr. McMahon.

"You are very kind, sir," he said. His mouth had a humorous curl at the corners, and there was something gay and very pleasing about his abrupt manner of speech. Timothy felt drawn to him. If it had not been for Mr. McMahon's chilling presence he might have linked arms with him instead of conducting him sedately to the room which he used as his personal office, but which looked more like the luxurious study of a private house than a place for the carrying on of trade.

Timothy thrust his key into the lock, and stood aside for the young man, who clicked his heels and bowed again before he passed. But in his blue eyes merriment danced, and even the close-cropped little mustache on his upper lip seemed to turn up in a sort of gay sympathy with youth and Timothy and things in general. His ceremoniousness was jaunty, like a top hat cocked over one eye.

"My name is Durga Gur," he said as he sank into a chair beside Timothy's desk. "I did not give it to the gentleman in the adjoining room for fear he would send me on my way. It is a cognomen for which I must be constantly apologizing."

He took a card from a slip in a red morocco memorandum book and laid it on Timothy's desk.

"I come to you in the hope of securing a small diamond to match one that belonged to my mother and which I desire to have reset."

"I hope we have what you want," said Timothy, without raising his eyes from the card, for fear his visitor would read the surprise in them. For, since Timothy had been at Irwin's, no new customer had come to the house, and Durga Gur was certainly not an old one. Timothy had gone over the address book in which Mr. McMahon listed their patrons. He would have remembered this name had it been there.

"Thank you," said Durga Gur. "I felt that I could rely upon you."

"Who—who sent you to us?" stammered Timothy, then flushed.

Durga Gur raised his brows.

"Do you mean that you do not do business with people who are not properly introduced?" he asked.

"No. No, indeed," replied Timothy, anxious to reassure the young man. "But our firm is old-fashioned and behind the times. I am always surprised when a stranger calls. Or, to be more exact, it surprises me that a stranger has called, for you are the first since I came. I—I naturally wondered how you had found us out, as we do not advertise nor have show windows."

Durga Gur smiled engagingly. "That's the reason I hunted you up. Somebody told me that you were as exclusive as the 'Almanach de Gotha.'"

"Then an old customer did send you. That's the only way we ever get any new ones, according to Mr. McMahon."

Durga Gur's eyes twinkled. "I can't say that it was an old customer. But it was somebody who knew you and who assured me that I could get just what I was looking for here." He thrust his thumb and forefinger into his waistcoat pocket and drew out a flat tissue-paper packet. This he unfolded leisurely while Timothy, watching him, noticed that his hands were pink and fine-skinned, his fingers rather stubby, with nails highly polished and carefully pointed. Suddenly he looked up, and, meeting Timothy's eyes, smiled amusedly.

"You are trying to place me, I see, Mr. Seward. You are wondering what a white-headed, pink-and-white Anglo-Saxon is doing with a Hindu name."

"I—I was thinking something of that kind," returned Timothy. "Although I wasn't sure that the name was Hindu."

"It is. It descended to me from a paternal grandparent. It's all I've taken from him, and there are times when I am tempted to throw that out of the window and begin over again with a patronymic for which I should have neither to apologize nor explain." He vouchsafed Timothy a smile so merry that it contradicted his pretended annoyance. Then he picked from the paper, which he had spread out upon the desk, a slender platinum chain from which a medium-sized diamond was suspended. "This," he said, swinging the chain toward Timothy, "is the stone which I am anxious, very anxious, to match. As I told you, it is an heirloom. I wish to have it reset in a ring with a pigeon-blood ruby between it and the stone which mates with it." A flood of color swept to his temples.

"An engagement ring," said Timothy to himself.

"You will notice that my little diamond is very white and—peculiarly cold and chaste."

Durga Gur rose, leaned forward, and dropped the stone into Timothy's palm.

Timothy turned it over gingerly with his forefinger, then looked up ruefully at Durga Gur.

"I know less than nothing about jewels," he acknowledged. "We had better have Mr. McMahon in. He will know at once if we have in our safes any stones that approximate yours in size and color."

Durga Gur objected with an emphatic shake of the head.

"A most estimable man, I am sure. But he affects me strangely. He inclines me to kick up my heels and hurrah just to convince myself that I am still alive and young. I'll pocket my diamond and quit rather than allow your managerial mummy to come into our conference."

Timothy chuckled. "We'll keep him out. He affects me badly, too. But I do not feel like kicking up my heels. Instead, I stumble over my own feet and whisper."

"Then we are friends."

Durga Gur shot out a hand, which Timothy gripped with heartiness.

"And now to business," said Durga Gur when they had finished pumping arms up and down. "We'll exchange our life stories later on."

He picked up the jewel, and stood with his back to the window, facing Timothy. From his uplifted hand the suspended stone swung back and forth but a few inches away and just above Timothy's eyes.

"Watch it," said Durga Gur, twisting the chain and releasing it so that the stone whirled round in the sunshine. "It is white, but the lights which it throws off are blue and crimson." The stone ceased whirling, and again swung

slowly backward and forward. "Blue and white, with now and then a flash of blood from the heart of it," intoned Durga Gur rhythmically, as if influenced by the movement of the jewel. "Coldly chaste and yet ablaze."

He stopped speaking, and stood erect and motionless save for his thumb and forefinger, which moved just enough to keep the diamond swinging to and fro. So fine and delicate was the chain from which it hung that it seemed suspended in space like a tiny soap bubble.

Timothy watched the jewel, fascinated. Crimson flashes seemed to dart from the depths of it, much as the tongue of the cobra had darted from its throat. They held his attention; they were illusive. He glimpsed them and lost them. The jewel was alive, a receptacle of sparkling color, and yet it seemed a fairy thing with neither weight nor substance.

Durga Gur, always smiling, held the stone higher. It was above Timothy's head now, and, in order to watch it, he had to lean back in his chair with his face raised. His head rested on the back of his neck, his eyeballs were rolled up so that the whites showed beneath the irises.

"It darts fire—blue and red and violet," murmured Durga Gur, and his voice was no longer staccato, but low and guttural. It sounded far away, although the jewel was there, just above Timothy's eyes. It tired them to watch it.

Durga Gur seemed presently to realize that Timothy was sitting in a most uncomfortable position, for suddenly he touched his shoulder, laughed, and lowered the diamond.

"The little stone charms you, as it does me," he said, and dropped it upon the spread-out square of tissue paper from which he had taken it. "I will leave it here with you, and you may take your own time in finding a mate for it. When that is accomplished let me know and we will, together, choose a ruby that will unite the two white jewels with a drop of crimson blood."

His eyes were whimsical. Between his smiling lips his teeth looked like plump kernels of corn, close, regular, creamy in their coloring.

"I will give you a receipt for it," said Timothy, pulling out the drawer in his desk.

"As you will, but the jewel is of small intrinsic value. I'll come in again in a few days." He paused, studied Timothy through narrowed lids; then, as if yielding to a sudden, amusing impulse, laughed and held out his hand. "I like you, and I'm going to see you again. Often. When you find the mating jewel, write or telephone. My rooms are in the Havelock Studio Building. That is where I have both my home and my workshop."

"Are you an artist?" exclaimed Timothy, dropping Gur's hand.

"I am supposed to be. Does it surprise you?"

Timothy's gaze swept from his companion's head, with its thick crop of short, fair hair, to his thrown-back shoulders and trim, small waist. "Frankly, yes," he said, smiling. "Possibly because I've lived mostly in the West, where artists are as rare as—as dodo birds. The few we have look like the pictures of Lord Byron."

Durga Gur's mouth took on the shape of an upturned crescent while Timothy talked.

"I know. Most folks expect us poor devils to look different from the rest of mankind and to dress ridiculously. But there's no reason why we should be more bizarre in our appearance than other business men."

Durga Gur clicked his heels.

"And you've never been in the service or—or athletics?"

"Well, if you must have it," laughed Gur, "I was trained for the army, and, try as I will, I can't rid myself of army mannerisms."

"West Pointer?" demanded Timothy.

Gur shook his head. "England, and afterward in India. And I used to do some running. But I fixed myself—overdid. I have what the doctors call an athletic heart, and I couldn't get a job even as a cook's helper in the service to-day. In other words, I'm done for." His laugh hurt something on the

inside of Timothy. "I spend my time making images out of clay. I have almost forgotten that I ever had any other ambition." He tossed his chin defiantly, but Timothy was not looking at him. He was gazing down at his own crippled foot.

"I buy and sell jewels." Timothy looked up with a twisted smile. "And you are a sculptor."

"Misfits, both of us. But enough of complaining. I must be on my way. It is almost eleven o'clock."

"Impossible!" Timothy glanced at his desk clock. "Twenty minutes to eleven! Where has the morning gone? It doesn't seem fifteen minutes ago that we came into this room."

"It doesn't," agreed Gur. "The five minutes that I spent with your frost-nipped general manager in that outer room were much longer in passing than the hour and a quarter we have had together." Again he held out his hand. "Drop in and see me when you have time."

"Thank you. I will."

Timothy held open the door leading to the corridor, and Durga Gur passed through it and out into the street.

After he had gone, Timothy picked up the diamond he had left and took it out to Mr. McMahon, who poked it about with an inquisitive forefinger; then, with a dropper and a bit of colorless liquid, applied the acid test to it.

"The stone's a good-enough one, worth about three hundred dollars," he said with a scornful curl of the lip. "But there will be no difficulty whatever in matching it. Diamonds of this size and color are about as common as field daisies. I supposed your—friend—had a jewel of great price, since he was determined to show it to nobody but the head of the house."

He rolled the chain between his thumb and forefinger. The stone swung round and round. Timothy gripped a chair back. His head was spinning. Was he about to have another attack of amnesia, like those he had in London? He had supposed himself cured.

"That thing makes me dizzy," he said.

Mr. McMahon shot him a quick glance, then dropped the stone upon his desk, and sat for a moment tapping its top with one after another of the fingers of his right hand. When he spoke again his voice was as smooth as oil.

"Your uncle made it a rule never to take anything in the form of a—ah—stimulant during business hours," he said. Two round blue spots had appeared on his cheek bones.

"My Uncle Irwin was right in that, as in most things," returned Timothy shortly. He was still a bit out of balance.

"New York is full of pitfalls for young men, especially for those from the—ah—as one might say, the outlands." The spots on Mr. McMahon's cheek bones changed to purple.

"So I understand, sir," acquiesced Timothy, still clutching the chair back. "Shall I leave the stone with you, or have it put into the safe?"

"I will take care of it. In fact, I may try to match it to-day. Although our commission on so trifling an order will be small, we must be grateful for anything; especially just now. We shall be a little straitened until after the auction of the Finch jewels. After that, if we manage to secure the Egyptian pendant for Mrs. Fairchild, we shall be in comfortable circumstances again. And I shall do my best to get it, Mr. Seward."

"I know that. And I shall be glad, for your sake, sir, when we are on Easy Street again." Timothy ventured to loosen his grip on the chair back. "Thank you for offering to take charge of this matter of finding a stone to match the one Mr. Gur left." He nodded stiffly. The consciousness of Mr. McMahon's sharp old eyes made him more than ever ungainly as he walked back to his own office.

Mr. McMahon followed him presently, tapping lightly upon the door panel and announcing himself in a rather breathless voice.

"I merely wanted to explain that I

meant no offense a moment ago. It seemed my duty to warn you, as an older man who has gone through the—ah—fires of temptation——"

Timothy passed his hand across his lips as if to rub out their suddenly amused expression.

"Don't let what you said trouble you for a moment, sir. It's more agreeable than otherwise to have somebody take an interest in my doings. And I'm not surprised that you made a mistake. I've been heady and out of balance this morning, but not because of anything wet I've been taking." Timothy beamed genially down at his flustered manager.

But Mr. McMahon was bent on making further amends.

"Young blood must have its outlet. I should be the last one to forget that. It's for us older heads to guide it in the right direction." He laid a square white envelope on Timothy's desk. "I shall not be using the card in that. It's for the regatta at Larchmont. The races this year have amounted to little, and there'll be nothing much worth seeing this afternoon, as the more serious events were run off this morning. But the ladies will be there, and it will be a change for you after New York. Your uncle always made it a point to attend on ladies' days during the summer, even when there were no events." A smile wrinkled his parchmentlike skin. "It is upon the ladies that a business of this kind leans for support. Irwin's has always drawn the right people through personal contact with them. I sometimes ran out to Larchmont with your uncle. The old commodore never neglected to send me a card during race week. His successor seems inclined to be equally gracious. I hope you will see fit to take advantage of your opportunity. The country is beautiful and it is a short trip either by train or motor. Besides, everybody will be there."

Timothy pulled its contents from the envelope. The prospect of visiting a country club on ladies' day made scant appeal to him, but he was too good-natured to say so.

"Thank you," he said. "When do the trains go to Larchmont?"

Mr. McMahon glanced at the desk clock. "By having an early lunch you will be able to make the one-six. It would give me pleasure if you would be my guest at the Brevoort."

"I'll be delighted," said Timothy untruthfully.

It was a quarter after two when the station taxicab, bearing Timothy, swept into the drive of the Larchmont Yacht Club.. The serious racing had wound up at noon, but the bay was still cluttered with all sorts of craft, trimmed with code flags and pennants, and throngs of people were crowded on the pier and along the shore, the women done up in their best, their frocks and sunshades impudently gay.

Timothy lumbered out of his cab, and, with a tightening at his throat, turned his face toward the water. The throngs of chattering people made him feel alien. He was still in the midst of New York—a New York at the top notch of artificiality—merely transferred to the country in a concentrated dose. Nature seemed as far away from him as ever as he leaned his arms on the pier railing and looked out over the bay toward the breakwater.

It was a pretty bit of the Sound which stretched away from him; so pretty, indeed, that it seemed unnatural. Even the sky and the rocks, gray-white in the bright sunshine, had the too-well-groomed look of the New York bred woman.

Timothy sighed heavily. Although he did not know it, he was homesick for his own rugged West.

Over near the breakwater, some canoes swung up and down. He fixed his gaze upon them, but unseeingly. Presently, however, one caught his attention. It was a graceful green thing, and it was coming toward him. There was a girl in its bow using a double-ended paddle lazily, and just enough to keep the craft headed right. This required considerable skill, as there was a continual wash from the many larger boats which were being brought into their moorings.

A man wearing a wide-brimmed Pan-

ama lounged in the bottom of the canoe. There was something familiar in the set of his shoulders and in the jerky motion of his arm as, now and again, he threw it out to let his hand drag in the water like an auxiliary rudder. Suddenly he sat up, seized the crown of his hat, and uncovered his head.

With a thrill of pleasure Timothy recognized him. It was Durga Gur. At the moment he made this discovery the girl dipped her paddle into the water seriously, and the canoe shot away from the breakwater and toward the pier, the girl propelling and guiding it with amazing deftness. On it came swiftly and with the straightness of an arrow.

"A pretty bit of work," said Timothy under his breath; then smiled and hunched his shoulders. "I don't blame Gur for being particular about the stone, if the ring's intended for her."

With the thought he dropped to one knee, and, as the canoe shot alongside the pier, reached down and caught the painter; then almost dropped it into the water. For the girl had looked up with a smile as she drew in her paddle, and Timothy had recognized her. She was the girl who had spoken to him in the public museum on the previous afternoon.

TO BE CONTINUED.

AN OUTRAGE TO FRANCE

BUNCOMBE COUNTY, North Carolina, is famous for its mountains, for its salubrious climate, and for being inhabited by people who are willing to try anything once. This readiness to take a chance embraces every line of endeavor, even foreign pronunciation.

Stuart C. Leake, formerly a railroad man and now a captain in the United States army, was sent on official business not long ago to the lovely heights of Buncombe, and, in the progress of his work, he was driven over the mountains by one of the leading citizens of the county.

The conversation turned, of course, to the subject of war, and the captain and the leading citizen—the latter, by the way, exhibiting his classical education and unlimited knowledge—discussed the various battlefields of Europe. At last the talk drew near to Ypres. The leading citizen hesitated for the fraction of a second. It is probable that he never would have tried to pronounce the name but for his memory that a man from Buncombe will and must try anything once. He conquered the hesitation and took the plunge.

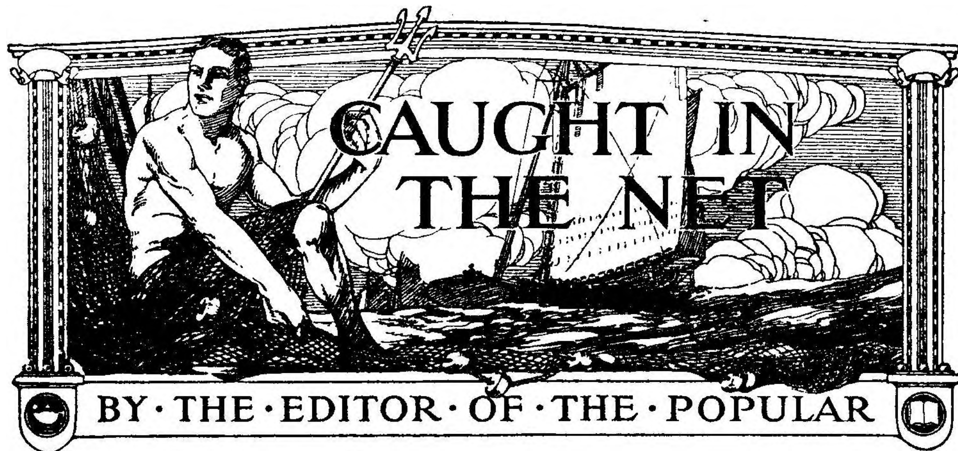
"I tell you," he said, properly admiring, "the fighting must have been fierce around Yaps."

ANOTHER U-BOAT STORY BY ROY NORTON

"ON AUGUST THE FIFTH"

In the next POPULAR, ON SALE JULY 20th

A complete novel of the further extraordinary adventures of the *Sea-Fox*, super-submarine, and her daring crew



UNCLE SAM TURNS JUNKMAN

UNCLE SAM, apparently taking his cue from those picturesque patriarchs who establish family fortunes through a droning trade in rags and bottles, has gone into the junk business himself. His headquarters, so to speak, are in the army cantonments, where he deals in the broken and worn equipment which in the old, wasteful days was thrown away as useless. An efficient reclamation department in each camp now salvages everything from a smashed-up automobile to a broken spur. Huge repair shops, manned by experienced soldier workers, return much of this equipment into service again, practically as good as new. When, however, articles are too badly broken or worn to be reconstructed, they are taken apart and the pieces used for repairs, or made over into something else. Thus, when tents and canvas cots can no longer be patched, they are cut up and made into clothing bags.

Soldiering is hard on clothes and shoes. But tattered uniforms are rebuilt, cleaned, pressed, and put on duty again many times before their final retreat to the ragbag. And army cobblers faithfully resole the shoes. In Camp Kearny, San Diego, for instance, one hundred pairs of shoes are repaired daily. These repairs prolong the life of the shoe one-fourth—thereby saving Uncle Sam seventy-five dollars per day on his boys' shoe bills in this cantonment alone. When boots and shoes are entirely past the mending stage, they are ripped up, the large pieces used for patches, and the scraps utilized in the manufacture of composite belting.

The taxpayer is being saved millions of dollars through Uncle Sam's junk business, by which nothing is allowed to go to waste, not even the eyelets in worn-out puttees—and that comes as near as possible to salvaging the hole in the doughnut itself.

NEBRASKA LEADS IN K_2O

SEVERAL times in this department we have spoken of the crying need of fertilizers in the country, especially of the invaluable element of potash, or K_2O, to give its chemical symbol. And our reference to its dearth has brought us encouraging and illuminating data from Nebraska. There is a region in the north-central part of that State which is occupied by about twenty thousand square miles of sand hills whose lakes and basins are rich in alkali.

The lakes are many in number, and vary from mere ponds to bodies of six hundred acres or more. In depth they range from a few inches to a few feet.

Here is where the potash reduction plants have materialized as if by magic. Four years ago the potash possibilities were undreamed of, and at first examination of the locality it was thought that only two or three lakes would be of importance as sources of the chemical. At the present time it is known that about seventy-five of them contain potash in worth-while quantities. Potash salts are found widely distributed in nature, but some idea of the value of the Nebraska deposits may be had from H. S. Gale's report on the alkali, in which he states:

"Sea water contains 3½% of dissolved salts and .04% K_2O. Great Salt Lake brine contains 20% dissolved salts and .41% K_2O. Searles Lake, California, has a saturated solution, 2.48% K_2O. Jesse Lake, Nebraska, has shown as much as 19% dissolved salt and 5.96% K_2O in the water."

Most of the potash is derived from the beds of lakes—that is, from the subsurface. And wells are put down to depths of fifteen to forty feet by drilling with casing and sand bucket.

The production of Nebraskan potash is now confined principally to Sheridan, Garden, and Morrill Counties. Four large reduction plants are operating at a feverish rate, and several others are in course of rapid construction. The output averages 400 tons a day, which credits Nebraska with 70% of the total production of potash in the United States to-day. Large as this appears, it represents only about 30% of the normal demand for fertilizing purposes.

But the Nebraska industry is in its infancy.

WHO WILL BE THE FIRST WOMAN PRESIDENT?

ALMOST as logical as that two and two make four is the conclusion that before long the country will be confronted with the question whether to elect a woman to the presidency. Already there is a feminine member of the lower House of Congress—Miss Rankin, of Montana. She is one of two women who, as early as March 4th this year—significant date!—said that they would be candidates for the Senate this fall. Miss Anne Martin, formerly a teacher of history in the University of Nevada, formally announced her candidacy to succeed the late Senator Newlands, and went so far as to outline her platform.

If women representatives and senators in Congress, why not women governors and—presidents?

Miss Martin says that "the welfare of women demands their presence in both Houses of Congress, and the welfare of the nation demands it." It is only a small step to substitute "White House" for "both Houses of Congress," and who can doubt that, in view of the rapid advance which the feminist movement has made in the last few years, the White House will be the goal of some ambitious woman politician in the not distant future? Entirely apart from the question of whether one favors or does not favor woman suffrage, it is time to consider this phase of our political life.

Everywhere are political organizations meeting the women more than halfway. From California to New York the feminine voter is being accorded equal rights with the masculine. President Wilson's indorsement of the Federal amendment to give the vote to women only hastened the day when in every

State the two sexes will be politically equal. Women are being appointed to official positions in increasing numbers in many States. No great prophetic ability is required to foresee that women cabinet members will be named before long by some president anxious to succeed himself or to strengthen his party in power.

In a large sense it is only natural that we should have women presidents. The Anglo-Saxon political traditions, which influence American life so strongly, are not opposed to feminine rulers. No salic law has ever operated to keep women off the British throne. Victoria and Elizabeth occupy larger places in English history than many a king who has sat on the same throne. After the war women will vote in England, and several Canadian provinces have already given them the ballot. If the United States were to elect a woman president in 1920 she would take office almost three hundred and twenty years after the death of Queen Elizabeth. But in these troublous times, when forceful executives are so greatly needed, it is improbable that a feminine candidate for the presidency will even be considered.

FREE PORTS IN THE UNITED STATES

BILLS have been introduced in Congress for the creation of free ports in this country, and it is likely that the administration, backed by the recommendations of the tariff commission, will urge the passage of such a bill, for it is now fully realized that the United States must develop technical and commercial institutions in connection with its forthcoming merchant marine.

What is a free port? Many confuse it with free trade, an altogether erroneous idea. If New York were a free port, for instance, it would set aside an area where goods imported from abroad could be stored without customs oversight, awaiting reëxportation or other distribution, and, if required here, taxed according to schedule. This particular area would be exempt from the red tape of customs surveillance, bonded warehouses, bonded manufacturing plants, and similar drawbacks. Goods in the free port could be mixed and repacked, and finished products fabricated from imported raw material, and these articles might be exported without the inconvenience and loss imposed by the present system. But beyond all other advantages, the free port would serve as a consignment market for cargoes of colonial products—rubber, sugar, coffee, rice, ivory, mahogany, et cetera.

Up to the present, London and Hamburg have been the chief consignment markets for these "colonial products." Of course, Hamburg is out of the business now. But London still continues her control over these valuable raw materials, and her free port enables her to buy them at the lowest prices and in what quantity she wishes. In turn, she uses the portion she wants and markets the remainder to us and other nations.

Few of us imagine to what extent we have accepted and relied on the indirect importation of our industrial necessities—the most expensive method of purchase also. Frequently half our imports from England were products of other lands, brought first to the British free port, then resold. The record proves that during the first six months of last year our purchases in England amounted to $141,000,000, out of which $104,000,000 represented goods that had their origin elsewhere. Rubber, of which we are the largest users in the world, comes to us in this roundabout fashion, England setting the price, which we pay plus the freight

Surely it is time we adopted the free port, with its indisputable advantages to us in foreign trade; and as for our domestic policy of tariff protection, it holds no menace for that.

SPORT?

SPORT in every form has played a major rôle in our lives, as it has in the lives of most Americans. Particularly keen has been our love for recreation with rod and gun. But tell us, is it sport to raise game, keep it in a domestic state, and then *kill* it? Not very long ago, certain foreign potentates were much derided because, seated upon comfortable camp stools, they slaughtered hand-raised "wild" animals and birds that were paraded, none too swiftly, before them. This always looked to us very much like going down to the pasture lot and shooting old Jennie cow as "Shep" drove her through the gate.

However, the practice must have been catching, for this form of "sport" has recently been taken up in this country on rather a large scale. In a small pond within the closely guarded confines of a certain club that we have in mind are found trout. These normally agile fish lie in sleepy ennui a few inches below the surface, as thick as straws in a barnyard. Prodded out of their lethargy, they can be caught with ease, provided their prepared breakfast has not been too hearty.

Pheasants and quail are raised by this club—and "wild" ducks, too—mostly from eggs set under prosaic hens, who mother the "game" until it is able to live to maturity in flocks, confined until the "hunting" season opens. Then it is that the "sport" commences. Members of the club, clad in full shooting regalia, motor out from town. All has been made ready, for the time of these men is very valuable. They want action, and they don't want to wait for it. Pheasants and quail have been turned loose. Almost entirely domesticated, they wander, with some reluctance, timidly away from their man-made homes. Sittin', on the wing, and on the walk, they "get theirs," and get it quick!

It's growing late; the "sportsman" must be getting back to town. "How about those ducks?" Nothing has been overlooked. Attendants have a big flock of "wild" ducks—and they are hungry, too—in crates at the other end of the pond. The "hunters" line up in front of the yard in which the ducks have been fed since they first saw the light of day. Up goes the signal. The crates are opened at regular intervals. Back come the hungry ducks to home and supper—and they get theirs.

Sport? We can't see it that way. Perhaps we have not kept abreast of the times, got old-fashioned views, have come to that garrulous, senile state where we babble about the good old times that have gone never to return—gone because we have lost our appetite for the fine things of life. But, honestly, we can't see it that way, and—well, *is* it sport?

POPULAR TOPICS

UP to the present, only the same religious holidays are observed in the different countries of the world; but the time is coming, and we hope not far off, when the nations will celebrate a universal political holiday—"The Freedom of Mankind Day," or some such festival that will mean that our Fourth of July has become international.

APROPOS, we have more races fighting for the United States than history can match in her annals; for, according to a war correspondent, the postal censors of the American Expeditionary Forces abroad have to know forty-seven languages to handle the mail. The least used are German and Chinese.

ARE you aware that, although the United States of America has only six per cent of the population of the world and covers only seven per cent of the land area, it produces about twenty-five per cent of the wheat grown and seventy-five per cent of the corn; that it mines forty per cent of the iron and forty per cent of the coal and fifty per cent of the copper; that it manufactures about thirty per cent of the articles and controls thirty-five per cent of the banking in the aforesaid world?

HERE is one of the ways that graft works in Japan: If one desires a telephone in that lovely land, he must apply to have it installed from ten to fifteen years ahead of the time he will be ready to use it; so the best way to go about it is to buy the right of one already installed, which in Tokyo costs from seven to eight hundred dollars. And sometimes, if you are just an ordinary citizen, a telephone over the eighteen miles between Tokyo and Yokohama will take anywhere from six to ten hours for connection unless you are "in the know."

THERE were 3,240 commercial failures in the United States for the first quarter of 1918, a smaller number than recorded for a similar period since 1907. Growth of business may be gathered from the additional statistics that there are approximately 1,740,000 business establishments of all kinds in the country, while ten years ago there were 1,420,000.

IT is a sign of the times when an institution of learning like Delaware College includes in its curriculum a course in shipbuilding and marine transportation. The course will begin in September. One of the requirements is that the student shall spend three summers in shipbuilding plants.

OIL-BEARING shale is attracting much attention and speculation. Experts assert that should our oil wells run dry in the future, there is plenty of petroleum to be had from the reservoirs in the Rocky Mountains. The known oil wells of the country are estimated to contain about 7,000,000,000 barrels of oil; but a recent survey of the State of Colorado alone revealed a shale-bed production of 26,000,000,000 barrels, while there are enormous similar deposits in Utah, Wyoming, Nevada, and California. And oil shale is not confined to the Rocky Mountains. It exists in Illinois, Kentucky, Indiana, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, and West Virginia. Incidentally the government has reserved 132,000 acres of shale beds for the future use of the navy.

FIGURES recently compiled show that two and one-half tons of shipping must be constantly kept in service to take each soldier to France and keep him provided with equipment, ammunition, and supplies. Formerly, tonnage per man amounted to four and five tons, but the systematizing of work and speedier operation of ships has reduced it.

THE Federal government has wonderful opportunities to distinguish itself in the handling of railroad problems, which are acknowledged to be multitudinous and multiplex. One point alone suggests the possible expansion of future activity, and that is that the railroad tracks of the country are used now only to one per cent of their maximum capacity. Merely another per cent of utility will work wonders.

The Sky Rider

By B. M. Bower

Author of "The Happy Family," "Chip of the Flying U," Etc.

SYNOPSIS OF PREVIOUS CHAPTERS

On the Rolling R Ranch in Arizona, near the Mexican border, is a cowboy named Johnny Jewel, who dreams of being an aviator, and sometimes writes verses about sky riding. The other cowboys ridicule his ambition, and they are joined in it by Mary V, daughter of the owner, Sudden Selmer. It becomes mutually agreeable to Selmer and Johnny for him to be transferred to a lonely part of the range called Sinkhole, where he looks after unbroken bronchos. Two Mexicans interest him in an air plane that has been found deserted on the desert, just over the border, and Johnny takes the chance of leaving the ranch unguarded for more than a day and a night to have the plane hauled to Sinkhole. He pays fifty dollars to one of the Mexicans. The actions of "Tex," one of the Rolling R cowboys, are suspicious to Mary V, who sees him conferring with strange men near Sinkhole, and there seems great danger that some of the horses on the range will be run off during Johnny's absence.

(*A* ***Four-Part Story—Part Two***)

CHAPTER VIII.

EACH TO HIS OWN INTEREST.

THAT night Johnny spread his blankets in a spot where he could lie and look at his air plane with the moon shining full upon it and throwing a shadow like a great black bird with outstretched wings on the sand. He had to lie where he could look at it, else he could not have lain down at all. He was like a child that falls asleep with a new, long-coveted toy clasped tight in its two hands. He worried himself into a headache over the difficulties of transporting it unharmed over the miles of untracked desert country to Sinkhole. He was afraid the mules would run away with it or upset it somehow. It looked so fragile, so easily broken. Already the tail was broken, where the flyers, in landing, had swerved against a rock. He pictured mishaps and disasters enough to fill a journey of five times that length over country twice as rough. He wished that he could fly it home. Picturing that, his lips softened into a smile and the pucker eased out of his forehead.

But he couldn't fly it. He didn't know how—though he would have tried it, anyway, had there been even a gallon of gasoline in the tank. But the tank was bone dry, and the tail was knocked askew, so Johnny had to give up thinking about it.

When he slept, the air plane filled his dreams so that he talked in his sleep and wakened the brother of Tomaso, who sat up in his blankets to listen.

"That plan, she's work fine, I bet!" grinned the brother of Tomaso, when Johnny had droned off into mumbling and then silence. "That Tex, she's smart hombre." He laid himself down to sleep again.

Speaking of Tex, that same night he lay awake for a long while, staring at the moon-lighted window and wishing that his eyesight could follow his thoughts and show him what he wanted to see. His thoughts took the trail to Sinkhole, dwelt there for a space in anxious speculation, drifted on to the border and beyond, and sought out Johnny Jewel, dwelling upon his quest with even more anxious speculation. Then, when sleep had dulled somewhat his reasoning faculties, Tex began to

vision himself in Tucson—well, perhaps in Los Angeles, that Mecca of pleasure lovers—spending his money freely, living for a little while a life of ease and idleness, gemmed with the smiles of those beautiful women who hover gayly around the money pots in any country, in any clime.

For a hard-working cow-puncher with no visible assets save his riding gear and his skill with horses, the half-waking dreams of Tex were florid and as impossible in the cold light of reason as had been the dreams of Johnny Jewel in that bunk house.

That night others were awake in the moonlight. Down at Sinkhole camp, five or six riders were driving a bunch of Rolling R horses into the corral. They were not dreaming vaguely of the future, these riders. Instead, they were very much awake to the present and the risks thereof. On the nearest ridge that gave an outlook to the north, a sentinel was stationed in the shade of a rocky outcropping, ready to wheel and gallop back with a warning if any rode that way.

When the horses were corralled and the gate closed, one man climbed upon the fence and gave orders. This horse was to be turned outside—and the gate tender swung open the barrier to let it through. That horse could go, and that and that.

"A dozen or so is about as many as we better take," he said to one who worked near him. "No—turn that one back. I know he's a good one, but his mane and tail and them white stockings behind, they're too easy reco'nized. That long-legged bay over there—he's got wind; look at the chest on 'im! Fore quarters like a lion. Haze him out, boys!" He turned himself on the fence and squinted over the bewildered little group of freed horses. He swung back and squinted over the bunch in the corral, weighing a delicate problem in his mind, to judge by the look of him.

"All right, boys; we kain't afford to be hawgs this trip. Straddle your hosses and take 'em over to that far corner where we laid the fence down. Remember what I said about keepin' to the rocky draws. I'll wait here and turn these loose and foller along and set up the fence after yuh. And keep a-goin'—only don't swing over toward Baptista's place, mind. Keep to the left all you can. And keep a lookout ahead. Yuh don't want that kid to get a squint at yuh."

One answered him in Mexican while they slipped out and mounted. They rode away, driving the horses they had chosen. Unobtrusive horses, as to color—bays and browns mostly, of the commonplace type that would not easily be missed from the herd. The man on the fence smoked a cigarette and studied the horses milling restlessly below him in the corral.

From the adobe cabin squatting in the moonlight came the shrill, insistent jingling of a bell. The man looked that way thoughtfully, climbed down, and went to the cabin, keeping carefully in the beaten trail.

The door was not locked. A rawhide thong tied it fast to a staple in the door jamb. With the bell shrilling its summons, the man paused long enough to study the knotting of the thong before he untied it. He went to the telephone slowly, thoughtfully, his cigarette held between two fingers, his forehead drawn down so that his eyebrows were pinched together. He hesitated perceptibly before he took down the receiver. Then he grinned.

"Hello!" His voice was hoarse, slightly muffled. He grinned again when he caught the mildly querulous tones of Sudden Selmer, sharpened a little by the transmitter.

"Where the dickens have you been? I've been trying all evening to get you," Sudden complained.

"Huh? Oh, I just got in. I been fixing fence over west of here. Took me till dark. No, the stock's all in—wind had blowed down a couple of them rotten posts. Well, they was rotten enough to sag over, so I had to reset them. Had to reset them, I said! Dig new holes!" He turned his face a little away from the transmitter and coughed, then grinned while he listened.

"Oh, nothing—just a cold I caught. Don't amount to anything. I'm doctoring it. I always get hoarse when I catch a little cold. Sure, everything's all right. I'm going to ride fence to-morrow. That so? It blowed to beat the cars down here all night. Why, they're lookin' fine. No, ain't saw a soul. I guess they know better than to bother our stock. All right, Mr. Selmer, I will—and say! I might be late in getting in to-morrow, but everything's fine as silk. All right. G'-by!"

He hung up the receiver before he started to laugh, but once he did start he laughed all the time he was retying the door in the same kind of knot Johnny had used and all the while he was returning to the corral.

"Fell for it, all right. Nothing can beat having a cold right handy," he chuckled, when he had turned out the stock, whistled for the sentinel, and mounted his horse. "Guess I better happen around to-morrow evening. They won't be back—not if they bring it with 'em."

While he waited for the guard to come in, he eyed the corral and its immediate neighborhood, and afterward inspected the cloud-flecked sky. "Corral shows a bunch of stock has been penned here," he muttered. "But the wind'll raise before sunup. I guess it'll be all right."

The sentinel came trotting around the corner. "How many?" he asked, riding alongside the other.

"Fifteen, all told. To-morrow night we'll cull that bunch that ranges west of here. Won't do to trim out too many at a time, and they may be back here to-morrow night. They will if they can't get it over. I don't much expect they will, at that, unless they bring it in pieces. Still, yuh can't tell what a crazy kid'll take a notion to do; not when he's got a bug like Tex says this one has got."

"Tex is pretty cute awright. Me, I'd never 'a' thought of that."

The boss grunted. "Tex is paid for being cute. He's on the inside, where he's got a chance to know these things. He wouldn't be worth a nickel to us if he wasn't cute."

"And it's us that takes the chances," readily agreed the guard.

"Yeah—look at the chance I took jus' now! Talked to old Sudden over the phone, stalling along like I was the kid. Got away with it, at that. I'd like to see Tex——"

"Aw, Tex ain't in it with *you*. When it comes right down to fine work——" So, feeding the vanity of the boss with titbits of crude flattery, which the boss swallowed greedily as nine-tenths of us would do, they jogged along down the pebbly bottom of Sinkhole Creek where it had gone dry, turned into the first rocky draw that pointed southeastward, and so passed on and away from the camp where Tex's thoughts were clinging anxiously.

When they had carefully mended the fence that had been opened, and had obliterated the most conspicuous traces of horses passing through, they rode home to their beds, perfectly satisfied with the night's work and looking forward to the next night.

A hot, windy day went over the arid range; a day filled with contented labor for some, strenuous activity for some others—Johnny Jewel among these—and more or less anxious waiting for a very few.

That day the fifteen stolen horses, urged forward by grimy, swearing Mexicans and a white man or two, trotted heavily southward, keeping always to the sheltered draws and never showing upon a ridge until after a lookout had waved that all was well.

That day Mary V. rode aimlessly to the western hills, because she saw three of the boys hiking off toward the south and she did not know where they were going.

That day Johnny Jewel suffered chronic heart jumpings, lest the four wide-blinkered mules look around again, and, seeing themselves still pursued by the great, ungainly contraption on the lengthened wagon they drew, run away and upset their precariously balanced load.

That day the man who had so obligingly answered the telephone for Johnny busied himself with various plans and preparations for the night, and retraced the trail down the rocky draws to the fence where horses and riders had crossed, to make sure, by daylight, that no trace had been left of their passing.

So the day blew itself red in the face, and then purple with a tender, rose-violet haze under its one crimson, lazily drooping eye. And at last it wrapped itself in its royal, gemmed robe and settled quietly down to sleep. Night came stepping softly across the hills and the sandy plains, carrying her full-lighted lantern that painted black shadows beside every rock and bush and cut bank.

With the deepening of the shadows and the rising drone of night sounds and the whispering of the breeze which was all that was left of the wind, the man came riding cautiously up through a draw to the willow growth just below Sinkhole watering place. He tied his horse there and went on afoot, stepping on rocks and grass tufts and gravelly spots as easily as though he had long practiced that mode of travel.

Sinkhole cabin was dark and quiet and lonesome, but still he waited for a while in the shadow and watched the place before he ventured forth. He did not go at once to the cabin, but, always treading carefully where imprints would be lightest, he made a further inspection of the corral. The wind had done its work there, and hoofprints were practically obliterated. Satisfied, he returned to the cabin and sat down on the bench beside the door, where he could watch the trail while he waited.

The telephone rang. The man untied the door, went in, and answered it hoarsely. Everything was all right, he reported. He had ridden the fence and tightened one or two loose wires. Yes, the water was holding out all right, and the horses came to water every night about sundown, or else early in the morning before the flies got too bad. His cold was better and he didn't need a thing that he knew of. And good-by, Mr. Selmer.

He went out, very well satisfied with himself, retied the door carefully with Johnny's own peculiar kind of hitch, stooped and felt the hard-packed earth to make sure he had not inadvertently dropped a cigarette butt that might possibly betray him, and rolled a fresh smoke before leaving for home. He had just lighted it and was moving away toward the creek when the telephone jingled a second summons. He would have to answer it, of course. Old Sudden knew he couldn't be far away and would ring until he did answer. He unfastened the door again, cursing to himself and wondering if the Rolling R people were in the habit of calling Johnny Jewel every ten minutes or so. He stumbled over a box that he had missed before, swore, and called a gruff hello.

"Oh, hello, cowboy!" Unmistakably feminine, that voice; unmistakably provocative, too—subdued, demure, on guard, as though it were ready to adopt any one of several tones when it spoke again.

"Oh—er—hello! That you, Miss Selmer?" The man did not forget his hoarseness. He even coughed discreetly.

"Why, *no*. This is Venus speaking. May I ask if you expected Miss Selmer to call you up?" Raised eyebrows would harmonize perfectly with that tone, which was sugary, icily gracious.

"Oh—er—hello, Miss Venus! I—ahum!—beg your pardon; my mistake. Er—ah—how are yuh this evenin'?"

"Oh—lonesome." A sigh seemed to waft over the wire. "You see, I have quarreled with Mars again. He *would* drink out of your big dipper in spite of me! I knew you wouldn't like that ——"

"Oh—why, no, of course not!" The hoarseness broke slightly, here and there. A worried tone was faintly manifesting itself.

"And I was wondering when you are coming to take me for another ride!"

"Why—ah—just as soon as I can, Miss Venus. You know my time ain't

my own—but maybe Sunday I could git off."

"How nice! What a bad cold you have! How did you catch it?" Sweetly solicitous now, that voice.

"Why, I dunno——"

"Was it from going without your coat when we were riding last time?"

"I—yes, I guess it was—but that don't matter. I'd be willing to ketch a dozen colds riding with *you*. It don't matter at all."

"Oh, but it does! It matters a great deal. Dearie, did you really think I was that nasty Mary V. Selmer calling you up?"

"Why, no; I—I was just talking to her father—but as soon as I—— I was thinking maybe the old man had forgot something and had her—— Uh course I knowed your voice right away—sweetheart!" That was very daring. The man's forehead was all beaded with perspiration by this time, and it was not the heat that caused it. "You know I wouldn't talk to her if I didn't have to." It is very difficult to speak in honeyed accents that would still carry a bullfrog hoarseness, but the man tried it, nevertheless.

"Dearie! Honest?"

"You know it!" He was bolder now that he knew endearing terms were accepted as a matter of course.

"Oo-oo! I believe you're fibbing. You kept calling me *Miss* Venus, just as if—you—liked somebody else better. Just for that I'm not going to talk another minute. And you needn't call up, either, for I shall not answer!"

She hung up the receiver; and the man, once he was sure of it, did likewise. He wiped his forehead, damned all women impartially as a thus-and-so nuisance that would queer a man's game every time if he wasn't sharp enough to meet their plays, and went outside. He still felt very well satisfied with himself, and to his satisfaction was added a thankfulness that he was clever enough to fool that confounded girl. All the way back to his horse he was trying to "place" the voice and the name. Some one within riding distance, it must be—some one visiting in the country. He sure didn't know of any ranch girl named Venus. After a while he felt he could afford to grin over the incident. "Never knowed the difference," he boasted, as he rode away. "Nine men outa ten would 'a' overplayed their hand right there."

Just how far he had overplayed his hand that man never know. Far enough to send Mary V. to her room, rather white and scared; shaking, too, with excitement. She stood by the window, looking out at the moon-lighted yard with its wind-beaten flowers. To save her life she could not help recalling the story of Little Red Riding Hood, nor could she rid herself of the odd sensation of having talked with the wolf. Though she did not, of course, carry the simile so far as to liken Johnny Jewel to the grandmother.

She did not know what to do—a strange sensation for Mary V. Once she went as far as the door, meaning to go out on the porch and tell her dad that somebody was down at Sinkhole Camp, pretending that he was Johnny Jewel when he was nothing of the sort and that the boys had better go right straight down there and see what was the matter.

She did not go farther than the door, however, and for what would seem a very trifling reason—she did not want her dad to know that she had been trying to talk to Johnny over the phone.

She went back to the window. *Who* was down there pretending to be Johnny Jewel? And what, in Heaven's name, was he doing it for? She remembered the Mexican who had ridden up that day and pretended that he wanted matches, and how he had returned to the camp almost as soon as she had left. But the man who had talked with her was not a Mexican. No one but a white man—and a range man, she added to herself—would say: "Uh course I knowed yore voice." And he had not really had a cold. Mary V.'s ears were sharper than her dad's, for she had caught the make-believe in the hoarseness. She knew perfectly well that Johnny Jewel might be hoarse as a crow and never talk that way.

Johnny never said, "Uh course I knowed," and Johnny would choke before he'd ever call her sweetheart. He wouldn't have let that man do it, either, had he been present in the cabin, she suspected shrewdly.

Being an impulsive young person, who acted first and did her thinking afterward, Mary V. did exactly what she should not have done. She decided forthwith that she would take a long moonlight ride.

CHAPTER IX.

A HEROINE RIDES TO THE RESCUE.

"Mary V., what are you doing in the kitchen? Remember, I told you you shouldn't make any more fudge for a week. I don't want any more sessions with Bedelia like I had last time you left the kitchen all messed up with your candy. What are you *doing?*"

Mary V. licked a dab of loganberry jelly from her left thumb and answered with her face turned toward the open window nearest the porch where her mother sat rocking peacefully:

"Oh, for gracious *sake,* mom! I'm only putting up a little lunch before I go to bed. I'm going to take my rides earlier, after this—and it wouldn't be kind for me to wake the whole house up at daybreak, getting my lunch ready——"

"If you're going at daybreak, why do you need a lunch? If you think I'll permit you to stay out in the heat all day without any breakfast——"

"Well, mom! I can't take pictures at daybreak, can I? I've got to stay out till the light is strong enough. And there's a special place I want, and if I go early I can get back early—before lunch at the very latest. Do you want me to go without anything to eat?"

"Seems to me you're running them Desert Glimpses into the ground," her mother grumbled comfortably. "You've got a stack higher than your head now. And some of these days you'll get bit with a snake or a centipede or——"

"Centipedes don't bite. They grab with their toes. My goodness, mom! A person's got to do *something;* I don't see what harm there is in my riding horseback in the early morning. It's a healthful form of exercise——"

"It's a darn fad, and you'll go back to school looking like a squaw—and serve you right. It's getting along toward the time when snakes go blind. You want to be careful, Mary V.——"

"Oh, piffle! I've lived here all my life, just about, and I never saw a person bitten with a snake. And neither did you, mom, and you know it. But of course, if you insist on making me sit in the house day in and day out——" Mary V. cut two more slices of bread and began spreading them liberally with butter. She looked very grieved and very determined.

"Oh, nobody ever made you sit in the house yet. They'd have to tie you hand and foot to do it," came the placid retort. "Don't you go helping yourself to that new jelly, Mary V. The old has got to be used up first. And you wipe off the sink when you're through messing around. Bedelia's hinting that she's going to quit when her month is up. It don't help me a mite to keep her calmed down, when you leave a mess for her every time you go near the kitchen. She says she's sick and tired of cleaning up after you. You know what'll happen if she does quit, Mary V. You'll be getting your Desert Glimpses out the kitchen window for a month or so, washing dishes while we scurrup around after another cook. Bedelia——"

"Oh, plague take Bedelia!" snapped Mary V. But she nevertheless spent precious minutes wiping the butcher knife on Bedelia's clean dish towel, and putting away the butter and the bread, and mopping up the splatters of loganberry jam. Getting her Desert Glimpses through the kitchen window formed no part of Mary V.'s plans or desires.

They seemed to Mary V. to be precious minutes, although they would otherwise have been spent in the wearisome task of waiting until the ranch was asleep. She took her jam sandwiches and pickles and cake to her room, chirping a blithe good night to her unsuspecting parents. Then, in-

stead of going to bed as she very plainly indicated to those guileless parents that she meant to do, she clothed herself in her riding breeches, shirt, and coat, and was getting her riding shoes and puttees out of the closet when she heard her mother coming.

A girl can do a good deal in a minute if she really bestirs herself. Her mother found Mary V. sitting before her dressing table with her hair hanging down her back. She was infolded in a very pretty pink silk kimono, and she was leisurely dabbing cold cream on her chin and cheeks with her finger tips.

"Be sure you take your goggles with you, Mary V. I notice your eyelids are all red and inflamed lately when you come in from your rides. And do put them on and wear them if the wind comes up. It's easier to take a little trouble preventing sore eyes and sunburn than it is to cure them. And don't stay out late in the heat."

"All right, mommie." Drawing her kimono closer about her, Mary V. put her face up to be kissed. Her mother hesitated, looking dubiously at the cream dabs, compromised with a peck on Mary V.'s forehead, and went away. Mary V. braided her hair, put on a pair of beaded moccasins, buckled on her six-shooter, and gathered together her other paraphernalia. She waited an hour by her wrist watch, but even that sixty minutes of inaction did not bring her better judgment to the rescue. Sober judgment had no place in her thoughts. Instead, she spent the time in wondering if Tango would let her catch him in the corral; and in fretting because she must wait at all, when there was no telling what might have happened at Sinkhole; and giving audience to a temptation that came with the lagging minutes and began persuading her that Tango was too slow for the trip she had before her; and in climbing into bed, turning over three times, and climbing out again, leaving the light covering in its usual morning heap in the middle.

It was half past nine when she climbed out of her window with her riding shoes and puttees, her lunch and her camera and her field glasses in a bundle under one arm. She went in her moccasins until she had passed the bunk house and reached the shed where she kept her saddle.

A dozen horses were dozing over by the feed rack in the corral, and Mary V.'s eyes strayed often that way while she was clothing her feet for the ride. Tango was a good little horse, but he was not the horse for a heroine to ride when she went out across the desert at midnight to rescue—er—a good-for-nothing, conceited, quarrelsome, altogether unbearable young man whom she thoroughly hated, but who was, after all, a human being and therefore to be rescued when necessary. Would she dare—— Mary V. hurried the last puttee buckle, picked up her bridle and a battered feed pan, and went quietly across the corral. Wondering if she would dare made her daring.

Most of the horses sidled off from her approach and began to circle slowly to the far side of the corral. Tango lifted his head and looked at her reproachfully, moved his feet as though tempted to retreat, and thought better of it. What was the use? Mary V. always did what she wanted to do; if not in one way, then in another. Knowing her so well, Tango stood still.

Mary V. smiled. Just beyond him another horse also stood still. A tall, big-chested, brilliant-eyed brown, with a crinkly mane and forelock and tail, and with a reputation that made his name familiar to men in other counties. His official name was Messenger, but the boys called him Jake for short. They also asserted pridefully that he had "good blood in him." He belonged to Bill Hayden, really, but the whole Rolling R outfit felt a proprietary interest in him because he had "cleaned up" every horse in southern Arizona outside the professional class.

Ordinarily Mary V. would never have thought of such a thing as riding Jake. She would have considered it as much as her life was worth to put her saddle on him without first asking Bill. Once she had asked Bill, and Bill

had looked as if she had asked for his toothbrush—shocked, incredulous, as though he could not believe his ears. "Well, I should sa-ay not!" Bill had replied, when she had made it plain that she expected an answer.

Ordinarily that would be accepted as final even by Mary V. But ordinarily Mary V. did not climb out of her bedroom window to ride all night, even though there was a perfectly intoxicating moon. Certainly not to a far line camp where a young man lived alone, just to ask him why some one else answered his telephone for him.

To-night was her night for extraordinary behavior evidently. She certainly showed that she had designs on Jake. She held out the feed pan and gritted her teeth when Tango gratefully ducked his nose into it. She let him have one quivery-lipped nibble, and pushed the pan ingratiatingly toward the black muzzle beyond.

Jake was not a bronk. Having "good blood," he was tame to a degree. He knew Mary V. very well by sight, and, if horses can talk, he had no doubt learned a good deal about her from his friend Tango, who usually came home with a grievance. Jake accepted the feed pan graciously, and he did not shy off when Mary V. pushed Tango out of her way and began to smooth Jake's crinkly mane and coax him with endearing words. After a little he permitted her to slip the bridle reins over his head and to press the bit gently into his mouth. She set the pan on the ground, and so managed to tuck his stiff brown ears under the headstall and to pull out his forelock comfortably while he nosed the pan. The bridle was too small for Jake, but Mary V. thought it would do, since she was in a great hurry and the buckles would be stiff and hard to open. The throatlatch would not fasten where Tango always wore it, but went down three holes farther. Jake was bigger than she had thought.

But she led him over to the shed door and adjusted the saddle blanket, and, standing on her tiptoes, managed to heave her saddle into place. The cinch had to be let out, too. Mary V. was trembling with impatience to be gone, now that she had two heinous sins loaded upon her conscience instead of one, but she knew better than to start off before her saddle was right. And, impressed now with the size of Jake, she stood on a box and let out the headstall two holes.

Jake did not seem to approve of her camera and canteen and field glasses and rifle, and stepped restlessly away from her when she went to tie them on. So she compromised on the canteen and field glasses and hid camera and rifle under some stacks in the shed. It seemed to her that she would never get started; as though daylight—and Bill Hayden—would come and find her still in a nightmare struggle with the details of departure. Back of all, the thought of that strange, disguised voice talking for Johnny Jewel nagged at her nerves as something sinister and mysterious.

She led Jake by a somewhat roundabout way to the gate, opened it, and closed it behind them before she attempted to mount. Jake was very tall—much taller than he had ever before seemed to be. She had to hunt a high spot and coax him to stand on the lower ground beside it before she could feel confidence enough to lift her toe to the stirrup. Bill Hayden always danced around a good deal on one foot, she remembered, before he essayed to swing up. Standing on an ant hill did not permit much of the preliminary dancing to which Jake was accustomed, so Mary V. caught reins and saddle horn and made a desperate, flying leap.

She landed in the saddle, found the other stirrup, and cried, "You, Jake!" in a not altogether convincing tone. Jake was walking on his hind feet by way of intimating that he objected to so tight a rein. After that he danced sidewise, fought for his head, munched the strange bit angrily, snorted, and made what the boys called "Jake's chain-lightnin' git-away."

Mary V. knew that Jake was running away with her, but since he was running along the trail to Sinkhole

Camp she did not mind so much. At the worst, he would fall down and she would get a "spill." She knew the sensation, having been spilled several times from the back of a horse. So she gripped him tightly with her strong young knees and let him run. And after the first shock of dismay she thrilled to the swift flight, with a guilty exultation in what she had done.

Jake ran a couple of miles before he showed any symptom of slowing. After that he straightened out in a long, easy lope that was a sheer delight to Mary V., though she knew it must not be permitted for very long because Jake had a good many miles to cover before daylight. She brought him down gradually to a swinging, running walk that would have kept any ordinary saddle horse trotting to match it for speed; and, although he still mouthed the strange bit pettishly, he carried Mary V. over the trail with a kingly graciousness that instilled a deep respect into that arrogant young lady. Tango would have been amazed to see how Mary V. refrained from bullying her mount that night. There was no mane pulling, no little, nipping pinches of the neck to imitate the bite of a fly, no scolding—nothing that Tango had come to take for granted when Mary V. bestrode him.

It was only a little after one o'clock when Mary V., holding Jake down to a walk, nervously passed the empty corral at Sinkhole Camp. She paused a while in the shadows, wondering what she had better do next. After all, it would be awkward to investigate the interior of the little cabin that squatted there so silently under the moon. She hesitated to dismount. Frankly Mary V. felt much safer with a fleet horse under her, and she was afraid that she might not be so lucky next time in mounting. So she began to reconnoiter warily on horseback.

She rode up to the window of the little shed and saw that it was empty. She rode inside the corral and made a complete circuit of the fence, and saw nothing whatever of Johnny's saddle and bridle. They would be somewhere around, surely, if he were here. She avoided the cabin, but rode down to the pasture in the creek bottom where Johnny's extra horse would be feeding. The horse was there, and came trotting lonesomely up to the fence when he saw Jake. But there was only the one horse, which seemed to prove that the other horse was with the saddle and bridle—wherever they were.

Mary V. returned to the corral, still keeping far enough away from the cabin to hide the sound of Jake's hoofbeats from any one within. She tied the horse to a corral post and went on foot to the cabin. She carried her six-shooter in her hand, and she carried in her throat a nervous fluttering.

First she sidled up to a window and listened, then peered in. She could see nothing, for the moon had slid over toward the west and the room was a blur of shade. But it was also silent—depressingly silent. She crept round to the door and found that it was fastened on the outside.

That heartened her a little. She undid the rawhide string and pushed the door open a little way. Nothing happened. She pushed it a little farther, listened, grew bolder—yet frightened with a new fear—and stepped inside.

It was very quiet. It was so quiet that Mary V. held her breath and was tempted to turn and run away. She waited for a minute, her nostrils widened to the pent odor of stale tobacco smoke that clings to a range bachelor's habitation in warm weather. She tiptoed across the room to where Johnny's cot stood, and timidly passed her hands above the covers. Emboldened by its flat emptiness, Mary V. turned and felt along the window ledge where she had seen that Johnny kept his matches, found the box, and lighted a match.

The flare showed her the empty room. Oddly she stared at the telephone as though she expected it to reveal something. Some one had stood there and had talked with her. And Johnny was not at camp at all; had not been, since——

With a truly feminine instinct, she lighted the lamp, turned to the crude

cupboard, and looked in. She inspected a dish of brown beans, sniffed, and wrinkled her nose. They were sour, and the ones on top were dried with long standing. Johnny's biscuits, on a tin plate, were hard and dry. Not a thing in that cupboard looked as though it had been cooked later than two or three days before.

A reaction of rage seized Mary V. She went out, tied the door shut with two spitefully hard-drawn knots, mounted Jake without a thought of his height or his dancing accomplishments, and headed for home at a gallop.

She hated Johnny Jewel every step of the way. It is exasperating to ride a forbidden, treasured horse on a forbidden, possibly dangerous night journey to rescue a man from some unknown peril, and discover that the young man is not at hand to be rescued. Mary V. seemed to find it exasperating. She decided that Johnny Jewel was up to some devilment, and had probably hired that man to answer the phone for him so her dad would not know he was gone. He thought he was very clever, of course—putting the man up to pretending he had a cold, just to fool her dad. Well, he had fooled her dad, all right, but there happened to be a person on the ranch he could not fool. That person *hoped* she was smarter than Johnny Jewel, and to prove it she would find out what it was he was trying to be so secret about. And then she would confront him with the proof—and then where would he be?

She certainly owed it to the outfit—to her dad—to find out what was going on. There was no use, she told herself virtuously, in worrying her dad about it until she knew just exactly what that miserable Johnny Jewel was up to. Poor dad had enough to worry about without filling his mind with suspicious and mysterious men with fake colds and things like that.

Mary V. unsaddled a very sweaty Jake before the sky was reddening with the dawn, before even the earliest of little brown birds were chirping or a rooster had lifted his head to crow.

She wakened Tango with the bridle, slapped her saddle on him, and tightened it with petulant jerks, got her rifle and her camera out from under the sacks, mounted, and rode away again before even the cook had crawled out of his blankets.

CHAPTER X.

SIGNS, AND NO ONE TO READ THEM.

Bill Hayden's mouth was pinched into a straight line across his desert-scarred face. He shortened his hold on the rope that held Jake, and passed the flat of his hand down Jake's neck under the heavy mane. He held up a moistened palm and looked at it needlessly. He stepped back and surveyed the drawn-in flanks, and with his eye he measured the length and depth of the saddle marks as though he half hoped thereby to identify the saddle that had made them. His eyes were hard with the cold fury that lumped the muscles on his jaw.

He turned his head and surveyed the scattered group of boys busy with ropes, bridles, and saddles—making ready for the day's work, which happened to be the gathering of more horses to break—for the war across the water used up horses at an amazing rate and Sudden was not the man to let good prices go to waste. The horse herds would be culled of their likeliest saddle horses while the market was best.

To-day, and for several days, the boys would ride north and west, combing the rough country that held two broad-bottomed streams and therefore fair grazing for horses. Bill had meant to ride Jake, but he was changing his mind. Jake, from the look of him, had lately received exercise enough to last him for one day at least. Suspicion dwelt in Bill's eyes as they rested on each man in turn. They halted at Tex, who was standing with his head up, staring at Jake with more interest than Bill believed an innocent man had any right to feel. Tex caught his glance and came over, trailing his loop behind him.

"What yo'-all been doing to Jake,

gantin' him up like that, Bill?" Tex inquired, his black eyes taking in the various marks of hard riding that had infuriated Bill.

Bill hesitated, spat into the dust, and turned half away, stroking Jake's roughened shoulder.

"I been workin' him out, mebby. What's it to yuh?"

"Me? It ain't nothin' a-tall to me, Bill. Only—yo'-all shore done it thorough," grinned Tex, and passed on to where a horse he wanted was standing with his head against the fence, hoping to dodge the loop he felt sure would presently come hissing his way.

Bill watched him from under his eyebrows, and he observed that Tex sent more than one glance toward Jake. Bill interpreted those glances to suit himself, and, while he unobtrusively led Jake into a shed to give him a hurried grooming before saddling another horse, Bill did some hard thinking.

"Shore is a night rider in this outfit," he summed up. "He shore did pick himself a top hoss, and he shore rode the tail off'n 'im, just about. Me, I'm crazy to know who done it."

Bill had to hurry, so he left the matter to simmer for the present. But that did not mean that Bill would wear "blinders," or that he would sleep with his head under his tarp for fear of finding out what black-hearted rogue had sacrilegiously borrowed Jake. Black-hearted renegade, by the way, was but the dwindling to mild epithets after Bill's more colorful vocabulary had been worn to rags by repetition.

All unconsciously, Mary V. had set another man in the outfit to working his brain and swearing to himself. Tex would not sleep sound again until he knew who had taken to night riding—on a horse of Jake's quality. Tex would have believed that Bill himself was the man had he not read the look on Bill's face while he studied the marks of hard riding. Tex was no fool, else his income would have been restricted to what he could earn by the sweat of his skin. Bill had been unconscious of scrutiny when Tex had caught that look, and Bill had furthermore betrayed suspicion when Tex spoke to him about the horse. Bill was mad, which Tex took as proof that Bill had lain in his bed all night. Besides, Bill would scarcely have left Jake out in the corral where he could have free access to the water trough after a ride like that must have been. Some one had brought Jake home in such a hurry that he had merely pulled his saddle off and—hustled back to bed, perhaps.

Tex was worried, and for a very good reason. He himself had been abroad the night before, dodging off down the draw to the west until he could circle the ridge and ride south. He had been too shrewd to ride a fagged horse home and leave him in the corral to tell the tale of night prowling, however. He had taken the time to catch a fresh horse from the pasture, tie his own horse in a secluded place until his return, and resaddle it to ride back to the ranch, careful not to moisten a hair. He felt a certain contempt for the stupidity that would leave such evidence as Jake, but for all that he was worried. Being the scoundrel he was, he jumped to the conclusion that some one had been spying on him. It was a mystery that bred watchfulness and much cogitation.

"What's that about some geezer riding Jake las' night?" Bud, riding slowly until Bill overtook him, asked curiously, with the freedom of close friendship. "Tex was saying something about it to Curley when they rode past me, but I didn't ketch it all. Anything in it?"

Bill cleared his mind again with blistering epithets before he answered Bud directly: "Jake was rode, and he was rode hard. It was a cool night—and I know what it takes to put that hoss in a lather. I wisht I'd 'a' got to feel a few saddle blankets this morning! The——" Bill cussed himself out of breath.

When he stopped, Bud took up the refrain. It was not his horse, of course, but an unwritten law of the range had been broken and that was any honest rider's affair. Besides, Bill was a pal of Bud's. "Hangin's too good for 'im, whoever done it," he finished vindic-

tively. "I'd lay low if I was you, Bill. Mebby he'll git into the habit and you kin ketch 'im at it."

"I aim to lay low, all right. And I aim to come up a-shootin' if the——"

"Yore dead right, Bill. Night ridin's bad enough when a feller rides his own hawse. It'd need some darn smooth explainin' then. But when a man takes an' saddles up another feller's hawse ——"

"I can see his objeck in that," Bill said. "He had a long trail to foller, an' he tuk the hawse that'd git 'im there and back the quickest. Now, what I'd admire to know is: Who was the rider, an' where was he goin' to? D'jou miss anybody las' night, Bud?"

"Me? Thunder! Bill, you know damn well I wouldn't miss my own beddin' roll if it was drug out from under me!"

"Same here," mourned Bill. "Ridin' bronks shore does make a feller ready for the hay. Me, I died soon as my head hit my piller."

"Mary V. she musta hit out plumb early this morning," Bud observed gropingly. "She was saddled and gone when I come to the c'rel at sunup. Yuh might ast her if she seen anybody, Bill. Chances is she wouldn't, but they's no harm askin'."

"I will," Bill said sourly. "Any devilment that's goin' on around this outfit, Mary V.'s either doin' it er gittin' next to it so's she kin hold a club over whoever done it. She mebby might 'a' saw him—if she was a mind to tell."

"Yeah—that shore is Mary V.," Bud agreed heartily. "Bawl yuh out quick enough if they's anything yuh want kep' under cover, and then turnin' right around and makin' a clam ashamed of itself for a mouthy cuss if yuh want to know anything right bad. Bound she'd go with us gatherin' hosses when she wasn't needed nor wanted, and now when we're short-handed she ain't able to see us no more a-tall when we start off. You'll have to git up on 'er blind side some way, Bill, er she won't tell if she does know who rode Jake."

"Blind side?" Bill snorted. "Mary V. ain't got no blind side I ever seen."

"And that's right, too. Ain't it the truth! I don't guess, Bill, yuh better let on to Mary V. nothin' about it. Then they's a chance she may tell yuh jest to spite the other feller, if she does happen to know. A slim chance—but still she might."

"Slim chance is right!" Bill stated, with feeling.

During this colloquy Mary V.'s ears might have burned had Mary V. not been too thoroughly engrossed with her own emotions to be sensitive to the emotions of others.

Mary V. was pounding along toward Black Ridge—or Snake Ridge, as some preferred to call it. She was tired, of course. Her head ached, and more than once she slowed Tango to a walk while she debated with herself whether it was really worth while to wear herself completely out in the cause of righteousness.

Mary V. did not in the least suspect just how righteous was the cause. How could she know, for instance, that Rolling R horses were being selected just as carefully on the southern range as they were to the north, since even that shrewd range man, her father, certainly had no suspicion that the revolutionists farther to the east in Mexico would presently begin to ride fresh mounts with freshly blotched brands? He had vaguely feared a raid, perhaps, but even that fear was not strong enough to impel him to keep more than one man at Sinkhole.

Sudden was not the man to overlook a sure profit while he guarded against a possible danger. He needed all the riders he had or could get to break horses for the buyers that were beginning to make regular trips through the country. He knew, too, that it would take more than two or three men at Sinkhole to stand off a raid, and that one man with a telephone and a rifle and six-shooter could do as much to protect his herds as three or four men, and with less personal risk. Sudden banked rather heavily on that telephone. He was prepared, at any alarming silence, to send the boys down there posthaste to investigate. But so long

as Johnny reported every evening that all was well, the horse breaking would go on.

It is a pity that he had not impressed these facts more deeply upon Johnny. A pity, too, that he had not confided in Mary V. Because Mary V. might have had a little information for her dad if she had understood the situation more thoroughly. As thoroughly as Tex understood it, for instance.

Tex knew that any suspicion on the part of the line rider at Sinkhole, or any failure on his part to report every evening, would be the signal for Sudden to sweep the Sinkhole range clean of Rolling R horses. He had worried a good deal because he had been prevented from telling his confederates that they must remember to take care of the telephone somehow, in case Johnny was lured away after the air plane. It had been that worry which had sent him out in the night to find them and tell them—and to learn just what was taking place and how many horses they had got. When a man is supposed to receive a commission on each horse that is stolen successfully, he may be expected to exhibit some anxiety over the truth of the tally. You will see why it was necessary to the peace and prosperity of Tex that the surface should be kept very smooth and unruffled.

Tex, of course, overlooked one detail. He should have worried over Mary V. and her industrious gathering of Desert Glimpses, lest she glimpse something she was not wanted to see. It never occurred to Tex that Mary V.'s peregrinations would take her within sight of Sinkhole, or that she would recognize a suspicious circumstance if she met it face to face. Mary V. was still looked upon as a spoiled kid by the Rolling R boys, and had not attained the distinction of being taken seriously by any one save Johnny Jewel. Which may explain, in a roundabout way, why her interest had settled upon him—though Johnny's good looks and his peppery disposition may have had something to do with it, too.

Mary V., having climbed to the top of Black Ridge, adjusted her field glasses and swept every bit of Sinkhole country that lay in sight. Almost immediately she saw a suspicious circumstance, and she straightway recognized it as such. Away over to the east of Sinkhole Camp she saw two horsemen jogging along, just as the Rolling R boys jogged homeward after a hard day's work at the round-up. She could not recognize them, the distance was so great. She therefore believed that one of them might be Johnny Jewel, and the suspicion made her head ache worse than before. He had no business to be away at night and then to go riding off somewhere with some one else so early in the morning, and she stamped her foot at him and declared that she would like to shake him.

She watched those two until they were hidden in one of the million or so of little arroyos that wrinkle the face of the range West. When she finally gave up hope of seeing them again, she moved the glasses slowly to the west. Midway of the arc, she saw something that was more than suspicious; it was out-and-out mysterious.

She saw something—what it was she could not guess—moving slowly in the direction of Sinkhole Camp. Something wide and queer looking, with a horseman on either side and with a team pulling. Here again the distance was too great to reveal details. She strained her eyes, changed the focus hopefully, blurred the image, and slowly turned the little focusing wheel back again. She had just one more clear glimpse of the thing before it, too, disappeared.

Mary V. waited and waited and watched the place. If it was crossing a gully, it would climb out again, of course. When it did not do so, she lost all patience, and was putting the glasses in their case when she saw a speck crawling along a level bit half a mile or so to the left of where she had been watching.

"Darn!" said Mary V., and hastened to readjust the glasses. But she had no more than seen that it was the very same mysterious object, only now it

was not wide at all, but very long—when it crawled behind a ridge like a caterpillar disappearing behind a rock. Mary V. waited a while, but it did not show itself. So she cried with vexation and nervous exhaustion, stamped her foot, and made the emphatic assertion that she felt like shooting Johnny Jewel for making her come all this long way to be driven raving distracted.

After a little, when the mysterious thing still failed to reappear anywhere on the face of the gray, mottled plain, she ate what was left of her lunch and rode home, too tired to sit up straight in the saddle.

CHAPTER XI.

THIEVES RIDE BOLDLY, AND LAUGH AS THEY RIDE.

Johnny Jewel heaved his weary bones off his bed and went stiffly to answer the phone. Reluctantly as well, for he had not yet succeeded in formulating an excuse for his absence that he dared try on old Sudden Selmer. Excuses had seemed so unimportant when temptation was plucking at his sleeve that almost any reason had seemed good enough. But now, when the bell was jingling at him, no excuse seemed worth the breath to utter it. So Johnny's face was doleful and Johnny's red-rimmed eyes were big and solemn.

And then, when he had braced himself for the news that he was jobless, all he heard was this:

"Hello! How's everything?"

"All right," he answered dully to that. So far as he knew, everything was all right—save himself.

"Feed holding out all right in the pasture?" came next. And, when Johnny said that it was: "Well, say! If you get time, you might ride up and get one or two of these half-broke bronks and ride 'em a little. The boys have got a few here now that's pretty well gentled, and they're workin' on a fresh bunch. The quieter they are the better price they'll bring, and they won't have time to ride 'em all. You can handle one or two all right, can't yuh?"

"Yes, I guess I can," said Johnny, still waiting for the blow to fall.

"Well, how many will the pasture feed, do you think? You can turn out one of the couple you've got."

"Oh, there's feed enough for three, all right, I guess——"

"Well, all right—there's a couple of good ones I'd like to have gentled down. Cold's better, eh?"

"I—yes, I guess so." Johnny just said that from force of habit. His mind refused to react to a question which to him was meaningless. Johnny could not remember when he had last had a cold.

"Well, all right—to-morrow or next day, maybe. I'll have the boys keep up the two I want rode regular. If everything's running along smooth, you better come up and get 'em. And when they're gentled you can bring 'em in and get more. These boys won't have time to get more'n the rough edge off."

When he had hung up the receiver, Johnny sat down on a box, took his jaws between his two capable palms, and thought, staring fixedly at the floor while he did so.

It took him a full twenty minutes to settle two obvious facts comfortably in his brain, but he did it at last and crawled into his bed with a long sigh of thankfulness, though his conscience hovered dubiously over those facts like a hen that has hatched out goslings and doesn't know what to do about them. One fact—the big, important one—was that Johnny still had his job, and that it looked as secure and permanent as any job can look in this uncertain world. The other fact—the little, teasingly mysterious one—was that Sudden evidently did not know of Johnny's two-day absence from camp, and foolishly believed Johnny the victim of a cold.

But Johnny's conscience was too much a boy's resilient fear of consequences to cluck very long over what was, on the face of it, a piece of good luck. It permitted Johnny to sleep and to dream happily all night, and it did not pester him when he awoke at daylight. After he crawled into his clothes,

he went out hastily and saddled his horse and rode to the rock-faced bluff, turned into a niche, and rode back to the farther end, then swung sharply to the left.

It was there. Dusty, desert-whipped, one wing drooping sharply at the end, the flat tire accentuating the tilt; with its tail perked sidewise like a fish frozen in the act of flipping; reared up on its landing gear with its little, radiatored nose crossed rakishly by the gravel-scarred propeller, that looked as though mice had nibbled the edges of its blades, it thrilled him as it had never thrilled him before.

It was his own, bought and paid for in money and the sweat of long, toil-filled miles. It looked bigger in that niche than it had looked out on the desert with nothing but the immensity of earth and sky to measure it by. It looked bigger, more powerful—a mechanical miracle which still seemed more dream than reality. And it was his—absolutely the sole property of Johnny Jewel, who had retrieved it from a foreign country—his prize.

"Boy! I sure do wish she was ready to take the air," Johnny said under his breath to Sandy, who merely threw up his head and stared at the thing with sophisticated disapproval.

Johnny got down and went up to it, laid a hand on the propeller where its varnish was still smooth. Through a rift in the rock wall a bright yellow beam of sunlight slid kindly along the padded rim of the pilot's pit; touched Johnny's face, too, in passing.

Johnny smiled, stood back and looked long at the whole great sweep of the planes, pulled the smile out of his lips, and went back to the cabin. He wouldn't have time to work on her to-day, he told himself very firmly. He would have to ride the fences like a son of a gun to make up for lost time. And look over the horses, too, and ride past that boggy place in the willows. It would keep him on the jump until sundown. He wouldn't even have a chance to go over his lessons and blue prints to see just what he'd have to send for to repair the plane. He didn't even know the name of some of the parts, he confessed to himself.

He hated to leave the place unguarded while he made his long tour of the fence and the range within. He did not trust the brother of Tomaso, who had been too easily haggled down in his price, Johnny thought. He believed old Sudden was right in having nothing to do with Mexicans, in forbidding them free access to this domain. Johnny thought it would be a good idea to do likewise. Tomaso was to bring back the pliers, hammer, and whatever other tools they had taken, but after that they would have to keep off. He would tell Tomaso so, very plainly. The prejudices of the Rolling R were well enough known to need no explanation, surely.

So Johnny ate a hurried breakfast, caught his fresh horse out of the pasture, and rode off to do in one day enough work to atone for the two he had filched from the Rolling R. He covered a good deal of ground, so far as that went. He rode to the very spot where fifteen Rolling R horses had been driven through the fence and south across the border; but since his thoughts were given to the fine art of repairing a somewhat battered air plane, he did not observe where the staples had been pulled from three posts, the wires laid flat and weighted down with rocks so that the horses and several horsemen could pass, and the wires afterward fastened in place with new staples. It is true that the signs were not glaring, yet he might have noticed that the wires there were nailed too high on the posts. And if he had noticed that, he could not have failed to see where the old staples had been drawn and new ones substituted. The significance of that would have pried Johnny's mind loose from even so fascinating a subject as the amount of fabric and "dope" he would need, and what would be their probable cost, laid down in Agua Dulce, which was the nearest railroad point.

As it was, he rode over tracks and traces and bits of sinister evidence here and there; and because the fence did not lie flat on the ground, and because

many horses were scattered in the creek bottom and the draws and dry arroyos, he returned to camp, satisfied that all was well on the Sinkhole range. He passed the cabin by and headed straight for his secret hangar, gloated and touched and patted and planned until the shadows crept in so thick he could not see, and then remembered how hungry he was. He returned to the cabin, turned his tired horse loose in the pasture, with Sandy standing disconsolately beside the wire gate, his haltered head drooping in the dusk and his mind visioning heat and sand and sweaty saddle blankets for the morrow.

Dark had painted out the opal tints of the afterglow. The desert lay quiet, empty, lonesome under the first stars. Johnny's eyes strained to see the ridge that held close his treasure. He had a nervous fear that something might happen to it in the night, and he fought a desire to take his blankets and sleep over there in that niche. Tomaso's brother knew where it was, and the Mexican who had driven the mules that hauled it there. What if they tried to steal it, or something?

That night, before he went to bed, he saddled Sandy and rode over to make sure that the air plane was still there. He carried a lantern because he feared the moon would not shine in where it was. It was there, just as he had placed it, but Johnny could not readily convince himself that it was safe. He had an uneasy feeling that thieves were abroad that night, and he stayed on guard for an hour or more before he finally consoled himself with the remembrance of the difficulties to be surmounted before even the most persistent of thieves could despoil him.

After that he rode back to the cabin and studied his blue prints and his typed lessons, and made a tentative list of the materials for repairs, and hunted diligently through certain magazine advertisements, hoping to find some firm to which he might logically address the order.

Obstacles loomed large in the path of research. The "Instructions for Repairing an Air Plane"—Lesson XVII—were vague as to costs and quantities and such details, and Johnny's judgment and experience were even more vague than the instructions. He gnawed all the rubber off his pencil before he hit upon the happy expedient of sending a check for all he could afford to spend for repairs, explaining just what damage had been wrought to his plane, and casting himself upon the experience, honesty, and mercy of the supply house. Remained only the problem of discovering the name and address of the firm to be so trusted, but it all took him far past midnight.

He was just finishing his somewhat lengthy letter of explanations and directions and a passable diagram of the impertinent twist to the tail of his machine. The moon was up, wallowing through a bank of clouds that made weird shadows on the plain, sweeping across greasewood and sage and barren sand like great, ungainly troops of horsemen; filling the arroyos and the little, deep washes with inky blackness.

Up from one deep wash-out a close-gathered troop of shadows came thrusting forward toward the lighter slope beyond. These did not travel in one easterly direction, as did those other scudding, wind-driven night wraiths. These climbed straight across the wind to a bare level, which they crossed, then swerved to the north, dipped into a black hollow, and emerged, swinging back toward the south. A mile away, a light twinkled steadily—the light before which Johnny Jewel was bending his brown, deeply cogitating head while he drew carefully the sketch of his new air plane's tail, using the back of a steel table knife for a rule and guessing at the general proportions.

"Midnight an' after, and he's still up and at it," chuckled one of the dim shapes, waving an arm toward the light. "Must 'a' took it into the shack with 'im!"

Another one laughed rather loudly—too loudly for a thief who did not feel perfectly secure in his thieving.

"Betche we c'u'd taken his saddle hoss out the pen an' ride 'im off and he wouldn't miss 'im till he jest hap-

pened to look down and see where his boots was wore through the bottoms hoofin' it!" continued the speaker contentedly. "Me, I wisht we c'd git hold of some of them bronks they're bustin' now at the ranch. Tex was tellin' me they's shore some good ones."

"What's the good of wishin'?" a man behind him growled. "We ain't doing so worse."

"No, but broke hosses beats broomtails. Ain't no harm in wishin' they'd turn loose and bust some for us—save us that much work."

The one who had laughed broke again into a high cackle. "What we'd oughta do," he chortled, "is send 'em word to hereafter turn in lead ropes with every hoss we take off'n their hands. And by rights we'd oughta *stip*-ilate that all hosses must be broke to lead. It ain't right—them a-gentlin' down everything that goes to army buyers, and us here havin' to take what we can git. It ain't right!"

"The kid, he'll maybe help us out on that there. I wisht Sudden'd take a notion to turn 'em all over to this here sky-ridin' fool——"

And the "sky-ridin' fool," at that moment carefully reading his order over for the third time, honestly believed that he was watching over the interests of the Rolling R and was respected and would presently be envied by all who heard his name. It would have been well for him could he have heard those night riders talking about him, jeering even at the Rolling R for trusting him to guard their property. This chapter would have ended with a glorious fight out there under the moon—because Johnny would not have stopped to count noses before he started in on them.

But even though horse thieves are riding boldly and laughing as they ride, you cannot expect the bullets to fly when honest men have not yet discovered that they are being robbed. Johnny never dreamed that duty called him out on the range that night. He went to bed with his brain a whirligig in which air planes revolved dizzily, and the marauders rode unhindered to wherever they were going. Thus do dramatic possibilities go to waste in real life.

CHAPTER XII.

JOHNNY'S AMAZING RUN OF LUCK STILL HOLDS ITS PACE.

On the shady side of the depot at Agua Dulce, Johnny sat himself down on a truck whose iron parts were hot from the sun that had lately shone full upon it. With lips puckered into a soundless whistle and fingers that trembled a little with eagerness, he proceeded to unwrap one of the parcels he had just taken from the express office. On another truck that had stood longer in the shade, a young tramp in greasy overalls and cap inhaled the last precious wisps of smoke from a cigarette burned down to an inch of stub and watched Johnny with a glum kind of speculation. Johnny sensed his presence and the speculative interest, and read the latter as the preparation for a "touch." And Johnny was not feeling particularly charitable after having to pay a seven-dollar C. O. D. besides the express charges. He showed all the interest he felt in his packages and refused to encourage the hobo by so much as a glance.

He examined the slender ribs, bending them and slipping them through his fingers with the pleasurable feeling that he was inspecting and testing as an expert would have done. He read the label on a tin of "dope," unwrapped a coil of wire cable and felt it, went at a parcel of unbleached linen, found the end, and held a corner up to the light and squinted at it with his head perked sidewise.

Whereupon the hobo gave a limber twist of his lank body that inclined him closer to Johnny. "Say, if it's any of my business, how much did Abe Smith tax yuh for that linen?" His tone was languid, tinged with a chronic resentment against circumstance.

Johnny turned a startled stare upon him, seemed on the point of telling him that it was not any of his business, and with the next breath yielded to his hunger for speech with a human

being, however lowly, whose intelligence was able to grasp so exalted a subject as air craft.

"Dunno yet—I'll have to look it up on the bill," he said, with a cheerful indifference that implied long familiarity with such matters.

"Looks to me like some of the same lot he stung me with last fall, is why I asked. Abe will sting you every time the clock ticks. Why don't you send to the Pacific Supply Company? They're real people. Got better stuff, and they'll treat you right whether you send or go yourself. Take it from me, bo, when you trade with Abe Smith you want a cop along."

Johnny fingered the linen, his face gone sober. "I told him to send the best he had in stock," he said.

"Well, maybe he done it, at that," the hobo conceded. "His stock's rotten, that's all."

"I was looking the bunch over so I could shoot it back to him if it wasn't all right," Johnny explained, with dignity. "They sure can't work off any punk stuff on me—not if I know it."

The hobo flipped his cigarette stub into the sand and stared out across the depressing huddle of adobe huts and raw, double-roofed shacks that comprised Agua Dulce. His pale eyes blinked at the glare; his mouth drooped sourly at the corners.

"Believe me, bo, if you're stranded in *this* hole with a busted plane, yuh better not take on any contract of arguing with Abe Smith. He'll stall you off till you forget how to fly." He turned his pale stare to Johnny with a new interest. "You aren't making a transcontinental, are you?"

"Well—n-no. Not yet, anyway. I—live here." You may not believe it, but Johnny was beginning to feel apologetic—and before a hobo, of all men.

"The deuce you do!" The tramp hitched himself up on another vertebra of his limp spine. "Why, I thought you was probably just making a cross-country flight and had a wreck. I was going to bone you for a lift, in case you was alone. You *live* here! Why, for cat's sake?"

"Lord knows," said Johnny. Then added impulsively: "I don't expect to go on living here always. I'm going to beat it soon as I get my air plane repaired, and——" He was on the point of saying, "when I learn to fly it." But pride and his experience with the Rolling R boys checked him in time.

The hobo looked hungrily at the "makin's" Johnny was pulling from the pocket of his shirt. "At that, I'll say you're lucky," he said; "having a plane *to* repair. Mine's junk, and I'm just outa the hospital myself. I was a fool to ever go East, anyway. They are sure a cold proposition, believe me. Long as you're rotten with money and making pretty flights, you're all right. But let bad luck hit you once—say, they don't know you any more a-tall. I was doing fine on the coast, too—but a fellow's never satisfied with what he's got. The game looked bigger back East—and I went. Now look at me! Bumming my way back when I planned to make a record flight! Kicked off the train in this flyspeck on the desert—nothing to eat since yesterday, not even a smoke left on me, nor the price of one!" He accepted with a nod the tobacco and papers Johnny held out to him, and proceeded languidly to roll a cigarette.

"Down to straight bumming, when I ought to be making my little old thousand dollars a flight. Maybe you've kept in touch with things on the coast. I'm known there, well enough. Bland Halliday's my name. Here's my pilot's license—about all them sharks didn't pry off me in the hospital! I sure do wish I had of let well enough alone! But no, I had to go get gay with myself and try to beat a sure thing."

Johnny was gazing reverently upon the pilot's license which he held in his hand, and he did not hear the last two or three sentences of the hobo's lament. He was busy breaking one of the Ten Commandments—the one which says: "Thou shalt not covet." That he had never heard of Bland Halliday did not disturb him, for in Arizona's wide spaces one does not hear of all that goes on in the world. He was suf-

ficiently impressed by the license and what it implied, and he was thinking very fast. Here was a man, down on his luck it is true, but a man who actually knew how to fly, a fellow who spoke of Smith Brothers Supply Factory with the contempt of familiarity, a fellow who had used some of the very same linen——

Johnny Jewel forgot his pose of expert aviator. He forgot that Bland Halliday was absolutely unknown to him and that his personality was not altogether prepossessing. As a rule, Johnny did not like pale eyes that seemed always to wear a veiled, opaque look. Heretofore he had not liked those newfangled little mustaches which the Rolling R boys had dubbed slipped eyebrows. And ordinarily he would have objected to a mouth drawn down at the corners in a permanent whine. To offset these objectionable features, there were the greasy brown overalls and the cap which certainly looked birdmannish enough for any one, and there was the pilot's license—no fake about that—and the fact that the fellow had known all about Abe Smith and the linen.

Johnny threw away his cigarette and his caution together. "Say, I might be able to take you to Los Angeles, all right—provided you will make a hand on the little old boat and help me put her in shape again. It oughtn't to take long if we go right after it. I—er—to tell the truth, it's hard to get hold of any one around here that knows anything about it. Why, I had one fellow working for me, Mr. Halliday, and just for a josh I asked him where the fuselage was. And he went hunting all over the place and finally brought me a monkey wrench! He——"

"No brains—that's the main trouble with the game," commented Bland Halliday, after he had exhaled a long, thin wreath of smoke, which he watched dreamily. "What you got?"

"Hunh? What kind of a plane? Why, it's a tractor. A military——"

"Unh-hnh! Dual dep control—or have you monkeyed with it and——"

"It's a regular military-type tractor. It—well, it has been in government service before——"

"You an army flyer? Then what'n hell you doing here? Say, put over something I can take, bo. You don't look the part. Only for that stuff you unwrapped, I'd tag you for a wild-and-woolly cowboy."

His tone was not flattering, and his very frank skepticism ill became a tramp. But Johnny had plunged, and he swallowed his indignation and explained with sufficient truth to be convincing. He even confessed that he could not fly—yet. There was something pathetic in his eagerness and his trustfulness, though Bland Halliday seemed to miss altogether the pathos in his greed for technical details of the damage to the plane and a crafty inquisitiveness as to distance and location.

He smoked another of Johnny's cigarettes, stared opaquely at the sweltering little village, and meditated, while Johnny wrapped his parcels and tied them securely and waited nervously for the decision.

"I wish I'd happened along before you sent for that stuff," Halliday remarked at last, flicking Johnny's face with a glance. "I've got a dope of my own that beats that any way you take it—and don't cost a quarter as much. And that linen—I sure would love to cram it down old Abe Smith's gullet. Say! You got tacks and hammer and varnish and brushes? If you're away off from the railroad, as you say you are, all these things must be laid in before we start work. And what about your oil and gas? And how's the propeller? Does she show any crack anywhere? How far is it, anyway? I'd like to look 'er over before I do anything about it. From all I can see, you don't know what condition the motor's in, even. How far is it, anyway? I might go and take a look."

"When you take a look," said Johnny, with a flash of his old spirit, "it will be with your sleeves rolled up. If you think I'm running a sight-seeing bus, you'd better tie a can to the thought. My time ain't my own—yet.

I can get by, this trip, because the bronk I'm riding needed the exercise—or I can say he did, and it will get over. But I don't expect to be riding in to the railroad every day or so. If I get another chance in a month I'll say I'm lucky."

"Well, I'd like to help you out, all right. I can see where you're going to need it, and need it bad. Tell you what I will do, providing it suits you. I'll go over with you and take a look at the plane. If it can be repaired without shipping it in to a shop, all right; I'll help you repair it. You'll learn to fly, all right, on the way to the coast. That is, if you've got it in you. And the other side of it is, if the plane can't be repaired at your camp and you don't want to trust me to get it to a shop where I can repair it, all right. You stake me to a ticket to Los Angeles and money to eat on. It's going to be worth that to you to know just what shape your plane's in and what it will cost to fix it. And without handing myself any flowers, I'll say I'm as well qualified as anybody. I've built fifteen of 'em myself. I can tell you down to the last two-bit piece what it's going to set you back to put her in shipshape, ready to take the air. And, believe me, old top, you can throw good money away faster on an air plane than you can on a jamboree. I've tried both ways; I know." He leaned back on the truck and clasped his hands around one bent knee, as though, having stated his terms and his opinion, there remained nothing further for him to say or to do about it.

Johnny looked at him dubiously, did some further rapid thinking, and went to inquire of the station agent the price of a ticket to Los Angeles.

"All right; that goes," he said, when he returned. "Come on and eat. We've got to do some hustling to get back before sundown. You make out a list of what we've got to have besides this—you said hammer and tacks—and I'll see if the hardware store has got it. Lucky I brought an extra horse along to pack this stuff on. I'll rustle a saddle and you can ride him out."

"Ride a *horse?* Me?" The spine of the expert stiffened with horror so that he sat up straight.

"Sure, ride a horse. You. Think you were going out on the street car?" Johnny's lips puckered. "Say, it won't prove fatal. He's a nice, gentle horse. And," he added meaningly, "you'll learn to ride, all right, on the way to camp. That is, if you've got it in you."

CHAPTER XIII.

BLAND HALLIDAY TAKES A RIDE.

Johnny was in one of his hurry-up moods now. He had the material to repair his plane, he had the aviator who could help him far, far better than could his cold-blooded, printed instructions. Remained only the small matter of annihilating time and distance so that the work could start.

In his zeal Johnny nearly annihilated the aviator as well. He rode fast for two reasons: He was in a great hurry to get back to camp, and he had a long way to go; and the long-legged, half-broken bronk he was riding was in a greater hurry than Johnny, and did not care how far he had to go. So far as they two were concerned, the pace suited. But Sandy refused to be left behind, and he also objected to a rider that rode soggily—ka-*lump,* ka-*lump,* like a bag of meal tied to the horn with one saddle string. Sandy pounded along with his ears laid flat against his skull, for spite keeping to the roughest gait he knew short of pitching. Bland Halliday pounded along in the saddle, tears of pain in his opaque eyes, caused by having bitten his tongue twice.

"For cat's sake, is this the only way of getting to your camp?" he gasped, when Johnny and the bronk mercifully slowed to climb a steep arroyo bank.

"Unless yuh fly," Johnny assured him happily, hugging the thought that, however awkward he might be when he first essayed to fly, it would be humanly impossible to surpass the awkwardness of Bland Halliday in the saddle.

"Believe me, bo, we'll fly, then, if I have to *build* a plane!" Halliday let go the saddle horn just long enough to

draw the back of his grimy wrist across his perspiring face. "And. I've heard folks claim they *liked* to ride on a horse!" he added perplexedly.

Johnny grinned and turned off the road to ride straight across the country. It would be rough going for the aviator, but it would shorten the journey ten or twelve miles, which meant a good deal to Johnny's peace of mind.

He did not feel it necessary to inform his expert assistant that Sinkhole Camp was accessible to wagons, carts, buckboards—automobiles, even, if one was lucky in dodging rocks, and the tires held out. It had occurred to him that it might be very good policy to make this a trip of unpleasant memories for Bland Halliday. He would work on that plane with more interest in the job. The alternative of a ticket and "eating money" to Los Angeles had been altogether too easy, Johnny thought. There should be certain obstacles placed between Sinkhole and the ticket.

So he placed them there with a thoroughness that lathered the horses, tough as they were. Johnny Jewel knew his Arizona—let it go at that.

"Say, bo, do we have to ride down in there?" came a wail from behind when Johnny's horse paused to choose the likeliest place to jump off a three-foot rim of rock that fenced a deep gash.

"Yep—ride or fly. Why? This ain't bad," Johnny chirped, never looking around.

"Honest to Pete, I'm ready to croak right now! I can loop and I can write my initials in fire on a still night—but damned if I do a nose dive with nothing but a horse under me! He—his control's on the blink! He don't balance to suit me. Aw, say! F'r cat's sake, lemme walk! Honest——"

"And get snake bit?" Johnny glanced back and waved his hand airily just as his horse went over like a cat jumping off a fence. "Come on! Let your horse have his head. He'll make it."

"Me? I ain't got his head! Sa-ay, where's——" He trailed off into a mumble, speaking always from the viewpoint of a flyer. Johnny, listening while he led the way down a blind trail to the bottom, caught a word now and then and decided that Bland Halliday must surely be what he claimed to be, or he would choose different terms for his troubles. He would not, for instance, be wondering all the while what would happen if Sandy did a side slip; nor would he have openly feared a "pancake" at the landing.

Johnny let the horses drink at a water hole, permitted the fellow five minutes or so in which to make sure that he was alive and that aches did not necessarily mean broken bones, and led the way on down that small cañon and out across the level toward another gulch, heading straight for Sinkhole, much as a burdened ant goes through—over or under whatever lies in its path.

It was a very good way to reach home quickly, but it had one drawback which Johnny could not possibly have foreseen. It brought him face to face with Mary V., without any chance at all of either retreating unseen or making a detour.

The three horses stopped, as range horses have a habit of doing when they meet like that. The riders stared for a space. Then Bland Halliday turned his attention to certain raw places on his person, trying to ease them by putting all his weight on what he termed the foot controls. Even a pretty girl could not interest him very much just then, and Mary V. was not looking as pretty as she sometimes looked.

"Well, Johnny Jewel!" said Mary V. disapprovingly. "*What* have you there?"

"Well, Mary V.! *What* are you doing here?" Johnny echoed promptly, choosing to ignore her question.

"What is that to you, may I ask?" Mary V. challenged him.

"What is the other to you, may I ask?" Johnny retorted.

Deadlocked, they looked at each other and tried not to let their eyes smile.

"You're all over your cold, I see," said Mary V. meaningly. "You didn't come, after all, to ride with me last

Sunday, although you promised to come."

"Promised? I did? Well, what did you expect? Not me—I'll bet on it." Johnny had been nearly caught, but he recovered himself in time, he believed.

"I expected you wouldn't know the first thing about it—which you don't. Oh—there's something back here I want to show you." She tilted her head backward, gave him a warning scowl, and rode slowly away.

Johnny followed, uncomfortably mystified. She did not go more than fifty yards—just out of hearing of the stranger. She pointed her finger at a rock which was like any other rock in that locality.

"What is that fellow doing here? He can't ride—I saw you when you came out of the cañon. So he isn't a new hand. And why did somebody answer your telephone for you, and pretend he had a cold so dad wouldn't know he was a stranger? Dad didn't, for that matter, but *I* knew, the very first words he spoke. And what are you up to, Johnny Jewel? You better tell me, because I shall find out, anyway."

"Go to it!" Johnny defied her. "If you're going to find out, anyway, what's the use of me telling you?"

"Who was it answered your phone? You better tell me that, because if I were to just *hint* to dad——"

"What would you hint? I've been answering the phone pretty regularly, seems to me. And can't I have a cold and get over it if I want to? And can't I fool you with my voice? You'd pine away if you didn't have some mystery to mill over. You ought to be glad——"

"You weren't at Sinkhole Camp that night I phoned." Mary V. looked at him accusingly.

"Oh! Weren't I?" Johnny took refuge in mockery. "How do you know?"

Naturally Mary V. disliked to tell him how she knew. She shied from the subject. "You're the most *secretive* thing—you are doing something dad doesn't know about, but you ought to know better than to think you can fool me. Really, I should not like to see you get into trouble with my father—even though——"

"Even though I am merely your father's hired man. I get you perfectly. Why not let papa's hired man take care of himself?"

Mary V. flushed angrily. Johnny was reminding her of the very beginning of their serial quarrel, when he had overheard her telling a girl guest at the ranch that Johnny Jewel was "only one of my father's hired men." Mary V. had not been able to explain to Johnny that the girl guest had exhibited altogether too great an interest in his youth and his good looks and had frankly threatened a flirtation. The girl guest was something of a snob, and Mary V. had taken the simplest, surest way of squelching her romantic interest. She had done that effectually, but she had also given Johnny Jewel a mortal wound in the very vitals of his young egotism.

"We are so short-handed this season!" Mary V. explained sweetly. "And dad is so stubborn, he'd fire the last man on the ranch if he caught them doing things he didn't like. And if he doesn't get all the horses broken and sold that he has set his heart on selling, he says he won't be able to buy me a new car this fall. There's the *dearest* little sport Norman that I want——"

"Hope you get it, I'm sure. I'll take an air plane for mine. In the meantime, you're holding up a hired hand when he's in a hurry to get on the job again. That won't get you any sport Normans, or buy gas for the one you've got."

"That man——" Mary V. lowered her voice worriedly. "I know something nasty and unpleasant about him. I can't remember just now what it is—but I shall. I've seen him somewhere. What is he doing here? You might tell me that much."

"Why, he's going to stay overnight with me. Maybe a little longer. I'm willing to pay for all he eats, if that——"

"Shame on you! Why must you be so perfectly intolerable? I hope he stays long enough to steal the coat off your back. He's a crook. He couldn't be anything else, with those eyes."

"Poor devil can't change the color of his eyes—but that's a girl's reason, every time. You better be fanning for home, Mary V. You've no business out this far alone. I think I'll have to put your dad wise to the way you drift around promiscuous. You can't tell when a stray greaser might happen along. No, I mean it! You're always kicking about my doing things I shouldn't—well, you've got to quit riding around alone the way you do. What if I had been somebody else—a greaser, maybe?"

Mary V. had seen Johnny angry often enough, but she had never seen just that look in his eyes—a stern anxiety that rather pleased her.

"Why, I should have said *'Como esta Usted?'* and ridden right along. If he had been half as disagreeable as you have been, I expect maybe I'd have shot him. Go on home to Sinkhole, why don't you? I'm sure *I* don't enjoy this continual bickering." She rode five steps away from him, and pulled up again. "Of course you want me to tell dad you have a—a guest at Sinkhole Camp?"

Johnny gave a little start, opened his lips, and closed them; opened them again and said: "You'll suit yourself about that—as usual." If she thought he would beg her to keep this secret or any other, she was mistaken.

"Oh, thank you so much. I shall tell him, then—of course." She gave her head a little tilt that Johnny knew of old, and rode away at as brisk a trot as Tango could manage on that rough ground.

"Some chicken!" Bland Halliday grinned wryly when Johnny waved him to come on. "Great place to keep a date, I must say."

Johnny turned upon him furiously. "You cut that out—quick! Or hoof it back to the railroad after I've licked the stuffin' outa you. That girl is a real girl. You don't need to speak to her or about her. She ain't your kind."

TO BE CONTINUED.

THE MARTIAL CITY OF WASHINGTON

WHEN the proposition was advanced in the House of Representatives recently to erect a statue in Washington in memory of President Buchanan and to place it in one of the loveliest parks of the city, statesmen were bitterly divided on the subject.

"The best thing we can do for Buchanan," shouted one congressman, "is to forget him!"

Another referred to him as "ten-cent Jimmie" because at one time he had favored a dime as the proper wage for a man's manual labor for a whole day.

Champ Clark, the speaker of the House, took a different view of the matter. He was in favor of putting up the statue. He said so in no uncertain terms. He said it in a voice that nearly tore the roof off.

"Right now," he declared, "wherever you turn in Washington, you see represented in bronze the mounted soldier heroes of the United States. No man who has distinguished himself in battle for this country since its formation as a country seems to be reproduced except astride a raging charger. And all of them are to be found in our statuary. Therefore I think the time has come to erect a few statues to the great statesmen of the nation.

"As a matter of fact, judging from the statues we see on every hand here now, the city of Washington is nothing but a cavalry outpost."

The Purling Brook Which Is Bow Sing Low's

By Donn Byrne

Author of "The Epistle to the Ephesians," Etc.

Of a Chinese poet who runs a chop suey restaurant, and of several of his customers who frequent his place to talk rather than eat in his Jasmine Garden—a circumstance that whets the curiosity of the delicate poet-caterer and leads to astonishing consequences

YOU might allude to it contemptuously as a "chop suey;" you might go further and say, with a sense of disgust, that it was a Chinese "joint;" but if you mounted the staircase and looked into the red-and-gold room and noticed the immaculate quality of the mottled, marble-topped tables, you would be extremely surprised. And if by any chance you can read the angular Cantonese script above the lintel of the door, a faint odor of Eastern romance will arise within you, for the words, translated into English, mean "The Garden of One Thousand Jasmine Blossoms and One Purling Brook, which is Bow Sing Low's."

Gunmen congregate there—slim, pallid youths with the pasty face and twitching hands of the cocaine eater; light women are not uncommon; a belated traveler on the Pennsylvania Railroad will choose it for a meal rather than the cold quality of the restaurant buffet; a few actors and actresses may enter, or at times a slumming party. But they seldom, if ever, see Bow Sing Low.

Of Bow Sing Low much might be written.

For centuries, down the dim vistas of time, his fathers had lived in luxury on that broad estate in San-shi, where the acres of poppy blossoms stretch for miles, corruptly chaste, restlessly soporific. There they had dwelt in dignity and wealth, seeking the mystery called Tao from morn to night, while their jade coffers filled with the treasure bought by the distillation of their crops of poppy blossoms.

But there are new days in the Yellow Empire now. No longer can the slant-eyed, mysterious ones drown the day and night away over the pipes of silver and bamboo and jade, dreaming of kings glorious as the rising sun, vari-colored, magnificent. No longer shall the odor of the poppy blossom evoke the vision of Hai-Loung-Wang, the Serpent King, sailing in a mist of gold and phosphorescence over the Outer Sea, while a million subtle pinpricks titillate their bodies and the indefinable torpor creeps in the centers of life. Those days are gone now.

"The halls of jasper are crumbled," Bow Sing Low said to himself; "the dining floor is dust, and fluttering rags are the satin window screens. No more is my wealth in land, but better so!"

A Manchu gentleman and a poet, he came to New York to make as much money as would keep him in affluence in his old days in his native province, as Meng Hao-Jan did. For ten years he had been in America, and money had poured into his lap like the shower of gold in which Jove came to Danäe. Already off the press were two books of his—"The Book of Blossoms" and "The Repository of Choice Aromas." "The Return to Wang-Hei" was as yet unfinished. But there was little heart in him to go back to the Yellow Land

now, because the Manchu days were gone. But still he kept his Jasmine Garden, with its two waiters—Mock Lee, the fat and tubby one, and the lugubrious Tai Liang, the dexterous. And still in the little back room, bare except for a few Chinese water colors on the wall, an immense copper brazier for the burning of sandalwood perfume, a chair and table with ink, small camel's-hair brushes and paper, he sat and wrote in weird characters on long, slim sheets:

About the city wall, he wrote, *the yellow dusk winds like a sheet. The crows creep homeward, cawing, to the familiar branch. Down by the flowered stream a woman works her pearly visions on brocade finer than pearl itself*——

Mock Lee, the tubby waiter, knocked gently at the door, knocked louder, took the liberty of opening the door, and walked in. Bow Sing Low looked up in a sort of daze.

"The baron wants to see you outside," he announced.

The poet's features twisted into a grimace; then his beady black eyes glinted like a snake's.

"Very well, I come, Mock Lee."

He walked into the gaudy and ornate dining room. He crossed to a table in a corner. His eyes were expressionless, but still he took in every detail of the party sitting there. The bland, corpulent man of forty, in evening dress, with the minute sword scars on his cheeks; the lanky, fox-faced man beside him; the harassed-looking woman in evening clothes, unnerved, hysterical, almost.

"Well, Bow, here we are!" the corpulent man blustered.

Bow Sing Low bowed.

"Sit down and have a little of your own food."

"I am very sorry"—there was hardly a trace of the "l" in the Chinaman's "r" —"I have business, most important." He bowed again and slipped out. Behind his supersensitive back he could almost catch the wink between the corpulent man and the lean one—and the terror on the poor lady's face.

He had thought about that corpulent gentleman quite a lot, had Bow Sing Low. A month ago he had come into the Jasmine Garden, introducing himself as Franz Helmstadt—Baron Franz von und zu Helmstadt his name had once been; once, he declared solemnly. He had once been an aristocrat; he boasted living off the labor of peasants; but now he was a plain business man, making his living by the work of his head and the sweat of his brow. He equally had embraced the principles of the land of his adoption! The street cleaner on the sidewalk was brother to him. He was a man, not an automaton. Every human being had a soul, had he not? The colored porter? He drew no color line. Why, he told Bow Sing Low, he respected a Chinaman as much as a white man. And Bow Sing Low, who was son of a Manchu prince and whom contemporary Chinese critics spoke of as the only poet since Po-Chüi, received the compliment with deferential, unsmiling face.

"It is good of you," he said humbly.

"There is no question of good in it," the baron intoned loudly. "We hold it in indisputable truth that all men are equal."

For the baron Bow Sing Low held a great measure of contempt; for, though the yellow millions hold business to be the most worthy of professions, yet they have queer intuitions, passing the logic of the Occidental. For the fox-faced man, whose name was Steifel, Bow Sing Low had not interest even for contempt. But for the baron's wife, the blue-eyed, fair-haired little Irish lady, patently bullied and harassed, forced to sit with these pigs in a place where light women came and went—for her Bow Sing Low felt sorry, indubitably sorry, and more angry than a Celestial is credited with being able to be.

Now, when Nora de la Poer met the explorer, Franz von und zu Helmstadt, on the occasion of the visit of a lecture of his before the Dublin Royal Irish Academy, she promptly became fascinated with the man. She dropped her hard-drinking, hard-riding Irish suit-

ors; the elegant English-government officials who talked at much length and with the Oxford accent, that abominable thing, of the problem of Ireland; she broke the hearts of an honest major of the Leinsters and of a rising subaltern of the Connaught Rangers. The trimness, the elaborate courtesy, the soldierly bearing of the German nobleman swept her off her feet. He would address her with the song of the mariner in "Tristan und Isolde," which begins, I am given to believe, with the words *"Du Irisches Kind."*

"The man's a damned fool!" some of her acquaintances told her bluntly; but she was only nineteen, and accepted this sentimentality as real, honest fervor.

And they were married. Old Beresford de la Poer, her father, was savage. "Aren't there men in Ireland," he demanded, "without trotting off with this Dutch cockatoo? This stiff-backed omadhaun! Explorer! Explorer be damned! What you want is a decent Irishman, who can drink his port and ride his horse and sing the 'Cruskeen Lawn.' Let me tell you this, young woman, that stiff-spined idiot gets no penny of mine!"

Old De la Poer may have been the best judge of horses in Ireland—he undoubtedly was. He may have known more about boxers and boxing than any men of his times—he said he did. But one thing he knew nothing about, and that was his daughter Nora. His wild jeremiads only made her more intent on marrying the man; and as for his money, Nora had enough of her own from her mother's jointure to make her a fair dowry. So, after a six months' engagement, she became Baronin von und zu Helmstadt, and walked from the altar down the aisle to a swelling organ excerpt from "Lohengrin."

Old man De la Poer swore viciously, became drunk heroically, and had every German waiter discharged from the Kildare Street Club, being chairman of the house committee. Nora, his daughter, went to live in a bleak barrack in Saxony, whence she emerged every six months or so to spend a few weeks with her explorer husband on the occasions of his return from Annam, Tibet, and China—it was mostly China. And when those weeks were over she went back with a sigh of relief even to that terrible imprisonment; for somehow, even in the short aggregate of time they had been together, the baron had cowed and broken her spirit with the efficiency of a prison warden. He had not been brutal—he had even, in a way, been affectionate—but there had been something so ghastly cold about him, so authoritative, so removed, as it were, that it chilled her heart and put into the marrow of her bones an impalpable fear.

Back in that bleak barrack in Helmstadt, she felt somehow that she was like a soul deserted in an arctic waste. No longer the fun of the hunting field, the cheeriness of the Irish balls. About her were her husband's relatives—mother and sister and niece—who were continually extolling Franz.

"You are a lucky girl," they were always telling her, "to get hold of Franz. You should look cheerful and happy about it. You look sorrowful and sulky. *Es ist nicht richtig!"*

If it had not been for that confounded De la Poer pride, she might have gone home to her father and her own people. But she would imagine always the old man continually chuckling and telling her he knew it would happen, and imagine the pitying glances cast at her by her old friends. At the hunt balls, could she ever dance again? No, she felt in the bruised heart of her, never!

It was in August of 1913—either August or September—that her husband came unexpectedly to the castle at Helmstadt.

"I am giving up my traveling," he told the family.

"So!" said the family, and went on knitting.

"Given up exploring!" Nora cried excitedly. "You don't mean you are going to quit and settle down?"

"Yes," he smiled.

"But what are you going to do?"

"I am going to a new country," he told her sententiously, "to be all the time near my little Irish rose. I am going to New York to set up in the export business and make money."

"So!" came the family chorus, and they went on knitting.

"But you are mad!" Nora cried out. "You know nothing of New York, and it takes years to get a business."

"I have decided," he said shortly.

They came to America. They came over on a Hamburg-Amerika boat as Mr. and Mrs. Franz Helmstadt. On Long Island they took a pretty and ornate house, which for a moment only cheered the crushed heart of her who was once Nora de la Poer. An office was taken on Broadway at Rector Street, where the one-time explorer put up a smart brass sign and did an infinitesimal amount of trading in spices and ginger.

"But where are we to get the money for this?" Nora asked her husband.

"That is man's work," he told her brusquely. "Women's work is in the house."

But for the five years money was plentiful with him. He entertained liberally. There were friends of his who came regularly to see him. Every day increasingly he spoke of his devotion to America, much as a chastened sinner might give evidence at a religious revival. Democracy became an *idée fixe* with him. He went into Polish, Jewish, Turkish places, bringing his wife with him, whom he could now control by one short flash of the eye. He was never tired of drawing attention to the fact that she was an Irish noblewoman, connected in Europe with the best circles. He insisted on her attending the smart functions of the British in New York, of having her pictures in the paper.

And then one day they came to the Jasmine Garden, which is Bow Sing Low's.

There is an analect of Confucius, I believe—or is it Chung-tzu?—which states that when a shepherd seeks your company, beware of ticks. Bow Sing Low should have been grateful to the democratic Franz Helmstadt, for certainly he brought custom to the Jasmine Garden, friends who sat with him and drank the choicest brew of tea and the most costly of Chinese edibles. There was Ram Chandra Singh, a Hindu prince, who deigned to grace the chop suey with his elegant presence. There was a certain Captain McKerr Keston, of the British army, a swarthy Hebraic man with a monocle. On the few occasions these gentlemen were present, his wife Nora was not. The conversation grew low and humming, like the drone of a bee in a dark cell.

Occasionally the former baron grew tipsy, as it were, and, speaking loudly of his admiration of democracy, would call a thug or drunken sailor to his table, and, with loud bursts of laughter and drunken slaps on the knee, would converse with his guest in a whisper, as though he were hearing or telling an indecent story. Many years on Eighth Avenue had added to the native wisdom of Bow Sing Low, which was not little. He knew when a man had taken a drug. He knew when a soul was craving for morphine. And likewise he knew when a man was drunk. And on these occasions he was certain the ex-baron was not.

"I see Raffertee," he said to himself.

There were many friends of Bow Sing Low's—there was a great singer, a great boxer, a Greek patriarch, and many others—but closest of all was the detective, Rafferty, a strongly built, square man of thirty-two, with wavy, chestnut hair and gray eyes. There was no close intellectual companionship between them, nor was there even camaraderie. They spoke shortly to each other, bluntly, but there was respect and a bond between them. There was nothing Bow Sing Low would not have done for Rafferty, and little that Rafferty would not have done for the Chinese poet.

"There is a man comes here, Raffertee," he told him, "with a wife who is Irish, like you."

"I know," Rafferty nodded.

"I do not like him, Raffertee," he

went on. "There is too much talk. He has too many friends."

"You're right," the detective nodded.

"You come in some night and see him?"

"I know him as well as you do."

"You come in and see his wife, Raffertee?"

"No, I will not!" Rafferty exploded. "That will be all right about the baron. Just let him alone."

There were many things that Bow Sing Low suspected about the young detective. He knew, for example, that the man was what the world calls a gentleman; that his name was not Rafferty; that he was fighting something more deadly even than death, and that he was winning all along. Bow Sing Low had seen that set jaw and vicious eye among his countrymen when they were throwing off the slimy tentacles of the poppy weed. And he had seen the bright, keen look come into their faces when victory came to them—the look of a wrestler as he grinds his opponent's shoulders inch by inch toward the mat.

And Bow Sing Low of the Jasmine Garden was right; for Rafferty was not Rafferty, but Robert O'Hara Boyd, the best amateur jockey of his weight that Ireland had seen for centuries; the soul of every riotous party in Dublin; the heartbreak of his family in Louth. Perhaps it was his association with men who own horses and men who deal in horses, or perhaps it was Satan going up and down the world for the ruin of souls; but for four years O'Hara Boyd kept up one continuous drinking bout. His father had played every card in his hand. He threw away the pack.

"You'll go away to Canada, and once a month you'll receive fifteen pounds from home—on condition you never show your face here again!"

"So I'm to be a remittance man? Thank you, sir. I'd rather not. But, by the Lord Harry, you've seen the last of my face!"

He sold everything he possessed, from his cob to his golf sticks, and made for New York. Of that city he made one violent boozing ken, finding himself at last in the gutter. There was some trouble with a longshoreman in which O'Hara Boyd was to blame. The affair ended in a month on Blackwell's Island.

In Blackwell's Island the pride of an Irish gentleman, which is prouder than the pride of a hidalgo of Spain, flared up in white fire. He came out of there and served long enough as a longshoreman to buy himself some decent clothes and to present a decent appearance. By some queer prick of mentality, he decided to work as a policeman—harsh, grueling work that would keep him alert and in condition. He tramped the streets; he rang his clock; he hauled his prisoners into the wagon; and after some time, through the intelligence he displayed in setting out the evidence of his cases, he was put in plain clothes and given more dangerous work. And thus he, like Franz Helmstadt and his wife Nora, came to the Jasmine Garden, which is Bow Sing Low's.

The poet was leaning over his thin slips of paper, his brush in hand.

Spring comes over the mountains like the soft thrumming of a lute, he was writing, *and she, the young bride, unscarred by sorrow——*

From the next room the voice of the baron rose loud and booming:

"My friend, I ask you what is better in the world than honest business, a good and fair——"

In limber, rustling silks and intricate embroidery climbs the kingfisher's tower, wrote Bow Sing Low.

"I ask you, is it honest business to sell liquor that takes away men's brains, that makes dogs of them——"

Over the great wall that Tawak builded she sees the moon rise like a monstrous orchid, went the firm dashes of the brush.

"The cocaine seller, the saloon keeper—they should be crucified. Why do I come here? Because it is this good Bow Sing Low hates opium, will have nothing to do with it——"

The poet laid down his brush patiently. His eye seemed to pierce through the wall.

"The praise of a contemptible man,"

he muttered to himself, "is a leper's spittle."

It might have been the depression of a hard winter that caused it, or it might have been police laxity occasioned by the change from a reform to a machine-made political régime. It might have been either of these that occasioned it, as has been advanced, but we prefer to think that the opium scare of 1914 was nothing but a mood of the city. For cities have moods, characters, vices, virtues, just as individuals have. It is not an aggregate of the character of the residents. It is something different. There is a spirit in every place, say the magic masters, which controls it—the *genius loci,* the Romans dubbed the thing. That is as it may be; but the fact remains, proof against reason, proof against faith, incontrovertible, assured—that a city has an entity for good or for evil.

And that now wayward, now repentant, utterly lovable which is New York has the individuality and the moods of a boy untamed and savage, of mixed strain of blood, who is passing through a dangerous age. At times it will be a mood of cruelty, and for lack of a better term newspapers will call it a crime wave. At times drunkenness and vice, those evil growing pains, will burst like a malignant rash, and wiseacres will prate of a new Babylon and of an end that is coming to things. At times it will become utterly vicious with cocaine. And now it had switched to a new-old vice, the soothing odors of the poppy weed.

In that queer little world of Mott and Pell Streets it had begun. There the little lamps of peanut oil had always been alight, the white foeys of chocolate-colored Li-un ever filled. But, waking up suddenly, the dragon with the monstrous shiny paws had stretched itself over the city. It had ambled through the maze of the East Side and switched toward the dignified brownstone fronts, relics of ancient civic dignity, of the west Forties. In the trim apartments of Harlem the scraping of the yen-hok was heard. In the Bronx fastnesses the brown ichor bubbled in the stone pipe bowls. In the backs of laundries, in the stately houses on the Drive the evil cropped up like some medieval plague. In highway and in byway throughout the city it lurked, a drowsy thing, an evil thing, with malignant eyes.

From China the opium had come in steamers, in sailing vessels, to Brazil and to Mexico, to Colombia, to the republics of the Central Latins. From there it had slipped into New York by railroad and by steamer, concealed with all the cunning of the Western smuggler and of the Oriental crook. By degrees it had been distributed in New York. Police officials snarled in impotent rage. Federal men hunted with the hunting keenness of hawks. Here and there were men caught, habitués and traffickers, but the trail was cunningly concealed. Great precautions had been taken, for great gains were at stake. There had been wholesale bribing, wholesale blackmail. Restaurant keepers had been taken in the act by justice; laundrymen, pharmacists. Here a prominent police captain had been indicted. There an important merchant implicated in the business. A great actress had admitted the use of the drug and pleaded screamingly to be cured. An important cleric was found to be interested in its sale. These things were nothing compared to the big game. Somewhere was there a gigantic organism handling the vice. Somewhere an able brain.

"Some day we'll get him," the harassed men at police headquarters told themselves in hoarse, angry whispers. "Some day—and then——"

But they didn't get him, and through all the city rolled the miasma of the ineffable poison weed. It crept through the veins of the body and it invaded the chinks of the soul, in strange whirls and arabesques, in fantastic scrolls and pale-blue clouds, like the vapor surrounding a magician when he stands within the Circle of Defense, and with his star-tipped almond rod conjures up unspeakable, unclean things from the Abyss.

But into the Jasmine Garden, which

is Bow Sing Low's, that never crept. For he who was now Bow Sing Low hated the purple weed with all the deep hatred of which a son of Han is capable. He had seen the Golden Empire fall a prey to vultures, to ghouls, and thieves through its black sway; seen the foreign hordes tramp through the gentle land; seen the arcana of his beliefs violated by brutal alien fingers.

"A foul thing," the baron was saying, "a foul vice."

He had come there that evening with his wife Nora. There was a dark Hindu present, and a Spaniard with a long, horse's face. Within his own sparsely furnished room, Bow Sing Low had dropped his camel's-hair brush over the broken manuscript.

"What is the police doing?" Helmstadt intoned sonorously. "Bah! My friends, what do the police ever do? I bet you now the man on the beat outside is getting his bribe for not seeing what goes on. This graft, as they call it."

The Hindu and the Spaniard nodded gravely. Nora shivered as she sat in her chair. Great blue circles appeared under her eyes. Long lines showed between nose and cheek bone, running down to her jaw. Her lips were dry.

"What do you expect with the mixture of races here? The hordes of yellow men! The scum of Asia!"

There was the easy sound of feet on the stairs, and Rafferty walked in, his face set. Behind him came two inconspicuously dressed men. They might have been bookkeepers. One wore thick glasses and had a habitual, affable smile.

"There you are!" Rafferty announced. "There's Ram Chandra Singh, and there's the Colombian!"

The men stepped forward.

"Don't you want Helmstadt, too?" Rafferty asked the bespectacled one.

"Can't touch him," was the answer. "We've got nothing on him."

He moved toward the table. Suddenly Nora turned around. Her face went white as lime.

"Bob Boyd!" she cried. "Bob Boyd!"

She had met him hardly a dozen times, at hunts and at races. There had been nothing between them. But to her, as to every horseman and horsewoman in Ireland, O'Hara Boyd had been an epic figure. In a hundred households his picture hung, on the rangy eighteen-hand hunter with which he had three times won the Viceroy's Cup. But now, she felt, he was everything to her—her only escape. She jumped from her chair and ran appealingly to him.

"Bob Boyd, take me home! For God's sake, take me home!"

He put his arm about her, saying nothing, for he was watching the slight scuffle at the table. The quiet-looking men had the Hindu and Colombian by the arms. Rafferty's eye held the baron's, as a snake holds a bird's.

"I'll stay here," he told the Federal agents.

"Take me home, Bob!" she cried incessantly. "I can't stand it!" She wrung her hands. "I can't stand it!"

The baron half rose from his chair.

"Sit down!" Rafferty barked. He caught the girl's hands.

"There's a taxi waiting outside," he told her. "It will take you up to a hotel in the Forties. The Countess of Lonth is across here on a visit. She knows about everything. Will you go up there, Nora de la Poer? Will you do that for me? I'll be up later."

The baron rose again excitedly. His face was purple with anger. At the communicating door between his study and the dining room, Bow Sing Low appeared. He stood erect unsmilingly.

"Sit down!" Rafferty snapped like a whip. The baron dropped into his chair.

"Now go." Nora slipped through the door to the street.

"Go inside!" Rafferty ordered. Bow Sing Low opened the door wide. The baron passed through to the poet's study. Rafferty followed. The baron turned about angrily.

"What is the meaning of all this?" he bellowed. "Your Federal agents arrest my friends for distributing drugs. They leave me alone. But you push me in here at a revolver's point. You

send my wife away. What do you mean?"

"You know." Rafferty eyed him coldly.

"I am a simple merchant. I have got nothing to do with it. My wife moves in the highest circles——"

"I'll close your mouth with the butt of this gun in a minute," Rafferty snapped at him. Bow Sing Low looked on curiously. The detective turned to the Chinaman.

"This dog, Bow Sing Low," Rafferty explained, "is the head of the whole opium ring. He attended for years to the shipments from Canton. He controls everything. It was he scoured China for the stuff. It's he that's getting rich on it all."

"Have you any evidence?" the baron asked angrily, but there was a sly gleam in his eye.

"Unfortunately, no," Rafferty answered coolly. "This dog, Bow Sing Low, used your place as a resort for meeting his lieutenants. He knew your reputation as an opium hater. He thought he would be safe here."

"I see," Bow Sing Low said calmly.

"This dog, Bow Sing Low"—Rafferty's voice was buzzing like an angry hornet—"was at the burning of the factories in China, collecting, spying out methods of manufacture, bribing, killing——"

"In Peking?" the Chinaman asked blandly.

"In Tientsin," Helmstadt stood up proudly and sneered openly.

"In Tientsin," Bow Sing Low nodded his head. "A moment, Raffertee! I had an uncle in Tientsin, an herbalist, who knew the secret Chianglin method. After the factories burned down, a party of Germans tortured him for the formula. When he wouldn't tell, they nailed him on a cross and set him down on the river. There were crocodiles in the river, Raffertee."

"By the saints!" the detective gasped. He lugged out his heavy pistol and caught the baron by the shoulder.

"What are you going to do, Raffertee?" Bow Sing Low asked.

"I am going to take this swine into the back yard and kill him."

"One moment, Raffertee." He walked to the door and clapped his hands. Mock Lee, the tubby, smiling waiter, came in.

"You go down to the Hip Sings, to Tom Lee," Bow Sing Low's singsong Cantonese went on. "You tell him I want four men, a taxicab, a junk boat, a raft, a hammer, and nails. I want them quickly."

He turned to Rafferty again.

"Raffertee," he said, "you don't do that thing. You go after that little Irish girl. The baron, who is democratic, will stay here with me—with his friend Bow Sing Low. The baron has often invited me to be his guest. Now he will do me the honor of being mine."

The big Irishman looked at the Chinese poet for a long minute searchingly. He put his revolver back into his pocket. He walked toward the door. He turned around suddenly.

"You don't deserve any decent man's saying it," he told the white-faced Helmstadt, "but may the Lord God Almighty have mercy on your soul!"

With a clear, sharp whistle the wind swept down the gully of the East River. It seemed to come from interplanetary space, so cold it was. Under a vagueness of stars, New York, at half light, rose like a range of icy mountains.

The last ferryboat had cloven its way from shore to shore, and even the police patrols had kept to their piers. No man would venture on the river that polar night, they decided. The sparkling bridges to the north and south shot out long rays like asteroids. In their booths the guards huddled for warmth.

Very faintly the junk boat chugged forward to the middle of the river.

"Upstream!" the pockmarked giant in the bows ordered in the grunting Shanghai jargon. "Hold her! Pull in the raft!"

"Pull him out!"

A gagged and bound figure was hoisted on the raft. It struggled furiously.

"Take out the gag!" the Shanghai giant ordered.

The big leader looked down at the crouching, bound figure with an aloof smile.

"Hammer and nails!" he ordered. "And hold him, Tong-Dok."

The figure in the raft straightened up suddenly.

"Listen!"

The massive Celestial looked down, ever smiling.

"Do you want money? Tens of thousands? A million?"

"We want nothing."

The Pekingese thrust his thumbs in the bound man's larynx. There was a scuffle. Silence.

"Let go, Tong-Dok!" the Shanghaian ordered.

"God!" the baron was babbling. "You are not going to put me on that—on a night like this?"

"Pang-hei, of Tientsin, died like this," the giant replied, in his even sing-song, "and a cold night is not so sharp as a crocodile's tooth."

"What did it matter to you that the white devils go dead in opium?" Helmstadt whispered fiercely, trying to reason as a last expedient.

"It mattered to me when the sons of Han went dead with it. It matters to me when a dragon is unloosed in a smiling land. Hold him, Tong-Dok; hold him!" The lean Pekingese thrust his thumbs once into the bound man's throat. In an instant he was quiet, hands and arms outstretched. For two minutes, perhaps, there was a metallic tapping, as of nails being driven.

The Pekingese released his thumbs from the larynx. For an instant he massaged the throat. He felt if the gag was fixed properly. He slapped the face and ran his hands over the nerves of the neck. A faint gurgle came from the gagged mouth. Water slapped the raft viciously. Ice blocks struck it and made it shudder as the blow of an ax might affect a tree.

"Oh, pity!" the scream cut into the air.

The Shanghaian chuckled musingly. The two Chinamen climbed back to the junk boat.

"Cut loose the rope!"

There was the slash of a heavy knife, and the raft floated off dimly. Faintly chug-chugging, the junk boat returned to shore.

A policeman came rushing down toward the junk boat as it touched land.

"Hey, you!" he bawled at the Chinaman. "Did you hear anything out there?"

"Cur dog," the Shanghaian replied, "drowning in the river."

The mandarin duck and drake fly upward on two wings, Bow Sing Low was writing, *overcoming the bitter clouds of fate. A hundred wrinkled sorrows touched their hearts, but now together they shall breast the winds, unconquerable. The moon and her stars shine fair for them; for them the silver spans the sky. The island of green jade shall see them groom and bride.*

Bow Sing Low remembered the rush the girl made to the ruddy-faced Irish sportsman. Again his brush slipped over the paper.

I hear the pigeon stirring in its nest; true as a bee, the pheasant flies homeward to its mate.

A soft knock at the door, and Mock Lee entered. He made a curious gesture and went out again. Bow Sing Low rose and passed through the dining room to the head of the stairs. At the bottom a huddled figure in overcoat and slouched hat was waiting.

"Is it done, Yen Tsan?" the poet asked.

Yen Tsan bowed deeply and slipped out into the darkness. Bow Sing Low turned to enter the dining room. The quaint writing above the door lintel caught his eye. He sniffed.

"The Garden of One Thousand Jasmine Blossoms and One Purling Brook—and one Purling Brook"—he smiled cynically as he thought of the whirling East River, with its crunching ice blocks and its whistling, crippling wind—"and One Purling Brook, which is Bow Sing Low's."

The Black Book

BEING FURTHER EXPLOITS OF YORKE NORROY, SECRET AGENT OF THE DEPARTMENT OF STATE

By George Bronson-Howard

Author of "Norroy, Diplomatic Agent," "Slaves of the Lamp," Etc.

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING STORIES

Charles Petersham, a young man of good antecedents, is on the way to promotion in the navy department when he is charged with treason. Yorke Norroy, believing in the suspected man's honesty, gets in touch with him, and by his aid finds the headquarters of the gang, but they escape through an underground passage while the house is surrounded. Petersham is added to the secret-service forces, after relating his refusal to sign his name in a book of friends of Germany which, he says, contains the names of many persons of more or less prominence in all parts of the United States. Norroy then adds to his forces Ulric Ulm, a penniless writer who, through a girl who takes him for a German spy, learns the whereabouts of four books which comprise the volume Norroy seeks. Two of the four are obtained after a desperate fight in Van Corlear Square. A girl, Clovis Clarke, and her uncle, gets one of the others. Norroy advertises for them in an ingenious way, and at the home of the girl in the outlying districts of New York there is another fight, in which Petersham is badly wounded, but the book remains undiscovered.

IV.—HIS COUNTRY OR HIS LIFE?

CHAPTER I.

THE MAN WHO FLED FROM HIMSELF.

ETHAN VAN CORLEAR had been plodding the streets since sundown, hands thrust deep into his pockets; his fingers were pressed hard against the lining. Had he lifted the soft Tyrolese hat, which, when bought in the Alps, where men wear such gear, and at a time when his spirits were in accord with it, had sported the cockiest kind of a cock's feather at the back, another indentation would have showed a red line just above ears and brows, for the hat was never meant to be pulled down so savagely and so low. And, though it was midwinter and a sullen, lowering sort of day, with ever and anon a cutting breeze that sent the snow sliding down slanting roofs and dispersed it elsewhere, Van Corlear wore both coat and overcoat open that he might better thrust those hands deep in those trousers pockets, from which he had not removed them since the sun had set.

For it was at this hour that he had come tearing forth from the front door of that house built when Van Corlear Square was the Van Corlear estate. It had been the Van Corlear "bouwerie," or farm, in the old Dutch days when Manhattan still wore knickerbockers.

The Van Corlear "mansion" which replaced the old New Amsterdam farmhouse was the only home Ethan had ever had, or was ever likely to have. He occupied the same attic room under the eaves that had been his at the age of eight, when they transferred him thence from the nursery. It had been his at eighteen, when he had returned home from "prep" school with high honors to read law with his father and his uncle, as his brother had done a few years before. Then, in good time, both were to make good the inference to be drawn from certain gilt letters, the first of a flock on similar signboards attached to either side of the carven pilasters of an ancient office warren on an old street, the rear windows of

whose upper stories overlooked the Battery and both rivers:

VAN CORLEAR & VAN CORLEAR,
Attorneys—Solicitors.
Executors East River Estates.

Such a sign had first shone forth bravely bedecked in gilt, an even hundred years after His High Mightiness Peter Stuyvesant first originated East River Estates to be "executed." Then there had been a yew tree before the office windows and gardens to many of the houses, and after "Van Corlear & Van Corlear" appeared the now evanished "Barristers of the Middle Temple." That had disappeared when "Van Corlear & Van Corlear" moved into their present quarters, built around a garden in imitation of one of the old London Inns of Court, each office, after one entered the main door and crossed a corridor, facing a gay pleasaunce of green in the center, a stairway to every two signs leading to an upper story.

That was how old "Van Corlear & Van Corlear" was. Which is older than any one now alive. Third, fourth, and fifth floors had been added to the old "Inn" just before Lincoln's election, and just after the birth of Ethan van Corlear's father, who was Elam van Corlear, the fifth, as Ethan's brother was Elam, the sixth. The eldest male Van Corlear was always Elam, the second son Ethan, and the two brothers, or three or four as might be, were always "Van Corlear & Van Corlear."

The sign, we repeat, still read "Van Corlear & Van Corlear," but there was only one brother in it now and that one was not he who since sundown had hurled himself across the face of New York, hands pressed hard against his pockets. No, despite his brilliant record at St. Paul's, the ease of his admittance to the New York bar after an exemplary showing at examinations, his auspicious start, Ethan Van Corlear, the sixth of that name, was, technically, an outcast, and Van Corlear & Van Corlear had never been notorious for outcast alliances.

Yet the name of Ethan, the sixth, had surpassed that of all the other Ethans; of all the Elams, too. Not only for his brilliant work as a lawyer, but for reasons utterly extraneous to his membership in the firm. Ethan, the sixth, it had been who had brought out, anonymously, at first, that extraordinary series of stories concerning the New York of other days which some said surpassed both in verity and in art similar effects by Irving. From these had been made, in collaboration with another, the play. "In Old New York," which, after being played everywhere in American and Europe, had been studded with songs and, as an operetta, played everywhere once again.

Ethan van Corlear, the sixth, Captain Ethan Corlear of the "Dandy Seventeenth"; Ethan the author, "the man who had everything," as somebody had said, and said truthfully, "wit, family, social position, fame, and his feet formally set upon the road to riches." But that was the trouble! Ethan had too much and he had got it too easily. And, as easily as he got it, he lost it.

His story is the story of too many brilliant youths who, having crowded a decade into a year, think they can crowd a century into a decade. After his play's instantaneous and incredible success, too many managers wanted plays from Ethan van Corlear, too many ladies aided and abetted the author to preen his peacock plumes, too many boon companions filled the cup already full to overflowing, too many.

The wit that once came without effort soon required the wine that once was only a foretext for graceful toasts. The wine was soon succeeded by whisky. When whisky is hourly needed to whip up flagging spirits and deaden an aching head, the end is soon in sight. And the end, for Ethan van Corlear, began in the sanitarium.

After drink came drugs. And now was the real end—the end of ends. Earlier in the day on which we take up his tale, Ethan van Corlear had seen himself rehabilitated, dying in Mexico at the head of his company, his faults forgotten, his virtues revived and made

immortal—only to be refused by the surgeons as "physically unfit" for active service, and discharged from the national guard on the eve of his regiment's departure for "the border."

The examining surgeons had not given the real reason; but, deep down, Ethan van Corlear knew they knew. And so Elam van Corlear was to represent Van Corlear & Van Corlear abroad as he now represented it at home. Both bits of bitter knowledge and their cumulative concomitants had been the cud that Ethan van Corlear was chewing before the study fire, when his elder brother, in uniform, passed him, laid a consoling hand on his shoulder, then departed upstairs to pack.

And Ethan, brought raging to his feet, was also about to go upstairs to unpack, among other things, the syringe for the use of which he now felt the insistent urge, the need for the drug it would carry through his veins stirring his listless blood to life again. But, at the very instant when it lay in his hand, charged and ready to use, he was overcome with a violent antipathy for it—this, the cause of his country's refusal of him, the reason why he could not, in serving a worthy cause, redeem himself.

He had cast the little shining instrument from him, seized hat and coat, and, as has been told, hurled himself into the streets once more to struggle against this slavery, the shackles of which galled as would those of the most shameful prisoners. Since then he had walked—and walked—and walked.

And now, at last, he was returning, vanquished, to his home in Van Corlear Square, not, it is true, to kiss his enslaver as once he might have done, believing himself richer by her acquaintance; but, unwillingly or not, to yield himself—because he must!

It was then, as he made his way with shoulders hunched high, and head bent low, feet that shuffled and eyes that sought the ground, that something hurtled through the air and fell directly at his feet. He stooped to pick it up as one who does a thing not because he wishes to do so, but because his dulled brain is running in usual channels. He was hardly conscious of brushing aside Miss Clovis Clarke as he stooped; he was utterly unconscious of her as he straightened up and turned the pages of the book he had picked up in the lamplight.

For, when he read name after name and found all German, and had glanced at the house and assured himself it was that one whose inhabitants, alone of all those in the square, were unknown and unusually aloof, and, yes, he remembered now, extremely foreign, he snapped the book shut and started off hurriedly.

For once he was the Ethan van Corlear of old, who leaped from theory to truth by brilliant burst of intuition. Forgotten for the moment—momentarily at least—was his necessity, the load under which he labored. He only knew that it seemed as if the Lord God had given him a final chance to be the almost forgotten man of yesteryear—unlike the other Ethan—a man his country needed.

He passed his home without a look. That was not the place to go if this book meant what, vaguely, he surmised it to mean. By no means. Where to go he did not exactly know. But not home.

As he half walked, half ran, he was not surprised to discover that some stranger was following him.

CHAPTER II.

THE MAN WHO PURSUED HIM.

To Ethan the drug was meat and drink, the love of woman, of home, of parents—of everything—all rolled in one. Yes, and also it held the great hate that one who has been worthy has, when, willy-nilly, he loves an unworthy woman; who, crying out against himself all the while, is yet drawn to her side as the steel is drawn by the loadstone.

But the man who, once he had read, surmised so brilliantly and hurried off so fast, was one to whom slavery was unknown; was the true Ethan van Corlear, whom once everybody had

known. The change was indeed no less than a miracle; there is but one word to describe it—transformation.

He did not enter the house of the Van Corlears for a very good reason. If the book was anything of the sort he surmised it vaguely to be, then to retreat with it into his own house was only to invite an assault later in the night.

This belief was borne out by the very evident espionage of the man who was in hot pursuit of him; a man Van Corlear had first seen out of the tail of his eye as he passed him at the street corner. Van Corlear had noted then just such a steady glare as a lurking leopard might have; the glare that would, in the leopard's case, have preceded a leap upon his prey. But it was not just the wisest thing for any man to do on a lighted corner—leopard-like inclined or no; so the man had turned and followed, and was, Van Corlear believed, only waiting for the opportunity to indulge his leopard proclivities.

Something subconscious must have whispered to the old Ethan van Corlear that the mental drive of the moment must soon succumb to sheer physical necessity for his drug. So he acted as promptly as might have been expected of the old Ethan van Corlear. It is possible he did not know exactly what he would do when the three-foot high jars of red and green liquid with the light behind them advertised the old-time chemist's shop of Albert Cornelius & Son—an establishment almost as ancient as Van Corlear & Van Corlear. Such an establishment had stood there when Van Corlear Square was an outlying suburb of New York; when there had been an inn over the way where the stagecoach stopped and let down its ladder.

Van Corlear knew the contemporaneous Cornelius as well as he knew anybody, nowadays; better than he knew most people, for, besides having played ball with him as a boy, it was to Cornelius that he came about this time each day bearing a doctor's permit for his daily need of the drug. Involuntarily, Cornelius went back of the counter and began to put up the morphia pellets, to paste on a label to the thin tube.

Van Corlear had followed him back of the counter; but not to hand over the prescription in his pocket. For the Van Corlear whose part he played for an all-too-brief period needed neither drink nor drugs.

He sat down at the little desk behind the partition. He was screened from the sight of his pursuer in this little sanctum. Grasping a pen, Van Corlear selected an envelope, addressed it to the chief clerk of the office of Van Corlear & Van Corlear on the old street downtown; adding to one corner of the envelope, "Put into safe until called for by Mr. Ethan van Corlear." And, in case this might be overlooked during the slitting open of a shoal of letters, he rewrote these directions on a Cornelius label, wet the musilaged back, and attached it to the book. This he slipped into the envelope and sealed it. On second thoughts he took the additional precaution of using the red sealing wax with which the chemist made air-tight the tops of corked bottles; dropping a great blob of the wax upon the envelope's outer flap and firmly imbedding therein that which represented all that was left to him of his vanished glory—the great seal ring his Uncle Ethan had worn during over half a century of honorable service to the State.

"When I leave here, Corny," Van Corlear adjured the druggist, "slip out and put this in the mail box on the corner. Promise! It's important!"

The kindly chemist, deeming this seriousness only one of the vagaries of a user of drugs, promised.

"But I mean immediately—as soon as I leave here. I have a good reason for not doing it myself. Promise me you'll do it the minute I leave you."

"Oh, all right, Mr. Ethan," said Cornelius impatiently.

Even in Van Corlear's fallen estate, this druggist and son of druggists could not call otherwise the son of the house of Van Corlear & Van Corlear, which

house had been the patrons of the house of Cornelius a century or more. There is tradition even in New York.

Cornelius took the envelope, laid it aside, and, taking up the pen, wrote upon the label of the tube. Mechanically, Van Corlear gave him the doctor's prescription. As soon as the envelope left his hands he was left in a state of transition between the two Van Corlears. And when the tube came into his hands, he sank back into the chair, racked, as before, by his imperative need. Only now it was worse than before; for he had the desire of the previous quarter hour plus that which had accumulated while he had played the part of the Van Corlear of yesterday.

He was torn by a terrible yawn that pried open his mouth as with a pair of forceps. The great gape that ensued stopped his vitals. His mouth remained open even after the yawn had passed, gripped by some power of inanition which made it impossible for him to close it. He sat as one stricken with lockjaw, while great beads of perspiration oozed forth from his forehead and hung there in fatty drops, and the membranes of his eyes were obscured and stung by a stream of salty tears that came without volition and without emotional cause.

Indeed, he sat as one paralyzed, unable to move, to speak, hardly to hear. Cornelius' voice seemed to come from some vasty distance, from another dimension. Van Corlear could not see him. He could only sit in his dumb, motionless misery—for he had postponed the taking of the drug so long that his heart was beating barely enough to keep him alive. Had he gone on without what he needed a little longer, he would have known first, dementia, then a nightmarish coma, then death. For such a mistress is Morphia, she holds even her subjects' lives in the balance.

"I'll fix you up," Cornelius had said pityingly. He knew the symptoms. He reclaimed the little tube, dissolved half a dozen of the pellets, drew the liquid into a syringe, fitted it with a long needle. Then, unbuttoning Van Corlear's coat sleeve—for he still patronized the sort of tailor who scorns buttons without buttonholes—and unfastening his cuff link, Cornelius bared Van Corlear's arm and rubbed a tiny spot with alcohol both before and after the injection.

As the ebbing blood was quickened by the anodyne, that both quieted the nerves and stimulated them, Van Corlear's lower jaw relaxed, his teeth met. Gradually, he was moved to raise his arm and wipe away the stinging perspiration and tears. Then he closed his eyes until he should be a man again instead of a wretched wreck, one of the many derelicts engulfed by the city's sands of pleasure.

Presently he staggered up, for the strain upon his heart had been terrific; straightened himself and held out his hand.

"Thanks, Corny," he said.

"If only you could quit it, Mr. Ethan," said the other dolefully, taking the hand and returning the remaining pellets in the tube.

"If only I *could*," said Ethan van Corlear, sixth, sternly. "Yes. Well, I've got to quit or die, haven't I? I can't stand much more of this——"

He broke off abruptly.

"Don't forget to mail that as soon as I go out, will you, Corny?"

Cornelius promised again, and, gripping himself with something of his old form, Ethan van Corlear steered a tolerably true course down the aisle between counters laden with the miscellany common to chemists' shops, and went out.

The man was waiting for him on the other side. Hardly remembering there was such a man, Ethan van Corlear made for Van Corlear Square as mechanically as a homing pigeon. But, before he reached his home, he heard the sound of pistol shots and turned toward that other house from a window of which the book had fallen to the bricks. And now from a little distance he saw what few have seen in that quarter of New York—what appeared to be a running fight between men within and outsiders on the pave.

True, those of Norroy's corps carried silencers on their weapons, as did those within, but this was not so of the bomb squad, and to the many flashes that lit up the dark, for the street lamp had been smashed, was added the sharp staccato of firing.

Ethan van Corlear turned quickly and retraced his steps. Whatever this meant, it would be a cowardly act to his mother, his aunt, and his young sisters to enter their house under such circumstances; followed as he was by one of these very men who did not scruple to resort to violence on one of the quietest of New York streets; especially when that man believed him to carrry an article apparently of some value, since it had caused him to be followed.

No, while the drug held, he must contrive somehow to shake off this spy. Van Corlear turned and went the way he had come. From the corner of the next street, he could see, in the pool of light cast by the two great jars of red and green, the bareheaded figure of Cornelius returning, no doubt, from the mail box.

Van Corlear took another turn, and made off at a rapid pace. The long chase began.

CHAPTER III.

UNDERGROUND AGAIN.

An Interlude in which Miss Clovis Clarke Takes Up the Story.

Between the chapters of my own narrative, as I understand it, will be inserted the adventures of others who were involved in the adventure of "The Black Book." At least it was so called, although really it was only a black leather case. But if you had seen it on a library shelf, you would have believed it to be one of those uninteresting volumes in black morocco published by Bible societies for Sunday-school gift books and entitled "The Bible in the Levant." All of which was very artfully designed to keep hands off it, should it by any chance go astray. I am sure, so far as I am concerned, or any of my acquaintance, it might have accumulated dust for ages. There would have been no fear of my taking it down to discover that it was in reality only a dummy made to conceal four thin volumes within; all bound in the same way, the thin, tough paper of each covered with the names of the War Lord's emissaries in America.

All this I had learned from the boy who was shot down before my eyes in his attempt to rescue me; the boy whose name I afterward learned was Petersham, and whose previous adventures in this connection I believe precede mine.

It was this that had been chiefly instrumental in arousing me to such a rage that I put up a perfectly impotent fight against the German agents who had come after the last volume of "The Black Book" which I had found and hidden, and had intended to give to young Mr. Petersham; representing as he did my own country, the United States, of course, to which the book I had found would be of immense value in locating and imprisoning the spies and traitors within our gates.

In the earliest part of my story I mentioned the rather wild-eyed man who stooped and picked up just such another book as the one that came into my possession; and it is he rather than myself whom this section of my story concerns.

But first I must tell how I came to be in the position in which he found me after he, too, became a prisoner.

I have already said that I fought impotently with those who had shot down the boy, especially with the man, Knatchbull—as he called himself—for whom I had conceived a feeling, part hatred, part horror, which was perhaps the strongest passion that had ever dominated me. I felt if only my fingers could fasten on his throat, God would give me the strength to cling to it until I had stifled every breath of air within him. This was sheer nonsense, of course, for Knatchbull was a powerful man and I, although tramping outdoors and open-air exercise in general had given me more than an average girl's

grip, was yet a mere weakling compared to him. Moreover, there were other able and willing pairs of hands to help him, and, in the end, finding I was not to be discouraged by ordinary means, one of them struck me heavily on the back of the head.

I remember struggling back to consciousness, my head hurting horribly, and became dimly conscious of the interior of the limousine that was bearing me off—and faint glimmers of daylight struggling through the places where the drawn curtains of the car bulged a little here and there. The faint rays of an overhead glow lamp showed me a confusion of faces bending over me, among them the hateful features of Knatchbull.

Evidently I had shown signs of returning consciousness, for he was ready for me; their dreadful "efficiency" seemed to be ready for everything. I heard his voice, as from a distance, telling them to hold me light, then I saw a knife blade gleam in Knatchbull's hand and describe a circle downward in my direction.

No doubt, now that I had come to think it over, it was no more than a pocketknife; for it was used for no more sinister purpose than to slit my sleeve. But with that blade descending and the sudden pain of two hands on either side fastening on me like claws, I screamed aloud. Almost immediately I felt a sharp, stabbing pain in my arm, and my agonized eyes beheld Knatchbull's saturnine face recede from me, wreathed in a smile of satisfaction. Again, now that I consider calmly, I know that the sharp stab came from nothing more deadly than a needle, the contents of which sent me back to shadow land.

But, as it happened, I believed that I had been done to death with a murderous knife and that the liquid which had escaped from the needle and which trickled down my arm was my own blood. I remember screaming again and again as I thought the tides of my life began to ebb away.

"Her heart is better," said some one in German. I had not heard this voice before my present awakening. But, during the time I played possum, I had heard hardly any other; so many discouraged expletives had it used, so many directions had it given. I was sure its owner was a doctor.

"What is it?" I heard Knatchbull ask surlily enough.

"One hundred and fifteen. Not nearly normal. But a little while since it was over one hundred and eighty; faster than I could count it. And then it shot down to forty and began to go lower, which is as bad. You should be careful how you use hypnotics upon people you do not wish to kill. What was it?"

"Hyoscin," answered Knatchbull in the same surly voice.

"Hydrobromide or sulphate?"

"I don't know. There it is."

Silence for a moment; then I heard something fall and roll around in what was evidently paper.

"That is where it belongs. In the wastebasket. I will get you some hydrobromide hyoscin which is effective in homeopathic quantities—almost. Do you know how little of that stuff of yours is necessary to kill—to *kill?* A tiny quarter grain, no more. One quarter of a grain is death."

Knatchbull evidently muttered something the purport of which was doubtless as to how I was.

"She'll pull through, thanks to my administration of cactine. Had I had the good Berlinger type of digitalin, I would have been spared much anxiety. A pest on these Yankees! They have not the delicate drugs we use in the fatherland, and since the British fleet blockades our commerce I must use American products."

He spent some little time damning American products and America.

The woman, who had been obeying the orders of the doctor, and whom I did not have to open my eyes to know for a nurse, gave a little exclamation. Her hand had been spanning my forehead, a finger on each of the veins on either side.

"It is one hundred now, doctor!"

"Oh, yes," he responded ungra-

ciously. "I knew her out of danger some time since. I go, Herr Knatchbull; I am no longer needed. And for my sake as well as your own avoid hypnotics and use anodynes. My use to the league is over if I must connive at murder. To-morrow I send you the hydrobromide."

"But she is not awake yet," objected Knatchbull.

"Soon she awakens, I promise you. Meanwhile I leave the fräulein, who will summon me again if there is need. You can depend upon her secrecy."

And, giving the nurse some general instructions, he took himself off. I could hear something clang to after him, something that had a metallic ring.

An iron door!

It was with great difficulty that I kept my face expressionless and my breathing rather hurried as before. The nurse went paddling softly about the room until Knatchbull's return, when the iron door clanged open and shut again. I could hear some low-voiced conference at the other end of the room, which, from what I could judge by hearing, must be a chamber of great size, since people could remain within it, yet be inaudible even when using ordinary low-voiced conversation. Evidently, also, it was dark, for, except when the nurse snapped on what must have been a night-table lamp near by to count my pulse by the wrist watch I had felt brush my face when she busied herself about me, I felt my eyelids exposed to no glare. Had they been it would have been difficult to avoid winking or contracting my brows.

The next I heard was this rather ungracious admission from Knatchbull:

"Yes, I suppose you'll have to eat some time, so you may as well do it now. I'll watch the girl until you get back."

I heard him moving around after the door clanged again, also the click of what my eyelids immediately told me was the lighting of an electric lamp; then came the scratching of a match, after which I smelled tobacco smoke. Evidently from the creaking of a chair, Knatchbull was making himself comfortable.

Silence ensued.

After some moments of restless indecision, I decided that, as the light did not annoy me, the lamp must be shaded and at some distance, since that one the nurse had used sufficed for the part of the room where I lay. Therefore, thought I, as I am in the shadows, he cannot see whether my eyes are open or shut. I cannot tell you why I continued to feign unconsciousness unless it was that I hoped that at some unguarded moment, believing themselves unheard by me, some one of my enemies would let drop some bit of useful information. All of which was entirely subconscious, for I remember remaining dormant only as one remembers the inevitable, the only thing to do. No great credit is due anything but my intuition, therefore, for what I learned by my trick.

But to return to the moment, I now opened one eye the minimum distance one can unveil one's sight if one wants to see. The room was very dark except for a patch of light which was, apparently, behind me, since ahead were only shadows. These presently resolved themselves into a long, low-roofed room. But not quite so low as I first imagined, for I had no more than three feet of head space. By observing the construction of the opposite side of the room, which was narrow although long, I saw why this was so. I was not in a bed, but a bunk, and, opposite me, were two bunks of the same type built into the wall. They were barely visible, however, through two half-opened closet doors; so that evidently these were what are called "press beds," closed in when not in use to represent cupboards. For, when I looked ahead, I saw that such another door swung out close to the foot of my bunk; another must therefore be at my back, which accounted for the minimum amount of light from the electric lamp reaching me.

This, and no more, outside of the little table near my head on which stood the other lamp, medicines, and so forth,

was all I could make out in the room. I saw no windows nor any door. At first, because of the room's peculiar construction, I almost fancied myself in a moving train, then deep down in the bowels of a ship. But, when I held my breath, there was no iota of motion; so I was forced to give up that theory, which I did quite joyfully.

It was bad enough to be kidnaped. But to be smuggled out of my own country was to lose the last vestige of hope. And I had hope enough. I knew from the boy, at the remembrance of whose fate I stifled an involuntary groan, that his superiors in the service knew whence he was bound and would follow him sooner or later and discover the crime committed at Cove Cottage.

Surely they would find something there to send them speedily after me. I had read many tales of the great detectives who discovered clews which told them the whole story of the most mysterious murder and identified the assailants immediately. And from what young Petersham had told me, there was a Mr. Yorke Norroy in charge of this business of "The Black Book," and he was, perhaps, the one man in America of whom all German agents had a wholesome fear.

I was absorbed by thoughts of this kind when there came a ringing sound from that end of the room where Knatchbull sat. This was repeated once, once—twice—thrice; once—twice; it was as though one struck the door with a small iron mallet. I heard Knatchbull get up and open the door.

"Krafft!" he said suddenly.

The other answered him in an excited whisper. Knatchbull's voice rose into a roar:

"And you brought him *here?*"

The other spoke louder now, and in the tones of one who defends himself.

"Around the corner in a cab. I didn't dare go to Voegel's; there are no dark streets near Riverside. We can carry him into the court and no one will be the wiser. The driver is Schweiss; I telephoned for him and his taxi and he helped me put him in and bring him here. Come, help me out with him. Suppose he comes to while I'm gone?"

Knatchbull cursed him at some length.

"Well, what would you have me do?" asked the other despairingly. "I didn't dare leave him alone anywhere while I came for help. And he hasn't got the book on him. I searched him from the skin out."

Knatchbull asked a question which was answered with concentrated venom and the utmost vehemence.

"Yes, I'm *sure;* certainly I'm sure. Unless *you're* sure of the other pair who went *your* way. I had seen a man enter the house whom we hadn't been told about. We'd been told to expect that woman with him—Flora Reyes. So I crept up on the house. So it happened I was near enough to see the window raised and a firework flung out. I looked up and saw a man at the lighted window. He flung something out. A moment later came this fellow, who was passing one way, and a girl and an old man passing another; both stooped, but it was this man whom I saw in the lamplight turning over the pages of one of the little books. I followed him——"

Knatchbull gave him no more time. "Come along," he said. "We'll have to risk it. You're sure you gave him enough stuff to keep him——"

At this the iron door slammed and I heard a key turn in the lock. No sooner had my enemies gone than I snapped on the light alongside the table. In its light was revealed halfway across the room and near a writing table a wastebasket just as I had supposed from the sound I had heard when the doctor flung away the vial he took from Knatchbull. In a second I was rummaging therein until my fingers closed on a thin little tube. As I was in a nightdress and none of my clothes were in sight, not even my stockings, I clambered back into the bunk and thrust the tube far down below, between the two halves of a double mattress. My intention at the

time was to watch for my chance to put some of this very powerful drug into some food or drink of my enemies. It was a slim chance, but it was better than nothing.

But, as you shall hear, it came to be used for a far different purpose.

CHAPTER IV.

THE OTHER PRISONER.

Miss Clovis Clarke Continues the Story.

After breathless waiting on my part, I heard the key rattle in the lock and a straight, spearlike shaft of light cleaved its way through the enshrouding darkness, lighting up the center aisle of the room between the two rows of bunks. I saw now what I had not seen before, and what accounted for the earthy smell, that the upper reaches of the room had for roof and walls a sort of soft, chalklike stone, or commingling of clays, which was prevented from falling down by a bridgework of iron stanchions standing upright like pillars, to which were bolted flat, iron crosspieces which extended across the ceiling, if it may be so called. From one of these crossbeams hung a hexagonal-shaped lantern by an iron hook fastened to an overhead ring. Along the walls on gun racks and revolver rests was a veritable arsenal; ugly steel-blue automatics of the Lüger type, long of barrel and chunky of butt, and below each a steel skeleton of a rifle stock to which they could be attached, making them the more deadly at long distance. Knowledge of this, of course, came later; at the time their purpose was unknown to me. Fewer in number were the Krag-Jörgensen carbines, which, standing upright in the wooden racks with their broad bladelike bayonet attachments, looked like a miniature forest of spears. There were other weapons, also, but there was too little time before the ray of light died out to distinguish just what they were.

Determined to continue my feigned sleep as long as I was allowed, I closed my eyes as I heard the men slowly advance into the room. Evidently it was a third man who carried the electric torch, and from what he said, and his eagerness to be off again, I judged that he was a sort of guard, or man on watch; stationed, I supposed, at the entrance of this subterranean region.

Knatchbull growled out permission, and I heard the third man make off, clanging the door. But before he did so, Knatchbull and his companion deposited their burden in the bunk opposite, and knowing their backs must be turned momentarily, I gave a furtive look in that direction.

They happened to be in such positions that they hid the man's body, but left his head exposed, and as it was turned in the direction of the light I saw his face, so ghastly white with eyes so glassy and wide open that I thought him dead. It was apparent he was not, however, for Krafft, kneeling by his side, ear to his heart, gave a relieved gasp and got up. Knatchbull, also, who had been taking the prisoner's pulse, loosed his wrist, grunting something that was confirmatory of Krafft's action, and the man's hand dropped limp and white against the dark wood of the bunk.

It was evident from Krafft's first words that while they had been out of the room he had told Knatchbull most of the story of his pursuit of the prisoner; for he now took up his tale somewhere near the end, after first giving an apprehensive glance toward me.

They left me for that region back of my bunk where my eyes could not follow them, and, after more striking of matches, Krafft said:

"The whole affair has me puzzled. The man is a mystery. After leading me that merry hell of a chase all over the town, a chase that lasted a good seven hours if it lasted a minute, and took me from the Battery to the Bronx, from the East River to the Hudson, from——"

"You've gone into all that," interrupted Knatchbull rudely. "I'm willing to concede that you had a chase of it. But what happened, man, what happened?"

"This!" continued Krafft, his tone somewhat aggrieved: "He must have

spent his last cent on the taxicab that he discharged over in Chelsea Village —on Twenty-third Street—for when I saw the taxi stop just as mine was about to turn the corner, I told my driver to go straight ahead and I paid and left him in the shadow of the next street while I went on foot toward my quarry. In that busy crosstown street there were so many people going to work even at that early hour that he didn't notice me. Besides he was looking for a pursuing taxicab. Anyhow he was deep in an argument with the driver as to the fare.

"'It's every last cent I've got,' he was saying as I came up, 'but if you'll give me your address, I'll send you the extra dollar or so. I thought I had more.' Well, the taxi driver took it finally, and gave him his address; and my man started off on foot to go back the way he had come, still keeping an eye out for my taxicab.

"Now, as I told you, I started after him before twelve o'clock last night and this was about six o'clock in the morning. He started off at a brisk sort of trot, but this died down by the time he had crossed Seventh Avenue to a sort of hurried walk—painfully hurried. He couldn't manage to keep this up very long evidently, for before he reached Sixth Avenue he sank down on the lowest one of a flight of old brownstone steps and sat there panting and perspiring as I came up.

"Unluckily enough for me, or luckily, maybe, there wasn't a soul on the street but ourselves and no convenient doorway to dodge into, for this was one of those old neighborhoods, with Dutch stoops; so, when he turned his eyes in my direction, I knew he realized he was still being followed.

"It must have come as a disappointment to him, believing as he did that he had shaken off all pursuit, for he got up, glaring at me, goggle-eyed, as sick looking a man as ever I want to see.

"'Damn you,' he said, as I came up and tried to pass on, pretending I did not see him. His fists were clenched and he raised them above his head as he cursed me. For a moment I thought he was going to spring at me and I felt for my gun. But instead of that, his fists went up until he was on tiptoe, then he toppled over and lay as still as a dead man.

"The taxi I had used was still following me at a snail's pace—I had ordered the chauffeur to do so—and now I signaled it to make haste. The street was deserted. It was too early for any but the main thoroughfares like Twenty-third Street to be populated; so the driver and I got him into the cab without much trouble.

"'Where to?' asked the driver.

"Then I was in a quandary. I did not know how much this infernal Norroy and his crowd knew. In following this fellow, as I told you, he had led me back to Van Corlear Square, where I saw the attack on our house, and I couldn't be sure how many other of our houses were known to them, nor how many of the books had fallen into his hands. I didn't even know who this man was, whether he was a stranger who just happened to pick up the book—or not. I knew a few moments later when I searched him in the cab and found no book, but I did not know then; so I took a desperate chance and told the fellow to go to my own place.

"As I said, as soon as we drove off, I searched our friend here and found no book——"

"Where was it, then?" demanded Knatchbull harshly.

"That's what I do not know," Krafft replied. "I've told you every step he took from the moment he picked it up. At first I thought he might have left it at the druggist's, but I found out why he went to the druggist's while I was searching him. Here!"

Evidently he must have held up something for Knatchbull to see; for the other said suddenly:

"Morphia!"

"Precisely," answered Krafft, "and that was what was wrong with him. He had gone too long without it. That was why he collapsed."

I heard Knatchbull mutter something

which I could not catch, and Krafft continued:

"Well, we got to my place, and the driver helped me to carry him in. Fortunately, I have the first-floor flat and live in an old-fashhioned house converted into apartments and minus a hallboy. As soon as I got him on the bed, I examined the label on this tube and gave the man a dose of twice the amount specified. I knew I was taking a chance of killing him, but a man who had shown his dogged determination in trying to shake me off and who had been clever enough to ditch the book somewhere without my seeing it, was apt to be a formidable antagonist once he was restored to normality. I figured that a double dose would bring his heart back to the proper beats and put him into a drugged sleep on top of it.

"Well, that's about all. All day, not daring to slip out for a bite of food, I've watched him, sitting alongside my bed. When he showed signs of coming to at one time, I gave him the same dose as before. Meanwhile, I managed to get Schweiss on the telephone. He has a taxicab and a driver's license, so I directed him as soon as it was good and dark to come and help me. He did so, and we brought him here.

"And here he is," he concluded, needlessly supererogatory I thought, and another match was struck.

There was a long silence; then I heard Knatchbull laugh. There may be uglier laughs than Knatchbull's, but I hope never to hear them. There was something so sinister about it that I could feel the surface of my skin turning to goose flesh, a chilly, clammy, itchy sensation, an experience none need envy me.

Then he said:

"Well, two of the books are safe enough, at any rate. That girl can't reach any one to tell where she has hidden hers, so even if she keeps mum to us, we're satisfied. As for this fellow——"

And his tone grew hard and ruthless:

"He'll tell us where *his* is within the next twenty-four hours. Yes, and he'll go down on his knees to beg us to listen to him. That book's as good as in my pocket now, my boy."

"What do you mean?" asked Krafft.

When Knatchbull told him, a shiver shook me from head to toe and I turned my face to the wall. Oh, God, that your creatures to whom you have given souls can sink so far below the brute beasts! That they can, with a laugh, inflict upon others cruelties impossible to the most savage of animals. And as I lay shivering and clutching my sheets, I prayed God to deal with this monster, Knatchbull, even as He had dealt with others of his kind.

I cannot write of what followed. In obedience to what has been pointed out as my duty, to give the public first-hand evidence that will greatly assist in arousing indignation against alien enemies in our midst, I have related as best I can past experiences for the most part disagreeable to recall, memories that will leave me easier of mind when forgotten.

But this! Ah, no! Let some one who has not seen, only heard, set it down. I cannot! I cannot!

(Miss Clovis Clarke stops her narrative at this point, where the story is continued by the author.)

CHAPTER V.

THE TORTURING OF ETHAN VAN CORLEAR.

Van Corlear remembered nothing of what happened from the moment when his spirit called too heavily upon his flesh, when, frenzied by his failure to shake off his pursuer and forgetting his weakness, he had flung both fists in air meaning that they should fall like flails upon the head of his enemy.

As blackness blotted out his surroundings, his last despairing realization was that he had made a mistake to tempt nature a second time after his warning of the night before, when the chemist, Cornelius, had come to his assistance. As consciousness returned to him finally, he wondered who had played Cornelius to him this

time, for he felt no pain. He became aware of human proximity, and, after some consideration of the sounds that reached him, was convinced that the some one in question was sobbing.

He opened his eyes. Kneeling by his bunk, her face hidden in her hands, was a girl in a torn silk waist. He could see the rise and fall of her shoulder blades at the point where the silk separated.

He looked around him. His surroundings differed in only one respect from those that had met the eyes of the sobbing girl upon her own awakening. The stands of arms at the rear of the room, and the weapons suspended on the walls above them, had been removed, leaving unspotted places in the film of dust that covered the floor and the wall panels.

Van Corlear coughed gently. The girl looked up. That pang of regret that always seized Van Corlear at the remembrance of what he had lost through the curse that lay heavily upon both his soul and body, took hold of him as her eyes shone up at him like twin stars through autumnal mists.

Van Corlear reached out for the girl's hand; his touch was like ice to her dry, hot finger tips.

"Don't," he soothed, forgetting himself in his discomfort at her grief. Gradually she subsided into only occasional sobs and again looked up at him.

Van Corlear thought her rarely beautiful even with her eyes rimmed with the red of weeping. Her color was that of an old miniature kept beneath glass—that ivory white that has more than a touch of saffron, which causes a wonderful clearness of color; clouded only where faint crimson crept into her cheeks—a rare crimson like the color of a March rose.

Rare indeed; that was the word that best described her, he thought; there was about her nothing that was undecided, whether of color or of feature. Her hair was that rare black that gives to cheeks a rarer whiteness, so that her pallor seemed more than ever that of the same old miniature, yet withal was the unclouded pallor of health. The hair was coiled low about the ears framing the face, out of which looked features as small as they were clearly outlined, and the red of her lips was as vivid as the color of her cheeks was faint and illusory. But her eyes were best of all; their blue was the blue found only in the eyes of beautiful women; to compare which to seas and skies is to rob them of a softly sparkling something that has never been seen in either.

Never, save perhaps when her thoughts dwelt upon the death of the boy at Cove Cottage—for she supposed him dead—would her eyes ever be more beautiful than they were when raised to Ethan van Corlear, eyes that held the tenderness of the Madonna, the Mother Woman to a world of broken, bitter men. And again Ethan van Corlear was upon the rack of regret. Such a woman might have been for him once.

He checked himself sternly. She had ceased to sob now, and was looking up, unable to answer the question he asked. She could not tell him it was for him that she wept. So Van Corlear, imagining he intruded where he had no right, changed the formula of his question:

"What is this place?"

She told him this time. Told him at length until his eyes blazed. That men should so handle women was an outrage upon his heritage from his ancestors. For, with some vague idea of keeping his thoughts from himself for as long as possible, she had included in her answer the tale of how she had been brought here, the brutality of her captors to the old man, her stepfather, and the shooting of young Petersham.

"But—they did not get the book?" he asked.

"No! They did not get the book," she answered simply. She did not tell him where she had hidden it, fearing unseen listeners.

He brooded upon it all at length, and a sense of bitter shame overcame him. She, a gentle girl, slender little thing that she was, had successfully resisted her natural fears, still stood out against her enemies despite her manifest help-

lessness at their hands. Why, if they wished, they could——

He gave a groan, remembering what men of this race had done to the women of Belgium. She knew all this, too, yet she dared withstand them. And he, a man, once a man of sorts, had been found a weakling; had fallen into their hands like some rabbit in a snare.

It was then that the first great fear overcame him. He felt in his clothes for the prescription given him the night before by Cornelius.

It was gone!

He felt in another pocket for the case that held his syringe. It, too, was gone. Such a look must have come into his eyes as frightened the girl, for she gave a little cry. And looking at her blanched face and her scared eyes, he knew that she realized.

"They—they took them," she faltered. "Your—your medicine."

Something in her manner made him eye her sharply. Finding confirmation of his worst fears in the look she tried to hide, a great dread took hold of him, a series of shudders convulsed him.

He hid his face from her until it was again a face he was not ashamed for her to see—the face of the old Van Corlear.

"Do you understand?" he asked slowly but steadily. "Do you?"

"Yes," she whispered, and silence fell between them.

Again he turned away from her and dared to face the hideous horror the hours would soon hold for him. In face of her own heroism, he could do no less than play the man. And yet the deadening knowledge was upon him that the power of playing the man would be presently denied him.

"You say you understand," he said presently, and very slowly but steadily as before. "But—*do* you? Do you know anything of what I am confronted with? Taking morphia is not like taking cocaine or whisky—or like anything else in the world. To its victims, it is the same as water is to the fish or air to you. When I am deprived of it—and I take it that is what our enemies intend—I will begin to die. If only the death would be over at once, but it is lingering torture. And before death comes madness. And in that space just before I go mad, who knows what I will not do for relief. Twice now, in the last twelve hours or so, I have tried to do without morphia. One result was to fall senseless at the feet of the man who for the entire night I'd been endeavoring to avoid." He paused. "I suppose he brought me here——"

She nodded, turning away her head, for the muscles of his face had begun to twitch horribly. Still with averted face and in a low voice she corrected him as to the time. "Much more than twelve hours," she said, and explained where he had been before being brought here.

"So it's midnight again," Van Corlear mused, controlling the twitching of his facial muscles with difficulty. "Then I dare say my captor must have found the stuff in my pocket and administered it, else I wouldn't be here now."

She nodded again; then, suddenly burst out:

"But aren't men cured? Can't they be? It's too awful. They *must* be."

"They are *cured,* what they called being 'cured,' " he responded listlessly. "I was cured once. They used hyoscin——"

"What?" she demanded, her eyes alight. "Say that again?"

"Hyoscin," he repeated, staring at her. "Hyoscin in small doses, along with other things to keep up my heart action, and others for—for a number of things. But it left me half blind and weak as a kitten and without interest in anything. The world seemed a very dull place, for I had lost my grip on everything. Then, if I had been half the man I should have been, I would have gone abroad and forgotten myself in fighting for France—for others. But I mooned about, wretched in soul and body; for using the stuff had unfitted me for anything I used to do. I had become flabby where once I was athletic, listless

where once I was ambitious. Nothing mattered. But, worst of all, I could not sleep, and that was what drove me back to the drug. If only I had been a man," he broke off bitterly, "and gone to France and fought. But all I seemed to think about was how peaceful and restful the days had been when I used morphia; how readily my brain had worked, how——"

He broke off again.

"Yesterday, when I reported at the armory to go to Mexico with my regiment, I was refused. 'Physically unfit' they said, and so I am. Physically and psychically and mentally, and in every other way unfit, as you will soon see. I don't know what in God's name I am going to do. That's the worst of it. I can't trust myself, for I don't know what I am going to do."

"You mean?" she asked, eyes widening.

He did not answer immediately. As he staggered to his feet, a yawn, such a yawn as the girl had never seen, distorted his face. A long-drawn shudder followed; she could see it rippling along the muscles of his arms—his legs—saw him press hard against the floor with both feet.

"You see," he said, his eyes blinded by the scalding tears that followed, tears that yet were not tears; "I'm getting my first warnings. That terrible yawning and shuddering. It feels as if it was tearing apart every muscle in one's body and afterward tying them into knots."

He began to pace the room. She followed him and laid a hand on his shoulders.

"I know you—you are in pain," she faltered; "but—but—what did you mean a moment ago when you said you couldn't trust yourself—didn't know what you would do——"

"Mean?" he repeated vacantly. Then, remembering, he gripped himself back to concentration. "I meant that I am not fit to be trusted. Especially with such a secret as I possess," he said grimly. " I have heard of an ordinarily peaceful man who broke into a doctor's office and killed him to get the stuff he was denied. What will *I* do, knowing I have only to speak to be given what I am beginning to need as badly as that murderer did."

His eyes held hers. She turned away. Both man and girl began pacing the room.

CHAPTER VI.

ETHAN VAN CORLEAR PROVES WORTHY OF HIS NAME.

Hours elapsed before either uttered a word; for the greater part of which she dared not even look at him; and during which there had been no sign of Knatchbull. When he entered at last, that same hateful smile upon his face that the girl dreaded, it was in company with Krafft, who carried a covered tray.

"Here's some food for you," he said.

The girl was not hungry, but anything was better than the monotonous pacing. She turned to Van Corlear, but he had withdrawn to the shadows at the rear of the room and, his back to her, shook his head. She felt a chill at the thought that he feared to let her see his face.

"Perhaps," said Knatchbull, reverting to his silkiest tones, "if the gentleman will not eat, he will take other relief?"

The girl's back was to Van Corlear now mercifully, and she pretended to have an appetite for her food. But she could not keep her eyes from Knatchbull, who, by the long table and in the light of the electric lamp, was going through a piece of business that she at first failed to understand.

He had taken one of the spoons from the tray and filled it with water which he was boiling over a small spirit lamp. This done he handed the spoon to Krafft, and, when the latter reached into his pocket and took out a small black case, she understood well enough.

Dropping several pellets from the tube into the barrel of a syringe, Knatchbull filled it with the boiled water, then shook the pellets up and down until they were dissolved.

The girl heard a stifled cry from be-

hind her. She flung down knife and fork. Their clatter sounded surprisingly loud in the dead silence.

Knatchbull only smiled at her. Rising, he took off his coat, rolled up his shirt sleeve, and, having anointed a place upon his arm with alcohol, plunged in the needle and pushed the piston.

Followed a sound like the roar of a sudden gale, and Van Corlear, his face distorted out of all semblance to humanity, reached the table, both hands before him clawing at Knatchbull's throat. But only to be confronted by the muzzle of the Lüger pistol that Krafft held pointed steadily against his forehead, pushing him back and holding him off at arm's length. And Knatchbull, not moving a step, smiled and smiled.

For a moment—although to the girl it seemed the stress and silence of it would never end—they held these positions. Then, with a bitter cry, Van Corlear crumpled up and sank into a chair, his head and arms flat on the table.

Knatchbull, whose eyes again gained their strange glitter, continued to smile as he spoke:

"That is my tipple, friend, not yours. Cocaine! It sharpens the wits instead of deadening them, as yours does. But I have yours in my pocket, also; and I am quite willing that you should have it, too. You know what I want. The book you picked up last night. Where is it?"

But, although she could see that rippling of his muscles plainly, for the sleeves of his coat were tightened in the position in which he lay, Van Corlear himself did not move. So, when Knatchbull spoke again, he was not smiling.

"Why prolong this uselessly? You *must* give in—you know you cannot hold out. And if I leave this room, I will not return for two hours. Two hours of torture when you can have relief now. *Now!* Look!"

And he held out in his palm a tube marked in red letters "Morphia;" held it within reaching distance. Slowly, as one hypnotized, Van Corlear raised a face so ghastly that, with a little shriek, Clovis Clarke turned away. His eyes encountered the tube, read the lettering. He seemed gathering all his strength for one great spring when, smiling again, Knatchbull pocketed the tube.

"Well?"

Clovis Clarke stole a look at Van Corlear. He was gripping the table with both hands, and they were beet-red from the strain. As he sat, rock-like, a tiny trickle of blood ran from his bitten lips down to his chin. But he did not speak.

"Very well! Two hours more! Come, Krafft" snarled Knatchbull, turning away.

His companion followed, but more cautiously, backing away, his hand upon his weapon; and the door clanged behind them like some ill-omened bell. And as it closed, there was torn from Van Corlear a sound the like of which the girl had never heard before; at the sound of which she was to awaken from many future dreams, a shriek in her throat. It was a sound that she could liken only to the wail of a lost soul.

She had stood all she was able to stand. Quickly, she ran to her bunk and rummaged therein for the hidden tube of hyoscin. With it in hand she approached Van Corlear. He felt her hand on his shoulder and turned his tortured eyes to hers.

"You said," she gasped, "something about hyoscin being used as a cure. Here is a tube of it. Perhaps it will help you. But be careful. A quarter of a grain is certain death."

She did not understand the look he gave her—that of one suddenly inspired, nor the slow smile that followed it and wiped away the worst of the pain in his eyes; did not understand it —*then!*

"There cannot be a quarter of a grain here—altogether," he answered her. "It is in fiftieths; yes, there is. Eighteen fiftieths. That is——" He paused so long endeavoring to concen-

trate on so simple a problem and failing that she answered for him:

"It is more than a third."

"Well, I will be careful," he said with the same strange smile. "But——"

Again he paused.

"It may make me unconscious, and so I want you to know"—he had risen and was whispering—"where that book is. I will write it down for you in case any one is listening. Memorize it, then destroy it. But memorize it carefully, first."

His scribbling covered half a page of paper before he concluded. "Memorize it quickly," he warned. And, as her eyes were concentrated upon it to the exclusion of all else, he took up a glass of water and stood for a second, eyes closed, head bowed, as one who prays. Then with a sudden movement he uncorked the vial, swallowed something from it, and washed it down with water.

He passed the girl who, with brows knit, still studied the slip of paper on which was written the address exactly as on the envelope he had given Cornelius to mail, addressed to his own office—or rather the office that once was his, "Van Corlear & Van Corlear"—with the instruction to the chief clerk to place it in the safe. This copied address was followed by his own name and residence. Came, then, these cryptic words, the full significance of which she did not immediately understand: *"Notify them if you can."*

She sprang to her feet. Van Corlear was in his bunk, very quiet now. Instantly she was at his side, pointing to the last words:

"What do they mean?"

As he turned his eyes to her, the dread suspicion in her soul became certainty. For his eyes were peaceful now, a faint film upon them.

"Destroy—paper," he whispered out of a dry throat. "Burn."

She knew she must obey, otherwise all had been to no avail. Striking a match, she set the scrap of paper alight, tossed it to the floor, and saw it burn black. Then it was she who was blinded by hot tears—real tears, as she bent over him.

"Let me see that tube," she faltered.

It was all he could do to open his palm. The tube rolled to the floor, corkless—empty.

"Only way," he whispered, so low she could scarcely hear him, for his lips were as dry as tinder, and his tongue seemed to crackle in his parched throat. "Bound to have told them. Couldn't—stand—any—more. It was—my country—or my life. Only—way——"

His eyelids fluttered, drooped. His lips snapped together as if they had been shutters closing by some mechanical device. His limbs straightened convulsively, then fell, rigid. The eyes opened, staring.

But when she looked again, a strange change had come over his face that but a short while since had seemed almost beastlike in its ferocity. About the poor dead lips seemed to hover a faint elusive something that was at once less—and more—than a smile. And the eyes no longer stared, or if they did they had first beheld something which had wreathed the lips about with that smile.

And so, as the dead lips smiled up at her, she burst into an agony of tears and sank down beside the Van Corlear who had proved himself worthy to bear his name.

For now she and she alone knew the whereabouts of two of the books which would give to her country the knowledge of the betrayers by whom it was beset. And she the prisoner of those betrayers—alone in that chamber of death—alone and afraid—afraid——

Had she known what Yorke Norroy knew at that time she would not have utterly despaired.

The fifth and final story of this series will appear in the July 20th POPULAR. It is entitled "A Leaf From the Kaiser's Book."

The Silver Fox

By E. Albert Apple

Author of "Mysteria, the Mind Reader," Etc.

Emerson says in one of his essays that the baby is the true monarch, making all serve him with gladness, and there is a decisive touch of that sort in this story of the Far North

SULLENLY Namaycush gathered up his bank account—a magazine rifle and two hundred steel-nosed cartridges. He lunged doggedly forward along the portage, his snowshoes swishing angrily. Three miles ahead and a lake—scowling black at the prospect of an early freeze over—appeared in patches through the larch brush, cake-frosted by snow. Close to the shore was a summer cottage, doors and windows boarded over for the winter. Namaycush swore violently, viciously, at this reminder of the existence of law and order. He broke into the boathouse and stole a canoe.

The Far North—once under its mask of snow—will at times confuse all but hell-divers and yellow-billed wild ducks. So Namaycush glanced up at the nearest hemlock, whose soft top forever bends to the east, caught his bearings, knelt in the canoe, and sped ahead swiftly. And if you noted the knack by which he handled his cedar single paddle—never lifting it out of the water, but bringing it quickly back, then sidewise ahead—you would recognize his skill at once.

Namaycush was an Ojibway Indian. Also he was the best shot between Royal Mounted headquarters in Regina and the Mongolian Pheasant House rifle range on James Bay. You could tell by the way he paddled that this district of Canada was listed under his name in the telephone office of the Fates, that he was at home in the woods as a lynx, that wherever he sought for large-mouthed black bass he would have to stand behind a stump to bait his hook.

If you ever holidayed at the miniature resort hotels of Muskoka, Nepigon, and Nipissing, you surely saw Namaycush, without knowing that he wasn't any ordinary Indian. Some time during the summer, it was inevitable that he came slowly down the lakes, in and out among the islands, trolling for doré and salmon trout, while Mrs. Namaycush trudged about the hotels and sold birch-bark baskets worked in colored grasses and porcupine quills.

Namaycush was so crushingly powerful physically, and so attractive in his homeliness, that he inclined to Abraham Lincoln architecture. He looked like all the other Indians, only more so. His hair was cut short and he shaved twice a week and he sported corduroys and a khaki shirt, also he wore shoes instead of moccasins. For Namaycush was a 1917-model Indian. He even knew what you meant when you talked of world's series and Mutt and Jeff and Wall Street and U-boats.

His real name was Joe Smith or Pierre Devereaux or one of the other bush names, but he was such a wonderful fisherman that they called him Namaycush—the Ojibway for lake trout.

That's what got him into trouble.

You see, Namaycush didn't believe in game laws, but the Dominion government did. The limit of one deer per person meant four words of print on a waterproofed-canvas license to him. He shot partridges only in the closed season, when they always taste best, and had even been known to mail some of the feathers to the game wardens.

They didn't mind that so much—Indians by unwritten law have special privileges in the North. What caused the trouble was that Namaycush, as soon as he learned that it was unlawful to spear salmon when they spawned on the shoals, promptly procured a small pitchfork—the owner is still wondering where he mislaid it—and made himself a spear.

Word of all this had gotten around to the game and fish wardens, but Namaycush was crafty. They knew, all right, but couldn't catch him with the goods. So he grew bolder. Now, the storybooks tell us that a sense of humor is more to be desired than wine, yea, than much fine wine; but it didn't work out that way at all with Namaycush.

"To-night I come back with fish scales in my boat—an' some one under arrest," reflected Old Man Sloniker, the fish warden, puffing gleefully at a pipe that had gone out. "I only hope it's that pesky Indian. I wonder who could have sent me that letter. Said to be in Stanley House Bay, near Echo Rock, at five to-morrow mornin' an' I'd find a party a-spearin' of salmon trout."

His teeth chattered as he peered out over the choppy lake waves that rolled in with an ugly, threatening, grumbling splash.

"It'll be one hell of a job to row them four miles in the dark, but it'll be worth it if I make an arrest. An' if I brought in Namaycush—h'm! I wouldn't wonder if the department let me begin chargin' up my meals."

Old Man Sloniker reached the vicinity of Echo Rock on time. He knew right away that he had been fooled. Namaycush had known it for twenty-four hours, for he had written the letter and left it at the closed-for-the-winter hotel where Old Man Sloniker always kept bachelor quarters when he came that way.

It was a good joke; so good, in fact, that Namaycush couldn't resist being on hand to watch the fun. He was hidden well back from shore when the old man viciously yanked his boat up on the snow. Namaycush listened delightedly to the cursing, then started back through the bush. The early morning was clammy and dismal. Namaycush had a camp a half mile away. He rolled into his blankets and slept till eight o'clock.

"It not only joke," he explained aloud to the invisible something that men who are much alone fall to talking to, "but now I spear salmon all want to near Echo Rock. He not come back—you not get him go 'gain for t'ous' dollar."

So that evening Namaycush returned. He paused in consternation as he neared shore, for there on the snow was Old Man Sloniker's rowboat, just as he had hauled it up. And not far away was the old man himself—face downward in the drift. Namaycush turned him over and exclaimed sharply. He saw a red disk the size of an orange on the flannel shirt.

Namaycush suddenly felt about as comfortable as one of his nature could.

He didn't need to think it over, to decide that he wouldn't move the body. Some native was sure to come by in a motor boat or canoe before night. The old man might have confided to some one about the letter, and if they compared it with the handwriting of Namaycush——

The Ojibway was in a serious predicament and he knew it.

The cunning of a murderer is nothing to the cunning of an innocent man completely tangled up in circumstantial evidence. Namaycush's eyes rested on the prints his snowshoes had left as "Exhibit A" of evidence. They weren't wide enough to be a white man's, those tracks. The first person to see them would know them for an Indian's. And Namaycush had been the only Indian in this section of Muskoka for two weeks.

So it came about that he stole the canoe. It was a basswood boat, heavy as lead, but five previous boathouses had failed to yield a cedar canoe and no further time could be wasted.

Near Portage Lake he cached the canoe and snowshoed cross country to Perry Sound. Here he would lay in

supplies. There were plenty of Indians in town, trappers trading furs with Hudson's Bay and Toronto agents, and Namaycush easily lost himself among them. Trains to him were still fascinating; he drifted toward the Canadian Northern depot. An express roared in.

"D'you hear 'bout Ol' Man Sloniker?" he heard the baggageman call out to the station agent. "Yeh, the fish warden. Found him dead down the line. Snowshoe tracks—small like an Ojibway's—near. Didn't have time to hear the rest. Tell you next trip."

Namaycush, with the constitution of an army mule, lugged away a store of bacon and flour that made him stagger. He portaged through to Blackstone Lake and camped. After lying low for a week, on the faint odds that the real criminal might be turned up, he beat back through the bush. There was one man he could go to for news in perfect safety—Henry Roggins, a native whose little girl Namaycush had once pulled out of the lake after she had gone down three times.

He came upon the native out in a clearing, felling hard wood for his winter fires.

"They goin' to get you an' no mistake!" greeted the native, rubbing a calloused thumb along the blade of his ax. "Must want you for somethin' mighty bad. They got the 'Silver Fox' of the Royal Mounted out lookin' for you. He come through here yesterday askin' if you'd been about."

Namaycush shook his head, almost wagged it, and the mink tails of his cap banged his eyes.

"No do somethin' mighty bad," he declared stolidly, sullenly. "No do nothin'. Only fish—hunt. Nothin' do for come R'l M'nt."

His eyes narrowed to slits, weighed the native's discretion, then he ventured confidentially:

"They t'ink I kill Ol' Man Sloniker near Echo Rock. I fin' him, but he dead then. I no kill."

"What! You don't say, now! Is *he* dead?" demanded Roggins, amazed. "First I hearn tell o' it. I must go in for the mail—ain't had no news for days. Now, you'd think sure the Silver Fox'd told me. He don't talk no more'n a porc chawin' a dry pine winder sill, though. You couldn't get inf'rmation outen him with a monkey wrench."

Ten miles away, Namaycush met up with another Indian and heard further bad news. Ground Hog Hi had been "brought in." It had always been Namaycush's pet boast that he could never be overtaken if he decided to plunge into the bush; that, even if he was followed, he could turn north and ski so far into the snow country that none dare follow. But now he began to have doubts. He didn't begin to imagine he was as artful as the Ground Hog.

"They get you, all right, the R'l M'nt, if they go after," was all the consolation the stray Indian stranger had to offer. "Me Regina when man bring Ground Hog in. He been gone for him t'irty year, but he get."

The hopeless feeling of a man in a death cell came over Namaycush, for he could not, come to think of it, recall a case where one of the Royal Mounted had ever failed. At least, if they failed, none ever knew, for if they didn't get their man they didn't come back—thirty years, think of it!—and Namaycush knew that if he lived to be two hundred he would every instant be apprehensive of some white-haired ancient about to slip up behind him, cock his rifle, and tell him to come along.

So north he went. At the end of three weeks, he figured he had gained only twenty hours on the shadow. That would never do. He had been crisscrossing his trail up to now, circling and doubling so that it was hard to tell which was being followed. There must be no more of this hide and seek and keeping tab.

He must head straight north and lead the Royal Mounted man into the eternal snows, where the Indian could surely endure by cutting out a caribou from an occasional herd, until his follower strayed or succumbed to snow blindness.

"No snow often enough or heavy enough to cover track," he lamented ruefully, turning and scowling at the snowshoe sweeps he left on the portages. One would have to be mighty stupid to lose his trail. The Silver Fox knew the country, too, every lake and portage; he could tell just where the Ojibway would land on the far shores. The farther north, the fewer portages blazed through the bush and the easier to follow.

There were about two feet of snow, but it was the clinging sort. Only the birches seemed able to shake it off. Nature had clearly run out of materials when she built this country—the geography was limited to lakes, birches, hemlocks, and huge outcroppings of bed rock. The hemlocks looked like heaps of white plaster on wooden legs. Black lake water, white snow, ebony, wet tree trunks—as Namaycush plodded along the indistinct portages, his canoe over his back and head, he would have photographed quite well as the explorer of a honeycombed mountain of sugar.

Food was an easy problem—wild ducks, ground hogs, porcupines, fish, and partridges. The bacon and flour had given out, but he rather liked an exclusive meat diet. At extremely rare intervals he picked off a black bear and had bear steak.

"Many fool," he reflected, "when they rustle up partridge and shoot on wing with rifle, make mistake and shoot at body. So spoil often the breast, best meat. I shoot always through head."

It was neither idle boast nor conceit. Namaycush was a wonderful shot. The Silver Fox, who was following some miles behind, was to learn shortly that the tales of Namaycush's marksmanship were not just empty rumor.

"The hunting bad!" observed the Indian shrewdly. "That mean an open winter. No game down from the North."

And the days stacked into weeks and the weeks added up two months and Namaycush rose long before the sun, for he knew that the sun came up no more inexorably over the horizon than that member of the Royal Northwest Mounted Police—no longer mounted—who was following him.

The big events all happened because Namaycush got a craving for fresh venison. But before that came the story of the five baby squirrels.

Namaycush still had the canoe, for the lakes had not yet frozen. It was early December. He would paddle miles, then flip the canoe to his back and portage it more miles on to the next lake, another paddle, another portage, then night in his blankets and daybreak mockingly ahead of time.

The snow was three feet deep now, and portaging with a seventy-pound canoe was genuine work. If it would only freeze up so he could get over the lakes on his snowshoes! It was not only going to be an open winter, but a freak winter. One morning, when he went to the lake for a drink, he saw black spiders on the snow near shore.

"J'en ai peur!" Namaycush muttered furiously. "It goin' to thaw!"

Well, it would be harder traveling, but just as difficult for the Royal Mounted man. Namaycush stalked ahead to gain while the snow held firm. He wondered casually how Mrs. Namaycush was making out. He had sent word by Roggins. She could take care of herself. Otherwise he wouldn't have married her.

He had worked well on toward James Bay. It occurred to him that it would be good strategy to unexpectedly break the straight course he had been making so long and double back. It was easy to do in this region of never-ending series of lakes, and soon the tables were turned and Namaycush was following the Silver Fox. This time he noticed the prints of two sets of snowshoes and knew that his pursuer had a companion. No wonder he had been gaining of late! One man was greatly handicapped against two on portaging canoe and supplies, also two men in a canoe could paddle faster over the lakes.

"Logging crew!" muttered Namaycush, and whistled gladly late one afternoon as he came upon sledge tracks in

the fast-sinking snow. They couldn't be after timber logs or firewood—it was too out of the way. Being a 1917-model Indian, Namaycush figured the crew was probably felling beech trees to drag south for conversion into high explosive.

At nightfall he drifted into the lumber camp, after a careful survey from behind the dense growth at the edges of the clearing. Near the mess cabin he met up with two lumberjacks coming in from work, axes over shoulders. They stared at Namaycush, then exchanged glances. Namaycush took his cue. So the Silver Fox had been along asking for him! He didn't greet them with "How!"—being a 1917-model Ojibway—but——

"'Lo! I work R'l M'nt—look for Ojibway—Namaycush. You see?"

"Naw!" burst forth both lumbermen.

"You see my friends—Silver Fox an' 'nother?"

"Spent last night with us. Come on in; the boys'll be glad to see you."

They welcomed him with the delight of lonesome men in far places. Strangers were a relief after being cooped up with each other so long. Namaycush would have been welcome among these Ontario lumbermen if he had turned out to be a French Canadian. To signify approval, they dug up a can of peaches and some real English orange marmalade.

Among other things, they had squirrel for supper that night—heavily salted and peppered and rolled in flour and fried in bacon grease—great eating, whether you were hungry or not; but Namaycush sternly shook his head and passed the thick crockery plate on.

"Ojibway no eat squirrel now," he explained apologetically. "When November come, also come baby squirrel—five to each mother—and if kill squirrel now, five babies they starve."

A lot of jeering rose from this, and it might have ended in a fight had not some lumberjack with kiddies of his own somewhere opened a discussion of why nature didn't start squirrels off in warm weather and give them more of a chance. Fried squirrel wasn't very popular that night.

"That damned Indian!" growled a six-footer. "An' I'd walked a mile up to now to get a squirrel if it was cooked right."

Namaycush was the last to leave the tall box stove that night. When the rest were asleep, he looked cautiously around, opened the case of his most priceless possession—a cheap silver watch—and gazed long and fondly at a paper pasted inside. For the paper was a picture—a very bad picture, only a snapshot, inclined to distortion and brown-stained from amateur development—but it was a picture of "The Little Trout."

"He great boy!" chuckled Namaycush. "An' all mine!"

Then, with the wisdom of perfect knowledge, he went to bed without undressing, and the loose possessions he had with him he tucked next to his naked skin; for the jacks walk in their sleep in lumber camps, and such things as knitted socks and blue handkerchieves and mufflers and the like cling to their fingers and disappear until you are gone for a certainty.

There came a frost. The next night a black freeze. The snow stopped melting and crusted over. Ice began to form in fragile scales along the lake edges. Namaycush felt a craving and isolated the desire as connected with venison tenderloin.

Deer were scarce this year. He finally found tracks. Namaycush figured that he must be fully a day ahead of the Royal Mounted man. He got the lay of the land, studied the deer tracks, sat on a rock under brush near the shore, and waited, idly gouging up reindeer moss with the butt of his rifle. Soon, he knew, would come the deer to drink. And soon it did come, with a great crashing, its head thrown back so its antlers would not catch in the branches, a magnificent buck.

Namaycush moved like a striking snake. His rifle slid to his shoulder. The wind was from the deer toward

the Ojibway, and it swept on to destruction, unsuspecting.

Crack!

"Good shot!" Namaycush congratulated himself approvingly. "Right behind the ear."

Then came another crashing. Namaycush's rifle was in position like a flash, though he knew it wasn't another deer, but a human. The ferryman at the Styx would ring up another fare if the Royal Mounted man dashed out now from the bush.

The advancing figure appeared, stopped, and Namaycush lowered his gun in disgust. It was a woman! He caught the situation in a flash. She had routed the deer up and had been following for an open shot.

"I t'ink," Namaycush grinned, "it b'long me. I shoot it."

"Yes, but you shot *my* deer!" snapped the woman.

A long argument started. She was a real woman of the bush, one of the backwoods natives, evidently a settler's wife. Her gray skirt was coarse and patched. From the sleeves of a heavy flannel blouse two hands showed —discolored, gnarled, all natural beauty crippled by hard work. Her face was set and almost cruel. Her eyes, tired. Even at that, she was a woman, and a white man would have handed the buck over without a word. But all women were alike to Namaycush, and the best of them were small potatoes when he had an appetite for venison tenderloin.

"Come up to the house with me," she insisted doggedly. "It's only a step. I want to show you something."

She led the way into a tiny log cabin of two rooms, lined with musty cheesecloth. Namaycush closed the door with a bang.

Straight to the corner marched the woman, to a soap box mounted on two old chair rockers. Namaycush grinned. The woman turned back the tiny blankets and toy crazy quilts with a tenderness astonishing, seemingly impossible for such rough hands. The divine fire of motherhood blazed in her eyes as she looked over her shoulder at the Indian triumphantly, proudly, silently.

The baby grinned at Namaycush—gurgled, cooed.

"Boy!" almost howled the delighted Ojibway.

The woman nodded.

'Mine!" she confided. "He lost his papa this summer."

"Bah-bah!" cooed the baby and kicked from the neck down.

The Indian with great effort maintained his dignity.

"The deer," he insisted. "It fine buck. You say it not mine. I say it not yours. So then it belong this ba-bee!"

"Well, we'll need it!" muttered the woman wearily, sinking to a rough, straight-backed chair. "We'll need it, all right. Mebbe you know what a piece of meat like that means to us natives here in the woods. Some one —lumberman, I think—stole my pig. The deer'll mean meat all winter."

"The ba-bee," explained Namaycush, shamefaced, "he look like The Little Trout—mine. He got two teet'!"

"Two teeth? Is that all?" exclaimed the woman, with a superior air. "This lad has three!"

Namaycush shook his head in awe at such wealth.

"T'ree!" he muttered, jealous. "I not been home now two mont'. Maybe he have *four* now. I bring deer to house, then chop ba-bee little wood."

They went out again into the cold. A fine snow had begun to sift down.

"Good!" commented Namaycush. "Start fine, last long. Soon now the lakes freeze. Then I travel fast."

Leading the way, he raised the sagging branches of a snow-laden hemlock as they neared the shore. The woman bent over, passed under, then exclaimed sharply. Namaycush hurriedly followed her.

The buck was gone. This was the place, all right—there was the hole in the snow where they had left it, a few drops of blood shining like rubies on the white background. But the buck had disappeared. Namaycush looked swiftly about for footprints. There

they were, leading up from the water and lurching back as the visitor had staggered under a great weight.

Namaycush cocked his rifle as he looked out over the lake. Two hundred yards away, paddling furiously, was a man in a canoe, bundled in a rough, red, lumberman's jacket. His boat lay low in the choppy water, the deer's legs over the sides.

Namaycush cursed in Ojibway. He raised his rifle. But at that instant the wind lifted the canoeist's hat and carried it overboard. Down fluttered long hanks of silver-gray hair, shining like cut glass as the snow fell about it. Namaycush lowered his rifle.

"The Silver Fox!" he muttered, surprised. "I not know he so close."

There flashed over him the scene in the little cabin. He saw the tiny figure in the soap box, gurgling, cooing. And then, far away and hazy, his own Little Trout, he who was to carry on the famed name Namaycush from Quebec to the purse nets of the Fraser River country. The deer belonged to the cabin baby, and Namaycush didn't waste any time reflecting that the thief's information on the subject was nil.

"I get buck," he promised grimly, motioning the woman back with a leathery hand. "You wait at house."

Into the bush and ahead along the shore of the lake he sped, discarding his snowshoes to break more agilely through the bush. Hurrying on silently, furtively, he kept abreast the canoe. The lake was long and narrow. Namaycush had conceived a diabolical scheme. At one stroke he would finish up the Silver Fox and execute the unwritten law of the bush for the outlaw who steals a kill.

Gradually the canoe in its spurting plunges neared an enormous rock far from shore. Namaycush fired. At the sing of the bullet the figure in the canoe stopped paddling and looked hurriedly over its shoulder. Evidently the shot was attributed to a stray hunter, for the paddle went to work again. And then suddenly the figure stopped paddling, glanced at his knees, and one arm shot behind and felt in the bottom of the canoe.

For Namaycush, the best shot between Royal Mounted headquarters in Regina and the Mongolian Pheasant House rifle range on James Bay, had pierced the canoe with his rifle bullet, just under the water line, and it was filling fast.

With a quick, jerking shift of his paddle, the Silver Fox turned the canoe toward the rock. There came another shot, and the paddle splintered below the right-hand grip at the top. This was a language the Silver Fox understood. Overboard into the icy water he went, just as Namaycush had planned, and with a dozen swift strokes swam to the rock. He made a smaller target in the water, and as he crawled up on the jagged granite he stretched flat so that he was hidden from shore.

Namaycush grinned.

"The Silver Fox, he trapped!" he muttered grimly. "This one fox that no gnaw leg off to escape from trap. It too cold for swim ashore."

On through the falling snow sped the Indian another half mile, to wait at the end of the lake. He had gauged his shot well. Even figured that the Silver Fox would jump overboard to save himself. His weight gone, the shot hole rose above water. The heavy bulk of the bow helped that. The canoe swung round and drifted ahead.

The Indian waded out and pulled the frost-rimmed boat high up on the snow. The soft, yielding body of the buck he dragged out and dumped with a swishing thud on a snowed-over rock. Then he raised the side of the canoe to let the water run out, and knelt to examine the bullet hole.

Namaycush became suddenly aware of a presence near him. He looked up quickly. A husky young fellow, holding an automatic carelessly, was surveying him coolly, rather quizzically. His right foot, on Namaycush's rifle, tapped the barrel confidently.

"You're a slick customer!" commented the young man, with a voice that would surely have scratched car-

borundum. "That was good shooting, Namaycush. Hustle up the patching job and go bring in my friend out there."

"No!" snarled Namaycush, with sullen passion. "He steal deer that I shoot for boy baby with no father."

The young man whistled, squatted on the snow, and laughed, twirling his revolver around his trigger finger.

"The Silver Fox," he explained shortly, "was out looking for a side or two of venison for the youngster you're talkin' about an' his ma. We been waitin' here a day for you to come up—got in ahead of you by shooting the Dipkeeoma Rapids. Deer's out of season, but the old man 'lowed he'd give the law the wink. I rather imagine he come on this buck—so you shot it?—and thought for to lug it off before the hunters got back, aimin' to give it to the little people in the cabin later."

"No get 'way from R'l M'nt," Namaycush burst forth bitterly. "I ought know Silver Fox he catch me. I go back. I no kill Ol' Man Sloniker."

"So that's why you were running away, eh?" retorted the young man genially. "We wondered. No one says you did kill him. He tripped over his gun and shot himself accidental. Bullet through the stomach. Must have lived a full half hour, for he'd gotten out a pencil and put it down on the back of an envelope. They did see Ojibway snowshoe tracks, but later on, when they went through the old man's clothes, they came on the envelope."

"What you want, then?" demanded Namaycush suspiciously.

"Headquarters," explained the young man wearily, "wants you to join the Royal Mounted. Every time one of us tried to get to you to talk, you were somewhere else. They finally sent me an' the Silver Fox out to bring you in. Figured it was the only way we could get to you to make you a proposition. You're going, too, if we have to hobble you. Hustle up now; the old man out there'll freeze."

Namaycush grunted his disgust.

"An' I come all this for nothin'!" he growled disgustedly. "How much job pay?"

"I figured," the Silver Fox explained that night when the camp fire of pitch knots had begun to crackle and snap encouragingly, "I figured that I just had to get a deer for that widdy back there. After I seen the baby it was all up. Did you see the youngster, you Lake Trout? Three teeth!"

Namaycush did not answer directly. He was fumbling for an old silver watch. He unscrewed the back and held to view the grinning likeness of The Little Trout, a very bad picture, only a snapshot, inclined to distortion and brown-stained from amateur development.

"Two teet'!" he boasted proudly. "Two teet' when I leave one—two—two mont' ago. I bet you"—his voice rose recklessly until it rang through the still night and almost shook down snow from the silent, motionless hemlocks—"I bet you he have *four* teet' when we get back. That woman, she have fine boy, but just wait till see The Little Trout!"

Other stories by Apple will appear in early issues. He is one of our new writers.

THE SECRET OF LONGEVITY

DOCTOR ALEXANDER GRAHAM BELL, who invented the telephone and a lot of other things, is an authority on longevity. He has written a book about it and has made many charts showing why some people will live long and why others will die young.

One day a senator asked the doctor for the secret of living to a ripe old age.

"There's only one secret to it," answered Doctor Bell. "If you want to live a long time, be sure to have a father and mother who lasted into the eighties."

The Three Sapphires

By W. A. Fraser

Author of "Fool's Gold," Etc.

(***A Four-Part Story—Part Four***)

CHAPTER XVIII.

MAHADUA, the hunter guide, led the three sahibs always in the direction of Kohima, sometimes finding a few pugs in soft earth. About three o'clock two natives overtook them, their general blown condition suggesting that their mission was urgent.

"I am Nathu, the shikari," one said, "and the Debta of Kohima has sent for the sahib to come and destroy a black leopard who has made the kill of a woman, for my gun—that is but a muzzle-loader—is broken. It is the man-eater who was taken from Kohima by the rajah, and is now back; he has cunning, for a spirit goes with him, sahib. Three women were drying mhowa blooms in the sun, and they sat up in a machan to frighten away jungle pig and deer who eat these flowers; perhaps they slept, for there was no outcry till the leopard crawled up in the machan and took the fat one by the throat and carried her off."

"How far is Kohima?" Finnerty asked.

"It is but a few hours' ride. But if the sahib comes he will find the leopard at sunset, for he will come to where the body of the fat woman lies on a hill. Now in the daylight men with spears are keeping him away till I bring the sahib for the kill. The sahibs can ride to Kohima, for there is a path."

When they arrived at Kohima, the village sat under a pall of dread, and their advent was hailed with delight. An old woman bent her forehead to Finnerty's stirrup, wailing: "Sahib, it is the daughter of Sansya who has been taken, and an evil curse rests over my house, for before, by this same black devil, was taken a son."

"We'll get busy because night will soon be upon us," Finnerty said to his companions.

They were led on foot to an almost bare plateau, and Nathu, pointing to the spearsmen fifty yards ahead, said: "The body is there, sahib, and as the sun goes behind the hills the leopard will come back to eat. He is watching us from some place, for this is his way. Here he can see without being seen."

They beheld a gruesome sight—the body of the slain woman.

"This black devil has the same trick of devouring his kill in the open as the Gharwalla man-eater had," Finnerty declared; "but I see no cover for a shot." He gazed disconsolately over the stony plateau with neither rock nor tree breaking its surface. "There is no cover," he said to Mahadua, and when the shikari repeated this to Nathu, the latter answered: "*There* is cover for the sahib," pointing to a thick clump of aloe with swordlike leaves, twenty yards away. "My men will cut the heart out of that so that the sahib may rest within. Even if the beast is wounded he will not be foolish enough to thrust his body against those spears."

Nathu spoke, and two men came forward from a group that had lingered back on the path, and with sharp knives lashed to bamboo handles cut an entrance and a small chamber in the aloe.

Finnerty laughed. "That is a new one on me, but it will probably deceive even that black devil; he would notice anything new here the size of a cricket bat."

"Huzoor," Nathu advised, "the leopard is watching us from some place,

but, cunning as he is, he cannot count; so, while we are all here, the one who is to make the kill will slip into the machan and we will go away, leaving the woman who is now dead beyond doubt. And as to his scent, sahib, I have brought a medicine of strong smell that all of his kind like, and I have put some where the woman lies and within the aloe machan, so his nose will not give him knowledge of the sahib's presence."

"It is your game, Lord Victor," Finnerty said. "We'll go in a body to the aloe, and you, taking my 10-bore, slip quickly into your cubby-hole. Squat inside as comfortably as you can, with your gun trained absolutely on the body, and wait till the leopard is lined dead with your sights; don't move to get a bead on him or he'll twig you."

Nathu followed the sahibs, dropping on their trail from a bison horn a liquid that had been decocted from the glands of an otter for the obliteration of the sahib scent; the taint of natives would not alarm the leopard, experience having taught him that when he charged they fled.

As Gilfain sat behind the saber-leafed wall of aloe he bent down a strong-fibered shoot to obtain a good rest for the heavy 10-bore, and an opening that gave him a view of the dead body of the woman. Beyond the plateau the jungle, fading from emerald green, through purple, to sable gloom as the sun slid down behind a western hill, took on an enshroudment of mystery. A peacock, from high in a tamarisk that was fast folding its shutter leaves for the night, called discordantly. A high-shouldered hyena slouched in a prowling semicircle back and forth beyond the kill, his ugly snout picking from the faint breeze its story of many scents. Closer and closer the hyena drew in his shuffling trot, till suddenly, with head thrown up as if something had carried to his ear, he stood a carved image of disgusting contour against a gold-tinted sky shot with streamers of red. Then, with a shrunken cringe of fear, he slipped away and was gone.

The wrens, with squeaks of alarm, rose on beating wings.

From the jungle something like a patch of its own gloom came out upon the blurred plateau. As the thing turned to sweep along the jungle edge the fading sky light glinted on two moonstones that were set in its shadowy form.

The watcher now knew what it was. His heart raced like a motor. At the base of his skull the tightening scalp pricked as though an etcher were at work. His tongue moistened parchment-dry lips. His fingers beat a tattoo upon the triggers of the gun. It was not fear; it was just "It," the sensation that comes to all.

More wily even than the ghoulish hyena, the leopard worked his way toward the spot of his desire. Belly to earth, he glided for yards; then he would crouch, just a darkening patch on the surface; sometimes he sat up —a black bowlder. Thirty yards across from the body, he passed beyond it to catch in his nostrils the gently stirring wind that sifted through the aloe blades to where, once more flat to earth, he waited while his sixth sense tabulated the taints.

Lord Victor's eye, trained along the barrels, saw nothing definite; he felt a darkening of the ground where the woman lay, but no form grew in outlines. Suddenly there was a glint of light as if from a glowworm; that must be the leopard's eyes. Then—Gilfain must have moved his gun—there was the gleam of white teeth fair in line with the sights as the leopard snarled with lifted head.

Inspiration pulled the triggers—once, twice! The gun's roar was followed by the coughing growl of the writhing leopard. With a dulled, automatic movement the man jammed two cartridges into the gun, and with foolish neglect of sense scrambled from his cage, the razor edge of an aloe leaf slitting his cheek, and ran to where, beside the woman's body, lay dead the one who had slain her.

An instinct rather than reason flashed across Gilfain's still floating

mind, a memory of Finnerty's precaution at the death of Pundit Bagh, and, holding both barrels cocked, he prodded the still twitching black body; but, now released from trivial things, the leopard lay oblivious of this.

Torches flickered in wavy lines where the village path topped the plateau, and a crunch of hurrying feet was heard. To reassure them Lord Victor cried a cheery, "Hello! Whoop-ah!"

When Finnerty and Swinton arrived at the head of a streaming procession a soft glow of satisfied victory loosened Gilfain's tautened nerves, and he babbled of the joy of slaying man-eaters till cut short by the major's: "Well, this act is finished, so we'll get back."

Mahadua was already busy. The leopard was quickly triced to a pole, and they were back in Kohima. Then there was ritual, for the hillmen of the jungle have their ways, and the killing of a man-eater is not of daily habit, and Mahadua, knowing all these things, had to collect a levy.

The slain one was deposited in front of the debta's house, and Mahadua, with some fantastic gyrations supposed to be a dance, collected a rupee from the headman, also from the villagers flour and ghee and honey, for that was the custom when a man-eater was slain.

Six strong carriers, each armed with a torch, were supplied by the debta to bear the trophy, slung from a bamboo, down to the next village, which was Mayo Thana.

For the sahibs milk and rice cakes and honey were supplied, and their praises sounded as demigods. Lord Victor, as he sat on a block of wood that was a grain mortar, found his knees in the thin, bony arms of an old woman whose tears of gratitude splashed upon the hand with which he patted her arm. She was Sansya, the slain woman's mother.

As they left Kohima, the carriers waving their torches in rhythmic lines of light, the leader sent his powerful voice echoing down the slopes in a propitiatory song to the god of the hills, which also conveyed an order to Mayo Thana to prepare a relay of bearers.

Weirdly mystic the torch-lighted scene, the leader's voice intoning the first line, and the others furnishing the chorus as they sang:

"God of our hills!
Ho-ho, ho-ho!
The leopard is slain!
Ho-ho, ho-ho!
To thee our praise!
Ho-ho, ho-ho!"

To the flowing cadence of this refrain the six bearers of the leopard trotted down the mountain path in rhythmic swing.

At Mayo Thana, a mile down, and at Mandi, half a mile beyond, thrifty Mahadua collected his tithe as master of the hunt, and obtained torchbearers, the lot from Mandi having the task of shouldering the burden till the elephant party was reached.

For an hour they traveled among heavy-bodied creepers and massive trees when, through the solemn stillness, echoed the far-off tinkle of a bell. Without command, Mahadua stood silently in the path, his head turned to listen. Five seconds, ten seconds—the sahibs sitting their saddles as silent as their guide, and again, now unmistakable, to their ears floated the soft note that Finnerty had likened to the clink of ice in a glass.

Mahadua, holding up his torch so that its light fell upon Finnerty's face, turned his eyes questioningly.

"It is Moti's bell?" Finnerty said, query in his voice.

"Yes, sahib; but it is not on Moti's neck, because it would not just speak and then remain silent, and then speak and then remain silent, for in the jungle her pace would keep it at tongue all the time."

Then, listening, they waited. Again they heard it, and again there was silence.

"Easy, easy!" Finnerty commanded, and, moving with less speed than before, they followed Mahadua.

As they came to a break in the forest where some hills had burst through its gloomed shroud to lift their rocky crests into the silver moonlight, Finnerty heard, nearer now, the bell, and,

startled by its unfamiliar note, a jackal, sitting on his haunches on the hilltop, his form outlined against the moonlit sky, threw up his head to send out a faint, tremulous cry. The plaintive wail was caught up as it died away by another jackal, and then another—they were like sentinels calling from posts in a vast semicircle; then with a crashing crescendo of screaming yelps all broke into a rippling clamor that suggested they fled in a pack.

"Charming!" Lord Victor commented. "Topping chorus!"

In the hush that followed this jackal din, Finnerty could hear the tinkling bell. "Does it come up this path?" he asked the shikari.

"Yes, sahib, and I thought I heard Moti laugh."

The major turned to Swinton. "I've got a presentiment that somebody—probably the man that stuck a knife into Baboo Dass' thief—having the bell, has got Moti away from my fellows and is leading her up this path to the hills. I'm going to wing him." He slipped from the saddle, his 10-bore in hand. "Of course, if I can get my clutches on him——" He broke off to arrange action. "Put out the torch, Mahadua, and have your match box ready to light it in a second. You two chaps had better turn your horses over to the grooms. With Mahadua I'll keep in advance."

Mahadua, putting his little hand up against Finnerty's chest, checked at a faint, rustling, grinding sound that was like the passing of sandpaper over wood. Finnerty, too, heard it. Perhaps a leopard had forestalled them in waylaying the one who had signaled his approach; or perhaps the one had stilled the telltale sapphire tongue, and was near. No, it tinkled, a score or more yards beyond. The shikari's hand clutched spasmodically in a steadying grip of Finnerty's coat; there was a half-stifled gasp from its owner as two lurid eyes weaved back and forth in the black depths in which the path was lost.

Finnerty's iron nerve went slack; his boy days of banshee stories flooded his mind in a superstitious wave as those devilish eyes hovered menacingly ten feet from the ground.

"A spirit!" Mahadua gasped as he crawled his way behind the major.

"Tinkle, tinkle, tinkle!" The sound came just below where the eyes had gleamed; then a smothering cry—the crunching, slipping sound of sandpaper on wood; a rapid clatter of the bell; a noise like the hiss of escaping steam mingled with the crunch of breaking bones; and again the gleaming eyes cut the darkness in sinuous convolutions.

A gasp—a cry of: "Gad, what is it?" came from behind Finnerty, and beyond there was a heavy thud, the clatter of a bamboo pole, as, with cries of horror, the men of Mandi dropped their burden and fled, gasping to each other: "It is the goblin of the Place of Terrors, and if we look upon his eyes we shall become mad!"

In front of Finnerty the jungle was being rent asunder. With a wild trumpet note of battle, drawn by the bell clangor, an elephant crashed through impeding limbs and seized the evil-eyed goblin.

"A light!" Finnerty grabbed the torch, and as it flared to a match that trembled in Mahadua's fingers he thrust it back into the guide's hand, cocking the hammers of his 10-bore.

The resined-torch flare picked out against the gray of Moti's neck a white-and-black necklace, the end of which was wound about a swaying vine, and in the coils, drawn flat like an empty bag, was a man from whose neck dangled a clanging bell.

"A python!" Finnerty cried as he darted forward to get a shot at the wide-jawed head that, swaying back and forth, struck viciously with its hammer nose at Moti's eyes.

The jungle echoed with a turmoil that killed their voices; the shrill, trumpet notes of Burra Moti had roused the forest dwellers; a leopard, somewhere up in the hills, answered the defiant roars; black-faced monkeys, awakened by the din, filled the branches of a giant sal and screamed in anger.

Great as was the elephant's strength,

she could not break the python's deadly clasp; she was like a tarpon that fights a bending rod and running reel, for the creeper swayed, and the elastic coils slipped and held and gave and gathered back, until its choking strength brought her to her knees.

For a second the serpent's head was clear—a yard above, and the 10-bore spat its lead fair into the yawning mouth. The coils slipped to looseness; the big elephant neck drew in the cooling air, and Moti, wise as a human, knew that she was saved. A grunt of relief rippled weakly from her trunk, and Finnerty, slipping up as she lay still bound in the python's folds, patted her on the forehead and let her hear his voice.

"Put the bell on her, sahib," Mahadua advised, "for now that she is tired she will be at peace."

Mahadua's call to the carriers was answered far down the trail; but reassured of his cry of, "The big snake is dead!" they came back. More torches were lighted, their flickering glare completing a realistic inferno.

Down on her bended legs like a huge, elephant-faced god, a dead man, clad in the snuff-colored robe of a priest, laced to her neck by the python coils and surrounded by black-skinned torch-bearers, Moti might well have been taken for some jungle fetish.

The men of Mandi carried little axes in their belts, and with these the serpent cable was cut and uncoiled. He was a gigantic brute, thirty feet long and thicker than a man's thigh. The mottled skin, a marvelous pattern of silver and gold and black, looked as though nature had hung out an embellished sign of "Beware!" Or, perhaps, mothering each of its kind, had, with painstaking care, here limned a deceiving screen like the play of sunlight or moonlight through leaves on the dark limb of a tree.

As the priest's limp body flopped to earth a jade-handled knife fell from a leather girdle. Swinton picked it up, saying: "This is familiar, major."

"There are two of them," Finnerty answered, stooping to reach another that still rested in its sheath.

The strap that held the sapphire bell, wound twice around the priest's shoulders, was evidently intended for Moti's neck, and with a continuous stream of low-voiced endearments, Finnerty buckled it to place.

Touching the iron chain that still held in its stride-shortening grip Moti's legs, Finnerty said: "That's why they came along at such a slow pace, and it will help us shoo the old girl back; she'll know that she can't cut up any didos."

Mahadua, though he didn't understand the English, realizing something of this, said: "Sahib, Moti will be like a woman that has had her cry of passion; she will now bear with her friends. I will go in the lead with a torch, and if the sahib will spare one of the bridle reins, holding an end and allowing Moti to take the other end in her fingers as she might the tail of an elephant, she will follow the horse."

It was soon arranged thus. At a word from Finnerty, Moti lumbered heavily to her feet, while he stood with uplifted whip, ready to cut a stinging blow to her trunk should she show signs of temper. Quite understanding this threat, Moti gently thrust her trunk toward the major's face and fumbled his chin with her thumb and finger as though she would say: "I know a friend when I find him."

As they neared the compound encampment, Moti, catching the sound of Bahadar's ears fanning flies, rumbled a soft message of peace; but there was no expected noise of greeting from the natives, no bustle of sleepers rising to greet the sahibs. They came right into the camp before some of the men, who had slept with their heads rolled in the folds of turbans or loin cloth, sat up groggily or struggled to incapable feet. The mahout reeled up from somewhere near Bahadar and salaamed drunkenly, a foolish, deprecating leer on his lips.

The sight of Moti partly sobered him, and his mind caught up the blurred happenings of the night. "An evil spirit, sahib," he babbled, "caused us to

fall heavy in sleep, and we were wakened by the breaking of the rawhide nooses that bound Moti; then she fled to the jungle."

"This fool is drunk!" Mahadua declared angrily. "If the sahib will beat him with a whip he will tell who brought the arak."

Gothya repudiated Mahadua's assertion, but a firm tap of the riding whip on his buttocks, with threats of more, gradually brought out the story of their debauch. A party of native liquor runners, men who smuggled arak across the line from Nepal, had stumbled upon the party and had driven a thriving trade.

"That accounts largely for the stealing of Moti," Finnerty declared. He had in his hand the rawhide noose, showing that it had been cut close to the elephant's leg. Evidently the priest had been able to crawl right in to the camp, the drunkards having let their fire die.

The mahout, salaaming, said: "Sahib, the jungle is possessed of evil gods to-night. Just when it was growing dark we saw passing on a white horse the one who gallops at night to destroy."

"Was that before you became drunk, or since?" Finnerty asked sarcastically.

"At that time the wine had not arrived, sahib. We all saw passing yonder in the jungle where there is no path the white horse."

"Gad! It has been the girl coming down out of the hills," Finnerty said to Swinton. "There must be something about to materialize when she waited so late. We'll camp here," he added to Mahadua. "Send a couple of these fellows into the village to tell Immat to bring out his tusker, with a couple of ropes."

The men were sent off, a fire built, the tent pitched, and Finnerty's servant, who had been brought in charge of the commissariat, prepared a supper for the sahibs.

Bahadar, seeing that Burra Moti had overcome her waywardness, knelt down for a restful night, but Moti, true to her African elephant habit, remained on her stalwart legs, fondling her recovered sapphire trinket.

CHAPTER XIX.

Like the aftermath of a heavy storm, the night held nothing but the solemn forest stillness; the tired sahibs lay in its calm creatures of a transient Nirvana till brought from this void of restful bliss by the clarion of a jungle cock rousing his feathered harem.

A golden-beaked black "hill myna" tried his wondrous imitative vocal powers on the cock's call from the depths of a tree just above them, and when this palled upon his fancy he piped like a magpie or drooled like a cuckoo; then he voiced some gibberish that might have been simian or gathered from the chatter of village children.

The camp stirred; the natives, shame in their hearts and aches in their heads, crawled into action. Amir Alli, the cook, built a fire, and brewed tea and made toast.

Lord Victor was filled with curiosity over the cock crow, and when it was explained that there were wild fowl about he became possessed of a desire to shoot some.

After breakfast Finnerty loaded a gun and sent Mahadua with Lord Victor after the jungle fowl. They were gone an hour, for the beautiful black-red jungle cock had led them deep into the forest before falling to the gun.

Upon their return Finnerty fancied there was an unusual diffidence about Lord Victor; he seemed disinclined to dilate upon his sporting trip; also Mahadua had a worried look, as if he held back something he should unfold.

A little later, as Finnerty went to the spot where Moti and Raj Bahadar were feeding upon limbs the men had brought, he heard Mahadua say to Gothya: "Does a spirit leave hoof-prints in the earth as big as my cap, believer in ghosts? And does it ride back to the hills in daylight?" Then Gothya caught sight of Finnerty, and the wrangle ceased.

When the major had looked at the elephants for a minute he drew Mahadua into the jungle, and there said: "Now, shikari man, tell me what has entered through those little eyes of yours this morning?"

The face of Mahadua wrinkled in misery. "Sahib," he begged, "what am I to do? I eat master's salt, and yet——" He was fumbling in the pocket of his jacket; now he drew forth a rupee and tendered it to Finnerty, adding: "Take this, master, and give it back to the young lord sahib that I may now speak, not having eaten his salt to remain silent."

Finnerty threw the silver piece into the jungle, saying: "Bribery is for monkeys. And now that you serve but one master what have you of service for him?"

The man's eyes, which had been following with regret the rupee's spinning flight, now reverted to his master's face. "Going I saw in soft earth the print of hoofs, the front ones having been shod with iron; they were not small ones such as Bhutan ponies have, nor a little larger like the Arab horses, but wide and full, such as grow on the *Turki* breed."

By the "Turki breed" Mahadua meant the Turcoman or Persian horse, Finnerty knew, and the gray stallion Marie rode was one such. He asked: "Was it the track of the white horse Gothya thought carried an evil spirit?"

"Yes, sahib; for as we went beyond after the jungle hens the mem-sahib who rides the gray stallion passed, going up into the hills, and a road bears its burden both coming and going."

Finnerty jumped mentally. Why had Lord Victor given Mahadua a rupee to say nothing of this incident? "But she did not see you nor the sahib?" he queried.

"She did not see your servant, but the young man spoke with her."

"And he gave you a rupee?"

"He put a finger on his lips and closed his eyes when he passed the rupee, and thinking the going abroad to eat the air by the mem-sahib of no importance to master I said nothing."

Neither did Finnerty say anything of this to either Lord Victor or Swinton. But he made up his mind that he would also go up into the hills that day. It was his duty.

Persistently his mind revolted at the thought of denouncing the girl. In some moments of self-analysis his heart warmed in confessional, but this feeling, traitorous to his duty, he put in the storehouse of locked-away impulses. He had never even whispered into words these troublous thoughts. It took some mastering, did the transient glint of pleasing womanhood into his barren jungle life, for the big man was an Irish dreamer, a Celt whose emotions responded to the subtle tonic of beauty and charm. Ever since he had taken Marie in his arms to put her in the howdah he had felt her head against his shoulder; had seen the heavy sweep of black hair that was curiously shot with silver.

Finnerty could see an uneasy look in Lord Victor's eyes as that young man watched him coming back out of the jungle with Mahadua. Why had the youngster talked with the girl on the gray stallion—why had he not let her pass? Why had he given the shikari a rupee to say nothing of the meeting? There was some mystery behind the whole thing. She had come back late the previous evening, and now she was going up into the hills at this early hour.

The elephant Finnerty had sent for had not arrived; perhaps the half-drunken messengers had lain down in the jungle to sleep off the arak. But at last the tusker appeared. It was during this wait that Finnerty proposed to Swinton that they should go up into the hills. He saw Lord Victor start and look up, apprehension in his eyes, when he broached the matter, but though the latter advanced many reasons why they should not make the journey he did not accept the major's polite release of his company; he stuck. Indeed, Finnerty was hoping Gilfain would decide to return to Darpore, for

the young man's presence would hamper their work of investigation.

He knew that the gray stallion's hoofprints would be picked up on the path that led to the hills when they came to the spot where the girl, having finished her detour, would swing her mount back to the beaten way, so he rode with his eyes on the ground. He first discerned them faintly cupping some hard, stony ground, but he said nothing, riding in silence till, where the trail lay across a stretch of mellow, black soil, imprints of the wide hoofs were indented as though inverted saucers had cut a quaint design. Here he halted and cried in assumed surprise: "By Jove! Somebody rides abroad early this morning!"

But his assumption of surprise was not more consummate than Gilfain's, for the latter's face held a baby expression of inquiring wonderment as he said: "Floaty sort of idea, I'd call it, for any one to jog up into these primeval glades for pleasure."

Swinton, who knew the stallion's hoofprints from a former study of them, raised his eyes to Finnerty's, there reading that the major also knew who the rider was.

Now by this adventitious lead their task was simplified, and Finnerty clung tenaciously to the telltale tracks. This fact gradually dawned upon Lord Victor, and he became uneasy, dreading to come upon the girl while with his two companions.

They had ridden for an hour, always upward, the timber growing lighter, the ground rockier, and open spots of jungle more frequent, when, on a lean, graveled ridge, Finnerty stopped, and, dismounting, searched the ground for traces of a horse that had passed.

"Have you dropped something, major?" Lord Victor asked querulously.

"Yes," Finnerty answered, remounting; "I think it's back on the trail."

Swinton followed, and Lord Victor, muttering, "What the devil are you fellows up to?" trailed the other two.

A quarter of a mile back, where a small path branched, Finnerty picked up their lead and they again went upward, now more toward the east. The presence of Lord Victor held unworded the dominating interest in Swinton's and Finnerty's minds, so they rode almost silently.

It was noon when they, now high up among hills that stretched away to the foot of Safed Jan, whose white-clothed forehead rested in the clouds, came out upon a long, stony plateau. Finnerty, pointing with his whip, said: "There lies the Safed Jan Pass, and beyond is the road to Tibet, and also the road that runs south through Nepal and Naga land to Chittagong. I've never been up this far before."

"If this trip is in my honor, you're too devilish hospitable," Lord Victor growled; "mountain climbing as a pastime is bally well a discredited sport."

Here and there on the plateau the damp-darkened side of a newly upturned stone told that the gray stallion had passed on the path they rode; but at the farther extremity of the plateau they came, with startling suddenness, upon a deep cleft—a gorge hundreds of feet deep, and yet so smooth to the surface that at fifty yards it was unobservable. There the path ended, and on the farther side, twenty feet away, perched like a bird's nest in a niche of the cliff, was a temple, partly hollowed from the solid rock and partly built of brick. To one side, carved from the rock, was an image of Chamba.

With a rueful grin, Finnerty cast his eye up and down the gorge whose one end was lost between mountain cliffs, and whose other dipped down to cut the feet of two meeting hills. He dismounted and prowled up and down the chasm's brink. There were no hoofprints, no disturbing of sand or gravel; absolutely nothing but the quiescent weathered surface that had lain thus for centuries.

When Finnerty returned, Swinton, amused at the intense expression of discomfiture on his face, said: "Our early-morning friend must sit a horse called Pegasus."

Finnerty, raising his voice, called across the chasm. He was answered

by an echo of his own rich Irish tone that leaped from gorge to gorge to die away up the mountainside. He seized a stone and threw it with angry force against the brick wall of the temple; the stone bounded back, and from the chasm's depths floated up the tinkle of its fall. But that was all; there was no response.

Somewhat to Finnerty's surprise, Swinton said: "Well, we've given our curiosity a good run for it; suppose we jog back? When we get in the cool of the jungle we'll eat our bit of lunch."

Finnerty did not voice the objection that was in his mind. Certainly the girl had passed that way—was still up above them; why should they give up pursuit because the trail was momentarily broken?

Back across the plateau Swinton had assumed the lead, and fifty yards in the jungle he stopped, saying: "I'm peckish; we'll have a good, leisurely lunch here."

When they had eaten, Lord Victor, saying he was going to have a look at the bald pate of Safed Jan, strolled back toward the plateau. When he had gone Swinton spoke: "If we stay here long enough, major, the girl, who of course rode that horse whose tracks we followed, will come around that sharp turn in the path, and, figuratively, plunk into our arms. We are at the neck of the bottle—the gateway. There's a mighty cleverly constructed drawbridge in the face of that temple; that brickwork hides it pretty well."

Finnerty whistled. "And the girl, you think, vanished over the let-down bridge?"

"Yes, and probably sat there eying us all the time."

"By Jove, they saw us coming on the plateau and drew up the bridge!"

"Yes."

"And what do we do now?"

"Wait here. We'll see her face to face, I'm certain; that will be something. Whether she will have with her what she searches for I don't know."

"Some companion she expects to meet here?"

"It must be, and I'm going to search him."

"Unless it's too big a party."

"When do we start?" Lord Victor queried, returning; but he received only an evasive answer. He grew petulant as an hour went by.

And now Swinton had disappeared up the trail toward the plateau. After a time he came back, and with a motion of his eyebrows told Finnerty that some one was coming. They could hear an occasional clink of iron striking stone as a horse, moving at a slow walk, came across the plateau, and then a gentle, muffled, rhythmic series of thuds told that he was on the jungle path.

Finnerty had laid his heavy hand with a strong grip on Lord Victor's forearm, the pressure, almost painful, conveying to that young man's mind an inarticulate threat that if he voiced a warning something would happen him; he read its confirmation in a pair of blue Irish eyes that stared at him from below contracted brows.

A gray horse suddenly rounding the sharp turn came to a halt, for Swinton was sprawled fair across the path.

A heavy veil, fastened around the girl's helmet, failed to release at her trembling, spasmodic grasp, and her face went white as Swinton, leisurely rising, stood just to one side of the stallion's head, his implacable, unreadable eyes turned toward her. She knew, perhaps from the man's attitude within reach of her bridle rein, perhaps from the set of that face, perhaps from blind intuition, that the captain had recognized her.

Finnerty came forward, lifting his helmet in an interference of blessed relief, for he, too, sensed that there was something wrong—something even beyond the previous suspicion.

Lord Victor, who had sprung to his feet with a gasping cry at the girl's appearance, stood limp with apprehension, his mind so much of a boy's mind, casting about futilely for some plan to help her, for there was dread in her face, and, like a boy's mind, his found the solution of the difficulty in a trick, just such a trick as a schoolboy would

pitch upon. The whole process of its evolution had taken but two seconds, so it really was an inspiration. He darted toward the horse, crying banteringly: "I say! Introduce me, old top." Then his foot caught in a visionary root, and he plunged, his small, bare head all but burying itself in Swinton's stomach.

The gray stallion leaped from the rake of a spur, his thundering gallop all but drowning the blasphemous reproach that issued from Swinton's lips, as, in a fury of sudden passion, he took a deliberate swing at the young nobleman's nose.

Finnerty unostentatiously crowded his bulk between the two, saying, with an inward laugh: "You're a dangerous man; you've winded the captain, and you've frightened that horse into a runaway. He may break the girl's neck."

They were a curious trio, each one holding a motive that the other two had not attained to, each one now dubious of the others' full intent, and yet no one wishing to clear the air by questions or recriminations—not just yet, anyway.

"What the devil did the girl bolt for?" Swinton asked angrily.

"The *horse* bolted," Finnerty answered, lying in an Irishman's good cause—a woman.

"You clumsy young ass!" Swinton hurled at Gilfain. "I wanted to——" Then the hot flush of temper, so rare with him, was checked by his mastering passion—secretiveness.

Lord Victor laughed. "My dear and austere mentor, I apologize. In my hurry to forestall you with the young lady whom you have ridden forth so many mornings to meet I bally well stumped your wicket, I'm afraid—and my own, too, for we're both bowled."

Finnerty philosophically drew his leather cheroot case and proffered it to Swinton, saying: "Take a weed!"

The captain complied, lighting it in an abstraction of remastery. He had made the astounding discovery that Marie was the young lady from whose evil influence Lord Victor presumably had been removed by sending him to Darpore, and, as an enlargement of this disturbing knowledge, was the now hammering conviction that she had brought the stolen papers to be delivered to traitorous Prince Ananda.

At that instant of his mental sequence the captain all but burned his nose, paralyzed by a flashing thought. "Good Lord!" he groaned. "It is these papers that she seeks up this way; the somebody who is coming overland is bringing them for fear the authorities might have caught her on the steamer routes." Then in relief to this came the remembrance that so far she had not met the some one, for she traveled alone. But now that she—as he read in her eyes—had recognized him—her very wild plunge to escape proved it—his chance of discovering anything would be practically nil; he would possibly receive the same hushing treatment that had been meted out to Perreira, the half-caste.

"Shall we go back now?" Lord Victor was asking. "It's rather tame today; I'm not half fed up on tiger fights and elephant combats."

"Presently," Swinton answered, sitting down to still more methodically correlate the points of this newer vision. He could not confide any part of his discovery to Finnerty with Lord Victor present; he would decide later on whether he should, indeed, mention it at all. At first flush he had thought of galloping after the girl, but even if he had succeeded in overtaking her what could he do? If he searched her and found nothing, he would have ruined everything; probably Finnerty would have ranged up with the girl against this proceeding.

Further vibration of this human triangle, the three men of divers intent, was switched to startled expectancy by the clang of something upon the plateau—an iron-shod staff striking a stone or the impact of a horse's hoof. This was followed by silence. Finnerty stepped gently across to his horse, unslung from the saddle his 10-bore, and slipped two cartridges into it as he returned to stand leisurely against a tree trunk, an uplifted finger commanding

silence. They could now hear the shuffling, muffled noises which emanate from people who travel a jungle trail no matter how cautiously they move, and something in the multiplicity of sounds intimated that several units composed the approaching caravan.

Two Naga spearmen first appeared around the turn, their eager, searching eyes showing they were on the alert for something. The threatening maw of the 10-bore caused them to stand stock-still, their jungle cunning teaching them the value of implicit obedience. They made no outcry. In four seconds the shaggy head of a pony came into view, and then his body, bearing in the saddle a sahib, and behind could be seen native carriers. The man on horseback reined up; then he laughed—a cynical, unmusical sneer it was. He touched the spur to his pony's flank, brushed by the Naga spearmen, and, eying the 10-bore quizzically, asked: "Well, my dear boy, what's the idea?"

Finnerty lowered the gun, answering: "Nothing; preparedness, that's all. Thought it might be a war party of Naga head-hunters when I saw those two spearmen."

The horseman slipped from his saddle and stood holding the rein; a lithe, sinewy, lean-faced man of forty-five years, his sharp gray eyes, a little too close set, holding a vulpine wariness.

Swinton had noticed his easy pose in the saddle, suggesting polo command, and now the two or three quick, precise steps forward spoke: "Service."

To Finnerty the cynical, drawling voice rang familiar; it had a curious, metallic, high-pitched crispness that the drawl failed to smother, but the man's face, caked with the drifting hill dust that sweat had matrixed, was like a mask. Finnerty proffered a cheroot, which the stranger accepted eagerly, saying: "Fancy my beggars bagged mine. I've had only some native mixture to puff from a crude clay pipe I made and baked in a fire."

"Come from Tibet way?" the major queried.

"No; been up country buying cotton for Chittagong people, and got raided by dacoits; had to work out this way."

This story, even fantastic and sudden-built as it sounded, might have passed ordinarily as just the rightful duplicity of a man not called upon to confide the reasons of his exploration trip to any one, had not the one word "Chittagong" burned like acid.

Swinton felt that the stranger's eyes were searching him, though his words were for Finnerty. Both knew the speaker was lying. His whole get-up was not the easy, indifferent, restful apparel of a man who had been some long time in the jungle. He wore brown leather riding boots instead of perhaps canvas shoes; his limbs were incased in cord breeches that spoke of a late Bond Street origin; a stock that had once been white held a horseshoe pin studded with moonstones, its lower ends passing beneath a gaudily checked vest. This very get-up dinned familiarity into the major's mind; he struggled with memory, mentally asking, "Where have I seen this chap?" The tawny mustache, bristling in pointed smoothness, had a rakish familiarity, and yet the echoes came from far back on the path of life, as elusively haunting as a dream recalled in the morning.

Abstractedly, as they talked, the stranger shifted his riding whip to his teeth, and, reaching down with the liberated hand, gave a slight tug at his boot strap, and that instant Finnerty knew his man. It was almost a gasping cry of recognition: "Captain Foley—by all the powers!"

The stranger's face blanched, and Swinton sprang to his feet, galvanized by a tremendous revelation.

An amused cackle came from beneath the tawny mustache, followed by an even-worded drawl: "You Johnnies are certainly out for a fine draw this morning; my name happens to be Blake-Hume—Charles Blake-Hume."

Finnerty grinned. "The same old delightfully humorous Pat Foley that I knew in the Tenth Hussars at Umballa, when I was a griffin fresh out; even in the choice of a new name you're aristocratic—'Blake-Hume!' My dear boy,

you could no more shed yourself than you could that desire for a fancy vest and the moonstone pin that you wore in a deviltry of revolt against the idea that moonstones were unlucky."

Swinton was now convinced that Finnerty had made no mistake; he could see it in a sudden narrowing of the foxy eyes, and, taking a step closer to their visitor, he said: "Captain Foley, your daughter Marie has just passed down the trail."

This simple assertion had the comparative effect of a hand grenade dropped midway between Finnerty and the stranger; possibly the major was the more astounded one of the two.

"What, in the name of Heaven, are you saying, man?" he cried, though he still kept his steadfast blue eyes held on Captain Foley, for something in the latter's attitude suggested danger.

"Simply this," Swinton answered; "Captain Foley is the father of the girl known here as Marie Boelke, and it was she who stole a state paper from the possession of Earl Craig."

"Candor seems to be a jewel above price in the jungles this morning, so my compliments to you, my dear Captain Herbert, government policeman," Foley snarled.

Stung by the gratuitous sneer, Finnerty said with feeling: "Perhaps 'Mad' Foley"—he dropped the captain, knowing that Foley had been cast from the service—"you also recognize me, but for certain pieces of silver you would deny it. Do you remember the time I saved you a jolly good hiding that was fair coming to you for one of your crazy tricks?"

"Perfectly, my dear Finnerty; you were known to the mess as the 'Ulster Babe;' it was just a humor of mine now to play you a little, and as for the 'bobby' here, one could never mistake those bits of blue china that have been dubbed the 'farthing eyes.' Indeed I know you both *quite well.*"

Swinton, less edged than Finnerty, now tendered some cynical coin in payment: "Perhaps you know this young gentleman also; I think he has cause for remembering *you.*"

"Good morning, Lord Victor! You are in pleasant company," and Captain Foley let his irritating cackle escape. He gathered the bridle rein in his left hand, grasping the mane at his pony's wither, and turned the stirrup outward to receive his foot as preparation for a leisurely lift to the saddle.

In answer to a hand signal, Finnerty lifted his 10-bore to cover Captain Foley as Swinton said: "Just a moment, Mister Foley; there are certain formalities imposed upon suspected persons crossing the Nepal border, which include perhaps a search. We want the papers your daughter stole from Earl Craig under your influence, and for which you were paid German gold."

"The bobby is devilish considerate, Lord Gilly, in not naming you as the careless one, isn't he? Charmingly diffident sort of chap to put the onus on the venerable early. The old gent would be tremendously shocked to know he was accused of flirting with a young girl, don't you think?"

"I *do* think something, which is that you're no end of a bounder to bring your daughter's name into your flooey talk," Lord Victor retorted angrily.

"Tell your coolies to open up everything," and Swinton's opaque eyes held Foley's shifty ones menacingly. "As to yourself, strip!"

"The coolies are at his majesty's service, Mister Bobby; as for myself I'll see you damned first. I am in independent territory; Maharajah Darpore is, like myself, not a vassal of Johnnie Bull. If you put a hand on me I'll blink those farthing eyes of yours, Mister Bloody Bobby."

Next instant the speaker sprawled on his back, both shoulders to the earthen mat, as Finnerty threw a quick wrestler's hold across his neck. The big Irishman's blood had been heated by the very words that had roused Lord Victor's anger. Besides, this was the easier way; they had no time for international equity. Swinton quickly searched the prostrate man. His boots were pulled off, the insoles ripped out—even a knife blade inserted between the

two laps of the outer soles, practically wrecking them. A Webley revolver that hung from a belt Foley wore was emptied of its shells; even its barrel was prodded for a hidden roll of thin paper. The search of the packs was most thorough, and fully devoid of results.

Foley laughed cynically when the two searchers stood empty-handed, discomfiture patent in their faces.

"You turned the paper over to your daughter," Swinton accused in an unusually verbal mood.

"According to your own statement, my dear government spy, you had the young lady in your hands here; did you find this apocryphal document?"

Swinton's eyes met Finnerty's, which were saying quite plainly: "The girl has beaten us out!" There also lingered in the Irishman's eyes, Swinton fancied, a pathetic look of regret that now there could be no doubt about her mission; he even heard a deep-drawn breath, such as a game better takes when he has lost heavily.

"A devilish nice mess you have made of your life and your daughter's, Captain Foley," Lord Victor suddenly ejaculated. "You were a 'king's bad bargain' in the army, and you're a man's bad bargain out of it."

Foley stared; then he sneered: "The young cock must be cutting his spurs. Rather tallish order from a waster, Lord Gilly." He turned to Captain Swinton. "Now that you have performed your police duties I have a bottle of Scotch, which no doubt you observed among my traps, and if you gentlemen have no objection to joining me we'll drink a toast, 'Happy to meet, sorry to part, and happy to meet again.'"

"I don't drink with the king's enemies!" Swinton clipped the words with a sound as if coins dropped.

"Nor I—with thieves," added Lord Victor.

"I'm sorry for you, my boy," the major said solemnly. "I'm ashamed to refuse to drink with an Irishman, but I'm fed up on traitors."

Swinton drew the major to one side. When they had finished a discussion as to whether there was any benefit in detaining Foley or not, which was settled in the negative, Foley asked, a sneer curling the tawny mustache: "Well, you pair of bobbies, do I pass?"

"You may go—to hell!" Finnerty added the warm destination in bitterness of soul over his shattered dream.

The coolies had repacked their burdens; the two Naga spearmen at a command trotted down the path; Foley swung into the saddle, and with a mocking, "Au revoir, Lord Gilly, Mister Bobby, and my dear Ulster Babe," was gone.

"Dished!" Finnerty exclaimed bitterly.

"The girl—we are outwitted by a woman!" Swinton admitted despondently.

"You two Johnnies have thrown up your tails," Lord Victor objected. "If the girl has the document you're so cocksure of, it's something to know that it's in Darpore. That's what I call a deuced good clew."

"My dear boy," Finnerty said, under evident control, "you're as innocent as a babe. You don't happen to know that there's a mutiny near ripe in Darpore, and it just needed a torch, such as this document, to set the whole state in a blaze."

Swinton, galvanized out of his habitual control, added fiercely: "And, you young ass! You knew who the girl was; we saw you at Jadoo Pool—we saved your life. If I'd known that it was Marie Foley I'd have dogged every footstep she took——"

"But you knew when you had her here," Lord Victor objected, momentarily forgetting his part in that episode.

"Yes, by Heaven, I did, and I can thank your sprawling interference for her escape! Why didn't you tell us that it was the girl who had stolen these state papers?"

"I've got a floaty idea that this lack of mutual confidence originated with your honorable self, Captain—Captain Herbert, as I now learn your name is. Do you think the earl would have countenanced my accepting the hospitality

of a prince accompanied by a government spy?"

"You've answered your own question, Lord Victor," Swinton said quietly. "Earl Craig belongs to the old school, the Exeter Hall crowd who believe the Oriental is an Occidental—India for the Indians is their motto—and that the Hun is a civilized gentleman, not as some of us know him, a rapacious brute who seeks to dominate the world. It is that cabal, the Haldane tribe, in psychic affinity with the soulless Hun, that makes it possible for this cuckoo creature, Boelke, to plant his eggs of sedition in the Darpore nest. Earl Craig would not have been a party to my way of unmasking or clearing the Darpores, father and son; he'd call it un-English. But I may say I did not come out here to watch you; there was no suspicion that you would come in contact with the stolen paper. My mission was concerned with some arms that are headed for India. I hope you see why it was thought advisable to keep you in ignorance of my status."

Lord Victor did not assimilate this rapidly worded statement as quickly as it was offered. He pondered a little, and then said: "I did not know that Marie Foley was here, and she got no end of a surprise when I turned up. It was all a bally fluke her arranging to meet me; she funked it when that gold cigarette case was handed her by Prince Ananda with the information that I had found it. She thought I had recognized it, which I hadn't; at least it dangled in my memory, but I hadn't connected it with her. She rode down the hill, and when she saw me coming along dropped a note so that I saw it fall—devilish clever, I call it—making an appointment at Jadoo Pool, and there she made me promise not to denounce her."

"Somewhat easy, I fancy," Swinton said sarcastically; "threw the glamour of love over you."

"You dear old bachelor! You have very visionary ideas of that matter. She doesn't care two straws for me; it was purely a matter of 'on honor' business, because she gave me her solemn word that she hadn't stolen the document, and that she hadn't brought it out to Darpore. As to the 'grand passion,' I have a floaty idea that the handsome major, with his trick of life-saving, has taken Marie's fancy."

Finnerty blushed, but Swinton said gloomily: "You see the result of believing her. She was just too fiendishly cunning; she hadn't the paper, but knew that her traitor father was bringing it and that she, comparatively immune from search, could safely carry it to the last lap of its journey. She knew that we were liable to intercept the father and very probably search him."

"Looks like it," Finnerty commented. "I didn't know that Foley had a daughter; I heard he'd been cashiered."

"He raced himself out of the army—gambled too heavily," Swinton explained; "then, it being the only thing he cared for, went at it professionally till he raced himself out of England. After that he drifted to Austria and married a Viennese, reported to be of noble family. Whether it was a chance to plant a spy in England or that the woman really fell in love with him I don't know. Marie, of course, is the daughter, and between them the Foleys stole that document through a chance that came because of Lord Victor's fancy for the girl."

Swinton had spoken without any feeling in his voice—automatically, like a witness giving evidence. Gilfain seemed to understand this, for he made no comment. But Finnerty said lugubriously: "Devilish nasty mess, and we've been dished." He picked up the 10-bore, and, going over to his horse, strapped it under his saddle flap, saying: "We'd better jog back."

CHAPTER XX.

Two legs of the mental triangle somewhat folded together as it dribbled down the forest path, Finnerty and Swinton riding in the lead and Lord Victor, with the depressing conviction that he had muddled things, behind.

"It's pretty well cleared up," Swinton remarked in a tone that just reached Finnerty.

"And looks rather bad for us being able to handle the situation without telegraphing headquarters," the major answered despondently.

"Small chance for that," and Swinton laughed in bitterness. "Our new Nana Sahib, Ananda, will have the wires cut or the operator under control; we'll get no word out of here until the thing has happened."

Finnerty also realized how completely they had been blanked. "By heavens, we've got to spike the guns ourselves! We'd better be killed in the attempt than be censured by government," he declared.

"I think so. They've left it to us so far, and the blame is really on our shoulders, old man."

"We'll never get the paper," Finnerty said with conviction.

"I agree with you in that, but we've got to get the machine guns and their ammunition; without them they'd be an unarmed rabble, and no great harm could be done before a regiment from Dumdum or Lucknow could be thrown in here. It's a crazy scheme of Ananda's, anyway, but the Mad Mullah in the Sudan cost many a British life because he was held too lightly at first and got guns."

Finnerty had been restlessly eying the trail they traveled. Now he worded the reason, which he had carried unplaced in words before: "Going and coming I've been looking for tracks left by that party of gun runners the Banjara told about, but I've seen none. This path that the girl followed is not the main trail leading up through Safed Jan Pass, and those accursed Huns, with their usual German thoroughness, built that drawbridge at the old temple so that Foley could slip in without a chance of being met. The whole thing is as clear as mud; he was to wait there till the girl came for the document. When we get lower down we'll cut across the jungle to the regular trail—it's an old elephant highway—and check up."

"We've got to get into that underground fort," Swinton said with solemn determination in his voice. "Jadoo Cave has got something to do with the entrance."

A disconcerting thought struck Finnerty. "The minute we show up we'll be surrounded by spies. They're in my bungalow all the time; we'll not get a chance."

There was a warning cough from behind, and then Lord Victor, urging his horse closer, said: "Don't bar me, you fellows, from anything that's on; I don't want to be 'sent to Coventry.' If it's a question of fight, for God's sake give me a gun. I'd rather have you damn me like a bargee than be left out. I can't bally well plan anything—I'm not up to it—but I'm an Englishman."

"My dear boy," Finnerty answered, "we know that. If we'd taken you in at the start we'd have given you a better chance; but we all make blunders."

It was about four o'clock when Finnerty, halting, said: "I know where I'm at now; the other trail lies due west, and if we keep our faces full on Old Sol we'll make it."

Through the jungle without a path their progress was slow. At times they were turned into big detours by interlaced walls of running elephant creeper and vast hedges of the *sahbar kirao*, the "have-patience plant" that, with its hooked spikes, was like a fence of barbed wire. Their minds, tortured by the impending calamity, were oblivious to the clamor of the jungle. A bear that had climbed a dead tree inhabited by bees scuttled down to the ground, an animated beehive, his face glued with honey, his paws dripping with it, and his thick fur palpitating with the beat of a million tiny wings. He humped away in a shuffling lope, unmolested; not even a laugh followed his grotesque form.

It was five o'clock when they struck the Safed Jan Trail and swung southward, Finnerty's eyes taking up the reading of its page. "Ah!" he cried suddenly, and, pulling his horse to a standstill, he dropped to the ground.

In the new partnership he turned rather to Lord Victor, saying: "We've been told that machine guns and ammunition have been run into Darpore over the same Chittagong route we think Mad Foley used, only they've come along this trail from the pass." He dipped his thumb into one of the numerous deep heel prints, adding: "See! The carriers were heavy loaded and there were many."

From the varied weathering of the tracks it was apparent that carriers had passed at different intervals of time.

The major remounted, and they had ridden half an hour when his horse pricked his ears and the muscles of his neck quivered in an action of discovery. Finnerty slipped his 10-bore from its holding straps, passed his bridle rein to Swinton, and, dropping to the ground, went stealthily around a bend in the path. He saw nothing—no entrapping armed natives—but a voice came to him from its unseen owner, saying softly: "Salaam! I am the herdsman, and am here for speech with the sahib."

"All right. Come forth!" the major answered.

From a thick screen of brush the Banjara stepped out, saying: "My brother is beyond on the trail, and from his perch in a tree he has given the call of a bird that I might know it was the keddah sahib that passed; he will soon be here."

Finnerty called, and Swinton and Lord Victor came forward. Presently the fellow arrived, and, at a word from the herdsman, said: "Nawab Darna Singh sends salaams to the keddah sahib."

Finnerty stared in amazement. "Why should he have sent you, knowing that a Banjara does not kiss the hand that has beaten him like a dog?"

"Because of that, huzoor. Darna Singh is also treated like a dog, for he is put in a cage, and those who are beaten join together against the whip."

"Why is Darna Singh caged?"

The man cast an uneasy glance toward Lord Victor and hesitated. Sensing the reason for this, Finnerty said: "Speak the truth and fear not."

"We of this country know that the sahibs are quick to anger if the mem-sahibs are spoken of, but it is because of the young mem-sahib that Darna Singh suffers. There is to be war, and Darna Singh came to know—though it may be a lie—that the mem-sahib would be made maharani—perhaps not a *gudi maharani*—and his sister would be taken with a fever and die. And it may be that in a passion over this he sought to end the matter with a thrust of a knife, but I have heard that Rajah Ananda received but a slight cut."

"I'm damned sorry for that, for the nawab has a strong arm."

"Darna Singh was indeed unlucky, sahib, for Rajah Ananda had been taught in Belati to strike with the hand and that saved him."

"Where is the Nawab caged?"

"Below; where the guns are."

Finnerty caught a quick flash of the eye from Swinton.

"And if that is the truth, that you come from him must be a lie, for a jailer does not give entrance to friends of the prisoner."

"True, sahib; but the rani is not caged, and she fears for the life of her brother, and knowing I had been beaten by the rajah and knowing that a Banjara does not forgive, for our tribe is many in her father's state, she sent by a handmaid, who is also of our tribe, a ring of keys that were Darna Singh's, and the woman was taught to say, 'Give these to the keddah sahib and tell him that war comes to the sircar; that these keys open the way where are many guns and where now is Darna Singh.' "

The man took from the folds of his turban a ring upon which were three keys. Finnerty received them in astonishment; then he asked: "Where are the doors?"

"The black leopard came out from his cage through Jadoo Cave, and it may be that Darna Singh opened a door of the cave with one of these keys."

"Damn it!" Swinton ejaculated. "That's the whole thing." But Finnerty

objected: "We searched that cave, and there was no door."

"True, there is no door, but there is a passage high up in the gloom, and beyond that is a cave that was made by the foreigners, and in that is the door. And also it opens to the trail that we are now on." The native messenger was explicit.

"By Jove!" Finnerty exclaimed. "That's how the leopard slipped away."

The herdsman said: "I did not know of this, and perhaps wrongly accused that monkey-faced shikari of sleeping over his task."

The messenger now said deprecatingly: "A watchman knows the many manners of acquiring to the inside of a bungalow without being seen, and one way is to wait for darkness. Also they will watch the sahib's bungalow for his return."

"Very well," Finnerty said; "if I am able to see to it, my faithful fellow, when this is over the sircar will give to you and your brother a village that you may collect the tithes from and have a home."

"Sahib, I have received my pay in advance from the rajah; I am but serving in the manner of the pay."

"Sit you then," Finnerty commanded, "while we talk in plans."

"We've a chance, major, now that we can get in," Swinton declared. "I have my cordite rifle, you have your 10-bore, and if we can but get command of their ammunition we'll blow the damn thing up, even if we go with it."

Finnerty felt that there was no question about the captain's sincerity; the flat blue eyes transmitted nothing but fixed purpose.

"Oh, I say, am I in the discard?" Lord Victor asked plaintively, for the messenger's information had been translated in a condensed form, Finnerty rather emphasizing the important part Marie played as the future maharani.

"I thought of that," Swinton answered; "you will be a 'reserve battalion.' I don't mind being pipped in the way of duty—rather expect it some day—but I should rather like my family to know that I pegged out playing the game, and I shouldn't wonder if we're bagged in that cubby-hole, that it would never be known just how we had disappeared."

"Besides, youngster," Finnerty added, "if you can work yourself into communication with the government we want you to let them know what is trump." The major spoke to the Banjara; then he returned to Lord Victor: "This chap will smuggle you out, he says, and I think he can do it. Your brother will bring you word if we get out, and even if he knows we've been captured he will come to tell you; at any rate, if we're not reported safe before morning you had better take the horses and get away—the Banjara can stick on one, he says."

"Don't worry over us, Gilfain," Swinton added; "just get word out as soon as you can."

Then the watchman said: "The sahib sent back out of the jungle the elephant with the bell, and it is a sacred elephant for such as worship the god that sits in sleep."

"It is a sacred elephant to those who worship Buddha," Finnerty answered.

"The woman who came from the maharani said that Rajah Ananda has taken the sacred elephant in his hand, for to-night is a night of omen at the Lake of the Golden Coin."

"By gad!" Finnerty cried. "That swine has got the three sapphires together now. Nothing will stop him; he'll be fanatically insane."

A sibilant whistle from Swinton was his only comment. The thought was paralyzing.

"Well"—Finnerty sighed the words—"we'll just sit here till it's dark, and then play our last card." He pulled his belt, in which was a hunting knife, a hole tighter, as if girding his loins for the fray.

The Banjara now said: "Rajah Ananda will send out men to look for you on the trail, sahib, but if you will go east through the jungle to where there is a small path—one the sahib no doubt knows—my brother and I will

lead the horses back up over this broad trail to a nala with a stony bed, and then through the jungle and back to where you wait, so that those who come forth will say: 'The keddah sahib and his friends came down and then went back again to the hills, perhaps to follow a bison.' "

"Splendid!" Finnerty commented, and added in commendation: "To a strong man a wrong done is more power.' "

Then Finnerty and his companion cut across through the jungle. It was a good ruse, for the rajah's men, thinking the sahibs were up in the jungle, would not guard every approach.

The sun was now sinking on the horizon, and with its usual bird clamor of eventide the day was passing. Once, as they waited, Lord Victor said: "I don't believe that girl would join herself to a native."

"That's because you're in the full moon of faith, my young friend. At your age I believed in fairies, too," Finnerty said.

"Just the sort of faith," Swinton contributed, "that gives such women their power for mischief; a Prussian spy must do as she is told, and if she were allotted to Ananda, to Ananda she goes."

A shrill note that might have been from a boatswin's silver whistle or a red-breasted teal came floating up from where they had left the Safed Jan Trail. It was answered from on toward the palace hill.

"Ananda's men have found where the horses have turned to go back up into the hills," Finnerty chuckled.

"Deucedly clever work of that Banjara," Lord Victor declared; "sorry I shot the old infidel's dog."

A little later the whistling note, repeated three times, came from higher up, where the Safed Jan Trail lay.

The forest was dark from the drop of night's curtain when the Banjara and his brother came so softly along the scarce discernible trail that they were almost upon the sahibs before they were heard.

"The moon will appear in two hours, sahib, and its light would betray you," the herdsman advised, "so it is well that we take the horses down this path which no one travels at night, and when we have come close to Jadoo Nala I will remain with the horses and you will go with my brother into the cave."

When they had come to a proper place to leave their horses in the jungle, Lord Victor said: "The strategy of you two Johnnies isn't what I'd call first chop. I'll be a dub at this sortie game, for I don't know the language."

"The Banjara does," Finnerty said shortly.

"There's another thing," the youth resumed; "either of you chaps are sort of serviceable to the king, probably cost him a thousand pounds up to date for your training, and I'm—as our delightful friend Foley phrased it—a waster. Sabe, my dear major?"

"My dear boy, you're in training for the future earlship. A thoroughbred colt isn't much benefit to the realm, but he generally develops into something worth while—sabe?"

"Thanks, old top! Rather think I'll stow that away as a good tip. But to return: I'd feel rather thankful to take a chance inside to—well, come back."

"You mean about the girl? We just forget all that, and are now trying to do the best we can for what's to come, and your place is just where you've been stationed; that is, unless you're in command."

Lord Victor sprang to his feet, clicked his heels together, very erect and soldierly, for he had been at Sandhurst, and saluted. With a laugh Finnerty said: "Fall out!" The discussion ceased.

From where they were they could hear, at times, curious, muffled noises disturbing the evening quiet, coming from the palace hill. Finnerty now gave some final advice:

"It is now eight o'clock. If we do not come back for the horses or get you word before morning, make for the outside. Have you any money?"

"Not much," Lord Victor answered.

Finnerty and Swinton gave him the money they had, the former saying:

"If we get caught in that cave we won't need these rupees to pay board for long, I fancy." He held out his hand, and the youth took it, saying: "I'll remember about the thoroughbred colt."

Swinton shook hands with him, saying: "Duty is the best tutor, Lord Victor; it's a steadier, eh?"

"Sorry about—well, the—that silly break of mine about secret service, you know."

The Banjara, noting this completion of detail, said: "And the matter of a village, huzoor—does the young Lord Sahib understand that he is to tell the sircar that me and my brother have been true to their salt?"

"I will tell him to not forget, my friend, for you will well deserve it," the major answered.

When he had impressed this matter upon Gilfain, Finnerty held out his hand to the Banjara: "Brother, you are a man."

"We Banjaras are taught by our mothers that we are to become men," the herdsman answered with simple dignity.

Like the sealing of a solemn compact between the members of a brotherhood was this exchange of handclasps, Swinton also taking the Banjara's hand in a grasp of admiration.

As Finnerty and Swinton melted down the gloomed path with the Banjara's brother, the herdsman stood watching their going, repeating a tribal saying: "In the kingdom of men there are no boundaries."

When the two sahibs came out to where the Safed Jan Trail wound along the bed of a nala approaching the palace plateau, their guide said: "Just beyond is the new cave. I will go forward to see that no one keeps the door, for they will not think it strange that I should be about. If the sahibs hear the small cry of a tree cricket they may come forward."

In five minutes the hissing pipe of a cicada came back to their ears, and, slipping from the jungle to the nala trail, they noiselessly crept to the dark portal that yawned to the right of their way. From the contour of the hill, outlined against an afterglow sky, Finnerty knew that they were on the reverse side of the jutting point that held Jadoo Cave. As they entered a gloom so intense they saw nothing, a whisper reassured them, and the native's hand grasped Finnerty's fingers. The major, understanding, reached back the stock of his 10-bore to Swinton, and they went forward into the blackness. Soon the watchman stopped and whispered: "Put out your hand, sahib, and feel the spot that is here."

By a grasp on his wrist Finnerty's hand was placed upon a stone wall, and his fingers, moving up and down and across, detected a thin crack so truly perpendicular that it suggested mechanics.

The native whispered: "One of the keys on the ring will unlock this that is a door." Then he fumbled the wall with his fingers, and presently found a square block of stone, saying: "The keyhole is within."

A long-stemmed key on the ring fitted the keyhole, but before Finnerty could shoot the bolt the native whispered: "Not yet, sahib." He produced two candles and a box of matches. "Remember, sahib, that no man owns the light of a fire; here is an eye that makes no betraying light." And he placed in Finnerty's fingers a slim male-bamboo rod.

At a twist from Finnerty's hand a heavy bolt in the lock glided back with noiseless ease; a pull caused the stone-faced door to swing forward in the same frictionless quiet, and beyond was a gloom as deep as that of the cave.

"I will watch, sahib," the guide whispered, "and if it is known that evil has fallen upon you I will warn the Lord Sahib; if it please the gods that you come forth I will also carry to him that good tale."

Closing the door behind them, the two adventurers stood in a void so opaque, so devoid of sound, that it produced a feeling of floating in blackened space with the earth obliterated. Finnerty's big hand groped till it found the captain's shoulder, where it rested for a second in heavy assurance; then

he gave Swinton a candle, saying: "If we get separated——"

They moved forward, Finnerty feeling the path with the bamboo rod. He hugged the wall on his right, knowing that the passage, skirting the hill edge, must lead to beneath the palace. Suddenly, shoulder high, the gloom was broken by a square opening, and through it Finnerty saw the handle of the Dipper in its sweep toward the horizon. Beneath this port was a ledge to support a machine gun, as the major surmised. Every twenty feet were openings of different shapes; some narrow, vertical slits for rifle fire. Once Finnerty's rod touched a pillar in the center of the passage. His fingers read grotesque figures carved upon its sides, and he knew they were in one of the old Hindu rajah's semisacred excavated chambers. Twice, on his right, his hand slipped into space as he felt his way—open doorways from which dipped stone steps to lower exits.

Suddenly his bamboo rod came dead against an obstructing wall in front. Set in this was a flat steel door, with a keyhole which admitted one of the other keys. Finnerty closed the door, not locking it, but when he had taken two steps he caught a clicking sound behind. Turning in apprehension, he pushed upon the door, but it refused to give. He inserted the key; the bolt was where he had left it, shot back, but the door was immovable. A shiver twitched his scalp. Had he himself touched something that automatically locked the door, or had its swing carried a warning to some one who had electrically shot the bolts. The door itself was massive enough to hold any sort of mechanism; it was like the bulkhead of a battleship.

Twice Finnerty found a closed door in the wall on his right; no doubt within the chamber beyond were cannon that commanded some road of approach to the hill. Next his hand swept across a four-foot space, and against the farther wall of this stood open a heavy teakwood door; from the passage beyond drifted a nauseating, carrion smell, such as hovers over a tiger's cage.

Twenty yards beyond, Swinton touched the major's shoulders and whispered: "I heard something behind; I feel that we are being followed."

The major shivered; not through personal fear, but if they were trapped, if they failed, what bloodshed and foolish revolt would follow. To turn back and search was useless; they must keep on. They must be close to the many chambers beneath the palace where the ammunition and guns, no doubt, were kept. It was ominous, this utter absence of everything but darkness.

With a gasping breath, Finnerty stood still. A slipping noise in front had caught his ear, but now, in their own silence, they both heard the slip of velvet feet on the stone floor behind, and in their nostrils struck full the carrion smell.

"Tiger!" Finnerty whispered, and the pulled-back hammers of his gun clicked alarmingly loud on the death air.

Swinton, too, cocked his rifle, and whispered: "Push on; I'll guard the rear!"

In ten paces Finnerty's gun barrel clicked against iron; it was a door. They were trapped. Behind, the thing crept closer.

"Light a candle and hold it above my head; I must settle that brute," he said, in his mind also a thought that perhaps the light would frighten away the animal that trailed them.

As Swinton struck a match it broke, its flickering fall glinting green two devilish eyes in the head of a tiger that was setting himself for a spring, ten feet away. The roar of Finnerty's 10-bore, the two shocks almost in one, nearly burst their eardrums, and Swinton, having slung his rifle, stood keyed to rigidity by the call for steady nerve. There was no rushing charge. A smothered cough from the tiger told that blood choked his lungs.

A man's voice came from the darkness almost at their elbow, saying: "Sahib, I am Darna Singh—a friend!"

"Come here!" Finnerty answered.

"But no treachery!" For he feared it might be an impostor.

Darna Singh drew close, whispering: "The tiger is dead, so do not make a light. How did the sahib get here—has he keys for the door?"

Finnerty told how the princess had sent him Darna's ring of keys.

Darna Singh explained: "I was cast in here by Ananda to be killed by the tiger who has been let down from his cage. Perhaps they do not know that you are here."

"Have they heard the gun?" the major asked.

"The doors are very heavy, and through the rock they would not have heard. If they have, the key will not open the door if they wish."

Then Darna Singh told what lay beyond the door. The magazine was all prepared for blowing up should Ananda's plan fail and there be danger of discovery of his imported guns. Wires ran from the magazine to a room in the palace, where a switch could bury everything in a second. The passages were lighted by electricity, and the dynamo might have gone wrong, causing the darkness, or it might be an entrapping scheme. There would not be more than one or two German guards at the magazine, where the guns were, and if the sahibs could fall upon these in the dark, Darna Singh could win over the native guards, for they did not love Ananda.

The door opened to a key, showing beyond no glint of light. They passed through; this time Finnerty, finding a fragment of rock, fixed it so that the door could not be closed behind them. Hope suggested that the shot had not been heard, for no storm of attack broke upon them.

After a time Darna Singh checked, and, putting his lips close to Finnerty's ear, whispered: "We are close to the gun and ammunition room. I will go a little in advance and speak in Hindustani to the sentry; he will think it one of their natives, and as we talk you must overpower him."

Keeping within striking distance, Finnerty and Swinton followed. As they crept forward, with blinding suddenness an electric glare smote their eyes, and from beneath the reflected light a machine gun stuck forth its ugly nose. Behind a steel shield a German-flavored voice commanded: "Drop your guns!"

Both men hesitated. To surrender was almost worse than death.

"Obey, or get shot!" the ugly voice called.

"We'll put them down, major," Swinton said; "dead men are no help to the government."

As they laid down their guns two Prussians slipped into the light and picked them up. From behind the steel shield two others appeared, and following them loomed the gorilla form of Doctor Boelke, his face wreathed in a leer of triumph.

At a command in German, one of the men swung open an iron-barred door, disclosing, as he touched a button, a cell ten feet square. Boelke turned to Finnerty: "Major, you haf intruded without der ceremony of an invitation; I now invite you to make yourself at home in der guest chamber."

"Your humor, like yourself, is coarse," Finnerty retorted.

"You vill enter der door, or——" Boelke waved a hand, and the bayonets were advanced to within striking distance, while the machine gun clicked ominously.

Finnerty realized that to resist was suicide; no doubt Boelke would prefer to have an excuse for killing them—there was absolute murder in the bleary animal eyes.

Swinton said in an even, hard voice: "The British government will have you shot as a German spy."

"Perhaps *Captain Herbert* vill be shot as an English spy to-morrow; und now" Boelke raised his arm—"ven I drop my hand you vill be shot for resisting arrest."

"We won't give the hound an excuse for murder," Finnerty said, leading the way through the door. A German followed them in, and ran his hands over their bodies for revolvers; finding Finnerty's hunting knife, he took it away.

The door was locked, and a guard placed in front of it.

It was only now that the two noticed that Darna Singh had disappeared; nobody seemed to have seen him; he had simply vanished. Probably the guard, even if they saw him, took him to be one of their own natives —not associated with the sahibs who had dropped into their hands.

CHAPTER XXI.

Captain Foley sat in Doctor Boelke's big chair in the doctor's bungalow, seeing a lovely vision in the smoke which curled upward from his cheroot; he saw himself the possessor of two race horses he would buy when he went back to Europe—perhaps it would have to be in Germany—with the money Boelke had gone to the palace for. The crafty captain had demanded "money down" —the two thousand pounds he was to have for delivering the stolen paper, and that, too, before he showed the paper. To guard against force, he had allowed Marie to keep the document, but Marie should have been in the bungalow; however, she could not be far —she would be in shortly.

From where he sat at Boelke's flat desk, Foley looked upon a wall of the room that was paneled in richly carved teakwood, and from a brass rod hung heavy silk curtains. On the panel that immediately fronted his eyes was Ganesha, a pot-bellied, elephant-headed god; a droll figure that caught the captain's fancy, especially when it reeled groggily to one side to uncover an opening through which a dark, brilliant eye peered at him. The captain's face held placid under this mystic scrutiny, but his right hand gently pulled a drawer of the desk open, disclosing a Mauser pistol.

When the whole panel commenced to slide silently, he lifted the pistol so that its muzzle rested on the desk. Through the opening created in the wall a handsome native stepped into the room, salaamed, and, turning, closed the aperture; then he said: "I am Nawab Darna Singh, the brother of Rajah Ananda's princess. May I close the door, sahib?"

Foley lifted the Mauser into view, drawling: "If you wish; I have a key here to open it, if necessary."

Darna Singh closed a door that led from the front hall to the room, and, coming back to stand just across the desk from Foley, said: "The major sahib and the captain sahib are prisoners of Doctor Boelke; they are below in a cell—they will be killed."

In answer to a question, Darna Singh related how the two men had been captured and how he, not observed, had slipped away, and, knowing all the passages, had made his way to the stone steps that led from the tunnels to Doctor Boelke's bungalow.

Foley in his cold, unimpassioned voice asked: "What do you want me to do?"

"Save them."

The captain's eyes narrowed. "They are not friends of mine; they searched me to-day, and if I play this silly game I chuck in the sea two thousand quid. It's a damn tall order."

Darna Singh's voice throbbed with passionate feeling: "I am a rajput, sahib, and we look upon the sahibs as white rajputs. We may hate our conquerors, but we do not despise them as cowards. I never knew a sahib to leave a sahib to die; I never knew a rajput to leave a brother rajput to die."

Foley puffed at his cigar, and behind his set face went on the conflict the rajput's appeal to his manhood had stirred.

Darna Singh spoke again: "The sahib will not live to be branded a coward, for his eyes show he has courage. And we must hurry or it will be too late, for these two sahibs have risked their lives to save the British raj against Prince Ananda's, who is a traitor to the sahib's king; he is a traitor to his wife, the princess, for to-morrow he will force into the palace the white mem-sahib who is here with Doctor Boelke."

"By gad!" At last the cold gambler blood had warmed. His daughter Marie, eh? That was different! And

to funk it—let two Englishmen die! One an Irishman, even! No doubt it was true, he reasoned, for that was why Darna Singh was in revolt against the prince.

"What chance have we got?" Foley asked.

"There will be a guard at the cage."

"A German?"

"Yes, sahib."

"They have seen me with Doctor Boelke; perhaps we can turn the trick. But," and his hard gray eyes rested on Darna Singh's face, "if, when we go down there is no chance, I won't play the giddy goat; I'll come back." He handed Boelke's Mauser to the rajput, saying: "I have a pistol in my belt."

Darna Singh slid the panel, and they passed from the room to a landing and down a dozen stone steps to a dim-lighted passage. Here the rajput whispered: "I can take the sahib by a dark way to where he can see the cage in which the two sahibs will be."

"Hurry!" Foley answered, for he was thinking ruefully of his money.

The underground place was a cross-hatch of many tunnels, and Darna Singh led the way through a circuitous maze till they came to a bright-lighted cross passage, and, peeping around a corner, Foley saw, fifty feet away, a solitary German leaning against the wall, a rifle resting at his side. Raising his voice in the utterance of Hindustani words, Foley rounded the corner at a steady pace, followed by Darna Singh. The sentry grasped his rifle, and, standing erect, challenged. In German Foley answered: "We come from the Herr Doctor."

The sentry, having seen Foley with Doctor Boelke, was unsuspicious, and, grounding his rifle tight against his hip, he clicked his heels together at attention.

"The two prisoners are wanted above for examination," Foley said. "You are to bind their arms behind their backs and accompany us."

"The one sahib is a giant," the other answered, when this order, percolating slowly through his heavy brain, had found no objection.

"Give me the gun; I will cover him while you bind his arms."

The sentry unlocked the door, took a rope in his hand, and, saying to Foley, "Keep close, *mein Herr,*" entered the cell.

Finnerty and Swinton watched this performance, in the major's mind bitter anger at the thought that an Irishman could be such a damnable traitor.

"Will the *Herr Kapitän* give orders in English to these *schweinehunds* that if they do not obey they will be killed?"

Foley complied. What he said was: "Major, put your hands behind your back; then when this chap comes close throttle him so quick he can't squeak."

A hot wave of blood surged in a revulsion of feeling through Finnerty's heart, and he crossed his hands behind his back, half turning as if to invite the bondage. When the German stepped close a hand shot up, and, closing on his windpipe, pinned him flat against the wall, lifted to his toes, his tongue hanging out from between parted lips.

"Bind and gag him, Swinton," Foley suggested.

In a minute the sentry was trussed, a handkerchief wedged in his mouth, and he was deposited in a corner. Outside, Foley turned off the cell light, locked the door, and, handing the guard's gun to Swinton, led the way back to the dark passage.

On the landing above the stone steps, Darna Singh silently moved the carved Ganesha and peered through the hole. Then whispering, "The room is empty," unlocked and slid open the panel, locking it behind them as they entered Boelke's room.

The bungalow was silent. There was no sound of servants moving about; no doubt they were over at the palace, waiting for the thing that was in the air.

Out of the fullness of his heart, Foley spoke in low tones: "Gentlemen, the doctor will be here shortly with money for me, and your presence might irritate him."

"I'll never forget what you've done for us, Foley," Finnerty said.

"Neither will I if you do me out of two thousand quid by blathering here," Foley drawled.

Swinton put his hand on Foley's arm. "Forgive me for what I said on the trail, and I give you my word that what you've done for us will be brought to the sircar's notice; but we've got to capture Boelke. We've got to nip this revolt; you know there's one on."

"Look here, Herbert," Foley drawled, "I don't mind risking my life to help out a couple of sahibs—a fellow's got to do that—but I'm damned if I'm going to chuck away a kit bag full of rupee notes."

"I've got nothing to do with the money; that's a matter you must settle with Boelke," Swinton said in dry diplomacy; "but if you and the major will hide behind that heavy curtain and capture this enemy to the British raj, I can promise you an unmolested return to England. There's another thing"—his words were hesitatingly apologetic—"we are now your heavy debtors and can't make demands on you for that paper, but if it gets into Prince Ananda's hands it will make his revolt possible. He will show it to the chiefs who meet him to-night."

"And with that I have nothing to do. I'll deliver the paper to Boelke and take my money; what you do to the Herr Doctor after that is no concern of mine."

With a smile, Swinton held out his hand, saying: "Darna Singh and I are going to blow up the magazine, but I'll just say, thank you, for fear I get pipped."

CHAPTER XXII.

Foley and Major Finnerty took up their positions in a corner behind a heavy curtain, Foley making two slits in it with a pocketknife. They were clear of the door leading below, and even if Boelke came that way he would not detect their presence.

In five minutes Marie entered the room, and stood looking about as if she had expected to see some one. She wore a riding habit, and through the curtain slit Finnerty could see that her face was drawn and white, her eyes heavy in utter weariness.

Almost immediately a heavy tread sounded in the hall, followed by the thrust of Boelke's ugly form through the door. He glared about the room, and, crashing into his chair, asked gruffly: "Vhere is your fadder?"

"I don't know," the girl answered wearily.

"You don't know! Vell, vhere is der paper?"

"You must get it from my father."

"I don't like dot; some one is a liar!"

The girl's silence at this brutality but increased Boelke's ugliness. "Your fadder don't trust me. Being a thief himself, und a traitor, he pays me der same compliment—he refuse to deliver der paper till der money is paid. Here is der rupees, und I vant der paper." His heavy knuckles beat upon the table.

"You must wait, then, till he comes."

"He toldt me you had der paper still—for fear he might be robbed, I suppose. Where is it?"

"It is hidden."

"Get it; der rajah vaits."

The girl sat with no movement of response. Finnerty could see her face draw into a cast of resolve. Both he and Foley felt that it would be better to wait for the girl to leave the room before they rushed upon Boelke; there might be shooting.

The doctor's rage increased. "If your fadder is traitor to me—if der paper is not produced in five minutes, I vill send out word that he be shot on sight, und between you two ve vill find der paper." Boelke sat back in his chair with a snorting growl.

"Listen to me, Herr Boelke," the girl said in a voice clean cutting as a steel tool that rips iron. "My father is acting loyal to you, though he is a traitor to his own government. He stole that paper because he faced what he called dishonor over gambling debts, and I was blamed for taking it. I was the one who faced dishonor, and, through me, Lord Gilfain. I escaped and made my way to India under false names,

not to help, as you thought, but to recover that paper and give it back to the government or destroy it."

"Haf you destroyed it?"

"You will never get it, Herr Boelke. I have to tell you this—that you may know my father did not act the traitor to you."

"Ha, ha! You are as mad as your fadder. If der paper is not here in five minutes do you know vat vill happen you?"

"I am not afraid; I took all these risks when I came here to clear my name."

"Here is der money—my time is short."

Twice Foley had laid a hand on Finnerty's arm in restraint.

"Never! I swear it. I am not afraid."

"No; like your fadder you haf not fear or sense. But vait. You do not fear for your own life—I know dot—but vill you trade dot paper for der life of der man you love—Major Finnerty?" The listeners heard a gasp. "I mean dot. He und der udder fool, Svinton, is below in a cell—caught dere as spies—und to-morrow dey vill be shot as spies. Dey took care dot nobody see dem go in, und I vill take care dot nobody see dem come out."

A ghastly silence followed, only broken by the sound of the girl's breathing.

Boelke waited to let this filter through her brain to her heart.

Then she said in a voice that carried no convincing force: "You are lying to frighten me."

"I vill prove it to yourself. You haf on der riding habit, und now I know you haf been riding to deliver dot paper to der major; but you did not meet him because he is a prisoner below."

Again there was the hush of a debate in the girl's mind; then she said: "If you will bring Major Finnerty and Captain Swinton from below, through that door, and let them go as free men, and will swear to not pursue them, I will give—get the paper, and——"

"*Ach, Gott!* You haf der paper! You put your hand to your breast!"

The girl cried out, startled, frightened, as Boelke's gorilla form flung his chair back. He saw the rush of Finnerty and threw back the drawer of his desk; it was empty—Foley had taken the Mauser.

"If you open your mouth, you're a dead man!" Finnerty declared; then adding, for relief: "You hound!"

The girl, who had backed to the wall, dropped to a chair, burying her face in an arm on the desk, swept by a flood of confusion and relief.

Foley transferred the packages of rupee notes to his pockets, saying: "I've delivered the paper in Darpore, and am taking my fee," while Boelke sat blinking into a pistol that stared at him four feet away.

Finnerty said: "We're going to gag and bind you, so make no outcry."

When this little matter was attended to, the doctor was dumped into a big closet and the door locked.

"I'll have a look at the outside, major," Foley said. "Fancy I heard some one prowling."

When the curtain slipped back to place, blotting out Foley, Finnerty gave an inward gasp; he was left alone with the girl whom he had heard offer to barter her more than life—her reputation—for his life. A dew of perspiration stood out on his forehead; he trembled; the shyness that had been a curse to him from his boyhood made him a veritable coward. He was alone with the girl in an atmosphere of love—the most dreaded word in the whole English lexicon.

Marie held the paper in her hand, looking upon it as though she were crystal gazing, using it as a magnet to focus her own multitudinous emotions. Before her stood a man that was like a Greek god—the man who had twice saved her life; though the saving of her life, while it would have wakened feelings of deep gratitude, could not have filled her soul with the passionate yearning that was there—the surging soul warmth that submerges everything.

The man was like a child. Words utterly failed to shape themselves into a fitting coherence for utterance. He

stepped to the wall and swung the little Ganesha panel, peering vacantly into the dark passage. He came back and gazed out into the hall.

"I want to tell you something——" The girl's voice startled him as though he had been struck; his nerves were frightful. "I want to tell you," she said again, a wan smile striving to master her trembling lips, "why I didn't give up this paper on the trail to-day."

"I understand," he interrupted; "it would not have cleared you."

"No; Captain Swinton would have thought that I had given it up under compulsion. But if I had lost it, all I have gone through would have been for nothing. That's what frightened me so when Doctor Boelke discovered I had it. I did wrong in keeping it; I was selfish."

The girl's tensed nerves were being slacked by her words; expression was easing the tightened coils as the striking of a clock unwinds the spring; the relief was loosening tears; they flooded the great dark eyes, and one had fallen on the paper, for an instant like a pearl before it was absorbed.

This trivial thing was a power that swept away the bondage of shyness that held the giant. He put his hand on the girl's shoulder; his voice was trembling. "Marie," he said, "I must speak—something. Don't mind, colleen, if you can't understand what I say, for I feel just like a boy at home in Ireland. I'm just mad with love for you; I can't live without you. All my life I've been alone. I love beautiful things—birds and trees and flowers and animals—and I've starved here, where all is treachery and work—nothing but just work."

It was a torrent, words trembling from the lips of a man whose soul was on fire, and the blue eyes had turned deep like rich sapphires.

The girl rose from her chair and stood against the wall, holding up her hand as if she would repel him, crying: "You mustn't say that; you must not! Oh, my God! Why didn't you let me die—why did you save my life, that I might now know the bitterness of living!"

Finnerty recoiled. His hand caught the corner of the desk; his voice was husky, full of despair: "You don't—don't—I'm too late? Is it Lord Victor that——"

"There is no one!" The girl's voice was almost fierce.

"What is it, then? Am I not worthy——"

"It is I who am not worthy. *You* not worthy? And you heard, standing behind the curtain, that I bargained my all for your life."

"Yes, I heard that. Then how are you not worthy of the love of a man if he were a hundred times better than I am?"

"You could not marry me. My father was a traitor, a gambler—we are the same blood."

Finnerty took a step forward and grasped the girl's wrist. The touch steadied him. "Hush, colleen; don't say that. Your father was just a brave, generous Irishman when I knew him before the gambling got into his blood. Fear he did not know. He didn't know how to do a mean act; he'd give away his last penny—the gambling got into his blood. Wasn't that what got him into this? It was India that scorched and seared his soul—the life here. The others had money, and here they lavish it, throw it about, gamble. He tried to keep his end up, for he was game. He was unlucky—it was a second name for him in the service—'Unlucky' Foley. I tell you it got into his blood, the wild Irish blood that boils so easily—that is not cold and sluggish from dilution from the essence of self."

It was curious the metamorphosis of love, the glamour of it that roused the imaginative sympathy of Finnerty, till, for the girl's sake, all her geese were swans. And yet there was truth in what he said; only a Celt could have understood Foley as Finnerty did.

Finnerty's hand had taken the other wrist. He drew the girl's hands up and placed them either side of his neck, and looked into her eyes. "Colleen, I love you. Nothing in the world is go-

ing to take you from me—nothing. I'm going to seal that with a kiss, and neither man nor devil is going to part us after that."

As his arms went around the girl a tremor shook the earth, the bungalow rocked drunkenly, they heard the crashing of rocks and trees somewhere on the plateau.

CHAPTER XXIII.

It had been easy for Darna Singh to smuggle Swinton through the tiger garden gate, for the guard were tribesmen of his own—rajputs who really hated Ananda.

And now the two sat in a room of the palace, at Swinton's elbow a switch that, at a shift, would send a current of eruptive force into the magazine. Through a closed lattice they looked out upon the terrace thronged with natives—Mussulmans, Hindus, Buddhists; and, gazing, Swinton thought that it was like bringing together different explosives—a spark would perhaps fan a sudden mental conflagration among these fanatics. Silence reigned—a hush hung over the many-colored throng as if something of this held them on guard.

Darna Singh was explaining in a whisper:

"Ananda has called these chiefs to sign a blood pact against the sircar. The two men of the big beards are from Khyber way—Pathans whose trade is war; one is Ghazi Khan and the other is Dhera Ishmael. They will not sign the blood pact unless Ananda shows them the paper wherein the sircar is to force their young men to war. The maharajah will not be here, but whether he is true to the sircar no man knows, and sometimes, sahib, he does not know himself, because of the brandy."

They could see Burra Moti upon her bended legs on the marble-slabbed terrace, a rich cloth, sparkling with jewels, draping her head and neck and body. Huge gold rings had been driven upon her ivory tusks.

Darna Singh whispered:

"Look, sahib, at the two men that stand beside the elephant's neck; they are my blood brothers, and when we entered at the teakwood gate I told them of the sapphire bell. They have their mission."

Beyond, the Lake of the Golden Coin, rich in its gorgeous drape of shadow and moon gold, lay serene, placid, undisturbed by the puny man passion that throbbed like a ticking watch above its rim.

The droning hum of voices, like the buzz of bees, died to silence, and foreheads were bowed to the marble floor as Prince Ananda, clothed in a coarse yellow robe, came forth and strode like a Roman senator to table at which sat with the two Pathans a dozen petty rajahs, nawabs, and Mussulman chiefs.

"They are waiting to have the paper translated to them by a *moonshi* and to see the sircar's seal upon it, for they all know that mark," Darna Singh said.

"What will happen if the paper does not come?" Swinton asked.

"They will not sign the blood bond; they will think that Rajah Ananda has told them lies. Also the two men who are my brothers will place another lie in the mouth of Ananda, if it is Kismet, and at that time the sahib will blow up the mine."

From below the voice of Ananda came floating up to their ears as he talked to the chiefs in impassioned words of hatred to the British raj. He told them of the machine guns and ammunition he had below; that the great German nation would send an army, for even now they had sent men to train the soldiers of the revolt.

To Swinton it was simply the mad exhortation of a mind crazed by ambition, but he knew that scores of revolts against the British had originated in just this way; the untutored natives, taught hatred of the British from their birth, would believe every word.

The voice of Ghazi Khan, rough as the bellow of a bull as it came through an opening in his heavy, matted beard, was heard asking:

"Where is the paper, rajah, wherein is written that the sircar commands our sons to cross the black water to fight against the caliph and to destroy

Mecca—even to destroy the faith of Mohammed, as thou has said?"

"We also, Rajah Darpore," the Nawab of Attabad said, "would see first the sealed order of the sircar, that we, too, are forced to cross the black water to the destruction of our caste—to fight battles that are not the battle of India. Thou hast said, rajah, that it is so commanded in a state paper that was to have been put in the Lord Sahib's hands as he sat in council in Calcutta, and though no doubt it is true we would see it, for war is not to be taken in words that are spoken."

Ananda explained that the paper would be brought soon by his German officer, and he would show it to them before they signed the pact.

Then Ananda, lowering his voice to tragic intensity, said: "It is written that if the three sacred sapphires come into the hand of a man it is because the gods have bestowed upon him wisdom and goodness and power; that he is to lead. It is also written that if, having the three sapphires, he stand beside the Lake of the Golden Coin at midnight in the full bloom of the mhowa tree King Jogwendra will appear in his golden boat if he be selected to lead. I will take the ordeal to-night, for the mhowa is in bloom and the three sapphires have been sent."

Swinton saw Ananda throw open his yellow robe, disclosing two sapphires, and heard him say: "The third is here on the neck of the sacred elephant in a bell."

Twelve times the gong throbbed as it quivered from a blow, and as the last whimpering note died away in a forest echo a circling ripple spread from the shadow of a pipal, and now the rippling waves came fast, darting here and there like serpents of gold or silver in the moonlight.

Men gasped in awe; some touched their foreheads prone to the marble floor as a boat of gold, its prow a serpent's head with gleaming ruby eyes, came up out of the water and floated upon the surface.

King Jogwendra clothed in a rich garment, his turban gleaming red and blue and white and gold where the moon flashed upon jewels, rose from a bier and lifted a hand as if to invoke the favor of the gods upon the prince who had called him from his long sleep.

Even Swinton, knowing that it was but a trick of the German engineers, shivered as if he caught a fragment of the spell that almost stilled the beating of hearts below.

And then from the sal forest came floating to this stillness of death the soft, sweet "Tinkle, tinkle, tinkle, tinkle, tinkle!" of the sapphire bell.

Burra Moti threw up her trunk, uttering a cry that was like the sob of a frightened child, and cocked her huge ears. As the bell called again, "Tinkle, tinkle, tinkle!" she thrust her trunk beneath her neck cloth; but her fingers found no bell; it had been stolen.

With a scream of rage she surged to her feet, and, trampling men, throwing them to one side like bags of chaff with her ivory spears, she crashed through the table and fled.

"Now, sahib!" Darna Singh cried.

In answer to Swinton's pull of the lever the plateau rose up, the palace quivered, the waters of the Lake of the Golden Coin swept across the terrace over a flattened, yellow-robed figure that had been Prince Ananda, and then was sucked back to disappear through a yawning crevice.

"Come, sahib; there will be no revolt, for Ananda is dead," Darna Singh said softly.

Sometimes when the mhowa tree is in full bloom the soft tinkle of the sapphire bell is heard up in the sal-covered hills; then the natives whisper:

"The spirit of Rajah Ananda rides forth on the Brown Elephant."

THE END.

W. A. Fraser will have other stories in the POPULAR in the near future.

The Grand Review

By Berton Braley

WHEN earth is brought to judgment before the golden bar,
And souls in countless millions shall flock from near and far,
And graves are void and gaping with mold upon their lips,
Then Davy Jones' locker shall yield its toll of ships.

And they shall come a-sailing in marvelous array,
The wind upon their canvas, their bowsprits wet with spray,
Swift triremes out of Athens and "quinqueremes from Tyre,"
And gorgeous Spanish galleons with mastheads like a spire.

The low, black hulls of pirate ships, the frigates broad and high,
And clippers out of Boston that once went booming by,
Slim galleys of the vikings and junks of clumsy mold
And evil-smelling slavers with niggers in the hold.

And there shall be the ironclads, the liners, and the tramps,
Upheaved to sun and weather from the everlasting damps,
Brave ships of all the ages, and steaming at their head,
The lordly *Lusitania,* with all her murdered dead.

Free of their tangled tackle and cleansed of deep-sea slime,
As gallant and as beautiful as ever in their prime,
The navies and the argosies that once were rotting wrecks
Shall heave in view with passengers and crews upon their decks.

Beyond all reach of vision shall stretch that countless fleet,
To pass in glorious review before the judgment seat;
And He shall send them forth again upon the surging sea,
To sail in ageless loveliness through all eternity!

Ropes Across the Boyne

By Thomas McMorrow

Author of "An Ambassador from Tennessee," Etc

A romance of the back yards, in which the line-up man, pursuing his daily climbing of clothespoles, is pursuaded to try his hand at the role of Cupid

PRETTY Annie Brogan leaned from a kitchen window in the rear of a tenement in the city of New York. It was Monday morning and ten o'clock, and the family wash still lay in the dripping basket behind her. A snarled rope ran from the window to one of the many gray poles which stood in line down the center of the hollow oblong inclosed by the tenement houses. The rope was Annie Brogan's clothesline, and it had jammed in the pulley highest up on the pole.

Annie was annoyed by the delay in her work, and also a wee bit conscious of the ardent gaze of young Owen MacWilliam, who sat in his window across the court. Owen was a stonecutter and an industrious youth, but to-day the stoneyard was closed. He chose to pass his holiday at home, watching for glimpses of Annie Brogan.

A nimble old man straddled over the board fence at the lower end of the oblong.

"Yi-ee!" brayed the old man through his nose.

Which sonorous appeal was intended to signify "Good morning, washladies! Do any of you wish your clothesline adjusted to-day?"

"The line-up man," murmured Annie Brogan relievedly. She waved her small red hand.

"Hi!" she cried.

The arm of the line-up man waved in recognition and he rocketed agilely over the intervening fences to the pole standing before the home of the Brogans. Nimbly he ran up the spikes protruding from the sides of the long stick, undid the knot in the line, and made it to run freely through the pulley.

"Yi-ee!" he brayed, scanning the windows for further custom.

Annie's sea-blue eyes with the midnight brows smiled thanks to the line-up man. He was only an old "furriner" to Annie Brogan, but there were ardent young eyes across the way which would drink in that enchanting smile.

Young Owen MacWilliam rose from his seat and vanished. She turned back into the room.

"A new man, it is," said her father, who sat in an adjoining window.

"A dago man," lisped Annie, a clothespin in her little red mouth.

"There's worse nor dagos," growled Brogan, a son of Catholic County Clare. And he glanced across at the superannuated sire of Owen MacWilliam, who sat likewise in a window, taking the morning air.

"I wish you'd forget your silly old Irish quarrel with Mr. MacWilliam," said Annie, with a coaxing touch of the brogue on her tongue.

"I'll not, just!" cried the old man hotly. "And no daughter of mine will ever marry with the son of an Orangeman, so there! Ah, Annie alanna, why do you be so headstrong? There's many a fine lad of the right color 'u'd be crazy to have ye."

"Whisht, dearie," said Annie soothingly. She bent over the basket. "Wait till you see what I got for your dinner—a lovely pig's head!"

"But ye know I disgust a pig's head, Annie!" protested her father.

"And that's your answer," laughed Annie Brogan merrily.

The line-up man had held on his way. He surmounted the remaining fences and vanished into a cellar at the other end of the long court. He emerged thence into Tenth Avenue.

A big, fresh-faced young man intercepted him.

"Wop," said the young man, "my name is Owen MacWilliam."

"A-sure, boss," bowed the line-up man.

"You fixed a line acrost from my window this morning," continued the young man.

"A-sure, boss," assented the line-up man.

"To-morrow," said Owen MacWilliam, "you'll fix that line again, understand? And you'll pin this letter onto the line. Here's a quarter."

To the line-up man he handed the coin, and a letter which avowed the writer's undying love for Annie Brogan.

"A-sure, boss!" grinned the line-up man.

The sun rose up the next morning and shone into that same block of tenement yards. It saw the two grim old men sitting in their windows, and it kissed the raven hair of Annie Brogan, who stood upon the fire escape, taking in the clothes. It disclosed the eagerness in the face of Owen MacWilliam as he leaned out and watched for the coming of his messenger.

"Yi-ee!" brayed a voice below.

The line-up man walked along the fence which followed the center line of the block; he stopped at the Brogan pole. He mounted to the top and fussed with the line while Annie Brogan watched him curiously. Dexterously he concealed the letter beneath a crimson garment, winked slyly at the pretty girl, and retreated to the foot of the pole. He came of a race which understood such matters, and now he awaited the answer.

Annie Brogan pulled in the line, detached the letter, and read it at once. She glanced stealthily at Owen MacWilliam and then pondered, while the young man's heart thumped. She stepped into her home as though to prepare the reply.

"P-sst!" hissed Owen MacWilliam to the line-up man, and gestured guardedly for him to catch the expected answer.

"A-sure, boss!" nodded the line-up man, going to the house wall below the flat of the Brogans.

"What ails the feller?" asked old MacWilliam testily, as he noted the line-up man's eccentric behavior.

"It's the sun," said Owen. "You'd better close that shutter yourself."

The bonny head of Annie Brogan appeared over the sill, and she peered down at the line-up man. He winked knowingly at Owen MacWilliam, and was perplexed by the youth's frantic gestures, which seemed to exhort the messenger to depart at once.

He looked up, but too late to avoid the crystal cascade which was falling upon his head.

Annie Brogan's small hands rested upon the window sill, and carefully she scanned the blue summer sky. Then she withdrew her head and pulled the window down.

"Will it rain to-morrow, Annie?" inquired her father wistfully. "To-morrow is the twelfth of July, Orange Day."

"There was a dampness in the air," said Annie Brogan.

A mystified line-up man made wet tracks over the board fences.

But Owen MacWilliam understood the cryptic message. The Boyne water still flowed between the houses of Brogan and MacWilliam. He took what comfort he could from the solid fact that his stubborn Annie loved him. That, of course, was one of the fixed truths of the universe.

His father was angry. His stockinged feet pounded upon the floor.

"Bad cess to her!" he complained. "But did ye see what that she-divil's done now? Owen, lad, run down and fetch the poor feller up to me! He's

our own kind, I'm thinking, or she'd not throw water on him."

Owen MacWilliam rose dutifully and went out. He returned, half leading and half dragging the wet line-up man. He had informed the Italian on the way that if he said a word of the letter Owen MacWilliam would surely cut the head off him.

"Me dacint man," said old MacWilliam, "and what is your name, pray?"

"Milone," said the line-up man sullenly.

"Maloney," repeated old MacWilliam, with an accent of doubt. "Ye're from the North, are ye?"

"A-no, boss," said the Italian. "From Firenze—Florence, you call heem? Tony Milone, boss! 'S'matter you?"

"A dago!" exclaimed old MacWilliam.

"A-sure, boss. A wop, eh? Oh, sure!"

"I thought ye were from the North," grumbled old MacWilliam. "Ah, well, there's worse nor ye." And he glanced through the casement.

"You Irisher, too, boss, eh?" The line-up man grinned. "Irisher lady over there she throw-a the wat'."

"To-morrow," said old MacWilliam consolingly, "it'll be the likes of her will have water thrown on them!"

"To-morrow?" said the line-up man eagerly.

"To-morrow," promised the old hard tike. "To-morrow is by way of being a great holiday for the Irish—them that's of the right sort."

"A-sure, boss! St. Patreeck's Day, eh?"

"No, not St. Patrick's Day!" growled the Orangeman. "But a better man nor he ever was! It is the glorious and mimorable anniversary of the famous Battle of the Boyne, and we cilibrate it! Did they never learn ye nothing, me poor feller? But what's the good of talking to ye? Here, take this dollar and get away with ye!"

"Thanks, boss, thanks!" bowed the line-up man.

And he departed with lively gratitude in his warm Latin heart. All day he climbed over fences and ran up and down poles, carrying his clarion call in his nose, but his brain was working on a plan to please that good old Irishman. And before he turned home that night he knew how it could be done.

Followed the twelfth of July in unclouded beauty. It was fine as that far-off day in 1690 when Ireland north and Ireland south had come to either bank of the Boyne and had closed in a battle whose ancient tumult still echoes in Irish hearts. Old Brogan took no joy in the day's splendor. His opinion was that the cherubs who hold the keys to the cisterns of heaven had looked out poorly for the interests of Erin. Into his prayers the night before he had slipped a suggestion for lightning and hailstones.

Annie Brogan looked out from her kitchen. It was only seven o'clock, but she saw a familiar figure on the pole which stood between the MacWilliams and the Brogans. It was the line-up man.

"Hello, lady!" he cried.

"Hello!" she smiled, liking his lack of rancor.

"To-day is a Irisher holiday, ain't it, lady?" he called cheerily.

"It is not!" said the daughter of the Brogans.

"No-o?" queried the line-up man. "To-day the Irishers won a big battle, lady!"

"They did," snapped Annie Brogan, blue fire in her eyes. "But it is not at all necessary to mention the fact!"

And down came the window.

Tony Milone was puzzled. The Irishers were a queer race and very sensitive as to their victories. But he whistled happily as he worked at the clothesline of the MacWilliams. He was grateful to MacWilliam, and that gentleman should see that Tony Milone was a man of knowledge and sentiment.

He climbed down the pole.

Old MacWilliam came to his kitchen window. He threw back the shutter, catching the clothesline behind it, and sat down for his pipe of sweet killikinnick.

The breakfast dishes were done before Annie Brogan raised the window again, to steal a look toward the home of Owen MacWilliam.

"Papa!" she gasped. "Will you come here and take a look at old Mr. MacWilliam!"

"Glory be!" he quavered, rubbing his dim eyes.

Owen MacWilliam appeared behind his father. At once Annie Brogan leaned far out and waved to him.

"Owen!" she cried. "Owen!"

Her father caught her arm and pulled her back. She turned on him reprovingly.

"Shame on you, papa!" she cried hotly. "There's old Mr. MacWilliam has the decency to be friendly on a day like this, of all days, and are we going to let him beat us in that? The Brogans are as good people as the MacWilliams ever thought of being, and now it's up to us to show it!"

The old man's lips quivered childishly, but he nodded when he had glanced again at the home of the Orange MacWilliams. The habit of a lifetime died hard. He swallowed and turned his white head away.

"Very well, Annie asthore," he said.

Annie Brogan left the window and hurried down to the florist shop in the street. She bought a large bunch of tiger lilies. Orange lilies, those pretty red-yellow blooms which are forbid to grow south of Ulster in the Emerald Isle. Her father met her reëntering the flat.

"Annie!" he implored.

"I'm going to put them in the window where old Mr. MacWilliam can see!" she said determinedly. "To-day is Orange Day, and the Brogans are not going to show their ignorance."

When old Brogan brought himself to the point of going to the window again, where his sleeve brushed the handsome flowers, he saw his enemy blowing vigorously into a red bandanna. MacWilliam waved to Brogan in amity.

" 'Tis a fine day!" he called across.

" 'Tis that—glory be to God!" answered Brogan.

"The boy is coming over to see your Annie!" cried MacWilliam.

"He'll be as welcome as sunshine," replied Brogan, and sat down with heaving chest.

He rose up, after a moment, and went for his hat and stick. " 'Tis a shock," he muttered. "I'm going out for a bit of a walk, Annie. Ye might keep the boy for supper to-night, if ye wish."

Annie nodded absently; she was at the window, watching the flat of the MacWilliams. She had suddenly remembered the line-up man that morning, and recalled that he had been perched upon the MacWilliams pole, and she suspected he was responsible for that green Irish banner now drooping over the MacWilliam shutter. She did not know of any reason why a line-up man should present such a gift to a rampant Orangeman, to whom it would have been as welcome as a red flag to a bull; but one mystery was as good as another, and there the flag of the southern Irish flaunted.

The sun was high when Owen MacWilliam, shaved to the blood and dressed to the eyes, appeared again behind his father's chair.

"You'll be broiled alive," he chided, "sitting here in the hot sun! Why don't you pull over the shutter, father?"

And, suiting the action to the word, he drew the shutter in.

The line sagged down and the golden harp on its raw green field waved in their sight.

"So!" gasped the old Orangeman, quick color flooding into his wan cheeks.

He reached out for the flag, but Owen caught his hand. They looked into each other's eyes challengingly. Then Owen MacWilliam cried across the court to Annie Brogan:

"I'm coming right over, Annie!"

"And why shouldn't I straighten the creases out of it?" snorted his father indignantly. He pulled gently at the green flag. "We're all Americans now, young man, and I'll just tell ye that!"

A Chat With You

ON August the fifth! Something ominous and menacing is threatening New York, the greatest and richest of cities, the future capital of the world. London has suffered, Paris has suffered—both have known the terror and confusion of the aëroplane and Zeppelin raid. Paris has reverberated to the blows of the Prussian supercannon as well—and now it is to be the town of a thousand skyscrapers. It needs little imagination to picture the horror and confusion of bombs falling on the great buildings of the lower city and on the crowded residential districts for miles about. Where the power that will loose the blow is hidden no one knows—but there have been rumors and reports. The secret service and the department of justice, the scout patrol along the coast are still baffled in the search, and the day of disaster, August the fifth, is drawing steadily nearer, with nothing accomplished and nothing definite discovered. People are working by day, and playing by night in happy ignorance. Save for once when the lights are dimmed in the streets, and the sheets of twinkling fires in the theatrical district are turned to blackness there is nothing to disturb the average man. The anxiety, the worry of those who are intrusted with the safety of the gateway of the continent, and who alone know of the imminent presence of the hidden peril, become hourly more acute.

THIS is the setting of the opening of what is perhaps the greatest novel that Roy Norton has ever written. It is the third and most thrilling of the trilogy, beginning with "The Phantom U-Boat." It will appear complete in the next issue of THE POPULAR, out two weeks from to-day. It is a mystery story. Any one in the navy can tell you that there is no German submarine base on our Atlantic coast. Any one acquainted with aviation knows that a practical raid, either by Zeppelins or planes from Europe or Mexico, is impossible. Our navy's precautions for guarding the entrances to the harbor, and the tremendous power of the coast defenses, make it impossible for a submarine to get close enough to shell Manhattan. The secret plan, the tremendous stratagem by which New York was to be reduced to a ruin, is disclosed in Norton's story. It is a tale of to-day, of the war brought to our shores, of a silent and desperate struggle, of brain and energy, thrilling in its intensity. Above all there is a bracing atmosphere of genuine old-fashioned American patriotism in the novel, something to stir your blood and make you glad you are an American. The chief actors in the drama are Harding, who tells the story, and his old companions of "Phantom U-Boat" fame, the discoverers and destroyers of the Secret Base. "On August the Fifth" is a great novel, a record of adventure and daring at its highest and keenest, a romance of the moment that will be remembered for years.

SPEAKING of patriotism, now that we are just through celebrating the Fourth of July in a year when patriot-

ism has been reawakened and Americanism has been reborn in a newer and higher spirit, there are some things about our United States worth noting. In the first place, we have the oldest, soundest, and most stable government in the world. France, our ally, has had seven destructive changes of government during the life of ours. Her present republic, the glorious France of to-day, is about fifty years old. A little over a hundred years ago, Napoleon and a French army pulled Germany to pieces, and it was not until 1871 that it was reassembled. Of the revolution that the Fates are arranging for Germany after the war, we can expect and hope much but say nothing. Germany's ally, the Dual Monarchy, dates from 1867. Turkey went through all the pain of a revolution without any of the benefits only a few years ago. Spain has had a stable government since 1890. The republic of Portugal, our ally, is about ten years old. The Balkan states are all new as governments. China became a republic only a short time ago. Canada has been a nation for about fifty years. Australia and South Africa are much younger. No South American state is one hundred years old. Mexico is still in process of rebirth. The Swiss had four revolutions in the nineteenth century. Holland and Sweden assumed their present forms after the fall of Napoleon. To get back to our allies, Belgium has been an independent state since 1830, and it is the faith of all true Americans that she will remain a glorious and independent nation for a long time to come. Great Britain ostensibly dates back to 1801 in its present form of government, but there was a quiet and bloodless revolution in 1830. Any one who has been there recently will tell you that another of those smooth and silent revolutions, at which our English cousins are specialists, is under way at present. So it seems that Uncle Sam is the dean of the fraternity.

THAT he is the most powerful and resourceful is attested by the fact that in less than a year he has landed a million of the best sort of fighting men in France, and fought his way through the submarines to do it. That he is adaptable is shown by his adoption of conscription within a month or so after his declaration of war, while it took John Bull nearly two years to get around to the same sensible idea. How much he can do is more than it would be easy to calculate. What he will do will be all that is necessary to win the war. His resources in ships, men, money, and arms are for all present purposes limitless.

WE are planning to make the best sort of magazine for the Americans in the trenches and in the training camps, and to give in fiction the truest and best picture of the American at war to those who stay at home. We want especially to call your attention to one of a series of training-camp stories by Raymond J. Brown, in the next issue. We suppose there is scarcely any one who is not forced to make some sacrifice on account of the war. A lot of our writers—Captain Peter Kyne, Lieutenant Wadsworth Camp, Raymond Brown, the Caseys, Major Bozeman Bulger, and a dozen others—are either at the front or on their way there. The cost of getting out a magazine is increasing. It is harder to get it out on time on account of the war supplies getting precedence on the railroads. At the same time we are going to make THE POPULAR better than ever. It is an essential of the first order, and you are going to get the best.

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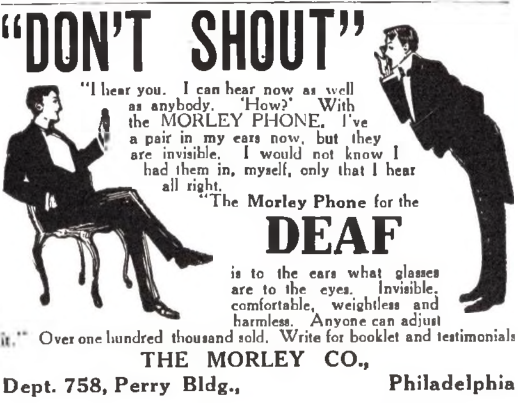

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