FIRST DEC. NUMBER

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The Popular MAGAZINE

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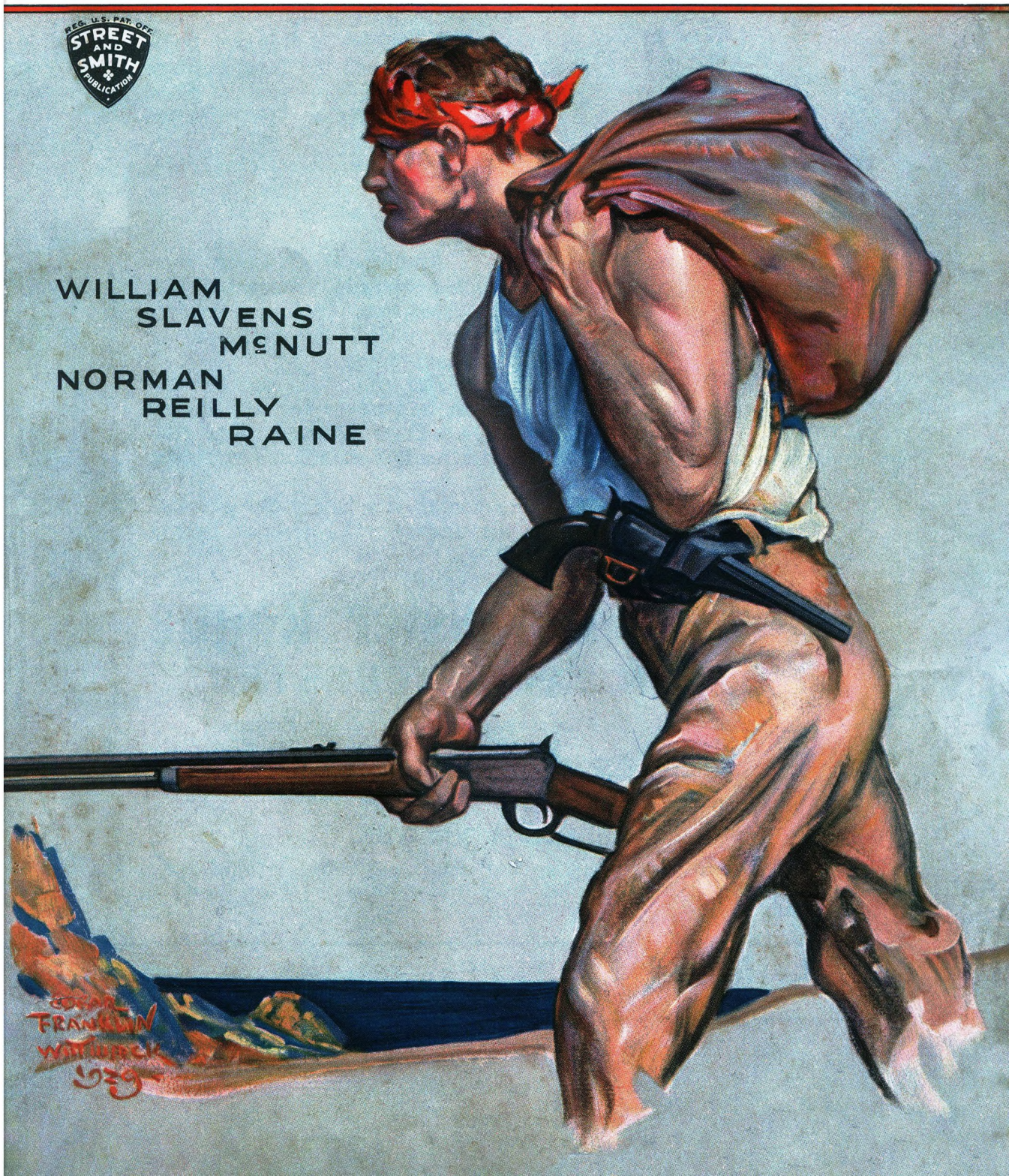

FIRST DECEMBER NUMBER

THE POPULAR MAGAZINE

20 Cents

. . . , by Fred MacIsaac

A young hat salesman dramatically helps to break up a crooked county ring.
A Complete Novel.

Volume XCVII Number 6

TWICE-A-MONTH
The Popular Magazine

Title Registered U. S. Patent Office

CONTENTS FOR FIRST DECEMBER NUMBER

Twice-a-month publication issued by Street & Smith Corporation, 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York. Ormond G. Smith, President; George C. Smith Vice President and Treasurer; George C. Smith, Jr., Vice President; Ormond V. Gould, Secretary. Copyright, 1929, by Street & Smith Corporation, New York. Copyright, 1929, by Street & Smith Corporation, Great Britain. Entered as Second-class Matter, December 22, 1927, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under Act of Congress of March 3, 1879. Canadian Subscription, $4.72. Foreign, $5.40. This issue dated December 7, 1929.

We do not hold ourselves responsible for the return of unsolicited manuscripts.
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LOW PAY.. LONG HOURS.. ROUTINE.. NO FUTURE

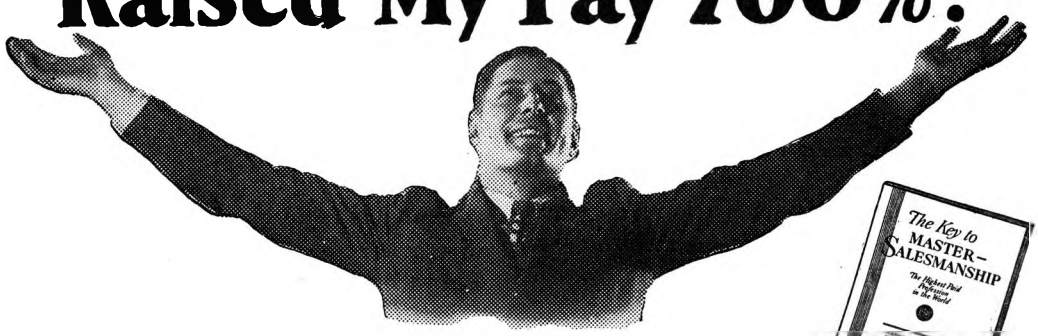
Always worrying over money. Always skimping and economizing—going without the comforts and luxuries that every man DESERVES for his family and himself.

The Time Clock—a badge of hawk-like supervision and The Rut. A constant reminder that one is "just another name on the pay-roll."

Human cogs in a great machine. No chance to meet people, travel or have interesting experiences. A long, slow, tiresome road that leads nowhere.

Always wondering what would happen in case of a "lay-off" or loss of job. No chance to express ideas and ability—no chance to get ahead. COULD there be a way out?

I Said "Good-bye" to It All After Reading This Amazing Book— Raised My Pay 700%!



Where Shall We Send Your Copy—Free?

WHEN a man who has been struggling along at a low-pay job suddenly steps out and commences to earn real money—$5,000, $7,500, or $10,000 a year—he usually gives his friends quite a shock. It's hard for them to believe he is the same man they used to know—but such things happen much more frequently than most people realize. Not only one, but HUNDREDS have altered the whole course of their lives after reading the amazing book illustrated at the right.

True, it is only a *book*—just seven ounces of paper and printer's ink—but it contains the most vivid and inspiring message that any ambitious man can read! It reveals facts and secrets that will open almost any man's eyes to things he has never even dreamed of!

Remarkable Salary Increases

For example, R. B. Hansen of Akron, Ohio, is just one case. Not long ago he was a foreman in the rubber-curing room of a big factory at a salary of $160 a month. One day this remarkable volume, "The Key to Master Salesmanship," fell into his hands. And from that day on, Mr. Hansen clearly saw the way to say "good-bye" forever to low pay, long hours, and tiresome routine! Today he has reaped the rewards that this little volume placed within his reach. His salary runs well into the 5-figure class—actually exceeding $10,000 a year!

Another man, Wm. Shore of Lake Hughes, California, was a cowboy when he sent for "The Key to Master Salesmanship." Now he is a star salesman making as high as $525 in a single week. L. H. Lundstedt, Chicago, read this free book—and raised himself from a stenographer to the head of a business with 600% increase in earnings. C. V. Champion of Danville, Illinois, raised his salary to over $10,000 a year and became President of his company in the bargain!

A Few Weeks—Then Bigger Pay

There was nothing "different" about any of these men when they started. None of them had any special advantages—although all of them realized that SALESMANSHIP offers bigger rewards than any other profession under the sun. But, like many other men, they subscribed to the foolish belief that successful salesmen are born with some sort of "magic gift." "The Key to Master Salesmanship" showed them that nothing could be farther from the truth! Salesmanship is just like any other profession. It has certain fundamental rules and laws—laws that you can master as easily as you learned the alphabet.

City and traveling sales positions are open in every line all over the country. For years, thousands of leading firms have called on the N. S. T. A. to supply them with salesmen. Employment service is free to both employers and members, and thousands have secured positions this way.

FREE TO EVERY MAN

See for yourself WHY "The Key to Master Salesmanship" has been the deciding factor in the careers of so many men who are now making $10,000 a year. Learn for yourself the REAL TRUTH about the art of selling! You do not risk one penny or incur the slightest obligation. And since it may mean the turning point of your whole career, it certainly is worth your time to fill out and clip the blank below. Send it now!

NATIONAL SALESMEN'S TRAINING ASSOCIATION

Dept. S-322

N. S. T. A. Bldg. Chicago, Ill.

National Salesmen's Training Assn., Dept. S-322, N. S. T. A. Bldg., Chicago, Ill.

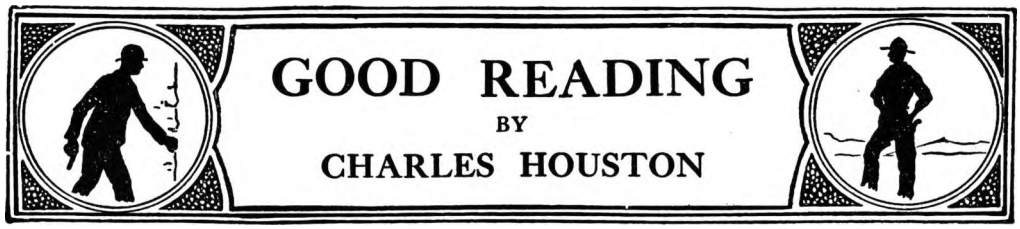
Without cost or obligation, you may send me your free book, "The Key to Master Salesmanship."

Name.....

Address.....

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

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



"Helen's lips are drifting dust;
Ilion is consumed with rust;
All the galleons of Greece
Drink the ocean's dreamless peace;
Lost was Solomon's purple show
Restless centuries ago;
Stately empires wax and wane—
Babylon, Barbary and Spain;—
Only one thing, undefaced,
Lasts, though all the worlds lie waste
And the heavens are overturned.
Dear, how long ago we learned!"

Through all the shifting scenes of history, from the time when fair Helen and the dream of her sent Grecian armies against Trojan walls to these days when a man and a maid walk arm in arm through the dim twilight of a great industrial city of the West, there remains the Great Common Denominator of young love.

And even as blind Homer sang of the battles on the windy plains, with Helen looking from the battlements, so to-day there are those who are sure of enthralled audiences as they tell of the immortal passion and its effects on the fortunes of men and women.

It is the one subject in the world which is forever young, which time can never stale or custom wither. In this America of the Machine Age, love stories are as eagerly sought as in the romantic era of the Renaissance or the May Days of Merrie England.

From coast to coast to-day men and women are turning to love stories for felicitous escape from the drabness of mass life and are being well rewarded for their endeavors. In the love stories which bear the famous imprint of Chelsea House, one of the largest and best established publishing concerns in the country, there is always that ideal combination of reality and romance which gives luster to any narrative and assures the rapt attention of the reader.

The latest offerings of Chelsea House are outstanding examples of how a good love story should be told. They have life and go, variety and humor, too, and above all, they pluck at the strings of genuine emotion which control the hearts of even the most matter-of-fact among us.

Here are rapid glances at four of the newcomers on this season's Chelsea House list:

THE SPLENDID FOLLY, by Beulah Poynter. Published by Chelsea House, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City. Price 75 cents.

Would she do it? Would this beautiful, shy, little stenographer take the place of the movie star as a "double" in an act of great daring? That was the question which Dawn McAllister had to answer, and though the thought of it made her tremble from head to foot, her answer was a determined "Yes." For back home was her father suffering from a dreadful illness, in desperate need of the money which Dawn would receive for her daring.

And so she went out to her first great adventure. But it was only the prelude to an almost incredible series of thrilling episodes through which she was to move with head held high. How Dawn found herself, in very earnest, "doubling" for the star, how she fell in love, and how many were the traps laid for her

(Continued on 2nd page following)

GOOD READING—*Continued*

final happiness—these make "The Splendid Folly" a splendid story.

IMPULSIVE YOUTH, by Vivian Grey. Published by Chelsea House, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City. Price 75 cents.

She was rich. And he was poor. She gave him up because she didn't want to break his mother's heart, the heart of the woman who had saved and scrimped so that he might go to college and get away from the manual labor that seemed destined for him.

It was an impulsive act, the sort of thing she was always doing, for at the start she had acted on impulse when she left her luxurious home to cast in her lot with the humble folk on the other side of the creek. It was impulse that sent her out at midnight to make her own way in the world, alone, with no money in her purse. And when Phil Rhoades found her and would bring her back, she refused, for she was determined that she would not stand in the way of the career of the man she loved.

In a way, it is true that most of us act on impulse at one time or another, trusting somehow to the hidden voices within us that our actions may be for the best. The author of this absorbing story tells what may happen when we make impulse the guide to life. It is a story of youth in the grip of a great love that is here before us, a book that we do not lay aside until the last page is read, and one that we take up again, for it is well worth the rereading.

THE FRONT-PAGE GIRL, by Jack Bechdolt. Published by Chelsea House, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City. Price 75 cents.

In many respects the city room of a great newspaper is one of the most fascinating places in the world. Particularly is this true if you have never worked in one.

But to Janice O'Dell, fed up with the small-town life of Graniteport and the irascibility of her cranky old guardian, the city room of the New York *Daily Pictorial* seemed like heaven. Then there was a moonlight night and happy-go-lucky Bill Lannigan, who told her some pretty tall stories about the excitements of reporting, and before long Janice found herself in a little apartment in Greenwich Village with Bill's fiancée, hard at work in a novel "school of journalism."

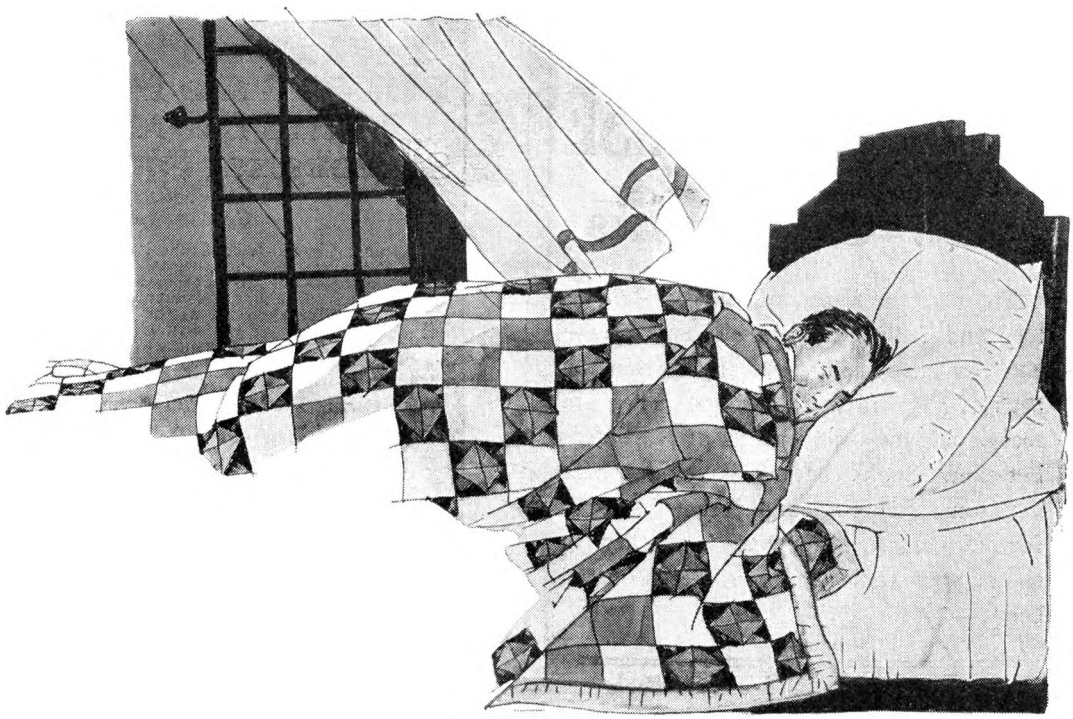
Before she knew it she had plunged headlong into a sea of intrigue. Two romances: a brother long lost and now miraculously reappearing, a front-page story, all in the course of a brief space of time! Enough to make the average newspaper yarn sound like the obituary notices in the Graniteport *Gazette*.

You've seen plays about newspapers and had a hint of what goes on when the presses start to rumble, but it's doubtful if ever before you've read quite such a fascinating newspaper story as "The Front-page Girl."

THE GINGHAM BRIDE, by Beulah Poynter. Published by Chelsea House, 79 Seventh Avenue. New York City. Price 75 cents.

"Locked in each other's arms, black hair mingling with gold, these two children mingled their tears in an outburst of grief for the one they had lost." And then slowly came realization that although they loved, it would be a long time before they could marry. He was nineteen, just starting a college career; she was just a small stray whom a kind woman had taken in. And now that woman had gone, things looked black indeed for poor little Sally.

Then, out of nowhere it seemed, came a ne'er-do-well father who took the girl off into a fantastic world—the world of the troupers. What strange adventures awaited her there! What amazing companions were to be hers! The story of "The Gingham Bride" has tears in it—and laughter—and from start to finish is one that will stir the reader strangely.



"Daddy's gone a-hunting"

His desk is clear. His office-door is locked. The evening paper lies heaped beside his chair. The detective story has slipped to the floor beside his bed, two chapters before the end!

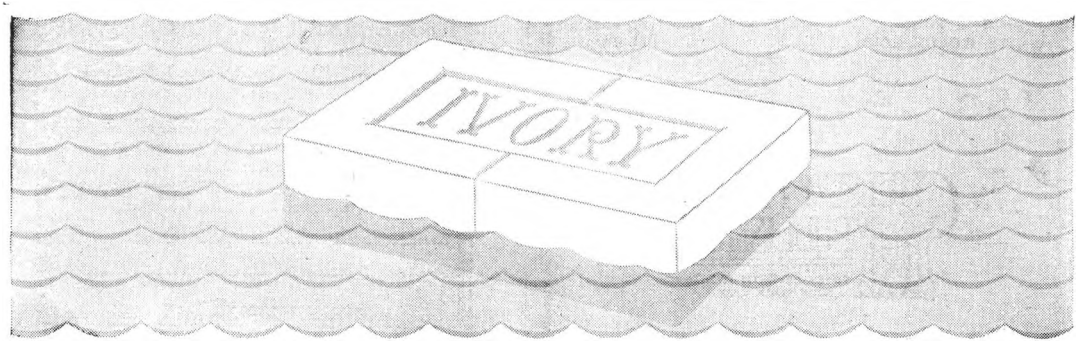
The gate of dreams has opened—and another hunter has joined the happy throng.

How quickly and silently they make that journey to dreamland—those smiling men and women, boys and girls, who end their busy day with a soothing Ivory bath!

But once there was a man who took his midnight bath with a cake of *sinker* soap. And all night long in his dreams he dived and dived. At dawn he woke, gasping for breath and weary with the struggle.

Ivory floats!

. . . kind to everything it touches · $99^{44}/_{100}$ % Pure · "It floats"



A Minute With—
Will McMorrow

TRAPPED

IT happened in 1916 on the British front, and though I got it mostly from hearsay, I think it is true and I think I spoke to the man himself. He had wandered behind the Allied line after dark. He was seeking, he said, the headquarters of a certain battalion, and he questioned many soldiers, until finally a canny sergeant of a Scottish unit offered to show the way and brought the questioner to the sergeant's own battalion headquarters instead.

As he stood in the candle-lit dugout, before the watchful group in khaki, he was obviously a British artillery officer, slim, neat, perfectly uniformed, perfectly poised, speaking English with the cultured, drawling accent of his caste. If there were a few tiny beads of perspiration on his forehead, it was perhaps natural. One does not like to be suspected of being a spy, dressed in the uniform of a dead enemy.

But he was cool withal. The hand that went forth to retrieve the identification papers he had shown, was as steady as a veteran gambler's.

"I don't understand how I missed my way, sir. One gets twisted about in the dark, especially a newcomer to the line."

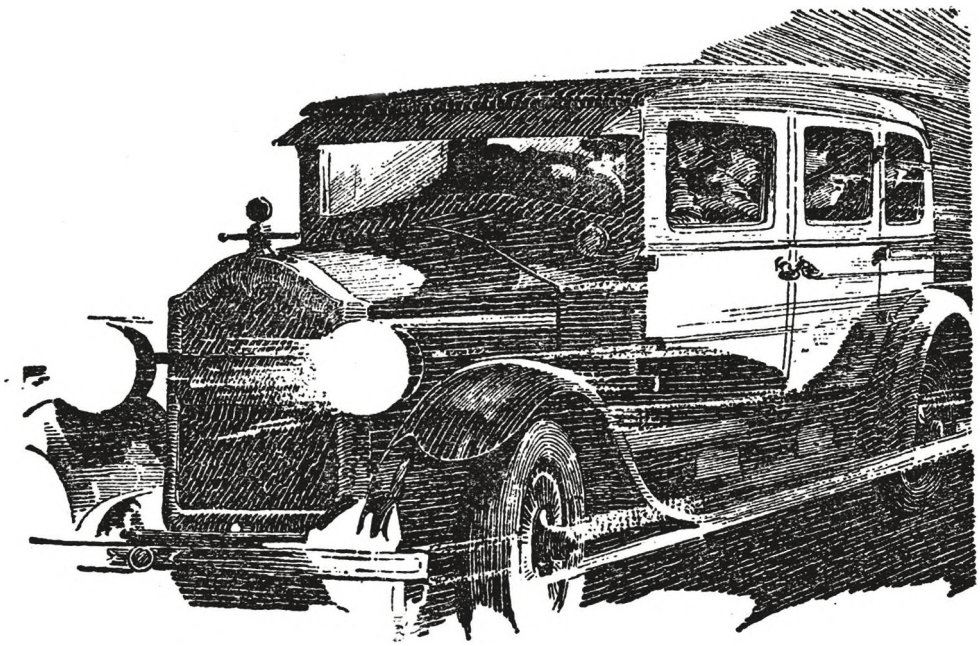
"Sorry, Lieutenant Jones, to have bothered you this way. But we have been fearfully annoyed by those chaps lately. Two of my own men were shot down last night from behind by one of their damned spies dressed in our uniform. Don't lose your way again."

"Quite right, sir. One can't be too careful."

The major nodded. "Return the lieutenant his revolver, sergeant."

The lieutenant smiled pleasantly, saluted all around, and swung back toward the sergeant who stood guarding the doorway. From the group about the major came a sharp command in German. The lieutenant stiffened, halted for an instant in his tracks. Only for an instant. But when he turned slowly back toward the candlelight his face was white as a man already dead. He smiled the wry smile of the game loser.

"The oldest trick in the world, gentlemen," he said, "but one cannot forget the training of a lifetime—and I believe I said I spoke no German. It was a mistake. So. To continue the farce would be useless now. Von Haffner is the name, Fifth Prussian Guard. See that they are informed. And—I hope your men are good shots, major."



The BEER RUNNERS

By Thomas and Woodward Boyd

CHAPTER I.

A STRANGE AND "DANGEROUS" GIRL.

AGAINST the bright-blue background of the sea the girl was standing on the deck, her hands behind her at the polished rail, looking up toward Sam Lowell and laughing. Then, inexplicably, one of those curious changes came over her face. And Sam could have sworn he saw a glint of agony in her clear, gray eyes.

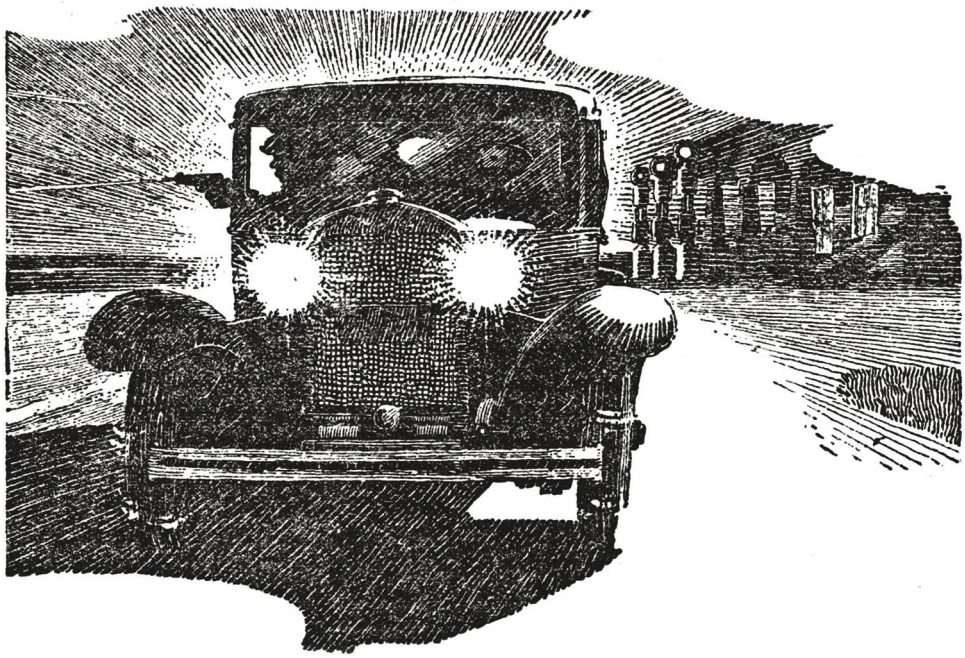
"Oh, now," Fritz Rudolph was saying lazily, "Chicago's not so different from other places. Go on and have your fun about it if you want to, but I've lived there all my life and to me there's not much difference between Chicago and London, or even between Chicago and Paris."

"Oh, come now," protested a casual Englishman, stepping back to the edge of the deck to let three athletic spinsters walk briskly past, "you'll destroy all our illusions about America. How about all those extraordinary gunmen and gangsters, what?"

Sam was still staring wonderingly down at Grace Meredith. It seemed to him that she was listening to the trifling remarks of Fritz Rudolph with an odd tenseness. Her short upper lip was taut and her eyes watched anxiously.

"Have you ever been in Chicago?" Sam asked her with some interest.

The girl looked up at him. Fritz Rudolph and the Englishman awaited her answer with polite attention. But she avoided the question. Assuming a quick liveliness of expression that made her



Big Ed, Chicago Boss Beer Runner, Who Ruled His Gangsters and Crushed His Enemies Like a Relentless Dictator, but Who Couldn't Hold the Girl He Loved Against the Only Man Who Did Not Fear Him.

features appear eager as a child's, she said abruptly:

"You're going there, you told me?"

"Yes," Sam nodded, his mind busy with the problem of the girl's behavior. "It's my home, but I haven't been back for nearly seven years. My family is gone and if it weren't for Fritz Rudolph, who's kindly taking me in, I shouldn't have any place to go."

"No," jeered Fritz with good-humored sarcasm, "not a place in the town to welcome the returned golf champion, except the houses of a dozen benevolent society dames who might be willing to make the sacrifice and offer their hospitality purely *pour le sport!*"

"It must be wonderful to be a golf champion." The girl looked teasingly up at Sam. But he had a belief that she was less interested in that pastime than in having given the talk a different turn.

But the casual Englishman had taken up Fritz Rudolph's statement and was doggedly pursuing it:

"Tell me now, Rudolph, is it a fact that Chicago is like a continental city? Those gunmen, for example—I suppose you meant they are similar to the apaches of Paris; but I say, you know, there's really nothing like that in London."

Those cool British tones roused Fritz Rudolph's native pride.

"Chicago," he began stiffly, "is a beautiful and remarkable city." Then he went on more naturally, but with no less warmth: "For some reason the crime there seems to have got a lot of notice lately, but I assure you it's prob-

ably no worse than most other big cities. Probably not one per cent of the people have ever come in contact with any of the so-called gunmen and gang leaders. Personally, I've always had my doubts of their existence. There are beer runners and bootleggers all over the country, I suppose. Occasionally the papers drag up some picturesque character like—well, 'Big Ed' Case—and give him columns of publicity. I open the Paris *Tribune,* for instance, and learn that Big Ed has been indicted for conspiracy in a new beer war. What does it mean to me? Or to any other respectable citizen of Chicago, for that matter? Nothing at all. I bet if I met Ed Case—and, personally, I never knew any one who ever had met him or any other so-called gang leader—he'd be as common and uninteresting as that deck steward and his infernal cups of broth."

"Some one else is approaching," said the Englishman, "who isn't commonplace or uninteresting—Lady Gladys Butterfield!"

"Who, by the way, happened to be *born* in *Chicago,*" Fritz shot at him as if to clinch his side of the discussion. "Good morning, Lady Glad."

Lady Gladys Butterfield's small, birdlike face was illumined with a swift, pleased smile. "Ah, Fritz!" she exclaimed. Stopping, she nodded carelessly to Sam and the Englishman, then looked with some interest at Grace Meredith. "And who is this remarkably pretty child?" she inquired cordially, slipping in between the girl and Sam Lowell, to Sam's considerable annoyance.

Grace looked up, smiling mischievously.

"Am I so much younger than you?" she asked.

"I'm twenty-two," said Lady Glad. "Give me a cigarette, somebody. How old are you?"

"Twenty-two in six months," said Grace.

Lady Glad lighted the cigarette which Fritz had handed her, and inhaled vigorously.

"Well, I'm no beauty, unfortunately. Consequently, I look at least ten years older than you." She eyed Fritz Rudolph quizzically. He, as she knew very well, was in love with her. "What goes on, Fritz? What were you talking about? You looked all puffed out, as if you were having a director's meeting as I came up."

"We were discussing Chicago—its gangs and shooting," said Fritz lightly. "Did you ever meet any gang leaders in your days in Chicago, Glad?"

Lady Glad laughed. "No, but I've always wanted to. Fritz, if you were of the slightest use in the world you'd get to know some of these exciting brigands and bring them out to Lake Forest. I'm *not* going back to London again until I know at least one. It's too humiliating. Everybody always asks me about them and imagines that grandfather's house is simply surrounded with them all the time."

Sam looked at Grace Meredith, who had turned aside a little from the gayety and was standing unhappily silent. He had a quick, sympathetic feeling for her and wished he were standing beside her again.

"That's exactly what I was saying," Fritz announced to Lady Glad. "I said I'd never met any one who ever knew a gang leader or ever saw a street fight." He turned to Sam for further corroboration. "Did you ever hear of any one knowing one of our precious specimens, Sam?"

Sam Lowell grinned. "I know a Chicago gunman, if that'll help any."

"Not really!" exclaimed Lady Glad with shocked delight. "Tell me, at once."

Sam summarized. "I knew four, to be exact. One of them tried to kill our mess sergeant one night, but nobody ever really found out who did it."

"Ah!" suggested the casual Englishman. "It was during the War?"

"In France," Sam nodded, "and they were in my infantry company. There were four of them and they made a tight, complete little organization of themselves from the beginning. A fellow named 'Simmy' Pope was the leader, and it was interesting to watch their plots and counterplots. The night they tried to shoot the mess sergeant was when we'd been overseas about two months and were in a training sector in the Vosges. You see," he explained parenthetically, "their way of getting what they wanted was by sticking together, wheedling, bribing or threatening as an organization. And their approach to the mess sergeant was like that—the object being to get extra rations out of him, which was very important in those days. But they couldn't make it, hard as they tried.

"So at last, one night after taps, when the mess sergeant was asleep in his corner room of the second platoon bunk house, one of them—or maybe the whole gang together—loaded a Springfield rifle and fired through the boards of the bunk house into the mess sergeant's bed. The shot missed him by about six inches and the next day he asked for a transfer to another company. But nobody," Sam ended, "was ever able to find out who had done the shooting; yet everybody had a definite feeling that it was Simmy Pope, Alfy Brennan, Riley Crookes or 'Mossy' Keppler. And when we got a new mess sergeant those four became the best-fed quartet in the outfit."

"How exciting!" exclaimed Lady Glad.

Fritz Rudolph frowned. A rich man with wide interests, he was heavily on the side of established law and order.

"A precious bunch of soldiers they must have made!" he said indignantly. "I should think you'd have had them drummed out of the regiment."

Sam laughed. "As a matter of fact, they were pretty good soldiers when we got up at the front. And besides, there was something likable about all of them."

"Well," admonished Lady Glad, "mind you look them up when you get to Chicago and bring them out to see me!"

"I'd be glad to," said Sam, "only there's not much chance. They were all killed at Soissons except Simmy Pope. And as for what's become of him, I don't know. He was quite a character and I always liked him." The thought of Simmy Pope, his dark, keen face and wheezy tenor, revived old memories and Sam added regretfully: "I wonder what's become of him."

The color had gone from Grace Meredith's softly tanned cheeks. Pale, without looking directly at any one, she stepped forward. saying:

"Excuse me, I must go."

But Lady Glad detained her with a firm hand on the sleeve of her colored sweater. "Oh, don't. There's nothing amusing to do. Stay on and tell us all about yourself. I've got such a failing for lovely people and I almost never see any——"

Grace flushed. "I'd really love to stay, but——" She gave a weak excuse with lowered eyes.

Fritz Rudolph, eager to please Lady Glad, offered effusively:

"Won't you have dinner with us tonight then, Miss Meredith? We'd like it so much if you would."

"That's great," supplemented Sam. and watched Grace expectantly.

"Please do," encouraged Lady Glad. holding out her hand.

But Grace blurted out a refusal:

"I can't. You're all awfully sweet to ask me, but I couldn't leave—I mean, I couldn't get away for dinner with you."

By this time her distress had become evident to all of them. Lady Glad insisted no longer.

"We'll see you again, then," she said quietly.

As Grace left the little crowd Sam also detached himself.

"Excuse me," he said. "I'd like to speak to Miss Meredith a moment." He strode down the deck after her.

But Grace Meredith walked rapidly away and, disappearing in the direction of her stateroom, left Sam to stare morosely into the empty sea. He lighted a cigarette and thought about her perplexedly. She was a pretty girl, a lovely girl, but her manner, he had to admit, was odd. What was the matter with her? Why couldn't she have dinner with him and his friends?

They had met the first day out of Cherbourg during a mix-up over her dog and his down in the dismal quarters where the pet animals were compelled to travel. He had liked her from the beginning, and admired her quiet air of self-composure, her distinction and unusual beauty. She talked with him impersonally and, afterward, they were more than once together on the promenade deck. But the slightest hint of interest in herself, the smallest question about her life before she had come on board the liner, caused her to become silent or to reply in a way that twisted the subject on another course. And thus Sam was always left with a feeling that it would be awkward to ask her further. Moreover, he believed he sensed a trace of strain and fatigue in her face that roused an unexpected pity in his own heart. But that, perhaps, rose only from his own emotion toward her.

Sam turned abruptly from his contemplation of the smooth water. There Grace was, once more standing by his side. He looked searchingly down into her gray eyes. This, he thought, was a strange and dangerous girl—one moment she ran from you and the next moment there she was, smiling up at you. She had, Sam felt, an insidious charm with a definite radius which was able to subjugate whatever it touched. Some unusual, foreboding sense warned Sam Lowell that unless he kept outside this annihilating sweep he would be made capable of any folly. He frowned, for women were not in his scheme of life.

"What's the trouble?" asked the girl with spurious sympathy.

"Why did you run away?" Sam demanded.

Grace was silent. "I don't know," she said slowly. "Or rather, please don't ask me. Sometimes," she went on philosophically, "we do things that are odd and impolite, out of a burst of feeling that we can't quite control. At least, I do. I hope I didn't offend your friends."

"Oh, no," Sam assured her, "you weren't impolite." He looked at her hopefully. "Then you will come to dinner to-night?"

With lifted brows and a rather sad smile curving her lips, Grace shook her head slowly. "I'd rather not."

They were both silent, looking down into the water that changed from blue to green beside the boat's swift flanks. Sam's heart was pounding and his face felt unusually hot. Under the tip of Grace Meredith's small hat he could just see the white curve of her uplifted chin. What was the trouble with her?—he asked himself irritably. The whole situation was unbearable. Abruptly he burst out:

"Look here! I'm getting awfully fond of you!"

Her head tilted back. He was looking into her eyes and he knew that his words had made her very happy. Warmth from her joyous gaze flooded him. She was radiant and glowing, her expression like that with which one greets a surprising, delicious moment out of life.

"Grace——" muttered Sam unsteadily, and grasped her elbow.

But the scene was interrupted. A woman of about forty was coming slowly along the deck. Dark eyed, with a long, wrinkled face like that of a kindly fox, she had an air of indomitable suburban respectability that was ludicrously out of place on the deck of a transatlantic liner. She stopped in front of Sam and Grace and said with a tone of unmistakable gratification:

"Nice morning, Mr. Lowell. Weather's been fine right along, hasn't it? Surprised folks, too."

Sam stared. He had never met the woman in his life and was not at all pleased by the interruption at such a moment. But Grace was speaking to him:

"This is my friend, Mrs. McClusky, with whom I'm traveling. You haven't met, have you?"

Sam bowed. "How do you do." That this woman, with her long teeth and her complacent smile, could be connected with Grace in any way was impossible. Yet there it was. Where on earth, he wondered momentarily, had Grace picked her up? It was astounding. But there was nothing actually against her. She seemed to have average intelligence, probably ordinary delicacy. But to be traveling with a girl like Grace!

"It *is* beautiful weather," Sam heard himself saying; but he mentally gasped: "Astounding!"

"It's almost time for lunch, Grace"—Mrs. McClusky looked affectionately at the girl—"and I expect you're good and hungry."

"Not very," said Grace. "But I was just coming. Good-by, Mr. Lowell. Come on, Helen." Grace turned her head for a parting glance.

But Sam, for all the curious medley of his thoughts, was able smoothly to interpose:

"Miss Meredith, perhaps you'd be willing to have dinner—just you and Mrs. McClusky and I?" He spoke anxiously, not knowing how long it would be until he saw her again if she succeeded in disappearing now.

Mrs. McClusky answered for Grace. "Oh, my yes!" she exploded excitedly. "Grace, do go on and have dinner with him. I won't be able to come, Mr. Lowell"—and here her wide mouth opened, her long teeth gleamed merrily as she said archly—"because I have some letters to write. But I'm sure Grace would love it."

Grace paused, hesitating, her eyes, it seemed to Sam, tenderly amused at her own predicament.

"Please come," Sam put in eagerly.

At last she nodded. "All right." And as her smile once more reappeared, he knew that she was glad and happy. "At half past seven, then. But won't your friends think I'm unpardonably rude?" she ended wistfully.

Sam grinned at her reassuringly.

"We'll keep out of the Ritz and they'll never know anything about it."

"My goodness!" exclaimed Mrs. McClusky. "Did you get another invitation, Grace? You *are* getting to be the most popular girl!"

Grace explained reluctantly: "Mr. Lowell's friends asked me to have dinner with them, Helen; but I thought I wouldn't."

"Oh!" Mrs. McClusky looked genuinely sorrowful. "Why don't you go, dearie? You could have such a wonderful time. She's the queerest girl," Mrs. McClusky addressed Sam, "with that lovely wardrobe of French dresses! All those society people, too! Just think, Grace," she went on coaxingly, "you might meet that Lady Gladys Butterfield——"

Suffused with embarrassment, Grace clenched her fists and her eyes darkened with minor tragedy. "I can't! Don't you see I can't?"

Sam was moved by the awkwardness of the situation, but was unable to do anything about it. He felt it best to leave. "At seven thirty, then," he said,

and turned away with Grace's troubled but grateful smile mirrored in his remembrance.

After dinner that night they danced a little, then went out against the starboard rail to talk. Midnight found them there, watching a yellow moon that sent benignant beams into the sleek, ebony-colored sea.

"Lady Glad was awfully nice to me this morning," said Grace after a long pause. "She seems more American than English."

"She's a nice girl," admitted Sam. "I've known her for years. Her grandfather is old George Parmer, you know—one of them—the other's a duke, of course—and she's spent half her life in Chicago." He felt restless with the conversation about Lady Glad.

"She's very attractive," mused Grace. In the soft, reflected light Sam could faintly see the movement of her white arm as she lifted her hand to stare down at a ring she was turning gently on her finger.

"Yes, attractive," agreed Sam carelessly. He touched her forearm with his fingers. "Grace, do you know this is our last night out?" He hadn't meant to say that. His voice, he realized, was trembling. He felt like a fool. But it didn't matter. "Grace," he whispered.

Slowly she turned, her eyes glistening in the darkness, the moon's rays making lights and shadows of her hair. "It is—isn't it?" she murmured with regret.

Sam leaned above her. His voice huskier and shakier than before, he muttered:

"Are you sorry that the voyage is over?"

The slow inclination of her head was answer enough. His arms went round her gently. She raised her eyes as he drew her close. He felt her moist, warm lips and lived a moment in a timeless ecstasy.

"You're so lovely, so unbelievably——" Sam whispered against her hair. Then for a long while they were silent.

Sam released her with reluctant hands. The effulgent moon, the shining, swaying sea, the shaded stateroom lights beside them—all were the same. But to Sam the world had changed and he stood in wonderment, looking dumbly on the crown of Grace's head.

It was she who was first to speak. "Perhaps," he heard her low voice saying, "I won't be very happy when I get back to Chicago, but I'll always remember—to-night."

"Chicago!" Sam caught her waist and shoulders jubilantly. "Are you going back to Chicago, too!"

Grace did not answer at once. "Yes," she said slowly: "I live there."

Sam felt giddy with joy. He beamed widely.

"Then we'll see each other lots. *Lots!*" he repeated. That Grace failed to answer was a fact that passed unnoticed, for he was busy foolishly kissing her slim, white fingers.

CHAPTER II.

THE CHASE OF THE GRAY CAR.

SAM woke up next morning to find the liner lying motionless at her dock. He jumped up and dressed hurriedly, thinking he must see Grace again before she crossed the gangplank. But as he was fitting his bright tie into the collar of his soft shirt a knocking sounded on the stateroom door. He called:

"Come in."

Two men appeared. The tall and tweedy one who had entered first performed the introductions for both.

"Mr. Lowell, I'm Paul Sykes of the *Tribune* and this is Tad Davis of the *Times*. If you'll just let us ask a question or two while you're dressing——"

Sam nodded briefly, and they began. What had the returned champion to say about his expected match with Bobby

Jones? Or was it only a rumor? How did the returned champion find European links as compared to those in America? What did he think of the Allied debt? Of the future of aviation? Of women's fashions? The questions stretched out while Sam fumed inwardly.

Dressed and free at last, Sam carried his pigskin hand bag belatedly to the gangplank. The stream of passengers was trickling thin and on the dock he had a glimpse of Grace moving toward a cab beside the solid figure of Mrs. McClusky. He hurried ahead as best he could, but was brought to a halt by the uniformed customs inspectors at the foot of the gangplank. By the time he was released Grace Meredith had disappeared, and Sam was surrounded by three cousins from Long Island with whom he had promised to spend a week on his return.

Sam heaved a long sigh as he turned himself over to his Long Island relatives. If only, he thought exasperatedly, he had had sense enough to get her address he could have written to her that night and she would find a letter from him when she reached Chicago. Then Fritz Rudolph appeared; he was shepherding Lady Glad. More introductions were called for between Sam's relations and his friends. Then Sam said: "So long, Fritz; see you in Chicago next Saturday!" The words came out automatically, like his answers to his jabbering, grinning cousins, for he was thinking: "Now I'll have to wait till I get to Chicago to hear from her!"

They left the pier in a cab and rumbled over the cobblestone streets toward Fifth Avenue. Afterward Sam's chief remembrance about the ride was a large sign which told him: "Say It With Flowers!" And again he cursed himself for not having found out Grace Meredith's address; at the least there should have been a bouquet from him when she arrived home.

The week on Long Island seemed inordinately trying; but at last another Friday came and Sam was on a flyer bound for Chicago and the pinnacle of the Rudolph Tower where Fritz lived. The Rudolph family was among the wealthiest and most influential of the city, but Fritz lived apart from his people in a large apartment of his own.

An ultramodern office building, the Rudolph Tower fronted Michigan Avenue a little south of the Oak Street intersection, and all of its eastward-facing windows above the tenth floor overlooked the lake. At the very peak, high above the swirl of traffic, were the luxurious quarters where Sam was to take up his abode. For Fritz Rudolph had been a friend of his since childhood, and it was he who had insisted on Sam's return from abroad after so long a time.

A keen business man despite his inherited wealth, Fritz thought Sam had reached the period for finding a serious occupation in life, such as selling bonds, for example. Being an amateur champion, Fritz had argued solidly, was all very well, but Sam's income was small and some day he would want to marry and support an establishment of his own.

Sam had scoffed at this advice; nevertheless he had come back with Fritz. And now, since he had met Grace, he was looking forward to earning money with an eagerness which would have astonished him a few weeks before.

Fritz was not in when Sam, having come by an earlier train, arrived. But the dark, straight-featured West Indian butler was there to welcome him. Sam asked quickly: "Any mail?"

"Yes, sah!" He was handed a package of letters which he looked through hurriedly. No, nothing there from Grace.

"Any phone calls?" Sam inquired.

"Yes, sah, Mist' Sam," Alexander, the butler, informed him approvingly. "Several people has called." Alexander

liked the feeling that those he served were popular, it was evident. "Ah wrote down the names," said the butler, and went to the desk beside the telephone, returning with a list of names and numbers. But not one of the names was Grace Meredith's.

"This all?" asked Sam, his disappointment plainly showing.

The butler nodded sympathetically. "They goin' to call to-day for sure, Mist' Sam," he offered comfortingly.

Sam fervently hoped so and went off to his room, a little depressed. It was certainly queer, he thought, that Grace had neither telephoned nor sent a message. But no doubt she would call either to-day or to-morrow. Sam began to unpack gloomily.

Halfway through with settling his belongings, he left his room and went out to look at the telephone book, and began poring over the long list of Merediths. But he hadn't the least idea of what part of the city Grace lived in. On the desk, however, was a copy of the Social Register. He looked hopefully through its pages, but the name of Grace Meredith was not to be found.

Then, with a new thought, he turned back to the telephone directory and scanned the columns of McCluskys for Mrs. John J. McClusky, which he remembered having seen on the passenger list. The book yielded a J. H. McClusky, a John M. and a James P., but that was all. Sam leaned back and frowned, realizing that he had no positive knowledge that Mrs. McClusky even lived in Chicago. That she had been traveling with Grace was the extent of his information concerning her.

That day passed and he had no word from Grace. Other days followed, but still he did not find her, though he tried most of the Merediths in the phone book. Then, as his useless search lengthened into weeks, he gradually began to lose hope. Going carefully over every hour of their talks together again and again, he at last accepted the reluctant conclusion that Grace did not want to be discovered. Perhaps she was married. That was the thought he dreaded most of all—also the possibility of an accident which had prevented her from calling. Yet he was convinced that there was some mystery, some cogent reason why he did not hear from her. For he knew that she had loved him; that she had been as deeply stirred as he that last night on the boat. And some day he would find her and lighten the whole puzzling business.

Meanwhile, he had begun to sell bonds.

"If you'd get that Meredith kid off your mind it'd do you a world of good," Fritz told him one morning as they had an eleven o'clock breakfast under a window that looked down over the blue, gleaming expanse of Lake Michigan. It was one of those useless days sandwiched in between a holiday and a week-end.

Sam smiled. "Yes," he admitted. "Still, it occupies my mind and keeps me away from the dangers of the stock market."

Fritz grinned and turned his newspaper from the financial section back to the first pages.

"Speaking of stock, I bought some shares yesterday in the Speedway Motors Corporation and—— I'll be damned!" He paused, absorbed in an item on the first page.

Sam helped himself to some chops which Alexander had set on the table.

"Well, what'll you be damned about?"

"Huh?" Fritz was absently munching a waffle, his eyes still on the paper. "What's that? Oh, nothing except that these racketeers seem to be all over the town. Here's a story about Big Ed Case again, the beer lord. They hauled him into court yesterday on some charge and let him go as usual. But it says in the story that he's president of the Speedway Motors." Fritz gulped his

coffee and added: "Well, I'll take a chance anyway and keep those shares a while."

"Big Ed Case?" said Sam. "Isn't that the man we were talking about on the boat?"

"Yes." Fritz got up. "Say," he said, "I wish you'd use the car to-day, Sam. I've got a date for lunch out at Libertyville and I'll drive the roadster. That'll leave Percy without anything to do—unless you want him to take you somewhere. Huh?"

Sam thought. He hadn't anywhere to go in particular. But on the other hand he liked Percy, the chauffeur—a forthright, sharp-eyed young man who bore up stoically under his lah-de-dah name. "Thanks——" began Sam and paused. Still undecided, he was saved an immediate answer by the whir of the telephone sounding from the little hallway beyond the dining room. Sam listened intently, hopeful that it might be Grace Meredith at last.

Alexander appeared. "Lady to speak to you, Mist' Sam." He grinned.

Sam's heart jumped. "Now!" he thought. "At last! It must be Grace." He strode over the thick carpet into the little hallway where the instrument stood and sat down recklessly on the carved, worm-eaten Italian table. "Hello," he said; and a female voice answered: "Oh, Mr. Lowell!"

But those were not the tones that Sam had hoped to hear, not the clear, throaty contralto of Grace, but the brittle, colorless voice of Mrs. Chauncey Dogriddle, the athletic chatelaine of a large estate in Lake Forest. She was an excellent golfer. Sam scowled with disappointment as he listened to Mrs. Dogriddle's gracious invitation to an afternoon of golf at the North Beach Country Club. He would, he said, be delighted to join her there; then snapped the receiver back on the hook.

Fritz's pointed ears were sharp with curiosity as Sam returned to the table.

"That your wide-eyed friend, the Meredith kid?" he asked. Due to Sam's ceaseless interest, that had become his host's standing question every time Sam was called to the telephone.

Sam shook his head and grinned. "Only a business acquaintance," he replied. "I intend to sell her husband a million dollars' worth of bonds."

"Great stuff," complimented Fritz. Then, in the manner of father confessor, he repeated his earlier advice: "Sam, you'd better get that Meredith kid out of your head. You won't see her any more and it cramps your style ot have something like that bothering you all day."

Privately Sam was almost willing to agree. But not quite.

"Come around and see me next year, Fritz," he answered jauntily. "You'll be surprised."

Again the phone rang. This time it was Percy, the butler informed Fritz, who in turn looked at Sam questioningly.

"What'll it be, Sam? Do you want him or not? If you don't he'll just loaf through till night; so you'd better take him."

"Tell him to come along," said Sam, "if you're so anxious to see him work." Percy could drive him out to the North Beach for his eighteen holes with Mrs. Dogriddle.

"I am," Fritz told him emphatically. "When people work for me I like to see 'em earn their pay."

The late breakfast ended, Fritz, in his varicolored silk dressing gown, went to his bedroom where he spent a full hour between it and his bath at his daily pursuit of self-adornment. Meanwhile, Sam sat reading a book and sometimes looking out over the tops of the buildings at the blue vastness of Lake Michigan.

Toward noon Percy lumbered in and stood awkwardly shifting his one hundred and eighty pounds from one foot

to the other, while Fritz instructed him in the duties of the day. "Yes, Mr. Fritz. Morning, Mr. Sam. I'm having the roadster brought right around, Mr. Fritz."

Sam said: "Hello, Perce, how's the home brew?"

Percy brightened. "Say, it's great, Mr. Sam!"

The buzzer announced that Fritz's roadster had arrived in front of the building, brought by one of the mechanics. Fritz gathered his gloves and panama hat. "See you for dinner, Sam." He was off, down the steps to the elevator.

Sam finished dressing—a white shirt and a flaunting tie, a roomy gray-tweed jacket and knickers from his London tailor. "Let's go, Perce," he said and, giving one last, reproachful glance at the silent telephone, led the way through the hall and down the narrow stairs to the elevator.

The iron cage dropped dizzyingly to the main floor. Skirting a corner of the great marble lobby, Sam and Percy went through a side door and down more steps to Fritz's garage where a long, powerful touring car, its top down and the windshield glistening, stood waiting. Sam got into the front seat with Percy, and the machine rolled out and swung around the block to reach Michigan Avenue.

Percy stepped on the clutch and brake at the boulevard intersection.

"It's north, ain't it, Mr. Sam?"

Lighting a cigarette, Sam sat surveying the asphalt thoroughfare crowded with swift, flashing cars. The North Shore Beach Country Club was north, as its name suggested. That, of course, was the way Sam wanted to go. But while the red light held him and the traffic streamed past like a river, he saw in the flood of southbound cars a long, gray machine, through the windshield of which he stared at the driver exultantly and with amazement. For, unless he was dreaming, the girl at the wheel was Grace Meredith. He raised his arm and shouted into that canyon of sound and a moment later was questioning himself fiercely: had she or hadn't she looked around? Did her face light up with a smile or didn't it? The motor had gone and he could not be sure. But he could still see it, weaving in and out among the traffic. And without taking his eyes from it he said quickly to Percy:

"South, Perce—and break right into that traffic, can you?"

"Can I?" echoed Percy proudly. "*Mis*ter Sam!" The chauffeur's eyebrows lowered purposefully, he hunched his shoulders, and the car, amidst the screech of brakes and a traffic officer's shrill, warning whistle, nosed abruptly into the flying mêlée and veered southward with increasing speed.

"Good boy," Sam muttered, "but keep your foot on it. There's a gray car up ahead and we've got to catch up with it." He sat tensely forward, his cigarette burning unnoticed between his brown fingers.

Well deserved as the compliment was, Percy flushed with pleasure, then tightened his lips and watched sharply for an opening in the clogged stream of traffic.

"I seen that bus, Mr. Sam and"—he whirled between two taxis—"we'll see it again or end up in the hoosegow." And to himself he confided: "Good eye, Mr. Sam's got; that was some swell dame!"

Past Lake Street, Washington, Madison, Monroe, and Adams the touring car moved, darting in and out among the swirl of traffic with the celerity and control of a cat's-paw. Then, halfway to Jackson, Sam saw the gray machine. It was swinging west around the corner. Sam leaned forward and asked tersely: "Got it?"

Percy merely nodded and kept his foot on the accelerator. They took the corner perilously—the burly traffic officer glaring in apoplectic wrath—but the

machine was heavy and well balanced. A green light showed at Wabash and they spurted on.

Three times the red light flashed against them before they had finished crossing the Loop. And once the gray car slipped out of sight. But rumbling over the Canal Street bridge Sam sighted it again, and the rest of the way was clear with easy going. Sam, lighting two cigarettes, gave one to Percy and gratefully inhaled the other. He could relax a little now.

"Thanks," said Percy. He looked momentarily at the instrument board. The speedometer registered forty-seven miles an hour and the clock a quarter of one. His glance skirted Sam's profile and he ventured:

"Clippin' right along, ain't she, sir?"

Sam nodded. "Right you are, Perce."

Percy embarrassedly cleared his throat and ventured further:

"Got to turn pretty soon or we won't be at the North Shore Beach till afternoon."

"Right again," Sam conceded. Discourteous though it would be to Mrs. Dogriddle, she would have to wait, for Grace Meredith must be overtaken.

The closely standing houses and pale-brick apartments which lined Jackson Boulevard were slipping past, giving way to the suburban dwellings and grassy plots of Austin and Oak Park. But still the gray car scooted down the asphalt and still Percy bent over his wheel, faithfully following. Then of a sudden Grace's car, outstripping Sam by nearly a block, turned north at a main crossing. Percy leaped for the corner ahead, slowed down and rolled around it. Again the gray machine was in sight, but gathering speed.

The trail led into the country. Percy muttered:

"Be in Ioway if this keeps up!"

But a few minutes later and a few miles farther on the gray car swung from the straight, level concrete into a winding gravel driveway above which a large wooden sign spelled out the name: "WILDHURST." Evidently, thought Sam as he took in the essentials quickly, a second-rate public resort. Through the maple shade he could see a gray frame summer hotel encircled by a spacious porch. Beyond it a little was Lake Mina, a million silver disks flashing on its surface under the afternoon sun. It was one of those numerous lakes that a glacial epoch had scooped out ages before on the northwestern border of the Chicago territory for the pleasure of future ages.

"We goin' in here, Mr. Sam?" asked Percy.

"You guessed right, Perce," Sam told him. "It's a hot day and the horse needs a drink." But in spite of his levity, Sam was perplexed. For Wildhurst was not the kind of place, he could already tell, in which he had expected his pursuit of Grace Meredith to end. Even the kindly spirited would have known at a glance that it was second rate; and the ungenerous minded would have simply described it as a roadhouse. Following along the drive, Percy brought the car up at the front entrance facing the lake. The gray machine stood there empty.

CHAPTER III.

AMAZING NEWS.

SAM LOWELL paused on the front steps of the resort called Wildhurst. There was not even a glimpse of Grace in the wide lobby. The porch was full of placid mothers and romping children.

Fixing his eyes interestedly on the exhibit of antlers above an empty fireplace, Sam sauntered in. Grace had disappeared. He looked into the large, dreary dining room, its chairs vacant, but the floor filled with tables that had soiled white cloths and wilted daisies ornamenting their square tops.

He explored the rest of the public rooms, but was forced to conclude that Grace either had an intimate friend who lived in the hotel or else was staying there herself. He even went up and talked to the hotel clerk about the bathing and fishing which the place afforded, meanwhile scanning the register for her name. But that brought him no nearer to the information he desired.

Sam did not like the look of Wildhurst, despite the innocent aspect lent by the playing children and their mothers. He went out once more and stood hesitantly on the steps, staring at the gray car still parked close by the main door. It was not that the place seemed disreputable; it was just second class—unlike Grace Meredith. And then, as he strolled down toward the lake, he wondered if Wildhurst was even respectable. Coming slowly in his direction, he saw the professional gunman whom he had known in the army during the War. Sam looked again. Undoubtedly it was Simmy Pope.

In a light, checked suit that fitted tightly at the hips, wearing a green-silk shirt with tie to match and a straw hat cocked at a jaunty but purposeful angle, Simmy approached. And Sam, motionless, stood regarding him with friendly but amazed interest. Simmy's intense pallor was as it had been ten years before. And beneath a coating of talcum applied after a recent shave, the blue-black bristles on his jaw were already so evident they looked like marks from a gunpowder explosion.

"Simmy!" Sam challenged.

The sartorically brilliant racketeer stopped suspiciously. But as he stared at Sam his angular face took on an expression of surprise; then his thin lips grinned and he thrust out a paper-white hand whereon a diamond sparkled under the midday sun.

"Sam! Well, where the hell——"

The sound of Simmy's husky, whisky tenor was good to Sam again. It brought back long-forgotten days, remembrances of men in olive drab, himself and Simmy among them, toiling down long, poplar-shaded roads to the front line; of soldiers sitting in little cafés, hilarious over bread and cheese, wine and cognac; of four mustard-colored waves advancing into a treacherous, verdant wood which spat machine-gun bullets from every angle; of Simmy limping away from the fields before Soissons, one leg of his breeches cut away and a blood-soaked bandage showing around his thigh.

They talked, like men who had just met after a vividly remembered accident which both had shared. Simmy shrilled in his whisky tenor:

"An' you didn't git bumped off or nothin'! You was always a lucky guy, Sam. Say, what's your racket? You look like one of them Limey dukes."

Sam ignored the question as to his occupation and explained his similarity in appearance to an English nabob's:

"Been over in London, Simmy. What's yours?"

Simmy lighted a cigarette and inhaled the smoke fiercely. His black eyebrows came down in a straight line.

"Same as everybody's. I'm runnin' the beer. It's a good racket, but I'm gittin' out an' startin' in for myself. Well, I'll be——" Simmy's eyes, moving to Sam's right, had fallen on the gray car parked down the gravel driveway.

Sam followed his gaze and asked abruptly: "What's the matter, Simmy?"

Simmy's eyebrows had drawn down still lower. He muttered:

"So Big Ed's out here. I could've swore he was in Burgess County!"

"Big Ed?"

"Sure, Ed Case, the low-down——" Simmy had a way of leaving his maledictions hanging in the air.

"What do you mean?" asked Sam, amused. This, then, had no connection with the gray car. Simmy was mutter-

ing ferociously to himself. "Here!" commanded Sam, and set his hand on Simmy's shoulder, which he gave a vigorous shake. "Snap out of your hop and tell me what you're talking about, you poor eel!"

Simmy's dark eyes turned on Sam, then slid away again.

"What's it to you? I'm talkin' about plenty. Big Ed owns this dump and operates it as a way station for his beer runners, but he keeps it as a family resort for a blind. Mean to tell me you never heard of Big Ed? Where in hell you been, anyway? The dirty tramp, I'll take him for a ride one of these days all hell couldn't bring him back from!"

"Good!" observed Sam helpfully. That Simmy could have any connection with Grace was too fantastic. He had been mistaken in thinking Simmy looked at the gray car. And yet Simmy's eyes continued to brood balefully on that same object. "What," asked Sam, "are you looking down the drive for? What are you looking at?"

"At that gray bus!" rapped out Simmy with an angry jerk of his shoulder toward the car.

"What's the matter with it?" asked Sam.

"Ain't nothin' the matter with it yet, but some of these nights I'm gonna turn it into a sieve."

Certainly, Sam told himself again, Simmy was making some insane mistake. He said:

"Well, don't go making war on any women, Simmy."

"Women!" wheezed Simmy. "Who's talking about women? That boat belongs to Big Ed Case an' don't go tellin' me it don't."

Unmistakably Simmy had the tone of one who knew what he was talking about. Sam stared blankly and felt an odd, internal writhing, a kind of sickness reminiscent of his first half hour under a heavy German barrage before the attack in Belleau Wood. But once more he hoped there might be some mistake. He expostulated:

"But Miss Meredith—she came in that car, Simmy!"

Simmy gave vent to a series of ominous sounds. "Ah-huhh! Oh-ho-ho!" He jabbed Sam in the ribs with his elbow. "So that's why you're out here! After the dame! I might 'a' knew it. Listen," he continued, his voice changing its chortling, jesting tone to one of seriousness, "listen"—he tapped Sam's chest with a lean forefinger—"lay offen that dame, Sam old kid. She's Big Ed's girl."

That, however, was too much for Sam, even from a friend of other days. He knotted his fist and his gray eyes slanted angrily.

Simmy noted the danger signs but remained unperturbed.

"Keep your shirt on, Sam. I ain't sayin' nothin' against the Meredith dame. I don't know nothin' about her except Big Ed Case's her guardeen and she's been away somewheres for a couple years. But she don't horn in on his racket, not as——"

In a red swimming cap, red beach robe and rubber slippers, Grace Meredith stepped from a side door of the hotel, crossed the porch to the left and walked down toward the lake. Hushing Simmy into silence, Sam stood watching her.

His heart was pounding very slowly. The easily filtering smoke from his cigarette was puffed out in a gasp. With narrowed eyes he looked after her, deserving her careless, swinging walk with a touch of his old ecstasy. She seemed even more beautiful than he had remembered, but his joy in her was faint as a song echoing on the far side of a mountain, for he had to adjust himself to Simmy's troublesome words. Mechanically, he dropped his cigarette and ground out the butt with his heel. Something curious seemed to be happening

to him, but he was unaware of his own stony face.

Simmy eyed him speculatively. "What you need's a drink." His hand went back to his pocket flask.

"No, thanks," said Sam. "See you later." He swung quickly in the direction of the lake toward which Grace was walking with her customary air of blithe enjoyment. But something in the poise of her body could not be concealed. She knew she was being watched. She was walking, not unconsciously, but like a person who is pretending to be unconscious.

"Here, wait a minute." Simmy hurried after him and thrust out a printed card. "Gimme a ring."

Sam nodded and continued toward the lake. He found Grace standing by the water.

"Well"—she laughed a little unsteadily and with assumed surprise—"what in goodness' name brings you way out here?"

Sam stood before her, looking down into her wavering, gray eyes.

"You," he said soberly.

"But what——" She turned her head uneasily. "You were very persistent to follow me so far."

"I'm always persistent." He stared at her. This, he thought, was sheer idiocy. They had parted lovers and now they met only to engage in futile sparring. Blankly he stared into her upturned eyes. There was a tiny crinkle of laughter about her lips that might turn at any moment into a mocking smile. Sam felt in his pocket for a cigarette. "Look here," he said helplessly; "I thought you were going to call me up."

She marked in the sand with one pointed, rubber-clad toe. "Did I ever say I would?"

"Well," temporized Sam, "I assumed you would. Of course——"

"I see by the papers," the girl went on mischievously, "that Chicago has given you a warm welcome. What with the lovely Dottie Parmer and the fascinating Mrs. Dogriddle, I didn't suppose you'd have any time——"

"Grace!" muttered Sam. He was in agony. All the weeks of uncertainty, the worry, the empty speculations about his own future so bound to hers, and the final puzzle Simmy had given him to unravel—these things made him feel despair. Meanwhile she was laughing at him! "Why didn't you let me know where you were? I've been so anxious about——"

She looked at him silently. Her eyes were grave at last.

"I thought perhaps——" she began, but this time it was obviously difficult for her to continue. Instead, she held out her hand to Sam in a mute gesture that was at once appealing and caressing. Sam took her fingers and they sat down side by side on the sand, looking earnestly into each other's faces.

"Sam," she began again, a strained smile stiffening her lips, "I'm afraid it's not going to be possible for us to be friends."

Sam took this in silence and gazed down toward his brown hand which clasped hers so closely. He believed he could never let go of it again. Breathing heavily, he met her eyes once more. "Let's not discuss that at all," he said slowly. "It's nonsense. We are friends and we always will be. But tell me one thing——"

"Yes?" She averted her face.

"Are you married to this—that is, I mean to say, is Ed Case your husband?"

Grace turned quickly, unexpectedly smiling with relief. "Oh, no!" Her voice was almost gay. "You've found out about me, then? You know that we're—connected!"

"A little," Sam admitted slowly. "I was told you were his girl."

"I am," said Grace. She looked down at their clasped hands. "But not in the way you understood it. He's been like

a big brother to me ever since I was a little girl and my father died. Ed was only a boy himself then—but he was earning money and he took me to live with his sister. You met her—Mrs. McClusky!" Her eyes sought his pleadingly. "You see, Ed's really been wonderful to me!"

Sam caressed her wrist happily. "Then you're not in love with him," he said.

Grace's clear voice repudiated this instantly. "Oh, *no!*" she exclaimed. "There's never been anything like that between us."

"He's a sort of guardian, then?" said Sam.

"Well, not quite. You see, I've never had a cent. But my father took a great interest in Ed, and helped him in many ways when he was very poor. So you see I have no property for Ed to guard, or whatever a guardian does for an heiress. Besides, he's much too young." She drew her bright cape more closely around her shoulder and smiled into his eyes.

"Then everything's all right now," said Sam, breathing deeply. "I was worried. "I thought something—really serious—was keeping us apart."

She sobered and looked up at him from a lowered head.

"It's serious enough, Sam. You don't understand very well."

"Will Big Ed shoot me?" Sam inquired lightly.

Grace's lips parted in amusement.

"Hardly. He's not like that. Ed's really a dear. He doesn't want a thing in the world of me, except to see me happy. Only, you see, that puts me under a sort of obligation. I can't very well go out with people who make fun of him and talk of him as if he were some circus animal."

Sam's memory flashed back to the day on the boat when she had been so agitated. Just before she left them they had been talking about Ed Case!

"But, Grace," he objected, "if those very people who were talking about him that day knew him as you do, don't you see they wouldn't talk of him that way?"

A slow, hot color crept into Grace's cheeks, but she hid her feeling by pretending to pat a sand house which her hands had shaped.

"Sam, it's no use talking. If they knew him it would be worse. There's really no excuse for Ed Case's actions!" She raised her small, determined chin and looked at him squarely. "Perhaps I ought not to say this, Sam, even to you, but I've felt very badly about Ed's" —she hesitated—"business. And he *is* going to give it up. He's promised Helen definitely that he will. You see, some one's bound to get him sooner or later if he doesn't. Attempts are always being made on his life. Well"—she drew the sand slowly through her fingers—"of course, that has nothing to do with it. Sometimes I think it's the excitement, the importance, the publicity he loves. And really Sam, at heart he's so good. He's done everything for me. And I can't be too grateful. I was only a child when my father died—an especially petted and pampered one, too. If it hadn't been for Ed I can't imagine what would have become of me. He's been more than a brother—a second father. Don't you see?" She looked at him pleadingly.

After a silence Grace sat up and, with her arms circling her bare knees, looked out into the little lake that was slowly turning to lavender in the late-afternoon sunlight.

"It was years before we knew the truth about Ed. At first he was in the automobile business and very successful. Then he began selling trucks to beer runners. There was great profit in it. I can see how he was tempted."

"Why," interrupted Sam, remembering his conversation with Fritz over the paper that morning, "he's still president of the Speedway Motors Corporation."

"Yes," said Grace, "I know. He's in a dozen different enterprises. He has a coal business that supplies a great many public buildings, too. You know, until the papers began printing so many stories and calling him 'Big Ed,' the power behind the scenes in all this beer running, neither Helen nor I ever believed he had anything to do with that sort of thing—gangs and all that. Really, Sam"—she laughed uneasily, deprecating her own words—"you'd not be able to believe such a thing about him if you saw him at home. He's just a sort of a big baby. And he tries so hard to please Helen and me and brings us presents and things——" She stopped, as if aware that her words could carry no picture to Sam of Ed Case as she saw him.

"But, Grace," said Sam gently, "I can't see how all this affects you and me. He wouldn't object to your marrying me, would he?"

"I should think he'd be glad," Grace answered simply.

"Well," said Sam with brisk assurance, "then what's the objection? Don't you want to?"

Grace nodded, her profile turned toward him, the clear pink rising in her cheeks. She turned to him quickly, her eyes flooded with radiance. "Only, Sam," she said unsteadily, "I'm afraid it wouldn't be fair to you. You couldn't possibly keep it a secret—my connection with Ed. I couldn't even try, not after all he's done for me. And then you'd be stigmatized, too."

Sam laughed. "That's nonsense."

"Yes," agreed Grace after a pause. She breathed in deeply. "It's nonsense compared with—with being in love." There was a longer silence. Afterward she added: "I ought to have known you'd feel that way, Sam. Only I kept thinking how you'd hate to have Lady Glad, for instance, asking people to come in and meet the ward of the famous gang leader."

Sam laughed again. "We'll have to take our chances with those perils. It's no worse than my job."

The shadows were stretching farther over the lake and beach. They had sat there for nearly two hours. Now they noticed the beginning of summer twilight. Grace stood up.

"I must go in and dress now. You'll have dinner with me, won't you, and"—she hesitated, a question in her eyes—"Ed, too?"

"Of course," said Sam. "I'd like to meet him. "Why didn't you say before that you were dining with him?"

"He's coming out here. It must be nearly time now. I'll take my dip and run back into the hotel."

For an instant on the deserted beach Grace rested against him. His arms went round her and they kissed with a swift, fugitive happiness. Then she ran down to the diving board and made a straight, clean leap into the water.

CHAPTER IV.

STACCATO SHOTS.

WHEN Grace had gone in, Sam strolled along the gravel path and circled toward the lake over which the sun sent long, slow, gorgeous rays that lay almost horizontally upon the water. He had never felt happier. She would be gone for half an hour at most. He lit a cigarette and stood thoughtfully regarding the resplendent scene.

Presently he was aware of steps on the grass behind him. But he didn't turn. He was at the moment too incurious about the world and all it held. Instead, he continued his well-pleased contemplation of the descending sun.

The steps came nearer. "Sam!" It was the husky voice of Simmy Pope.

Sam beamed toward the lake. "Simmy, just look at the sunset. Simply marvelous, isn't it?"

"Yah!" jeered Simmy. "What the hell! Sunsets don't get you nowheres."

But Sam continued his blissful, meditative remarks. "Almost scarlet, that broad streak in the middle, Simmy. Remember it, Simmy. And the next time you hear some fake poet raving about the moon you just take him out and push his head into a sunset."

"Aw," muttered Simmy in disgust, "pipe down an' gimme your ear. I want to talk to you."

Sam eyed his companion in pained surprise. "Say, what's the matter with you! Isn't scenery good enough for you to talk about——"

Simmy interrupted. "Shut up, can't you? I been watchin' you and the dame. What I want to know is, did she say any thing about Big Ed?" His face was strained.

Sam considered thoughtfully. "I see what you mean. You were right, Simmy. He's her guardian. She told me all about it."

"What the hell!" The flat of Simmy's hand slashed slantwise through the air in front of him, his gesture of supreme disgust. "Who cares what that bozo is. What I ask you is, did that dame say he was out here or ain't he?"

Sam scowled a moment. Ought Simmy to be taught better manners or oughtn't he? That was the question. In favor of the negative was the fact that Simmy meant no disrespect toward Grace. And also that he was certainly anxious about some matter of his own.

"He's coming out," Sam answered. "In fact, I'm to have dinner with him and Miss Meredith."

Simmy shot a question: "Straight?"

Sam nodded, already thinking of when he would see Grace again. In ten, fifteen, twenty minutes at the most.

"Then," said Simmy with intense feeling, "I've got him!"

Sam woke up. For there was enough vindictiveness in Simmy's tone to rouse him from his delectable trance. "What's the matter with you, Simmy? What have you got against Ed Case?"

Simmy cursed softly but with complete mastery of his subject. "Who? Me? I ain't got nothin' against him. He's jist froze me outa Burgess County, that's all! Jist because he had the jack to do it."

Sam cocked an inquisitive eyebrow. "Well, let's have the story, Simmy. What's it all about?"

Simmy spat and drew down his black eyebrows. He looked at Sam steadily.

"Ain't I been tellin' you! He gypped us out of Burgess County—split up a bank roll the size of your leg, an' now he's got the sheriff an' judges an' all the rest of 'em eatin' out of his big mitt. He goes in there, peddles his beer an it's O. K. But when we try it—— Well" —Simmy's voice became bitterly hopeful—"it ain't over yet."

"You should have bribed them yourself," commented Sam.

Simmy eyed him scornfully "You sure give hot advice. You talk like we ain't handed 'em everything but our shirts."

Sam accepted the rebuke. "So now," he said, "you've got your beer and no place to sell it. That's too bad."

"Too bad for somebody. Too damned bad!" Simmy wheeled away. "Thanks, Sam. See you later." He walked quickly up the slope from the lake, the weight of a Colt automatic sagging down the pocket of his light, checked coat.

Watching the swaggering figure for a moment, Sam turned back toward the enshadowed water. It was nearly seven o'clock, but from the most optimistic view he could take of the matter it was unlikely that Grace would appear in the lobby for dinner before ten or fifteen minutes had passed.

He walked aimlessly, ending at the hotel after a tramp along the quiet shore. Crossing the darkened porch where a few people sat chatting, he had a momentary sense of overhanging misfortune. The afternoon had been too glorious for it to be otherwise now, he

thought with that sense of disaster in his marrow. Then back of him a large closed car swung around the driveway and stopped beside the steps. Crowded with silent men, the machine for an instant seemed to loom with a hidden threat. The door opened. A bulky young man with heavy shoulders went rapidly up into the hotel.

Curious, Sam moved one pace forward. The man brushed hurriedly past. "I wonder," thought Sam, "if that's not Big Ed Case." There was an air of authority about the departing back as there had been in the round face and massive jaw—a genial but definite strength.

The man went straight across the lobby and into the manager's office. Two minutes later he reappeared and stood waiting impatiently at the bottom of the stairs, a diamond-studded little finger flicking the ash from his half-smoked cigar. Presently Grace, fully dressed and wearing her hat and a summer coat, came down the second floor.

Before Sam could enter the door the man had taken Grace by the arm and was propelling her toward the porch. And Sam heard her saying:

"But what is it, Ed? I can't possibly go back to town now. You promised to have dinner out here. And besides, I've made an engagement for you."

Big Ed Case patted her reassuringly on the arm.

"Now, now," he said soothingly, "that's all right. I'll tell you all about that later. But just now I gotta hurry and gotta hurry bad. See?"

Still protesting, Grace was led by Big Ed toward the door. She saw Sam and held out her hand to him.

"But Ed, I want you to meet Mr. Lowell—you remember I told you about crossing over with him on the boat. We were to have had dinner together."

Big Ed looked at Sam. He held out a square, solid, exquisitely manicured hand. "The golf champ, huh!" Though he may have meant his words cordially, his round face and heavy chin were impassive and there was a measuring light in his small, dark eyes. "Glad to meet you." He was pushing Grace toward the door again, explaining: "We gotta beat it into town. Business. How about makin' this date for to-morrow?"

Sam didn't like Big Ed's proprietary gestures.

"I can see Miss Meredith home all right——" he began.

Big Ed turned his head confidentially.

"That'd be fine any other night, but I want to get Grace outa here right away. I'm not saying anything, but there's a lot of soreheads around here. Call you up to-morrow," he finished abruptly.

Sam hesitated, more than ever disliking Big Ed's manner. Still, Case must know what he was talking about; and with the possibility of endangering Grace it would be foolish to interfere. She was looking backward at him, her eyes pleading and sympathetic. "I'll call you up at Mr. Rudolph's to-morrow, Sam," she promised.

After that assurance Sam submitted. But, whatever his manner, he felt far from graceful about it. Standing on the porch and frowning he saw that the big car in which Case had arrived was gone and that the girl's guardian was leading her toward the gray machine. "Damn!" Sam muttered and left the porch. "Damn!" he repeated as he stalked over the damp grass toward the bar, where he found Percy straddling a chair and blowing the foam from a glass of beer.

Percy came to the doorway.

"Percy," said Sam, "you'd better get yourself some dinner——" He paused heavy heartedly and listened to the gray car, which moved so swiftly he barely saw its disappearing back, speed into the main road.

"Get yourself some dinner, Perce, and we'll go back to town——" he began again, but once more he was inter-

rupted. On the gravel outside somebody was running. He turned sharply. In the darkness the figure was reminiscent of Simmy Pope. And while he was thinking that Simmy had asked him if Big Ed were due at Wildhurst that evening, and that there had been a pistol in Simmy's pocket, he heard the noise of a car starting jerkily on the highway.

He should, he knew then, have warned Big Ed—for while it was not within Sam's province to interfere between Simmy and Big Ed, it was a different affair with Grace riding in the same car that carried the man whom Simmy had threatened.

"Sorry, Perce," Sam told the chauffeur shortly, "but it's eat in town or nowhere. Start that car up, will you?"

Urged by Sam's obvious agitation, Percy hurried. And in a soft dusk which drew the horizon close to the white road and flanking hedgerows, they traveled at forty, at fifty, at fifty-five miles an hour, the car gliding with a scarcely perceptible hum through the mellow path made by the great head lamps. His features stiffened by anxiety, Sam watched the road ahead. Big Ed and Grace, he thought, could not have gone very far; neither could Simmy have gained much of a start.

But though the machine continued at hurtling speed, Sam saw no gray car in front of him. The miles of the long road dwindled, straggling houses lying at the edges of the suburbs appeared, their lights glowing beneath half-lowered shades. By a large corner gas station Percy stepped on the brake and the machine rolled around into the main thoroughfare going east toward the city.

Sam sat thoughtful, beginning to doubt that any good would come of his swiftness after all, for he had sighted neither Simmy nor Big Ed. There had been a vengeful note in Simmy's voice, he had to admit, but he tried to calm his temper by telling himself that it didn't necessarily mean a shooting affray with Big Ed Case But it was not easy to convince himself that there was no danger to Grace.

Perhaps half an hour after the car turned east, a sharp flurry of sounds broke out of the gathering darkness ahead. Sam's lips stiffened with an old, familiar feeling. For that rapid crackling noise came from an automatic rifle, he was certain. Then, "What the——" he muttered irritably, for Percy was slowing down.

Percy explained:

"Some fight goin' on up ahead, Mr. Sam. It don't pay to get too close to all that shootin'."

Sam answered by reaching for the wheel and sliding the throttle halfway down. As the car leaped under the surprised Percy's hands Sam told him:

"That's a fine sentiment for any time but to-night. But just now I'm in a hurry."

A minute later the car had spurted over a mile of cement road and Percy had jammed on the emergency brake. About a hundred yards ahead Sam could see in the glare of the head lamps that a motionless automobile stood half on the pavement and half in the grass. And as he climbed out and ran forward he saw that the machine was the gray one in which he had seen Grace that afternoon Both rear tires were blown through and the left hind wheel was splintered by a shot. It had been abandoned.

Percy got out and stood beside him. He said cheerfully:

"Looks like somebody got bumped off, don't it, Mr. Sam?" He stopped to ejaculate: "Mr. Sam, ain't that the car we followed out to Wildhurst?"

Sam nodded. "It is. Come on"—two other motorists had stopped at the scene—"come on before we get in a traffic jam." They drove on, Sam scowling with anxiety for Grace. Now and again Percy's words repeated themselves in his brain, but each time he shut them

resolutely out. But the vividness of that gray car by the roadside and the remembrance of those staccato shots were harder to dispose of. But what had been the outcome? And where was Grace? He could feel the sweat dripping from his forehead, yet he shivered.

Some distance nearer the city another car had been drawn to the side of the road and beyond it a man, evidently the driver, was standing in the glare of its headlights. The figure was familiar and as Sam moved nearer he recognized Simmy Pope. His face cleared, for doubtless Simmy had been in the shooting affray and would know what had become of Grace. He called sharply: "Simmy!" Percy slowed down the car.

Simmy looked quickly into the darkness, then waved his hand and climbed inside before the car had stopped. He was breathing excitedly. "Glad to see you, Sam. Guess I got my bus shot up."

"What happened, Simmy?" Sam demanded. The car picked up speed again.

Simmy's dark eyes shone feverishly.

"Sam, if you'd've only give me the dope a couple o' minutes sooner, we'd've had that bozo cold."

Percy goggled with wonder and bottled curiosity. Sam spoke his surmise, "They got away, then?" and tried to keep his voice level as he asked: "What about Miss Meredith?"

"The dame? Hell, I wasn't lookin' for no dame." Simmy's tone was full of trouble for his plan had miscarried. "Big Ed beat us to it. He's a smart boy, Ed is. But if he hadn't changed from the big car to that gray touring out at Wildhurst, we'd've got him, 'cause it was the big car that my gang jumped an' I got there too late to tip 'em that he was in the gray touring. Sam, if you'd only——"

"Shut up!" said Sam savagely. "I want to know why Miss Meredith's car was left by the road and where the people are that were in it."

Simmy shrugged. "You got *me*, Sam. I don't know. I didn't catch up with the gray touring till it was right up next to Big Ed's other one. I plugged a couple tires, but I didn't see nobody till I come up alongside the big car. And boy, did they let off their artillery as I eased past!"

Sam's scowl deepened again. Simmy told him that both of Big Ed's cars had been halted on the road, that the racketeer had escaped, and that Simmy had gone through a shower of bullets, which doubtless accounted for his disabled machine. But that news was of little interest to Sam then.

His nose fairly twitching with curiosity, Percy asked as he guided the car through the gathering traffic: "Excuse me if I'm speakin' outa my turn, but didn't nobody git bumped off?"

Simmy eyed Percy sharply, then grinned coolly in the darkness.

"We give 'em a few casualties," he admitted, "but it wasn't like bumpin' off Big Ed himself. Say, better look out, buddy! That looks like Case's bus up ahead."

Soberly Percy slowed. As they stopped at the next red light they were flanked on either side by evening autoists in shirt sleeves and straw hats. Simmy, in the back seat, leaning forward and talking to Sam, broke off and glared at a large, inclosed machine that had stopped a little ahead and to the right of them.

"There!" Simmy jerked his thumb, cutiously lowered his head and said: "That's Big Ed an' his bunch of gorillas now."

"Where?" Sam turned quickly, hoping to catch a glimpse of Grace.

"If they ain't wild," said Simmy as Sam turned, "to see me sittin' pretty here!" But Simmy had been seen in Sam's car. A window of the sedan was sliding rapidly down.

But it was not at Simmy that Big Ed Case was directing his angry gaze. Sam stiffened with surprise under the look which Big Ed concentrated on him.

"Yeah, you golf champ, I'll get you!" Ed Case bawled, and shot his car forward as the light went green.

Sam stared after the car, astounded at the venom in Big Ed's voice.

"Step on it, buddy," Simmy advised from the back seat; then added apologetically to Sam: "I didn't figure to get you in on this, Sam. If I'd've thought we'd catch up with Case I'd've walked in on my dogs."

Sam laughed mirthlessly. He was still flushed under the remembrance of Big Ed's words. Coming from a man whom he had met but once, a man with whose ward he was in love, it was amazing. It *was* a little embarrassing that he had picked up Simmy.

"Ho!" Simmy was saying. "If you think it's all right, you don't know that bozo." He leaned forward and tapped Percy on the back. "Lemme out at that garage up there, will you, buddy? I'll get 'em to tow my car in." He dropped off quickly, before Percy had quite stopped. "Gimme a ring, Sam," he called in farewell.

CHAPTER V.

BIG ED IN ACTION.

HAD Sam Lowell known that Grace had not gone back to town with Big Ed in the gray car he would have been spared much anxiety. For Case, hurrying her away from Sam at the door of Wildhurst, propelled her toward a small sedan belonging to the ostensible owner of the resort.

"Soreno'll be here in a minute," Ed explained. "He'll drive you over and you can get the electric back home. There's a train in twenty minutes. And go straight to the apartment, kiddo, no foolin'."

Grace stopped, half angry. "If I'd known that, I'd have stayed with Sam," she protested. "I'm going back——"

But Big Ed pushed her resolutely into the smaller car.

"Sam?" he asked her banteringly. "Where do you get that 'Sam' stuff? You cuckoo over that golf baby?" He looked at her closely, showing a shade of uneasiness. "Not crazy about *him*, are you, Grace?"

"Perhaps." Grace smiled happily and dropped her hand lovingly on Ed's massive shoulder. "Ed, he's asked me to marry him," she whispered joyously.

Big Ed's round face went blank as a dinner plate. He stared like a hurt two-year old. Then he smiled crookedly. "Kiddin' me?" he questioned pleadingly.

Grace laughed. She shook her head. Big Ed's expression puzzled her, but she continued frankly: "No, really, Ed. We arranged it all this afternoon."

She stopped, astonished to see his jaw drop, then slide forward ominously. He straightened, closing the door with a snap.

"Here's Soreno," he said abruptly. "He'll drive you back to town. So long." He turned on his heel. At once the little sedan turned out of the driveway and Ed Case ran for the gray touring car.

He was sore and full of hurt at Grace's unexpected news. The engine turned on, he started the car quickly and in a moment was spearing through the growing shadows, his small eyes focused on the flat, wide road ahead. He cursed, for his thoughts had always been that he would marry Grace some day when she grew old enough. And now somebody else had stepped in. He had waited too long. Or had he? His jaw set and his foot trod heavily on the accelerator.

A long car shot past him. Absently he lifted one hand in greeting, not looking up from the white half circle of light that his head lamps made on the cement. He knew it was the closed

machine in which he had driven to Wildhurst from Burgess County. Empty of himself and his immediate henchmen, it was now full of professional gunmen, ready to meet the attack of his infuriated enemies which they had threatened that afternoon. Big Ed hunched lower in his seat, watching the red, winking tail light of the car disappear.

Well, Big Ed told himself forlornly, Grace had no use for him any more. This fellow, this Sam Lowell, was one of her own kind. Not that he would ever treat her as well as Big Ed would treat her. As a matter of fact—and at this point in his bitter reflection Ed's backbone straightened with a sudden hope—this Sam Lowell probably had no intention of marrying Grace. Grimly he thought of three women who thought themselves practically engaged to Ed Case—but wait till they saw where they got off at. Women were soft; they'd fall for anything. But let Sam Lowell try any of that stuff on Grace!

Gradually Big Ed was working himself into a rage with the help of his imagination. Flushed and angry, he sounded a mourning note on his horn and in a burst of speed passed a merrily racing roadster. It was not very likely that a swell fellow like Sam Lowell would be so crazy about Grace as to offer to marry her this soon. Talking of marriage right away! Probably Grace had misunderstood him. To Sam Lowell, what could Ed's ward be? Fun for a summer maybe, but that was all. Big Ed cursed again and made a painful attempt to imitate Sam's speech: "Ah'll see Miss Mewedith home," he viciously mimicked aloud. "Yeah," he went on in his own voice, "he's a golf champ. What that guy needs is to be made into a golf ball!"

Ahead and to his left was a gas station with a curved driveway before it. It lay in enemy territory, marked off by crossroads, high over which swung a red traffic light. Slackening speed, Ed saw that his car of gunmen had stopped. But as the signal showed green they rode on into the danger area.

In front of the gas station by the crossroads stood a heavy touring car, top down and side curtains raised. It might have been a lazy motorist replenishing his supply of fuel, but Big Ed watched it tensely. He did not like the look of those curtains on that balmy evening.

As Ed's load of gunmen went over the crossing with increasing speed, the waiting machine with the side curtains swung swiftly out of the curved driveway and followed. Ed was alert. Driving close, he watched both cars with care. He saw the unknown car swing out to the side as if to pass. A rapid spattering of bullets clicked in the stillness of the evening. Big Ed's gunmen wavered toward the ditch. Their assailant spurted out of sight. Racing up behind his men, Big Ed jerked the emergency brake and stopped a few feet from their rear bumper. He kicked open the car door.

Unprepared for the attack from the rear which the enraged Simmy now made upon the gray car, Big Ed nevertheless remained unharmed as the clip of Simmy's automatic emptied into his machine. As Simmy flew forward and beyond them, Big Ed jumped in beside his gunmen in pursuit, coming upon Simmy's abandoned motor half a mile down the road. For Simmy had taken to the neighboring woods.

When such brief battles happened on the highway they were seldom heard about unless taken part in by the police, which was seldom. Considering the incident closed, Big Ed took the wheel and drove his gunmen toward town. His casualties were not serious and his thoughts, as he drove out of the hostile district into an outlying suburb, were soon with Grace Meredith.

In the front seat beside him a gangster interrupted Case's reflections with:

"Somebody sure must 'a' tipped off Simmy, Ed."

"That guy ain't got long to live," Big Ed grumbled dourly.

In the back of the car a man who was holding his shoulder and moaning softly, leaned fiercely forward:

"Yeah, I know who done the tippin' off—a tall guy that was standin' by the door watchin' you when you come in from Burgess. I seen him down on the beach talkin' to some bozo an' I figured then it looked like Simmy Pope."

Big Ed made a disgusted backward gesture. "Shut that guy up. He's been seein' things. I know the fellow he means an' he ain't got nothin' to do with it."

"All right." The man with the wounded shoulder lapsed into aggrieved silence. "Only I'm tellin' you, that's all."

Big Ed drove on, scarcely heeding the wrangling that had begun in the rear of the car. One of his henchmen was asking the wounded man why in hell, if he had seen the enemy gunman, he hadn't bumped Simmy Pope off? Ed held the wheel and tried to shut out the sound of the voices, for it was unlikely that Sam Lowell would have any connection with Simmy Pope. Ed only wished that such a relation were more probable, because deep in his heart he knew that if Sam really wanted to marry Grace it was more fitting that he should than that Ed Case should have her. But Sam didn't really want Grace for a wife; Ed convinced himself of that fact. The golfer was just amusing himself with her. Grunting disgustedly to the man beside him, he drove doggedly on.

At a red light's traffic warning nearer town he slowed down and sat absorbed, not noticing the near-by machine with Sam and Simmy in it. But excitement from the back seat ran high.

"Yeah, what'd I tell you? There's that bozo now, with Simmy again, just like he was when he tipped him off."

"Lookit! Simmy Pope! Lookit, Ed!"

Ed Case glanced out. There was Sam Lowell sitting in the car beside the chauffeur. And Simmy Pope was leaning forward from the back seat, talking confidentially. Rage swept Ed Case. The double-crosser! Pretending to come after Grace! Being in with Simmy Pope's gang! He opened the window beside him and bawled his challenge at Sam's unsuspecting profile.

That made him happier, happier than he had been since Grace had told him she was in love with Lowell. Speeding on toward town, his mind was intent on ways by which he could carry out his threat.

At the edge of the city limits Ed stopped his car in front of a corner drug store. Here his men got out. The casualty with the wounded shoulder went behind the prescription counter where a druggist skilled in first aid took care of him. Big Ed stepped heavily to a corner and took up a telephone which was always reserved for him there at that hour. A silent partner in the store, he gave his far-reaching protection to the alcohol it sold as gin. He gave a number and stood thoughtfully tapping the glass casing of the booth while the operator connected him with the wire in the office of Captain North of the police force.

"Hello, cap? This's Ed Case. Say, cap, ever hear of a golf champ called Sam Lowell?" he began impatiently.

"Sure, I heard of him," answered the police officer from the other end.

"Livin' down in your district, ain't he?" pursued Big Ed.

"Yes? I didn't know about *that*."

"Sure he is. Must be. He'd flyin' around with all them Gold Coast families. Cap, I thought you might've took him home drunk some night or something?" he waited hopefully.

"No," Captain North laughed. "No such luck, Ed." He made rather a spe-

cialty of taking home the wabbly sons of the rich, knowing that if he ever got into trouble with his department officials he was always personally popular in his district. "I've got nothing on Sam Lowell, if that's what you're looking for."

Big Ed was silent a moment. "That's bad," he said at last. "Not so good, cap. Say"—he had another thought—"you got a plain-clothes dick around with a tux? You know what I mean, society stuff?"

"Oh, yes." In that matter Captain North could oblige Big Ed. "Swartz and Murray. They're around here now; just got in from guarding a bunch of wedding presents on the Gold Coast. Maybe they'd know something about Lowell. I ask 'em?"

"No, I ain't got time. But listen. If they don't know nothin', tell 'em to find out somethin'—see? Specially on the woman angle. An' say, I want that guy's address, too."

"I'll do that." Captain North's affirmative was pleasantly spoken, for now he would probably be able to let his wife have that new electric sewing machine which she had been pestering him about.

"O. K." Then Ed instructed: "Call me at Burley 3333 in half an hour." He jiggled the receiver and called another number. This time there was no affable exchange of greeting. Big Ed did all the talking:

"That you, Al! . . . Swell. Got a little job for you to-night. You and your brother go down to Clark and Chicago. Call me up at the Burley number in thirty-five minutes. Got it? . . . You'll have to work fast, kid."

He hung up, lighted a cigarette and walked briskly through the drug store to the curb. The car with the gunmen had gone away, but another machine was standing there waiting for him. In the back seat sat a swarthy man with a heavy jaw and beady eyes—"Silent Pete," whose evening's business had just begun, for it was his regular job to pick up the car at the drug store each night and remain in it until it had been finally driven into Big Ed's private garage. Without a word, with scarcely even a look, Ed Case climbed in and took the wheel.

Case drove directly to the Airway, which was in the western suburbs and was the biggest of his roadhouses. Set a little back from the highway, it was surrounded by a high board fence that was distant enough from the building to allow the parking of pleasure cars in front and beer trucks in rear. The aspect of the place was ultrarespectable, with a smug and slightly gloomy grandeur.

Parking at the side, Ed Case entered through the main door. The numerous well-filled tables were dim, for at the moment the only light came from a strong, blue blaze surrounding a refined young woman who was singing a song about her mother. Tears were spilling into the beer at many a table. Big Ed paused for a moment, a sentimental tug at his heart.

"When I left her how I cried!
And my dear old mammy sighed——"

Ed's breast was flooded with a warm, sweet rush of emotion. That was the stuff. Home and mother. That was the way life ought to be. Without a maternal parent since his early childhood, Big Ed yet could dimly picture a white-haired Grace Meredith in years to come tottering into a golden sunset beside his own aged and stooping figure.

The singer ended and the lights flashed on. Around the tables in party groups sat a generous number of racketeers and their families, the crowd filled out by sight-seers of suburban high life. All were resplendently dressed, some of the men in dinner clothes, others in striking tweeds and business suits, while most of the women were plump housewives with an air of strident respecta-

bility that was not to be downed by rouge or even bare arms. There was about the Airway an aura of indomitable stodginess not unlike that about a German beer garden.

Whispers excitedly followed Ed Case's entrance:

"There goes Big Ed!"

"Where? Which one?"

"Over there, goin' past the guy in gray. That's Judge Daniels he's bowin' to. Look!"

"Yeah? Who's that woman wavin' at him?"

"The fat one? Say, that's Bess Stolp —his girl. Big Ed's girl. Don't you know I pointed her out to you last Friday at the ball game?"

Smiling, conscious of his authority among the crowd, Big Ed went on toward the manager's office. But at a table for two near the door he was stopped by a large, blond woman whose big, gray eyes rolled upward from beneath her turban. She laid a plump hand on his arm and commanded:

"Not so fast, you big bum! Wait a minute."

Big Ed paused unwillingly. "Hello, Bess," he said in a grudging manner, and would have passed on except that something in her proprietary air forbade him. He hesitated.

"Sit down—there's an empty chair." Bess pointed with an inviting smile. "Mr. Case, I want you to meet Mr. Lambert, a distinguished journalist friend of mine, who is showing me a hell of a time this eve."

Mr. Lambert arose and gravely shook hands with Mr. Case. During the ceremony there hovered about them a weighty air of formality to which, even in his hurry, the racketeer paid court. This was social life, this meeting, and Big Ed remembered that he was a gentleman. "Pleased, I'm sure," he said elegantly. But he refused to draw up an extra chair and sit down. Freeing himself from Bess as soon as he could, he went into his office where he gave an order for a special brand of his own private whisky to be sent at once to Mr. Lambert and Miss Stolp. This done, he turned immediately to business.

His manager, "Shorty" McGee, came in and Ed began to go through the files of his expenditures. Shorty was the ostensible owner of the Airway; but even the local chief of police, who was at that moment in the dining room with his wife, knew the place was the property of Big Ed Case.

"Hello, Shorty, how's business?" Ed greeted him.

"It ain't so bad." A smile of particular friendliness creased Shorty's square, ugly face. He was a stocky, bullet-headed man with close-cropped, sandy hair. Having come up from newsboy through the ranks of prize fighter and beer runner to his present position of eminence through sheer virtue, Shorty prided himself on the fact that he neither smoked nor drank. "I hear you cleaned up Burgess County this afternoon," he went on in his heavy voice.

Big Ed grinned. "If there's any trouble out there all the officials in the county'll go under indictment for participation in beer distribution," he volunteered.

"How about the picnic, Ed, out at Downer's Grove?" asked Shorty in a businesslike tone.

"Oh, I guess you can take about three hundred tickets. That ought to be enough to satisfy that gang. Say, get Mike Murphy on the phone an' tell him they're gonna pull a raid on his place about eleven o'clock and to have a case of near beer ready for 'em to analyze."

"Sure," said Shorty. "How about them soreheads out in Burgess County?"

Big Ed laughed. Ain't nothin' to worry about. They tried to put me on the spot a while ago to-night, the dumbbells! Well, I don't need to fret about them carrot-heads."

The phone rang. Big Ed answered.

Shorty, not daring to listen to the conversation except at Big Ed's orders, withdrew at once.

Captain North was at the other end of the line.

"Well," asked Big Ed, "did you get any dope on that bird?"

"Sure," said Captain North. "He lives with Frederick Rudolph—guess you know who *he* is. Lives in a place he had made for himself up on top of the Rudolph Tower."

"Yeah?" said Big Ed in some excitement. "That's swell, cap. And now, what about the dames he runs with?"

"Not much on that," answered Captain North. "Knows a swell English woman named Lady Gladys Butterfield pretty well. She come up to Rudolph's apartment one afternoon last week, but she's the only one I could get a line on at all. We got that out of the elevator boy."

Big Ed whistled. "Lady Gladys Butterfield, eh? That's pretty good, cap. I'll have to remember you in my will." Big Ed smiled and hung up the receiver. If Sam Lowell was interested in a person of the importance of Lady Gladys Butterfield, there was not much chance that he would be serious about Grace Meredith. That is what Big Ed told himself. But he was far from believing it to be the truth. For he felt in his heart that Grace was too valuable for any man not to desire her. But now, he decided, Sam Lowell needed a lesson. He would teach these high-flying boys to come around butting in on his, Ed Case's, private affairs!

Watching the clock, he fumed, eager for Al, the slugger, whom he had sent into the district near Sam to telephone for instructions.

Promptly at the minute Ed had named the phone rang, for his large staff of workmen were well trained in dispatch. "Al?" Again Big Ed did most of the talking. "Get this: the bird you're after is named Sam Lowell—see? He lives up on top of the Rudolph Tower in a flat that belongs to a guy named Frederick Rudolph. Got that?"

There was indication from the other end of the wire that Al had got it.

"O. K.," Big Ed went on. "This bird's comin' in there to-night. Shoot over as fast as you can with Jake—see? Get a description of him outa somebody in the building—one of them elevator lads'll do. Then when you see him sock him good—see? I don't like him. . . . Naw, don't use a gat. He ain't worth it. Just scare the hell out of him an' make him cry for mamma. Be enough to break his jaw. Hurry, now," his parting instructions were; "y'ain't got much time."

Big Ed pushed the telephone to one side of the desk and looked at his watch thoughtfully. It was just about forty minutes since he had seen Sam at the crossroads. He estimated it would take about an hour for Sam to get from there through the Loop to the Rudolph Tower. Thus his two bruisers would have from ten to twenty minutes' time for preparation. Already he congratulated himself on his quick, neat plan; then began wondering whether Grace had got home yet. No, she wouldn't have had time. In another half an hour, perhaps. He would call her up to make sure. Then he turned determinedly back to the pile of bills of the Airway which lay before him on the desk.

CHAPTER VI.

"TRYIN' TO DOUBLE-CROSS ME!"

BUT Big Ed found it impossible to give those bills his strict attention. Grace and Sam Lowell! He felt depressed at the coupling of the two names. Grace, however, would soon get over it, he told himself. For one thing, his attitude toward her would be different henceforth. Why, he had never given her a chance to think of him as a lover! Not even a chance. Still, he

thought ruefully, Grace might have guessed——

Ed Case's pink, enameled nails drummed impatiently against his desk. Half an hour passed. He took up the telephone and called his home.

"Hello," he said. "Mrs. McClusky, please. I suppose Miss Meredith's not in yet? All right, tell Mrs. McClusky I want to speak to her."

Unconsciously a slight solace descended on his spirit as he waited for the maid to call his sister. Helen McClusky was devoted to him and sure to sympathize. "Say, Helen," he began abruptly, "was there anything to this Sam Lowell business on the boat when you and Grace came back? I mean, did Grace seem like she took him serious?"

His sister, at the other end of the wire, was silent for a moment.

"I don't know, Ed. Sometimes I thought one way and sometimes I——"

"Well," broke in Ed wrathfully, "you should've told me before. Now she comes out with this stuff about bein' engaged. You knew about that, too, did you?"

Once more Helen McClusky was silent, but this time from wonder and surprise.

"Why, he's a real society fellow, Ed. Went right around with English ladies and everybody."

"Yeah?" Ed was not so awe-struck. "Buzzed around the girls a lot, huh? Well, I guess that's about the size of it. When Grace gets in give her an earful and tell her not to go losin' any sleep over that big bozo. Tell her she'll prob'ly never see him again. Tell her to be sure she's got the ring before she goes talkin' to anybody else about it. See what I mean?"

"Yes," said Mrs. McClusky slowly, "I see what you mean. And I guess you're right, Ed. It's not very likely that a fellow like that Sam Lowell would be after Grace."

"That's the stuff, Helen," her brother warmly approved, "and you can't put it to her too strong."

Again he turned determinedly to his accounts. But still he was dissatisfied. Grace was to be warned against her lover, Lowell was to be knocked out by two hired sluggers, but Ed's restless nature craved more action regarding the affair. Ruminating for some time, he rose at last, took up his hat and opened the door into the dining room. There, two funny country boys, one of them with scarlet hair and patched overalls, the other in a straw hat and leather boots, were telling the assembly stories about what it was like on the farm. This was Shorty McGee's favorite act of the week, because it was so clean.

Big Ed, smiling at the performers, joined Bess Stolp and her friend Ted Lambert, the newspaper reporter. Bess was leaning over the table, telling a joke as Big Ed lounged slowly up to the table. "Mind if I sit down?" he asked with his accustomed manner of excessive geniality.

"You big bum," said Bess invitingly. She smiled up at him, dangling her glittering earrings. Ed sat down, absently marking the small smudges of white powder on her black hat.

"I see you got my card," he said, looking at the whisky in their glasses. The bottle was under the table. "Pretty good stuff, eh?" he remarked as he settled himself and began to feel for a cigarette.

Behind Bess Stolp's bantering smile there was something hard and anxious.

"I haven't seen you so much lately, Ed," she complained. "Where have you been hanging out all these long summer evenings?"

Big Ed lifted his hand to his forehead and gestured slightly downward.

"Business," he explained. "It's been terrible. No time for anything," Big Ed ended, then added with specious warmth. "Sure lookin' fine, Bess."

Ted Lambert put in timidly:

"Well, Mr. Case, you don't seem to be wearing any horns to-night." He was a slender youth with a lean, bird-like face. As he spoke he thrust his head outward and pivoted it knowingly as if he hoped thus to lend himself an easy manner.

"Horns?" asked Big Ed, smiling. "I'm not so bad as that. What paper you with, Lambert?" He felt in his pocket with an air of importance and drew out three long, brown cigars. "Have a smoke," he offered parenthetically.

"No, thanks. I stick to cigarettes," Lambert explained. "Why, I happen to be with that wonderful sheet known as the *Times-World*. Ever heard of it?"

"I seem to have," said Big Ed. "By the way, what's your address?"

Lambert told him. "Only I hope you're not thinking of having me bumped off to-night."

Big Ed chuckled. "That's good! Havin' you bumped off. So that's what you newspaper boys think of me! No, I kind of figured I might have a case of that Scotch delivered there to-morrow."

"Oh, say!" protested Lambert delightedly as visions of the most wonderful party of his life floated before his eyes. "I can't afford even a bottle."

"Forget about that, you poor cheese," Bess Stolp advised him. "I guess Ed won't ask you to pay for it. I told you what kind of a guy he was, didn't I?"

Big Ed leaned over the table and clasped his fists above the cloth.

"Say, Lambert," he inquired casually, "you got anything to do with the bird that writes the society stuff for your paper?"

Lambert, flushed with elation at the racketeer's flattering friendliness, said with a cocky air:

"Daisy? Do I know Daisy, poor old soul? I'll say I know her."

"Yeah?" Big Ed watched him closely. "Is she the one that writes up the fancy weddings and all that stuff? Well, listen. D'you suppose I could get her to put something in for me?"

Lambert hesitated. He had no notion of what Big Ed was driving at, but he had a vagrant suspicion that Case was planning some social flight of his own—in which event Daisy, the poor old soul, would not allow the publication of even a solitary line.

"I might," he answered cautiously.

"Well," said Big Ed, still with his air of casualness, "you can take it or leave it, but here's the dope. You've heard about that golf bird, Sam Lowell?"

Ted Lambert nodded, a little mystified.

Ed went on: "He's livin' with that Ritzy boy—what's his name now?—Frederick Rudolph, yeah."

Ted Lambert immediately became cordial.

"Oh, sure, anything about those two the Marchioness'll eat up and ask for more."

"The Marchioness?" queried Big Ed. "Who's she?"

"Daisy, the society editor. She used to be the managing editor's secretary and now she's gone up in the world and uses 'the Marchioness' as a by-line for her society scandal."

"Classy title," said Ed admiringly. "Sounds kinda high class an' foreign." He paused. "Well, as I was sayin', here's the dope: this Sam Lowell's engaged to a swell dame here in town, and I want you to have that society editor announce it in to-morrow's paper. Can you fix that up?"

Lambert looked at his watch. "I might. Who's the girl?"

Big Ed was nonplused for a moment. In the rush of the evening's many interesting events he had forgotten the name which Captain North had given over the telephone. It was some well-known name—but what? He rubbed his glossily manicured hand thoughtfully across his closely shaved upper lip.

He puffed his lips out and drew them in slowly.

"Lemme see, it was Lady Something-or-other—Lady Clementine? No, that ain't it, but it's something fancy."

Excitedly Lambert tapped the end of his cigarette and lighted it, his eyes resting brightly on Big Ed. This was rounding into a story.

"Why don't you find out her name and let me have it to-morrow?" he suggested.

Big Ed heard the other sulkily. "Naw. What the hell difference does it make who the girl is so long as she's got a big name? Ain't there some way you can work it into to-morrow's paper anyway?"

Bess Stolp, who had been strangely and unusually silent, gulped down her drink and, leaning forward on her plump, bare elbow, said with slightly narrowed eyes:

"What's the big idea, Ed? What's so important about it?"

Ed patted her smooth forearm paternally.

"Never mind, cutie. I gotta settle this now. Can't you think of anything, Lambert?"

Lambert took a long sip of his amber-colored high ball.

"Well," he said slowly, "the Marchioness runs a daily column of gossip —little notes about who is seen and where and why—that sort of stuff. If you're sure you couldn't find out the name of the girl to-night, she could sort of hint at it in her column in the morning paper and bring out the actual announcement later."

Big Ed tilted backward in his chair and looked thoughtful. He didn't want to make a mistake at the very outset. It would be easy to call up Captain North and find out the name he had been given; but on the other hand that girl's people were influential and they might demand a retraction in the papers, which would nullify all profit to Big Ed. And so it seemed to him that, if there *was* a way of having the piece of gossip published without the girl's name, it would be better for the present. Later, when he had found out more about Sam Lowell, he would know better what to do.

"What kind of stuff could she put in the paper without usin' the girl's name?" Ed asked.

Bess interrupted. "Why not use my name, Ted?"

"Pipe down," said Ed with gruff good humor.

Ted Lambert laughed.

"Oh, she often has vague announcements of engagements in her column when she's sure nobody can make a kick about it. Tell you what: I'll just get her on the phone and ask her what she can do with it. A straight tip now, no kidding," Ted Lambert appealed to his informant. "This Sam Lowell, the golf champion, is going to marry somebody with a title? But you don't know the title. Is that true?"

"Sure." Big Ed's small eyes were coolly honest. "That's straight. At least, her name's Lady Something-or-other—that's as near as I can come to it."

Ted Lambert rose. "Well, we'll see what we can do." He walked unsteadily from the table, guided poorly by the effects of a pint of Scotch.

As soon as Ted Lambert was gone Bess Stolp clutched Ed Case convulsively by the sleeve.

"Listen, Ed," she said, slowly edging her big, rouged cheek close to his, "tell me what goes on."

Ed Case drew a deep breath and turned until his dark, little eyes were staring straight down into the woman's beside him. But what he saw revealed there made him lower his brows in an unexpected frown. It deepened into an angry scowl. A few inches distant Bess' own eyes, liquid and hot with rage, glared back at him. Her expression

unnerved him for the moment, but he muttered unpleasantly:

"Yeah—little wild cat, hey?"

Below the firm column of her neck, Bess Stolp's bosom was heaving volcanically. "Grace Meredith!" she shot out the name accusingly. "Tryin' to double-cross me—that it?"

Big Ed was startled. His eyes wavered. For an instant his bullying manner was gone.

"Say," he said, with no conviction in his tones, "what do you mean? How do you get that way?"

"Oh, I know. I know, all right." Bess leaned back and fumbled for a cigarette with trembling fingers. The match sputtered angrily in Big Ed's hand as he prepared the light for her. Bending forward to the tiny flame, Bess continued more calmly: "I found out not ten minutes ago. That Lowell is trying to cop off Grace and you decided all of a sudden that you wanted her yourself." She shrugged her large shoulders, looking at him with bitter amusement. "Aren't you a little late in the day?"

Amazed at the girl's knowledge, the emotion uppermost in Ed Case was sullen rage. Slowly a deep red mounted to his throbbing temples. Averting his face from her he opened a corner of his mouth and emitted jerkily: "You got spies on me!" He stared back into her eyes, bull-like in his belligerence. "Workin' in with Simmy Pope and his flashy outfit——"

Disgustedly Bess shifted her bulk from one side of the chair to the other. The bright sequins danced on her dress. She put one hand on her hip.

"Yeah? You *would* think that!" Inhaling slowly, she laid her cigarette on the thick, ugly ash trap. "Spies!" She laughed scornfully.

Big Ed relaxed a little. "Then where'd you get all this so-called dope?"

"Oh, sure, I'll tell," said Bess quickly. "Just ask me! And to-morrow somebody'll find that guy's body lyin' up an alley. You know what I think of you?" went on Bess, lifting her head impressively. "I think"—she paused—"I think you're a big dumb-bell!"

Big Ed sighed impatiently. "Oh, come out of it, Bess. I don't care who your friend is that gave you all that bunk. Next time you meet him give him a kiss and tell him if I ever find out his name I'll crack his skull—see? Soothe him like a mother and tell him I said he was a liar. You ought to have more sense than to believe anybody that says I'm gonna double-cross you."

Bess Stolp's eyes gleamed. There were tears which she quickly wiped away with her tiny handkerchief. Breathing emotionally, she closed her eyes for a second, then looked at Ed who was smiling. "You big bum," she said unsteadily.

Big Ed patted her gently on her smooth, enormous arm.

"You ought to know me by this time, Bess," he said softly.

Bess smiled. "All right, Ed." She had become meek. Nevertheless, she knew it was not all right. She knew from his manner that Ed was attempting to deceive her. But that he could seriously want to marry a young girl like Grace Meredith, a girl of so different a sort from himself, was difficult to believe. She opened her silver powder case and dabbed a soft puff at her rather handsome nose. Traces of tears were all gone from her eyes. She knew that Big Ed was planning to doubt-cross her, but since he hadn't the courage to tell her so, she didn't think he would succeed.

Ted Lambert came walking back from the telephone booth, his earnest, concentrated gaze on the floor ahead of him, like a man balancing on a tight rope. He did not stagger; he proceeded with a more upright carriage than was natural to him, straight past the table. "Here," said Big Ed, pulling him by

the coat tail. "What happened?" He looked at Bess in some alarm. "D'you think he was too plastered to get that message through?"

"No, that boy can stand more liquor than your whole gang put together. Only he goes blind sometimes. What happened, Ted?"

"It's all right," said Ted. "It'll be in the paper in the morning." He sat down abruptly.

CHAPTER VII.

SLUGGED!

SAM LOWELL was an ardent believer in action. Driving with Percy into town that night after leaving Simmy Pope, he said:

"Perce, you can drop me at the first drug store and go on home. I've got to make some phone calls."

Steering through the traffic of Madison Street, Percy's large features sagged unhappily. "I will if you say so, Mr. Sam. But I ain't anxious to go home. I kinda thought——" He paused and looked ashamed of himself.

Sam eyed him sharply. "Out with it! What did you think? We've had too many mysteries already to-night."

Percy nodded. "Sure, Mr. Sam. That's why I'd kinda like to stick around till maybe you hear what's happened."

Sam grinned. "Perce, you've certainly a sympathetic nature. That's fine. Only stop at the first restaurant instead of at the first drug store."

The driver's rugged countenance assumed its normal serenity. "There's a good little one right around Wells." Percy swung around the corner and stopped at the curb.

"Order for both of us," Sam said recklessly, and crossed to the telephone booth at the rear of the restaurant. Picking up the huge directory, he began searching for the name of Ed Case. There were, he found, many representatives of that family listed in the thick book. And among them were two Edwins and three Edwards. He got five nickels from the cashier's desk and stepped into the booth. The first coin plinked. A woman's voice answered.

"Mr. Ed Case, please," Sam spoke into the transmitter.

"This is Mrs. Case speaking. Mr. Case is out of town."

"Sorry," said Sam. If there was a Mrs. Case it was the wrong number.

He tried again, the second Edwin.

"Can you tell me," he asked the masculine voice that answered, "whether Miss Meredith has got in yet?"

"Nobody here by that name. Must have the wrong Edwin Case," the man replied civilly.

Sam hung up and tried again. This time, after a long ringing, his inquiry was met with a testy response: "Never heard of anybody named Meredith. Why don't you get your numbers straight?" The receiver clashed on the hook at the other end of the line.

Sam tried the last two names. His success was no greater than before. His nickels were gone and the Ed Cases in the phone book exhausted. He backed out of the phone booth, sweating a little. Clearly Big Ed had a private number at his residence.

Looking up from his steak, Percy asked eagerly:

"Any luck, Mr. Sam?"

Sam shook his head and moodily sipped at his coffee. There remained the newspapers, which would doubtless know if any accident had been reported to the police. He went to the cashier for more nickels.

He called the morning papers and the afternoon papers. Had any accident involving a Miss Grace Meredith been made known to them? To his partial relief, none had. Sam scowled. He scratched his ear. He vented a few favorite words of disapproval at life's unhappy complexities.

"Where to now, Mr. Sam?" asked Percy as they left the restaurant.

"Mr. Rudolph's apartment," Sam muttered bitterly. There was nothing else to do. He would simply have to wait till to-morrow. Then Grace would telephone. He would go to her and take her away somewhere. As for Big Ed's menacingly bawled threat, Sam regarded it as unimportant. That the heavy-shouldered gangster had shouted, "I'll get you!" was understandable enough—Ed regarded Sam as an enemy because he and Simmy had been in the same car. But that mistake could be briefly explained when Sam saw Big Ed the next day.

The car rolled halfway through the Loop and turned north to the Clark Street bridge, then east in a short cut to Fritz Rudolph's garage, which was in the rear of the towering office building on Michigan Boulevard where he had his apartment. Yes, thought Sam as Percy drove over the cobblestones and past the darkened warehouses that lined the river, Big Ed's mistake could be quickly explained. And if the gangster didn't like it he could go to the devil. For, now that Sam was considering Big Ed and Grace, he recollected Big Ed's manner toward his ward with sharp distaste. It had been so familiar, so much more than brotherly. It had been as if Big Ed's gestures had been those of a prospective husband, the tentative lover lurking beneath the fraternally bullying attitude.

The car turned in at the garage. Percy honked and the doors parted. Sam got out. "I'm much obliged to you, Perce." He held out his hand.

Percy grinned embarrassedly as he said:

"That's all right, Mr. Sam. If you don't mind I'll walk up with you and ask Mr. Fritz what time he wants me to-morrow."

Sam said: "He probably won't be in yet." He looked at his watch and held up the dial. It showed half past ten. "Later than I thought," he added.

Together they went out of the garage into the darkened street, intending to climb the concrete steps to the side door of the building and take the night elevator to Fritz Rudolph's apartment. Sam was reflecting that, taken altogether, the day had been a lucky one for him because he had found Grace and would hear from her to-morrow. But as his heels scraped over the white cement that was barely gray in the blackness, he stopped and his pulse raced madly with the sense of danger. Something was moving in the deep shadow of the side door not four steps ahead of him.

Or was the movement only in his imagination? He scornfully told himself it was and went forward with Percy close behind him. But then the shadows around the door were stirred more violently. Sam saw the glint of two hostile eyes and raised his arm defensively. But his arm dropped numbly and a fist drove at his face.

"Look out, Perce!" he said, and dodged. His right arm went out and around his assailant's middle, his head went forward and he butted like a bull. He heard the man beneath him mutter as he fell, "Git the other——" and was vaguely aware of a stocky body plunging down the stairs upon the advancing Percy. But a singing sound started in his left ear. It was loud and painful. It shut out all other noises. Smack! A short upper jab struck the side of his face again. But with his head still down and the shoulder of his useless left arm hunched, he jerked his right hand loose from his attacker's waist and slashed with fist and elbow. Under him the body writhed furiously and kicked upward with a punishing knee.

Sam drew back his knuckles and pounded twice. Gasping through clenched teeth, he raised his fist again. But he was too slow. A blow as from a club struck the side of his head, his

assailant heaved terrifically under him, and Sam went sprawling down the steps, dimly conscious of legs approaching from below and hoping, in that moment before he lost his senses, that they were friendly ones.

He didn't know until Fritz Rudolph told him, and that was two hours later. Lying on his back, his eyes slowly opened. Above and about him was semidarkness. He felt out carefully with his right hand and his fingers encountered a texture smooth and soothing. Sheets. He knew he was in a bed. But he didn't know where. Then, "Perce!" he shouted, and the remembrance of the struggle on the steps came back to him.

But Percy didn't come. Looking toward the door, Sam saw the darkness thinning in the room. The door opened and a figure that looked stout and skirted stood blocked in the light from the adjoining room. A voice asked:

"You feeling better now, old man?"

It was Fritz Rudolph. Sam tried to sit up, but dropped back easily after a moment. "Where's Perce?" he demanded.

Fritz, in a voluminous silk dressing gown above which showed his stiff evening shirt and black bow tie, sat gingerly on the edge of the bed.

"The doctor sent him home in a cab. Say, what was the great idea? Did you get held up or what?"

Doctors made Sam think of bandages, and with that he started to explore the side of his head. But his left arm refused to bend. He could twiddle his fingers, but the elbow was stiff as wood. He tried his right hand with better luck and satisfied himself by the feel of gauze that the dull pounding from his jaw to his ear had received the proper dressing. He wet his dry lips with the tip of his tongue and asked slowly:

"Was Perce hurt badly?"

"Only a cut in the shoulder and a black eye. Damn good bodyguard, that chauffeur of mine!" Fritz looked toward Sam for confirmation of this judgment. "He brought you up here after you'd been knocked out."

"Did he?" asked Sam. He had been mildly curious about those legs toward which he had rolled as consciousness went out of him. Obviously they had belonged to Percy. Involuntarily Sam's eyes shut, and Fritz stepped softly from the room, curbing his curiosity until the morning.

Sam slept. When he awoke, a smooth-faced doctor with nose glasses was kneading his arm and beaming cheerfully. "Pretty stiff yet, eh? Ah, that will pass in a day or so." He dropped the arm. "Now we'll have a glance at the facial abrasion—ah, just so!" The adhesive ripped; another bandage was applied. Sam winced, then worked his swollen lips to form the question:

"Is Mr. Rudolph up yet? I want to know if I've had any phone calls?"

The West Indian butler, standing unobserved by the door, replied with unction:

"No telephone calls, sah; and Mr. Frederick is in his bath."

Preceded by the butler, the doctor went out. Left alone, Sam regarded the pale, severe walls and ceiling; but instead of considering Fritz's monastic tastes which the decorations gave evidence of, he thought exclusively of Grace's failure to ring him up that morning. Certainly she must know that he would be anxious about her. Nor was it like her to wait until afternoon when she could just as well telephone in the morning. He started painfully, thinking what if she, too, were lying disabled in bed! But if she were it would certainly be reported in the papers by this time. Sam called the butler and asked for them.

"Mr. Frederick has them in the bath, sir."

Sam groaned. It hurt his side to

groan, so he groaned again, this time from physical pain, not because of Fritz's deplorable habits. Damn that roughneck of last night! If Sam hadn't been given a benumbed arm at the beginning of the encounter he now would know the reason for the attack, even if he had had to choke the confession out of the thug. It might, of course, have been merely a holdup; but if so, it was the strangest one Sam had ever heard of, for it was so much more like a slugging match than anything else. In fact, Sam thought, it was almost as if Ed Case had sent two men to carry out his vicious threat—in which event, Sam decided calmly, he would have an excuse to do some slugging himself some time when he met Big Ed.

The rustling of papers and Fritz's lumbering tread sounding through the living room distracted Sam from his vengeful thoughts. He looked eagerly toward the door.

Fritz came bustling through the door, indignantly shaking an inside sheet of newspaper at Sam. His pale eyes were reproachful.

"When it comes to keeping personal affairs from your intimate friends, Sam Lowell, I've got to hand it to you for being a ring-tailed marvel!"

Sam cocked his right eyebrow in mild surprise. Then he said:

"Where's the rest of the paper? I want to see it."

Fritz continued to stand over him. He looked accusingly.

"Why didn't you tell a fellow what was going on? And who's the lucky lady?"

Struggling up on an elbow, Sam's mind groped with these dark sayings. Personal affairs? What personal affairs? The lucky lady? What lucky lady? "Do you mind telling me what the devil you're talking about?"

Fritz held out the newspaper and screwed up his lips disapprovingly.

"I didn't know you were so fast a worker. Congratulations. Now don't you think you might tell me the lady's name?"

Sam's hand fumbled with the awkward, crackly sheet. Fritz's stubby finger had pointed toward the upper left-hand column. He looked there. Beneath a double row of black, curly type which hinted betrayal of scandalous doings among the ultra-smart was a small line which said modestly: "By the Marchioness." An upper paragraph of small type read:

> The Riding Club, by the way, is the scene of much gayety at present. Here, the other day, the Viscountess Claypool (Ardelia Heintz) and her charming sister, Mrs. Skittridge de Groot Rumpsey (Violetta Heintz) were seen looking very smart in the informal riding costumes now so popular——

"Very bright and chatty," said Sam. "Gimme a cigarette."

"Read on," commanded Fritz. "It's down near the middle of the column."

Sam lifted the paper. His eyes were attracted by the following:

> Persistent rumors of a certain engagement in the *haut monde* drift in daily. Biarritz and Deauville are in mourning, they say, for one of our most popular young bachelors, since Mr. Sam Lowell has taken to making Lake Forest his habitat. Attracted thitherward by the charming granddaughter of a certain early Chicago pork packer—whose slight taint of the stockyards has long since been wiped out by some of the purest blue blood of Europe—gossip says in the amusing vernacular of to-day, "It won't be long now."

Sam looked up into Fritz's coolly interested eyes.

"It won't be long now," mocked Fritz. And then: "Who's the lady? Not the fair Ardelia?"

Sam reread the paragraph. He shook his head dumfoundedly.

"You know as much about it as I do. Because the whole paragraph's a lot of hooey. I haven't been alone with any girl from that Lake Forest crowd a single hour since I came to Chicago; and

as for trying to marry one of them——" He broke off, dropped the paper and rubbed his chin thoughtfully. "As a matter of fact, that damned little piece in the paper is pretty embarrassing, because I did propose to a girl yesterday afternoon."

Fritz leaned back and thrust his hands in his bright, voluminous bath robe. "Well, then—there you are. The papers've got hold of it, that's all."

Sam muttered impatiently. "No, no. You don't understand. She's not of that crowd, Fritz. She doesn't know them and they don't know her. All I hope is that she doesn't see the papers till after she has called up and I've had a chance to deny that dizzy story——" He paused sheepishly. "As a matter of fact," he added, "it's Grace Meredith."

"Well!" Fritz showed his astonishment by dropping on the couch. "What—I thought you couldn't find her? I thought—no, really? Well, I congratulate you!"

Sam took a cigarette from the little table beside his bed.

"Fritz," he said, "it's a funny story—queer, I mean. By the way, I must send some flowers out to Norma Dogriddle this morning—I'm afraid she didn't like it when I failed to show up at the North Shore Beach yesterday afternoon." He stopped, then said: "Fritz, Grace is a sort of ward of Ed Case."

Fritz clapped his hand to his forehead. "Good Lord! You don't mean *Big* Ed Case! Why, he's the worst gangster in Chicago!"

"I know that," said Sam, and calmly lighted his cigarette.

Fritz smote his brow again and groaned.

"But how?" he asked helplessly.

Sam told him.

"So you see," Sam concluded a little later, "how rotten that announcement is. With Grace so sensitive about being mixed up with Ed Case and having an exaggerated notion of my social position and interest in that sort of thing, I may have a hard job convincing her that that story is the bunk."

Fritz nodded. During Sam's account his first amazement had turned to sharp interest and, calling for the rest of the morning papers, he had been carefully scanning the news columns for any item concerning an automobile or shooting accident of the night previous. And though he found a number of both, there was none that could reasonably be linked with Grace and the fracas on the road from Wildhurst.

"Nothing here," he told Sam, and pushed the papers out of the way. "Guess you'll have to wait till she calls up."

But the day passed and there came no word from Miss Grace Meredith. And as night came Sam muttered:

"Well, it's up to me to find Ed Case."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE "SHRINKING" VIOLET.

HAVING his breakfast and reading his own undisturbed morning paper, it occurred to Big Ed Case that he was a singularly thoughtful and considerate man to provide a separate set of daily newsprint for his womenfolks.

Freshly shaved, reeking of lavender water, Ed sipped his coffee contentedly while he turned deliberately to the social columns of the *Times-World*. His heart bounded. There it was! The Marchioness had done well. He had hardly read the gossipy little squib when his sister came in and settled herself at the head of the table.

Grace, looking very cool in a bright dress of yellow linen, followed her. Big Ed hastily folded his own paper to the financial section.

"Hello, Edward," Grace remarked gayly. "Another boiling hot day lies beautifully before us. Good morning, Helen. I'm frightfully angry with your sister, Mr. Case." Grace sat down and

unfolded her napkin. Ed slumped on his backbone, pretending to be absorbed in the stock market. Grace continued: "She spent the entire evening last night attempting to convince me that Sam Lowell was merely playing with me!"

Ed grunted. Helen put two pieces of bread in the toaster.

"By nine o'clock," went on Grace, attacking her grapefruit, "I was beginning to feel like that poor girl in the book by George Eliot—deserted and abandoned. Ed, do put your paper down and talk to me. Tell me how you liked Sam. Didn't you think he was marvelous? Didn't you wonder how on earth he ever came to look at mere Grace? Helen did. She told me——"

Gloomily pouring out the coffee, Helen interrupted:

"I didn't say anything of the kind. I only said I'd like to see the diamond first," she added sharply.

Big Ed rattled his papers, opened them so wide that he was completely concealed.

"Pass the sugar," said Grace. "Ed's cross this morning because they neglected to mention on the first page that he's a beer lord. Or is it the 'King of the Booze Runners'? If I were you, Ed, I'd be worried. It must be a week since you've been in the headlines."

Big Ed grinned sheepishly behind his screen of print.

"Say," he remarked, "there's a swell show just come. I heard the guys boostin' it last night. Le's see, wait—I'll find the name of it. Run a year in New York. I'll get the tickets and you girls can drive down this afternoon. How's that?"

"Pretty good grapefruit, Helen," said Grace with relish. "Ed, I couldn't, this afternoon, not possibly. At least—I'll have to get in touch with Sam first. And *by the way,* Ed," she went on with emphasis, "what *did* you think of Sam? You haven't told me yet."

With an exclamation of annoyance Ed seized his napkin. He had spilled coffee on his beautiful red-silk house coat.

"I know what *you* think of him," he growled to Grace. "Douglas Fairbanks and Jack Dempsey rolled into one!"

Grace laughed. "Can't I have just a touch of President Hoover in my hero, too?" Neither Ed nor Helen replied to this. Both had a despondent air. Helen opened the paper and began to read. Ed watched her furtively. Grace, her morning ardor a little dampened, began silently on her bacon and eggs. Sunlight filled the room. Yellow daisies nodded from the table. A slight breath of gasoline floated upward from the boulevard.

"Say!" exclaimed Big Ed suddenly. He paused. A new idea had popped into his head. "I almost forgot to tell you," he began deliberately, carefully feeling his way through the jungle of his own fabrication; "I got a swell cottage for you two out at Wildhurst." This was pure imagination, but it could become a fact within an hour. "I want you girls to go right out there this afternoon and move in. It's too hot for you in town."

"Nonsense," objected Grace, "I'd much rather stay here, Ed."

"Yeah," said Big Ed, "and the next thing I got you on my hands with a heat stroke."

"Oh!" Helen suddenly remarked. She had found the item in the paper about Sam Lowell. Ed looked at her apprehensively and saw her lips close firmly over her long teeth.

"What's the matter?" asked Grace.

"I thought the toast was burning," answered Helen grimly. She opened the electric appliance at her elbow and looked at the crisp, browning bread. "It's all right," she remarked.

Big Ed sighed. He was growing impatient.

"Thought you must've saw something in the paper," he couldn't resist hinting.

"Gimme some more coffee, Helen," he added uneasily.

Helen, her dark eyes closed to slits with repressed anger, poured out a cup of coffee from the large silver urn beside her. She handed the cup across the table and looked pityingly at Grace. Grace was not paying much attention; her eyes were fixed dreamily on a frieze of yellow birds that flitted across the wallpaper above the plate rail.

Ed watched narrowly. At last Helen made up her mind to speak. She drew a long breath, folded the paper with the item uppermost and with compressed lips held it out to Grace.

"There, Grace," she said quietly: "You might as well have it first as last, I suppose."

Grace stared into Helen's excited face with amazement. From a glance at Ed's tense expression she turned wonderingly toward the folded paper.

"You saw it," said Helen to Ed.

Ed, twisting his mouth ominously, made no reply. Grace read the paragraph through without raising her head.

When she had finished she looked up. There was no more merriment in her face.

"And you think I'd pay any attention to drivel like that about Sam Lowell?" she demanded spiritedly. She arose and threw down her napkin.

Big Ed's lips hung rather loosely. He had never thought of her taking this attitude. He had been prepared to have her burst into tears or go silently away to her room to suffer. He had been suffering himself in anticipation of the pain he was making her undergo. And she didn't even believe the story! Didn't believe it when she read it in the paper. Self-pity stirred feebly in the depths of his being. He had been so unselfish about it. Made himself late for downtown. Wanted her to see a show and forget about it.

Helen was remonstrating:

"Don't be foolish, Grace. It only goes to prove what I was telling you last night. In real life folks don't act the way they do in storybooks, and that's what you've got to find out. This fellow probably likes you real well, but he's going to marry some society girl, like it says in the paper."

Grace flushed. "But it's not true. I know it's not. You can't *possibly* understand."

Helen rose and followed Grace to the window where she was standing, looking out over the flat boulevard below.

"We feel just as bad about it as you do, honey," she said sympathetically. "Don't we, Ed?"

"Sure we do," said Ed gloomily. "The big double-crosser."

"He's not!" said Grace. "You can't say such things about him. You don't even know Sam Lowell!"

"I know plenty," said Ed grimly. "He tried to get me shot last night, for one thing. I know that."

Grace was aghast. "Why, how perfectly ridiculous! You must be crazy! Sam Lowell tried to have you shot!" She stood over Big Ed in such amazement that he rose to deny her implication that he was mad.

"Oh, I ain't crazy," he remarked. "You think he was out at Wildhurst yesterday to see you, don't you? Well, he wasn't. He was out there with Simmy Pope, a guy that'd put me on the spot at sight."

"Simmy Pope!" said Grace, her lips dry. Sam had mentioned that name on the boat.

"Sure, Simmy Pope. This love business is a lot of hop, Grace. I'm tellin' you. Listen!" He came close to her and stood looking down with a tender, straightforward expression on his heavy face. "D'you think I'd try to put anything over on you?"

Grace swallowed painfully. She answered slowly:

"Of course not, Ed. I know you wouldn't."

Big Ed took her by the arm.

"You know damn well I wouldn't, don't you? Well, I'm tellin' you that this Lowell's no good and he's in with a bunch of babies that's tryin' to put the skids under Ed Case. That enough, is it?"

Grace put her hand over his.

"But Ed," she protested, "I'm sure there's some mistake about it. You don't understand how I feel about Sam. He's—he's loved me ever since—ever since on the boat, Ed. Let's get together for dinner to-night and we'll all talk it over!"

Ed backed away from her bitterly.

"Yeah, I suppose you'll ask him if he's tryin' to put a knife into me, and if he says, 'No,' you'll run off and marry him." He breathed deeply and threw up his head like an impatient colt. "Listen, Grace, I wouldn't go to a meal with that guy—not for a million!" With a flat hand he cut a semicircle in the air before him. "When Simmy Pope finds out where I eat I'm as good as a dead man."

Grace turned impatiently from the window.

"I'm going to call Sam up."

"All right!" Big Ed sat down and nursed the back of his chair arm sullenly. "Jist order some flowers for me, will you, Helen?" With lowered brows he continued from the side of his mouth: "I want a large floral offering at my funeral."

"Grace!" exclaimed Helen. "Don't you see? How can you act this way to Ed? He knows what he's talking about. Besides," she added with the ring of conviction in her tones, "I'd have too much pride to call up a fellow after a thing like that came out in the paper about him."

"Well, I certainly think he ought to be given a chance to explain it," retorted Grace. She walked to the table and, taking up a glass of water, drained it quickly. "Rather, what I really think is that that newspaper item is nothing but drivel and that nobody with any sense would pay attention to it!"

Drivel! Big Ed gulped painfully. That paragraph had cost him a good case of Scotch, yet she called it drivel! However, he had a new respect for Grace, and he perceived that the only thing in all of his plans against Sam that had been effective was what he himself believed to be true. He said slowly, after a pause:

"Listen, Grace, I got the right dope on this baby—see? Gimme a chance to prove it to you; that's all I ask. Jist gimme a few days. Promise that you won't call him up or have anything to do with him till I give you the word. How's that? Will you do it?"

Grace considered with a downcast face. It was a great sacrifice, but when she looked into Ed's eager eyes and into Helen's worried countenance she could not do otherwise than give her promise. But how painfully the words were spoken. Despite her brave front before Ed and Helen about the paragraph in the *World-Times,* there was still a little secret doubt gnawing at her heart. If only she could go to Sam at once and let him explain them away. She said at last very deliberately:

"Well, Ed, all right. I won't try to see him at all, if that will satisfy you. He doesn't know my phone number, nor where I am, so he can't possibly reach me. But then, after you've investigated you must apologize, and very thoroughly for all those things you've said. Do you understand?" she ended with a slightly playful manner.

Big Ed's fulsome cheeks quivered with a huge sigh of relief. He got up from his chair and smiled.

"All right, kiddo. I'll eat the dirt if I'm wrong." He went to the door. "Oh, jist one more thing I've got to say. Go on out to that cottage this afternoon, the both of you, will you? It'll be all ready to move in."

"I don't care," said Grace listlessly. She picked up the newspaper and began to read the item about Sam once more. Big Ed motioned his head for his sister to follow him into the next room. Here he easily convinced her that it was necessary to make a special effort to get Grace out to the Wildhurst cottage that day. This accomplished, he went whistling to his own room where he exchanged his elegant house coat for one of gray tweed.

Half an hour later Ed was on his way to the place he thought of as his morning office. He had four business offices —one at the Speedway Motors Corporation which he rarely visited; one on West Madison Street above a pool room that he never entered, but which was a hangout for a squad of his sluggers awaiting orders; one over his cabaret on Wabash Avenue in the Loop; and, last, the one he was now approaching, in a hotel on lower Michigan Avenue.

This place, represented by a telephone number that was not in the directory, had no lettering on the door and consisted of only two rooms. In one a confidential clerk, a bookkeeper and stenographer worked daily. In the other sat Big Ed, issuing orders over the wire in the campaigns he was constantly conducting.

The day was hot. As he reached his private room he threw his panama hat on the long mahogany table and lowered himself into the padded chair by the telephone. Wiping his reddened forehead with his handkerchief, he waited for some moments while the operator continued to ring the number he called.

"Hello," the sleepy voice of a girl finally sounded in his ear.

"Hello!" snapped Ed briskly. "This is Ed Case. Been to breakfast, Violet?"

"Say," said Violet, "what do you think this is, getting a girl out of bed in the middle of the night!"

"Yeah?" said Big Ed. "Too bad. I got some business for you, Vi. I'll stand you to a swell breakfast if you make it snappy. Meet you up at the dago's in ten minutes."

"Oh, gee——" said Violet despondently.

"Come on, snap into it, baby," advised Ed kindly. "There's some jack in it for you."

"All right," Violet agreed.

Ed stood up and frowned excitedly at the huge picture of Bess Stolp which stood in a silver frame on the long mahogany table. He did not see the picture, for his mind was intent on the latest scheme of his, which had come to him earlier that morning. Going into his outer office, he spoke to his confidential clerk:

"I seen a couple cottages advertised out at Lake Mina. I think they belong to Sweeney out at Wildhurst. Go on out there and rent the both of 'em—see? Right away. I'm pretty sure they're furnished, but if they ain't, get 'em furnished by this afternoon. If you have any trouble, lemme know. Schwartz'd send a van out there in a hurry for me. You jist got time to hop a train," he went on rapidly. "Fix one of 'em up as swell as you can. I want it for myself. Anything'll do for the other one."

The clerk asked one or two questions in a matter-of-fact tone, then picked up his hat. Ed Case went out to keep his appointment with Violet.

The girl who waited for him at the corner restaurant was an extremely pretty yong blonde. Her eyes looked sleepy, and beneath her saucy little hat the make-up had been put on crookedly; but her smooth skin could stand that. She had on a slightly rumpled, sleeveless sport dress of white.

"This has got to be good," she warned Ed as they sat down at the small table together, "getting a girl out of bed!" she added reproachfully.

"Never mind," said Ed brightly; "you'll get a new fur coat outa this."

The youthful lips were pursed to the shape of a scarlet poppy. "I think it rates a roadster, myself." She took the menu into a small, white hand whose nails were resplendent with rose-colored varnish. "I'll take some ham an' eggs," she told the waitress, "and some buckwheat cakes and——"

"Watch out you don't get fat, Vi." Big Ed advised her, fanning himself slowly with his panama hat. "They don't go over so big at the Lindy when they get fat. I want to ask you——"

"Say, I couldn't get fat if I tried," boasted Violet. "Bring some ketchup and mustard with the ham and eggs. My mother isn't fat. Neither is my father. Nobody in our fam——"

Big Ed leaned impatiently over the table toward her.

"Listen, Vi, I want to slip you some dope you got no business to know—see? And I want you to forget about it as soon as it's all over."

Violet curved her white neck hungrily over the menu.

"Say, there's no pork sausage on here," she complained indignantly. "I can't stand wheat cakes without——"

Big Ed rubbed his chin impatiently.

"Send out and get some pork sausage for the lady," he ordered with a wave of dismissal to the waitress.

"Pork ain't no good at this season," objected the waitress.

"That's right, Vi," supplemented Big Ed. "You don't want to poison yourself, eatin' so heavy on a day like this."

"Say, you couldn't poison me if you tried," said Violet. "I don't see why you couldn't have threw a good breakfast while you was throwing one. But never mind the pork sausage. I'll take a small steak and two poached eggs on toast, or no—never mind—make it an omelette with chicken livers."

"Coffee?" said the waitress disinterestedly, running a pencil through her frowsy brown hair.

"Yeah, a couple cups," said Violet absorbedly; "and some orange juice right away and a grapefruit while I'm waiting."

The waitress departed. Violet's beautiful eyes continued to study the menu with concentrated attention.

"Violet," began Big Ed again, "this job I got for you is personal, see, and I don't want to have it blabbed to nobody."

"Well, gee, I can't blab it to anybody at this hour of the morning, can I?" asked Violet aggrievedly. "There's nobody up yet for me to blab it to."

Big Ed looked at her pointedly, then closed his eyes and set his lips disgustedly.

"Keep still a minute, can't you, kid, an' lemme tell you what it's all about? If I thought you were gonna blab I wouldn't let you do it, would I? Now shut up for half a second while I talk to you."

Violet leaned her elbow on the table and sighed with an air of long suffering. She set her pretty chin on her little fist and looked at the ceiling silently.

Big Ed continued:

"My sister, Mrs. McClusky, and her friend, Miss Meredith, have taken a cottage at Lake Mina. There's another one next to it. You get your girl friend and go out there and stay for a week and——"

Violet focused her gaze downward on Big Ed.

"Just a minute, big boy. When does all this take place?"

"Right away. To-night."

Violet put her hands on her hips.

"Nothing doing! What about my act?"

Big Ed waved his hand as if he were brushing away a fly.

"Forget about your act. I guess the Lindy won't close down without song an' dance." Then, as he saw Violet's frown, he went on hastily: "For a few days—see? Course, if you were to be gone long we'd have to shut up the shop.

The fact is, maybe you won't have to stay out at that cottage even a week. But you got to get your girl friend and beat it out there as quick as you can *now.*"

"*Now!*" shrieked Violet. "Oh, Ed, have a heart! This is a hot day!"

"Keep you from gettin' fat," Ed grinned. "Now shut up and listen to me. You take a bathin' suit along and get acquainted on the beach with Miss Meredith. Tell her your line—a cabaret singer—but don't mention the Lindy. And you never heard of me—see? You don't know me at all."

"Here's the orange juice," Violet said, moving back eagerly as the waitress arrived. "H'm. It's not very cold."

"Grapefruit," replied the waitress crisply.

Big Ed slid impatiently about in the small, straight chair.

"Can't you pay attention, Vi?"

"Grapefruit's not so bad," said Violet, looking pleased. "Honest, I hear every word you say. Go on. You're going to give me a roadster. I got that much, if I tell everybody I don't know you——"

"Don't try to be funny," said Ed. "You go out to Lake Mina and meet Miss Meredith accidentally and you tell her that all the men fall for you."

"Well, don't they?" asked Violet calmly.

"Sure. Well, mention the names of a couple and say that a bird named Sam Lowell is off his nut about you. Say he's a fast worker and that he wanted to marry you the first time he danced with you. That's important."

"He wanted to marry me the first time he danced with me," repeated Violet, showing some interest. "Only he never did dance with me. I never heard of him."

"I didn't ask you if you'd heard of him," Big Ed reminded her. "I asked you if you wanted a new fur coat by any chance."

"I'd rather have a roadster," said Violet wistfully.

"Well, you'll get it," said Big Ed as he stood up, "but not from me. You rate a fur coat this trip and that's all, baby. You understand?"

Violet brightened as the waitress approached with the chicken-liver omelette, toast and a small steak. "I got you," she said absently. Then she tore her lovely eyes away from the food long enough to utter in farewell: "I'll do it," she promised; "never fear."

"Here's the name of that guy written on a piece of paper and the address of the cottage you're to go to," Big Ed instructed finally. He went out, leaving Violet beaming happily while the waitress surrounded her with food.

CHAPTER IX.

"WHERE'S BIG ED?"

IT was another day. Sam and Fritz sat in the Rudolph apartment. "How's the arm?" asked Fritz.

Sam tapped the swollen muscles above his elbow speculatively. "Be all right in a few days." He sat moodily wondering if he would ever hear from Grace.

"But no golf for a while," Fritz predicted.

"I'm not thinking about golf. I want to find Ed Case."

"That ought to be easy"—Fritz rubbed his chin thoughtfully—"but dangerous." And to Sam's query he explained: "Just put two and two together. Night before last Case threatens to get you. A few hours later you're waylaid and mauled. Next morning you wake up to find a fake rumor of your engagement in the paper. Seems clear enough." He stood up and went for his hat. "Got a date now."

Left alone, Sam followed a short time later, going as far as the lobby where, in a drug store, he found a city directory which he immediately began to

search for the name of Ed Case. The list there, he found, was larger and more comprehensive than that in the telephone book. And carefully following down the row of Cases who were lawyers, typists, traveling salesmen and clerks, Sam came at last to "Case, Edward, president, Speedway Motors Corporation. Resident, No. 29075 Sangamon Boulevard."

Jotting down the two addresses, Sam went out of the lobby, smiling with complete satisfaction. How simple it was, he thought. He would go out to the Speedway Motors and have a showdown with Big Ed at once. If Big Ed chose to be surly and silent, then Sam would go on out to Sangamon Boulevard where he would find Grace, and he would explain the falseness of that piece of gossip by the Marchioness in the *World-Times*.

The Speedway Motors Corporation, Sam found after consulting the telephone book and taking a taxi ride, was a large, white, imposing building which occupied nearly a full block on Roosevelt Road near Crawford Avenue. Riding up in a cab half an hour after leaving the Rudolph Tower, Sam went in through the open doors to a showroom filled with the chassis of heavy trucks. A large-eared, white-collared salesman, disengaging himself from conversation with a colleague, came up with bright expectancy.

"Ed Case in?" Sam asked. "I want to see him personally."

The salesman lost interest in Sam at once. "I don't know, but his office is in through that door." He nodded his head toward the side of the room.

Sam passed through and stood at a polished rail behind which half a dozen girls with marcelled hair clicked incessantly at typewriters. Sam captured the attention of a sleek-haired office boy who was sorting letters. "Is that Mr. Case's office?" Sam motioned toward a glass door marked, "Private."

"Yes, sir, but there's somebody in there right now." Unconcernedly, the boy went back to his work of sorting the afternoon mail.

Sam waited. Half an hour passed. Meanwhile, voices sounded indistinctly. But at length the door opened and a man came out—an ordinary, successful-looking man who had the appearance of one who might be proprietor of a number of chain stores. Sam went in without further ado.

But the man who sat at the desk behind the door was not Ed Case. Nor was he at all like that gangster. On the contrary, he was a stern, pious man with cold, pale eyes and thin lips.

Those pale eyes now surveyed Sam with chill resentment.

"I'm sorry," apologized Sam, "to interrupt—I thought I'd find Ed Case in here."

The thin lips snapped: "Well, he's not!"

Sam smiled. "Obviously. But can you tell me when I'm likely to find him here?"

"Not likely to at all. *Mr.* Case seldom comes here. I'm the manager."

Sam hazarded: "I don't suppose you could tell me where he might be?"

"No!" the monosyllable crackled like a breaking icicle. "I can't!" The pale eyes looked suggestively at a framed wall motto which bore the words: "This Is My Busy Day."

Sam grinned and left the Speedway Motors Corporation to its own diversions. Outside, he looked at the Sangamon Street address and, stopping a scudding cab, drove southeast. Ed Case, he thought, would have to wait; his main object was to find Grace Meredith.

Due to delays and distance it was mid-afternoon when the taxi stopped before the number on Sangamon Street. Looking out of the cab window, Sam saw a three-story flat building of brick from which the red paint was peeling. The

blinds looked old and weather stained, the curtains frowsy; and going into the entrance hall Sam found half the mail boxes stuffed with paper bills and the tiled-wall siding cracked and dirty. That Grace Meredith lived there was incredible. The janitor's information verified Sam's doubts. Gloomily, Sam shut the door and made the long ride back downtown, wondering how long it had been since Big Ed had given the Sangamon Street address to the compilers of the city directory.

And so, Sam thought with bitterness as the elevator ascended to the uppermost pinnacle of the Rudolph Tower, another unprofitable day was passing. Up in the apartment he sat looking through the south window upon the city which stretched in an endless, uneven floor of flat-topped roofs. Somewhere within that forty-mile radius of Lake Michigan's southwest corner were Grace Meredith and Big Ed Case, and it was infuriating to be unable to find them.

A little before dinner Fritz came in. Sam had begun to dress for the evening and was knotting his black tie.

"Well," Fritz observed as their eyes met, "so you didn't find Big Ed today?"

Sam's hands dropped and he stared in surprise.

"How the devil did you know that?" he asked.

Fritz laughed. "That's easy. There aren't any more cuts or bruises on your face."

But Sam laughed humorlessly, intent on tracing Big Ed to Grace.

The night passed. Sam slept little. But by morning he had bethought himself of his old friend, Simmy Pope. As a fellow racketeer, even though on a slightly less imposing scale, Simmy ought to know the whereabouts of Ed Case. And, Sam remembered, Simmy had given him a card the last time they had met. Now, if only that gray-tweed coat hadn't been sent out to the cleaners yet!

It hadn't been. And Sam found the piece of pasteboard in the pocket where he had left it. On it was Simmy's name, his West Side address and phone number. Sam went out into the hall and took up the receiver.

The shrill, anxious voice, doubtless of the Pope female contingent, answered, "Yeah-us?" and Sam inquired: "Is Simmy Pope there?"

"No, he ain't here," the voice said flatly. "Who is this?"

"A friend of his," Sam answered. "Do you know where I can find him?"

"Who's the friend?" Mrs. Pope was suspicious. But when Sam told her she became cordial at once. "Oh, it's Sam Lowell! Well, he's down at his new place—I'll give you the number, 'cause it's not listed yet."

Which she did while Sam reached for the pad and pencil on the table. A moment later he was asking again for Simmy and, soon afterward, speaking to him.

"Yeah. Sure. Say, you want to come out, Sam. I got a swell dump out here that'll suit your highbrow tastes right down to the ground."

Sam promised: "I will. But listen, Simmy. Where can I find Big Ed Case?"

Simmy Pope's gasp of surprise was audible over the wire.

"Well, waddya want to find that big bozo for? That boy don't hand out good Christmas presents. What's the idea?"

"I know." Sam nodded briefly toward the transmitter. "But there's somebody I want to locate through him and I've got to find him."

"Ho-ho!" Simmy crowed wisely. "I got you now. It's that dame you're lookin' for. Well, why'n'cha come on out here, Sam? Mebbe I can help you an' mebbe I can't. But anyway, I want you to see my new dump."

Sam temporized. It would be good to see Simmy again. He was the only person who, to Sam's knowledge, was acquainted with Ed Case.

"Well," Sam inquired, "where. is it?"

Simmy told him: "Out past the Airway. Know where that is? Take the Lake Street 'L' to the end of the line and get a taxi. It's a couple miles out on Woonsocket Road."

Telling Simmy that he would start directly, Sam took up his hat, went down the elevator and across the river to the Loop, where he got the elevated. Simmy, he thought as he sat by the window of the swaying coach, had spoken as if he might have some means of discovering what Sam wanted to know.

The journey was long—nearly an hour of rumbling, first above the roofs of buildings, then rattling out over the suburbanized prairies. But at last the end of the line was reached and a waiting cab carried Sam over a wide, smooth, cement road and stopped before a long, low-roofed building which flourished the gaudily painted sign of the Blue Danube.

It was obviously a new roadhouse and, for its kind, a resplendent one. Going up toward the door, Sam saw the big parking square at the side, the colored electric lights on the building and the striped curtains at the windows. He entered to find Simmy in silk shirt sleeves which were rolled up to expose his hairy forearms. Simmy was giving orders to a uniformed doorman and two bullet-headed waiters.

But as Simmy saw Sam he broke off his instructions and came forward, grinning.

"Ain't this the swell dump, though? Come right into my private office, Sam old kid, and we'll open up a bottle of prewar Scotch."

They went in and sat down in red-leather chairs before a mahogany table. With a bottle and two glasses set out, Simmy leaned forward and began to speak enthusiastically:

"Sam, I been workin' like a dog and you gotta come out for our openin' night. Last time I saw you I told you I was goin' in for myself, didn't I? Well, waddya think of it?"

Sam said: "It's fine, Simmy. Of course I'll come out. When do you have your opening night?"

"Along about the end of the week," Simmy went on with brisk pleasure. "My first shipment's comin' in before to-morrow morning. Then I'll be all set."

Sam nodded.

Simmy continued: "Three truckloads to-morrow and six the next night. Boy, I'll have beer enough to float this joint!"

"Good beer?" interjected Sam.

"Five per cent," Simmy told him, "and the real stuff." Simmy lifted the bottle of Scotch. "And, boy, I got real protection out here." He leaned backward, his dark eyes shining with pleasure. "Not bad, huh?"

"Not bad," Sam agreed. "Simmy, what about Ed Case?"

Simmy swiftly lighted a cigarette. "Say, that guy's a telephone number, Sam. I don't know where he is. How come you can't find the dame? Ain't you seen her?"

"Not since that afternoon out at Wildhurst," Sam confessed. Then he told Simmy of having been waylaid with the chauffeur at the side entrance of the Rudolph Tower, also of the false announcement in the paper. "I don't believe," he added humorously, "that Ed Case likes me very much."

"Look out he don't put you on the spot," warned Simmy. And as Sam looked puzzled, he explained: "Take you for a ride—bump you off! Can't you talk American?"

"Oh," said Sam, "I'm not worrying."

"Well," Simmy told him, "I'll see what I can do for you. I'll ask around."

"That'll be great, Simmy." Sam sighed hopefully.

There was a knock outside.

Simmy called: "Come in."

A little man with pointed features, small, close-set eyes and black clothes entered the door. He asked: "Mr. Pope?"

"That's me," admitted Simmy cheerfully.

"I'd like to take up a few minutes of your time." The visitor paused and looked at Sam as if expecting him to leave.

Sam picked up his hat and glanced inquiringly at Simmy.

"Sit still," said Simmy genially, and turned to the sly little newcomer. "Spiel away; this guy's a friend of mine. He's all right."

Simmy's little visitor wriggled the end of his nose in a dissatisfied manner, than produced a card from his black coat. He was a lawyer with an office near the county building; and his name, Sam saw from the card which Simmy had dropped on the table, was Glenn E. Snively.

"I propose, Mr. Pope," began Glenn E. Snively firmly, "to deal fairly with you. I understand that you have a five-year lease on this property. That's right, isn't it?"

"Correct as hell," agreed Simmy blithely.

Glenn E. Snively inclined his head.

"It's good property, Mr. Pope, but hardly suitable for your uses. That is not only my opinion, but also the opinion of the clients I represent in the matter. They are"—Glenn E. Snively pursed his lips so that his words sounded as if he were trying to whistle—"assured that a roadhouse in this neighborhood is bound to be a losing proposition. Now they are willing to save you the expense of finding out your mistake by offering to take over your lease to-day." Glenn E. Snively, with lowered eyes, began fumbling in the breast pocket of his black coat. Producing a check and a legal paper, he continued: "I am empowered to offer you a check for twenty thousand dollars to sublet for the five years."

"Ho!" said Simmy. "You make me a proposition, do you? Well, I make you one, too. It's: git the hell outa here before I tie you up in a knot!"

"But——" Glenn E. Snively hesitated.

"G-g-g-g!" stuttered Simmy. "G-git out!" He raised his fist and glared.

Glenn E. Snively backed hastily through the door.

Simmy sat down heavily and tilted the bottle of Scotch.

"Can you beat that?" he demanded indignantly.

"What's it all about?" asked Sam. Lawyer Snively's offer was about the most unprofessional he had ever heard, as mean and presumptuous as the man himself.

Simmy ground out the butt of his cigarette.

"Jist a tip from down the road—tryin' to throw a scare into me."

"Down the road?" Sam inquired.

"The Airway. But they'll never put it over, because I'm outside their territory and I've got my own protection. That Airway gang," ended Simmy graciously, "can go plumb to hell—everybody from Big Ed straight down to the hash slingers in the kitchen!"

Sam stiffened with alertness. "Big Ed—Case? What's he got to do with your Airway gang?"

"Ho!" said Simmy. "Why, he's the big squawk down there—he owns the joint."

Sam reached for his hat. "Then that's where I'll find him." Now, he felt, matters were improving.

"Jist a minute," Simmy stopped him on his way to the door. "You don't think you'll find Big Ed hangin' over the cash register down at the Airway, do you?"

Sam paused. "Why not?"

"Say!" Disgustedly, Simmy sliced at the air with the flat of his hand. "Big Ed ain't down there even one night a week!" Then, noticing Sam's disappointment, he added: "Leave it to me, Sam. I'll git a line on that Meredith dame for you. Soon as I hear anything I'll call you."

Sam leaned over the table and began fervently:

"Simmy, that would be simply wonderful—I mean to say I'd be grateful as hell——"

"Aw"—Simmy waved his hand negligently—"forget about it. See you the night of the opening."

"I'll be the first one there," Sam promised, and went out.

Out on the road again, Sam looked at his watch. It was still early in the afternoon. He decided to walk back to the station and stop in at the Airway on the journey. If Simmy had spoken truly of his enemy's habits, there was little chance that Big Ed Case would be found; nevertheless, Sam felt it involved a point of honor for him to show himself scornfully invading the gangster's own premises after Big Ed's threat.

The Airway lay half a mile down the road at the edge of a large aviation field on which several hangars had been erected. Standing inside a high inclosure was a low, broad, stucco building with wide plate-glass windows which were curtained halfway up the sashes with green plush. Sam crossed the gravel drive and opened the door. But the place, except for the few attendants and a party of three having an early dinner in a corner, was deserted. Asking a waiter if Ed Case had been there or was likely to be, Sam received no definite reply. He ate a sandwich, drank a cup of coffee, smoked a cigarette and then, feeling it would be useless to remain longer, continued on to the elevated station and took the train downtown.

Back at the apartment on the Rudolph Tower after his office had closed for the day, Sam was greeted by the West Indian butler who informed him hesitantly:

"You had a caller this afternoon, Mistah Sam."

Sam halted and waited breathlessly, his eyes questioning. Perhaps, he felt in a wild rush of buoyancy, Grace Meredith had been there! He asked quickly: "A lady?"

Alexander, the butler, coughed deprecatingly.

"Well, sah—ah, yessah. I think so, sah. Said her name was Miss Stolp, sah. Miss Bess Stolp."

Sam's hopes fell at once.

CHAPTER X.

VIOLET DOES HER STUFF.

ALWAYS completely self-absorbed, Violet's conversation was never anything but ingenuously matter of fact. Thus her talk had every appearance of frankness. Now she sat on the beach at the north end of Lake Mina and waited for the opportunity to finish her temporary job and be soon on her way to the Lindy, Big Ed's cabaret in the Loop.

Grace Meredith, coming down the path from her cottage, stopped; unconsciously wrapping her scarlet beach cape tightly around her, she stared. For the sandy plot in front of her was occupied. An enormous umbrella, the color of a daffodil, had been thrust in the russet sand. Around it was a decorative circle of orange peel. And under it the most beautifully modeled little figure she had ever seen sat placidly eating a large bun with a sausage in it. Golden mustard oozed from the sides. Bright ketchup dripped from the edges.

"Hello," the girl pleasantly remarked to Grace. Her words were not distinct because her mouth was full. "Know how to swim?"

Noting the calm loveliness of the eyes, rimmed with black, heavily painted lashes, Grace answered wonderingly: "A little." She was an excellent swimmer. Throwing off her cape, she stood tall and supple in her red suit, above and below which the tan showed evenly. A little pityingly she observed the sheer, white skin of the fragile creature under the umbrella. Violet had thickly coated her legs and arms with pink talcum and colored her nails with rose enamel. Her yellow suit exactly repeated the shade of her hair. Around her waist was strapped a small waterproof kit. Even the tips of her toes were shadowed by the umbrella.

"All right!" exclaimed Violet, jumping up as Grace answered. "Run you a race across the lake!" She crammed the rest of her sandwich between her little jaws and sprang to the water's edge, surprisingly executing two rapid cartwheels.

Grace chuckled to herself at the idea of this girl swimming across the lake, for it was nearly half a mile from shore to shore.

"You mustn't go into the water so soon after eating," she advised; "it might make you sick."

"Say!" Violet retorted contemptuously. "You couldn't make *me* sick if you tried!" Her bare head struck gold from the sunlight. Raising her arms, she flung herself, headforemost, into the water. Then, as she turned on her back to look at Grace, she called: "Wade out and start even. Let's go!"

Grace followed hesitantly, a little worried about the prospect of swimming across the lake. The girl, she thought, might get cramps. But she waded forward and struck out leisurely as Violet made an enthusiastic start. Swimming on her side, she anxiously watched Violet's stroke. It was the crawl, purposeful and reassuring. Grace swung into a crawl herself, intending to overtake the girl as soon as she tired.

In the middle of the lake Grace paused and treaded water. Far ahead Violet's bright, wet head bobbed steadily forward and her slim, white arms revolved as regularly as the wheels on a steamboat. "Whew!" exclaimed Grace in astonishment. She began to swim in earnest.

But Violet won easily. She welcomed from the beach as Grace came up beside her: "You can do better than that. I was watching you yesterday." Her clear skin was fresher than ever, the black paint unsmudged about her bright eyes. She added: "Not used to racing, maybe?" As she spoke she tugged at the rubber case on her belt and drew out an enormous yellow powder puff. "Gee, I hope my knees don't get sunburned," she said anxiously, coating her neck and shoulders anew with a heavy, pink talcum. "I oughtn't to sit in the sun at all."

Grace sat beside her. They talked. Grace learned that her new friend's name was Violet Mackey, that she lived in the cottage next door to her, that she was a dancer by profession, but could sing a song with the best "coon-shouters" in the Loop.

"You seem awfully young for that," observed Grace, pulling off her rubber cap and shaking her hair back from her forehead.

"Eighteen," remarked Violet carelessly. "I suppose that seems young to *you*."

Grace was amused. Evidently Violet was still at an age where a couple of years seem endless.

"I should think it might seem so to everybody," she mildly suggested.

"Nope," responded Violet. She looked restlessly toward a near-by pier where she studied the diving board with her beautiful, self-absorbed eyes. "Not to the men." She rose slowly, yawned widely and stretched out her arms, adding: "Old enough to get married, anyway. That's what the boy friends say.

And I got *some* boy friends, too—and how!" For a moment her eyes gleamed with interest and, getting to her knees, she peered into Grace's face. "Jim Frankling, the big real-estate man—I guess you've heard of *him*. Come up some time and I'll show you the swell string of turquoise he gave me for my birthday. He gave me this bathing suit, too, and this beach umbrella. Jim is wild about me, but, of course, I don't care for him. Another man I'm engaged to is Mr. Dowling—you know, the head of the street-cleaning department." She looked thoughtfully at Grace, then her interest seemed to waver toward the diving board. "I think I'll try going off there a couple times." She rose and tucked her powder puff into its rubber case. "Oh, yes, I'll tell you another boy friend I got—Sam Lowell, the big golf champeen." Then, after taking a swift run and executing two more handsprings, Violet trotted on slowly to the pier.

Grace watched her, dumfounded. Suddenly the lake looked steelly, with treacherous little points of light. Grace shivered with a sense of overhanging trouble. Yet the girl had said nothing, really—only that she knew Sam Lowell. Probably she *had* met Sam somewhere and was exaggerating the acquaintance. Grace got up and soberly followed Violet along the pier.

Poised at the end of the board in her yellow suit, Violet's loveliness came to Grace again. Seldom had she seen a more beautiful being. That Sam might very well have fallen in love with her seemed reasonable. She saw Violet spring sharply into the air, turn a complete somersault and slip neatly beneath the surface. Grace sat down and clasped tense hands about her knees as she watched for the girl to come up the ladder.

Violet reached for the rung just above the water and pulled herself up. Grace asked:

"Did you say you know Sam Lowell?"

Violet coughed and put her hand over her mouth. "The diving board's not so good as it looks," she said. "It's too stiff. I jump off just once more and then me for the sunshade." She climbed up and surveyed her legs anxiously. "Need some more talcum; I'm afraid I didn't get enough cold cream on. It's not sticking right."

Not wishing to appear too anxious about Sam, Grace joined in:

"I suppose you can't afford to get sunburned in your profession."

Violet went straight for the diving board.

"It's not that," she said carelessly. "I just don't think sunburn's so hot!" Then her expression focused with intense interest on preparations for a back dive. And a few minutes later Grace was in the water beside her, both on the way to the cottages.

Violet went slowly, turning over and over, whistling softly to herself.

"Gee!" she remarked as they neared the beach. "Don't it make you laugh the way some people puff the minute they get in the water?"

"I was going to say a minute ago," Grace answered, "that I know Sam Lowell, too."

"He's a fast worker," said Violet without interest. "Gee, lookit!" One small fist clasped her little nose, the other arm stuck vertical as a flagpole. Her head went down; the upright arm sank slowly. Water touched the white wrist, crept slowly up to the pink fingers until one glossy nail was surrounded by several bubbles. Then it, too, disappeared.

Panic seized Grace. She hardly knew whether it was because the girl's careless words had struck her so unpleasantly or because she feared that Violet might have become entangled by a weed. She dived with open eyes in search of the girl, but the opaque greenness

showed no moving object anywhere. She came up, out of breath and puffing as Violet, blowing cheerfully, rose to the surface several feet away from her.

"I couldn't touch!" gasped Violet, "Gee, this lake is deeper than I thought!"

Exasperated, Grace swung into a deliberate crawl and made for the home beach. A fast worker! What did that mean? Why should she bother with this girl at all?—she asked herself irritably, and decided she didn't like Violet. As Helen had said, men were strange and curious when it came to love. Sam might be in love with Violet—it was not unreasonable. And then, Grace's thoughts added irrelevantly, why should any one put it in the paper that Sam was engaged to a girl unless he had shown her marked attention? She plowed on fervently through the water, working too hard, losing her breath a little.

Watching Grace slip forward, Violet began to pursue. For her childish mind remembered her chief business with Grace and, though she had said nearly all she had been told to say, she was very thorough and it occurred to her that with a few finishing touches the job would be ended. Then she would be free to hurry back to the Lindy for her performance that night.

She overtook Grace just as the latter's toes were scraping the bottom. Grace swam on and then waded doggedly to the shore where she picked up her red cape.

"Say," called Violet, "wait a minute."

Grace paused.

"Where you going?" asked Violet.

"In the cottage," Grace answered, but still waited uncertainly.

"So you know Sam Lowell?" said Violet. Then, with a thorough manner, she repeated: "He's a fast worker."

Grace's tone was slightly one of annoyance: "I don't know what you mean."

"I mean he asked me to marry him the first night I danced with him," said Violet expressionlessly. Her work was done. She sighed with relief, far too taken up with herself to notice the effect of her words on Grace. She was, in fact, so intent on pulling her yellow umbrella out of the sand that she scarcely was aware of it when Grace walked away.

Grace went into the cottage without looking back. There was no more doubt in her mind. Ed and Helen had been right. She had been wrong about Sam. Her head was bent; she shook with cold under the hot sun as she went on slowly to the little house. She had an odd sense of loss, as if she had just heard of Sam's death. And yet at the same time there was a sense of numbness, making her unable to realize fully what she had found out. The porch was deserted as she came to it. She crossed it unseeingly and went on up to her room.

The door of her bedroom she carefully closed and locked. Then, for some hidden reason, she walked to the mirror and searched her own face with desperate inquiry. Her damp hair hung softly about her white, suffering features. She looked, she decided, ghastly. Slipping out of her bathing suit and flinging a silken robe around herself, she sat down and stared blankly at the wall, her hands folded.

All of her life she had been unconsciously waiting, with Big Ed and Helen, for a door to open on the outer world. The door had opened, but now it was closed again. There was a finality about this swift shutting out of everything, much worse now than it had been when she parted with Sam on the boat. Then there had been the poignant, romantic comfort of his unquestioned love for her. Now there was nothing. Sam had never been.

The hot summer day pressed its heat through the windows remorselessly. Grace's lips felt dry. She sat alone in

a world of suffering so deep and distant that when Helen knocked at the door it was like being wakened from a long sleep.

Grace rose reluctantly and slowly turned the key. Helen stood there saying:

"Dinner's about ready—— My goodness, aren't you dressed yet?"

"It's hot," Grace answered dully. "I don't feel hungry."

Helen came in and sat down on a rocking-chair near the window. There was a trace of nervous strain in her manner.

"Grace," she said, "there's something I want to tell you."

Listlessly Grace drew on her stockings. "What is it?" Her voice was without interest.

Helen hesitated, watching Grace dress. Grace was silent, her mind far away from Helen and her fidgety embarrassment.

Helen blurted out:

"Ed wants to marry you, Grace!"

Grace walked to her dressing table and sat down, as if she had not heard Helen's astounding remark. Searchingly she looked again at her own face. There were delicate shadows beneath the eyes, a strange etching at the sides of her soft white cheeks. Somber and dark, her gray eyes stared questioningly at the reflection. Slowly she took up a powder puff. Helen's words dimly entered her consciousness. Ed wanted to marry her. That sentence was like the echoes of a tolling bell. So many dumfounding things had happened that she could not be surprised even by this. She bent forward, covering her forehead and cheeks with powder, wondering, "What next?"

"Did you hear me, Grace?" asked Helen nervously.

"Yes," responded Grace. She opened her drawer and drew forth a box of rouge. Hesitantly she took up the small puff and dusted her cheeks with the red powder. Now her countenance seemed to leer at her hideously, her eyes coming forward out of frightful caverns with feverish intentness. Hastily she scrubbed the rouge away on her handkerchief. "So Ed wants me to marry him." Her own voice was unnatural to her ears and the words idiotic. "That's very kind of him."

Helen's patience exploded. "Well, it *is* kind of him! Grace, after all he's done for you! You needn't act so high and mighty about Ed Case. He may not have had the schooling, but he comes from educated people. Our father went right through the high school there in Rockwell County and our mother was a teacher herself when she was a girl!" Helen dropped her defensive tone and took up one of wise pleading. "I know Ed talks rough," she admitted, "but a wife could soon take that out of him —and it's not often a girl gets a chance like that at a good man that's never looked at another woman—just waiting for her to grow up."

Grace's sentiment was touched.

"Ed *is* sweet, Helen," she murmured. Just waiting for her to grow up! After the humiliations of the day, those words were not without balm. "Please don't scold me. I appreciate Ed's qualities as much as you do." Just waiting for her to grow up. There was something distressing as well as soothing about that statement. She asked: "Why hasn't he ever said anything to me about it?"

Helen rocked slowly, inspecting Grace with shrewd eyes.

"He's tried to, but I guess you never noticed. But he has to me. He says you never take him serious. He's just been waiting all his life for you, honey. You're all the world to him and it will just break his heart if you say, 'No.' Of course, he's the kind that never says much. You know Ed never hardly ever says anything. But he feels things all the same. He says he's going to give up his—his business—and retire if

you'll marry him. Just think what that would mean, honey! Just think! It would be the saving of him!"

Grace glanced at Helen's radiant face. Thoughts of a respectable future for Ed brought back the distant past—her father, honored with many university degrees, but dying penniless; herself a girl, no more than a child, who had been left unprovided for; Ed, with his lumpy fists, his round, serious eyes which had worshiped Doctor Meredith who first had taken *him* in, trudging into life under a double burden which he shouldered uncomplainingly.

There had been times Grace had known when a dollar had meant everything to Ed. And now, after his struggles, he was a man of wealth. There was a life of ease and quiet ahead for him if he would take it, a life where desperate shooting and disquieting talk of racketeers would no longer intrude to worry Helen and Grace.

Her mind diverted from her own troubles for the moment by Helen's expectant face, Grace said softly:

"It would be wonderful."

Helen beamed with rapture.

"And he's doing it all for you, Grace. Oh, I think that you and Ed are just suited to each other! Oh, I'm so glad Ed feels that way about you and that you act so sensible! We could go down to Florida and get Ed to be like a—like a real society man. He could put on a dress suit for dinner every night and stop saying 'ain't' and 'I seen it.' It's not that he don't *know* grammar. You and Ed would be so happy together, because Ed worships you and you'd soon find out what it means to have a husband that's only got one wish and that to please *you*. You know, Ed's never been much for women. That's something to have in a husband. You don't realize it now, but you will."

Slowly Grace drew the comb through her hair. She hardly heard Helen's words. Suddenly she saw two tears rolling down her cheeks reflected in the mirror. She closed her eyes, wiped her face and shook her hair forward determinedly. But the room went black and she gripped the sides of her dressing table to keep from swaying in her chair. She felt trapped, deserted, sick. Going to her bed, she lay down.

"I don't believe I'll have lunch, Helen. It's so hot, I——" she murmured vaguely.

Helen bent over her solicitously, a light of understanding in her eyes.

"It's the suddenness," she diagnosed. "You're just upset. Maybe I should have told you a little easier, but I was so pleased and anxious about it when Ed told me how he felt—— I'll get a cold cloth." Helen began to bustle about with tender authoritativeness. "And you can have your lunch whenever you want it." Arranging the pillows for Grace and laying a soaked towel on her hot forehead, Helen then slipped downstairs.

Meanwhile, Big Ed lounged unhappily in a swing on the cottage porch. He whistled disconnectedly, picked up the Sunday papers, laid them back again and glanced toward the door. Earlier that morning Helen had been with him on the veranda. They had talked. He had arisen, pulling uneasily at his monogrammed belt.

"Say, Helen," he had begun, "did you ever think about me getting married?"

Helen had answered, resignedly, "That's bound to happen, Ed."

But she had become not only relieved but happy when he added: "I mean—to Grace."

"To Grace!" Helen had exclaimed: "You want to marry Grace!"

Big Ed had demanded tensely her opinion and she had answered:

"I think the idea would surprise her, but she thinks an awful lot of you, Ed."

They had talked further. Then Helen had said: "I'll see." Ed had gone for

a restless walk. And now he was waiting for Helen to reappear with her report.

As Helen came to the porch Ed asked sharply: "Well?"

Helen smiled mysteriously and shook her head.

"Just like a man," she said, mildly indignant, "expecting everything to happen in a day and no patience if it don't." But there was a hint of promise in her voice.

Big Ed frowned anxiously. "It's all up to Grace," he said. "I even went and bought a diamond, but I——" He flung his cigarette over the wooden railing and felt deep in his trousers pocket. "Say, Helen, she's a beauty." He turned over a small, purple box with loving fingers and unsnapped the clasp. "There's the baby! Think she'll like it?" A large, blue diamond set in platinum glowed between his thumb and forefinger in the reflected sunlight.

Helen coughed warningly. "Here comes Grace," she said. She rose, descended the steps and walked toward the lake as Grace stepped through the door.

Her eyes ringed darkly with sadness and her cheeks unnaturally pale, Grace stood on the porch. She looked from Helen's disappearing back to the heavy jaw and massive shoulders of Ed who sat nervously watching her. In going away, she thought uncomfortably, Helen was trying to be tactful. But what was there to be tactful about? Ed was no different from what he had always been —a kind of overgrown half brother. Perhaps Helen had been mistaken, was taking too much for granted in speaking for Ed. Yet the words had been spoken. Ed himself, her emotionally frayed nerves could feel, now stood before her in a new light. But she was thinking less of that than of her own abysmal misery.

As Grace stood there uncertainly Big Ed got up and walked slowly across to her. He took her arm in a clumsy, tentative manner. Leaning above her he began huskily:

"You sure got beautiful eyes, kid."

His words were so well meant, so awkward, so sincere. And Grace felt so deserted, so humiliated, so forlorn. Here at least was a friendly, familiar bulwark to lean against. The tension snapped.

"Oh, Ed!" She began to cry, her bosom heaving and her lashes wet with tears. "You're so—so good to me!"

Ed Case dropped a protecting arm about her shoulders and looked down, not only in genuine sympathy but also with a smile of anticipated triumph.

CHAPTER XI.

THE SHOW-DOWN.

IT was a Sunday morning, a little before noon, and Sam Lowell sat by the apartment window thinking ruefully of the very few hours he had spent that week at his bond office.

Fritz was to go in the roadster for Lady Glad, having arranged to take her to the opening of the Blue Danube that night and to drive her to town for an open-air concert that afternoon. Between the music and the supper they were to pick up Sam.

At about eleven the phone rang. It was Simmy Pope.

"Say," wheezed that racketeer after a few preliminary words of greeting had been exchanged, "I got the dope you wanted on the dame."

"Not Grace Meredith!" Sam eagerly drew the instrument closer to him.

"Sure," responded Simmy; "but keep your shirt on. She won't run away. She's out in one of them cottages on the lake past Wildhurst, livin' with an older dame."

"Where? Which cottage?" demanded Sam, already glancing toward the table where his hat lay. He grinned joyfully.

Simmy told him. "The snooper I had

out on her said she was up at the north end of the lake. Name of the joint is called Uneeda Bath, or now—let's see—Uneeda Rest, I guess."

"I'll find it," said Sam confidently. "Maybe I'll bring her down to-night for your opening, Simmy," he went on optimistically. "Say, that was great of you, Simmy——"

"Forget it," growled Simmy, his gratification showing plainly. "But lemme give you a tip. When you start coppin' that baby off, cop her quick—see? And don't let Ed Case see you first. Well, so long, Sam, ol' kid. I won't keep you any longer."

"Watch me walk out there to-night with Mrs. Sam Lowell," Sam told him impressively.

"Great stuff!" said Simmy delightedly. "I'll have orange blossoms on the table."

Elated, Sam hung up the receiver.

"Hey, Fritz!" he shouted excitedly. "I found her!"

Fritz, who was in the hall contemplating an extraordinary porcelain vase which was as large as himself, looked up as Sam came in. He stroked the surface lovingly. The vase had been delivered only the afternoon before, but he had bought it in Italy during his recent trip across the Atlantic.

"Found her?" he said absently. "Oh," he continued with more interest, "not Grace Meredith?" He saw the answer to his question in Sam's beaming face. "That's great, old son. Where is she?"

"She's out at that little lake west of the city—where I found her before. I'm going out there now." Sam took up his hat and stick.

"Wait a minute," advised Fritz. "Don't you want to take Percy? You'll get there faster."

Sam hesitated. He had planned to go on the electric train, but he had no idea of the time when the cars left.

"Don't *you* want him?" he asked. Then he added: "But it's Sunday, Fritz. Let the poor guy have a day off, why don't you?"

"Got a hunch he won't want it," Fritz smiled as he went to the telephone. "That other trip out to Wildhurst sort of aroused his natural taste for excitement. I'll get him in a minute."

Sam sat down impatiently. He looked without interest at the new vase Fritz had bought. The apartment was full of art pieces which any museum might have welcomed, for Fritz was something of a collector. The vase stood very near the door that opened into Sam's bedroom. He walked past it, deciding to change his necktie while he waited for Percy.

In his room Sam whistled softly to himself. He heard Fritz knock on the door to tell him that Percy would be around in a minute. "Fine," he said; and Fritz departed singing, for his own bathroom. Then the little bell in the apartment tinkled warningly. Alexander tapped on Sam's door.

"The lady to see you, sah, that was here the other day," said Alexander in a low tone. "Miss—ah—Miss Stolp, she said her name was."

Impatiently Sam walked into the living room. Miss Stolp! He had never heard of her. As he entered he saw a large female in a lacy picture hat who looked up from the couch by the fireplace and greeted him smilingly.

"Pleased to meet you, Mr. Lowell. Always wanted to shake hands with a genuine millionaire. Most of the millionaires I met so far don't know whether they'll have a million to-morrow or a one-way ticket to Leavenworth."

As she spoke the woman bent her head and fumbled in the depths of a white bag on her lap. Sam looked at her helplessly.

"I'm afraid I'm not a millionaire, either," he said, wondering what on earth such a woman wanted from him

and wishing he had had the forethought to tell Alexander he was out.

Miss Stolp drew forth a package of cigarettes and handed them to Sam. She smiled. "Have one?"

Sam took a step forward. "Thanks," he accepted. Well, he thought, as soon as Percy came he would bolt. Resignedly holding out a match for the woman's cigarette, he watched her smiling upward out of softly luminous eyes.

"Sit down," she said, and patted the couch beside her tenderly. "You big bum," she added.

Dumfounded, Sam simply stared. He had no notion that Bess Stolp's favorite aphorism was: "Call a man a big bum and you've got him." A weak smile flitted over Sam's lips.

"I'm sorry," he said, "but I have an engagement. I've got to hurry right away. Did you want to see me about anything in particular?"

Bess lifted a very plump forefinger. "Now, now," she said banteringly, "mamma's old sweet thing! Mustn't talk that way to Bess! Sit down and tell me all about itself. We got lots of time."

"Have we really?" Sam was a little nettled. Undoubtedly, he decided, this was some new kind of agent. Well, if she insisted on waiting around, she would have to be left to the tender mercies of Fritz.

"Oh, I've got plenty to say," Bess answered. Inhaling slowly, she added: "Of *interest*." She showed her gleaming teeth in an inviting smile. "Come on, big boy. Sit down and we'll have a real heart-to-heart talk. I've got your welfare at heart, you big bum, and it might be we've got interests in common." She paused. "Meanwhile, I've got no objections to going out to lunch with a millionaire."

Sam walked restlessly to the door and glanced into the hallway. Percy, his cap in his hand, was standing beside Fritz's new vase, gazing with awe at its great size. Sam looked back toward his astounding guest.

"There *is* a millionaire around here, as it happens," he observed pleasantly. "I believe he's in his bath at present, but you might speak to him of your passion for lunching with millionaires." He walked out. "Good-by," he added, thrusting his head in the room. "So nice of you to come and see me." Nodding to Percy, he went out through the hallway before Bess Stolp could rise to protest.

In front of the building he jumped into the waiting car beside the chauffeur.

"We're off in a cloud of dust," he said hilariously. "Make it Wildhurst today, Percy, and don't stop for anything."

"Aw, listen, Mr. Sam," began Percy in protest. "I got a cousin on the police force and he's a square dick——"

Sam leveled an accusing stare. "Percy, you've been going to the movies."

Percy blushed. "That's right, Mr. Sam. But my cousin, he's on the level and so's the copper he pals with. I give 'em a ring this morning and I thought we ought to take 'em in the back seat."

Sam laughed. He said, "You're cuckoo, Perce. No, we'll get along without their help. And if you're afraid, I can get a taxi."

Percy made no answer to this, but bent his eyes on the sunny boulevard which streamed with pleasure cars. In an hour and forty-five minutes they had passed into the country and were skirting along the edge of Lake Mina toward its north end. They came to a cluster of low dwellings facing the water.

"Must be one of these," said Sam. "I'll get out here. Perce, you can wait till I come back."

Percy put on the brake and turned off the engine. Then he deliberately inserted the key in the transmission lock.

"I'll come along, Mr. Sam," he remarked soberly.

"You will *not!*" Sam ordered sharply. "Now get back at the wheel and unlock the motor."

"I got a gun," said Percy moodily.

"Then don't tell me about it," said Sam, "because it would be my duty to have you arrested. I suppose you think there's a man behind every tree! Well, get ready to start up quickly in case it's necessary and don't be surprised if you have another passenger going home."

Percy brightened. "Oh, I've got you, Mr. Sam. You're gonna kinda sneak up like and run off with the girl. I see. Well, I'll be all set to travel."

Sam smiled and buoyantly walked off over the soft grass.

Two cottages stood close together near the beach. One, he saw as he came up to it, was deserted, for Violet had done her work and was back at the Lindy on Wabash Avenue. It bore the rustic sign: "Dewdrop Inn." Sam passed it at an increasing pace. The next one carried the information, "Uneeda Rest." That was the place; and with a thumping heart Sam walked up on the empty veranda and, opening the screen, knocked at the open door.

There was no response. Sam looked from left to right. The cottage was cool and inviting. At the windows cretonne curtains were swaying slightly. His eyes fixed expectantly on the bare staircase that rose up from the hall, Sam knocked again.

A woman was coming down the stairs. He could see her white slippers. But his second glance disappointed him. The white legs were slightly curved and as he saw the skirt he knew it for the sober fabric worn by an older woman. A moment later Helen McClusky, her brows questioning under her dark, fox-like eyes, stood at the bottom of the steps.

"How do you do, Mrs. McClusky," began Sam cordially. "Is Miss Meredith in?"

Recognition came into Helen McClusky's face. She frowned. Keeping her hands close to her sides, she answered uninvitingly: "Oh—it's Mr. Lowell." As she spoke Sam heard a slight stir at the head of the stairs. Looking down again he quickly read the hostility in Mrs. McClusky's face, and Simmy's warning came to him: "When you start to cop her, cop her quick." There had been, Sam felt, too many setbacks for him to permit another. He strode to the stairs and, with his hand on the newel post, looked upward.

"Grace!" he called.

Helen McClusky stepped back inside the doorway of her little living room in some astonishment.

"Well!" she said tartly. "My land, Mr. Lowell, but you've got your nerve with you!"

Unheeding, Sam went on, for he had seen Grace looking over the banister, her small face drawn and unhappy, her eyes round with dreadful questioning. "Grace!" called Sam again, and bounded upward. She was walking slowly toward him. He held out his arms with eagerness.

Below in the hall Helen McClusky quickly disappeared. Above on the stairs Sam anxiously watched Grace's troubled expression. She had no smile for him, no welcome. Very soberly she sat down and drew away from his eager hands.

From one of the rear rooms in the cottage there came an infuriated roar. Big Ed appeared, shouting and cursing: "Lemme get at him! I'll teach him ——" He stopped, for he had never allowed himself to curse before Grace. "Get off them stairs!" he snarled. "What the hell d'you mean, bustin' in this house?"

Sam looked over the curve of the stairway at the enraged man below. He moved his eyes away again, as if the sight were of negligible importance.

"Grace," he said, "if it's about that

piece in the paper—that's a lie." He leaned toward her pleadingly.

Big Ed was climbing the stairs.

"What the hell do you think she gives a damn *how* many women you're engaged to?" he bawled, his jealousy plainly showing. "Grace, git out an' lemme handle this bozo!"

Grace rose slowly to her feet.

"Let him alone, Ed," she said wearily. "I can talk to him."

Hesitant, fearful of his actions under Grace's eyes, Ed Case stood beside Sam on the stairway, his instinct warning him not to begin the assault while Grace remained. Both men were watching her with anxiety. Twisting a fine linen handkerchief in her nervous fingers, she said levelly at the end of a doubtful moment:

"Ed is right, Sam. I have no interest in—in your engagement to *anybody!*"

Hurt and bewildered by the calm finality of her words, Sam stared blankly into Grace's eyes. All at once she met his gaze, her own expression a reflection of the anguish he felt. Involuntarily he held out his hands again, the hulking man beside him forgotten.

"But Grace," he told her miserably, "I've never been engaged to anybody—never wanted to be engaged to anybody except you!"

Big Ed leaned against the wall and drew up a corner of his mouth satirically.

"Fancy talk!" he observed. "Hot stuff!"

Sam turned angrily. "I don't know what your object is, Case," he said hotly, "but I wish you'd let me speak to Grace alone."

Big Ed's face grew ugly. "Yeah? We'll talk about that outside. Jist now the young lady's got something to say to you!"

Grace looked at Ed despairingly. Then, keeping her eyes from Sam, she laid her hand on Ed's shoulder as if for strength.

"I'm going to marry Ed," she said with pallid lips, and then, as both men stared at her, she turned and disappeared around the corner of the stairs.

Big Ed stamped slowly to the hall. Sam clamped his jaws and followed. He was no longer bewildered. Big Ed was his enemy and a jealous one. Perhaps on account of his having been seen with Simmy Pope. Perhaps because of Grace. He passed by Big Ed who opened the screen and held it. A slight tinge of gratification was mingled with the unfriendly stare in the racketeer's eyes.

"I got a few words to say to you, fellow," said Big Ed. "Come on out here on the porch!"

Sam eyed him contemptuously.

"I don't give a damn what you've got to say to me," he answered coldly. A chill fury grasped him like a giant hand. Case, he knew for certain now, was back of all his misfortunes, wanting Grace for himself.

"Mebbe not." Big Ed spat and narrowed his eyes. "But that talk don't get you nowheres. You been buttin' on my business long enough, fancy boy, an' you're gonna butt out from now on. An' when you see that yellow-backed Simmy Pope——"

Sam stiffened. "Your business?" His voice was scornful. "*Your* business! Case, I'd never get low enough to be mixed up with any possible business of yours. I've my own affairs and there's no room in them for crooks and liars like yourself. And if I ever find you trying to interfere——"

"Yeah? What'll you do!" Big Ed cut in, his small eyes glaring, his jaw outthrust and his shoulder hunched like a bull's. He knotted his fist and shot it outward and upward.

Sam speedily moved his feet. Ed Case struck the air and Sam lunged in with a blow to his jaw. "And if I ever find you trying," Sam clipped out from compressed lips, "trying to——"

But Big Ed had regained his balance and came forward with lowered head. Reaching for Sam, he raged:

"You got the guts to threaten *me!* Why, when I git through with you—you won't—you won't"—they had closed, their arms about each other, each straining to throw the other—"you won't be even dog meat!" gritted Ed Case.

Sam kept his breath and watched his chance to break the clinch. The bulk of the racketeer was heavy and overbearing, the arms constricting about Sam's shoulders and middle. And the stubby fingers of the uppermost hand were searching avidly along Sam's cheek for a place to gouge. Sam strained until his face was red and the veins stood like blue cords at his temples. But Big Ed's grasp was unshakable, his hands were creeping farther, and there was the warm, salt taste of blood on Sam's lips.

For a moment Sam was held in the deadlock. He wrenched backward as Big Ed reached for his eyes. The hand had gone too far and the grip was slipping. Big Ed realized his mistake, but too late. Jerking sidewise and using his elbow like a stump against the racketeer's chin, Sam broke loose and stood with his fist drawn back for an uppercut. But unexpectedly the blow was halted. And the two belligerents turned from each other toward a voice that commanded:

"*Get* away from there!"

Percy, a pistol protruding from a steady hand, stood glaring at Ed Case with anger and indignation. He jerked his head a little in Sam's direction. "You do what you wanta do, Mr. Sam. I guess I got this guy stopped pretty good." He nodded threateningly at Big Ed and waited, expecting Sam to run into the house, appear with Grace Meredith and hurry to the waiting machine while he checked the racketeer with his pistol.

But Sam stood disappointingly irresolute. Finally turning from Big Ed, he said gloomily:

"Put up your gun, Perce. It's time for us to go."

Percy, looking at Sam in pained surprise, shook his head. He couldn't understand why Sam, when he had come for the girl, should leave without her. Nodding vengefully at Ed Case, he ordered:

"You keep kinda motionless. If you don't I'll plug you one!" Then he dropped his heavy weapon in his coat pocket and lugubriously followed Sam to the waiting car.

CHAPTER XII.

BOMBED!

SAM'S ride back to town from Wildhurst that late Sunday afternoon was a silent one. He sat scowling beside the slightly bewildered Percy. The heavy car held its slow pace in the long line of summer holiday traffic, which streamed unbroken over the flat highway for miles toward Chicago.

There was no way of hurrying, nor any need, Sam thought gloomily. For with those last words of Grace it seemed as if the most engrossing chapter of his life had come to a sudden and dissatisfying close. He might get himself engaged to any girl in the country and it would be of no concern to Grace. She was going to marry Big Ed! He had heard her tell Ed so.

His anger against Ed Case mounted and he gripped his fingers into a solid fist. Percy, he regretted somberly, had done him no service in appearing with that pistol. The interruption, well meant as it had been, had done no more than delay the final show-down until another time.

Thus his thoughts played gloomily with his predicament as Percy kept the touring car in the long line of eastward-moving traffic. At one moment Sam would bitterly assure himself that Grace

was gone from him forever. And his mind would picture Grace as mistress of a glorified suburban bungalow, the wife of that hulking racketeer, while he, Sam, pursued his desolate and angry way from his room in some men's club, far from the society of womenkind, to his bond office, where he would grow rich and gray, and thence to the golf courses where the young upstarts of the country would easily rob him of his hard-earned championship.

But then that sad visualization of his future life would swiftly pass; with hope and fury he would remember Grace's words, both those that she had spoken and those that had lain in her eyes. She had said she no longer had an interest in his affairs. But hadn't her look denied it? She had informed him that she intended to marry Case. But her voice had been shaky and her lips pitiably pale.

So there was hope for Sam, cause for hope and cause for anger. Without that fake story in the *World-Times'* social column, without the influence of Ed Case, Grace Meredith could never have changed so quickly in her regard for Sam. Big Ed, surely, was the prime mover behind the vicious assault on him that night at the side of the Rudolph Tower. Ed also had brought about his estrangement from Grace, Sam was certain. And with that certainty solid in his mind, his feelings soared and his thoughts for the time were focused less on the girl than on plans to obliterate the barrier that stood between. Big Ed, he grimly told himself, had somehow to be knocked out of the way.

Midafternoon when they had left Wildhurst, it was nearly evening when the car passed through the suburbs and came to the city limits. Fritz, Sam knew, would still be out, having supper with Lady Glad. Ahead, dim in the fading light of day, showed the electric sign of a spacious restaurant.

"Let's stop and eat," said Sam.

Percy parked the car and they went inside. As the food was brought Sam brooded moodily on what appeared to be Big Ed's strange power over Grace. As soon as he got back to the apartment, Sam decided, he would write her a long letter. For if Big Ed had persuaded her to marry him out of a sense of gratitude and duty, she ought to be warned that such an unsuitable marriage could be only the most painful of mistakes. But still, he knew, there was more than that behind Grace's amazing decision. Why should she tell him she was not interested in his engagement to anybody? The newspaper squib, yes—but was that all? So he sat, pondering gloomily, vainly seeking a way to strike back at Ed Case.

From the restaurant they drove on to the Rudolph Tower. Arriving there, Sam had barely time to write his letter to Grace and dress before Fritz and Lady Glad came gayly into the apartment. They had been dining together at one of Fritz's clubs. Both of them were in high spirits, for Lady Glad had an eager interest in meeting Chicago's leading racketeer, and Fritz had obligingly fitted his own mood to hers.

"Where'd you get the black eye?" Fritz merrily exclaimed as he saw the abraded and discolored side of Sam's face.

Sam put on his hat with dignity. "Ed Case," he said.

Fritz callously emitted a chuckle. "Well, that puts Mr. Case two up on you. What the devil were you doing?"

Sam pushed Fritz into the elevator and they shot down to the lobby outside of which the car was waiting at the curb. On the way down Lady Glad said sympathetically:

"But how dreadful! Did you really have a fight with a gunman? Sam, really, you're my ideal. Fritz has been telling me the story of that delicious little Meredith girl. Didn't I say on the

boat that there was something unusual about her? Fritz, didn't I? I can always tell. I have *such* a talent for people. Now tell me how it happened."

Sam took his place in the machine and told them briefly as they passed over the bridge. "And so," he ended, "that's that."

"That's bad," Fritz admitted in a matter-of-fact tone. "But I hope it'll be a lesson to you, Sam. You ought to keep away from a man like that."

"Of *course* he won't keep away from him. Will you, Sam?" Lady Glad looked at Fritz indignantly. Then she turned a delightedly hopeful smile on Sam and urged: "It's a gang war now, isn't it, Sam?"

"Oh, yes," Sam agreed with mock cheerfulness. "Delighted, if you'll promise to be my gang."

"What I hope," broke in Fritz, "is that now, maybe, you'll begin to look among your own friends for a wife."

Lady Glad cut in spiritedly:

"He'll do nothing of the sort! Fritz is simply too unromantic for words! For my part, I'm all for the beautiful Grace and I think it's the sweetest thing I ever heard of. I wish I could do something! Couldn't I? Couldn't I dash out there and talk with Grace and explain everything to her?"

Sam said fervently: "Lord, if you only would!"

But Fritz snorted: "I think you ought to leave the whole shooting match alone, Glad. Big Ed has done enough to show the sort he is, and I think Sam damn well deserves what he got for busting in on gangsters' affairs. The way I look at it," he continued philosophically, "is live and let live. The racketeers have never troubled me. They'd never have troubled Sam if he'd kept away from them, or at least not antagonized them. That doesn't pay. I've never bothered them, and sometimes they do me little favors. For instance—that case of Scotch I bought from your friend, Simmy Pope, was real stuff."

"Disgusting!" Lady Glad labeled Fritz's attitude in the matter.

The car turned in at the parking area at the side of the Blue Danube and stopped. They got out and went inside. Simmy, Sam discovered as they passed through the door into the great crowded room, had tried to make the Blue Danube live up to its name so far as the walls were concerned. All the decorations were in aquamarine blue, with heavy curtains of soft velvet in the same color shutting off the cloak room. And surrounding the tables were fantastic river scenes where gorgeous boats plied up and down, from which peasant girls dived sportively overboard through the blue air into the still bluer water.

At the rustic tables, on the rustic chairs, which enforced Simmy's decorative scheme as to likeness of the Danube, sat party after party of men, girls and older women, most of whom were quietly and pleasantly defeating the Eighteenth Amendment by means of the foamy, creamy beer in steins on the table and flasks of cut whisky on the floor beneath. Many were from the city, but some of them had come from the adjacent suburbs. They were there for a good time, they wanted the distinction of having been present at the first night of the county's newest and most resplendent places, and they wanted to see who else was there. And as the head waiter, black-jacketed and bullet-headed, led Sam's party to a large central table near the orchestra platform, the only unoccupied table in the room, there was many an eye turned toward the newcomers.

But Lady Glad, accustomed to creating sensational entrances, passed by unnoticing. Fritz followed, and Sam was too preoccupied with his own thoughts to observe. "Mr. Pope," the head waiter was saying to him, "he's pretty busy to-night, he said to tell you. You

know, with the openin' an' all this gang, he ain't got so much time."

"Oh, dear!" wailed Lady Glad. "I know I'm not going to get to meet him!"

They sat down at the table. "Sure you'll see him. You'll probably——" But the blare of the jazz orchestra drowned out his unimportant words and he took up the drink card resignedly.

Sam sat looking about the room. his gaze twice passing a vaguely familiar figure of a woman, then wandering on again among the faces of the crowd. The woman was large, and beneath her lacy picture hat her smile flashed toward him. Once more he looked, irritated to be unable to place her. Then recognition came. It was the Stolp female who had come up to the apartment that morning and had brazenly sat there until he escaped. He said to Fritz:

"Fritz, after I left this morning, was there a woman in the living room when you came out?"

"No," said Fritz, "I didn't see any woman there. Was there some one?"

Sam told him, ending: "She must have gone away as soon as I left."

"Perhaps," suggested Lady Glad mischievously, "she's a gangstress."

Sam laughed. But meanwhile Bess Stolp, seated at a small table opposite a large fat man, was scribbling a note to Sam on the back of a bill of fare and, having finished, called a waiter to deliver it.

The waiter, a henchman of Simmy's, looked at her out of long, narrow eyes. "Do your own dirty work," he said out of the corner of his mouth, and turned abruptly on his heel.

"Gosh, but you're a bright boy!" Bess angrily called after him.

"Yeh?' The waiter twisted around to mutter: "How's Big Ed to-night?"

Bess Stolp looked solemnly at her escort. "That bozo sure is a bright boy."

"Well," said her companion, "what do you expect? Now, listen, Bess, if you and me——" His talk went on while Sam, Fritz and Lady Glad drank beer and waited for Simmy Pope to appear. But Simmy was having a more than busy evening among his cooks, waiters and delivery vans in the rear. Twice he came out in the crowd—once to speak to the entertainers and once to hurry toward the front door and back again—but each time he bestowed on Sam and the party of honor no more than a swiftly waved hand.

The evening wore on.

"Let's go," said Fritz. "You'll have to wait another time to see your gunman in a close-up."

But Lady Glad was obdurate. "I mean to stick it out," she said.

"I'm usually in bed by midnight," objected Fritz, "and it's now——" He raised his wrist watch for her inspection. It was after eleven.

"Oh, sit around a while," said Sam. "This is the first good beer I've had since I came back to Chicago." He took a replenished stein which the waiter handed him and drained it. Over the brim his glance traveled toward the table which Bess Stolp had occupied. But another couple now sat there. "That Stolp female's gone," he observed.

"Now for the bombing!" suggested Lady Glad.

"Bombing!" Fritz jeered. "This place is just about as exciting as the Ritz or the Savoy—only there's a devil of a lot more noise."

Midnight came. The crowd was dwindling. Again Fritz pushed back his cuff and exposed his watch. "It's a good hour's driving back to town," he said, "and Lord knows where I'll have to take you after we get there."

At last Lady Glad was ready to leave.

"Only to Dotty Parmer's," she interrupted; "I'm stopping the night with her. And if you really want to go, we'll go."

They left. The ride back to town seemed long and tedious, the conversation chiefly concerned by a dispute between Fritz and Lady Glad as to whether the Blue Danube had been worth the trouble. Lady Glad, clear to the lobby of Dotty Parmer's apartment building, maintained that it had been, which somewhat softened Fritz's attitude, for she had said she wanted to go again.

"Fine," said Sam, parting from Lady Glad. "We'll go again and I promise to have Simmy fully on display."

The two men got back into the car and drove to the Rudolph Tower. As they walked to the elevator Fritz began to deliver a little paternal advice which he had been preparing throughout the evening.

"Now this loping all around town is well enough, Sam, but, damn it, I hope you get down to your office in the morning and do some work. Why don't you simply admit to yourself that you've made a poor choice and look for some other girl?" They were ascending to the top. "You shouldn't," said Fritz as he stepped out of the grilled cage to the little stairs that led to his private apartment, "get so heated up about these gangsters. It doesn't make any difference——"

Fritz stopped short. For the floor and walls seemed to rock about him as if ready to cave in the middle. There was a roar that drowned his words, and both men staggered. But Fritz, who was nearer the door, regained his footing and jerked at the knob. The door flew open and a haze of acrid smoke rolled out. Fritz recoiled and Sam, more acquainted with the fumes from bombs, rushed into the room and ran to open the windows. Returning, the smoke somewhat abated, Sam found Fritz standing in the hall between his bedroom and the bath. There was a hole in the wall. Beneath it lay a pile of plaster in which showed richly colored chunks of the antique porcelain vase, the latest art treasure to be housed in the apartment.

Fritz cursed, infuriated at the whole world:

"Damn it, I told you you ought to keep away from these racketeers! Damn that Ed Case! I wonder who in the hell he thinks he is, that he can plant a bomb in *my* apartment and smash up *my* porcelain vase! But he'll pay for it! I'm damned if he won't!" Fritz stood gripping his fists and staring into the wreckage.

Sam interrupted, but politely:

"And just how will Big Ed pay for it, Fritz?"

Fritz stared with indignation and fury.

"Oh, he'll pay for it! If he thinks he's got all Chicago afraid of him, it shows what a fool he is."

Sam laughed. Fritz was taking his own misfortunes much more seriously than he had taken Sam's.

"Oh, I didn't mean to imply he had you big butter-and-egg men bluffed."

"Never mind," Fritz told him coldly, "about us big butter-and-egg men. Ed Case'll be damned sorry."

"Oh, sure," Sam answered moodily. "I suppose you're thinking of punching him in the jaw."

"Too crude," said Fritz, and was silent.

But three days later, at a special meeting of the stockholders, Ed Case was deposed from his presidency of the Speedway Motors Corporation, one of the many concerns in which Fritz Rudolph not only held stock, but knew many other financiers who held even more.

To be concluded in the next issue.

A Perfect Gentleman

By MARK PRICE

What Is a Hard-boiled Two-gun Westerner To Do When the Girl of His Dreams Takes Him For a Perfect Gentleman?

AS I rode toward Oakwood three hombres popped up from behind a rock and stuck their guns under my nose. I stopped and says: "It's a fine day, gents."

"Damn the weather!" answers one of them. "What we want to know is who are you?"

"Let the kid alone, Bill," says another. "Can't yuh see he ain't the one? He ain't got any down on his upper lip even, and look at those innocent blue eyes!" He grinned, and I didn't like his remarks, but what can you do when three guns are pointin' at you?

"Yuh see, stranger, we're on the lookout for a hombre," explains the third man. "His name is 'Trigger' Caswell, a card sharp and a gun slinger. He cleaned the boys over at Union City last week, and then shot his way out. We got word that he's headin' this way, and we're goin' to keep him out of our town. But since you look young and harmless you c'n go on."

So I rode on in to town.

Right away I seen a girl, and I nearly fell off my bronc. She was a beauty, dark hair and brown eyes and a face like an angel. I had never looked at females before, but somehow I knew I had to get acquainted with her. I dismounted and walked past her.

"It's a fine day, ma'am," I says.

She went sailin' by as if I had not spoke. I started to walk after her, but then I thought of a better way. My bronc Henry is a trick pony, and he's got one stunt that I am particular proud of. I whisper in his ear and his front legs cave in and he drops as if he is dead. It looks awful real. So I went back and got in the saddle and trotted past the young lady, and then whispered in Henry's ear. And the bronc went down like he had been shot, and I fell in the dust and laid there like a dead man. It is dangerous, but a sure-fire method to get acquainted.

The girl ran up and knelt down beside me, and raised my head in her arms. "Oh!" she sighs. She looked so tender and charmin' that I couldn't sham no longer. I sat up and says, "Thank you kindly, ma'am, but I'm not hurt much."

"Dear me!" she says, "I thought sure you were dead." I sighed and acted weak, so she wouldn't go away. So she helped me up slow and easy, sayin', "It's a mercy you were not killed."

"Yes, ma'am," I says. "And by the way, what is your name?"

"Carol Hoyt," she answers. "And what is yours?"

After a pause I says, "Joe. Joe—Smith." And we shook hands solemn.

"Mr. Smith, all the men in this town are terrible unmannerly ruffians," she declares. "You are the first man that ever came here that didn't try to flirt with me, and get acquainted. You seem to be a real gentleman."

She must not of heard me when I spoke to her about the weather. I thanked my lucky stars, and changed the subject. "It's lucky for me that I fell off my horse, or I wouldn't of got to know you, Miss Hoyt. And also I think Carol is a awful pretty name."

We walked along talkin', and as we passed the gamblin' hall a man came up. He had a fancy vest and a little mustache and a hard face, and right off I disliked him. He raised his hat with a grin, and says, "Howdy, Carol."

Carol lifted her nose in the air and went on, like he was dirt. He flushed and gave a hard laugh, sayin', "Still the same, ain't you?" Then as he went by he brushed against me.

Right away he was boilin' mad. He shoved me aside. "Get out of my way, you dumb rhinoceros!" he yells. And that got me mad, too, but also puzzled. For before I could push his face in, I had to know the meanin' of his words. Rhinoceros, thinks I; what in blazes is a rhinoceros? And by the time I could think of it, the hombre had disappeared through the door of the gamblin' hall.

Just as I was ready to go after him, Carol touched my arm. She looked at me admirin'. "I certainly admire you," she says. "Most men would of started a fight with him for what he did. But instead you restrained yourself and took it quietly. You almost come up to my ideal of a perfect gentleman!"

She was givin' credit where no credit was due, but I did not let on. "And what is your ideal of a perfect gentleman?" I asks.

"He must be mild and courteous," she answers. "He must not flirt, or gamble, or drink, or swear. And he must not fight, whatever the circumstances might be."

Them specifications hit me pretty hard. I could not imagine a real he-man livin' up to them—he would have to be a kind of tailor's dummy to meet Carol's demands. "Aren't you askin' a little too much?" I asks.

"No," she answers, her dark eyes flashin'. "I couldn't ever have anything to do with a man who didn't live up to that!"

That was sure a large order that she mentioned. But I looked at her and her wide eyes was beautiful, and her delicate face was beautiful, and she was the finest girl I had ever seen. No matter how tight a loop she's spreadin',

thinks I, I got to get inside of it regardless. So I says, "Ain't that peculiar, ma'am? You and me, we think just exactly alike on these things."

"I'm so glad, Mr. Smith," she says, and held my arm tighter. By this time we had come to a store, and here she stopped. "I must go back to work, now," she tells me. "This is my store here. Good-by, Mr. Smith. I hope to see you again some time."

"You sure will, Miss Hoyt," I replies, as I left her. And I meant that. I put my bronc in the stable, and got a room in the hotel. I had not intended to spend much time in Oakwood, but after seein' her I was ready to stay there forever.

After a while I went back down to the store, and there was Carol behind the counter. "A half pound of crackers, please," I says.

After makin' my purchase I loitered around some. Carol told me that her dad had died recent, and now she was runnin' the store herself. It was no job fer a woman, but she seemed to handle it pretty well.

A horseman rides by down the street, and I seen that it was the same jasper who had shoved me that mornin'. "Who is he?" I asks.

"That is Hal Spencer," she replies. "He runs the gamblin' hall, and they say he runs a crooked game. My father used to go to his place, and now Mr. Spencer is always coming around the store. I wish he would stay away."

"Does he bother you?" says I.

"He is a nuisance, always insistin' that I got to marry him," she says. "I always refuse him, but he won't take no for an answer. He's a gunman and a thief. I don't want anything to do with him!" She shivered.

I was ready to tell her that I'd get rid of him for her, but then I remembered I had to be a gentleman and couldn't fight, so I says nothin'. "I'll see you again, Miss Hoyt," says I.

It was evenin' now. Walkin' down the street I stopped in at the gamblin' hall. There was redeye bein' served, and my throat was dry. And there was games of poker goin' on, and I fair itched to take a hand of stud. But I couldn't do neither of these things, 'cause I had to be a perfect gentleman.

So I just stood and looked on. The house gamblers was shifty-eyed rats that looked like they knew all the crooked card tricks by heart. The boss, Hal Spencer himself, came in, and he gave me a sneerin' look. He passed on, and then three hombres loungin' at the bar started talkin' about me.

"Who's the strange cow-puncher?" asks one.

"That's the coyote what took water from Hal Spencer this mornin'," answers another.

"Ho!" laughs the third. "I guess he just wears that gun on his hip fer a ornament!"

I was beginnin' to see red, and to avoid trouble I walked out pronto. Their mockin' laugh rang in my ears as I left. By followin' Carol's ideas of a gentleman I was layin' myself open to be called yellow, but that could not be helped. I had seen her only that day, but already I was willin' to walk through fire for her. I had it bad. There was nothin' else to do, so I went to the hotel and to bed, and dreamed about Carol.

Next mornin' when I came to the store there was Hal Spencer with the town marshal beside him. Carol leaned against the counter, and her eyes was red like she had been cryin'.

"So here is the note," says Spencer, handin' her a paper. "And I am takin' over the store in return fer it. Not so, marshal?"

"Exactly," says the law.

"But you can stay on here as clerk, Carol," continues the gambler. "I want to treat you right, because I think a lot of you." And he grinned at her.

Carol did not answer; she stood there sort of half dazed. Spencer laughed insultin' and looked at me, and then he and the marshal walked out. "I am leavin' you in charge of the store, Carol," he calls as he left.

"What is wrong?" I asks her then.

She answers that he had brought a note signed by her father for a thousand dollars, an old gamblin' debt, and since she could not pay it he had taken the store. "It's strange that father didn't tell me about it," she adds.

"Have you got anything else that your dad wrote?" I asks. She brought out a letter, and I laid the note beside it to compare with. The handwritin' was pretty close, but it was not quite the same in the two.

"Carol——" says I.

"Please call me Miss Hoyt," says she.

"Miss Hoyt," says I, "you are bein' cold-decked by this tinhorn gambler. This note was not wrote by your father. It is forged."

"Oh!" she sighs. I was hopin' that now she would let me go ahead and take Spencer apart, but she only shrugged her shoulders. "Well, there is nothin' to be done. The marshal and the justice are under Spencer's thumb, and I can't get any help from the law here. Just have to let the store go, I guess."

"That is too bad. And also, I don't think much of your new boss."

"Nor do I. But I'll just make the best of it," says she. And her brown eyes lit up with a smile, and she looked calm and brave in the face of her troubles.

When I came back that afternoon there was more trouble. I came in the door, and there was Spencer holdin' Carol in his arms. He was pullin' her close and tryin' to kiss her. She fought him off with all her strength, silent and furious.

I seen red then, and rushed in. The tinhorn heard me come, and he pushed the girl away and stood facin' me. And then Carol, all pale and excited, shook her head at me and held up her hand in a forbidding manner.

That stopped me like a bucket of cold water. I remembered that I had to be a gentleman, and take everything quiet. If I tie into this hombre, thinks I, it will finish me with Carol. So I stopped, and stood there.

Spencer laughed then, and waved his hand airylike. "I'll see you again, Carol," he says, and he went away.

"I am so glad you controlled yourself, Mr. Smith," says Carol. "You certainly showed yourself to be a perfect gentleman."

"Carol——" says I.

"Please call me Miss Hoyt," says she.

"Miss Hoyt," says I, "you need somebody to look after you. Maybe if Spencer was hit on the jaw he wouldn't bother you any more."

"Oh!" gasps Carol. "I couldn't think of that! It would be terribly ungentlemanly!"

"Well, I was just thinkin'," says I, sort of lame. "Please give me half a pound of crackers, Miss Hoyt. And if you don't mind, I will hang around here fer a few minutes." So I stayed there, lookin' at Carol and talkin' to her, fer eight hours, till she closed the store at midnight.

When I left her, I couldn't go to the hotel to my bed. I was all restless and half crazy, like a cow what had et loco weed. I went to the stable and got my bronc Henry, and rode him tearin' across the plain.

Carol and Spencer was on my mind. When I thought of the tinhorn gambler I saw red, and when I thought of Carol, her sweetness and charm, my heart nearly stopped beatin'. And the more I thought the more I got on the prod, like a boiler gettin' up steam.

I laid down on the ground for a while, and in the middle of the mornin' rode

back to Oakwood, and went to the store. "Good mornin'," says I to Carol.

"Good mornin'," says she.

"Carol——" says I.

"Please call me Miss Hoyt," says she.

"Miss Hoyt," says I, "since you've been cheated out of your store, s'pose I go down to Spencer's place and ask him to pay for it?"

"That would be all right," she answers, sort of shaky. Then she tells me that Spencer had been there that mornin'. He says that he was boss in Oakwood, and she couldn't stall him off no longer. She was goin' to marry him that night, whether she wanted to or not. "He is a very hard and powerful man," she says, and I could see she was afraid.

"S'pose a fellow that thought a lot of you went to help you out, and in the course of things he gambled, and had a fight or two. What then?" I asks.

"That would be terrible! A man who acted like that would be no gentleman, and I wouldn't have anything to do with him," answers Carol. She tossed her head, and her brown eyes shone.

"Oh," says I, out loud. "Hell," says I, to myself. "I'll see you later," says I, out loud.

I went down the street, and turned in at the gamblin' hall. Spencer was not there, but two of his gamblers was playin' poker with two prospectors, with a crowd around. I stood and watched, and soon saw that the two tinhorns was usin' all the crooked card tricks there was, and that the two prospectors would soon be dry-gulched out of their gold dust.

Nobody else seemed to notice, and the game went along quiet. I went back and sat down. There was somethin' to thresh out in my mind. Things was gettin' me on the prod, and I could hardly keep a grip on myself any more. And also, I knew now that I was awful deep in love with Carol. But there was her words: "Any man who swears, or gambles, or fights is not a gentleman, and I won't have anything to do with him!"

Now I was up a tree. Carol was in a fix, and if I took a hand I would have to act like no gentleman, and she wouldn't look at me again. If I helped her out I would kill my own chances with her. But if I didn't—— I thought for a while, and decided.

The poker game was over, and the two prospectors was cleaned. The two gamblers was lookin' around for fresh victims, and I came up. "Here is all I got, boys," says I with a grin, holdin' up a twenty-dollar bill. "S'pose we play a hand."

The two tinhorns looked at each other and winked. "Take him, Jake," says one to the other.

Jake gave me a look like I was an easy mark. "You are too young and innocent to play this game, but come on," he says, and gave me twenty silver dollars fer chips. I sat down and dealt.

We played. Fer a time we ran along even. Then I seen the gambler deal himself a card from the bottom of the deck. The crooked work was beginnin'. He did it slick, and I says nothin'. But thinks I, you have got to fight the devil with fire. 'So I paid more attention to the game, and after that begun to win steady and heavy.

After a couple of hours there was nearly a thousand dollars in cash in front of me. The gambler was peeved and worried. "You got the damnedest luck I ever seen," says he. "The way you hold the cards you must be Trigger Caswell himself."

"Maybe I am him, at that," I answers, and he laughed.

The game went on, and a crowd gathered around. I went on winnin', and the house was gettin' worried. Jake cussed to himself, and the other gambler and the bartender closed in and stood watchin' like hawks. "Spencer ought

to be here," mutters the bartender. "But this kid's luck is bound to break soon." But my winnin' went on.

At last there was one grand pot, and I held four kings against Jake's full house, and raked in the cash. Jake scowled and shrugged his shoulders. "That's all there is," he says. "The house is broke."

So I stacked up my winnin's and counted them, and there was two thousand and twenty-nine dollars all told. I put the money in my pocket and got up. "Much obliged, gents. I must be goin'," I says.

Jake looked at his friends and jumped up. "Not so fast, stranger," he snarls. "You'll leave that money here when you go. None of that crooked gamblin' goes here!"

"Crooked gamblin'? You never caught me at any of that. And how about your top-and-bottom dealin', Jake?"

Jake says nothin', only put his hand on his gun. The crowd got out of the way, and the two gamblers and bartender stood ready to battle for the house. I stood waitin', and pretty soon Jake gritted his teeth and made a play for the holster, and the other two followed suit.

I went for my smoke wagon also, and beat them to the draw. I drilled Jake in the shoulder, and put the other gambler out of commission with a bullet through his gun arm. Then the bartender pulled down on me, but his bullet only nipped my leg. And after that I put a slug in his collar bone, and it was over with.

I put my gun away, says, "Look after these hombres," and headed for the door. The crowd barred the way, mutterin' and scowlin'. "If any more of you want trouble, speak up," says I. At that they opened up and let me through.

I went down the street toward the store. Actin' the gentleman for so long had been a big strain, but now I had blowed the lid off with a bang. I was on the prod, and lookin' for more trouble. And I found it down at the store.

There was Spencer again, with Carol strugglin' in his arms. Her eyes was wide, and her face was white and scared. It was just like the day before. But I was not a gentleman now, and could follow my own inclinations.

The gambler let go of Carol, but when he seen who it was he grinned mockin'. "On your way, boy," says he. But I stepped up to him and says, "Mister, your manners are bad," and with that I hit him on the jaw and knocked him down.

He got up, and handed me a stiff one in return. Then we went at it hammer and tongs, fightin' up and down the store. And Carol stood by watchin' us, her hands clenched.

Now she sees what a roughneck I really am, and will have nothin' more to do with me, thinks I sort of bitter. And my temper was up anyway, so I took it all out on Spencer, and gave him somethin' to remember me by.

He was game. I knocked him down against the canned goods shelf, and a dozen cans came down. He came back for more. After a while he was sent sprawlin' against the flour barrel, and he and the flour went to the floor together. He got up, all covered with flour and half crazy, and made a lunge for the cheese knife. But I kicked it out of the way, and hit him fair on the point of the chin. He turned a somersault and went feet first through the plate-glass window. Then he lit out in the street and laid still.

I followed to the door, but there was no more fight in him. Both him and his store was wrecked. I was bleedin' and pantin', and half tore apart, myself.

Turnin' around, there was Carol starin' at me with wide eyes. I pulled out my roll. Peelin' off twenty-nine dollars for myself, I handed the rest to her.

"Miss Hoyt, here is two thousand dollars in full payment for your store," says I. "I was down at Spencer's place, and his man agreed they hadn't treated you right, so he gave me this for you."

She took it without speakin'. I went out into the street. There was three men comin' from the one direction, and a lone rider from the other. The three was the town marshal and two of his deputies.

The marshal looked at Spencer layin' on the ground, and then at me. "Young fellow, you are under arrest!" he bawls.

I had fought in self-defense, and was not goin' to be locked up by no servant of Spencer's. "If you want me, marshal, you better come and take me," says I, and put my hand on my gun.

The three stopped, and it looked like more war. But just then the horseman came up, and it was nobody but my old pal Bill Farrel, who I had not seen for years. When he seen me he pulled up and sings out, "Well, dog my cats if it ain't old Trigger Caswell! What do you say, Trigger? Are you tryin' to take this town apart, like usual?" And he jumped down and grabbed my hand.

"Glad to see you, Bill," says I, but I was not so very pleased. At the mention of my real name everybody in hearin' looked excited.

"Are you Trigger Caswell, the gambler and gun slinger?" asks the marshal.

"That is my name," I admits.

The marshal rubbed his chin. "I guess we have made a mistake, Mr. Caswell. We have no charges against you. Let's go, boys," he says. So his men picked up Spencer, who was comin' to now, and they went away.

I looked at Carol in the doorway, and she looked at me. After a minute Bill shook his head and says, "Oh, so that's the way it is! So long, Trigger." And he rode away, and left us two alone.

"Miss Hoyt, you better not stay in Oakwood after this," I says. "I am leavin' also, and if you like I will take you over to the county seat to the railroad."

"All right," she agrees, and she went and packed her bag. In a half hour we rode out of Oakwood and took the trail for the county seat. It was at sunset.

Carol was on the bronc in front of me, with my arms around her to steady her. "I'm sorry to have to hold you like this, but it can't be helped," I apologizes. And she says it was all right.

We rode for a long while, and the conversation was zero. At last I speaks up.

"I told you my name was Joe Smith, but it is not true. I am Joe Caswell, better known as Trigger Caswell." And I went on and told her all about it—how between spells of cow-punchin' I went around gamblin', playin' crooked if the other fellow started the dirty work, fightin' and raisin' hell in general. "So I am not much, you see," I finishes. "And I'm sorry for havin' deceived you, Miss Hoyt."

"You've been wonderful to me," she says kindly. Her face was close to mine, my arms were around her and her hair blew against my cheek. My heart pounded like a hammer, and it was all I could do to keep from pressin' her close to me and sayin' that I loved her. I was wild about her, I'd pulled her out of a jam, and by doin' so had lost her for good. It was a tough break. But I kept cool as ice, and says, "I think a lot of you, Miss Hoyt. It's too bad we won't ever see each other any more."

"Why not? What do you mean?" she asks, surprised.

"Why, you told me that a fellow must be a perfect gentleman, not gamble or fight or anything, or else you wouldn't have anything to do with him. I have just got done bustin' all the rules in your calendar, so I guess that finishes me with you."

Carol raised her eyebrows. "Why,

I never said such a thing!" she declares. "I said that I liked men who were strong and brave, who could hold their own with other men, at gambling, or fighting, or anything."

I could hardly believe my ears. "You said that?"

"Yes," she says calmly. "You must have misunderstood me."

We rode on, while I tried to puzzle it out. First she said one thing and then another, and a man couldn't tell where he was at. And, anyway, I could not call her a liar. Well, women have always been a mystery to me.

One thing was clear—even though I wasn't a perfect gentleman by a hell of a sight, I was still in the runnin'. And Carol was lookin' at me sidewise out of the corners of her eyes, and there was a tender look on her face, and she seemed sweeter than ever before. So after a while I took a deep breath. "Miss Hoyt——" I says.

"Please call me Carol, Joe," says she.

"Carol," says I, "I love you."

For a long time she didn't answer, and I begun to think she had not heard. Then at last she turned and faced me, smilin', and says, "Joe, you are a big fool."

"Why?" I asks, dumfounded.

Her warm arms went around my neck. "Can't you see," she says, "that I love you, too?"

"Oh," says I. Then I drew her close in my arms, and kissed her lips. And my bronc Henry did not notice, but went ploddin' along just like before.

Three miles more. It was twilight by now. "Carol, you can reform me partly, but I will never be a perfect gentleman," says I.

"Let us hear no more about that," she answers.

Another mile, and the buildin's of the county seat came in sight. "We will go there and get married, Carol," says I.

"Yes, Joe," says she.

And we did.

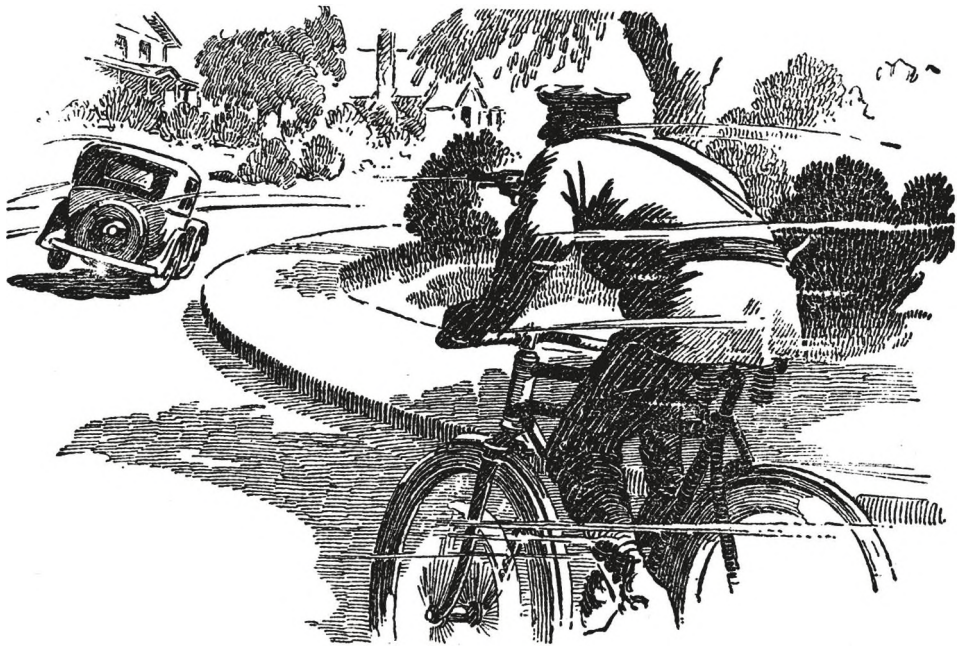
HOW TO STAY YOUNG

CHARLES T. ENWRIGHT, the Cleveland manufacturer, was in Washington to attend some of the hearings before the House Ways and Means Committee on the tariff bill.

"The most important thing I've learned since I came here," he told a group of congressmen, "is the secret of everlasting youth, and I got it from Congress. For women, it isn't in frequenting the beauty parlors. It isn't in buying rouge, lipstick, or hair dye. It isn't in banting. For men, it isn't in exercise. It isn't in cutting out tobacco. It isn't in going to bed early. For anybody and everybody, it isn't in any of the recipes for lasting youth that we have heard so often. The one sure way to stay young in spite of the encroaching years is to have Indian ancestry.

"Look at Vice President Curtis. Part Indian, he's in his seventieth year, but he could pass for a gay sport in his late forties or early fifties any day. And there's Representative William W. Hastings from Oklahoma. Also part Indian, he's in his sixty-first year, but he could easily get by as forty-five or less. So I say, if you want eternal youth, get yourself some Indian ancestors."

As a Headquarters Dick, Carnigan Wasn't So Hot, but as a Two-fisted Suburban Bull, He Knocked 'Em Dead.



BIG SHOT

By ROBERT CARSE

CARNIGAN came back on the coaster brake, slowing down the bicycle as he neared the bottom of the grade. Yes, there was Tim Boyd in the doorway of the garage, after-dinner pipe in mouth, gray chauffeur's cap poked on the back of his bald head. With the skill that comes only after years of practice, the big, blue-clad policeman sharply turned the bike up into the gravel driveway, jumped off before his friend.

"How's tricks, Tim?"

"They could be worse, Mike. An' did ye an' th' missus an' th' kids have a good time on yer vacation?"

"A swell time. We was down to Fire Island fer a week, then wit' th' woman's folks th' last days." The big bicycle patrolman took a treasured toothpick from a tunic pocket, stood picking his teeth thoughtfully, body braced against his bike. He looked about him at the peaceful sunset country which had been his own territory for the last eleven years and was the far end of the northernmost precinct in the city.

"Ye seem glad t' get back," said Tim from the doorway, as he spat judiciously.

"I am," said Carnigan simply.

"'Tis lots there is fer ye t' do, Mike."

"An' what? Has not th' lad who took me place tended t' things?"

The bald-headed chauffeur shook his head, smiling a bit.

"Sure, an' he has. But th' folks here on River Hill'll not trust another lad like they trust you, Mike. Ye're th' Big Shot fr'm here t' th' city line."

A short, strange laugh came from the veteran patrolman.

"Ye would not think so, Tim, t' listen to th' woman."

"Is she at ye again, then?"

Carnigan shrugged his heavy shoulders.

"Ye know a patrolman's pay, Tim, an' how far it gets ye when there's six mouths t' feed—an' me a big eater when I'm home."

"So." Tim Boyd was also the father of four. "Never ye mind, though, lad," he rumbled. "Ye'll be a sergeant or a detective one o' these bad days!"

Mike Carnigan looked at his friend: Tim Boyd had been repeating that statement for long, long years. Carnigan's square, sun-ruddied face shadowed a bit.

"I dunno, Tim," he said slowly, "if I'd take th' either job, was it tossed at me dome by th' commissioner himself!"

"So?" grunted the other, with a bit of good-humored skepticism. "And are ye content t' always be the Big Shot in a small place, Mike?"

Carnigan did not make direct answer. He flung his left leg up over the crossbar, got his pedals into position.

"'Tis a grand place, this," he stated softly, "an' I like it!"

He started the bike into motion, raised a hand to the chauffeur. Silently, as was his way, Tim Boyd raised his hand also in farewell. Carnigan rode on slowly down the hill, looking to right and left of him at the big estates which made up the territory on his immense beat. That new wop gardener at the Rochners', he saw, had made a helluva job of those lilacs. The Smolletts had a new lawn spray, and a good thing, too; the summer was very dry.

"Mike! Mike!"

He jerked the bike to a stop, slid off. A small figure in khaki shorts and knit jersey stood at the foot of one winding drive.

"Hello, Davey!" greeted the patrolman. "An' who would be handin' ye a shiner like that?"

The brown, handsome boy smiled nervously.

"'Shack' Smollett did."

"Brawlin', Davey?"

"No; we had the gloves on. He has a new pair."

"An' he whipped ye?"

The answer came slowly: "Yes. Say, Mike, how does a left jab go?"

Mike grinned from ear to ear.

"Hold th' bike," he commanded. Davey did so. "Now, watch—this—an' this!" The great, lithe bulk of the patrolman tensed. Inside his black knit bicycle stockings, his calf muscles stood out distinctly, and the tunic sleeves bulged. "An' so—an' so!" he ended, jabbing in a terrific slash at an imaginary opponent.

"Wow!" said Davey. "Wow! What a sock. Oh, boy, wait till I get Smollett now!"

"Mind ye, no brawlin', Davey," warned the patrolman, taking back his bike.

"Nope. It'll all be with the gloves on. Night, Mike!"

"Night!"

Davey tore up the driveway toward the big Georgian house on the knoll. Mike rode on, whistling. From the shadows about the Keelings' gate at the foot of the hill, a girl stepped suddenly forth. Mike's trained eyes recognized at once the blue summer uniform and white apron of the Keelings' maids. It was Olga, the upstairs girl.

"Mike," she called, and there was a strong hint of a sob in her voice.

"Hello," grunted Mike, stopping the

bike beside her. "An' what might it be now, Olga—that lad o' yours?"

"No more he ain't *mein* lad!" sobbed Olga. "Over to Rochners' twice I have see him go, vit candy, vit flowers, vor dat Latvia girl. *Ach!*"

She wept. Mike scratched his nose. Affairs of the heart, although he had been chief counselor in many of them, were always a bit outside his recognized field.

"'Tis Tim Boyd who was just after tellin' me," he said slowly, "that th' Volmens has got a new house man—a Dutchy."

"A *Deutscher?*" queried Olga through her tears.

"Yeah. A real *knockwurster,* right offa th' boat. Th' cook was tellin' Tim, he was just after tellin' me, that th' *knockwurst* can't speak no good American. A nice-lookin' boy, he is, too, they say, an' lookin' fer one o' his own t' teach him American. 'Tis you who are his own country, an' can teach him it. Ye know th' Volmens' cook, don't ye?"

"*Ja!* But——"

"But nothin'! A pretty, free lass, th' likes o' yerself——"

Broad feet found the pedals.

"Good night, Olga!"

"Good *nacht!*" Olga was smiling as she said it.

Where two curving macadam roads intersected, and centered on a small triangle of turf, was Mike's white-pointed police booth. Against it he leaned the bicycle, unlocked the door and entered. Inside were a newspaper-padded chair, a pot-belly stove, a telephone, a small locker. From the locker Mike took out the remainder of his supper, which he had originally brought with him from home and deposited here when he came on tour at four o'clock. He arranged the bits of bread, cheese and meat in a neat pile, wrapped them again in a damp cloth and returned them to the locker. Later on in the night, after he had made his second swing of the beat, they would serve him as night lunch.

The sun had been down an hour or so now and long, purple shadows all but engulfed the peaceful, wooded fields on each side of the macadam. On a nail beside the door, Mike hung his turnip watch. He dragged the stout-legged chair forth, propped it against the door jamb, seated himself, tunic collar unbuttoned.

An occasional car flashed by, tires slicking over the macadam. Couples, most of them servants from the big estates in the district, passed by on foot. Many raised their hands in greeting to him; more than one couple came over to gossip with him, ask his advice, his political predictions, carrying the weight of a city employee of long and good standing.

At his ear, the police telephone jangled. As he rose to answer it, he looked at his watch: it was ten minutes of nine. The desk lieutenant must be in some rush, for he, Mike, was to make his regular call to the house at nine o'clock sharp. He took the receiver from the hook.

"Carnigan speaking. Yes, sir. Yes, sir! I will, sir!"

The connection broke; the lieutenant was through. The entire conversation, important as it was, had not taken a full minute. In that minute the smile had gone from Mike's face; small furrows, knots of muscles, had become prominent on his browned jaws. His blue eyes had narrowed, and his mouth taken on an inflexible, grim line.

A quick hand felt for the service .38 at his hip, for the blackjack in the rear left pocket. Then he turned off the light, locked the door, flicked the bike from the side of the booth. He mounted, rose in the pedals, gaining maximum speed.

Racini's, one of the biggest houses on his beat, had just been entered by second-story men. An under-butler, a

bullet through his stomach, had managed to crawl to a kitchen phone, even while the three yeggs pounded through the otherwise deserted house upstairs.

"Will they?" grunted Mike, shoving the bike ahead at a dangerous pace. "Will they come into me home bailiwick and shoot down me friends? Th' domn fools!"

Racini's was the biggest home in River Hill. The house lay back almost an eighth of a mile from the road. On its lush, beautifully tended lawns were bronze satyrs, marble cupids, fountains, stone benches and pergolas. The house itself was an immense place, a cross between an Italian *castella* and an English country house, with turrets and bastions, sloping mansard roofs and mullioncd windows. Mike Carnigan knew the place well: it was a veritable art museum and treasure house, holding all the rare *bibelots* old Racini had been able to pick up in Europe in his annual expeditions Mike had always feared a robbery here; now it had come.

His tires chirred swiftly over the gravel of the curving drive. There was no moon as yet and the big elms and maples on the lawn threw deep shadow. But, he must take no chances. He turned off his searchlight, rode in darkness, trusting to his sharp eyesight and his memory of the place.

Suddenly, he came in sight of the house. It was all but dark. The family, he recalled, had gone to Newport for a week, and left the place in charge of the staff of servants. He was almost at the porte-cochère now. He flung himself from his wheel, let it drop to the ground, ran up the steps toward the outer door. Just as he swung across the wide, dark porch, the outer door cracked open, and a heavy .45-caliber automatic slammed death at him.

Mike Carnigan dropped to the floor of the porch, let drive three shots toward that spit of flame. A voice cried out in agony; something fell heavily to the floor of the porch. Then three other men, shooting as they came, rushed forth. One bullet hit Mike Carnigan in the shoulder, spun him around, knocked him up against the wall of the house. His hands groped along the wall, he slipped, rolled to his face, just conscious.

The three pounded across the porch, swinging up heavy sacks, not even calling out or looking back at the fourth man, the one Mike had shot in the doorway. With his right hand, Mike explored that shoulder. It had not broken the bone, but had torn the ligaments badly. He jerked a handkerchief from a hip pocket; using his teeth and his right hand, he pulled tight a tourniquet just above his left elbow.

Then, reloading his service .38, he ran down into the drive. A car was grinding toward him in second gear, its headlights searing at his eyes, throwing his body into bold relief against the black background of the nouse. Bullets smacked about him. The racing car was not fifty feet away. He steadied himself, and fired three shots before he jumped for his life up the steps. The first shot from his gun smashed the windshield, the second bashed in the left headlight, and the last knocked in the right.

With a scream and whang of bending metal, the lightless car rammed the side of the porte-cochère, bounced off, kept on. A low mutter of curses and commands came from inside it. The small parking lights flicked into being. In their light, Mike saw that the right front wheel, which had come so violently in contact with the side of the porte-cochère, was wabbling on its axle, and that the axle itself was bent back out of alignment.

These things he saw, then dropped flat, for the two enraged yeggs in the back seat were hammering at him with four guns. At a speed of perhaps thirty-five miles an hour, the car veered

out of the driveway, swung left, and toward River Hill Avenue. After it, Mike slashed the remaining bullets in his gun; jumped up, ran, grasped his wheel and threw himself on it.

He mounted it in one flying leap, very nearly lifted the front wheel from the ground as he tore down the driveway, standing free from the seat as he pedaled desperately. He was not a hundred yards behind that car when he came out of the driveway gate. It was continuing left, and toward River Hill! Avenue, the one main thoroughfare leading downtown and into the mazes of the city proper. Chances were, pondered Mike swiftly, that they would not dare flee north; any patrolling motorcycle officer, any officer stationed at a traffic light, would notice that smashed fender and wabbling wheel, force them to stop—question them, anyhow. No, they would undoubtedly head south, along River Hill Avenue, until out of this strictly residential section and near some place where they could safely abandon the telltale car and commandeer a taxicab. If that were so, and it must be, he had one gamble to catch them. He could not pursue and overhaul them on his bike. A man with one good hand and arm could not fire straight from a racing bicycle.

But, there was that short cut, by that path through the fields, to the corner of River Hill Avenue, and within twenty yards of Tim Boyd's garage. He took it. The path was a precipitous one—up, down, sharp in its curves, hills and descents. But Mike Carnigan knew it; used it nightly to save himself a weary mile or so of pedaling around on the usual road.

He slithered down the last hill, machine bucking beneath him, steering with his one good hand, head bent, eyes peering forward into the dancing rays of his searchlight on the handlebars. The front wheel hit one small stone a glancing blow, swept sidewise. Mike tried hard to swing it back, succeeded, and then hit a large boulder squarely. The wooden rim of his front wheel was cracked into bits, and he himself very nearly hurled headlong on his face.

But his athlete's sureness of foot and balance saved him. He ran on, hurtled the last fence, stood on River Hill Avenue, facing south. Just going from sight over River Hill was a dim tail light that waggled from side to side of the road. It was the yeggs' car!

Mike lunged up the driveway to the door of the garage.

"Tim!" he called. "Tim!"

A window shade snapped upstairs, in the living quarters.

"He's comin', Mike!" called Tim's wife.

The big garage doors swung back. Tim Boyd stood there, stuffing a nightshirt tail into his trousers, his gray cap already on his head. The big patrolman was speechless with pain and exhaustion, could do nothing but point at his left arm, then at the low slung, silver-hooded Belgian town car that was Tim's joy and pride, then south, along River Hill Avenue.

Tim Boyd was a quick-witted Irishman. He slipped beneath the wide wheel of the car, thrust open the door on the other side for the staggering patrolman. Carnigan threw himself in. The motor boomed. Gears meshed cleanly. Tires caught with a whimpering sound on the macadam as Tim backed her around, straightened her out, flung her into second gear from a flat start.

Like a vast and terrible arrow of vengeance, he shot the gleaming, booming car down the dark macadam of the avenue. Sixty, the speedometer read, seventy-one, two, three. Clumsily, Mike Carnigan had been reloading his gun. He leaned far out now, into the whip of the wind. Far ahead, just rising up, then going from sight over a knoll, was a wabbling tail light. For just a second

Tim Boyd shot a look at him. The patrolman nodded. The silver-and-black Belgian car hit that rise doing eighty-two miles an hour.

A bullet cracked at them; a hail of bullets. A growl came from Tim Boyd. He put the accelerator pedal flat against the floor. Then Mike Carnigan stood up, in the open front cockpit of the town car, and fired shot upon shot. The car ahead side-swayed across the road, then back, then into the ditch. It hurtled high, snapped a wheel, the bad, right front wheel. Tim Boyd slammed on foot and hand brakes, flung his car, screaming and skidding over the macadam, jerked the bucking wheel around, and was facing squarely across the road. Mike Carnigan fired three more shots, deliberately. And then fell out over the door into the roadway on his head and shoulders.

The brawny chauffeur found a jack-handle in a side pocket, got out with it in his hand, snarling a Gaelic challenge to battle. It went unanswered. He found, when he dragged open the door of the car in the ditch a minute or so later, three burlap bags containing close to half a million dollars in loot, one man with a bullet through his throat, another with a lead-cracked spine, and a third, the driver, with a broken neck, snapped against his own windshield frame.

Far up the dark reaches of the avenue a siren wailed and he could hear the pound of a straining motor. He advanced a bit into the road, raising his hands high over his head. The police department Cadillac whacked to a stop; spewed big, grim men in dark suits. They ran forward, guns low and level.

" 'Tis all over," said Tim Boyd.

It took the downtown detectives perhaps half a minute to verify the chauffeur's statement. They loaded Mike Carnigan, unconscious and limp, into the Cadillac, and took him to the hospital. Tim Boyd went home to bed. The detectives, after disposing of three dead yeggs and half a million dollars in loot, went home downtown, very unhappy men. A donkey bicycle cop, one of the last and very few on the metropolitan force, had made one of the most sensational collars and killings in years.

The newspapers thought as much, also the chief inspector, even the commissioner himself. When Mike Carnigan came out of the hospital he was a famous man and a first-grade detective, his pay all but doubled. In a week or so the papers forgot him, and almost everybody in the department. He had been transferred to a big downtown precinct, where there were almost twenty detectives in the bureau and over three hundred men on patrol duty.

He was a very lucky man; Tim Boyd told him so, his wife and family told him so, the men in the department repeated it time after time. For a while Mike himself believed it. Then, as the months passed, he changed his mind. The work in the big, central detective bureau was new, complicated, arduous. For days at a time he would live, eat and sleep in the station house, kept close by some case which would not permit him to go home. His partner was a smart, well-dressed youngster with political power and pull in the department. He continually grumbled to the detective lieutenant in charge of the bureau about the ex-bicycle patrolman's work. Mike Carnigan was no detective; never would be.

One night, after he had gone all wrong on the solution of a simple stick-up job and his partner had solved it in half an hour, he realized as much himself. He wanted one thing, one only, was suited to that and nothing else—his old beat in River Hill. The lieutenant in charge of the bureau was in the office, checking over the details of the stick-up report with Mike's partner. Mike called him aside, confided his ambition and admission of failure. The lieutenant was very agreeable; he had

a young cousin in a distant precinct bureau who would quite competently take Mike's place.

A week later, Mike Carnigan was back in the uniform of a simple bicycle patrolman, and on his beat in River Hill. They staged what really amounted to a Welcome Home party for him. He almost wept with joy. Olga had a hand-knit necktie for him. Davey, through his father, presented him with a thin, beautiful wrist watch. Tim Boyd's wife made him a cake, arranged with the patrolman on the day tour to see that it was in the police booth locker when he came on duty. Mrs. Racini came personally to give him a hammered silver cigar case, and two hundred Havana panatellas to fill it with. After they had all gone, he stood alone in the door of the booth, looking happily up the avenue through the moon-brightened night. *Arragh*, what a difference! Here, these people made him feel like a Big Shot. While, downtown there, in the bureau, where he had been supposed to be a real Big Shot, he had actually felt like a sore thumb on the wrong hand. This was the life.

But, during those following months, River Hill found that their Big Shot was not happy. He greeted them mechanically as they met him cycling slowly about his beat. He discussed and diagnosed their troubles and joys only with difficulty, and after long thought. He was not the same Mike Carnigan; he was, strangely, an old, weary and uneasy man.

Tim Boyd it was, who, as his best friend on the beat, got the truth from him. The two stood for their usual evening's chat before the garage. The big patrolman stood leaning against the crossbar of his bike, hands crossed on his chest, eyes on the ground, silent, uncommunicative. It was hard for Boyd to speak, but at last he found the words:

"What's bitin' ye, Mike? Ye been actin' o' late like a man wi' a broke leg. Is it that ye do no' like us here on th' Hill no more?"

A soft, but somehow bitter, laugh came from Carnigan.

"No, Tim. 'Tis th' woman, th' kids."

"Huh? Them?"

"Them."

"Well, what o' them?" asked Tim a bit bellicosely.

Mike Carnigan was a long time in answering.

" 'Tis just that," he murmured, "they think I am a flop—a—not a Big Shot, after all, Tim."

"An' why not?" snapped the chauffeur.

"An' why so?" countered Carnigan grimly. " 'Tis this way, Tim: Mickey, th' oldest, was entered by th' woman fer college, when they learned I was to have th' pay of a first-grade detective. An', a new rad-dio, new clothes, a new parlor table, a new sink in th'——"

"Ah," said Tim Boyd softly. "An' now th' lad will have t' work his way through school, and th' missus will have t' squeeze pennies out o' th' house money fer th' rad-dio, the sinks an' th' rest."

"So. An' there is nothin' I kin do, Tim."

"Nothin' but bein' yerself, an' no four-alarm plain-clothes detective, which the good God never gave ye t' be. Tell th' woman I said ye so, Mike. An' now ferget it!"

Mike Carnigan tried hard. And, although all of River Hill attempted to help him as best it might, there was every sign that its efforts, and his own, were unsuccessful. Before, Mike Carnigan, content to be a plain patrolman, his life, and his family's geared to that mode of living and none other, had been perfectly happy. Now, after that quick taste of glory, things would never be the same. According to River Hill, which loved him, Mike Carnigan had done the

right, the sensible thing. According to his family, he had been given the one, golden, lucky break every uniformed man prays for, and had then let it slip through his fingers.

A year passed. River Hill got into the habit of trusting its little confidences and troubles to the man on day tour. Some of them still came to Mike Carnigan, but not as they had in the old days; for he was not the old, smiling Big Shot. He was grave-eyed, his face drawn, deep lines etched about his nose and mouth. Sometimes, while swinging his beat, he rode absent-mindedly right past people without speaking or nodding to them. In all truth, he was a greatly changed Big Shot.

In the second year of his return to River Hill, the famous series of one-man robberies began in the wealthy, quiet district. The Keelings were robbed of gems, silver plate, precious jades and pictures by a man who was obviously a connoisseur and an excellent burglar. The Volmens suffered next, then, over a period of six months, eight more houses in the district were robbed.

Complaints were made to headquarters. The papers flanked news story by news story, then started to speak of it editorially. It was near election time, and the opposition papers easily made an issue out of it, refueling the old fires of police-department, and thus, city-government, laxity. The small detective force in the local precinct was doubled, redoubled. Cars packed with the smartest detectives the department had roamed north from headquarters and patrolled the district desperately for months. They got plenty of clews, but no burglar, and plenty of harsh words from their superiors.

Big Shot went dully on his way; he was no detective, had resigned as such long ago. Let these smart headquarters sleuths ferret out this daring criminal. So he said, until one hot night he stumbled over the body of the Murdicks' second chauffeur, lying in the entrance of the driveway, three bullets through his back.

One of the Murdicks' hysterical downstairs maids gave Carnigan what few details she could. She and the second chauffeur had been out for a walk; he, Big Shot, had seen them strolling on the avenue half an hour before, close to eleven o'clock. They had returned to the entrance of the estate, stood before the big gates for a last few minutes' talk before parting for the night.

All she knew was that a small, monkeylike man with a mask and a black bag had suddenly sprung from the shrubbery behind them on the lawn, where he must have been hiding since their silent approach up the road, and run past them, toward River Hill Avenue. The second chauffeur had recognized in him the mysterious burglar; and being a hearty and hot-headed youth, had started after him, yelling loudly.

The monkeylike man with the mask had turned in the road, and there had been a gun in his hand. He ordered the chauffeur to stop, turn around, and walk, without looking over his shoulder, back to the gates of the driveway. The chauffeur must have turned his head to look, although she didn't think so. Anyhow, the monkeylike man fired three shots into the chauffeur's back, killing him instantly. Then she, speechless with fear and hysteria, had fled.

The dead man had been a good friend of Mike Carnigan's, had worked for the Murdicks for five years, was a well-known character in River Hill. To Mike Carnigan, thefts of jewelry from rich people was one thing; the brutal, uncalled-for murder of innocent workingmen another. He reported the death to the station house, posted himself beside the body until the smart downtown detectives arrived, and then went, grim and silent, on about his own business.

He did not meet up with the monkey-like man, did not see him or find a trace of him, until three months later. Then it happened this way:

Mike was on his last swing of the night, coasting easily and quietly along one of the narrow macadam side roads of the district. Ten minutes before, along this same road, one of the big department touring cars had passed, filled with detectives. Before every house they had stopped, a half dozen of them gotten out, carefully searched every bit of lawn, every likely hiding place for a clever burglar. None, as usual, had been found.

So it was that Mike hesitantly stopped his bike, put down his feet from the pedals and stood straddling the machine in the middle of the road right before Robie's. It was a new house, of the Spanish *hacienda* type, and angled so that one corner, wherein was the kitchen, was close to the road. The Robies were away now, in the Catskills, for a month's vacation, and had taken their servants with them. There was no light in the house now, and no sign of occupancy.

What had stopped Mike Carnigan was a faint, rustling, slapping sound. He knew just what it was; had heard it too many times before in his life to mistake it. A window was partly open somewhere in that house, and the soft night wind was jerking and twisting the window shade, probably pulled down full against the window sill. Mike scratched his nose in thought. Then got off his bike and leaned it, without sound, against the wall beside the road.

Step by step, walking on the turf beside the driveway so as to make no sound, he went up toward the big, square white house. It was an open window, all right, and a flapping window shade, in the butler's pantry. He'd better close it, or the rain would come in.

He stepped up to the wall of the house, raised himself on his toes, and grasped the top edge of the window frame, to pull it down tight. But he was Irish, and curious. So he stood there for just a moment, blunt head cocked to one side, listening for any sounds in the house. He held the wind-moved window shade still with one hand, leaned in. There was a small, reiterant and irritant sound—that of metal against metal.

Mike Carnigan went up through the window, pulling himself there with his powerful forearms and hands. He paused in the butler's pantry, service .38 in his right hand, leathered blackjack in his left. A thin splinter of light lay on the dining-room floor. The irritant metallic noise had stopped. He would have scratched his nose wonderingly if his hands had not held a gun and a blackjack. But, despite his wonder, some primeval instinct prompted him to step flatly back against the pantry wall.

In that instant, through the white-painted door facing into the dining room, four automatic slugs smashed. Mike Carnigan let go a throaty, terrible scream, bumped and banged his elbows against the wall. It was very much the sound a mortally wounded man might make as he toppled dying to the floor.

Inch upon inch, the swinging, bullet-shattered door pushed inward. Mike fired, fired. Bullets lammed back, rocketing through the thin panel, goring the ceiling, the floor in their deflected flight. Soft-soled shoes slurred over the wide-tiled floor of the dining room. Mike Carnigan flung open the shattered door, rushed through it, shooting.

The flame of his gun showed him a crouched, dark figure at the other end of the long living room, bent over a jimmy and the lock on a French window. Mike's gun was empty; he charged, head down, through the darkness. The man at the French window, nerves snapping, shot too fast, and too high—then flung the jimmy at the bulky

form of the patrolman, and fled with the swift, scurrying grace of a rat.

In the center of the place, in true Spanish style, was a patio, roofed with glass, flanked, above, by a carven balcony. Here lay the upstairs bedrooms; leading up to them, from each side of the living room, were winding, graceful wrought-iron staircases. Not all this did Mike Carnigan know until later.

A gun flash came from above. Dimly, Mike saw a dead-white, ratlike face peering down at him from the head of a winding staircase. He grunted, and in the ensuing, nerve-taut darkness, sought both. He did not fire going up those steps. A shot from him would show the trapped, desperate killer above him just where he was. Bullet after bullet cracked the blackness above him, tore at the wall hangings, rang off the wrought-iron stair rail. None hit him, his Irish luck was in.

He reached the top, gun in hand, and started to his feet. A small Mohammedan prayer carpet, used by Mrs. Robie to adorn her stairhead, slipped beneath his feet, and he crashed to the floor. At once the gangster was on him, clubbing with his hot, empty gun, clawing with his other long-nailed hand for eyes and gullet. Mike Carnigan was the bigger, stronger man, but the other had the rush, the impetus. He knocked the patrolman off his feet, only to be caught about the legs and dragged with him, head over heels, down the stone steps of the staircase.

They hit the bottom together. The gunman broke clear, rose panting, mouthing gutturally, and ran, using his rat's eyes, for the butler's pantry and for freedom.

Mike Carnigan's head was reeling with pain; blood from his gashed forehead was in his eyes, but his .38 was still in his numb fist. He fired one shot, and missed, by yards. Fired another, and shattered the gunman's brain at the base.

For that night, the commissioner gave him the Police Department Medal and his old grade of detective sergeant. With characteristic Irish stubbornness, Mike took the medal, and refused the sergeancy, insisting, glumly, that he stay where he was—and belonged. Mr. Robie, back from the Catskills in a hurry, Mr. Volmen, Mr. Keeling and the rest, went to police headquarters in a body and attended to that. Then, just as irresistibly, went to Mike's home in the Bronx and presented his wife with a ten-thousand-dollar check.

A week later, on his second swing of the evening, Mike came down the hill past Tim Boyd's garage. The bald-headed chauffeur, done with furbishing the black-and-silver town car for the night, stood in the door, pipe in mouth, gray cap on the back of his head. Mike braked his bike to a stop, got off at the end of the gravel drive.

"How's tricks, Tim?"

"Good, lad; I ain't th' man with a kick. But, they's plenty for ye t' do. Young Davey has been give a new shiner by that Smollett kid; he's waitin' fer ye down th' hill. An' Olga—ye know Olga—she's waitin' t' see ye, too. Her old boy friend has come back, an' she can't make up her Hamburg head t' marry old er new. But, how about yerself, Big Shot?"

"Me?" Mike Carnigan had been resting against the crossbar of his bike. Now he looked about him at the peaceful sunset fields flanking the big estates. A slow smile came to his lips and eyes. "*Arragh,* it's a gran' world, ain't it, Tim?"

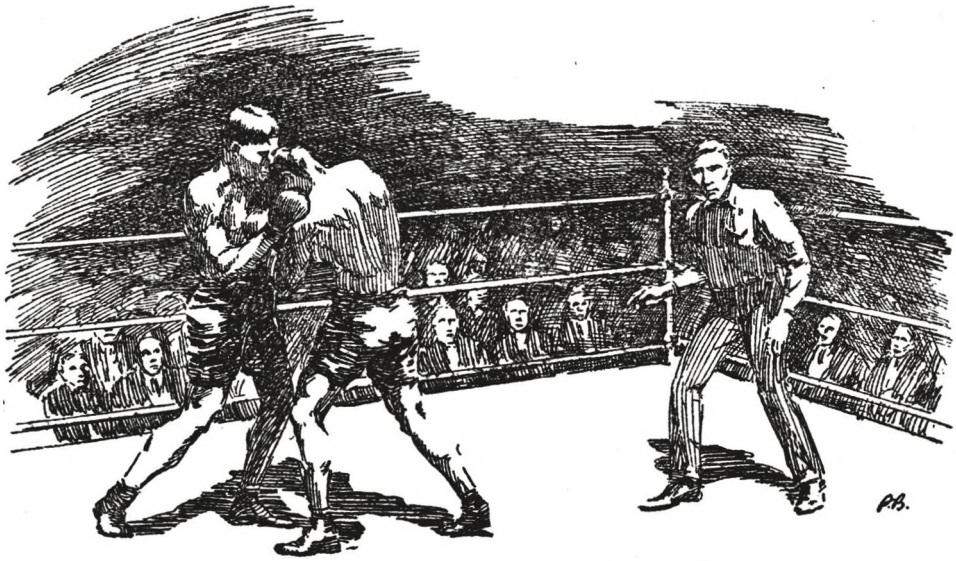
He got on his bike to ride off. The old chauffeur took the pipe from his mouth and spat judiciously.

"Swell," he confirmed.

Other stories by Robert Carse will appear in these pages from time to time.

NUTS *and* APPLES

By William Slavens McNutt



Mr. Helmick, the Fighting Vegetarian, Was Afraid of His Own Strength.

"BOX him," Benny Greenspan commanded tensely. "Keep 'at left in his nose all the time. Don't let him get in on you now. Box him!"

It was the weekly show at the Forest Heights, a neighborhood fight club in Brooklyn. A few seconds short of the gong starting the first bout on its way. In one corner Tony Belloni, the "Brooklyn Flash," weight one twenty-six and one half; in the other "Red" McCabe, the "Pride of Park Row," weight one twenty-four. Four rounds.

Benny Greenspan was back of Red McCabe. On Benny's feet were soiled canvas sneakers. A green sweater incased his skinny torso. His sharp, lean face was a mask of relentless savagery.

"Box him," he repeated. "Left all the time."

Red McCabe, the Pride of Park Row, nodded uncertainly and blinked his eyes.

"He looks kind o' big," he whispered, indicating Tony Belloni.

"Fat," Benny whispered back. "Hog fat! 'At's what makes him look like that! 'Member now. Box him."

"Them lights hurts me eyes," Red complained, squinting at the hooded battery of bulbs suspended above the ring.

"They do no such a thing!" Benny shrilled. "Do you got to gimme an alibi before you get licked even? Them's the same kind o' lights they got by all rings! Did you see somewhere any fighter got a black eye from lights?"

The bell rang.

"Box him," Benny shrilled as he slipped out under the ropes and crouched on the narrow flight of stairs

leading to the ring. "Left all the time. Here we go."

Belloni rushed. McCabe went into reverse and backed away, stabbing frantically with his left. Belloni herded him into a neutral corner and crowded close, banging away at the body with left and right. McCabe gasped and clinched. The referee parted the pair.

"Left!" Benny screeched, making wild motions with his hands. "Left—left!"

McCabe stabbed again with his left as Belloni rushed. The stocky little Italian ducked under the blow and crossed his right to the chin. McCabe's legs melted under him and he flopped forward on the canvas. The referee waved Belloni to a neutral corner and began the count, leaning above McCabe and waving his right hand up and down like a pump handle. "One, two——"

"Stay down!" Benny shrieked. "Keep cool! Take the count! Take nine."

McCabe had risen to one knee. His ringing ears picked out Benny's voice from the howling of the crowd. His dulled eyes detected a blurred something that looked like Benny gesticulating between the bottom rope and the canvas. To prove that he understood and was keeping cool he smiled drunkenly and nodded.

"Five, six," said the referee, "seven, eight——"

"Now!" Benny yelled. "Up!"

Red smiled and nodded and stayed right where he was.

"Nine," said the referee.

"Up!" Benny screamed, motioning wildly with his hands. "Up! Get up!"

"Ten," said the referee, "and out."

He leaned down and attempted to lift McCabe to his feet. Red struggled to stay down, looking to Benny for instructions. Benny crawled through the ropes and helped the referee hoist McCabe to his feet.

"Wha's matter?" McCabe asked.

"You got to be told?" Benny retorted bitterly.

"You told me to stay down," McCabe argued. "I heard you."

"That you heard!" Benny snapped. "When I tell you to get up what do you hear? Music, I guess! Maybe the band is playing some place! Yah!"

Grim-faced, he led the way down from the ring and along the aisle between jeering fans. Thence to the smelly little dressing room below. McCabe sat on a bench and felt tenderly of his jaw.

"Sore," he mumbled.

"That worries you!" Benny cried scornfully. "A little bump on the jaw you think about! For one round only we get paid and you got to think about a little bump on the jaw!"

"We can't win 'em all," McCabe said plaintively.

"All!" Benny cried, gesticulating. "Did I ask you? One! Win one, then we talk about the rest."

"I didn't do so bad for my first fight," McCabe whined. "Lots o' good fighters get took their first fight. Now I got some professional experience, why——"

"Experience!" Benny exclaimed. "To-night you got experience! The first minute in the first round you get knocked out and you got experience!"

"I didn't get knocked out!" McCabe declared. "My head was clear. I had me wits about me. Sure I did. I just didn't hear the count, that was all. Everybody yellin' an' everything! I heard you tell me to stay down. Don't that show? Would I heard you if I would 'a' been knocked out?"

"Two dollars!" Benny said glumly. "Two dollars with the night elevator boy at the office I bet on you. He gimme five to one! All you got to do is lick this Belloni and I win the ten fish!"

"I'm sorry, Benny," McCabe said humbly.

"Your name in the paper!" Benny

went on. "I use my influence an' get it put in. For what?"

"It was only just the name you got put in," McCabe grumbled.

"Only just!" Benny cried. "'Red McCabe, the Pride of Park Row, makes his professional bow in the opening four-rounder with Tony Belloni at the Forest Heights Club to-night.' 'Just the name,' he calls that! I tell you this, you bum: You got to die funny to get that much about you in our paper only for my influence! Only just the name!"

By day Benny attended to the office wants of a New York afternoon newspaper's sports staff. Employed thus, he heard talk of profits in the fight racket that made his ears itch. He picked up the routine of the business, and spent scant time in deciding that he was cut to the managerial pattern. He had been on the paper only a few months when he began accumulating fighters and getting them bouts. He picked his boys from among the amateurs, and wheedled an occasional paragraph of publicity on days when space was plenty, and the sporting editor in good humor.

He had no difficulty in getting boys to fight for him. The trouble was that no one of them fought long enough at one time. In spite of Benny's instructions, advice, and encouragement, they one and all went into the ring and got themselves knocked out. Benny's experience with McCabe was nothing new to him. Indeed it was so similar to all his previous experiences with fighters that it added the irritation of monotony to his disappointment.

On the following day at lunch he met Edna Margolis. Edna typed names and addresses for a downtown mail-order house.

"They got no ambition," he told her gloomily, after giving her a summary of the previous night's bad news. "Look at the money they get if they don't get licked. I'm not foolin' you, Edna. If a boy would win a few fights one after another—the money! You wouldn't believe!"

"Where do they come from?" Edna asked. "The ones that don't get licked?"

"Who knows?" said Benny. "Some from one place and some from another. Who could tell?"

"Isn't there any way to pick out the good ones?" Edna asked.

"Sure," said Benny. "You try this one. You try that one. You try the other one. You try somebody else. If anybody you try don't get licked, he's a good one."

"You'll find a good one, Benny," Edna assured him.

"Sure I will," Benny agreed. "I got eyes. Some day I get me a boy he'll be a champion. You'll see. I ain't discouraged, Edna. It's only I'm impatient."

"I didn't say you were discouraged, Benny," Edna said.

"Sure not," said Benny. "You know me better. Will you be home to-night, Edna?"

"My cousin from Jersey City, she's comin' over," Edna said.

"Oh," said Benny. "The one went to Coney Island with us last summer?"

Edna nodded. "Mary d'Angelo," she said. "She's got a new fellow."

"Is that a trick?" Benny exclaimed. "Any girl could always get new ones."

Edna smiled tenderly. "I haven't had a new one for a long time now, have I, Benny?"

Benny smiled back and patted her hand. "That's not so common," he said. "It's a year and two months and three days now, Edna."

"You remember!" she exclaimed.

"Would I forget!" he exclaimed. "In the Bronx express when it started from Park Place. I remember the first words I heard you speak, 'cause I stepped on your foot."

"I bet you don't," she said coyly.

"A kiss the next time we get the chance?" he bargained.

"Two to one," she offered.

Benny smiled, a dreamy look in his eyes. "You said, 'Who do you think you're steppin' on, you fresh kike, you?' "

"Benny!" she exclaimed rapturously. "You do remember!"

"Could you think I didn't?" he reproached her.

"I'm glad you did," she admitted. " 'Cause I wanted you should win the bet."

"Edna," Benny said solemnly, "if some day I should get me a boy, he's as good a fighter as you are a sweetheart, we would be heavyweight champion of the whole world even if he would only weigh a hundred and twelve pounds."

"Aw, Benny," Edna said.

"I'm not kiddin' you," he assured her. "Should I come up to-night?"

"Sure," said Edna. "Why not? We could all go to the Elite, maybe. I don't know what they got there. If the picture's rotten, or we seen it or somethin', we could stay home and dance with the radio. Maybe I could pay you the bet I lost."

"I wouldn't let you owe it to me longer," Benny assured her. "About eight o'clock, huh?"

Edna nodded. Benny leaned across the table, excitement evident in his manner. "Look, Edna," he whispered. "The fellow there at the table under the fan. See the one I mean?"

"Eating soup?" Edna whispered back.

Benny nodded. "The hands!" he exclaimed. "Look at 'em."

Edna looked and made a face. "We shouldn't make fun of him, Benny," she said. "Maybe he does some dirty work, and didn't get a chance to wash."

"The dirt!" Benny exclaimed. "Not the dirt—the size! Look how big."

"Oh," Edna said, looking again. "Uh huh. Yeh. They're big, too."

"I bet he could hit," Benny said. "Maybe not. You can't tell. Anyhow, some day I find me one. Eight o'clock to-night, huh?"

Benny arrived at the Margolis apartment promptly at eight. Mary d'Angelo and the new boy friend were there. He was a large, pink-faced, blond young man.

"Benny, I want you should meet Mr. Helmick," Edna said. "This is Mr. Greenspan, Mr. Helmick."

"How are you?" said Helmick.

"Pleased to meet you," said Benny.

They shook hands. Benny winced, and looked solicitously at his fingers after the handclasp. "My!" he said. "You've got a grip, Mr. Helmick."

Helmick smiled. "I take pretty good care of myself," he admitted.

"Oh," said Benny, interested. "Are you an athlete, Mr. Helmick?"

"In the true sense of the word I am," Helmick confessed. "I don't have time for any foolishness like games and such."

"Nelson's awful strong," Mary d'Angelo boasted.

"Benny's strong for his size," Edna said loyally. "Course he's skinny, but he's strong."

"Do you eat meat?" Helmick asked Benny.

"Ham, too," said Benny. "I ain't orthodox."

"I don't," Helmick said proudly. "Ham or any other kind. There's more strength in a pound of spinach than there is in a pound of any kind of meat."

"You don't tell me," said Benny. "I eat spinach sometimes. I like celery better."

"Celery's rich in vitamins, too," Helmick said. "Do you eat nuts, Mr. Greenspan?"

"Peanuts sometimes," Benny said.

"Nuts are wonderful," Helmick said solemnly. "I eat nuts for lunch."

"Only nuts?" Benny asked incredulously.

"With an apple," Helmick said. "Nuts and one apple. That's my regular lunch right along, day after day."

"I hear apples are good," Benny said.

"All fresh fruits are good," Mr. Helmick declared. "Cooking spoils them."

"Feel his arm, Benny," Mary suggested.

Helmick presented his right arm, flexed. Benny examined the bicep with his fingers.

"Ooh!" he said. "Like iron!"

"And Benny's double-jointed," Edna bragged. "He could 'a' been an acrobat if he trained for it."

"Hit me," Helmick said to Benny. "Here. In the stomach. Hit me hard."

"Is it a gag?" Benny asked suspiciously.

"Go on and hit me," Helmick urged. "Go on! Hit me as hard as you can."

Benny shrugged. "I got witnesses —you gave me leave."

"Sure," Helmick said. "Don't hold back. Hit me as hard as you can."

Benny drove a hard right to Helmick's stomach. Helmick, immovable, smiled.

"I haven't eaten a mouthful of meat in six years," he said.

"He lays on his back and lets people jump up and down on his stomach," Mary bragged. "Big men, too. He's awful strong."

"Look, Mr. Helmick," Benny said eagerly. "Did you ever fight any?"

"I can defend myself when I have to," Helmick said. "I never use my strength to bully anybody. You wouldn't believe I was a sickly boy, would you, Mr. Greenspan."

"If you say so," Benny said, shrugging. "You're well again, ain't you?"

"I built myself up," Helmick explained.

"You did good," Benny said admiringly. "Did you ever box any, Mr. Helmick?"

"I learned the art of self-defense while I was building myself up," Helmick said. "I think every boy ought to know it. It makes him manly."

"Sure!" said Benny. "But look, Mr. Helmick, what I'm askin' you! Did you ever fight professional? In the ring, I mean."

"Prize fighting?" Mr. Helmick asked. "Is that what you mean?"

"He works in a furniture store," Mary explained. "He's a salesman."

"Benny works in the fight department of the *World*," Edna countered. "He knows all the big fighters an' everybody. He meets them down where he works."

"There's money in it, Mr. Helmick," Benny said earnestly. "Believe me, big money!"

"I couldn't be a fighter!" Helmick exclaimed.

"For big money, you couldn't?" Benny challenged him.

"Why, I—I never thought about it," Helmick said.

"You'd better not think about it, neither," Mary warned him. "That Murphy boy that lived up over us when he was in Hoboken, he was a fighter, and you should see him sometimes! Like a taxicab had hit him or he'd been run over by a truck or something. His eyes black and his face all cut up and everything!"

"Oh, him!" said Benny scornfully. "He was just a tramp fighter only."

"Oh," said Mary. "Did you know him?"

"Must I know him to tell he's a tramp, if he gets all beat up like that?" Benny cried. "Do you think somebody is going to do like that to Mr. Helmick, if he was to fight in the ring? Strong like he is!"

"I guess I could take care of myself if I had to," Helmick said.

"What do you weigh, Mr. Helmick?" Benny asked eagerly.

"A hundred and eighty-three and a half this morning," Helmick said. "Stripped. I'm about a pound and a half overweight. A hundred and eighty-two is what I should weigh really. I can take that off easy, though. I fast once a week."

"You fast?" said Benny. "Like on Yom Kippur?"

"One day each week I go twenty-four hours without taking a bite of solid food," Helmick explained. "Only orange juice."

"If it does you good, who should say no?" Benny said. "A hundred and eighty-three and a half. You're a heavyweight, Mr. Helmick. Do you know what the heavyweight champion gets when he fights?"

"Oh, well," said Mr. Helmick—"the champion."

"Somebody's the champion," Benny said. "How do you know it couldn't be you if you tried?"

"I never thought of it," Helmick admitted.

"How much does the heavyweight champion get when he fights?" Mary d'Angelo inquired, interested.

"If he shouldn't get a half million dollars, somebody cheated him," Benny said impressively.

"A half million dollars!" Mary exclaimed, her eyes shining. "Ooh! How many times a year does he fight?"

"I never thought of it," Helmick repeated, evidently remedying that oversight.

"All you need is the right manager, Mr. Helmick," Benny declared earnestly. "It's like something brought us together, ain't it? I'm where I know everybody big in the fight racket. Writers, managers, promoters, everybody. I could get space about you in the paper and everything. You wouldn't have nothing to do but train and fight. I take care of everything. All the business; all the worries; all the troubles. I do the whole thing, Mr. Helmick."

"Well, I don't know," Helmick said hesitantly. "These people I'm with, I wouldn't like to quit them right away."

"Quit them right away!" Benny said scornfully. "No, sir, Mr. Helmick. We give them a surprise. You don't work nights?"

"No," said Helmick. "Not nights."

"Nights we fight!" Benny exclaimed. "Instead we go to the movies or play pinochle or something, we fight. After we begin to get big money, we drive up to the place where you work some day, and we go in and give the boss a big surprise. We tell him who we are. Won't that be good fun?"

"I never met any professional fighters or managers," Helmick said. "Aren't they—well—I mean——"

"Aren't they what?" said Benny. "What do you mean? Ask me questions, Mr. Helmick. I would lie sooner if I was on a witness stand then tell you one."

"Well—aren't they a pretty tough crowd?" Helmick asked.

"Look at me," said Benny. "I'm a manager. Am I tough? Never mind my feelings, Mr. Helmick. Tell me the truth. Am I tough?"

"Well, no," Helmick admitted. "You're all right, but——"

"If I'm all right, who should worry you?" Benny argued. "Look, Mr. Helmick, did you hear of Gene Tunney?"

Helmick nodded.

"Is he tough?" Benny asked. "A gentleman! Everybody knows that. You want samples? I give 'em to you. I'm a manager. Gene Tunney, he was a fighter. Are we tough?"

"I never thought about it before," Helmick said earnestly. "Tell me——"

"Sit down," Benny said, taking him by the arm. "I tell you everything, Mr. Helmick. I ain't superstitious, Mr. Helmick, but you can't tell me something didn't bring us together to-night. Here I'm looking for a fellow like you

and you're looking for a fellow like me, even if you didn't know it. Sit down, Mr. Helmick. Now what do you want I should tell you? Ask me everything."

The next night Helmick met Benny at Al Garber's Gym and stripped for a tryout. Benny was delighted with his appearance.

"Oh, such muscles!" he cried. "Honest, Mr. Helmick, only for statues in the park I never see anybody got muscles like you."

"Notice in the back," Helmick said. He turned and flexed his back muscles.

"Better than on statues!" Benny declared. "I always knew some day I'd get me a boy, he'd be a champion."

Helmick frowned. "I'm twenty-three," he reminded Benny huffily.

Benny laughed. "You shouldn't be sore, Mr. Helmick," he said. "It's a way of speaking. When a manager's got a fighter, he would call him a boy, even if he should be fifty with whiskers."

"Oh," said Helmick.

"You see?" said Benny. "All these little things I know. We go upstairs now and you box with Louis Munson."

They went upstairs and met Munson. He was in ring togs, a bald-headed, somewhat paunchy man of forty, weighing in the neighborhood of two hundred. In condition he had been a hard-working, second-flight middleweight, and wore the permanent record of his ring labors—two cauliflower ears, a pad of scar tissue about each eye, and a nose that looked like the calloused, thick thumb of an aged laborer.

"This is Mr. Helmick I was speaking to you about," Benny introduced his protégé. "Does he look like something, Louie? Tell me."

"Something," Louie admitted cryptically, eying Helmick. "Put 'em on. Let's see what he's got."

With trembling fingers Benny slipped the big training gloves on Helmick's hands.

"I'll go easy, Mr. Munson," Helmick said generously.

"Ain't you nice!" said Munson. "Never mind that easy stuff. You tear in and see what you can do."

Helmick smiled. "I wouldn't want to do that," he said. "I can tell from looking at you that you're not in very good condition."

"I don't have to be to handle the mugs that train in this dump. Come on, son. Knock the old man's head off and watch it bounce. Try an' do it!"

"Time!" Benny called excitedly.

They touched gloves and started to box. Munson led with his left to the face. Helmick side-stepped, slipped the punch, and countered with his right to the body. Munson grunted, and an expression approximating respect replaced the sneer on his face.

"Yow!" Benny screeched, clapping his hands excitedly. "A champion! Did I tell you?"

They sparred for a moment. Munson landed a light left to the face, and a right to the body. Helmick, smiling, tied him up in a clinch, and without effort, held him helpless.

"Break!" Benny yelled. "Oh! Give a look at the way he does it!"

They broke and sparred for a moment. Helmick landed a left to the face and got away without a return. He was not a bad boxer. No wizard but pretty good. Munson took the round on points, but at no time did he make Helmick appear ridiculous. At the end of the round Munson was puffing hard. Helmick was serene, breathing easy.

"I've seen worse," Munson admitted reluctantly. He looked at Helmick, puzzled. "Tear into me next round, big fellow," he said. "Give me all you've got."

"Oh, I wouldn't want to do that!" Helmick protested.

"Don't be so good-natured!" Benny commanded anxiously. "Do like he tells you. He gives you leave, don't he? Couldn't you get mad at him? Go on! Knock off his block, if you could do it. Kill him!"

Helmick shuddered. "Don't say that!" he said sharply. "Not even in fun. Don't say it!"

The second round was a repetition of the first. Helmick boxed well. Again Munson outpointed him, but Helmick was always cool, and never in serious difficulty.

"He handles himself pretty well," Munson said at the end of the round. "He can take it. Upstairs and down. I'll say that for him. I hit him some pips and he never even blinked! Not once!"

"Did I tell you?" Benny cried.

"I keep myself in shape," Helmick exclaimed, smiling.

"A champion," Benny declared. "No less! One year, Mr. Helmick. I say one year. Maybe sooner! Who knows?"

Munson shook his head. "Don't get excited," he said. "He's no good. He can't hit."

"He can't hit?" Benny cried. "Strong like he is? He can't hit?"

"He couldn't break eggs with brass knuckles!" Munson said scornfully.

"That we could teach him," Benny insisted. "Couldn't we teach him that, Louie?"

He turned to Helmick. "Couldn't you learn that, if we taught it to you, Mr. Helmick?" he asked.

Helmick shook his head. "I don't need to be taught," he declared. "I can hit, if I want to."

"If you want to?" Benny cried. "Why shouldn't you want to?"

Helmick held out his gloved hands. "Take them off," he said sadly. "I can't be a fighter."

"A reason!" Benny begged tearfully. "A reason, Mr. Helmick!"

"All right," Helmick said reluctantly. "I'll tell you. I'm scared."

"Scared!" Benny jeered. "A big, strong one like you?"

"That's why," Helmick said glumly. "You've got no idea how strong I am, Mr. Greenspan. I'm scared I'll kill somebody."

"Hear what he says!" said Benny. "You shouldn't let that worry you, Mr. Helmick. In the ring, if you should kill a man, they would do more to you in court if you drive by a red light. I give you my word, Mr. Helmick, you wouldn't hardly even be arrested. Maybe just for a little while, but nothing serious. Am I right, Louie?"

Louie nodded. "They never send you up for killin' a man in the ring," he said. "That goes in the book as accidental. You think you'd kill somebody if you ever cut loose, huh?"

"It scares me to think of it," Helmick confessed.

Louie grinned. "I wouldn't worry about that," he counseled. "You can cut loose with me, any time you feel like it. If you knock me into a suit of pine underwear, I'll promise not to come back and haunt you."

Helmick shook his head. "You don't know!" he said earnestly. "I'm stronger than you've got any idea of, Mr. Munson. I've built myself up and built myself up until even I don't know how strong I am, if I use everything I got. I'm scared."

"I'm tellin' you they wouldn't put you in jail for it," Benny argued desperately. "You ain't scared of something you wouldn't get put in jail for, Mr. Helmick?"

"I wouldn't want it on my mind," Helmick said.

"A fighter!" Benny said scornfully. "A fighter would be on your mind, Mr. Helmick?"

"They're human beings," Helmick argued.

"I give you that," Benny said. "Even

so, Mr. Helmick, look in the subway when it's a rush hour. They're human beings, Mr. Helmick. Too many, Mr. Helmick. Anywhere you go—too many. If one has bad luck, and you didn't mean it, Mr. Helmick, and it was only an accident, is that anything wrong?"

"You ain't goin' to kill anybody," Louie Munson said scornfully.

"I'm positive you wouldn't," Benny said. "Look, Mr. Helmick: It ain't so easy to kill people nowadays. All what the doctors learned about everything, and the way they do for you when you get hurt. Why, Mr. Helmick, they've learned so much, you could hit people with trucks, an' hardly anybody dies from it."

"I suppose most fighters are pretty healthy," Helmick said, beginning to weaken.

"Healthy?" Benny cried. "Mr. Helmick, you wouldn't believe! Anyhow, Mr. Helmick, the doctors look at them before they go into the ring. If they ain't healthy, they wouldn't let them fight."

"Is that so?" said Helmick.

"You shouldn't take my word," Benny said. "Ask Louie."

Munson nodded.

Helmick sighed. "All right," he said reluctantly. "I'll take a chance. I hate to do it, but——"

"Now we talk sense," Benny said delightedly, patting his shoulder. "You box again with Louie, an' hit now, huh? Hit hard!"

"Sure," said Louie. "Come ahead. I'll take a chance."

"No," Helmick said firmly. "Only in the ring. After all, in the ring it's a sort of a business. I see that. Not in training, though. Don't ask me to do it in training. I couldn't do that. Anyhow, Mr. Munson's not in condition."

"Couldn't you hit him just a little bit hard?" Benny asked. "Maybe half as hard as you could hit if you hit as hard as you can?"

Helmick shook his head. "I can't do things halfway," he exclaimed. "I either have to put everything I've got into it, or else go easy."

"Would you put into it all you've got if I get you a fight in the ring, Mr. Helmick?"

Helmick considered. "Yes," he said at last sternly, "I will."

"You wouldn't go easy?" Benny persisted. "You promise."

"Yes," Helmick said solemnly. "Yes, I promise."

That night Benny signed a contract with Helmick. It was the regulation manager-fighter document under the terms of which Benny was to receive thirty-three and one third per cent of all the money earned by Helmick in the ring or by any method capitalizing his reputation as a pugilist. Benny then signed over ten per cent of his cut to Louie Munson, in return for which the old fighter agreed to do his best for Helmick at least half an hour four nights a week.

Benny saw Al Garber then, and promised him a paragraph of publicity for his gym as soon as he could possibly arrange it, in return for permitting Helmick to train in his place nights for a month.

"If he just don't get good-hearted on me!" Benny said to Edna Margolis at lunch the next day. "Honest, Edna, if we could just keep him from getting good-hearted so he wouldn't care how hard he hit anybody, who knows what might happen? Look, Edna, if he got to be a good fighter pretty soon, and I was his manager and making all that money and all—— What d'ya say, Edna?"

"Sure, Benny," Edna agreed tenderly. "If it happened like that. Mary called me on the phone this morning. She's all excited about it, too. What you said about a half million dollars got her all

worked up. She likes him good enough, anyhow, and if he made a lot of money fighting, why——"

"Tell her she should promise him!" Benny urged. "If she promised she would marry with him if he got to be a big fighter, he wouldn't care if he killed somebody or not."

"Aw, Benny!" Edna said. "You wouldn't want him to kill anybody, would you?"

"Did I say so?" said Benny. "He wouldn't kill anybody, Edna. It's only he's afraid he might."

"I'll see will she promise him," Edna said. "I could be helping if I did that, couldn't I, Benny?"

"Sure," said Benny. "Anything you could do, so he won't get good-hearted, that helps. That's all that worries me—that he don't get good-hearted. That's his trouble."

Within the next few days he managed to get Helmick a license and a chance in the opening four-rounder at the Forest Heights Club, in Brooklyn, on a card three weeks distant, against one "Stubby" Jensen, a recent heavyweight graduate from the amateur ranks.

Each evening Benny spent anxiously watching his protégé working at Garber's with Louie Munson.

"He won't cut loose and punch, no matter what I say," Louie said to Benny after working with Helmick for two weeks. "I wish I knew some way to make him mad."

"If we could do that!" Benny said. "What I say all the time is, Louie, the only trouble with Helmick he's too good-hearted."

"He says he'll cut loose when he gets in the ring," Louie said. "I dunno. Maybe he will."

"I've got a big idea," Benny said, suddenly radiant. "Why shouldn't I think of that before? To-morrow, Louie. To-morrow you see. If Helmick, he's good-natured after I talk with him to-morrow—— Well, you'll see."

The next night after Helmick finished boxing with Munson, Benny translated his big idea to action.

"Mr. Helmick," he said earnestly, "I think it ought to be told to you this man Jensen we got a fight with, he's a very mean fellow."

"Is that so?" Helmick asked placidly.

"Very mean!" Benny said impressively.. "He says about you, Mr. Helmick, that you are a no good and got a yellow streak, and when you get in the ring, he will knock your ears off quick in the first round."

"Did he say that!" Helmick exclaimed, incredulous.

"Worse," said Benny impressively. "Some what he said, Mr. Helmick, honest, I wouldn't speak over again to you."

"That's too bad," Helmick said sadly. "If he feels that way, maybe we'd better not fight him."

"Oh, no, no no, Mr. Helmick!" Benny chattered excitedly. "All the more reason we fight him. You see? All the more reason."

Helmick looked puzzled. "It seems to me professional fighting is just a business," he said. "The only reason for fighting in the ring is money. Isn't that right?"

"Who told you different!" said Benny.

"Then why should I fight Jensen just because he makes nasty cracks about me?" Helmick asked. "The thing to do is not to fight him. Then he won't make any money."

"We!" Benny cried. "We! If we don't fight him, how much money do we make?"

"Oh," said Helmick, "I see."

"Do by him as he says he'll do by us," Benny counseled. "In the first round, right away when the fight starts, knock his ears off."

Helmick smiled. "Say," he said en-

thusiastically, "that's not a bad idea. No, sir! That's pretty good! That'll be sort of putting the shoe on the other foot, now won't it?"

"That's it," Benny said earnestly. "Just keep feeling that way, Mr. Helmick. Only look. When you think about putting that fellow Jensen's shoe on the other foot, don't smile like that. Just as a favor to me, Mr. Helmick. don't smile so nice."

Helmick sat on a bench in the dressing room at the Forest Heights Club. He wore a bath robe over his ring togs. He was not smiling. His facial expression, however, displeased Benny, who was drawing the gloves on the big fellow's hands with trembling fingers. It was much too placid to suit Benny's conception of the look the future champion of the world should wear just prior to entering the ring. Indeed, Helmick fairly beamed with contentment as Munson, kneeling, kneaded his legs.

"Ah," he said, drawing a long breath. "That feels good."

"Look, Mr. Helmick," Benny said desperately, as he knotted the laces on the gloves. "Did you ever see Dempsey?"

"Dempsey?" Helmick repeated. "The fighter?"

Benny made a clucking noise with his tongue. "Do you know somewhere of Dempsey I'm talking about makes button holes on silk underwear or something?" he said disgustedly. "Would I be askin' now about some Dempsey what ain't the fighter?"

"I've seen pictures of him," Helmick said. "Very well developed."

"Couldn't you act a little bit like him, Mr. Helmick? In the face, I mean. So it would look a little madder."

"Is that necessary?" Helmick asked.

"It's important," Benny said. "Believe me, Mr. Helmick, it's very important."

The door was opened from outside. A tall, dark-haired, smiling young fellow wearing a bath robe stepped in.

"Helmick?" he asked.

"Yes, sir," said Helmick. "That's me."

"Jensen," the young fellow introduced himself, stepping forward and extending his hand.

"Oh," said Helmick, shaking hands. "How do you do?"

"Fine," said Jensen genially. "Hope we make a good fight of it to-night."

"Say!" said Benny angrily. "What's the big idea? You get away from here!"

Jensen looked at him surprised, shrugged. "Oh, well!" he said. "If you feel that way about it."

Helmick stood up. "No!" he said. "Wait a minute." He turned to Benny. "You shouldn't speak like that to Mr. Jensen," he reprimanded him.

"I just came in to say hello," Jensen explained. "This is business with both of us. No use having any hard feelings about it."

"Certainly not," said Helmick. "It was very nice of you to come in to see me, Mr. Jensen."

"Glad you feel that way about it," said Jensen. "Well, good luck." He smiled and went out, closing the door behind him.

"Say," said Helmick, smiling broadly. "He's kind of a nice fellow, isn't he?"

"It's a trick!" Benny warned him shrilly. "Don't be fooled, Helmick! It's a trick! He come in that way just to get you good-hearted."

"Oh, I hardly think that," Helmick said. "He seemed like a real nice sort of a fellow."

"You see?" said Benny wildly. "He's done it! Now you won't hit him like you should, because you're good-hearted about him."

"I do sort of hate to hurt him!" Helmick confessed.

"Will you think of Mary d'Angelo?" Benny said desperately. "Would you

be hurting her if you got soft-hearted and don't win the fight? Is she depending on it you should get to be a big fighter quick, so she could be happy? Would you think of me? Did I do all this business for nothing? You should feel bad about hurting a dirty crook? Comes in and gets you good-natured, just when you're going to fight him. Would you think of yourself, if nobody else? Maybe this Jensen, he's such a good fellow, he'll pay your bills, if you get good-hearted and don't hit him like you should. Tell me, please. Fighting ain't friendship. It's a business."

Helmick nodded, scowled. "You're right," he said grimly. "I won't have any mercy."

"You promise?" Benny cried.

"I promise," said Helmick.

Munson swore. "Damned if you ain't the first fighter I ever seen that was punch drunk before he ever got hit," he said disgustedly.

A club attendant opened the door and put his head in. "All right, you birds," he said. "Get up there."

There was an exclamatory murmur from the crowd when Benny snatched the robe from Helmick's shoulders just before the first bell.

"Hot dog!" said one ring worm admiringly. "Some muscles, eh?"

"Sandow the second," said another.

The bell rang.

"Go on now!" Benny shrieked. "Do it now!"

They met, sparred, and began to fight.

"He's pullin' his punches," Munson yelled in Benny's ear, after a few seconds. "He's doin' just like he did with me in the gym. He ain't tryin' to hit."

There were tears in Benny's eyes. "He's gone and got good-hearted, just like I was scared he would!" he sobbed. "Helmick! Will you hit him? Please. Don't be good-hearted! Hit him!"

If Helmick heard, he did not heed. The first round was tame. Neither fighter did any damage. The gallery booed when the two men went to their corners.

"You promised!" Benny said tearfully to Helmick as the latter sat on his stool during the minute rest period. "You promised."

Helmick nodded. "I just couldn't bring myself to do it," he confessed. "I will now, though. Just as soon as the bell rings. Right away."

He looked across the ring at Jensen and set his face in a scowl. When the bell rang, he advanced to the center of the ring, fiddled for a moment, measured Jensen with a light left to the face, and then stepped in with a full right to the jaw. He dropped his hands and stepped back. Jensen shook his head slightly, looked surprised at Helmick, standing with his hands at his sides, and then stepped in, socked his opponent with a savage right uppercut to the point of the jaw.

Helmick dropped and took the count of five.

"Hit him!" Benny screamed through the ropes as Helmick got to his feet. "Hit him like you promised."

Helmick's face was a study in bewilderment. "I did!" he shouted back. "Honest I did."

Jensen rushed. Helmick side-stepped, and sent a right to the pit of the stomach, grunting loudly with the explosive effort of his punch. There was no answering grunt from Jensen. His reply was a stiff left hook to the side of the head, and a right to the body. Helmick grabbed him and hung on tight. Over Jensen's shoulder he stared at Benny.

"Hit him!" Benny cried. "Hit him! Hit him! Hit him!"

"I did!" Helmick cried back. "I did!"

"You did not!" Benny yelled. "Hit him!"

"I did so!" Helmick shouted back. As he argued thus with his manager, he held Jensen helpless in a viselike embrace. The referee strove to pry him

loose. He might as well have tried to pry up a manhole cover with the point of a penknife. Jensen struggled, helpless in Helmick's grip. The referee swore and tugged to no purpose.

For thirty seconds the struggle went on while the house roared laughter. Benny shrieked at Helmick to obey the referee and fight. The referee gave up at last, and disqualified Helmick for holding. The gong clanged. Benny and Munson clambered into the ring. Still Helmick held Jensen pinioned helpless. At last a look of reason returned to his face. He released Jensen, and stood back, abashed.

"Why didn't you hit him?" Benny raged, tears in his eyes. "Why didn't you hit him like you promised you would?"

Helmick's lips quivered. Tears rolled down his cheeks. "I did, Mr. Greenspan," he blubbered humbly. "Honest I did. I hit him twice just as hard as I could, but—but nothing happened."

"Muscle bound!" Munson said scornfully. "The big sap's been hittin' as hard as he could all the time, only he didn't know it! Hurry up! Let's get him out of here, before somebody dies laughin' at him. That's the only way he'll ever be the cause of killin' anybody."

Benny had lunch with Edna Margolis the next day. "I ain't discouraged, Edna," he assured her stoutly. "I'll find me one some day. You'll see."

"Sure you will, Benny," Edna said consolingly. "I ain't worried about that. Not one bit. Look, Benny. Don't you think a fellow that's going to fight, he ought to eat meat?"

"Three times a day," Benny said. He sighed, and added fervently, "An' no nuts."

WANTED: FREE TRADE IN IDEAS

IN his dissenting opinion on the Abrams free speech case Mr. Justice Holmes, that grand old progressive of the United States Supreme Court, had this to say:

"When men have realized that time has upset many fighting beliefs, they may come to believe, even more than they believe the very foundations of their own conduct, that the ultimate good desired is better reached by free trade in ideas—that the best test of truth is the power of truth to get itself accepted in the market, and that truth is the only ground upon which their wishes can be carried out. That, at any rate, is the theory of our Constitution. It is an experiment, as all life is an experiment."

If that had been the creed and code of men always, no bloody deed for bigotry's sake would appear in the records. Phidias and Anaxagoras would not have died in prison for "sacrilege" against Greek gods, nor would Socrates have drunk the hemlock nor Giordano Bruno gone to the stake for free speaking, nor Ridley and Latimer burned for their way of worshiping God.

Dungeons and chains—the rack—the gallows—burnings at the stake! That has been the cry through all the ages because man would have none of this free trade in ideas. It is still the cry. It is the cry that keeps many modern quests for truth from being fields for the high and unrestricted adventuring of the mind, fields where, with enlightenment as the Golden Fleece, the Argonauts of our day might go exploring and discovering, and in the end win fame instead of defamation.

Concerning One Johnny Barker of Bootle and a Mighty Battle in the Stokehold of the *City of Padang.*

A Stokehold David

By NORMAN REILLY RAINE

JOHNNY BARKER of Bootle limped over the bright sea road from Woolongong to Port Kembla totally oblivious to the loveliness of blue water caught in a rim of dazzling sand, and to the misty violet of the hills of New South Wales running smoothly back from the flower-spangled salt flats of the coast. He was hungry, fed up, and far from home, and the beer that a generous stranger had stood him in the Oxford bar at Woolongong had run out through his pores with the heat of his walk. His one good eye could hold no finer picture than the dingy yellow masts and red funnel of the tramp ship *City of Padang,* Sydney to London via Panama, now rising above the Port Kembla coal wharf. Even from afar he could hear the roar of the great chutes as they poured fuel into the bunkers for the long run, and the sound was melody to his scrubby ears.

He slackened his pace somewhat, mopping his face with his sleeve and wiping the sweat out of his eye with a crooked forefinger. Johnny Barker no longer was young. Gray lines of failure and exhaustion ridged his brow and cheek, and his dumpy body had gone soft with idleness; but a shrewdness in his glance, and a certain turn to the corner of his lips, told of a spirit that did not ask much of life, and which made the best of the little it got. He glanced at the sun. Past noon. He thought, philosophically, "Even if I don't get a job they'll 'ardly refuse to let me stow away some digestibles."

At the top of the gangway of the

City of Padang was a bottle-nosed man in greasy dungarees, with a stomach, and a hairy chest, and great toil-hardened hands. He watched, scowling critically, and flicking his cigarette ash, as Johnny Barker climbed the gangway and deposited his pudgy form upon the deck abaft the forward house.

Barker coughed tentatively, and removed his battered hat. The other gazed indifferently over the side. Barker hemmed again, and asked apologetically:

"Beg pardon, sir; is the deucer—the second engineer, aboard?"

The man with the bottle nose spat at a passing gull.

"'Oo wants to know?"

Johnny Barker chuckled at this pleasantry.

"Why, as a matter o' fact, sir, I do."

"And 'oo are you?"

"Name's Barker, sir—o' Bootle, in Liverpool. Mebbe you've 'eard tell of——"

"What do you want?"

"Ah, so you're the deuc—the second, sir. I wants to ship out; to get back 'ome." Memory of diverse experiences rendered his voice bitter. "For five years now I been nursemaid to a flock o' sheep in the back blocks. Nothink to eat 'arf the time but mutton wot's died on the 'oof; nobody to talk to but meself; nothink to see but 'ills an' sky—an' the dingoes 'ollerin' of a nighttime fit to drive you fair extracted. It were terrible."

The other looked him over painstakingly.

"Look 'ere," he said at length, "you 'ook it out o' this. We don't need nobody, an' if we did there's a pal o' mine at Woolongong'd get the job. The very idear if a sheep-'erder comin' on a respectable ship and wantin' to sign on. Besides," he added as an afterthought, "you've prob'ly got fleas."

Johnny Barker was hardened to such compliments. Also, he was a persistent soul in his modest way, and he wanted to go home. He said:

"Just the same, sir——"

"Ye needn't 'sir' me. I ain't the deucer."

"Well, if you'd tell me where I might find 'im, I'd like——"

The other swelled with sudden rage.

"Don't you 'ear good?" he roared. "Now get away ashore, afore I——"

He looked abruptly beyond Johnny Barker, and his frame seemed to shrink. Then he slipped like magic into the shelter of the fidley. A stout, good-natured-looking man, with a pock-marked face and keen eyes, was coming out of the port alleyway. He wore four rings of bright purple-edged braid upon his sleeve.

"Whut's all the rumpus?" he asked mildly.

Johnny Barker took no chances. He sidled a step nearer the gangway.

"I was only arsking for the second engineer, chief," he beamed ingratiatingly.

The chief shook his head.

"No good looking for a job, if that's whut ye want, my man," he said. "We signed a full crew on in Sydney."

Johnny Barker's spirits drooped, but he persevered.

"Sure there'd not be room for one more, sir? I ain't a little Mary Pickwick to look at, but I kin work. The larst ship I was afflicted with——"

"Eh?" said the chief. "What? Oh, I see whut ye mean—affiliated."

"Aye, sir, that's it. It were seven year ago, but I got a good discharge out of 'er, an' the chief told me 'imself that——"

"It's no guid going on," said the chief. "I canna take ye. Hae ye had your dinner?"

The gratified Barker smiled.

"No, sir, I 'aven't. God bless you, sir," he added cannily.

The chief hailed a steward.

"Take this man tae the galley and see

that he gets his dinner before he goes ashore. Well—whut is it now?"

"If it don't ill convenience you, sir," said Johnny Barker, "that feller I was talkin' to when you come along, 'e wasn't an engineer, I s'pose?"

"Him? Lord, no! Yon was Nixon, a fireman. He was afraid ye'd get a berth he was asking for a friend o' his. Awa' ye go, now. Good luck tae ye. Ye'll get a ship afore long, I na doot."

In the grateful atmosphere of the galley Johnny Barker exercised considerable diplomacy in dealing with that touchiest of ship's individuals, the cook. He did not know the *City of Padang's* sailing hour, but there was another meal to the day.

"Excellent wittles, doctor," he said, as the cook's suspicious eye rested on him as he stood outside the galley, spooning up his plateful of food.

"Are they, now?" said the cook discouragingly. "I seen lots better."

"O' course"—Johnny Barker hastened to shift ground and, in so doing, got in a shrewd touch—"a good cook makes anythink tasty, if it's on'y a cut off a fo'castle swab. But this 'ere scouse, now——" He wagged his head appreciatively.

"Hmm! I s'pose you've et worse," said the cook, relenting; and Johnny Barker insinuated himself into the galley, and accepted another helping.

"Mind where you're settin'," went on the cook. "That range is 'ot. Make yourself at 'ome most anywheres, don't yer?"

Johnny Barker changed the subject.

"You seem an 'orspital kind of a feller," he said. "I ain't met many o' that sort lately. Tried to sail wi' you, I did, but they wouldn't 'ave me. Met a nasty-lookin' cove name o' Nixon, an' we 'ad a bit of a run in." He let his fancy rove a bit. "I give 'im a good tellin' off."

The cook clucked admiringly.

"Did you reely? 'Ave some puddin'. 'E's a bad one, is Nixon. Dumped the black pan on me 'ead one night, 'e did. Said it wasn't 'ot. I found it 'ot enough."

"Wot's the rest like—engineer's crowd, I mean?"

"The chief's all right. 'E don't interfere much down below. Third an' fourth is young fellers, wot minds their P's an' Q's. But the deucer, now! 'E's a proper swine, 'e is, same's 'is pal Nixon, what 'e meets when they goes ashore. I wish the Old Man would catch 'em together!"

"I know," said Johnny Barker. "I've met deucers like 'im afore. I could tell you many an antidote about 'em. But don't you forget that Bible feller, Samuel—'im wot slew Goliar the Babylodian wi' a catterpulp! Allus thought a lot o' that yarn, I did. I 'eard it of a cousin o' mine in the clergical way, wot come to our 'ouse in Bootle one Throve Tuesday. An' these engine-room Goliars all meets their Samuels, soon or late. You watch." Reluctantly he yielded up his plate. "I s'pose if I was to be about 'ere around suppertime—— Oh, you're sailin' at four thirty. Well, much obliged, mate."

Johnny Barker shook hands and stepped out into the brilliant sunshine of the *City of Padang's* deck.

Three days later, at four o'clock in the morning, the second engineer of the S. S. *City of Padang* clambered down the ladder to his trick amid the oily, hot smells and orderly, shining confusion of the engine room. While the third, whom he was relieving, recorded on the blackboard the steam pressure, vacuum, R. P. M.'s, and sea and discharge water temperatures, he busied himself thumbing bearings, noting water levels, bilges, pumps, thrust block, and other incidentals of taking over.

"Everything all right, Third?" he asked, shouting to make himself heard

above the pound and clang of the crank shaft, the suck and sigh of the pumps and the deep hum of the dynamo.

"All except that damn feed pump valve again. We'll have to see to it shortly."

"All right. Tell the chief in the morning."

As the third climbed the ladder the deucer stooped between the hot boilers, about to go through the low door into the stokehold, when he suddenly remembered that he had neglected to examine the stern gland at the extreme after end of the propeller-shaft tunnel. He turned back to the engine room. Immediately his trained ears caught a sound foreign to the rackets of the smooth-glittering machinery. He stopped; listened intently; heard it again.

"In the tunnel, whatever it is," he muttered, and snatching a bubbly lamp from the storeroom bench entered the long, dark burrow. Almost halfway along he caught sight of a pair of fat bowlegs disappearing up the perpendicular emergency man shaft leading to the poop.

The deucer staggered aft as fast as the increasing roll of the ship would permit.

"Come down here, you!" he yelled.

There was no response. He hailed again, with threats, and as these evoked no reply, commenced to climb the man-shaft ladder. A heavy foot pinned his fingers to a rung. Cold with rage he dropped back into the tunnel, and was about to summon the oiler on watch, when a tactfully obsequious voice floated down.

"Was you wantin' somethin', sir? Me 'earing ain't wot it was."

The second's reply was translatable only by a gifted few.

The fat bowlegs appeared again, dangled for a moment, and descended, and the unlovely person of Johnny Barker came into range of the bubbly lamp.

The small eyes of the deucer narrowed, and he shot his jaw toward the engine room.

"In there," he rasped, and the stowaway slipped past him, a practiced elbow raised to protect his ears, a cautious hand to his stern.

"You would," said the deucer with intense venom, bunching his large fists, "stow your worthless carcass away, and choose my watch to nip out in, would you? Well, *that's* to pay you off with—and *that*—and *that!*"

He put his sleek black hair in order, while Johnny Barker reeled back, dazed and bleeding.

"I didn't mean no 'arm, sir," he whimpered. "I was that interjected at bein' left be'ind on the dock, an' this fine ship leavin' for 'ome, I just *'ad* to come along. I'm sorry it's yore watch, sir." Mopping a cut eyebrow, he threw out a helpful thought. "If you like I'll pop back again, an' come out in the fourth's."

The deucer kicked him, brutally and satisfyingly. It was not often that one of his bulk and disposition got a chance to hammer a man at sea in these effete days. But this man was a stowaway, with no legal status for protection, and the second was a thwarted hard case. What that means every deep-water black gang knows. The final kick landed Johnny Barker sprawling on the coal-dust polished steel plates of the stokehold.

"Give him a shovel," the deucer directed one of the men on watch. "He might as well begin to work his passage now. I'll be in from time to time, and I want to see him sweating. When I go off I'll take him up to the Old Man."

It did not help matters much when a vaguely familiar voice assailed Johnny Barker's stunned ears.

" 'Ello, 'oo 'ave we 'ere?" it chortled. "Blessed if it ain't the lousy sheep-'erder! Look mates, wot the bilges

coughed up!" He came close to the stowaway and thrust a shovel into his trembling hands. "Wouldn't take me advice and clear off ashore, would yer, eh? Well, the deucer'll give ye a bellyful, I warrant; an' if 'e forgets, there's plenty more of us to remember. 'Ere, wrap yer dainty 'ands around this shovel' andle, an' let's see 'ow well you can 'erd coal through that fire door!"

" 'Ave a 'eart, chum," Johnny Barker whined. "I ain't fit for coal passin'. It'll fair kill me, an' me wi' the shape I'm in. The deucer beat me somethink cruel, 'e did."

"Save that fer the Old Man," said Nixon. "An' 'ump yerself wi' that shovel or I'll fetch you a lick meself."

It was a lively watch for a man past middle age, whose muscles were soft through drink and idle living, whose hands were tender and uncalloused and long strange to toil, and whose fat-cased body was so much suet in the terrific blasting heat of the stokehold. In his younger days he had been no stranger to shovel and slice bar. Now, they caused him tears of futile exasperation and despair. Sweat poured from him in streams, smarting his eye, draining the residue of strength from his aching frame. After an hour of it he threw down the shovel and braved the deucer's wrath in the engine room.

"Look at them 'ands, sir," he wailed, and they were something to look at, with blisters the size of half dollars, broken and moist, baring the angry flesh beneath. "I can't 'ardly lift the shovel wi' them. They stick to the 'andle an' fair take the palms off me!"

By a saving atom of agility he dodged the deucer's heavy boot, and staggered back to the stokehold and the jeering of Nixon. Again he seized the sticky shovel, and from the degradation of his spirit something new arose; a stubbornness foreign to him which found expression in grim, uncomplaining effort to show himself as good as these grinning, mocking apes who despised his weakness and showered him with clumsy sarcasms and lumps of coal.

Time and again his tortured muscles refused the load imposed on them, but he kept on. When he was cleaning his fires, with a barrowful of glowing embers under his nose, Nixon suddenly doused the load with water, and a cloud of steam and ash dust belched upward into his face. He dared not retaliate physically for the brutal jest; but he bared his teeth in a dogged grin, until the grin became a fixture, and his gums cracked in the heat; and over the grin his one baleful eye promised something if ever he came to even terms with his iron-muscled tormentor.

By the end of the watch his face was twisted into gray ridges of pain and fatigue; yet, amazingly, he contrived a careless note when the deucer entered the stokehold and summoned him, even though his heart palpitated with dread. But his new-found spirit deserted him when, in response to the command to go on deck, he would have gone topside through the engine room to save his bleeding hands.

"Up the monkey ladder to the fidley," the deucer ordered and the stowaway shamelessly pleaded. Up the monkey ladder it was, however, though each rung seared the raw flesh like a branding iron and he swayed perilously at the top, and would have dropped like a stone except for the supporting arm of a fireman on the rung below.

He had time to revive himself with great gulps of the fresh sea air by the time the deucer came around from the after end of the house. The chief was waiting at the foot of the bridge ladder, and together they climbed to the Old Man's domain, where Johnny Barker fell under that one's icy gaze.

"Why ye chose my ship to stow away in, you can best tell," said the Old Man, angry but calm. "However, I'll have

no idling aboard, so ye'll work your passage. Chief, you'll see to that, I reckon."

Johnny Barker choked. "Idling!" He pleaded.

"I beg pardon, capting—I'll work, yes—but lemme stay topside! I'm too old for the black gang."

The Old Man turned his back.

"Put him to work, chief," he said, and reëntered his cabin.

The deucer asked:

"Could I have him in my watch, sir?" And the chief nodded. It does not do to encourage stowing away on deep-water merchantmen.

The deucer prodded his victim with his thumb.

"Get away below again, to get your hand in."

The chief turned about at that, and looked the stowaway over with keen scrutiny.

"He's had quite enough for the present, Mr. Chapman," he said quietly. "Four this afternoon'll be time enough. Let him gang aft now, and get some breakfast and a doss. You, fellow, draw your eating gear frae the steward as ye go below."

The deucer had flushed brick-red at the implied reprimand; but he managed a knee in Mr. Barker's kidney as the stowaway preceded him down the ladder.

Johnny Barker drew his gear from the steward and passed aft, sucking great gulps of air into his overtaxed lungs. The *City of Padang* rolled easily to a deep blue swell, and far to starboard a Panama liner, Sydney bound, left a finger smudge along the sky. The ash hoist clattered to the accompaniment of picturesque English from the man in the fidley, and the contents of the chute plopped and spattered musically in the lacy millrace along the vessel's side. The sun was bright on the gently heaving sea, the air balmy. Outside the forecastle, and on the after hatch, a score of caged canaries and cockatoos fluttered in the sunlight and bandied compliments. From the funnel valve came the soft roar of escaping steam. Four o'clock was eight hours away, and Johnny Barker's naturally volatile spirits began to revive.

"Better than sheep-'erdin' or beach combin'—p'raps," he thought.

As he passed the galley he smelled food. Force of habit brought him to a halt and he stuck in his head.

"'Ello, doctor," he greeted.

The cook eyed him with hostility.

"Go along now, you dirty feller! Don't be 'angin' your smutty person about the galley," he said; then, as he penetrated the mask of coal dust and sweat, and recognized his acquaintance of three days before, he whistled softly.

"Lor'! It's you, is it? 'Ow'd you get aboard, eh? 'Op inside 'ere a minute. Wot you bin doin', cleanin' bilges wi' your face?"

Grateful as a puppy for a kindly word, Johnny Barker told him. The cook sympathized.

"Too bad it was that pig of a deucer found you," he said. "Look, 'ere's a bucket o' good 'ot water. You 'ave a good wash-up, an' put some o' that lard on your 'ands, an' you'll feel better. But mind you keep your eye on that deucer, an' steer clear of 'im. 'E's a killer."

"It ain't only 'im," the stowaway confided. "Goliar. I've nicknamed *'im* to meself. But there's another Babylodian below. Nixon! That's two of 'em, an' that's one more than that Bibulous feller I was tellin' you of 'ad to trussle with. An' though me name's not Samuel, cook, but Johnny Barker, I've took all I'm goin' to from them. If they tries any more o' their tricks, I'll——" He shook his head ominously, hoping that neither of his enemies was within earshot. "Now wot about a bite o' breakfuss? In the fo'c's'le? Right. Much obliged."

Considerably comforted, Johnny Barker entered the forecastle. His recent watchmates sat at breakfast, looking, with their fresh-scrubbed faces, and rings of ingrained coal dust about their eyes, much like hard-featured chorus girls. Nixon announced him to the forecastle in characteristic fashion.

"'Old yer noses, boys! 'Ere comes the bloomin' sheep-'erder. Much too delicate for a tramp's stoke'old 'e is. But the deucer clipped 'is wool for 'im."

Johnny Barker essayed a placating smirk.

"Done me best, mates. Don't be too 'ard on a chap."

"*Me,* 'ard? The very idear! It's you wot's soft. Bit of exercise is wot you need. So turn to an' clean up the fo'c's'le. You'll be fireman's peggy from now on."

Johnny Barker laughed merrily.

"You must 'ave yer bit o' fun," he said brightly, with inward quaking. "But it ain't my turn for peggy yet. I just signed on, you might say. Besides, I ain't eat nothing in three days, so I——"

He attempted to step over the bench to a vacant place at the table, but Nixon thrust out a massive arm.

"You do wot you're bid," he growled, "or I'll wring ye out fer a sweat rag."

Then he stopped in some amazement, and gasped; for Johnny Barker, the long suffering, goaded beyond endurance, was executing a lively step dance in the center of the forecastle.

"Come on—step in—ye cross between a grate bar and a clinker!" he piped, weaving his pudgy fists. "I've 'ad about enough o' yore cheek! Me, wot's 'ad his second engineer's certificate afore to-day!" he added untruthfully. "Johnny Barker be a peggy for a sour-smellin' swag-belly of a fourth-rate trimmer? I'll give yer peggy!"

His frenzy was cooled by a back-hand slap that shot him halfway across the deck. But he came back, and by a lucky fluke got one in with such astonishing force upon the fireman's jaw that it sent him flat on his stern. He jumped to his feet with a bellow of fury, eyes glowing red; but aid came to his opponent from an unexpected source. Roused to laughter by the antics of the fat little beach comber, and to admiration of his burst of spunk and language, three firemen off watch interposed.

"Keep off 'im," one of them snarled at Nixon. "'E's all right, the old feller is, and you was arskin' for it. Let 'im alone, or I'll lay ye stiff!"

Johnny Barker, safe behind the bulky forms of his protectors, shrieked insults.

"Let me at 'im! Don't 'old me back!" he bawled valorously if insincerely, until a brawny trimmer reached around and, catching him by the neckband, deposited him at the table.

"You quit yelpin' and eat your breakfast," he commanded; and, honor satisfied, Johnny Barker made haste to comply.

Soon after the stowaway went on watch at four o'clock he was tied up into knots with fireman's cramps, and had to be carried to the deck to revive. The *City of Padang* rapidly was entering the tropic latitudes and the stokehold atmosphere was sulphurous. Wind chutes were rigged, but what breeze there was came from astern, and not a breath of air stirred to temper the appalling heat of the engine room and stokehold. With Nixon out of the stokehold he had an easier time of it, for when he resumed his shovel after his sick spell topside his running mate insisted upon shouldering the burden of the work, and the stowaway had a chance to recuperate.

In the early-morning watch, however, he again was paired with Nixon, who entered the inferno a few minutes before him. When Johnny Barker descended the ladder, grasping the rungs with his finger ends to save his palms

for the shovel, he found his enemy sitting idle on his shovel and whistling. There was a full head of steam up; but shortly after the stowaway's arrival his gauge began to drop. Nixon, almost without moving, seemed to find no difficulty in keeping his own well up to scratch.

"Come on, mutton fat," he gibed, "get your glass up afore the deucer sees it."

Johnny Barker spat on his hands and set to work, but try as he might the pressure decreased.

Presently he was visited by the deucer, who took one look at his gauge, cursed him for an indolent rascal, and gave him a hearty cuffing. Nixon had got to his feet when the engineer entered the stokehold. As soon as they were again alone he resumd his seat on his shovel, contenting himself with an occasional spray of coals over his fires, while his mate fought the ravenous furnace and the protests of his own wretched body.

Naked to the waist, his thin canvas trousers held up by a bit of rope, he toiled doggedly on, throwing open the fire doors, swinging the heavy-laden shovel till it seemed that his back must crack in two, and feeding the insatiable blaze. Still the glass went down, and still Nixon sat idle, a queer smile on his hard face as he watched the stowaway breaking his heart.

Presently, when his uninspiring flesh would be driven no longer, suspicion stirred in long forgotten depths, and Johnny Barker recollected some of the cruel stokehold tricks of his youth. He threw aside his shovel and investigated; and investigation bearing out his suspicions, there arose within him an emotion he had not known in all his craven life. He forgot his seared, raw hands, his heat-blistered body, his aching innards, twisted and wrung with cramps under the livid fires. His conciliatory whine turned to a bull roar of anger; his cringing, violence-dreading body snapped erect in the sudden upburst of a fighting heart. He bellowed.

"You dirty, low-down swine! You screwed down your main stop valve an' opened mine, an' I've 'ad to keep up steam for both of us!"

Grasping his shovel in both hands, Johnny Barker rushed to battle.

The fireman, turning from grinning contemplation of his mate's falling gauge, jumped to his feet to meet a maniac who threw himself upon him with flailing shovel. Nixon caught the flashing weapon upon his big forearm and, with a dexterous twist, wrested it free; but his adversary had him by the throat and with tremendous access of strength banged his skull against the bulkhead. The fireman dropped, and in the few seconds that it took him to clear his spinning head and get to his feet Johnny Barker had regained his shovel, and was at him again, banging, slicing, smashing, jabbing, with the fury of madness. To and fro they fought, over the slippery, reeling plates, tripping over loose gear, stumbling against red-hot fire doors that exacted patches of skin for every contact, slashing, pounding, and dodging, in the dim light and the hot breath of the fires, while far above them the *City of Padang,* dipping easily over a summer sea, caught on her blunt bows the first spearheads of dawn.

Beaten twice to his knees, insensible to pain or fear, Johnny Barker slipped from the man-killing grasp of the big fireman. He went down for the third time, tripping cruelly over a slice bar; but his desperate grip never relaxed upon the handle of his shovel. As Nixon dove for him he straightened like a whip, and the heavy blade, flashing upward in an arc of terrific force, caught the fireman on the side of the head and fractured his jaw.

Screaming with the agony of it, and frightened at last into panic at the murderously set face and gleaming eye of the stowaway, he dodged another sweep-

ing stroke and fled for the engine room. Johnny Barker did not pursue him. Instead, he waited, legs braced apart, back against the bulkhead, facing the door, his lacerated fists gripping the shovel handle like a two-handed crusader's sword.

The door swung open and the deucer appeared in the opening, holding before him a length of iron pipe. Johnny Barker's lip curled back as he carried the fight forward. *One—two!* The shovel swung right and left as though it had been a tennis racket, and the astonished deucer, knocked off his balance, knew immediately that he, too, was in for the battle of his life.

He had all the advantage of weight, and freshness, and a handier weapon; but Johnny Barker had more: he had the fighting spirit of a cornered rat. The stokehold rang with the din of iron against steel, the shuffle of swift-padding feet, the panting breath of two men in the grip of a blood lust more primeval than the silent hills, the smack and dull *chuk* of metal against yielding flesh and bone. In and out like a darting shadow the stowaway wove, cracking home with every swing, tapping the strength of the tiring deucer as surely as a cut vein saps the strength of the body. He seemed invulnerable; the center of a moving circle of slashing light that dealt out paralyzing bolts from every curve. A slip, a quick recovery, the impact of steel on flesh, and the deucer's weapon was struck out of his hand and went ringing against the wet skin of the ship. The white face of the deucer stared.

"Now!" shouted Johnny Barker and his shovel flashed up.

But it did not descend. Puzzled, he tugged, but it would not come clear. Slowly the crimson film cleared from his bloodshot eye and he saw that the stokehold was full of figures—firemen, trimmers, the Old Man, the chief engineer. On the floor at his feet a humped-up figure sobbed convulsively with lung-tearing inhalations, the fingers at the end of his outstretched arms clawing at the steel deck plates.

Some one pulled the shovel from Johnny Barker's stiffening hands. He did not shrink. He looked them full in the eyes—the firemen, the mates, the third, the chief, the Old Man, and told them to go to hell.

An hour later he lounged, with bandaged hands, and court-plaster embellishments over a goodly part of his area, outside the galley by the fresh-water pump. The cook halted breakfast operations every now and then to have another look at him.

"Lor'!" he said admiringly for the tenth time. "You do look a treat. Wot did the Old Man say?"

"'Im an' the chief wos very fair," said Johnny Barker tolerantly. "They knowed wot 'ad been going on an' said they didn't blame me. The deucer caught 'ell from the chief, an' 'e's leavin' the ship at the end o' the v'yage. O' course, I was partly to blame. I reely should 'ave polished 'em off sooner. See wot comes o' bein' kind-'earted, cook? Anyway, the Old Man's signin' me on as donkeyman next trip, after I've 'ad a week or two at 'ome, so we'll be shipmates for a while yet. Got a drop o' coffee 'andy?"

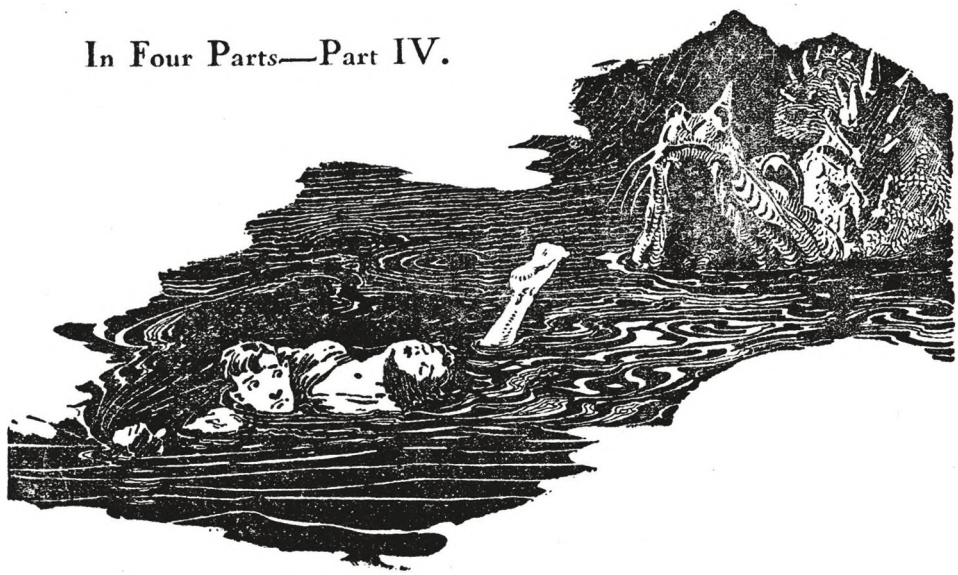
THE HIGH COST OF ILLNESS

"INVESTIGATION is made," says a news item, "to determine how the man of average means may afford the best medical care available." As things stand now, no matter how economically the majority of us live, we shall find after a long and fatal illness that we are dying beyond our means.

The CAVE *of* DESPAIR

By FRED MACISAAC

In Four Parts—Part IV.



The Battle in the Cave and the Encounter with the Monster of the Pool.

CHAPTER XVII.

CAPTURED AGAIN.

TALKING earnestly, Aruku and Hyacinth reached the floor of the cavern and Aruku led her through the savage throng to the rear of the cave. The argument continued and then the prince shouted loudly, his voice echoing and reëchoing weirdly. Immediately two men came out of the group close to the camp fire and approached him. They were armed with long, wooden spears. The prince talked to them and the white men above surmised by his gestures that he was setting them as a guard about Hyacinth. He bowed to her coldly and walked away. The girl called after him but he did not turn and she sank upon the sand and buried her face in her hands. The two guards regarded her indifferently.

"Now's our chance if ever," said Mulligan tensely. "Work along this path until we're directly over her, watch our chance to knock the guards on the head and carry her off."

"Man, she isn't a hundred feet from the rest of the outfit," argued the American. "They would be on us and all over us in half a minute."

"All right. You tell us."

"Suppose I crawl along on my stomach and get as near her as possible. You remain here and guard the rear, and cover our retreat if we can manage it. Perhaps I can get her attention without the guards noticing. See, they have

their backs turned to the wall and they're watching the camp."

"Same plan as mine. I'm not going to stay back."

"One man might crawl up there where two could be seen."

"I'll keep about ten yards behind you then."

It was dim twilight in the great cave, the walls were irregular and deep in shadows, and the path was a natural one from which the most troublesome obstructions had been removed by the outlaws. Lander bent double as he moved along until its gradual descent in a wide curve had brought him to the back wall and only a dozen feet above the floor of the cave. From that point he crawled forward a rod or two and found himself behind Hyacinth and eight or nine feet above her. She was sitting on the ground, her back to him, elbows on her knees and her head buried in her forearms. The two sentinels stood five or six feet in front of her, also facing the camp and leaning upon their spears.

Even if the girl knew of his presence so near her and was prepared to cooperate in her escape, she could not climb the wall to join him at that point and the path did not descend to the floor for a hundred feet farther. Did she wish to escape? Had she discovered that she did not belong with Aruku and his people in these caves, that her place was with the whites in the settlement above—with him, Vincent Lander? The fact that she was guarded seemed to indicate that. Aruku was aware that she knew the caves and feared that she would leave him.

Lander lifted himself on his elbows and peered over the edge. How could he attract her attention? He dared not call, because the sentries had ears, even if they didn't understand French or English. He broke off a small piece of limestone on the edge of the path and tossed it gently at her. It missed and rolled beyond her almost to the bare foot of one of the guards. The girl did not appear to see it. He broke off another piece of soft rock, leaned far over the better to hit her without hurting her, and felt the edge of the wall give way beneath his breast. He tried desperately to wriggle back but his weight had dislodged a whole section, and, as part of a small avalanche, he slid down into the cave and came to rest a few feet beyond Hyacinth on top of a pile of crumbling coral and limestone. She gave a slight scream as she was partially deluged by the dust and soft rock, the guards turned, saw the young man getting stupidly to his feet, lifted spears, uttered outcries and rushed at him. But the girl was quicker. With a scream she sprang to her feet and threw herself in front of him. The yellow men paused with ready weapons and Hyacinth stormed at them in their own tongue. While they hesitated, Prince Aruku appeared from the direction of the fire and uttered a high-pitched command. The guards did not strike and Hyacinth faced Vincent Lander.

"Oh, *mon ami,*" she wailed, "why did you come? Now they will kill you."

"It's Monsieur Lander," exclaimed Aruku. He was smiling dangerously and pointing a revolver at the breast of the American. "So you decided to return to us."

Hyacinth fell at Aruku's feet, threw her arms about his knees and pleaded wildly in the language of Anam. He answered her softly, unfastened her arms and evidently gave her some assurance for she permitted him to lift her to one side.

"May I ask how you arrived here and why you come?" asked Aruku coldly.

Lander's mind had been working furiously in the few seconds permitted.

"I came by a passage I found from the cliff, and I was searching for Mademoiselle Hyacinth," he said.

"The young lady has cast in her lot

with us," replied the prince. "You are intrepid, monsieur. I admire your courage greatly, but you dare too much. How did you get by my sentinels?"

"One was asleep upon top of the cliff. I had to kill the other."

This he feared might cause his immediate death—but they would quickly discover that the sentinel had vanished. Where was Doctor Mulligan? Would he have sense enough to make his escape or would he come charging in like a bull?

"For permitting you to pass, both men deserved death," replied Aruku calmly. "Are you in love with mademoiselle, Monsieur Lander?"

"No, no," cried Hyacinth. "He could not love a girl who was half yellow. He told me so."

"That is fortunate. I brook no rival. Why did you follow her, then?"

"Because I considered it my fault that she had fled from her father's house, Prince Aruku. I should have revealed to Colonel Dupres her friendship with you, but I was persuaded by her not to do so."

Aruku fingered the trigger of his weapon. For a second he was silent.

"I am curious to know how you escaped the first time," he demanded. "I have been unable to understand."

Lander pointed to the pool. "I swam it," he said simply.

The Anamese looked astounded. "You dared!" he exclaimed. "Monsieur, there are hideous creatures in the depths of that pool. We have seen them."

The American shuddered but managed a smile. "I was lucky, I suppose."

Hyacinth, who could keep silent no longer, grasped Aruku by the arm and renewed her plea, in the Anamese language, for the life of Vincent Lander. He spoke to her sharply and swung himself free.

"Monsieur," said the prince, "I regret that I have to consider you as my enemy. You are chivalrous. You recognized me in the crater and you refused to betray me. My wife-to-be has pleaded for your life. Unfortunately you have blundered between the combatants of a battle to the death. I have sworn to kill every white man on this island. They will slay us to the last man if they come upon us. I do not see how I can spare you, but I shall not have you executed until I find it absolutely necessary."

"Thank you for so much," said Vincent with a forced smile. Hope was not dead. Doctor Mulligan must have suppressed his Celtic lust for battle and decided that the thing to do was to bring help. If he had not taken too long to make up his mind, he ought to be well on his way out of the cave by now. If Aruku sent a searching party up the passage, however, they would probably overtake him. Time was needed.

"Aruku," Lander said, "I admire you probably more than you admire me. I hate to see you destroy yourself in a hopeless struggle. Your coup this morning was a stroke of genius. When I saw you in the crater I suspected that you were tampering with the coolies there but your courage was so great that I couldn't bring myself to give the alarm. I have been in mademoiselle's confidence from the time I accidentally saw her meet you on the ledge above and I have kept her secret. Why do you persist in considering me your enemy?"

"Because you are white," replied Aruku.

"I don't consider that a reason. Now let me give you good advice. You have terrified the settlement by your achievement in the crater. Although they have machine guns and trained soldiers and excellent defenses, they are alarmed at present. In a few hours they will be ready for you, and if you attack them they will annihilate you. Just now I

think you could make terms. Why not let me be your ambassador? Let me arrange to give you and your men a safe passage away from Murotoru. You are too fine a person to be shot down like a dog on this island. You can go to Europe and live comfortably in Paris like so many of your countrymen."

As he had anticipated, this crafty speech drew from Aruku a long and impassioned recital. He began with the encroachment of the French into the old empire of Anam and carried it down to the abortive rebellion which had caused his capture and sent him to the phosphate island. He told eloquently of the sufferings of himself and his people in the crater, of his escape, his misery, the building up of his devoted band until his present strong position had been achieved, and then he explained fully and with passion the necessity for a complete revenge. Make terms with the French? Accept safe conduct from them? Sail away, leaving some of his countrymen to continue to labor in the crater, with their white masters living to carry on their abuses? No, he preferred to die—and his soldiers with him.

Lander ventured further arguments and drew answers, but Aruku finally tired of oratory. Vincent calculated that he had held the man inactive for fully a quarter of an hour and in that time Mulligan ought to be out of the tortuous passage and well up the ledge toward the top of the cliff.

Aruku clapped his hands and several outlaws rushed upon Lander, removed his weapons, and then bound him hand and foot with grass ropes, after which they laid him upon his back on the ground, while Hyacinth wept bitterly and vainly.

"Later I may have you unbound," said the prince. "At present I have things to do."

He gave an order, and Hyacinth, protesting vainly, was led away and forced to sit down a hundred feet off. A few minutes later Lander saw Aruku accompanied by six men, two of them armed with rifles, start up the path around the cave which led to the exit upon the ledge. They moved very swiftly and he prayed that the doctor had fled at top speed.

If Mulligan escaped, what would happen? The doctor would rush to the settlement and tell Colonel Dupres that Hyacinth and the American were captives and that he knew the path down the cliff into the cave where the outlaws were camped.

He thought that the colonel would not hesitate, then, to call upon Lemaitre to attack the caves, and Lemaitre would have to consent. Aruku, in all probability, supposed that Lander had found his way through the passage from the cliff alone. He would replace his sentinels and return to decide the fate of the prisoner and Doctor Mulligan would lead the force down the face of the cliff. Being aware where the sentinels were stationed, sharpshooters would go ahead to pick them off and the path to the big cave would lie open with chances of a surprise fairly good.

In case of an attack, Lander didn't think he stood a chance of life, if he lay there bound. A bullet from the storming party might strike him and, if it didn't, one of the Anamese would consider it proper to spear him. He tugged at his bonds, but the rope made of vines was strong and well tied. Less than a foot to his right, however, a ridge of coral rock protruded through a couple of inches of the sand, and he knew to his sorrow how sharp was an edge of coral.

Without attracting the attention of the men who stood guard over him, he shifted his position imperceptibly until he lay upon this ridge, and, gradually, he worked his arms until his wrists were upon the many toothed coral. He began to saw, hunching his back to give room

for wrist movement, and finally he felt one strand of rope after another give way. In a few minutes he was free, and then he edged off the uncomfortable coral upon the sand. To free his feet would be a simple matter now. In the confusion of an attack he could manage it in a minute, he thought. He and Hyacinth would have to be out of the way when the fun began.

A few minutes after he had severed the ropes, he heard voices up above and knew that Aruku was returning. Had he captured or killed Doctor Mulligan?

Presently he saw Prince Aruku, followed by his party, come into the firelight. They had no prisoner. Aruku gave some orders which caused a bustle and scurry and movement of many men, and then he walked to the spot where Hyacinth was sitting and sat down beside her. On the brink of the pool the Anamese fell into line without weapons and several men who seemed to be drill sergeants began to bark commands as they clumsily attempted formations.

Lander thought that these were the new recruits whom Aruku hoped to whip into some sort of shape so that they would be useful in the attack he was planning upon the settlement. Sorry material they looked.

Time passed. Aruku left Hyacinth and went down to inspect his force of naked, unarmed yellow men, talked to his sergeants, and then vanished in the direction of the passage through which he had originally brought Lander into the cave.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE GUARDIAN OF THE POOL.

HYACINTH in effective pantomime was conveying to the bound American her distress at his situation, and he took advantage of the inattention of the guards to wave one of his hands at her. She clasped both her hands and swayed to and fro to signal her satisfaction that he had freed himself.

The pathetic drill upon the brink of the pool came to an end, and the Anamese coolies scattered to sit or lie upon the ground. They talked much to one another and gesticulated more. Had Mulligan made the top of the island, Vincent wondered. The path was very narrow; in his haste he might have gone over the edge. If he had been successful he should have reached the settlement in half or three quarters of an hour. Lander estimated that two hours must have passed since his capture. He yearned to talk to Hyacinth, to whom he had so much to say. Aruku might decide to kill him; if he suspected that the American was in love with the girl and she inclined toward him, he would shoot him without mercy. Before he died he must tell Hyacinth why he had hesitated that morning; that for him race was no barrier, he wanted her for his wife. This was something he could not convey by pantomime.

There was a stir on the farther side of the camp fire and Aruku appeared in its yellow glow. He circled it and came toward Hyacinth, hesitated, and turned toward Lander. When he was standing over him he said:

"I shall cut your bonds, monsieur. This time you may be sure you will not be permitted to escape."

"I give no parole," said the American. In a second the prince would discover that he had already freed his hands.

Aruku smiled. "It will not be necessary."

A shrill cry from high up upon the path down which Lander had been conducted from the settlement ten days before caused Aruku to turn and run in that direction. A second later Lander heard a succession of very faint reports.

Rifles!

And they came from the opposite direction from which he expected them. A messenger bounded down the path at the right and Aruku ran to meet

him. The prince shouted sharp commands and immediately the encampment buzzed with activity. A horde of men rushed for the pile of tools and armed themselves, while others picked up kegs of blasting powder and carried them toward the right-hand path. Order came out of chaos. Men fell in line, shouldering picks and crowbars and brandishing spears, and moved in single file up the path. Aruku appeared suddenly before Lander, a savage smile on his face.

"Your friends from the settlement are rushing into a trap which I have set for them," he said calmly. "Evidently they have discovered that you and mademoiselle have fallen into my hands and the fools are coming into the caves through the tunnel so conveniently placed within the barricade. Not one will escape alive."

A score of men, including two riflemen, separated from the main body, and, to Lander's distress, began to mount the path from which he had fallen. Aruku left the American and hastened to Hyacinth, to whom he evidently made the same boast as he had made to Lander, for she uttered a piercing shriek and fell upon her knees before him. He shook his head and joined his forces, which were moving up the path to the right.

During this time the rattle of small arms continued to be heard, though from a great distance. Lander writhed as he divined the plan of the Anamese. Aruku was going to permit the attacking force to penetrate some distance down the tunnel and then entomb them by setting off kegs of blasting powder. Most likely several mines were already laid.

The camp was already deserted save for the two yellow men who stood guard over the American and one spearman who remained to watch Hyacinth Dupres. All three were gazing intently up the path which led to the tunnel in which a battle was raging. It was time for action. Lander sat up, stooped over and worked at the bonds around his ankles. They were well fastened and resisted his fingers for several minutes, but they finally yielded and he was free. On hands and knees he began to creep toward the nearest guard, while Hyacinth sprang to her feet and took a few steps toward him, her right hand thrust into her mouth to prevent the scream which tried to come. Lander, now immediately behind the fellow, rose up, clenched his right fist and swung with all his strength, striking the man in front of the right ear. The Anamese crumpled, and as he dropped Lander grasped the spear from his hand and charged the second guard.

The sight of the terrible American bearing down upon him was too much for a little man who had not the heart of a warrior. He dropped his own weapon and ran. Hyacinth's guardian was made of bolder stuff. With a shout he lifted his weapon and charged Vincent Lander like a spearman of old. Lander stopped short, grasped his spear as he was taught in Plattsburg to hold a rifle with bayonet fixed, and waited. The scream escaped from Hyacinth as the spearman thrust. Lander parried it deftly and drove his point into the body of the creature against whom he had no hatred, and with whose cause he sympathized completely; but it was his own life and the future of the girl's against an unknown Mongolian. With a dreadful cry the Anamese fell and Vincent turned toward Hyacinth, who came bounding toward him and threw herself into his arms.

At that moment came a deafening detonation from the region where a weird battle was waging, and from the lofty roof of the cave were precipitated a number of heavy stalactites which dropped into the pool with a great splash, causing six-inch waves to break upon the shore.

"*Oh, mon amant,*" cried Hyacinth, "I was so afraid for you. What has happened? What was that explosion?"

"I'm afraid Aruku has set off a mine in the path of your father's soldiers. If that happened it blocked the tunnel and they can't get through."

"What shall we do, chérie?" she demanded hysterically.

Lander looked wildly around. If the tunnel had been closed by the mine and Lemaitre's men were entombed in it, Aruku and his crew would be trouping back in a few moments. Now, if ever, he must get the girl away. He looked at the path which led eventually to the ledge over the sea but egress there was blocked by the band who had been sent to guard it. He folded Hyacinth tight in his arms. Something must be done and she expected him to do it. Her own folly had brought them both to this pass; it was her fault that her father's men had plunged into the passage which led to their doom. But in this moment all he knew was that she was lovely, loving and trusted in his strength and ingenuity.

And then he remembered the side passage down which he and Doctor Mulligan had blundered. If they hid there and the score of men who had gone that way returned to the cave leaving only one or two men on post, he had a chance, even burdened with Hyacinth. Picking up the spear of his dead enemy, rather than withdraw his own from the man's body, he grasped her by the hand.

"Come. This way," he exclaimed and dragged her to the entrance to the path to the ledge. Holding tight to each other's hands, they mounted the narrow way. Hyacinth was accustomed to rough roads and was no burden upon them. Progress was easy until the path became a tunnel and the dim light faded, after that they moved very slowly and they had proceeded fifty yards in the dark when the reverberation of firing ahead stopped them. He grasped the girl's waist and listened. The next outburst of firearms was closer and he knew what it meant.

Doctor Mulligan had led one party down the cliff trail while another detachment entered the tunnel from the settlement itself; and the cliff force had encountered the band of Aruku and was driving them back. It was excellent strategy to attack the outlaws from two sides and the prince of Anam, who had carefully prepared for an attack through the passage whose existence he was aware was known to the white men, had not expected a foray via the cliff route.

It was good strategy but it would be fatal to the two persons whom the colonel wished to rescue. In a few moments the Anamese, who had only two riflemen, would be driven back upon Lander and Hyacinth, who could reckon on short shrift. The side tunnel was some distance ahead, according to Lander's reckoning, and unless they felt their way slowly, they might miss it in the dark. The Anamese, who were familiar with the passage, would fall back rapidly. He could not risk it.

"We have to go back," he cried. "Hurry."

They turned and fled over the path upon which they had ascended—and none too soon, for cries of men could be plainly heard behind them. Had the Anamese reached the ledge before the rescuers, their riflemen could have picked them off with ease as they crept down the face of the cliff.

Lander pushed the girl ahead of him and tightened his hold on the spear. If they were overtaken he thought he could hold the path for a moment or two against the mob of yellow men, if they were no more expert in the art of thrusting than the man he had overcome below.

However, they reached the floor of the cavern before the first of the fugitives came in sight high up on the wall. The Anamese were running and yelling

while the bullets of riflemen as yet unseen were hastening their steps. The rifle shots sounded like the reports of cannon and echoed and reëchoed in the vast cave.

With his arms around Hyacinth, Lander stood on the sand and waited for what might happen. He did not have long to wait. From the other path a howling mob was returning, their forms dimly discerned far up on the side of the cavern. These were jubilant, triumphant yells; the yellow men had tasted blood and they were out of hand. Down the sea road the fugitives galloped, shouting warnings to their friends and appeals for help. The first of them spied the white man and woman locked in each other's arms.

With a war cry and uplifted spear he rushed upon them and Lander thrust Hyacinth behind him and leveled his wooden shaft. The fellow plunged in madly; again the bayonet fighter parried the thrust, but the Anamese leaped aside and evaded his powerful lunge. Lander drew back, the lances crashed again, and this time the American drove home the blow and the savage fell, transfixed. A dozen others were on the strand now and, despite their bloodthirsty fury, they were discreet enough to advance in formation. A hedge of spears approached. The gunmen, apparently, had lost their lives in the tunnel.

Lander pulled out his lance with difficulty from the flesh in which it was imbedded, and retreated slowly, dragging the terrified girl with him. From the other path a score of yelling madmen, brandishing picks, crowbars and spears, were coming.

And as he was driven toward the brink of the pool, white men's shouts were heard and half a dozen rifles cracked. Two or three of the assailants fell but the others came on. They were on three sides now and Hyacinth shrieked that some were slipping around behind them. Lander dared not look behind, but he knew that a dozen riflemen were firing from the high path and the Anamese were dropping rapidly; but from the other passage a hundred, who were running amuck, were coming fast.

The soldiers of the settlement would wipe them out, but they wouldn't accomplish it in time. A daring yellow man darted out of the ranks and thrust his long skewer at Lander who laid him dead at his feet but could not loose his weapon. The others were within a dozen feet. Hyacinth uttered a piercing shriek.

"We're at the pool!" she cried. Confident, now, the Anamese closed in, and the fact that a score of their fellows were writhing on the ground did not deter them. And then Vincent Lander picked up Hyacinth in his arms and rushed with her into the waters of the pool. A dozen feet and the shore dropped from beneath his feet. They sank down into very deep water, and as it was closing over his eyes he saw a shower of spears strike the water. He struggled to the surface, holding Hyacinth in his left arm, striking out valiantly with his right and his powerful legs, and, as their heads emerged, other spears drove past them to splash on all sides. He swam desperately to get out of spearshot, and a hundred feet from shore he treaded water and looked back.

Standing upon the high pathway was a line of Chinese soldiers firing steadily upon a swaying, swirling mob of naked, maddened savages. The sand was covered with dead and wounded. He saw Aruku draw out of the mob, run toward the line of marksmen upon the high ground and empty a revolver at them, and then he saw the Prince of Anam totter and drop to the ground. In another few minutes it would be safe to swim ashore.

The din in the cavern was deafening; every shot was echoed a dozen times. He looked at Hyacinth. She was white

and her eyes were closed. Fortunately she had not seen the death of Aruku. Had Lander not taken to the pool with the girl, they inevitably would have fallen under the spears of the Anamese or have been riddled with the bullets of their friends.

Now the Anamese were huddled in a group, and he saw a white loin cloth waving. Surrender! Instantly the firing ceased and Lander struck out for the shore. A wave came from behind and passed over his head and from far above a stentorian voice, Mulligan's, shouted:

"Swim, boy! Swim for your life!"

He glanced back. A couple of hundred feet behind there was a great white thing on the surface of the pool, and as he looked, a huge mouth opened and he saw horrid red jaws. The still water was lashed like a lake in a storm. From above and upon the shore burst a hurricane of shrill shouts and cries. Even the Anamese, who would have slaughtered them joyously upon the beach, were horrified at what had appeared. The thing was coming rapidly. Lander thought he was petrified, but he was swimming with the strength of desperation. Something forced him to look back over his shoulder, and less than fifty feet behind him was the thing; its mouth a yawning cavity, the opening three or four feet wide at least, and, stretching far behind, gigantic coils.

Hyacinth might have died of terror, but she was happily unconscious. He swam on, but in a few seconds he knew they would be engulfed in the mouth of the dreadful denizen of the bottomless pool brought to the surface by the detonations in the cave.

And then—*rat-a-tat-tat, rat-a-tat-tat,* like a drumbeat came the rhythm and roar of a machine gun in action. High up on the cave's side Colonel Dupres was operating the Lewis gun and riddling the soft flesh of the water monster with bullets.

It is said that so low-powered was the intelligence of some prehistoric creatures they would fight on for several minutes after they were actually dead before the fact was conveyed by their nervous systems to their minute brains. This pool serpent, according to the watchers upon the high path, continued its pursuit for several seconds after it had taken a hundred steel-jacketed bullets into its body, and it closed its great mouth and sank less than six feet behind the swimmer and his burden. In horrified frenzy Lander drove on until his feet touched bottom and he rushed upon the strand, holding Hyacinth's slight body high above his head. He did not think, of course, during the last few seconds, but instinctively he acted as though he wanted the beast to swallow him and be satisfied to leave Hyacinth.

He ran across the strand until he bumped against the far wall of the cave and then he slipped to the ground, letting Hyacinth gently down, and passed into oblivion.

There was a rush of men, now, from the path, upon the floor of the cave. They quickly rounded up the Anamese, whose desperate valor had run its course. It was Doctor Mulligan who reached Lander and Hyacinth first, and Lander was already coming to his senses, while Hyacinth had opened her eyes and sat up. She remembered nothing since they first plunged into the pool.

Vincent Lander came back to life shuddering, at first unable to believe that they were safe on the sand, and his first act was to grasp the young woman and squeeze her so frantically that she was forced to make laughing protest.

CHAPTER XIX.

CONCLUSION.

"OH, Hyacinth, my darling!" he exclaimed. "To think——" He burst into tears.

"We are safe now. What is the mat-

ter, Vincent, *mon ami?*" she asked, wondering.

"Don't tell her now. Tell her later," said Doctor Mulligan, shaking him roughly. "Snap out of it, me boy. Try to forget that thing and put your mind on something else."

"All—all right, doctor. That machine gun did the trick, did it?"

"Sure it did. I s'pose you thought I was a dirty coward to let them capture you and make a get-away."

Lander smiled. "It was the only intelligent thing to do."

"Well, it's the first time I ever turned tail. Man, dear, the way I scrambled up that passage and the way I climbed those cliffs! I burst in on a council of war and you should have seen their faces when I told them."

The doctor was talking fast because he wanted to get his friend's mind off the horror of the pool.

"In ten minutes everything was ready. Lemaitre and half the Chinese went through the tunnel from the settlement. Thank Heaven, we had kept it open. Ten chinks and fifteen white men came with me down the cliff trail and we swung into the passage just as the yellowbellies were coming out of the tunnel entrance. We opened on them first, dropped the two boys with guns instanter, and chased the rest down the tunnel. I guess the other party had a harder job. They haven't shown up yet."

"My God!" exclaimed Lander. He loosed Hyacinth and jumped to his feet. "Mulligan, they're entombed! Some of them may be alive. Aruku had that tunnel mined."

The red face of the doctor paled. "Oh, the fiends! The murtherin' devils!" he exclaimed. "How do we get to them?"

"Come on. I'll show you the way," cried Lander excitedly.

Colonel Dupres came upon the scene at that moment and Hyacinth threw herself into his arms, while his heart was too full to chide her. Lander explained the peril of the other party tersely and succinctly and the old soldier was instantly active. In a few minutes he had driven a mob of Anamese, with picks and shovels, up the path toward the settlement tunnel and drove them like a madman as they dug through the mass of rock, fortunately soft, which blocked the road of rescue.

Captain Lemaitre and his party had entered through the narrow hole into which Lander, blindfolded, had been forced to crawl, and had wriggled upon their stomachs, as he had done, for some distance, when they found the passage high enough to move forward in a stooping posture. They came upon the descent, which was so steep that Aruku had made of it a staircase, and proceeded more swiftly because they lighted their way with pocket lamps. One of the lieutenants headed the advance, there followed the Chinese, rifles ready, and Lemaitre at the rear drove the reluctant Celestials onward. So far they had encountered no opposition and it appeared that the Anamese had left the tunnel unguarded. Leaving the stairs, they proceeded through a broader tunnel or natural passage, through which they were able to march two abreast, and at a turn in the passage they met a spearman who hurled his weapon, guided by the flash light held by the officer in advance. At a distance of thirty feet it was impossible for him to miss, and the leading Chinese soldier, walking beside the lieutenant, uttered a shriek and went down, transfixed. The young officer emptied his pistol at the unseen spear thrower and a soldier who stepped over the fallen Chinaman discharged the magazine of his rifle.

Halt was ordered, word was passed back to Lemaitre, who instructed that lights be extinguished, and they advanced slowly and cautiously.

It was this burst of firing which had

penetrated through the caves and passages and reached the ears of Vincent Lander, lying on the sand in the camp far below.

For perhaps a hundred yards the expedition proceeded without meeting an enemy, moving always downward into the bowels of the rocky island. The passage widened, they crossed a cave, and, after some search, found the continuation of the tunnel, from which, as they entered, they were fired upon by an unseen person with a revolver. A volley drove him back and they moved on into another cave, where they halted for conference between Lemaitre and his lieutenant. There was a very faint light in this cave and it permitted them to discern, assembled upon the far side, a score or so of Anamese who shouted defiance at them and brandished weapons but seemed to have no firearms. Lemaitre gave them a volley and they appeared to melt away, whereupon the captain ordered a charge. They pursued the enemy into another broad, high passage, but the Anamese fled rapidly before them and the tortuous character of the place made it impossible to mow them down. Again the rescuers lighted their way and the passage narrowed and the roof lowered rapidly, compelling movement in single file. Fifty or sixty yards of this and there was a dull roar and a mine exploded beneath the feet of those in advance, while the roof of the tunnel fell upon them. Those in the rear, with shouts of terror, turned, Lemaitre in the van, and a second explosion entombed them in their turn.

This had been Aruku's plan of battle. His mines had been planted and fuses laid from the day he learned that Lander had been saved and brought back to the settlement. His hope had been that the attacking party would include the available strength of the phosphate company and he had placed two mines in the passage fifty yards apart, to be fired by a train of gunpowder, as he had no equipment by discharging them by electricity. In order to discharge the second mine, one of his men was told off to hide in the outer cave, creep in after the soldiers, set fire to the powder fuse and run back to make his way to the camp by another passage known to the Anamese.

Lest the approaching spark of the frontal mine be seen, the blasting powder had been buried at a turn in the passage. Had the colonel not divided his forces, Aruku would have wiped out the defenders of the settlement. The distance between the two mines saved the lives of some of the men shut up in the passage.

At the point where the colonel attacked the cave-in, the tunnel was about five feet wide and six feet high—too narrow for rapid work; but a line of men was formed to pass from hand to hand the rock as it was removed. Five feet in they came upon the mangled body of the lieutenant and in twenty feet drew out five dead men. In five feet more and they came suddenly into open tunnel, where, lying upon the ground, but alive, were a dozen Chinese, uninjured but close to asphyxiation. Twenty yards beyond, the tunnel had been blocked by the second mine, and the rescuers attacked the rock with fury.

Two men, crushed by the weight of the mass which had descended upon them, were quickly uncovered, and in a tiny rock chamber was a Chinese who had not been injured by the cave-in but had smothered to death.

The gruesome work continued as body after body was uncovered. The last to be reached was Captain Lemaitre, who lay on his face, his head crushed in. He had led the retreat and was within five feet of the limit of destruction.

All this work occupied several hours, and Lander and Doctor Mulligan, after conducting the colonel and his force of

rescuers to the point where the first mine had blocked the tunnel, returned to the main cave, in which a sergeant and a squad of men had been left to guard the prisoners not drafted for pick and shovel work, and to see that no harm came to Hyacinth.

They found the girl on her knees beside the body of Prince Aruku, which lay where he had fallen, face to the foe, his empty revolver, originally the property of Vincent Lander, lying beside him. He had been hit by a dozen bullets. Hyacinth's head was bowed and her hands clasped in prayer. Vincent waited respectfully until she had finished her devotions.

Aruku had been a soldier and a gentleman, who had died, as he probably would have chosen, in battle, and the American had respected him as a daring if relentless opponent. Had Aruku lived, he would have been sent back to the killing labor in the crater to perish sooner or later of a miserable disease, if he had not been immediately executed as a rebel. For him there could have been no release.

That morning Lander had begun to realize that he was in love with Hyacinth, but the fullness of his affection had not dawned upon him until he learned that she had fled to the caves, and the peril of the pool, in his mind, had sealed them together forever; but he felt no pang of jealousy because she grieved for Aruku and prayed beside his dead body.

If Hyacinth had really loved Aruku she could not have turned to the American so speedily. The glamour of Anam had been about him in her eyes; he had personified the spirit of revolt against oppression which was in her soul, but she had begun to see him as he really was when she learned that he had sworn falsely by his ancestors regarding the disappearance of Vincent Lander. If she had fled from her home and joined him in the cave, it was that her sensitive little heart was wounded because of what she assumed to be his distaste for her mixed blood.

"I'm going to be busy here for hours," said Doctor Mulligan. "I've got to take care of these wounded coolies and they may find some of our men in the tunnel still alive but in need of attention. You take Hyacinth out by the cliff trail, Lander. This is no place for the blessed child."

Vincent touched the girl on the shoulder. She looked up, rose, and sought the solace of his arms.

"Aruku," she sighed. "He was not a bad man, my Vincent. You do not mind if I sorrow for him?"

"Of course not, sweetheart; but he died as he wanted to, and you can't do any more for him. Your father wants me to take you back to your home."

She looked wildly around. "Where is father? He is not hurt?"

"No, no. He is leading the search for Captain Lemaitre's men, who entered by the other passage." Time enough to tell her that the captain and his party seemed to have been buried in the tunnel.

Docilely she accompanied him to the foot of the path, hid her face in her hands to hide the sight of dead and wounded Anamese strewn on the sand, and, guided by a flash light, given Lander by the doctor, the pair made rapid progress up and out of the great cave and through the passage to the ledge.

They came upon several bodies in the passage, members of the band who had disputed the way with Colonel Dupres' detachment and they were compelled to step over them, though Hyacinth insisted upon learning, first, if life was extinct in those she had considered her countrymen.

As Hyacinth was familiar with the cliff path, they climbed rapidly and entered the settlement to find the entire French population of noncombatants assembled in a white-faced group, while

the small body of armed men left for their protection under one of the two lieutenants of Lemaitre were in a state of nervous vigilance.

A cheer broke forth when Mademoiselle Dupres and her escort passed the carrier at the railroad track, and they were immediately overwhelmed with congratulations and demands for news of the expedition.

"The party under the colonel which took the trail down the cliff captured or killed the outlaws, including Aruku," Lander reported to the lieutenant. "The progress of Lemaitre's party was blocked by the explosion of a mine and we have no news of them."

He made a signal to the lieutenant, who walked aside with him, and told him that he feared the captain's band had been entombed.

"Colonel Dupres is driving the captured Anamese at the work of excavating the lower end of the tunnel. I suggest that you take a party and attack the upper end."

"My orders were to remain here, sir. Do you bring me orders from the colonel?"

"No, but you need have no more fear of the outlaws, and by quick action you may save some lives."

"I have only ten men to defend the settlement, monsieur. There are many women here and the laborers below must be guarded. If you can suggest——"

"Give me two armed men and a dozen laborers and I'll tackle the job myself," said Lander.

"That will be a mighty service, monsieur."

Fortunately Vincent was relieved of this duty by the arrival of a messenger from Colonel Dupres, instructing the lieutenant to turn over command of the village to Monsieur Colombe, and to take a work gang of Anamese guarded by five soldiers and attack the upper end of the cave-in.

Hyacinth tore herself from the arms of the women and made signs to Lander to follow her to the house. He had to tell, in complete detail, the happenings below before he could follow her, but he omitted the incident of the pursuit by the denizen of the pool, for it still sickened him to think of it.

When they were alone in the house of Colonel Dupres he started to take the young girl in his arms, but to his surprise she fought him off.

"We must be calm," she said. "Please sit down. No, over there."

"What's the matter?" he demanded, aggrieved.

She motioned imperiously to a chair and he sat down with ill grace.

"Down below we were about to die and nothing mattered. I loved you and you loved me and all was well," she began. "Now things are as they were, *mon ami.* I am still half Anamese. I am the little Eurasian that you would not wish to show your friends in America as your wife."

"My darling child——"

"This morning, when I asked you, you could not answer——"

Lander rose, strode to her side, picked her up, and despite her struggles, sat down in her chair and took her on his lap.

"This morning, you ran away before I could find words to tell you how proud I would have been," he said. "I thought then that I loved you, but I did not know how much until you had run away from me. Why do you suppose I dared to enter that cursed cave again? Why do you suppose I leaped with you into the pool? Those savages would not have harmed you if I had left you alone. I preferred to drown with you rather than to have you fall into the hands of Aruku. And when the great white serpent was almost upon us——" He stopped in confusion.

"What do you mean?" she exclaimed. "Serpent? Where—when?"

He told her and she passed her arms

about his neck, shuddered, and held him close.

"I knew then that I would have given myself to the serpent to save you," he finished.

"Then you do love me, Vincent mine," she breathed.

"I'm mad about you, Hyacinth," he said unsteadily.

"But your family—what will they think?"

He laughed. "They will wonder how such a marvelous little creature could make up her mind to marry a very ordinary person like me," he declared.

"And if they do," she asserted, "I shall tell them how very unworthy I am of such a husband. Vincent, I never did love Aruku. It was just his bravery and—well, he was handsome and he was a prince of Anam. You, you are a Prince of America—and that is better."

The two lovers then lost track of time completely, and to them it seemed only a few moments, although it was several hours, before Colonel Dupres and his forces entered the settlement, driving their captives before them.

Doctor Mulligan had remained in the cave; where he was establishing a hospital for those too badly wounded to mount the perilous trail up the cliff; but there were a number of slightly wounded coolies in the dismal procession and several of the Chinese soldiers wore bandages over flesh wounds.

Of three hundred Anamese who had been lurking in the caves, some sixty were killed and a hundred wounded, two score of them very seriously. The others marched meekly back to their quarters prepared to take up again the killing labor in the crater. The losses of the French forces were heavy, considering their comparatively small numbers, but these were due entirely to the mining of the tunnel; not a man of those who had entered the cave by the cliff trail had received a scratch. Captain Lèmaitre and his first lieutenant were the only whites killed or wounded, but a dozen Chinese soldiers had lost their lives.

Lander and Hyacinth met the colonel as he came up the path toward his cottage and he saw at a glance how it was with them.

"Well, my children," he said kindly, "you seem very happy, but it was a dreadful day for the rest of us."

He passed an arm about her waist and drew her to him.

"I am sorry, *mon père*. I am sorry also for the poor Anamese who were slaughtered."

"They were rebels," said the colonel sternly. "They all deserved death. The captain was your defender and our friend. His is a great loss."

"I regret it," said Hyacinth, "though I never considered him as a friend to any of us."

"Well, well. It's too late to help him. Monsieur Lander, I have you to thank for the salvation of my little daughter. You and Doctor Mulligan were rash to enter the caves unsupported. And I shall never again live through such horror as I experienced when I saw you and Hyacinth in that pool."

Lander made an expressive gesture. "Your machine gun, colonel—if it had not been for that——"

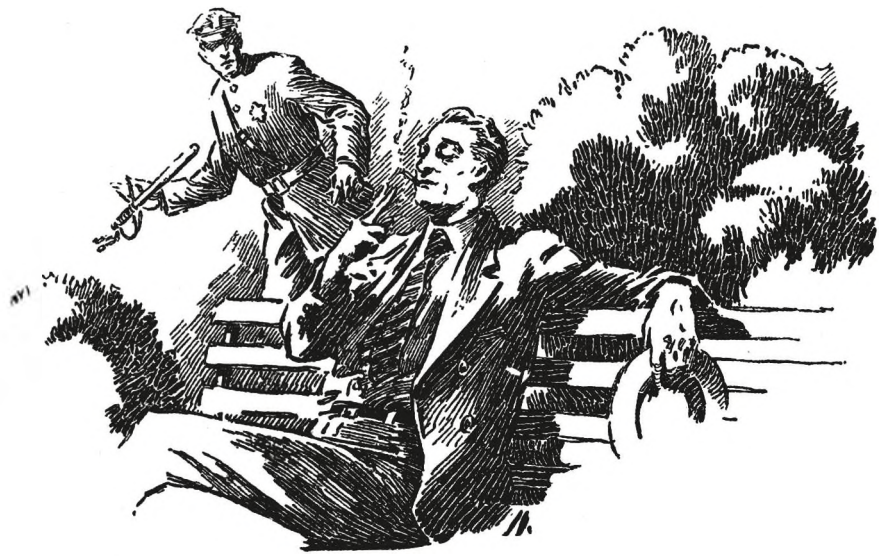
Colonel Dupres took the American's hand and pressed it. "We had just set it up to sweep the rebels when I saw that grisly head break the water. I don't know how I had the strength to turn the gun upon it nor the craft to fire it."

"*Mon père*," said Hyacinth, "Monsieur Lander has asked me to be his wife."

The colonel nodded. "I thought it was like that. He has earned you, my daughter."

THE END.

The Police Dragnet Was Out, and Caught in the Entangling Mesh Were a Skilled Crook and an Honest Down-and-Outer.



A PUPIL *of* VENGEANCE

By ROY W. HINDS

VICKERY "THE MUFFLE" was at peace with the world. A strange flush of happy serenity suffused his soul—like the soft, crimson twilight of late spring flooding the little park in which he loitered. One of his arms was draped over the bench back and his highly manicured nails tapped lightly at the woodwork. His other hand toyed reflectively at the gold pendant of his watch fob. One leg was flung over the other, the suspended, richly shod foot slowly tripping the empty air. His eyes were half closed dreamily, as he watched the gentle departure of a perfect day and listened to the laughter of children at a distant fountain and the flutter of birds at dusk.

So much at peace was Vickery the Muffle that the sight of a uniformed policeman sauntering toward him failed to arouse even a faint spark of ire in his police-hating soul. The officer, lazily swinging his stick, smiled upon the Muffle—in fact, he nodded a greeting. The policeman was rosy-faced and happy, very girthy and pleasant to look upon. The Muffle smiled and nodded back. Nothing but spring could have worked this miracle.

As glorious as was the day, an even more glorious period was about to open before Vickery the Muffle. On the morrow he was to depart, laden heavily with money, for a summer's sojourn in the wonderful mountains of New England. There he would meet, as he had the previous summer, a young woman who, he found, had grown more and more into his heart. He didn't know but this

might be the opening of a new life. He might marry.

He didn't know but he might take up a life in which "the Muffle" would drop from his name and he become known as plain Charles Joseph Vickery, which was honestly his name. He didn't know but he might set himself up in some honorable business and go straight. The summer might bring all these changes. Spring had gotten into his soul—aided, perhaps, by a letter from the young woman. He hadn't seen her since last summer—she lived in a Middle Western town—but her letter had informed him that she was to visit again the New England summer town and that she would be more than glad to renew their friendship.

So absorbed was Charles Joseph Vickery in these reflections that he lost sight, momentarily, of the fact that for this night he must perform as Vickery the Muffle. Just now he possessed seventy-five cents. Before morning he would possess—well, say, ten thousand dollars. That was the very least he expected to get from the bank he would raid that night—a bank in one of the suburbs.

Yes, he had that one job to do, and he hoped it would be the last. He must do that job, he reasoned; else how could he go to New England? Vickery the Muffle was very selfish about this reformation business. He wanted to reform, but no idea of benefiting humanity confused his thoughts. He would reform because he saw, now, where reformation would swell his personal happiness. If he failed to get the ten thousand dollars—well, he dared not think of that.

But he couldn't see how he could fail. The "plant" had been "pegged" for a week—he knew as much about the bank as its own board of directors. He would have with him a reliable confederate—"Flinters" Wilkins. Flinters would be his "outside" man. Vickery himself would do the "inside" work—and a better team never disturbed the dreams of the Bankers' Protective Association. The suburb was poorly policed. The bank had no night watchman. Why think of failure?

And, besides, wasn't he Vickery the Muffle? Hadn't the quaint affix to his surname been bestowed because of his adeptness in covering up his crimes? Thieves, like the men of ancient times, identify each other—that is, the experts—by some suggestion of occupation, accomplishment or physical characteristic. Vickery the Muffle's specialty was in making clean get-aways. He left no clews—no "lithographs," as his people call them. He was exceptionally clever at covering up his trail—"muffling his heels," as they termed it. Therefore, "the Muffle."

Vickery had committed much crime, but he had been arrested only once, and then he had done but six months on the Island. They didn't have any concrete evidence against him and Vickery happened to be possessed of a thousand dollars. The police knew he was guilty but they couldn't prove it, positively, against the alibi that Vickery's thousand-dollar lawyer provided. They had finally compromised and Vickery consented to plead guilty to vagrancy rather than to stand trial on the burglary charge. As strong as was the alibi, somehow he feared an untoward development in court that might put him away for ten or fifteen years. Besides, he was very young then—he was only thirty now—and he didn't have the highest judgment.

He took the six months for vagrancy—and by doing that he gave the police the right to finger print and catalogue him. His thousand-dollar lawyer had failed to warn him of that contingency. Maybe the lawyer didn't know the Vickery contemplated continuing his life of evil.

Vickery had another specialty of which even his fellows were unaware. He was an expert on safe doors. He

never resorted to explosives and drills. He opened his safes by a much quieter method—a method known only to himself. He never worked "inside" with any one. It was a peculiarity of his that his companions did not try to penetrate. They were satisfied to do the "outside" so long as he would bring out the swag.

Vickery's baggage was packed for the trip into New England. In fact, his trunk had been already sent to the station. His suit case and traveling bag were in his hotel room—in an unostentatious but respectable hotel. Also in this room was a mysterious black satchel. At midnight, clad somewhat differently than he was now, he would depart for the suburb with this satchel. After the job had been done, he would cast this satchel into a creek—he knew the lay of the land. With the casting away of the satchel, he also would cast away the old life. His share of the swag would amount to ten thousand dollars. Then for the new life.

The pleasant reveries of Vickery were somewhat shaken when a sudden thought darted into his half-somnolent brain. He had almost forgotten an essential detail. Lucky he had thought of it in time!

Vickery and Flinters Wilkins, in reconnoitering at the bank, had observed that a special, bent-bladed screw driver would be needed to unscrew the bars from a back window. There were other routes into the bank but the back window was the best, and entrance must be gained quietly and without any hammering or ripping. A jimmy is a noisy animal on window bars. If the screws happen to be a bit rusty, they give off a spine-grating rasp when jimmied loose. These particular bars were bowed and what the burglar calls a "blind driver" —a screw driver that can be thrust between the bars and operated at an angle —was needed. "Jersey Mapes" had just such an instrument. Vickery the Muffle, a close friend of Jersey Mapes, had volunteered to borrow it, and he had almost forgotten it!

Vickery knew that Jersey Mapes hung out at a saloon on Sixth Avenue, so he abruptly got to his feet and started over that way without a thought of the things he had read in the newspapers that day. A crime wave was upon the city and the papers were goading the police. Vickery might have known the dragnet had been flung. Surely, Spring and Love had robbed him of precaution!

The saloon toward which Vickery hastened was a notorious hangout for criminals. Had Vickery thought of the crime wave and the dragnet, he would have known that neither Jersey Mapes nor any other wise crook would be in the place. But, with New England mountains, blue eyes and fluffy curls dotting his landscape, Vickery stepped through the swinging doors of the saloon.

Soft-footed Huggins, from headquarters, whose brain in itself was a rogue's gallery, followed three paces behind.

"Hello, Vickery?" Huggins greeted.

Vickery, a pang of alarm gripping his heart, altered his pace but the fraction of a step and plowed straight ahead to the bar. He was too wise a crook to respond to his name when it was spoken by an unseen man.

"A glass of beer," Vickery said to the bartender, who, also wise, proceeded to fill the order without a glance at the headquarters man.

"I said hello, Vickery?" repeated the persistent Huggins, who now had drawn up alongside his quarry. Huggins was smiling but there was a certain iciness in his voice.

"Were you speaking to me?" Vickery asked. He knew the detective by sight.

"I called you by name, didn't I?"

"I didn't catch the name."

"Vickery."

"I guess you've made a mistake, my friend."

"Drink your beer, and we'll take a walk," said Huggins.

The barroom seemed to spin before the eyes of Vickery the Muffle. Was this to be the outcome of his dreams? Would he fail to meet Flinters Wilkins on this night of all nights? Would he fail to make his final haul? Would he fail to spend the summer in New England—would he fail to meet—— He felt like crying out, but he gripped himself. In a flash he realized that he couldn't bluff Huggins out of the knowledge that he was Vickery the Muffle. He must try another course.

"What's the idea, Huggins?" he asked softly.

"I'll have to take you down, Vickery."

"But you haven't got anything on me."

"I know it, but it's orders; I'll have to take you down—and they'll probably turn you loose as soon as you give an account of yourself. You know how those things are."

"I know how they are, but don't you figure that I've got some rights? I've been decent, Huggins—on the square, I have—and it'll get me in awfully bad to be dragged down to headquarters. Why"—speaking in a whisper—"do you think I'd have come into this place if I wasn't going straight?" The crime wave and the dragnet were all too clear to him now and he could have booted himself all over town for a fool.

"I don't know why you came in here—and I don't care," said Huggins doggedly. "I've got my orders and there isn't any use to argue about it. Are you going along with me or will I have to *take* you?"

Vickery knew that resistance would be foolhardy. He, by his own recklessness, had stepped into a bad situation. His only hope was to square things at headquarters. Inwardly, he was literally boiling with rage and he could have mouthed violent protests against this invasion of rights, but he didn't. He felt his world crashing about his ears, but he was not bereft of all wisdom.

"Oh, I'll go along," he said. "But I hope I don't get a piece in the papers out of it. Vickery is my right name, Huggins, and it'll hurt me a lot. I hope the police don't want to stop me going straight."

"It'll be easy enough for you to go straight, if you've *been* going straight," observed Huggins laconically.

The meshes and tentacles of the dragnet, that snare which is so sinister to the underworld, swished up onto the beach at police headquarters a wriggling catch of humanity, embracing all that is genteel and all that is squalid in the sea of crime. The high and the low were there. Polished, suave confidence men were in the line that passed by the booking sergeant and under the inspection battery of six detectives, who, among them, knew almost every crook in the city. Deft pickpockets and treacherous gunmen, whose stock in trade was a knife thrust in the dark, a thudding blow or a shot from ambuscade; burly housebreakers and nimble safeblowers; dexterous forgers, soft-treading thugs—all were there.

But the dragnet also takes the unfortunates and the loiterers. The seedy of dress and hungry of body ebb as in a whirlpool into the haunts of crime. There they find shelter and sometimes food. When the net is flung it sweeps in all who can give no plausible account.

Half a hundred men had been booked and looked over by the experts when Vickery the Muffle found himself before the booking sergeant. His ordeal was brief. He was known, and he realized how useless it would be to say he was "going straight" and working, for this story would be investigated. His only hope lay in getting into communication with friends, who would get him a lawyer. This might save him from the usual six months for vagrancy which

the police, having nothing specifically on a known criminal, bring about for the protection of the city.

Vickery was booked and set down for further investigation. This would come after certain unsolved robberies had been dug up and an effort made to lay them at his door. He was sent to a cell.

The next in line was a youth. He was shabby and had a hungry look, but his eye was clear and he wore only an air of bewilderment.

"Name?" demanded the sergeant.

"Albert Flobert."

"Age?"

"Twenty."

"Address?"

"I ain't got none."

"No address? Where d' you sleep at? You must have an address of some kind. Come on, out with it!"

"I ain't got none; I been sleepin' in the parks." The entry was "no home."

"Occupation?"

"I'm a machinist, but I can't get a job."

"Why can't you get a job?"

"Because I'm only an apprentice—I haven't finished my trade. Every one tells me they want only journeymen." The entry was "machinist, unemployed."

"Ever been arrested before?"

"No."

"How long have you been in the city?"

"Three weeks."

"Where's your home?"

"I come from Hershey, up State."

Albert Flobert then passed under the critical and searching gaze of the inspection squad.

"Never saw him before," pronounced the six detectives. Then he was "frisked." Not a cent was found upon him—not a thing of value. Every trinket had been "peddled" for the pittance it would bring. The prisoner was led away to a cell. The prisoners were being grouped two in a cell—and Albert Flobert found himself in the same cell with Vickery the Muffle. And so they met.

"So you've been wandering around town, hungry and with no place to sleep, eh?" Vickery asked the youth. They had had some conversation and were sprawled out on their bunks. The last suspect out of the dragnet had been locked up and the clattering of steel doors and jargon of voices had faded.

"Yeh," Flobert answered. "I wonder if they'll feed us pretty soon?"

"Sure, they'll feed us—in the morning—a ladle of half-cooked hominy and a dipper of black coffee that'll rust our guts out."

"Not till mornin'?" the youth asked, crestfallen. He was very hungry. "I ain't et since yesterday."

"Well, son, that doesn't make any difference to the chief of police. He isn't worrying about your appetite—he's thinking of his own hide that the newspapers have been pricking."

"What d' you s'pose they'll do to us—to me?"

"Six months in the workhouse, that's all they can do. They haven't got anything in particular on me, and they haven't got anything at all on you, I guess—so they'll pin a vag badge on us and put us away for six months. That's all they can do."

"Six months?" Flobert repeated. He spoke hardly above a whisper. "Six months—six—why, I ain't done nothin'! They can't give me six months!"

"They *can't?*" the Muffle mocked. "They *can't?* Of course, son, we all know they *can't*—but they *will!* Six months in the house of toil for yours."

"Six months in the—the what?"

"The house of toil—the workhouse, where they'll put us on half rations and give us so much to do a day. And we'll do it, too, before we go to bed. If it takes us too long to do it, they'll cut out our supper; if we do it quicker than they expected, they'll increase our water al-

lowance. It's a fine place. I've been there."

"I didn't think they sent folks to the workhouse 'less'n they done something —'less'n they stole something." The youth, weakened by undernourishment and long tramps about the city, had paled and lay very feebly on his bunk. He was sick at heart, and the dim light along the cell row accentuated his pallor to a ghastly hue.

"Son," Vickery assured him—he was, in spite of himself, smitten with pity—"son, they're not going to put you in the workhouse because *you* stole something—it's because somebody else stole something. You're going over because the police can't catch the guys that are doing the stealing, and because you're broke and there's a chance that you might steal something. The newspapers are prodding them and somebody's got to go to the workhouse. But haven't you any people who can help you?"

"No. I ain't got no people; I ain't had no people since I was a kid. I worked in a machine shop up State, but I didn't get but a dollar a day, and I got sick of it. I heerd there was plenty of good jobs here at big wages, but I ain't found none of 'em. I ain't even found no one—'ceptin' you—that'd give me a decent word. 'T seems like they all think I'm goin' to rob 'em, or do something to 'em—I never see such a place! I guess a feller's better off some-'eres else."

Vickery was tempted to give the lad good advice—he could have done so—but an idea was crystallizing in his selfish brain. If the police sent him over and thereby cheated him out of his plans for the summer, why, here was a chance to get back at them. He would strike back at the police, first, and society in general.

"Well," he said, "you're in a bad fix. You haven't got any money or any friends. You haven't got as much chance as I have. I've got a watch that's worth forty dollars, and a few friends. I might be able to get a lawyer, and then I stand some chance. But the vag laws are made so that they can send a man over whether he's got money or not—if he can't show a means of legitimate income, and they think he's dangerous. In your case"—and Vickery the Muffle knew the police well enough to hit upon their exact theory—"they'll find you dead broke, hungry and with no home. They'll find you haven't any prospects for work. They'll figure that you'll steal if you get a chance. Being a machinist, you know something about tools, and that's the most dangerous kind of a man to have loose and hungry. I can't see any hope for you. And, so far as that's concerned, I don't see much hope for myself. They know me too well and I can't prove anything —that looks good."

"They don't give a feller a fair chance in the city!" the youth burst out angrily. "If he looks a little jakey, why, he ain't got no chance at all. Why, if they send me to the workhouse—when I ain't done nothin'—I'll—why, I'll——"

"Well, what'll you do?"

"I don't know." He was quieter. "But it'll make me terrible mad—and I don't care much what I do when I come out." This was exactly the sentiment the wily Vickery sought to inspire. "I guess I won't look like much if I stay in there six months," Flobert went on, drawing a deep, fluttering breath. "Six months! Criminy, but that's a long time, ain't it?"

And they got six months each. Vickery the Muffle's case was disposed of scarcely before he knew it. The police felt justified, and they were, at putting this man away. But in the case of Albert Flobert they acted as stupidly as they had wisely with Vickery. He was simply lost in the shuffle, slated for six months with many others, and they went to the Island together. Vickery set

himself to the task of fashioning, out of Albert Flobert, a weapon with which to strike back.

A sharp exclamation—an involuntary gasp of sheer surprise—brought "Mittens" Flobert to a cat-quick wheel-about. A moment before he had held only a finely-tapered screw driver in his right hand. At the instant of turning, the screw driver had clattered to the floor and the dexterous young burglar came around with a gun-metal automatic leveled, from the hip, at the source of the interruption—a gray-haired, benevolent-looking man standing in the doorway between the two offices of the Stockton Brokerage Company.

The door of the safe of the Stockton Brokerage Company now swung half open. Before it stood, crouched a little, Mittens Flobert—tense, jaw thrust forward belligerently, eyes gleaming dangerously, body taut for a spring if necessary.

He did not fire. Mittens—so-called because of his unusually large hands—was a very cautious burglar. Cautious burglars do not shoot except as a last resort. Burglars want money, not blood, and it is only the novices, the nervous cowards, who fire at first sign of danger. A cautious burglar does not want a murder charge against him. Mittens Flobert was a very cautious, and a very expert, burglar. He had learned his trade from the very efficient Vickery the Muffle.

The man standing in the doorway was unarmed, so far as outward appearances showed. One empty hand swung at his side. The other arm, hand also empty, was bent across his corpulent waistband. More than that, his eyes were reassuring—glaring a little, it is true, but not with threat nor with fear. It was rather a look of surprise, not totally devoid of admiration. Seeing no menace, the burglar did not fire. Instead, he soon stood upright, still keeping the automatic poised at a commanding angle. His muscles lost their tautness and he returned the man's gaze—steadily, level and without qualm of fear.

"Can you do that again?" the man asked, smiling.

"Do what again?" Flobert asked. He did not return the smile. He suspected a trick and his voice was as chilled as the deadly weapon he clutched.

"Open that safe?"

"Why, I guess I can—I did it once."

"I know you did, and that's what surprises me." He was still smiling. "But, of course," he bantered, "you're not going to rob me now. You wouldn't do that with me looking on, I'm sure. It would have been all right, if I hadn't happened in; but I don't think it would be professional, would it, to continue the job now?"

"I don't know whether I'm going to rob you or not—I'll think about it." He gazed coldly. "I suppose you're kidding along with me," he said, "to gain time. I suppose you're expecting somebody else up here—and then you figure you'll trap me, eh?"

"Not at all, young man; not at all. You see, I was taking a nap in a little den off this office at my back. I don't suppose you noticed that door—or maybe you thought it was a closet. I heard you come in—and, frankly, I was curious when I saw you make straight for the safe." His smile was succeeded by the old look of wonder. "I couldn't believe that a man could open a safe with a screw driver and a match!" he exclaimed. "And that safe is supposed to be burglar-proof, too."

"They don't make a safe that I can't open," boasted Flobert.

"Is that so?" he of the gray hair wondered. "Maybe—do you suppose you could open one of those round safes—those big ones that are supposed to be the latest despair of burglars?"

"I'm not saying whether I can or not."

"You needn't continue to threaten me with that pistol," the other suggested. "I'm not going to call the police or attempt to interfere with you in any way. You can go through the safe, if you want to, but you'll not find any money. I'm sure you don't want anything else you find in it." He shot a sharp glance into the eyes of the burglar and spoke slowly. "The papers you were sent after," he said, "are not in the safe. They have been removed to a safe-deposit vault—and I don't think you can get to that. You can tell your employers that, too."

It was the turn of Mittens Flobert to be surprised. Somehow he felt reassured. The other man had a way about him of inspiring confidence. He had said he wouldn't call the police, and Flobert believed him. He put the automatic into a hip pocket.

"I don't know what you mean—my *employers,*" the burglar said. "I don't get you."

"Possibly you came here to steal money from that safe?"

"What else would I come for?"

"There are certain people who would like to get their hands on papers I have, and which they naturally think are in the safe. There is a possibility they might have sent you."

"Nothing like that," the burglar stated positively. For some reason he could not explain, he was anxious to avoid suspicion of being anything but a burglar. He didn't relish being classed as a sneak thief. "I came here to steal your money," he protested, "and nothing else."

"I'm glad to hear that. Won't you sit down? I'd like to talk with you."

He had a very cordial smile, and Flobert sat down on one side of a flat-top desk. The elderly gentleman sat down opposite. Flobert liked him, and, for the matter of that, he liked Flobert. Rarely does friendship begin under such strange circumstances.

"How long have you been a burglar?" the host asked quickly.

"Five years," Flobert answered before he thought. What was he doing? Why, he was letting this guy pump him.

"How long do you expect to keep it up?"

"Say, what is this—the third degree?"

"Not at all, young man; not at all. But we're going to be friends, aren't we?"

"That depends."

"Supposing I offer you a chance of living honestly—of honest employment at a good salary? Would that appeal to you? Or do you want to be a burglar all your life?"

Things were beginning to get interesting. As a matter of fact, Mittens Flobert had decided not long ago to take up honest livelihood after he had made a big haul. That was a philosophy he had absorbed from Vickery the Muffle—go straight after just one more haul. Burglars who operate on that basis seldom go straight. They continue too long looking for the big haul—until the law sneaks up on them. Like successful business men, they are men who are going to retire after they have made "just a little more." The "little more" is always around the corner, and death finds them in the harness.

"I wouldn't mind going straight," Flobert answered, "if I could get started off right."

"Then tell me something about yourself. I'm serious, I promise you, and it's for your own good."

The young burglar reflected for a moment and then, with that alacrity of mind which had developed in the precarious life he had lived, he made his decision.

"There isn't much to tell," he said. "I was roped in by the police for nothing in the world but being broke. I was sent to the Island and got to be

friends with a fellow who taught me all I know about the business. Not only that, but he taught me other things. He was my schoolmaster and he gave me what education I have. We were together three years after we got out of the workhouse—lived together and worked together. He took a liking to me, but he told me once that his main reason in sending me crooked was to get back at the police and the world. He would turn out a finished crook, he said, and get his revenge that way for the shabby trick they played on him on the same day he was thinking about going straight and getting married.

"Well, we worked together three years—and then he got mixed up with a gang that I didn't know. He said we'd have to split. He was drunk at the time and told me I didn't have brains enough to play the new game. So we split, and I haven't seen him since. I've been going it alone for over a year and have been making it all right."

"Just why did you come to this building?"

"When we were working together, we touched nothing but banks, but it takes at least two men to rob a bank. After I cut loose by myself, I decided I wouldn't team up with any one. So I took to opening safes in office buildings. It's much easier. I can get into the offices with a pass-key, open the safes without any noise, and get away by dodging the watchman. I can hide out in an office building in the daytime and don't have to break any doors or windows. The safes in offices are easier to open than the ones in banks, and, if things go right, I can do three or four offices a night."

"Just how do you open a safe?"

"That would be telling."

"You won't tell me?"

"No, sir. That secret belongs to my old friend as much as it does to me—and I can't tell you that."

"Well, the fact remains that you can open almost any safe you wish. Is that right?"

"I have so far."

"Would you open one for me?"

"I just opened one for you."

"No, I mean would you open one in another office: one that I pointed out to you?"

The situation was beginning to clear up now—this benevolent old gentleman had a chestnut or so in the fire and his own fingers were too tender to get them out.

"I see," said Flobert, nodding wisely, "you're playing a little game yourself, eh?" He was conscious of a slight decline in his respect for the man on the other side of the desk.

"I have a game—and it's an honorable game—at least it will turn out that way, regardless of the methods," said the older man, very seriously. "Listen, I'll tell you the whole business, and you can do as you like.

"My name is William Stockton and this is the Stockton Brokerage Company. I'm the head of it—and will be for a few days yet"—his voice was rather sad—"by which time the firm will either be a big one or it won't exist at all.

"There's a wildcat brokerage firm in this same building—two floors above me. The J. A. Crathall Investment Company, they call it. I had a deal all swung for the purchase of the Golconda mining property out West—I'm not going into details; I'm just sketching the high spots for you—a deal that would put this firm among the biggest in the country. This Crathall layout bought one of my employees, who tipped them off to the entire transaction. I had already sold thousands of dollars' worth of stock in Golconda, having promises of options both on the land where the mines are and on the mining machinery, which were owned by separate parties.

"I am pledged to my investors for

stock. I have their money, much of which I had put into the options. A dividend is due next week and, in order to collect the full dividend, I must have both options. I have one of them—the option on the land. I had them both in this office at one time. One of them—the option on the mining machinery—was stolen by the employee I spoke of, who, I suppose, got a big price for it.

"He handled the deal for me. He acted under his own name, as I did not want certain parties here to know yet that the Stockton company was taking over the Golconda property. The options were made out to him personally. One of them is in my safe-deposit vault and the other one, I suppose, is in the office of the Crathall company—undoubtedly in their safe.

"It was my money—ten thousand dollars apiece—that was paid for these options. The option that was stolen represents a clear theft of ten thousand dollars from this office. Also there was stolen the copy of the agreement between myself and the dishonest employee in regard to the purchase of the options. That agreement clearly shows that he was acting as my agent. As things now stand, I haven't a thing to show that the stolen option belongs to me. I can't prove it was stolen—it is in his name and he simply can say he was acting for the Crathall company and not for me. Neither can they prove that the option I have doesn't belong to me. Both sides are laying low, afraid to precipitate matters and trusting to some freak of fortune to get possession of the other fellow's option. One option, without the other, is nearly worthless.

"I must have that other option. The deals are to be closed next week and the property—land and machinery—is to be turned over to the parties holding the options. Immediately thereafter a dividend is due. If I collect that dividend, I will be able to pay the full dividend on Golconda stock that I have sold. Unless I do that, it will precipitate a run on my business that will prove fatal. Will you open the Crathall safe and get the option for me?"

"If what you say is right," commented Flobert, "it looks as though you have been trimmed. I'm a burglar, but I haven't any use for a man who robs another man while posing as his friend. I go into a place of business and take a chance on getting shot to death. I don't go in there as an employee and then knife the boss in the back."

"Which is just what that employee did to me; and I can prove it to you if we're fortunate enough to find the copy of the agreement that was stolen. Probably they have destroyed that, but they won't dare chirp when I get that option in this office. Opening a safe the way you do, they won't have any way of knowing how in the world the option got away. Chances are they'll suspect the employee who knifed me, and he'll get what is coming to him—fired. This Crathall company is skating on thin ice and will go clear to smash, where it belongs, when it loses out on the crooked deal it tried on me."

"What time is it?" asked Flobert.

"Ten twenty-five," said Stockton, glancing at his watch.

"Will twelve o'clock be time enough for that thing to be in your office?"

"Great heavens, man! Does it look that easy to you?"

"Well, you said it's one of those round safes. That usually takes fifteen or twenty minutes longer."

The broker was nonplused. "You haven't asked me," he suggested, "what you're going to get out of it."

"A chance to go straight."

"By heavens, son, you'll get it with a whoop!"

Mr. Hubert Jocelyn, junior partner in the J. A. Crathall Investment Com-

pany, was somewhat tired of eye when he sat down to his desk at ten o'clock a. m. The night had been one of worry. Business was on the ragged edge and he realized by what a slender thread his fortunes were suspended.

The junior partner was a comparatively young man, rather tall, and of sharp face. A sleek Vandyke imparted an air of distinction to his personality. A fastidious dresser, even under business worry, he did not permit this feature to slump. He was very nattily dressed and barbered.

Mr. J. A. Crathall, senior partner and somewhat older, breezed into Mr. Jocelyn's office shortly after the latter had taken his desk.

"Have you any plan?" he asked brusquely.

"Have *you* any plan?" the other retorted just as testily.

"There's no use quarreling about it," the senior partner suggested, his voice softer. "Something's got to be done. Who'd ever think that old fox would take to sleeping in his office—I wonder if some one tipped him off that we were planning desperate measures?"

"I don't know. Cropley knifed him when he was working for him. And I have my suspicions that Cropley would knife us if he got a chance. Why didn't he hook both options while he was about it? Did you ever think of that?"

"Can't say that I have."

"It occurs to me that he wanted to leave things up in the air so that he could play Stockton and us against each other."

The suspicion was uttered quite calmly. The other man stared, red of face and breathless for the moment, and then brought his fist down on the desk.

"As sure as you're near busted, that's the truth!" he ejaculated. "I believe it, danged if I don't! Keeping us hung up in the air for a week or two—and then selling out to the other side, after having taken down a fat lump from this side. That's the only way I can explain his refusal to let us destroy his agreement with Stockton. He wanted to have something to pinch us with—he can use that to squeeze the daylights out of both sides. By the way, how long has it been since you've seen our option?"

"About three days."

"Cropley, when the safe is open in the daytime, could sneak it out of there, you know."

"Let's go in your office and take a look at the option for luck."

It took the senior partner but a few moments to open his burglar-proof safe. It took him but a few moments more to find that the coveted option was gone!

So was the copy of the agreement between Stockton and his dishonest employee!

"What the devil, Vickery!" cried the senior partner. "We're——"

"Shut up, you fool!" hissed the other, clapping his hand over the man's mouth.

"That dirty Cropley!" the senior partner burst out.

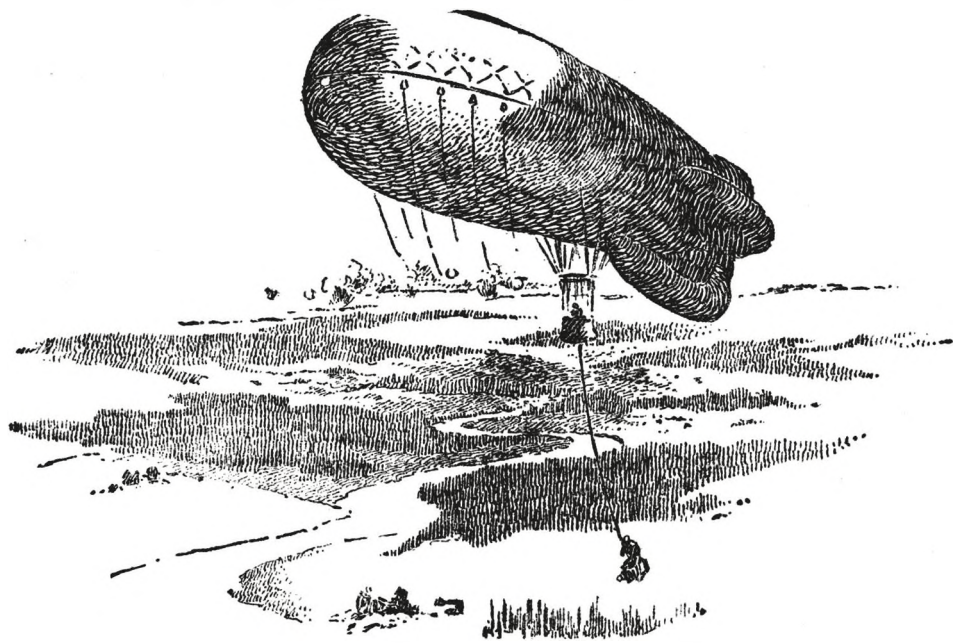
The junior partner said nothing. Finally the men gazed into each other's glaring eyes.

"Do you suppose," the senior partner asked, "that this safe was opened by a burglar in the employ of Stockton?"

"No," said the youngish man with the sleek Vandyke. "No. There's only one man in the world, outside of myself, who could open that safe by a trick. It couldn't have been him." He brushed his hand across his perspiring forehead. "Yes," he went on, "there's only one other man in the world who could do that—and I taught him everything he knows!"

The Man Who Didn't Care

By GORDON McCREAGH



The Superbly Daring Exploit of a Young American Officer Out to Locate a Huge German Gun.

JUNIOR LIEUTENANT HARRY INGLIS was a man without a single human emotion. So said the others; and sometimes they almost envied him. That was when they talked together in disjointed snatches about going back to the hell of the front line. Not that they were not keen enough, these hard-faced men of all the nations. There was not one of them but longed, as soon as his wounds would let him, to get back to the hideous job and finish it once and forever; but they wished they could view the grim prospect with the same unmoved calm as this young lean-jawed American with the soft drawl in his voice.

And then again they envied him not at all. That was all the rest of the time. For instance, when they sat on the long veranda of the château and looked down from its little hilltop onto the beautiful landscape which stretched so peacefully below, fifty miles away and in heavenly reprieve from the horror which they had recently left. And when madame, kindly and sympathetic and so attentive, came and talked with them and called them her brave boys; madame who was so solicitous for their welfare; for Monsieur le Colonel Duchêsne commanded a squadron of air fighters somewhere out there, and madame in her great sympathy and her eagerness to

help had offered her beautiful home for the recuperation of convalescents from the same great game.

Who could help adoring madame, then—except this young serious-faced lieutenant from the mountain country down South somewhere. And then there was mademoiselle. Ah, but mademoiselle! Who could describe that ministering angel of endless patience and cheerfulness! The French adored openly and kissed her hand with reverence; and all the other less demonstrative Americans and British were her more distant slaves. Only this Inglis fellow smiled on their ardor with the same inscrutable calm with which he greeted the angel herself. His punctilious disinterestedness sometimes struck them as almost a sacrilege.

"Confound you, Inglis," grumbled Lieutenant Trelawney of the R. F. C. after a particularly irritating display of callousness. "You're just like a bally sphinx or something. Dash it all, don't anything ever move you?"

And Inglis smiled at him with serene amusement and imitated his Eton accent.

"Why, of course, old top; yes indeed, I assure you. For instance, the charming little silver bell which announces tea, don't you know."

Trelawney, having both arms in a sling, just groaned. Trevor, also of the R. F. C., found it necessary to elucidate with serious elaboration.

"No, no, you don't grasp him, old man. He means, doesn't a vision of extraordinary beauty ever stir up any enthusiasm in you."

The rest shouted with joy, and Inglis replied artlessly:

"Oh, yes indeed, my dear fellow, indeed it does. In fact I write regularly to at least six back home."

The others shouted again. But the subtlety of the thing was lost on Captain Lajoie, who was an instructor in Inglis' own squadron.

"Mais non, c'est pas vrai," he cried excitedly. *"Jamais,* nevaire. For seex month I know heem, and nevaire is it that he writes the letters, *non, pas à personne."*

"That calls your bluff, Inglis," said a voice.

Inglis stood up, tall and aristocratic looking, and yawned with ostentation. Then he smiled at them benignly and drawled:

"Well, letters are such a plebeian display of sentiment."

Then they threw pillows at him, and Inglis fled; and presently they saw him limping beside mademoiselle in the garden, and they looked at one another and grunted at the perfidy of the wretch. But Inglis was telling her tactlessly how much more beautiful his own rugged mountains were than the fair hills of France, proving his points with scientific dissertations on geology and schemes of natural color. She, for her part, displayed the same friendly interest which she accorded to all of them. Captain Lajoie, therefore, nodded sagely and spoke with the intuition of his race.

"He is vairy restraint, this young man. *Il cache bien c' qu'il pense;* but you shall see; there shall come the time of recovery, of going again, and then—obsairve, my friends—he shall not conceal so easily, *n'est-ce pas.* For me, I wish him of luck; he ees *brave garçon."*

And the others, though some of them promised themselves that they would be strenuous rival contestants, grunted again and, since they had lived through what had left nothing but the whole white man in them, wished him luck, too. Then they grinned at one another and promised again that they would watch him squirm, as others had done, when his time came; and then they would get all their own back in merry gibe and subtle jest.

But Lieutenant Harry Inglis, when he finally got well and his orders came to report again for duty with his unit, remained all unmoved and carefree as he

had been when his wound was at its worst. The others, watching slyly with covert grins, their perceptions quickened by their very rivalry, could detect never a tremor of his voice or hand, never a sigh or a far-away look—not even the smoking of an undue number of cigarettes, which Lajoie in his wisdom warned them to look for; nothing at all. The Inglis fellow said his good-bys smiling, debonair, and as happy as though he were going home instead of going back to war. The others looked at Lajoie accusingly as though he were to blame for the phenomenon. But Lajoie, the romantic, stoutly maintained the conclusions from his first analysis.

"There shall be letters," he insisted. "*Attendez. Moi aussi*, shortly I shall be with heem. I shall watch. He shall write, I tell you! and messieurs—obsairve now; it is I who say it—he shall receive reply! And then—*Aha vous autres*—I shall write to you the news and destr-r-roy your hopes. *Voilà tout!*"

The threatened ones just grunted as had become their habit and ceased to worry. They understood the variations of their own racial temperaments better than the Frenchman. The Inglis man was just one of those freaks who didn't care; he simply had no emotions, that was all.

And in point of fact Lieutenant Harry Inglis was entirely happy. While he had been laid up, his transfer to the balloon section had gone through and he was absorbed in his new work. He had wanted to get in with the "blimps" because he held that that branch of the air service, though devoid of the spectacular-stunt stuff which makes popular heroes, was much more scientific in its requirements. And since popular adulation stirred him not at all and abstruse mathematical calculations did, obviously then the lighter-than-air was his choice.

His new commanding officer was almost as happy as he was about it. He regarded this cool young Southerner with the unwavering gray eyes as a prize snatched from the unappreciative and unworthy rival branch. Furthermore, the youngster was so keenly interested that after a short while he could be relied upon to relieve his superior of much work which required intricate care and which it was difficult to find a man to intrust with.

And then again, after a while, the commanding officer was not quite so happy. He began to be vaguely disappointed. His new treasure, while a keenly efficient balloon officer, was not measuring up to expectations. It was true he knew more about "gas bags" and gas and angles of observation than any officer in the unit; and he spoke with cryptic glibness of homogeneous atmospheric currents and zones of equilibrium and total ascensional forces; but at just about that point he stopped short. When he had worked out some problem of wind pressure and observation, he had no desire to carry the thing out to its logical conclusion of practical experiment. His interest was gone, and he was immediately ready to tackle the next knotty point. The earlier question reawoke his interest for a short time only when he was able to check up his calculations with the notes made by the observers. Then his eyes would gleam faintly for a fleeting second, and then he was ready to go on with the newest matter in hand. Recognition and promotion came naturally from the work which attracted most attention; but to this inexplicable young man recognition and promotion were but uninteresting incidentals in life. This attitude would have been invaluable to a scientist; but the commanding officer was not a scientist; he was a military man, and he was correspondingly disappointed.

Inglis, to put it briefly, never seemed to want to go out and slam the Hun. The C. O. complained grumblingly:

"Dash it all, the boy ought to be a fossilized old professor with a yard of gray beard. He knows more about the game than I do; but, confound him, I can't stir up any enthusiasm in him. When he has once doped out the how and why of a thing he's through with it, just as if he were a cold-blooded scientist."

There were others too who were quick to note the young officer's lack of desire for practical experiment, and in that gathering of reckless dare-alls they were quick to whisper. Only the whisper, instead of mentioning cold blood, centered round a more ominous expression—"cold feet!"

And Lieutenant Harry Inglis smiled serenely at both. What did mere idle opinions matter to him! He was interested in more important things. Just now he was absorbed in a most fascinating problem.

Somewhere across from his sector the Germans had planted a big gun, one of those long-range horrors which threw a shell every now and then into the outskirts of Paris. The whole air force was doing its utmost to place it. Observation planes and even single seaters were out all day trying to locate the hellish thing. But always they came back—at least, nearly always—and were forced to give the Hun credit for cunning. Pilots took the most frightful risks in their realization of its importance, and finally the thing had been marked down somewhere in a wood about six miles behind the lines, but just where, the best of them was unable to determine. Photographs, which ordinarily could be relied upon to furnish the most definite information about enemy artillery positions, were practically impossible, for the perfect forest of anti-aircraft guns and the swarms of defending planes forced observers to remain well above the fifteen-thousand-foot level; and hurried snapshots from that height, even with the elaborate process of enlargement and microscopic examination by the experts behind the lines, revealed nothing but large expanses of leafy green interlaced with railroad tracks.

Observation balloons went up two and three at a time to the extreme limit of their cables, and from their steadier positions officers with powerful glasses spent hours trying to trace and sort out from one another elusive puffs of smoke. Even Inglis went up and surprised his fellows. He took with him a Pitot tube and an air speed indicator and he made voluminous notes. Then he murmured casually that he had thought so, and forthwith left the matter to the continued efforts of other misguided enthusiasts.

The hidden horror was becoming an obsession with the whole unit, not only on account of the diabolical beastliness of its effect, but as a matter of professional pride. Major Norton who had acquired a reputation as the keenest of artillery observers formed a habit of mooning round in the evenings among the different hangars, biting his mustache and cursing softly to himself as he searched for scraps of information from the experiences of others which might be useful. Inglis' commanding officer was always in a fit mood to help him growl. When the two met the younger officers always gathered round and gleaned wisdom from their lips, and the very young ones even offered helpful suggestions.

Jimmie Watterson, who was quite new, went so far as to ask accusingly what was the matter with the observers that they could not locate a huge gun which must be at least fifty or sixty feet long. The harassed major whirled on the presumptuous one to obliterate him entirely, and then stopped askance at his extreme youth. Instead of instant annihilation, he explained.

"Son," he said kindly. "You'll find out after a year or so of experience here

that the Hun is not a fool; also that some of us have learned one or two things. Listen now: that sixty feet or so of gun isn't just propped up behind a tree; it is safe betting that it is mounted in a subterranean chamber with several yards of good earth between it and the sky, and the most that there will be to see will be the end of its nose sticking out of a hole in the ground, and camouflaged at that. Now you go up to fifteen thousand, and if you can spot within a mile of it I'll trade my rank with you."

The youth wondered whether he had been reproved; and Inglis kindly covered his confusion by saying:

"I think I could tell you within four hundred yards, sir."

The major whirled again and gaped at him.

"If you can you're a wonder," he snorted. "But even so it wouldn't do any good. We can't drop shells over a half mile square of ground and hope to hit a hole ten feet across."

"Yes I knew it wouldn't be of any use and so I didn't follow it up."

The casual disinterest of the young man's tone caused the major to gasp afresh, and Inglis' commanding officer found it necessary to smile apologetically and draw the major aside to explain the phenomenon.

Even Captain Lajoie, who had returned from his convalescence, shrugged his shoulders finally with a hopeless air and gave it up. He had watched the young man carefully, full of an almost fatherly interest in what he had convinced himself was a budding romance; but there was never a regretful look to be detected on that keen, untroubled face, never a word of reminiscence—and there certainly had been no letters. The brave captain shrugged, therefore, almost up to his ears and admitted his defeat.

"*Eh bien*, it ees true then. *Il n'en a pas*, he has not of the emotions humaine. *Zut, alors!*" His shrug indicated the extremity of finality.

That fact, then, having been definitely established throughout the unit without contradiction, there occurred the miracle of transmutation. What was its cause, nobody could guess; but its effect was amazingly palpable to all eyes.

Inglis appeared among his fellow men vastly excited!

That is to say, he had ceased to smile upon them through half-shut eyes with inward amusement, and his face had taken on an expression of mild anxiety. He strode among the hangars with an almost abstracted air and poked his head into every shelter and hut. At last he found his man—Major Norton, of all men; and his smile then was one of human gladness, almost of relief.

"Can you give me half an hour or so, sir?" he asked seriously, and then went on quickly: "I can show you how to locate that gun!"

He spoke with such certainty that the major changed his mind. He had been about to send the young man, whom he regarded as a little queer after that evening, about his business; but now he snapped at him:

"Don't talk foolish, boy."

Inglis' smile through long habit was inscrutable again, but he insisted.

"This is straight goods, sir. I'll guarantee to let you photograph it—if —er——"

"If what?" snapped the major fiercely.

"I beg your pardon, sir. I was going to say, if you had the nerve."

The major almost exploded.

"Wh—— What! *You* ask *me* if I have nerve!"

The implied reflection was cruel, but Inglis remained unperturbed. He smiled for so long and so unmovedly that the major growled again:

"You're crazy, but I'll listen."

Inglis made his preliminary statement

with concise brevity so as not to lose the awakened interest.

"We can do it in a free balloon, sir. Float over low on a dark night when the wind is right and shoot a flash-light snap."

The major swore with disappointed irritation.

"Float over when the wind is right! Well, I'll be damned! And go on floating till we can deliver the photograph in Berlin, I suppose. Now I know you're crazy."

"No, sir, it is an axiom of aërodynamics that wherever there is a surface current in one direction it must be offset somewhere by a current in the opposite direction in a higher stratum. The problem in ballooning is to find the right current."

Major Norton turned to him again with a new interest and a dawning of vague possibilities in his mind.

"Oho? Yes, of course—— H'm —— It is possible, my boy, that you're crazy enough to be a genius. Come on over to my luxurious hut and let's talk about this thing."

Inglis was actually eager. He displayed an inexplicable anxiety to convince the major of the possibility of a photograph. Still he was deliberate. He took the cigar which the major gave him and smoked absorbedly for a few minutes while he laid out his case in his own mind. Then he produced it with tabulated clearness.

"You see, sir, a balloon is the only possibility, because it drifts with the wind in dead silence; an airplane, of course, would draw every searchlight and 'Archie' in the sector onto it. Now I can calculate the ascensional force and the necessary restraining ballast to the last ounce so that we'd find our zone of equilibrium at say six hundred on the barograph——"

"Don't be so darn technical, young feller," the major growled.

Inglis smiled constrainedly and shook himself free from the language of books and began again.

"What I mean is, I can calculate the ballast so we'll float low. Wind speed and direction, of course, are easy. With any sort of luck, then, we ought to pass near enough over the spot to get a good flash photograph, and we'd be well away again before the Heinies could get their searchlights to bear on the place where our flash was—in any case they might think it was a shell; and further, the very fact that we were low would quickly screen us behind the treetops. After that all we'd have to do would be to shed ballast and rise till we found our return current; and these surface drafts, it has been definitely established, rarely extend to higher than two thousand feet."

The major looked at him with an astonished respect. The thing, outlined as it was, certainly sounded feasible.

"You said once you thought you could spot the place within four hundred yards— H'm—— How low could you float?"

"Oh, any height. A hundred feet with very fine calculation, but there's always a certain rise and fall in a balloon and five or six hundred would be about the limit of safety for night flight when you can't see ground obstructions such as tall trees and so on. However, the camera and flash apparatus could be lowered on the dragrope, which is two hundred and fifty feet long, and connected up with a small battery. But you know more about the photographic end than I do, sir, and I'm presuming that your men could fix up a sufficiently powerful flash to get a picture from three hundred feet or so."

"Sure, oh, sure," said the major quickly. "But how could we know just when to shoot our picture?"

The major's "we" indicated that he was unconsciously accepting the plan as a possibility in which he might be involved. Inglis' eyes shone.

"Careful wind-speed calculations, sir, in conjunction with the distance, which we know; and we ought to be able to distinguish ground masses even on the darkest night. The thing will be dead easy, really."

As a matter of fact, from the alluring aspect which Inglis presented, it did look easy; too easy to be true. He said nothing about the infinitely delicate calculations which he would have to make —but that, perhaps, was because he felt so confident of his ability to make them accurately. What he had no control over, however, was the very much worse possibility of the wind perhaps failing and revealing them with the morning light suspended over the German lines to be a derisive target for every anti-aircraft gun within a couple of miles. Or again, the horrid chance that a wandering searchlight might fall on their slow-moving bulk and direct immediate annihilation against them. Or a dozen other dangers which a balloon caught unawares is so helpless to avoid.

Major Norton scowled at him introspectively with his chin in his hands. It was just these very chances that he was thinking about, and he was weighing them against the chances of success. Reluctantly, he had to confess that they outweighed the other side hopelessly. And having arrived at this conclusion he spoke with cheerful decision.

"Well, let's go and see your C. O. about getting permission."

Inglis jumped up and held out his hand with a shockingly plebeian display of sentiment. The major shook it hard while he looked searchingly into the other's eyes; and he found them not at all inscrutable. Then he muttered:

"I think we're both crazy."

It was a beautiful night for the great work. That is to say, it was a foul evening, dull and soggy and blacker than pitch with low-hanging clouds. There was a good fifteen-mile breeze, rather gusty; but the direction, which was far more important, was constant. The great netted sphere loomed mysteriously out of the lantern light and tugged fitfully against the encircling sandbags which hung from its hoop, or load ring. From its long, attenuated trunk a thick line of gas feed pipe stretched away like a black snake into the darkness. A small group of men stood round and spoke to one another in whispers, unconsciously giving voice to the deadly importance of silence and secrecy. Presently Inglis came striding lankly out of the gloom. He had been calculating the exact point with reference to the wind direction from which the ascent should take place.

"I've marked the place," he said softly. "All ready here? Inflation complete?"

"Yes, sir," reported a man with a heavily striped sleeve.

"Good! Gimme the list of Class B equipment weights including photographic apparatus."

Inglis consulted an instrument which gave him the humidity of the atmosphere and calculated quickly how much weight of moisture clinging to the surface of the balloon must be added to the equipment. Then he consulted the barometric pressure, calculated some more, and then muttered:

"Net lift will be eight hundred and ninety-five pounds. Class B equipment and ourselves, four hundred and eleven and seven ounces; gives four eighty-three and nine ounces sand ballast for maneuvering. Fine. Pile it right in, boys."

The sand had been carefully weighed in readiness and packed in bags of thirty pounds net; it remained only to weigh out the difference. That would mean that with the total weight in the basket the balloon would just rest on the ground as lightly as a feather, so delicately balanced that a kick would send it a hundred feet into the air like a giant

football. In the meanwhile Inglis drew the major forward by the sleeve.

"I'd like you to watch this, sir, because I may have to ask you to handle these later."

A man had cast off the gas feed pipe and was holding the trunk closed in a tight twist. Inglis took it from him and, untying the twist, thrust his hand swiftly within. After a moment's groping he produced from it a stout line the resistance of which he tested critically. As he tied the trunk round it again with twine, he explained.

"This trunk, major, is what we call the large appendix; through it this line connects with a valve on top. One second's valving will bring us down approximately sixty feet; and conversely, one cupful of sand thrown out will just about take us back; this tin ballast cup holds just three pounds. This little tail alongside the big one is the small appendix, and this cord connects through it to the rip panel, also on top. One good rip will bring us down from any height as fast as we can fall. So we call these cords 'life' and 'death.' They're yours. Hang on to them till we leave ground."

The major noted with grim approval the cool, swift efficiency with which the boy who should have had a yard of gray beard made his arrangements for departure into the darkness. This was the young officer about whose courage there had been whispers, he said to himself, and he snorted a ferocious "H'm!" as he took the lines in hand and stepped into the basket on a sign from the expert. Inglis followed him, and the sergeant immediately began to unhook the holding-down weights while men clung to the basket. They "walked her over" gently to the place marked by Inglis, and the momentous instant of departure had arrived!

The men held their breath and hardly dared to speak. Even though not going on the wild venture, they could imagine already the presence of a vicious enemy lurking somewhere in the thick blackness beneath, and the impulse was to draw their feet up from the clutching menace. Inglis quietly emptied out seven cups of sand.

"That'll jump us about four hundred feet right away," he whispered, unconsciously affected himself by the attitude of the men. He noticed his own condition at once and laughed. Then his voice came clear and sharp.

"Here comes a lull, boys! Stand by! —— Hold!—— Hands off!"

The major gave a start as the white faces of the men suddenly fell away into black nothingness, and the wind which had been blowing sharply against his face miraculously ceased.

"My God! It's stopped!" he gasped.

Inglis' voice chuckled from the inkiness over his shoulder; he knew from past experience just what the major meant.

"Stopped nothing. We're making a good fifteen over our second line. Look at the lights."

The major looked, and apparently miles below he saw a few faint specks here and there slipping silently one after the other beneath the basket. Then he felt a fumbling at his "life" cord, and snatched at it apprehensively. He caught Inglis' arm.

"What are you doing?" he jerked out. His first experience of ballooning into the inky night was upsetting even to his nerves.

"Opening up the appendix!" was the appalling reply.

"Good God! Why? What's the matter? Have we gone too high? Won't that let air in?"

"Not at all. On the contrary, it'll let gas out." The major could positively feel the grin on Inglis' face. "You see, the appendix is her windpipe. As we ascend and outside pressure decreases, inside pressure increases, of course; and if a balloon had no such 'breather' she'd

presently go pop. It's a gradual waste of gas, of course; but presently we'll find stable equilibrium and then I'll choke her off. It's taking a chance; but there isn't very much variation of pressure at night; and we're taking chances this trip anyhow. Now, listen, please. I'm fastening the valve cord to the load ring on your *left* side; rip cord on the *right;* and for Mike's sake don't make a mistake."

Inglis' voice was so quietly confident that the major cursed himself for his nervousness. The voice came again.

"Now we're all snug. And we're high enough, so let's get the photographic outfit over the side and pay out the drag."

Together they fumbled in the bottom of the basket and lifted the great box camera with its vertical lens and elaborate flash apparatus and downward reflector over the edge, and in a short time the rope with its thin attendant line of electric wire stretched taut into the void from which it sent up a faint hum. It gave a creepy impression of being that much nearer to the ground and therefore so much the closer within the reach of some silent waiting malignance which would presently come clawing up out of the blackness to clutch at them. Inglis felt it, too; but all he said was:

"Now all we've got to do is watch."

"And pray," muttered the major grimly.

This was the part which was the most trying for Inglis. On his calculations for distance and speed and height depended everything, and most of it now had to be guesswork. Looking over the side, the general blackness seemed to disintegrate and reassemble itself again in slow kaleidoscopic patterns of faint lines and blacker blotches; and then, before the straining eyes could make sure, the designs had changed again. Here and there a faint glow appeared, and once a whole long-stretching line of them slid slowly under. Away to the right, miles away, a pale wavering pencil of searchlight wrote its cryptic messages against the cloud blanket. At intervals a light burst out and sank slowly to the ground, and a far-away popping, as of corks, indicated that something was happening along the line there. Here, everything was silent and clammy and black. There was no activity because the very darkness and the low-hanging clouds rendered air raids practically impossible. Suddenly Inglis' voice cut crisply into the silence.

"The wind's dropping!"

The major started out of a gloomy introspection.

"How d'you know? I don't feel a thing in this cursed emptiness."

"I don't really know; I sense it rather. Confound it! It's a temporary lull, of course, but it upsets speed calculations, and consequently the time of arrival over the spot. Dammitall, there's no way of judging either. By daylight I could estimate speed by timing the passing of our shadow over any fixed point; but here—— Might as well guess at the speed of a bat in hell. Maybe with the night glasses we'll be able to distinguish the forest when we get there. See what you can see now."

They drifted on in the uncertain oppressive gloom while the major strained his eyes and swore softly.

"Nothing at all, curse it. Or perhaps a road or something—— Or maybe it's a field—— Or a house."

Then there came a faint swish from below, and right after it another, louder and accompanied by a dragging sensation, while the hum of the dragrope gave place to a dull twang.

"Gosh! That's a tree!" whispered Inglis. "Whee, we're low! Must be a frightfully heavy dew. Ballast, sir, quickly!"

He ducked into the basket and swiftly flashed a tiny electric torch onto an instrument fastened to the side and tersely snapped:

"Barograph says three fifty! Not that that's any too accurate for low altitudes; but four cups will be enough."

The major was already pouring sand over the side. Inglis flashed his torch onto another instrument, a statoscope.

"Fine, we're rising slowly," he muttered.

Then a furious voice floated up to them from the thick blackness with appalling abruptness.

"Gott verpflucht! Wer schmeisst denn da den verdammten Sand?"

Instantly both crouched tense like frightened mice, holding their breaths, and each shot out a hand and gripped the other with the frenzied impulse of enjoining silence. Each knew, too, that the other was staring with wide eyes into nothingness. For full minutes they held it motionless; then Inglis' pent-up breath escaped in a long hiss.

"Whe-e-ew! That was close! I never thought of that. We've got to be mighty careful!" Then he chuckled suddenly in the dark. "Hope it went down his neck!"

Again they drifted, and gradually their pumping hearts subsided to the normal. Inglis flashed his torch on the statoscope again.

"Wind's coming again," he whispered irrelevantly. "And we're singing, too! There's no help for it. Shed it a grain at a time, sir."

With apprehensive exactness the major complied, listening fearfully betweenwhiles, till the instrument showed another gentle rise. Presently he groped and found Inglis' arm.

"Look over down here. See that wide-spreading blotch like a cloud! What d'you think?"

Inglis took the glasses, all keyed up with the tenseness of expectation. His whisper was scarcely audible.

"Ye-es, I guess that's the forest. There's a couple of lights, too! See how they break and appear again? That's through trees all right. We're arriving, sir!" There was a wild exultation in the voice of this man who had no emotions, and the major, too, seasoned veteran, felt himself tingling with anxious anticipation.

In a few more minutes dim glowworm spots appeared again, and as they drifted under, the blackness of the blotch seemed to give place to a more open space. Then more faint spots of luminance, quite a cluster of them. Surely that must be some sort of artillery park! Inglis pointed significantly down to it, as though his companion could see him. Then he groped and pressed his lips to the major's ear.

"What d'you think? That must——"

A switch clicked softly in the basket. There was an instant dazzling white flash far below them and a crackling report! For a fleeting fraction of a second before his eyes tingled in the darkness again Inglis' startled retina recorded a confusion of shiny surfaces and bulking shadows and smooth, sinister guns pointing skyward and—he was sure—a dark square hole with sharp edges of masonry! Then the blackness shut in again like a smash in the face and iridescent greens and reds floated before his eyes, while from below came a startled shouting and a confused rushing of feet; and then a searing white beam stabbed up into the sky! Inglis wondered vaguely why the aim was so bad. Then another vicious shaft shot up and crossed the other; and another came and played about them and around. The aim seemed to grow steadily worse. Till Inglis realized suddenly that the direction of the search was growing farther with each second; and he realized, too, that he was gripping his superior officer's ear with one hand while the other clung to the basket edge. The major's insistent voice bored in on his consciousness.

"Camouflage!" he kept repeating. "That report was all camouflage! All my idea! Just camouflage!"

Then they held their breaths again and wondered and quaked and prayed. Till slowly the shouting died in the distance and the terrible questing rays slanted low in the direction of the Allied lines. The major's voice broke the tension.

"By God, we've done it!"

Inglis breathed noisily through his nose. For a long time he did not speak. His mind was readjusting itself to the cold requirements of a very exacting science. Then he said:

"Yes, I think so. Did you see green spots, too?" He shook himself. "Now for getting back. Meteorological data and my own observations for the past few days point to the supposition that this surface current won't extend higher than two thousand feet or so. Above that there's possibly what we want; though maybe a cross current. In that case we must try higher again. Four bags will do it for the present."

The major groped for the ballast cup and began dipping sand over the side, gingerly as he thought of the appalling result of the last time. In the tense, clinging silence he could hear the rain of it on the leaves, and he wondered uneasily how long they might be. Inglis' voice galvanized him into swift action.

"Hurry up, sir, we're dragging again! Heave them over bodily. It won't matter now; we'll jump right up."

One after the other in quick succession the thirty-pound bags went over and their successive crashes through the treetops came up with alarming distinctness. The major waited, wondering with interest whether he would feel a catching of the breath at the sudden increase in height. All he felt was the slow tightening of Inglis' grip on his arm. Then a voice like a stranger's, flat and dead and despairing, hissed out slowly into his ear:

"We're—stuck!"

Major Norton had proved himself time and again to be a man of unshakable courage; but at that his heart stopped beating. The situation crushed him with its immediate hopelessness. Right on the top of the exhilaration of success, too. There was the priceless photograph, snatched out of the very teeth of death after unthinkable risk! And there were they, anchored to a tree a few hundred feet above enemy ground! He sensed again that Inglis was staring at him with wide, horrified eyes. Presently a fleeting hope flashed into his mind.

"Couldn't we joggle it loose?"

Without a word he felt that Inglis was fumbling for the dragrope. He leaned over and took a helping grip. Together they jerked and pulled, trying to convey some sort of movement to the long line; but it was taut with the pull of the hundred and twenty pounds of sand which had been discharged. They struggled in their awkward position till they had to give up panting. There was another hopeless blank silence. Then Inglis' voice came again, tense with constraint and misgiving.

"There's just one way," he murmured tentatively.

The major's jangled nerves flashed into overwrought rage.

"By God, no! Never! I'd sooner stay. We came out to get that picture, and, by Heaven, I'm not going to cut the line and leave it now! I'm ashamed to think that we——"

Inglis' voice cut in again, somewhat stiffly.

"I was thinking, sir, of climbing down and loosening her up."

The major stopped with a choke.

"My boy, I beg your—— Can you. d'you think?"

"Oh, it's easy enough to climb *down* a rope."

"Why, yes, of course. I—wonder we never thought of that before. But—see here, my boy, how about getting back? D'you think that——"

Then suddenly it was borne in on

the major by the curious jerking vibration of the basket that he was alone.

"My God!" he gasped again. "My God, the boy's done it!" And his voice trailed off in horrid doubt.

The vibration continued for an endless time. Wouldn't he ever reach the end! It never occurred to the major that he might grow weary and lose his hold; the boy somehow looked too lithe and cleanly knit for that. At last there came up a faint rustling, and the rope was still. Painfully still. Terrifyingly still! The major began to feel with a sense of horror that that thin line which he could not even see was his only connection with a lost world. And worse than that, his only connection with the brain which was necessary to take back the precious photograph. He began to realize now, too, that it would be quite impossible for the pluckily foolish owner of that brain to climb back. Up in the inky darkness and clutching loneliness there he shuddered at the nerve-racking silence.

If he had known the reason for the silence he might have shuddered more; though not for himself, not for a minute; it was the all-important camera that obsessed his soul.

Inglis reached the treetop and found, as he had expected that the camera had got wedged under a fork. Dislodgment was easy enough, and he was about to call recklessly up to that effect, when his blood chilled.

A guttural voice from the ground was grumbling:

"Was im Teufel's Namen war denn das?"

Another thick growl answered from farther off, and he could hear men thrashing about in the undergrowth. He felt himself trapped, helpless. He clung motionless to the fork like some crouching night beast and wondered desperately how he could communicate with the major poised so far above him. Meanwhile the men below grumbled and searched on. Through the mat of leaves he could see the occasional flash of an electric torch.

Suddenly an inspiration came to him. The major, as an observation officer, would surely know the signals! With the stealth of a wild animal he produced his knife and commenced to tap with it against the tight-stretched line. Surely the vibrations would carry up! With halting pulse he signaled up toward heaven. Long short, long short, long. the attention call of the immortal Morse. Again he sent his stealthy call up the line. And again. Then the major caught on—and understood!

"Hello!" came down the line in noiseless throbs.

"Caution. Germans below." Inglis signaled. "Can release camera."

"Good," came back immediately. "How you come back?"

Inglis had already thought this matter out and his mind was made up. He signaled resolutely:

"Photo most important. I stay and trust to luck to get back over lines."

The sharp staccato of the return was an illuminating indication of the major's view of the matter.

"Fool! Necessary you should navigate balloon."

The tragic futility of such an argument conducted in the clinging darkness over an impassable bridge of unseen rope struck Inglis as grimly humorous. Deliberately he signaled again:

"Impossible. I signal you instructions. Easy. Camera must get back. Hurry. Germans have found sandbag!"

The instant order which came down was peremptory.

"I, superior officer forbid you make this sacrifice. If—you must stay, I stay—understand—I forbid."

The last part of the message was considerably broken up by a violent jerking of the line. Then the major suddenly felt a swift downward rush of air past

his face, and with quick horror he felt himself terribly alone!

He was utterly cut off from the earth, poised in the middle of black, oppressive nothingness in a fearsome vessel which he was unable to control. He could not tell where he was going or how, and he had no means of finding out. Gradually the stiff upward pressure against the soles of his feet began to diminish and he was able to reason that the swiftness of ascent was slowing down. Looking uselessly over the side, he found that he could see a wide expanse of dotted lights beneath him and watching then dazedly he realized that the terrible machine which imprisoned him was revolving for some unknown and malicious reason. He clung to the basket with a sense of helpless bewilderment. Yet all he said was to keep muttering to himself:

"Poor devil! Poor brave fool of a poor devil!"

Then he was shocked into sitting down heavily on the stacked sandbags.

"Hooray," came tapping up the line. "Wind direction right!"

The major leaped to the basket edge and peered over to locate the miracle. Nothing but silent blackness! He went round and looked foolishly over each of the other three sides of the basket, and even groped wonderingly down as far as his arm would reach.

"Tap-tap-tap, tap-tap," came at his ear again. He seized the line.

"Where are you?" he signaled wildly.

The answer staggered him. At the same time his heart leaped.

"Sitting on camera. Rope between legs. Fine and comfy, thanks."

The major's feeling of thankfulness amounted almost to a prayer. For a long time he stood without moving; then the need for information stirred him. He turned to the line.

"What must I do?"

"Nothing," was the cheering answer. "Direction W. N. W. See lights below. Not dead right, but probably strike Vauxmont salient. Nothing to do but wait dawn."

It was like a reprieve from death. The rest of that night would have been a horror to both men under any other circumstances, the one alone in the dark in a floating basket which he knew nothing about, and the other clinging cross-legged to a precarious pendulum at the end of an invisible line; but they were both under the spell of a wild exhilaration at their success and at their escape from dangers so infinitely greater that the present situation was in comparison a picnic. And then, they were both young and entirely reckless—otherwise they would never have been in Uncle Sam's service.

They conversed, then, over their unique telegraph line with an assumption of careless banter as men of their kind do under unpleasant circumstances. From time to time Inglis signaled up instructions for the dropping of ballast to counteract the loss of gas by unavoidable leakage, and swore in Morse at his superior officer for pouring sand into his eyes. Whereat the superior waited with cheerful malice to pour more. At one time Inglis signaled hopefully for encouragement on the all-absorbing question.

"D'you think we got it?"

The major knew what obsessed him. He signaled back confidently:

"Son, if we ever get back we'll blow that gun higher than heaven the very same day."

Inglis settled down on his precarious perch with a slow chuckle of contentment to wait for that day. It came at last. Soft waves of pearly, peaceful dawnlight, and the great question immediately was: Were they over France? Inglis felt reasonably sure, having made careful note of such lights as they had passed; yet it was with a feeling of thankfulness that he was at last able to distinguish a country of wide, shat-

tered fields and desolated farms. This was unmistakably France.

"Valve," he signaled to the major. "Valve for ten seconds at intervals till I signal stop."

To the major the swiftness of their descent, much as he longed to touch solid earth again, seemed appalling. With the dawn the wind had almost dropped, and they came down vertically.

"Stop!" suddenly signaled Inglis. His calculation had been so nice that his legs, hanging over the edge of the box, swung slowly some fifty feet above the ground. A troop of horsemen from some tents a few miles away saw the portent and came racing across the shell-pitted fields.

'One second!" signaled Inglis; and he braced himself to prepare for the hardest task of all. The balloon swung majestically along with a seven-mile wind. No very great speed, it is true; yet a velocity dangerous enough for a human pendulum to be dragged over rough ground. And dragging, Inglis knew very well, was a dire necessity. For him a jump would have been an easy way to safety; but if his nerve should fail him and he should let go, the balloon, relieved of his weight, would immediately shoot up again to a height of nearly four thousand feet with nobody this time to direct a safe descent for that precious camera. Grimly, then, Inglis set himself to fend it from damage, hoping prayerfully that he might in some way be able to wedge it again and so bring the great bag to a stop.

Bump! His feet touched ground, and immediately with the momentary lessening of weight the balloon took a great bound of thirty feet into the air. Slowly it subsided again in a long slant. Swish! It tore the clinging human pendulum through a bush and lacerated his face. Bump, bump again, and another great bound. The pendulum had acquired a movement of its own now and it hurtled with a horrid momentum at each forward swing. There was a grove of shell-shattered trees ahead. Desperately Inglis tried to avoid them, but he was quite helpless to control his direction. He saw a stump swing toward him with horrid speed. Smash! The life seemed to be crushed out of him and he felt his senses swimming in limitless rosy air. Smash again! It was almost the limit of his endurance. Desperately he clung to the precious mechanism and he knew that he was being dragged again over hard earth. He knew, too, that his nerveless muscles and his senses were slipping together. Then a thunder of galloping hoofs sounded in his ears.

Captain Lajoie hopped about among the hangars jubilant. And why not? For was not the great gun doomed! And, *sapristi!* was he not vindicated in his judgment of men!

"Ees it not true, that which I have told you, *mon ami?*" he crowed to Trelawney of the R. F. C.

"Oh, rubbish, my dear fellow," said Trelawney. "You can't make me believe that a fellow would take all that risk in the far-fetched hope that he would break his arm and get sent to the Château Duchésne to recover. Really now you can't. Besides, he might have been sent anywhere else."

"Ah *non, non, non.* Eet is not that at all, *du tout, du tout.* You do not understand. You English are so practical of mind. But consider I ask you, the case of this brave boy who you have said has not the emotions humaine. *Mais moi.* I have know better. Attend then. This big gun, this *monstre affreux* did throw a shell onto our so dear château. The veranda where we sit, it ees *écrasée!* Pouf! Feeneesh! *Alors. C'était la retribution,* the punish for the impious affront to that home which ees to him sacred. You understand me, *hein?*"

A Chat With You

IN the front of every progressive American's brain is the ever-tantalizing question: "How can I get ahead?" More than at any other time in the history of mankind, people are vitally interested in personal success. The rewards are rich. Everywhere we see ads of cars, furniture, clothes, houses, amusements, and thousand of things that we want, and want badly. Other people have them—why shouldn't we? How did those other people get them? By disciplining themselves, studying, saving, investing, seizing opportunities, using their brains to get ahead.

* * * *

OUR great motto is "Success." We picture it as a vivid, sparkling sun on the far horizon. A narrow, rocky road leads toward it. The way is hard and slow. On either side of the road are pleasant fields that try to lure one into time-wasting diversions. Those we must avoid. We must keep our eyes fixed on that distant goal.

There are critics who sneer at this new creed of success that America has injected into the world. They say we are money mad, materialistic. That is what has happened in every era of progress—the shouters-down have curled their lips and remarked cynically: "Look at the poor fools, with their noses stuck into their businesses!"

* * * *

BUT the men who plan vast skyscrapers of steel and concrete; the men who build and man gigantic liners that surge majestically across the lashing seas of the world; the men who dominate the throbbing planes that soar from coast to coast, carrying passengers and mail across mountains and deserts; the men who, deep into the night, bend with serious faces and keen, intent minds over laboratory test tubes or scientific volumes or intricate blue prints; the men who travel from city to city and town to town and village to village, working like industrious bees to bring progress and comfort to their fellow men—these men are in a position to pat the shouter on his excited little head and say: "Calm down, calm down. Suppose you get a shovel and get out and dig. Do something constructive for a change."

* * * *

OUR most admired national heroes are not those who have won battles, but those who have fought their way up from poverty and obscurity. The story of the lad who was born in a remote log cabin and rose to become president, never fails to stir our blood. The story of the boy who comes from the country to the city and succeeds in the end, wins our hearts.

In our childhood storybooks we lingered over the tale of Dick Whittington, who approached London town timidly, started to turn back, but heard the bells of the city calling to him, "Turn again, Dick Whittington, turn again—thrice Lord Mayor of London!" And he turned again, went to the city and ultimately become lord mayor.

Another boy, Benjamin Franklin, walked down a street in a strange city, Philadelphia, with a loaf of bread under one arm. He made good. Edison, Ford, Rockefeller, and countless others of our great men were unknown and poor at one time. Who can help but respect such men? Any sensible man

respects achievement over obstacles. And that is the spirit that is behind the philosophy of success which young America has given to the sleepy old world.

* * * *

WITH examples like these, it is no wonder that every American young man builds huge hopes for the future. If he is wise, he does something more than dream. He works. He starts in on some job which, though meagerly paid, is suited to his abilities, and works up. In the next issue of THE POPULAR Fred MacIsaac tells an astonishingly graphic story of such a chap. He is a clerk, and wants to become a salesman. About him he sees people who have made good at selling. The story of his fight to get out of the rut and out on the road, and the strongly dramatic experiences he encounters out there, make as interesting reading as we have come across for many months. You are sure to enjoy it, and you will find it instructive and inspiring, too. The title of the novel is, "The Crooked County."

* * * *

IN that same number will be the first installment of Charles Neville Buck's new serial, "Bad Blood." This is another adventure-romance of the primitive Kentucky Cumberlands. Mr. Buck is famous for his Cumberland novels. Many of them have been made into plays and motion pictures. Millions of people have enjoyed his mighty dramas of the mountaineers. "Bad Blood" is so true to life that it leaves you breathless. Perhaps no living writer understands these people as does Charles Neville Buck. He is not satisfied merely with describing their surroundings and faces and actions; he digs into their hearts and makes you feel, all too clearly and poignantly, exactly what they feel. "Bad Blood" is a noteworthy work of fiction—and we are proud to feature it in the pages of THE POPULAR.

Statement of the Ownership, Management, etc., required by the Act of Congress of August 24, 1912, of THE POPULAR MAGAZINE, published semimonthly, at New York, N. Y., for October 1, 1929.

State of New York, County of New York (*ss.*)

Before me, a Notary Public, in and for the State and county aforesaid, personally appeared George C. Smith, who, having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is Vice President of the Street & Smith Corporation, publishers of THE POPULAR MAGAZINE, and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management, etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption, required by the Act of August 24, 1912, embodied in section 411, Postal Laws and Regulations, to wit:

1. That the names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business managers are: *Publishers*, Street & Smith Corporation, 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; *editors*, Richard F. Merrifield and Philip Conroy, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; *managing editors*, Street & Smith Corporation, 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; *business managers*, Street & Smith Corporation, 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

2. That the owners are: Street & Smith Corporation, 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; a corporation composed of Ormond G. Smith, 89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; George C. Smith, 89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; George C. Smith, Jr., 89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; Cora A. Gould, 89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; Ormond V. Gould, 89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

3. That the known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding 1 per cent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages or other securities are: None.

4. That the two paragraphs next above, giving the names of the owners, stockholders, and security holders, if any, contain not only the list of stockholders and security holders as they appear upon the books of the company, but also, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting, is given; also that the said two paragraphs contain statements embracing affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustees, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of a bona fide owner; and this affiant has no reason to believe that any other person, association, or corporation has any interest direct or indirect in the said stock, bonds, or other securities than as so stated by him.

GEORGE C. SMITH, Vice President.
Of Street & Smith Corporation, publishers.

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 1st day of October, 1929. De Witt C. Van Valkenburgh, Notary Public No. 74, New York County. (My commission expires March 30, 1930.)

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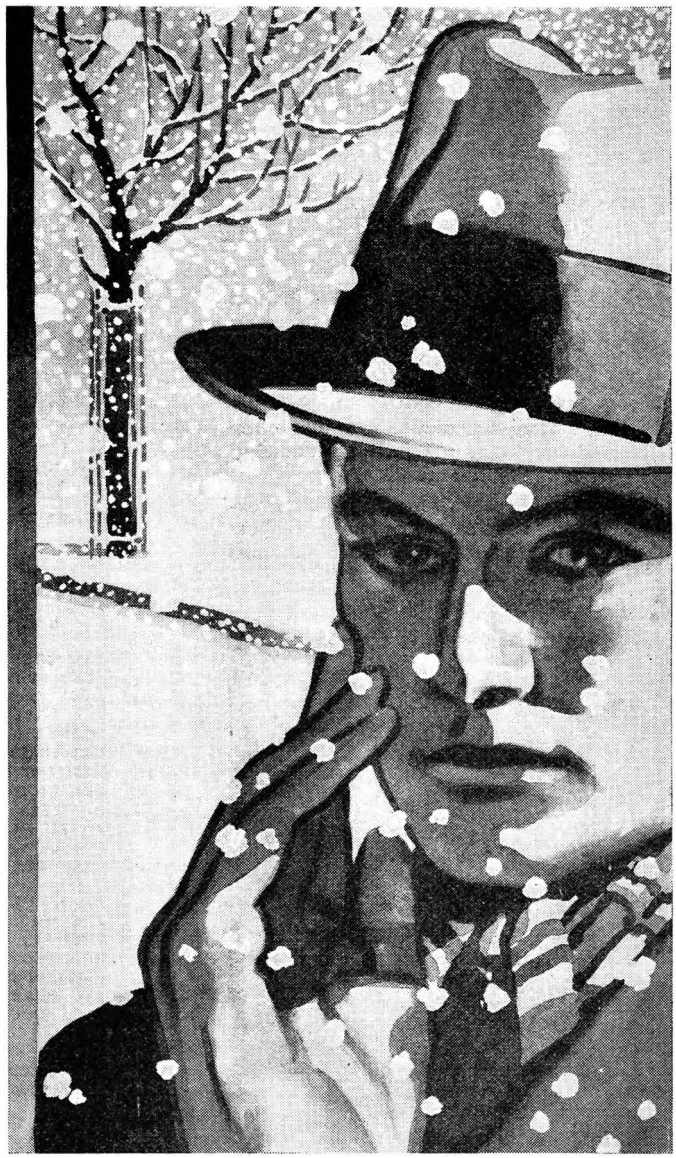

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