TWICE-A-MONTH 20 Cts.

The Popular Magazine

AUG. 20. 1917

BOOK-LENGTH NOVEL
BY B.M.BOWER

STORIES BY
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VOLUME XLV NUMBER 5

TWICE-A-MONTH

The Popular Magazine

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Field, Trap *and* Target

AN IDEAL SPORT FOR WOMEN.

By Harriet D. Hammond.

The writer of this article—Miss Hammond—is the women's trapshooting champion of Delaware. She has won the title two years in succession. Miss Hammond formed the first women's trapshooting club in America and is an authority on trapshooting.

—Ed. *Field, Trap and Target.*

THE sport of trapshooting, by reason of its fascinations and health benefits, is fast becoming one of the most popular sports among the outdoor sport-loving women of the country.

It is not nearly so strenuous as golf and tennis, and the improvement in the manufacture of ammunition and guns has been so wonderful in the last few years that there is no longer need for any fear or dread of the shotgun.

The so-called "kick" is a thing of the past with a well-balanced gun and load, and it is now possible for the most refined and sensitive woman or girl to learn to shoot without the slightest injury or shock to her nervous system.

Of course, the well-fitting gun plays an important part in the sport, and when a beginner is taken out for her first try at the flying clays care should be taken that she does not attempt to use a gun that is too long in the stock for her.

The stock of her gun should be short enough to fit comfortably and easily against her chest, and not out on her arm, where the slightest bit of recoil will bruise the soft muscular tissues and cause a black and blue spot that is not at all dangerous, but looks very formidable to the novice.

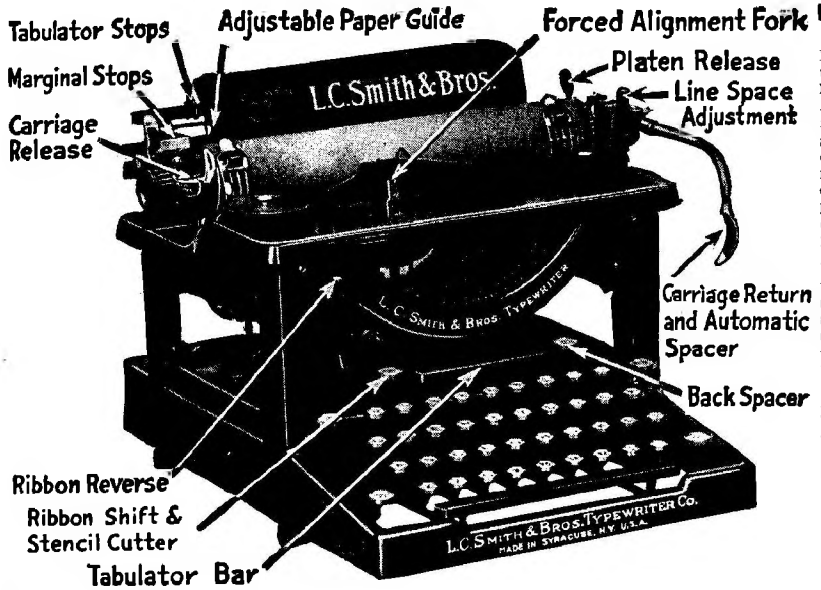
Until the muscles of her arm become accustomed to the weight of her gun, it would be well for the beginner to start with a small-bore shotgun, preferably a .20-gauge. A well-balanced gun of this bore will shoot just as easily as the standard .12-gauge trap gun, and will be much easier for the beginner to handle. In a short time she will have become so accustomed to the weight of this gun that it will seem like a toy to her, and she will ask to be promoted to the larger bore gun.

Every novice should have individual instruction. Give her all the time she wants, and make sure that she assumes a correct position, and knows her gun perfectly before she is allowed to shoot. This may seem to take up a lot of time at first, but it will pay in the long run.

The first rules of trapshooting correctly learned will follow the shooter all through her trapshooting career, and she always will be master of herself and of her gun, no matter what kind of a tournament she may take part in.

Miss Harriet D. Hammond, Women's Trapshooting Champion of Delaware.

Practice at home. Many women who could not go to gun clubs have purchased hand traps and targets, and learned to pulverize the clays on their own home grounds.



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THE POPULAR MAGAZINE

VOL. XLV. AUGUST 20, 1917. No. 5.

Cabin Fever

By B. M. Bower

Author of "Starr of the Desert," "Flying U's Last Stand," Etc.

The Old West and the New join hands in this novel. For the central figure you have a cheerful fellow who relinquishes the joys of cow-punching to become owner of an auto stage line running from San José to the State Park. Also he marries—and gets his first attack of cabin fever, which Bower describes as a malady of the mind induced by monotony. Next you find the ex-cow-puncher, ex-stage driver out in the wilderness prospecting with an old-timer who has no interest in life outside of gold hunting. Here he suffers his second attack of cabin fever. This time he finds an antidote that has miraculous powers. Bower has never written a more "human" story. The counterpart of the cabin-fever victim you will find in all walks of life. His chief failing was that he didn't understand women—but who does?

(*A Complete Novel*)

CHAPTER I.

THERE is a certain malady of the mind, induced by too much of one thing. Just as the body, fed too long upon meat, becomes a prey to that horrid disease called scurvy, so the mind, fed too long upon monotony, succumbs to the insidious mental ailment which the West calls cabin fever.

If you would test the soul of a friend, take him into the wilderness and rub elbows for five months. One of three things will surely happen: You will hate each other afterward with that enlightened hatred which is seasoned with contempt; you will emerge with the contempt tinged with a pitying toleration, or you will be close, unquestioning friends to the last six feet of earth—and beyond.

All these things will cabin fever do, and more. It has committed murder. It has driven men crazy. It has warped and distorted character out of all semblance to its former self. It has sweetened love and killed love. There is an antidote—but few there be that find it.

Bud Moore, ex-cow-puncher and now owner of an auto stage that did not run in the winter, was touched with cabin fever and did not know what ailed him. His stage line ran from San José up through Los Gatos and over the Bear Creek Road across the summit of the Santa Cruz Mountains and down to the State Park, which is locally called Big Basin. For something over fifty miles of wonderful scenic travel he charged six dollars, and usually his big car was loaded to the run-

ning boards. Bud was a good driver, and he had a friendly pair of eyes—dark blue and with a humorous little twinkle deep down in them somewhere—and a human little smiley quirk at the corners of his lips. He did not know it, but these things helped to fill his car.

Until gasoline married into the skylark family, Bud did well enough to keep him contented out of a stock saddle—and it is harder for an old cowpuncher to find content now that the free range is gone into history, than it is for a labor agitator to be happy in a municipal boarding house.

Bud did well enough, which was very well indeed. Before the second season closed with the first fall rains, he had paid for his big car and got the insurance policy transferred to his name. He walked up First Street with his hat pushed back and a cigarette dangling from the quirkiest corner of his mouth, and his hands in his pockets. The glow of prosperity warmed his manner toward the world. He had a little money in the bank, he had his big car, he had the good will of a smiling world. He could not walk half a block in any one of three or four towns but he was hailed with a "Hello, Bud" in a welcoming tone. More people knew him than Bud remembered well enough to call by name, which is the final proof of popularity the world over.

In that glowing mood he had met and married a girl who went into Big Basin with her mother and camped for three weeks. The girl had taken frequent trips to Bowlder Creek, and twice had gone on to San José, and she had made it a point to ride with the driver because she was crazy about cars. So she said. Marie had all the effect of being a pretty girl. She habitually wore white middies with blue collar and tie, which went well with her clear, pink skin and her hair that just escaped being red. She knew how to tilt her "beach" hat at the most provocative angle, and she knew just when to let Bud catch a slow, sidelong glance—of the kind that is supposed to set a man's heart to syncopatic behavior.

Bud did not notice Marie much on the first trip. She was demure, and Bud had a girl in San José who had brought him to that interesting stage of dalliance where he wondered if he dared kiss her good night the next time he called. To him Marie appeared hazily as another camper who helped fill the car—and his pocket—and was not at all hard to look at. It was not until the third trip that Bud thought her beautiful, and was secretly glad that he had not kissed that San José girl.

The drive through the shady stretches of woodland grew suddenly to seem to Bud like little journeys into paradise. Sentiment lurked behind every great, mossy tree bole. New beauties unfolded in the winding drive up over the mountain crests. Bud was terribly in love with the world in those days.

There were the evenings he spent in the Basin, sitting beside Marie in the huge camp-fire circle, made wonderful by those shadowy giants, the redwoods; talking foolishness in undertones while the crowd sang snatches of songs which no one knew from beginning to end, and that went very lumpy in the verses and very much out of harmony in the choruses. Sometimes they would stroll down toward that sweeter music the creek made, and stand beside one of the enormous trees and watch the glow of the fire, and the silhouettes of the people gathered around it.

In a week they were surreptitiously holding hands. In two weeks they could scarcely endure the partings when Bud must start back to San José, and were taxing their ingenuity to invent new reasons why Marie must go along. In three weeks they were married, and Marie's mother—a shrewd, shrewish widow—was trying to decide whether she should wash her hands of Marie or whether it might be well to accept the situation and hope that Bud would prove himself a rising young man.

But that was a year in the past. Bud had cabin fever now, and did not know what ailed him, though the cause might have been summed up in two meaty phrases: too much idleness and too

much mother-in-law. Also, not enough comfort and not enough love.

In the kitchen of the little green cottage on North Sixth Street, where Bud had built the home nest with much nearly Mission furniture and a piano, Bud was frying his own hot cakes for his ten o'clock breakfast, and was scowling over the task. He did not mind the hour so much, but he did mortally hate to cook his own breakfast —or any other meal, for that matter. In the next room a rocking-chair was rocking with a rhythmic squeak, and a baby was squalling with that sustained volume of sound which never fails to fill the adult listener with amazement. It affected Bud unpleasantly, just as the incessant bawling of a band of weaning calves used to do. He could not bear the thought of young things going hungry.

"For the love of Mike, Marie! Why don't you feed that kid or do *something* to shut him up?" he exploded suddenly, dribbling pancake batter over the untidy range.

The squeak, squawk of the rocker ceased abruptly. "'Cause it isn't time yet to feed him—that's why. What's burning out there? I'll bet you've got the stove all over dough again——" The chair resumed its squeaking, the baby continued uninterrupted its *wah-h*-hah! *wah-h*-hah, as though it was a phonograph that had been wound up with that record on, and no one around to stop it.

Bud turned his hot cakes with a vicious flop that spattered more batter on the stove. He had been a father only a month or so, but that was long enough to learn many things about babies which he had never known before. He knew, for instance, that the baby wanted its bottle and that Marie was going to make him wait till feeding time by the clock.

"By heck, I wonder what would happen if that darn clock was to stop!" he exclaimed savagely when his nerves would bear no more. "You'd let the kid starve to death before you'd let your own brains tell you what to do. Husky youngster like that—feeding 'im four ounces every four days—or some simp rule like that——" He lifted the cakes onto a plate that held two messy-looking fried eggs whose yolks had broken, set the plate on the cluttered table, and slid petulantly into a chair and began to eat. The squeaking chair and the crying baby continued to torment him. Furthermore, the cakes were doughy in the middle.

"For gosh sake, Marie, give that kid his bottle!" Bud exploded again. "Use the brains God gave yuh—such as they are! By heck, I'll stick that darn book in the stove! Ain't yuh got any feelings at all? Why, I wouldn't let a dog go hungry like that! Don't yuh reckon the kid knows when he's hungry? Why, good Lord, I'll take and feed him myself, if you don't! I'll burn that book —so help me!"

"Yes, you will—not!" Marie's voice rose shrewishly, riding the high waves of the baby's incessant outcry against the restrictions upon appetite imposed by enlightened motherhood. "You do, and see what'll happen! You'd have him howling with colic, that's what you'd do."

"Well, I'll tell the world he wouldn't holler for grub! You'd go by the book if it told yuh to stand 'im on his head in the ice chest! By heck, between a woman and a hen turkey, give me the turkey when it comes to sense. They do take care of their young ones——"

"Aw, forget that! When it comes to *sense*——"

But why go into details? Bud lost his temper and said a good many things he should not have said. Marie flung back angry retorts and reminded Bud of all his sins and slights and shortcomings, and told him many of mamma's pessimistic prophecies concerning him, most of which seemed likely to be fulfilled. Bud fought back, telling Marie how much of a snap she had since she married him, and how he must have looked like ready money to her, and added that now, by heck, he even had to do his own cooking, as well as listen to her whining and nagging, and that there wasn't a clean corner in the house and she'd rather

let her own baby go hungry than break a simp rule in a darn book got up by a bunch of boobs that didn't know anything about kids.

By that time he had gulped down his coffee, and was into his coat and looking for his hat. Marie, crying and scolding and rocking the vociferous infant, interrupted herself to tell him that she wanted a ten-cent roll of cotton from the drug store, and added that she hoped she would not have to wait until next Christmas for it, either. Which bit of sarcasm so inflamed Bud's rage that he swore every step of the way to Santa Clara Avenue, and only stopped then because he happened to meet a friend who was going downtown, and they walked together.

At the drug store, on the corner of Second Street, Bud stopped and bought the cotton, feeling remorseful for some of the things he had said to Marie, but not enough so to send him back home to tell her he was sorry. He went on, and met another friend before he had taken twenty steps.

This friend was thinking of buying a certain secondhand automobile that was offered at a very low price, and he wanted Bud to go with him and look her over. Bud went, glad of the excuse to kill the rest of the forenoon.

They took the car out and drove to Schutzen Park and back. Bud opined that she didn't bark to suit him, and she had a knock in her cylinders that shouted of carbon. They ran her into the garage shop, and went deep into her vitals, and because she jerked when Bud threw her into second, Bud suspected that her bevel gears had lost a tooth or two, and was eager to find out for sure.

Bill looked at his watch, and suggested that they eat first, before they got all over grease by monkeying with the rear end. So they went to the nearest restaurant and had smothered beefsteak and mashed potato and coffee and pie, and while they ate they talked of gears and carburetors and transmission and ignition troubles, all of which alleviated temporarily Bud's case of cabin fever and caused him to forget that he was married and had quarreled with his wife and had heard a good many unkind things which his mother-in-law had said about him.

By the time they were back in the garage and had the grease cleaned out of the rear gears so that they could see whether they were really burred or broken, as Bud had suspected, the twinkle was back in his eyes and the smiley quirk stayed at the corners of his mouth, and when he was not talking mechanics with Bill he was whistling. He found much lost motion and four broken teeth, and he was grease to his eyebrows; in other words, he was happy.

When he and Bill finally shed their borrowed overalls and caps, the garage lights were on and the lot behind the shop was dusky. Bud sat down on the running board, and began to figure what the actual cost of the bargain would be when Bill had put it into good mechanical condition. New bearings, new bevel gear, new brake lining, rebored cylinders—they totaled a sum that made Bill gasp.

By the time Bud had proved each item an absolute necessity, and had reached the final ejaculation, "Aw, forget it, Bill, and buy yuh a Ford!" it was so late that he knew Marie must have given up looking for him home to supper. She would have taken it for granted that he had eaten downtown. So, not to disappoint her, Bud did eat downtown. Then Bill wanted him to go to a movie, and after a praiseworthy hesitation Bud yielded to temptation and went. No use going home now, just when Marie would be rocking the kid to sleep and wouldn't let him speak above a whisper, he told his conscience. Might as well wait till they settled down for the night.

CHAPTER II.

At nine o'clock Bud went home. He was feeling very well satisfied with himself for some reason which he did not try to analyze, but which was undoubtedly his sense of having saved Bill from throwing away six hundred dol-

lars on a bum car; and the weight in his coat pocket of a box of chocolates that he had bought for Marie. Poor girl, it was kinda tough on her all right, being tied to the house now with the kid. Next spring, when he started his run to Big Basin again, he would get a little camp in there by the Inn, and take her along with him when the travel wasn't too heavy. She could stay at either end of the run, just as she took a notion. Wouldn't hurt the kid a bit; he'd be bigger then, and the outdoors would make him grow like a pig. Thinking of these things, Bud walked briskly, whistling as he neared the little green house, so that Marie would know who it was, and would not be afraid when he stepped up on the front porch.

He stopped whistling rather abruptly when he reached the house, for it was dark. He tried the door, and found it locked. The key was not in the letter box, where they always kept it for the convenience of the first one who returned, so Bud went around to the back and climbed through the pantry window. He fell over a chair, bumped into the table, and damned a few things. The electric light was hung in the center of the room by a cord that kept him groping and clutching in the dark before he finally touched the elusive bulb with his fingers and switched on the light.

The table was set for a meal—but whether it was dinner or supper Bud could not determine. He went into the little sitting room and turned on the light there, looked around the empty room, grunted, and tiptoed into the bedroom—in the last month he had learned to enter on his toes, lest he waken the baby. He might have saved himself the bother, for the baby was not there in its new gocart. The gocart was not there, Marie was not there; one after another these facts impressed themselves upon Bud's mind, even before he found the letter propped against the clock in the orthodox manner of announcing unexpected departures.

Bud read the letter, crumpled it in his fist, and threw it toward the little heating stove. "If that's the way yuh feel about it, I'll tell the world you can go and be darned!" he snorted, and tried to let that end the matter so far as he was concerned.

He flung the box of chocolates into the wood box, crawled out of the window by which he had entered, and went downtown to a hotel. If the house wasn't good enough for Marie, let her go. He could go just as fast and as far as she could. And if she thought he was going to hotfoot it over to her mother's and whine around and beg her to come home, she had another think coming.

He wouldn't go near the darn place again, except to get his clothes. He'd bust up the joint, by thunder! He'd sell off the furniture and turn the house over to the agent again, and Marie could whistle for a home. She had been darn glad to get into that house, he remembered, and away from that old cat of a mother. Let her stay there now till she was good and sick of it. He'd just keep her guessing for a while; a week or so would do her good. Well, he wouldn't sell the furniture; he'd just move it into another house, and give her a darn good scare. He'd get a better one, that had a porcelain bathtub instead of a zinc one, and a better porch, where the kid could be out in the sun.

Yes, sir, he'd just do that little thing, and lay low and see what Marie did about that. Keep her guessing; that was the play to make.

Unfortunately for his domestic happiness, Bud failed to take into account two very important factors in the quarrel. The first and most important one was Marie's mother, who, having been a widow for fifteen years, and therefore having acquired a habit of managing affairs that even remotely concerned her, assumed that Marie's affairs must be managed also. The other factor was Marie's feminine craving to be coaxed back to smiles by the man who drove her to tears. Marie wanted Bud to come and say he was sorry, and had been a brute, and so forth. She wanted to hear him tell how empty the house had seemed when he returned and

found her gone. She wanted him to be good and scared with that letter. She stayed awake until after midnight, listening for his anxious footsteps. After midnight she stayed awake to cry over the inhuman way he was treating her, and to wish she was dead, and so forth; also because the baby woke and wanted his bottle, and she was teaching him to sleep all night without it, and because the baby had a temper just like his father.

His father's temper would have yielded a point or two the next day had it been given the least encouragement. For instance, he might have gone over to see Marie before he moved the furniture out of the house, had he not discovered an express wagon standing in front of the door when he went home about noon to see if Marie had come back. Before he had recovered to the point of profane speech, the expressman appeared, coming out of the house, bent nearly double under the weight of Marie's trunk. Behind him in the doorway Bud got a glimpse of Marie's mother.

That settled it. Bud turned around and hurried to the nearest drayage company, and ordered a domestic wrecking crew to the scene; in other words, a packer and two draymen, and a dray. He'd show 'em. Marie and her mother couldn't put anything over on *him;* he'd stand over that furniture with a sheriff first.

He went back, and found Marie's mother still there, packing dishes and doilies and the like. They had a terrible row, and all the nearest neighbors inclined ears to doors ajar, getting an earful, as Bud contemptuously put it. He finally led Marie's mother to the front door, and set her firmly outside. Told her that Marie had come to him with no more than the clothes she had, and that his money had bought every teaspoon and every towel and every stick of furniture in the darned place, and he'd be everlastingly thus and so if they were going to strong arm the stuff off him now. If Marie was too good to live with him—why, his stuff was too good for her to have.

Oh, yes, the neighbors certainly got an earful, as the town gossips proved when the divorce suit seeped into the papers. Bud refused to answer the proceedings, and was therefore ordered to pay twice as much alimony as he could afford to pay; more, in fact, than all his domestic expense had amounted to in the fourteen months that he had been married. Also, Marie was awarded the custody of the child, and, because Marie's mother had represented Bud to be a violent man who was a menace to her daughter's safety—and proved it by the neighbors who had seen and heard so much—Bud was served with a legal paper that wordily enjoined him from annoying Marie with his presence.

That unneccessary insult snapped the last thread of Bud's regret for what had happened. He sold the furniture and the automobile, took the money to the judge that had tried the case, told the judge a few wholesome truths, and laid the pile of money on the desk.

"That cleans me out, judge," he said stolidly. "I wasn't such a bad husband, at that. I got sore—but I'll bet you get sore yourself and tell your wife what for now and then. I didn't get a square deal, but that's all right. I'm giving a better deal than I got. Now you can keep that money and pay it out to Marie as she needs it, for herself and the kid. But for the Lord's sake, judge, don't let that wild cat of a mother of hers get her fingers into the pile! She framed this deal, thinking she'd get a haul outa me this way. I'm asking you to block that little game. I've held out ten dollars to eat on till I strike something. I'm clean; they've licked the platter and broke the dish. So don't never ask me to dig up any more, because I won't—not for you nor no other darn man! Get that?"

This was not in the courtroom, so Bud was not fined for contempt. The judge was a married man himself, and he may have had a sympathetic understanding of Bud's position. At any rate, he listened unofficially, and helped Bud out with the legal part of it, so that Bud walked out of the judge's

office financially free, even though he had a suspicion that his freedom would not bear the test of prosperity, and that Marie's mother would let him alone only so long as he and prosperity were strangers.

CHAPTER III.

Bud Moore went down to the garage where he felt most at home, and stood there with his hands in his pockets and the corners of his mouth tipped downward and his eyes sullen. He took the ten-dollar bank note from his pocket, straightened out the wrinkles, and looked at it disdainfully. As plainly as though he spoke, his face told what he was thinking about—that *this* was what a woman had brought him to! He crumpled up the bill, and made a gesture as though he would throw it into the street, and a man behind him laughed abruptly. Bud scowled and turned toward him a belligerent glance, and the man stopped laughing as suddenly as he had begun.

"If you've got money to throw to the birds, brother, I guess I won't make the proposition I was going to make. Thought I could talk business to you maybe, but I guess I better tie a can to that idea."

Bill grunted, and put the ten dollars in his pocket.

"What idea's that?"

"Oh, driving a car I'm taking south. Sprained my shoulder, and don't feel like tackling it myself. They tell me in here that you aren't doing anything now——" He made the pause that asks for an answer.

"They told you right. I've done it."

The man's eyebrows lifted, but since Bud did not explain, he went on with his own explanation.

"You don't remember me, but I rode into Big Basin with you last summer. I know you can *drive*, and it doesn't matter a lot whether it's asphalt or cow trail you drive over."

Bud was in too sour a mood to respond to the flattery. He did not even grunt.

"Could you take a car south for me? There'll be night driving and bad roads, maybe——"

"If you know what you say you know about my driving, what's the idea—asking me if I *can?*"

"Well, put it another way. Will you?"

"You're on. Where's the car? Here?" Bud sent a seeking look into the depths of the garage. He knew every car in there. "What is there in it for me?" he added perfunctorily, because he would have gone just for the sake of getting a free ride, rather than stay in San José overnight.

"There's good money in it—if you can drive with your mouth shut. This isn't any booster parade. Fact is—let's walk to the depot, while I tell you." He stepped out of the doorway, and Bud gloomily followed him. "Little trouble with my wife," the man explained apologetically. "Having me shadowed, and all that sort of thing. And I've got business south, and want to be left alone to do it. Darn these women!" he exploded suddenly.

Bud mentally said amen, but kept his mouth shut upon his sympathy with the sentiment.

"Foster's my name. Now here's a key to the garage at this address." He handed Bud a padlock key and an address scribbled on a card. "That's my place in Oakland—out by Lake Merritt. You go there to-night, get the car, and have it down at the Broadway Wharf to meet the eleven-thirty boat—the one the theater crowd uses. Have plenty of gas and oil; there won't be any stops after we start. Park out pretty well near the shore end, as close as you can get to that ten-foot gum sign, and be ready to go when I climb in. I may have a friend with me. You know Oakland?"

"Fair to middling. I can get around by myself."

"Well, that's all right. I've got to go back to the city—catching the next train. You better take the two-fifty to Oakland. Here's money for whatever expense there is. And say! Put these number plates in your pocket, and take off the ones on the car. I bought these

of a fellow that had a smash; they'll do for the trip. Put them on, will you? She's wise to the car number, of course. Put the plates you take off under the seat cushion; don't leave 'em. Be just as careful as if it was a life-and-death matter, will you? I've got a big deal on down there, and I don't want her spilling the beans just to satisfy a grudge—which she would do in a minute. So don't fail to be at the ferry, parked so you can slide out easy. Get down there by that big gum sign. I'll find you all right."

"I'll be there." Bud thrust the key and another ten dollars into his pocket and turned away.

"And don't say anything——"

"Do I look like an open-faced guy?" The man laughed. "Not much, or I wouldn't have picked you for the trip." He hurried down to the depot platform, for his train was already whistling farther down the yards.

Bud slid the wrapped number plates into the inside pocket of his overcoat, pushed his hands deep into his pockets, and walked up to the cheap hotel which had been his bleak substitute for a home during his trouble. He packed everything he owned—a big suit case held it all by squeezing—paid his bill at the office, accepted a poor cigar, and in return said, yes, he was going to strike out and look for work, and took the train for Oakland.

A street car landed him within two blocks of the address on the tag, and Bud walked through thickening fog and dusk to the place. Foster had a good-looking house, he observed. Set back on the middle of two lots it was, with a cement drive sloping up from the street to the garage backed against the alley. Under cover of lighting a cigarette, he inspected the place before he ventured farther. The blinds were drawn down—at least upon the side next the drive. On the other he thought he caught a gleam of light at the rear; rather, shining on the next house the beam that came from a gleam of light in Foster's dining room or kitchen. But he was not certain of it, and the absolute quiet reassured him so that he went up the drive, keeping on the grass border until he reached the garage. This, he told himself, was just like a woman—raising Cain around so that a man had to sneak into his own place to get his own car out of his own garage. If Foster was up against the kind of deal Bud had been up against, he sure had Bud's sympathy, and he sure would get the best help Bud was capable of giving him.

The key fitted the lock, and Bud went in, set down his suit case, and closed the door after him. It was dark as a pocket in there, save where a square of grayness betrayed a window. Bud felt his way to the side of the car, groped to the robe rail, found a heavy, fringed robe, and curtained the window until he could see no thread of light anywhere, after which he ventured to use his flash light until he had found the switch and turned on the light.

There was a little side door at the back, and it was fastened on the inside with a stout hook. Bud thought for a minute, took a long chance, and let himself out into the yard, closing the door after him. He walked around the garage to the front, and satisfied himself that the light inside did not show. Then he went around the back of the house, and found that he had not been mistaken about the light. The house was certainly occupied, and, like the neighboring houses, seemed concerned only with the dinner hour of the inmates. He went back, hooked the little door on the inside, and began a careful inspection of the car he was to drive.

It was a big, late-model touring car, of the kind that sells for nearly five thousand dollars. Bud's eyes lightened with satisfaction when he looked at it. There would be pleasure as well as profit in driving this old girl to Los Angeles, he told himself.

There did not seem to be a thing that he could do to her, but nevertheless he got down and gave all the grease cups a turn, removed the number plates and put them under the rear-seat cushion, inspected the gas tank and the oil gauge and the fan belt and the radiator, turned back the trip mileage to

zero—professional driving had made Bud careful as a taxi driver about recording the mileage of a trip—looked at the clock set in the instrument board, and pondered.

What if the old lady took a notion to drive somewhere? She would miss the car and raise a hullabaloo, and maybe crab the whole thing in the start. In that case, Bud decided that the best way would be to let her go. He could pile onto the empty trunk rack behind, and manage somehow to get off with the car when she stopped. Still, there was not much chance of her going out in the fog—and, now that he listened, he heard the drip of rain. No, there was not much chance. Foster had not seemed to think there was any chance of the car being in use, and Foster ought to know. He would wait until about ten-thirty, to play safe, and then go.

Rain spelled skid chains to Bud. He looked in the tool box and found a set, and put them on. Then, because he was not going to take any chances, he put another set that he found hanging up on the front wheels. After that he turned out the light, took down the robe, and wrapped himself in it, and laid himself down on the rear seat to wait for ten-thirty.

He dozed, and the next he knew there was a fumbling at the door in front and the muttering of a voice. Bud slid noiselessly out of the car and under it, head to the rear, where he could crawl out quickly. The voice sounded like a man, and presently the door opened, and Bud was sure of it. He caught a querulous sentence or two.

"Door left unlocked—the ignorant hound! Good thing I don't trust him too far——" Some one came fumbling in and switched on the light. "Careless hound—told him to be careful—never even put the robe on the rail where it belongs—and then they howl about the way they're treated! Want more wages—don't earn what they do get——"

Bud, twisting his head, saw a pair of slippered feet beside the running board. The owner of the slippers was folding the robe and laying it over the rail, and grumbling to himself all the while. "Have to come out in the rain—daren't trust him an inch. Just like him to go off and leave the door unlocked——" With a last grunt or two the mumbling ceased. The light was switched off, and Bud heard the doors pulled shut and the rattle of the padlock and chain. He waited another minute and crawled out.

"Might have told me there was a father-in-law in the outfit," he grumbled to himself. "Big a butt-in as Marie's mother, at that. Huh! Never saw my suit case, never noticed the different numbers, never got next to the chains—hunh! Regular old he-hen, and I sure don't blame Foster for wanting to tie a can to the bunch."

Very cautiously he turned his flash light on the face of the automobile clock. The hour hand stood a little past ten, and Bud decided he had better go. He would have to fill the gas tank and get more oil, and he wanted to test the air in his tires. No stops after they started, said Foster; Bud had set his heart on showing Foster something in the way of getting a car over the road.

Father-in-law would holler if he heard the car, but Bud did not intend that father-in-law should hear it. He would much rather run the gantlet of that driveway than wait in the dark any longer. He remembered the slope down to the street, and grinned contentedly. He would give father-in-law a chance to throw a fit next morning.

He set his suit case in the tonneau, went out of the little door, edged around to the front, and very, very cautiously he unlocked the big doors and left them open. He went in and felt the front wheels, judged that they were set straight, felt around the interior until his fingers touched a block of wood, and stepped off the approximate length of the car in front of the garage, allowing for the swing of the doors, and placed the block there. Then he went back, eased off the emergency brake, grabbed a good handhold, and strained forward.

The chains hindered, but the floor sloped to the front a trifle, which helped. In a moment he had the satisfaction of feeling the big car give, then roll slowly ahead. The front wheels dipped down over the threshold, and Bud stepped upon the running board, took the wheel, and by instinct, more than by sight, guided her through the doorway without a scratch. She rolled forward like a black shadow until a wheel jarred against the block, whereupon he set the emergency brake and got off, breathing free once more. He picked up the block and carried it back, went inside and hooked the little door, came out and quietly closed the big doors and locked them, taking time to do it silently. Then, with a glow of satisfaction with his work, he climbed slowly into the car, settled down luxuriously in the driver's seat, eased off the brake, and, with a little lurch of his body forward, he started the car rolling down the driveway.

There was a risk, of course, in coasting out onto the street with no lights, but he took it cheerfully, planning to dodge if he saw the lights of another car coming. It pleased him to remember that the street inclined toward the bay. He rolled past the house without a betraying sound, dipped over the curb to the asphalt, swung the car townward, and coasted nearly half a block, with the ignition switch on, before he pushed up the throttle, let in his clutch, and got the answering chug-chug of the engine. With the lights on full, he went purring down the street in the misty fog, pleased with himself and his mission.

CHAPTER IV.

At a lunch wagon down near the water front, Bud stopped and bought two "hot-dog" sandwiches and a mug of hot coffee boiled with milk in it and sweetened with three cubes of sugar. "O-oh, boy!" he ejaculated gleefully, and, leaning back luxuriously in the big car, he ate and drank until he could eat and drink no more. Then, with a bag of bananas on the seat beside him, he drove on down to the mole, searching through the drizzle for the big gum sign which Foster had named. Just even with the coughing engine of a waiting through train, he saw it, and backed in against the curb, pointing the car's radiator toward the mainland. He had still half an hour to wait, and he buttoned on the curtains of the car, since a wind from across the bay was sending the drizzle slantwise. Moreover, it occurred to him that Foster would not object to the concealment while they were passing through Oakland. Then he listlessly ate a banana while he waited.

The hoarse siren of a ferryboat bellowed through the murk. Bud started the engine, throttled it down to his liking, and left it to warm up for the flight. He ate another banana, thinking lazily that he wished he owned this car.

A street car slipped past, bobbing down the track like a duck sailing over ripples. A local train clanged down to the depot and stood jangling its bell while it disgorged passengers for the last boat to the city.

Feet came hurrying. Two voices mumbled together. "Here he is," said one. "That's the number I gave him." Bud felt some one step hurriedly upon the running board. The tonneau door was yanked open. A man puffed audibly behind him. "Yuh ready?" Foster's voice hissed in Bud's ear.

"R'aring to go." Bud heard the second man get in and shut the door, and he jerked the gear lever into low. His foot came gently back with the clutch, and the car slid out and away.

Foster settled back on the cushions with a sigh. The other man was fumbling the side curtains, swearing under his breath when his fingers bungled the fastenings.

"Everything all ready?" Foster's voice was strident with anxiety.

"Sure thing."

"Well, head south; any road you know best. And keep going till I tell you to stop. How's the oil and gas?"

"Full up. Gas enough for three hundred miles. Extra gallon of oil in

the car. What d'yah want—the speed limit through town?"

"Nah. Side streets, if you know any. They might get quick action and telephone ahead."

"Leave it to me, brother."

Bud did not know for sure, never having been pursued, but it seemed to him that a straightaway course down a main street where other cars were scudding homeward would be the safest route, because the simplest. He held the car to a hurry-home pace that was well within the law, and worked into the direct route to Hayward. He sensed that either Foster or his friend turned frequently to look back through the square celluloid window, but he did not pay much attention to them. Keeping sharp lookout for skidding cars and unexpected pedestrians and street-car crossings and the like fully occupied Bud.

For all that, an occasional mutter came unheeded to his ears, the closed curtains preserving articulate sounds like room walls.

"He's all right," he heard Foster whisper once. "Better than if he was in on it." He did not know that Foster was speaking of him.

"——if he gets next," the friend mumbled.

"Ah, quit your worrying!" Foster grumbled. "The trick's turned; that's something."

At dawn they neared a little village. Through this particular county the road was unpaved and muddy, and the car was a sight to behold. The only clean spot was on the wind shield, where Bud had reached around once or twice with a handful of waste and cleaned a place to see through. It was raining soddenly, steadily, as though it always had rained and always would rain.

Bud turned his face slightly to one side. "How about stopping? I'll have to feed her some oil, and it wouldn't hurt to fill the gas tank again. These heavy roads eat up a lot of extra power. What's her average mileage on a gallon, Foster?"

"How the deuce should I know?" Foster snapped, just coming out of a doze.

"You ought to know, with your own car—and gas costing what it does."

"Oh—ah—what was it you asked?" Foster yawned aloud. "I musta been asleep."

"I guess you musta been, all right," Bud grunted. "Do you want breakfast here, or don't you? I've got to stop for gas and oil; that's what I was asking."

The two consulted together, and finally told Bud to stop at the first garage and get his oil and gas. After that he could drive to a drug store and buy a couple of thermos bottles, and after that he could go to the nearest restaurant and get the bottles filled with black coffee and have lunch put up for six people. Foster and his friend would remain in the car.

Bud did these things, revising the plan to the extent of eating his own breakfast at the counter in the restaurant while the lunch was being prepared in the kitchen.

From where he sat he could look across at the muddy car standing before a closed millinery-and-dry-goods store. The curtains were buttoned down tight, and he thought amusedly of the two men huddled inside, shivering and hungry, yet refusing to come in and get warmed up with a decent breakfast. Foster, he thought, must certainly be scared of his wife, if he daren't show himself in this little rube town. For the first time Bud had a vagrant suspicion that Foster had not told quite all there was to tell about this trip. But it was none of his business what the man had up his sleeve. He wanted to get somewhere quickly and quietly, and Bud was getting him there. That was all he had to consider. Warmed and once more filled with a sense of well-being, Bud made himself a cigarette before the lunch was ready, and, with his arms full of food, he went out and across the street. Just before he reached the car, one of the thermos bottles started to slide down under his elbow. Bud attempted to grip it against his ribs, but the thing

had developed a slipperiness that threatened the whole load, so he stopped to rearrange his packages, and got an irritated sentence or two from his passengers.

"Giving yourself away like that! Why couldn't you fake up a mileage? Everybody lies or guesses about the gas——"

"Aw, what's the difference? The simp ain't next to anything. He thinks I own it."

"Well, don't make the mistake of thinking he's a sheep. Once he——"

Bud suddenly remembered that he wanted something more from the restaurant, and returned forthwith, slipping thermos bottle and all. He bought two packages of chewing gum to while away the time when he could not handily smoke, and when he returned to the car he went muttering disapproving remarks about the rain and the mud and the bottles. He poked his head under the front curtain and into a glum silence. The two men leaned back in the two corners of the wide seat, with their heads drawn down into their coat collars and their hands thrust under the robe. Foster reached forward and took a thermos bottle; his partner seized another.

"Say, you might get us a bottle of good whisky, too," said Foster, holding out a small gold piece between his gloved thumb and finger. "Be quick about it, though; we want to be traveling. Lord, it's cold!"

Bud went into a saloon a few doors up the street, and was back presently with the bottle and the change. There being nothing more to detain them there, he kicked some of the mud off his feet, scraped off the rest on the edge of the running board, and climbed in, fastening the curtain against the storm. "Lovely weather," he grunted sarcastically. "Straight on to Bakersfield, huh?"

There was a minute of silence, save for the gurgling of liquid running out of a bottle into an eager mouth. Bud laid an arm along the back of his seat and waited, his head turned toward them. "Where are you fellows going, anyway?" he asked impatiently.

"Los An——" the stranger gurgled, still drinking.

"Yuma!" snapped Foster. "You shut up, Mert! I'm running this!"

"Better——"

"Yuma. You hit the shortest trail for Yuma, Bud. I'm running this."

Foster seemed distinctly out of humor. He told Mert again to shut up, and Mert did so grumblingly, but somewhat diverted and consoled, Bud fancied, by the sandwiches and coffee—and the whisky, too, he guessed. For presently there was the odor of an uncorked bottle in the car.

Bud started, and drove steadily on through the rain that never ceased, and as he drove he turned over and over in his mind the mysterious trip he was taking. It had come to seem just a little too mysterious to suit him. And when Bud Moore was not suited he was apt to do something about it.

What he did in this case was to stop in Bakersfield at a garage that had a combination drug store and news stand next door. He explained shortly to his companions that he had to stop and buy a road map, and that he wouldn't be long, and crawled out into the rain. At the open doorway of the garage, he turned and looked at the car. No, it certainly did not look in the least like the machine he had driven down to the Oakland mole—except, of course, that it was big and of the same make. It might have been empty, too, for all the sign it gave of being occupied. Foster and Mert evidently had no intention whatever of showing themselves.

Bud went into the drug store, remained there for five minutes perhaps, and emerged with a morning paper, which he rolled up and put into his pocket. He had glanced through its feature news, and had read hastily one front-page article that had nothing whatever to do with the war, but the daring robbery of a jewelry store in San Francisco the night before.

The safe, it seemed, had been opened almost in plain sight of the street crowds, with the lights full on in the

store. A clever arrangement of two movable mirrors had served to shield the thief—or thieves. For no longer than two or three minutes, it seemed, the lights had been off, and it was thought that the raiders had used the interval of darkness to move the mirrors into position. Which went far toward proving that the crime had been carefully planned in advance. Furthermore, the article stated, with some assurance, that trusted employees were involved.

Bud had also glanced at the news items of less importance, and had been startled enough—yet not so much surprised as he would have been a few hours earlier—to read, under the caption, "Daring thief steals costly car," to learn that a certain rich man of Oakland had lost his new automobile. The address of the bereaved man had been given, and Bud's heart had given a flop when he read it. The details of the theft had not been told, but Bud never noticed their absence. His memory supplied all that for him with sufficient vividness.

He rolled a cigarette, lighted it, and, with the paper stuffed carelessly into his pocket he went to the car, climbed in, and drove on to the south, just as matter-of-factly as though he had not just then discovered that he, Bud Moore, had stolen a six-thousand-dollar automobile the night before.

CHAPTER V.

They went on and on, through the rain and the wind, sometimes through the mud as well, where the roads were not paved. Foster had almost pounced upon the newspaper when he discovered it in Bud's pocket as he climbed in, and Bud knew that the two read that feature article avidly. But if they had any comments to make they saved them for future privacy. Beyond a few muttered sentences they were silent.

Bud did not care whether they talked or not. They might have talked themselves hoarse, when it came to that, without changing his opinions or his attitude toward them. He had started out the most unsuspecting of men, and now he was making up for it by suspecting Foster and Mert of being robbers and hypocrites and potential murderers. He could readily imagine them shooting him in the back of the head while he drove, if that would suit their purpose, or if they thought that he suspected them.

He kept reviewing his performance in that garage. Had he really intended to steal the car, he would not have had the nerve to take the chances he had taken. He shivered when he recalled how he had slid under the car when the owner came in. What if the man had seen him or heard him? He would be in jail now, instead of splashing along the highway many miles to the south. For that matter, he was likely to land in jail, anyway, before he was done with Foster, unless he did some pretty close figuring.

After an hour or so, when his stomach began to hint that it was eating time for healthy men, he slowed down and turned his head toward the tonneau. There they were, hunched down under the robe, their heads drawn into their collars like two turtles half asleep on a mud bank.

"Say, how about some lunch?" he demanded. "Maybe you fellows can get along on whisky and sandwiches, but I'm doing the work, and, if you notice, I've been doing it for about twelve hours now without any let-up. There's a town ahead here a ways——"

"Drive around it, then," growled Foster, lifting his chin to stare ahead through the fogged wind shield. "We've got hot coffee here, and there's plenty to eat. Enough for two meals. How far have we come since we started?"

"Far enough to be called crazy if we go much farther without a square meal." Bud snapped. Then he glanced at the rumpled newspaper, and added carelessly: "Anything new in the paper?"

"No!" Mert spoke up sharply. "Go on. You're doing all right so far; don't spoil it by laying down on your job!"

"Sure, go on!" Foster urged. "We'll stop when we get away from this darn burg, and you can rest your legs a little while we eat."

Bud went on, straight through the middle of the town, without stopping. They scurried down a long, dismal lane toward a low-lying range of hills partly wooded with bald patches of barren earth and rock. Beyond were mountains which Bud guessed was the Tehachapi range. Beyond them, he believed he would find desert and desertion. He had never been over this road before, so he could no more than guess. He knew that the ridge road led to Los Angeles, and he did not want anything of that road. Too many travelers. He swung into a decent-looking road that branched off to the left, wondering where it led, but not greatly caring. He kept that road until they had climbed over a ridge or two and were in the mountains. Soaked wilderness lay all about them, green in places where grass would grow, brushy in places, barren and scarred with outcropping ledges, penciled with wire fences drawn up over high knolls.

In a sequestered spot where the road hugged close the concave outline of a bushy bluff, Bud slowed and turned out behind a fringe of bushes, and stopped.

"This is safe enough," he announced, "and my muscles are kinda crampy. I'll tell the world that's been quite some spell of straight driving."

Mert grunted, but Foster was inclined to cheerfulness. "You're some driver, Bud. I've got to hand it to you."

Bud grinned. "All right. I'll take it; half of it, anyway, if you don't mind. You must remember I don't know you fellows. Most generally I collect half in advance on a long trip like this."

Foster's eyes opened, but he reached obediently inside his coat. Mert growled inaudible comments upon Bud's nerve.

"Oh, we can't kick, Mert," Foster smoothed him down diplomatically. "He's delivered the goods so far. And he certainly does know how to put a car over the road. He don't know us, remember!"

Whereupon Mert grunted again and subsided. Foster extracted a bank note from his bill folder, which Bud observed had a prosperous plumpness, and held it out to Bud.

"I guess fifty dollars won't hurt your feelings, will it, brother? That's more than you'd charge for twice the trip, but we appreciate a tight mouth and the hurry-up trip you've made of it, and all that. It's special work, and we're willing to pay a special price. See?"

"Sure. But I only want half right now. Maybe," he added, with the lurking twinkle in his eyes, "I won't suit yuh quite so well the rest of the way. I'll have to go b' guess and b' gosh from here on. I've got some change left from what I bought for yuh this morning, too. Wait till I check up."

Very precisely he did so, and accepted enough from Foster to make up the amount to twenty-five dollars. He was tempted to take more. For one minute he even contemplated holding the two up and taking enough to salve his hurt pride and his endangered reputation.

He ate a generous lunch of sandwiches and dill pickles and a wedge of tasteless coconut cake, and drank half a pint or so of the hot, black coffee, and felt more cheerful.

"Want to get down and stretch your legs? I've got to take a look at the tires, anyway. Thought she was riding like one was kinda flat the last few miles."

They climbed out stiffly into the rain, stood around the car and stared at it and at Bud testing his tires, and walked off down the road for a little distance, where they stood talking earnestly together. From the corner of his eye Bud caught Mert tilting his head that way, and smiled to himself. Of course they were talking about him! Any fool would know that much. Also they were discussing the best means of getting rid of him or of saddling upon him the crime of stealing the car or some other angle at which he touched their problem.

Under cover of testing the rear wheel farthest from them, he peeked into the tonneau and took a good look at the small traveling bag they had kept on the seat between them all the way. He wished he dared—— But they were coming back, as if they would not trust him too long alone with that bag. He bent again to the tire, and when they climbed back into the curtained car he was getting the pump tubing out to pump up that particular tire a few pounds.

They did not pay much attention to him. They seemed preoccupied and not too friendly with each other, Bud thought.

He screwed down the valve cap, coiled the pump tube, and stowed it away in the tool box, opened the gas tank and looked in, and right there he did something else; something that would have spelled disaster if either of them had seen him do it. He spilled a handful of little round white objects like marbles into the tank before he screwed on the cap, and from his pocket he pulled a little paper box, crushed it in his hand, and threw it as far as he could into the bushes. Then, whistling just above his breath, which was a habit with Bud when his work was going along pleasantly, he scraped the mud off his feet, climbed in, and drove on down the road.

The big car picked up speed on the down grade, racing along as though the short rest had given it a fresh enthusiasm for the long road that wound in and out and up and down and seemed to have no end. As though he joyed in putting her over the miles, Bud drove. Came a hill; he sent her up it with a devil-may-care confidence, swinging around curves with a squall of the powerful horn that made cattle feeding half a mile away on the slopes lift their heads, startled, and look.

"How much longer are you good for, Bud?" Foster leaned forward to ask, his tone flattering with the praise that was in it.

"Me? As long as this old boat will travel," Bud flung back gleefully, giving her a little more speed as they rocked over a culvert and sped away to the next hill. He chuckled, but Foster had settled back again, satisfied, and did not notice.

Halfway up the next hill, the car slowed suddenly, gave a snort, gasped twice as Bud shifted gears to help her out, and died. She was a heavy car to hold on that stiff grade, and, in spite of the full emergency brake, helped out with the service brake, she inched backward until the rear wheels came full against a hump across the road and held.

Bud did not say anything; your efficient chauffeur reserves his eloquence for something more complex than a dead engine. He took down the curtain on that side, leaned out into the rain and inspected the road behind him, shifted into reverse and backed to the bottom.

"What's wrong?" Foster leaned forward to ask senselessly.

"When I hit level ground, I'm going to find out," Bud retorted, still watching the road and steering with one hand. "Does the old girl ever cut up with you on hills?"

"Why—no. She never has," Foster answered dubiously.

"Reason I asked, she didn't just choke down from the pull. She went and died on me."

"That's funny," Foster observed weakly.

On the level, Bud went into neutral and pressed the self-starter with a pessimistic deliberation. He got three chugs and a small backfire into the carburetor, and after that silence. He tried it again, coaxing her with the spark and throttle. The engine gave a snort, hesitated, and then, quite suddenly, began to throb with docile regularity that seemed to belie any previous intention of "cutting up."

Bud fed her the gas, and took a run at the hill. She went up like a thoroughbred, and died at the top, just when the road had dipped into the descent. Bud sent her downhill on compression, but at the bottom she refused to find her voice again when he turned on the switch and pressed the accelerator.

She simply rolled down to the first incline, and stopped there like a balky mule.

"Thunder!" said Bud, and looked around at Foster. "Do you reckon the old boat is jinxed, just because I said I could drive her as far as she'd go? The old rip ain't shot a cylinder since we hit the top of the hill."

"Maybe the mixture——"

"Yeah," Bud interrupted, with a secret grin. "I've been wondering about that and the needle valve and the feed pipe and a few other little things. Well, we'll have a look."

Forthwith he climbed out into the drizzle and began a conscientious search for the trouble. He inspected the needle valve with much care, and had Foster on the front seat trying to start her afterward. He looked for a short circuit. He changed the carburetor adjustment, and Foster got a weary chug-chug that ceased almost as soon as it had begun. He looked all the spark plugs over, he went after the vacuum feed, and found that working perfectly. He stood back finally, with his hands on his hips, and stared at the engine and shook his head slowly twice.

Foster, in the driver's seat, swore and tried again to start it. "Maybe if you cranked it," he suggested tentatively.

"What for? The starter turns her over all right. Spark's all right, too. Strong and hot. However——" With a sigh of resignation, Bud got out what tools he wanted and went to work. Foster got out and stood around, offering suggestions that were too obvious to be of much use, but which Bud made it a point to follow as far as was practicable.

Foster said it must be the carburetor, and Bud went relentlessly after the carburetor. He impressed Foster with the fact that he knew cars, and when he told Foster to get in and try her again, Foster did so with the air of having seen the end of the trouble. At first it did seem so, for the engine started at once, and worked smoothly until Bud had gathered his wrenches off the running board and was climbing in, when it slowed down and stopped, in spite of Foster's frantic efforts to keep it alive with spark and throttle.

"Good glory!" cried Bud, looking reproachfully in at Foster. "What'd yuh want to stop her for?"

"I didn't!" Foster's consternation was ample proof of his innocence. "What the devil *ails* the thing?"

"You tell me, and I'll fix it," Bud retorted savagely. Then he smoothed his manner and went back to the carburetor. "Acts like the gas kept choking off," he said, "but it ain't that. She's O. K. I know, 'cause I've tested it clean back to the tank. There's nothing the matter with the feed; she's getting gas same as she has all along. I can take off the mag. and see if anything's wrong there, but I'm pretty sure there ain't. Couldn't any water or mud get in; not with that oil pan perfect. She looks dry as a bone, and clean. Try her again, Foster; wait till I set the spark about right. Now, you leave it there, and give her the gas kinda gradual, and catch her when she talks. We'll see——"

They saw that she was not going to "talk" at all. Bud swore a little and got out more tools and went after the magneto with grim determination. Again Foster climbed out and stood in the drizzle and watched him. Mert crawled over into the front seat, where he could view the proceedings through the wind shield. Bud glanced up and saw him there, and grinned maliciously. "Your friend seems to love wet weather same as a cat does," he observed to Foster. "He'll be terrible happy if you're stalled here till you get a tow in somewhere."

"It's your business to see that we aren't stalled," Mert snapped at him viciously. "You've got to make the thing go. You've *got* to!"

"Well, I ain't the Almighty," Bud retorted acidly. "I can't perform miracles while yuh wait."

"Starting a cranky car doesn't take a miracle," whined Mert. "Anybody that knows cars——"

"She's no business to be a cranky car," Foster interposed pacifically.

"Why, she's practically new!" He stepped over a puddle, and stood beside Bud, peering down at the silent engine. "Have you looked at the intake valve?" he asked pathetically.

"Why, sure. It's all right. Everything's all right as far as I can find out." Bud looked Foster straight in the eye, and if his own were a bit anxious that was to be expected. "Everything's all right," he added measuredly. "Only she won't go." He waited, watching Foster's face.

Foster chewed a corner of his lip worriedly. "Well, what do you make of it?" His tone was helpless.

Bud threw out his two hands expressively and shook his head. He let down the hood, climbed in, slid into the driver's seat, and went through the operation of starting. Only he didn't start. The self-starter hummed as it spun the flywheel, but nothing whatever was elicited save a profane phrase from Foster and a growl from Mert. Bud sat back, flaccid, his whole body owning defeat.

"Well, that means a tow in to the nearest shop," he stated after a minute of dismal silence. "She's dead as a doornail."

Mert sat back in his corner of the seat, muttering into his collar. Foster looked at him, looked at Bud, looked at the car and at the surrounding hills. He seemed terribly depressed and at the same time determined to make the best of things. Bud could almost pity him—almost.

"Do you know how far it is back to that town we passed?" he asked Bud spiritlessly after a while.

Bud looked at the speedometer, made a mental calculation, and told him it was fifteen miles. Towns, it seemed, were rather far apart in this section of the country.

"Well, let's see the road map. How far is it to the next one?"

"Search me. They didn't have any road maps back there. Darned hick burg."

Foster studied a while. "Well, let's see if we can push her off the middle of the road, and then I guess we'll have to let you walk back and get help. Eh, Mert? There's nothing else we can do——"

"What yuh going to tell 'em?" Mert demanded suspiciously.

Bud permitted a surprised glance to slant back at Mert. "Why, whatever you fellows fake up for me to tell," he said naïvely. "I know the truth ain't popular on this trip, so get together and dope out something. And hand me over my suit case, will yuh? I want some dry socks to put on when I get there."

Foster very obligingly tilted the suit case over into the front seat. After that he and Mert, as by a common thought impelled, climbed out and went over to a bushy live oak to confer in privacy. Mert carried the leather bag with him.

By the time they had finished and were coming back, Bud had gone through his belongings and had taken out a few letters that might prove awkward if found there later, two pairs of socks, and his razor and toothbrush. He was folding the socks to stow away in his pocket when they got in.

"You can say that we're from Los Angeles and on our way home," Foster told him curtly. It was evident to Bud that the two had again not quite agreed upon some subject they had discussed. "That's all right. I'm Foster, and he's named Brown—if any one gets too curious."

"Fine! Fine because it's so simple. I'll eat another sandwich, if you don't mind, before I go. I'll tell a heartless world that fifteen miles is some little stroll—for a guy that hates walkin'."

"You're paid for it," Mert growled at him rudely.

"Sure, I'm paid for it," Bud assented placidly, taking a bite. They might have wondered at his calm, but they did not. He ate what he wanted, took a long drink of the coffee, and started off up the hill they had rolled down an hour or more past.

He walked briskly, and when he was well out of earshot Bud began to whistle. Now and then he stopped to chuckle, and sometimes he frowned at

an uncomfortable thought. But on the whole he was very well pleased with his present circumstance.

CHAPTER VI.

In a little village which he had glimpsed from the top of a hill, Bud went into the cluttered little general store and bought a few blocks of slim, evil-smelling matches and a couple of pounds of sliced bacon, a loaf of stale bread, and two small cans of baked beans. He stuffed them all into the pocket of his overcoat, and went out and hunted up a long-distance telephone sign. It had not taken him more than an hour to walk to the town, for he had only to follow a country road that branched off that way for a couple of miles down a valley.

He called up San Francisco, and got the chief of police's office on the wire, and told them where they would find the men who had robbed that jewelry store of all its diamonds and some other unset jewels. Also he mentioned the car that was stolen, and that was now stalled and waiting for some kind soul to come and give it a tow.

He speedily had all the attention of the chief, and, having thought out in advance his answers to certain pertinent questions, he did not stutter when they were asked. Yes, he had been hired to drive the car south, and he had overheard enough to make him suspicious on the way. He knew that they had stolen the car. He was not absolutely sure that they were the diamond thieves, but it would be easy enough to find out, because officers sent after them would naturally be mistaken for first aid from some garage, and the cops could nab the men and look into that grip they were so careful not to let out of their sight.

"Are you sure they won't get the car repaired and go on?" It was perfectly natural that the chief should fear that very thing.

"No chance!" Bud chuckled into the phone. "Not a chance in the world, chief. They'll be right there where I left 'em, unless some car comes along and gives 'em a tow. And if that happens you'll be able to trace 'em." He started to hang up, and added another bit of advice: "Say, chief, you better tell whoever gets the car to empty the gas tank and clean out the carburetor and vacuum feed, and she'll go all right. Adios."

He hung up and paid the charge hurriedly, and went out and down a crooked little lane that led between bushes to a creek and heavy timber. It did not seem to him advisable to linger; the San Francisco chief of police might set some officer in that village on his trail just as a matter of precaution. Bud told himself that he would do it were he in the chief's place. When he reached the woods along the creek he ran, keeping as much as possible on thick leaf mold that left the least impression. He headed to the east as nearly as he could judge, and when he came to a rocky cañon he struck into it.

He presently found himself in a network of small gorges that twisted away into the hills without any system whatever, as far as he could see. He took one that seemed to lead straightest toward where the sun would rise next morning, and climbed laboriously deeper and deeper into the hills. After a while he had to descend from the ridge, where he found himself standing bleakly revealed against a lowering, slaty sky that dripped rain incessantly. As far as he could see were hills and more hills, bald and barren except in certain cañons whose deeper shadows told of timber. Away off to the southwest a bright light showed briefly—the headlight of a Santa Fe train, he guessed it must be. To the east, which he faced, the land was broken with bare hills that fell just short of being mountains. He went down the first cañon that opened in that direction, plowing doggedly ahead into the unknown.

That night Bud camped in the lee of a bank that was fairly well screened with rocks and bushes, and dined off broiled bacon and bread and a can of

beans, with tomato sauce, and called it a meal.

At daylight he opened another can of beans, and made himself two thick bean sandwiches, and walked on while he ate them slowly. They tasted mighty good, Bud thought, but he wished fleetingly that he was back in the little green cottage on North Sixth Street, getting his own breakfast. He felt as though he could drink about four cups of coffee, and as to hot cakes—— But breakfast in the little green cottage recalled Marie, and Marie was a bitter memory. All the more bitter because he did not know where burrowed the root of his hot resentment. In a strong man's love for his home and his mate was it rooted, and drew therefrom the wormwood of love thwarted and spurned.

After a while the high air currents flung aside the clouds like curtains before a doorway. The sunlight flashed out dazzlingly, and showed Bud that the world, even this tumbled world, was good to look upon. His instincts were all for the great outdoors, and from such the sun brings quick response. Bud lifted his head, looked out over the hills to where a bare plain stretched in the far distance, and went on more briskly.

Late that afternoon, by traveling steadily in one direction, he topped a low ridge, and saw an arm of the desert thrust out to meet him. A scooped gully with gravelly sides and rocky bottom led down that way, and because his feet were sore from so much side-hill travel, Bud went down. He was pretty well fagged, too, and ready to risk meeting men, if thereby he might gain a square meal. Though he was not starving, or anywhere near it, he craved warm food and hot coffee.

So when he presently came upon two sway-backed burros that showed the sweaty imprint of pack saddles freshly removed, and a couple of horses also sweat-roughened, he straightway assumed that some one was making camp not far away. One of the horses was hobbled, and they were all eating hungrily the grass that grew along the gully's sides. Camp was not only close, but had not yet reached supper time, Bud guessed from the well-known range signs.

Two or three minutes proved him right. He came upon a man just driving the last tent peg. He straightened up and stared at Bud unblinkingly for a few seconds.

"Howdy, howdy!" he greeted him then, with tentative friendliness, and went on with his work. "You lost?" he added carefully. A man walking down out of the barren hills, and carrying absolutely nothing in the way of camp outfit, was enough to whet the curiosity of any one who knew that country. At the same time curiosity that became too apparent might be extremely unwelcome. So many things may drive a man into the hills—but few of them would bear discussion with strangers.

"Yes, I am, and I ain't." Bud came up and stood with his hands in his coat pockets, and watched the old fellow start his fire.

"Yeah—how about some supper? If you am and you ain't as hungry as you look——"

"I'll tell the world I am, and then some. I ain't had a square meal since yesterday morning, and I grabbed that at a quick-lunch joint. I'm open to supper engagements, brother."

"All right. There's a side of bacon in that kyack over there. Get it out and slice some off, and we'll have supper before you know it. We will," he added pessimistically, "if this dang brush will burn."

Bud found the bacon, and cut according to his appetite. His host got out a blackened coffeepot and half filled it with water from a dented bucket, and balanced it on one side of the struggling fire. He remarked that they had had some rain, to which Bud agreed. He added gravely that he believed it was going to clear up, though—unless the wind swung back into the storm quarter. Bud again professed cheerfully to be in perfect accord. After which conversational sparring they fell

back upon the little commonplaces of the moment.

Bud went into a brush patch, and managed to glean an armful of nearly dry wood, which he broke up with the ax and fed to the fire, coaxing it into freer blazing. The stranger watched him unobtrusively, critically, pottering about while Bud fried the bacon.

"I guess you've handled a frying pan before, all right," he remarked at last, when the bacon was fried without burning.

Bud grinned. "I saw one in a store window once as I was going by," he parried facetiously. "That was quite a while back."

"Yeah. Well, how's your luck with bannock? I've got it all mixed."

"Dump her in here, ole-timer," cried Bud, holding out the frying pan, emptied of all but grease. "Wish I had another hot skillet to turn over the top."

"I guess you've been there, all right," the other chuckled. "Well, I don't carry but the one frying pan. I'm equipped light, because I've got to outfit with grub farther along."

"Well, we'll make out all right, just like this." Bud propped the handle of the frying pan high with a forked stick, and stood up. "Say, my name's Bud Moore, and I'm not headed anywhere in particular. I'm just traveling in one general direction, and that's with the coast at my back. Drifting, that's all. I ain't done anything I'm ashamed of or scared of, but I am kinda bashful about towns. I tangled with a couple of crooks, and they're pulled by now, I expect. I'm dodging newspaper notoriety. Don't want to be named with 'em at all." He spread his hands with an air of finality. "That's my tale of woe," he supplemented, "boiled down to essentials. I just thought I'd tell you."

"Yeah. Well, my name's Cash Markham, and I despise to have folks get funny over it. I'm a miner and prospector, and I'm outfitting for a trip for another party, looking up an old location that showed good prospects ten years ago. Man died, and his wife's trying to get the claim relocated. Get you a plate outa that furtherest kyack and a cup. Bannock looks about done, so we'll eat."

That night Bud shared Cash Markham's blankets, and in the morning he cooked the breakfast, while Cash Markham rounded up the burros and horses. In that freemasonry of the wilderness they dispensed with credentials, save those each man carried in his face and in his manner.

It transpired, in the course of the forenoon's travel, that Cash Markham would like to have a partner, if he could find a man that suited. One guessed that he was fastidious in the matter of choosing his companions, in spite of the easy way in which he had accepted Bud. By noon they had agreed that Bud should go along and help relocate the widow's claim. Cash Markham hinted that they might do a little prospecting on their own account. It was a country he had long wanted to get into, he said, and, while he intended to do what Mrs. Thompson had hired him to do, still there was no law against their prospecting on their own account. And that, he explained, was one reason why he wanted a good man along. If the Thompson claim was there, Bud could do the work, under the supervision of Cash, and Cash could prospect.

"And, anyway, it's bad policy for a man to go off alone in this part of the country," he added, with a speculative look across the sandy waste they were skirting at a pace to suit the heavily packed burros. "Case of sickness or accident—or suppose the stock strays off—it's bad to be alone."

"Suits me fine to go with you," Bud declared. "I'm next thing to broke, but I've got a lot of muscle I can cash in on the deal. And I know the open. And I can rock a gold pan and not spill out all the colors, if there is any—and whatever else I know is liable to come in handy, and what I don't know I can learn."

"That's fair enough—fair enough," Markham agreed. "I'll allow you wages on the Thompson job till you've earned enough to balance up half the

outfit. After that it'll be fifty-fifty. How'll that be, Bud?"

"Fair enough—fair enough," Bud retorted, with faint mimicry. "If I was all up in the air a few days ago, I seem to have lit on my feet, and that's good enough for me right now. We'll let 'er ride that way."

And the twinkle, as he talked, was back in his eyes, and the smiley quirk was at the corner of his lips.

CHAPTER VII.

They outfitted at Needles, and began the slow, monotonous journey across the lean land which Cash had traversed years ago, when the stark, black pinnacles and rough knobs of rock might be hiding Indians with good eyesight and a vindictive temperament. Cash told many things out of his past, while they poked along, driving the packed burros before them.

It took them over a month to reach the place where Thompson had located his claim. It was desert, of course, sloping away on one side to a dreary waste of sand and weeds with now and then a giant cactus standing gloomily alone with malformed fingers stretched stiffly to the staring blue sky. Behind where they pitched their final camp the hills rose. But they were as stark and barren almost as the desert below. Black rock humps here and there, with ledges of mineral-bearing rock. Bushes and weeds and dry washes for the rest, with enough struggling grass to feed the horses and burros if they rustled hard enough for it.

They settled down quietly to a life of grinding monotony that would have driven some men crazy. But Bud, because it was a man's kind of monotony, bore it cheerfully. He was out of doors, and he was hedged about by no rules nor petty restrictions.

Life droned along very dully. Day after day was filled with petty details, grown important in the flat monotony, just as a hill looks like a mountain if it rises abruptly out of a level plain, with no real mountains in sight to measure it by.

The Thompson claim did not justify any enthusiasm whatever. They found it, relocated it, and worked out the assessment for the widow, and when Cash received her check he declared profanely that he would not give his share of the check for the whole claim.

Bud and he prospected a likely ledge west of the Thompson claim that showed strong indications on the surface, but less and less gold as they went into it, though it still seemed worth while if they had the capital to develop it further.

They staked and recorded the claim, calling it the Burro Lode, worked it for three hard months, and then gave it up.

"We've done all we can do to the Burro Lode for a year at least," said Cash. "The assessment work is all done—or will be when we muck out after that last shot. The claim is filed; I don't know what more we can do right away. Do you?"

"Sure thing," grinned Bud. "We can get outa here and go some place where it's green."

"Yeah." Cash meditated, absently eying the burros. "Where it's green." He looked at the near hills and at the desert and at the dreary march of the starved animals. "It's a long way to green country," he said.

They looked at the burros.

"They're tough little devils," Bud observed hopefully. "We could take it easy, traveling when it's coolest. And by packing light and graining the whole bunch——"

"Yeah. We can ease 'em through, I guess. It does seem as though it would be foolish to hang on here any longer." Carefully as he made his tests, Cash weighed the question of their going. "This last report kills any chance of interesting capital to the extent of developing the claim on a large enough scale to make it profitable. It's too long a haul to take the ore out, and it's too spotted to justify any great investment in machinery to handle it on the ground. And," he added, with an undernote of fierceness, "it's a terrible place for man

or beast to stay in, unless the object to be attained is great enough to justify enduring the hardships."

"You said a mouthful, Cash! There's a moon to-night; how about starting along about midnight? That would put us in Gila Bend early in the forenoon to-morrow."

"Suits me," said Cash. "Now I've made up my mind about going, I can't go too soon."

"You're on. Midnight sees us started." Bud went out with ropes to catch and tie up the burros and their two saddle horses. And as he went, for the first time in two months he whistled, a detail which Cash noted with a queer kind of smile.

Midnight and the moon riding high in the purple bowl of sky sprinkled thick with stars; with a little, warm wind stirring the parched weeds as they passed; with the burros shuffling, single file, along the dim trail, which was the short cut through the hills to the Bend. So they started on the long journey to the green country.

They would go on prospecting, using the widow's check for a grubstake. That much the partners had decided without argument. The gambling instinct was wide awake in Bud's nature, and, as for Cash, he would hunt gold as long as their money held out. When that was gone, they would get more, and go on prospecting. But they would prospect in a green country, where wood and water were not so precious as in the desert, and where, Cash averred, the chance of striking it rich was just as good; better, because they could kill game and make their grubstake last longer.

CHAPTER VIII.

They waited in Gila Bend for three days to strengthen the weakened animals with rest and good hay and grain. Then they took again to the trail, traveling as lightly as they could, with food for themselves and grain for the stock to last them until they reached Needles. From there, with fresh supplies, they pushed on up to Goldfield, found that camp in the throes of labor disputes, and went on to Tonopah.

There they found work for themselves and the burros, packing winter supplies to a mine lying back in the hills. They made money at it, and during the winter they made more. With the opening of spring, they outfitted again, and took the trail, their goal the high mountains south of Honey Lake. They did not hurry. Wherever the land they traveled through seemed to promise gold, they would stop and prospect. Many a pan of likely-looking dirt they washed beside some stream where the burros stopped to drink and feed a little on the grassy banks.

So, late in June, they reached Reno, outfitted and went on again, traveling to the north to the green country for which they yearned, though now they were fairly in it, and would have stopped if any tempting ledge or bar had come in their way. They prospected every gulch that showed any mineral signs at all. It was a carefree kind of life, with just enough of variety to hold Bud's interest to the adventuring.

Late in August they came upon a mountain village perched beside a swift stream and walled in on three sides by pine-covered mountains. A branch railroad linked the place more or less precariously with civilization, and every day—unless there was a wash-out somewhere or a snowslide or drifts too deep—a train passed over the road. One day it would go upstream, and the next day it would come back. And the houses stood drawn up in a row alongside the track to watch for these passings.

Miners came in with burros or with horses, packed flour and bacon and tea and coffee across their middles, got drunk perhaps as a parting ceremony, and went away into the hills. Cash watched them for a day or so, saw the size of their grubstakes, asked few questions, and listened to a good deal of small-town gossip, and nodded his head contentedly. There was gold in these hills. Not enough, perhaps, to start

a stampede with, but enough to keep wise old hermits burrowing after it.

With supplies of flour and bacon and beans and coffee, and other things quite as desirable, but not so necessary, Bud and Cash followed the miners into the hills.

Fifteen miles from Alpine, as a cannon would shoot, high up in the hills, where a creek flowed down through a saucerlike basin under beetling ledges fringed all around with forest, they came, after much wandering, upon an old log cabin whose dirt roof still held, in spite of the snows that heaped upon it through many a winter. The ledge showed the scars of old prospect holes, and in the sand of the creek they found "colors" strong enough to make it seem worth while to stop here—for a while, at least.

They cleaned out the cabin and took possession of it, and the next time they went to town Cash made cautious inquiries about the place. It was, he learned, an old, abandoned claim. Abandoned chiefly because the old miner who had lived there died one day and left behind him all the marks of having died from starvation mostly. A cursory examination of his few belongings had revealed much want, but no gold save a little coarse dust in a small bottle.

"About enough to fill a rifle ca'tridge," detailed the teller of the tale. "He'd pecked around that draw for two, three year mebby. Never showed no gold much, for all the time he spent there. Trapped some in winter—coyotes and bobcats and skunks mostly. Kinda off in the upper story, old Nelson was. I guess he just stayed there because he happened to light there and didn't have gumption 'enough to git out. Hills is full of old fellers like him. They live off to the'rselves, and peck around and git a pocket now and then that keeps 'm in grub and tobacco. If you want to use the cabin, I guess nobody's goin' to care. Nelson never had any folks that anybody knows of. Nobody ever bothered about takin' up the claim after he cashed in, either. Didn't seem worth nothin' much. Went back to the gov'ment."

"Trapped, you say. Any game around there now?"

"Oh, shore! Game everywhere in these hills, from weasels up to bear and mountain lion. If you want to trap, that's as good a place as any, I guess."

So Cash and Bud sold the burros and bought traps and more supplies, and two window sashes and a crosscut saw and some wedges and a double-bitted ax, and settled down in Nelson Flat to find what Old Dame Fortune had tucked away in this little side pocket and forgotten.

CHAPTER IX.

The heavy boom of a dynamite blast rolled across the flat to the hills that flung it back in a tardy echo like a spent ball of sound. A blob of blue smoke curled out of a hole the size of a hogshead in a steep bank overhung with alders. Outside, the wind caught the smoke and carried streamers of it away to play with. A startled blue jay, on a limb high up on the bank, lifted his slaty crest and teetered forward, clinging with his toenails to the branch, while he scolded down at the men who had scared him so. A rattle of clods and small rocks fell from their high flight into the sweet air of a mountain sunset.

"Good execution, that was," Cash remarked, craning his neck toward the hole. "If you're a mind to go on ahead and cook supper, I'll stay and see if we opened up anything. Or you can stay, just as you please."

Dynamite smoke invariably made Bud's head ache splittingly. Cash was not so susceptible. Bud chose the cooking, and went away down the flat, the blue jay screaming insults after him. He was frying bacon when Cash came in, a hatful of broken rock riding in the hollow of his arm.

"Got something pretty good here, Bud—if she don't turn out like that dang Burro Lode ledge. Look here! Best-looking quartz we've struck yet. What do you think of it?"

He dumped the rock out on the oilcloth behind the sugar can and directly under the little, square window through which the sun was pouring a lavish yellow flood of light before it dropped behind the peak. Bud set the bacon back where it would not burn, and bent over the table to look.

"Gee, but it's heavy!" he cried, picking up a fragment the size of an egg and balancing it in his hands. "I don't know a lot about gold-bearing quartz, but she looks good to me all right."

"Yeah. It *is* good, unless I'm badly mistaken. I'll test some after supper. Old Nelson couldn't have used powder at all, or he'd have uncovered enough of this, I should think, to show the rest what he had. Or maybe he died just when he had started that hole. Seems queer he never struck pay dirt in this flat. Well, let's eat if it's ready, Bud. Then we'll see."'

"Seems kinda queer, don't it, Cash, that nobody stepped in and filed on any claims here?" Bud dumped half a kettle of boiled beans into a basin and set it on the table. "Want any prunes tonight, Cash?"

Cash did not want prunes, which was just as well, seeing there were none cooked. He sat down and ate, with his mind and his eyes clinging to the grayish, veined fragments of rock beside his plate. "We'll send some of that down to Sacramento right away," he observed, "and have it assayed. And we won't let out anything about it, Bud—good or bad. I like this flat. I don't want it mucked over with a lot of gold-crazy lunatics."

Bud laughed, and reached for the bacon. "We ain't been followed up with stampedes so far," he pointed out. "However, here's hoping!"

Next day Bud started out with three different samples for the assayer, and an air castle or two to keep him company. He would like to find himself half owner of a mine worth about a million, he mused. Maybe Marie would wish then that she had thought twice about quitting him just on her mother's say-so. He'd like to go buzzing into San José behind the wheel of a car like the one Foster had fooled him into stealing. And meet Marie, and her mother, too, and let them get an eyeful, especially the mother. He'd like to see her face when he drove along the street in a big, new Sussex. She'd wish she had let him and Marie alone. They would have made out all right if they had been let alone. He ought to have taken Marie to some other town, where her mother couldn't nag at her every day about him. Marie wasn't such a bad kid, if she were left alone. They might have been happy——

He tried then to shake himself free of thoughts of her. That was the trouble with him; he brooded morosely. He couldn't let his thoughts ride free any more. They kept heading straight for Marie. He could not see why she should cling so to his memory; he had not wronged her—unless it was by letting her go, without making a bigger fight for their home. Still, she had gone of her own free will. He was the one that had been wronged. Why, hadn't they lied about him in court and to the gossipy neighbors? Hadn't they broke him? No. If the mine panned out big, as Cash seemed to think was likely, the best thing he could do was steer clear of San José. And whether it panned out or not, the best thing he could do was forget that such a girl as Marie had ever existed.

Which was all very well, as far as it went. The trouble was that resolving not to think of Marie, calling up all the bitterness he could muster against her memory, did no more toward blotting her image from his mind than did the miles and the months he had put between them.

He reached the town in a dour mood of unrest, spite of the promise of wealth he carried in his pocket. He mailed the package and the letter, and went to a saloon and had a high ball. He was not a drinking man—at least, he never had been one, beyond a convivial glass or two with his fellows—but he felt that day the need of a little push toward optimism. In the back part of the room three men were playing freeze-out. Bud went over and

stood with his hands in his pockets and watched them, because there was nothing else to do and because he was still having some trouble with his thoughts. He was lonely, without quite knowing what ailed him. He hungered for friends to hail him with that cordial, "Hello, Bud!" when they saw him coming.

No one in Alpine had said "Hello, Bud!" when he came walking in that day. The postmaster had given him one measuring glance when he had weighed the package of ore, but he had not spoken, except to name the amount of postage required. The bartender had made some remark about the weather, and had smiled with a surface friendliness that did not deceive Bud for a moment. He knew too well that the smile was not for him, but for his patronage.

He watched the game. And when the man opposite him pushed back his chair, and, looking up at Bud, asked if he wanted to sit in, Bud went and sat down, buying a dollar's worth of chips as an evidence of his intention to play. His interest in the game was not keen. He played for the feel it gave him of being one of the bunch, a man among his friends, or, if not friends, at least acquaintances. And, such was his varying luck with the cards, he played for an hour or so without having won enough to irritate his companions. Wherefore he rose from the table at supper time, calling one young fellow Frank quite naturally. They went to the Alpine House and had supper together, and after that they sat in the office and talked about automobiles for an hour, which gave Bud a comforting sense of having fallen among friends.

Later they strolled over to a picture show which ran films two years behind their first release and charged fifteen cents for the privilege of watching them. It was the first theater Bud had entered since he left San José.

He eyed a succession of "Current Events" long since gone stale out where the world moved swifter than here in the mountains, and he felt as though he had come once more into close touch with life. All the dull months he had spent with Cash and the burros dwarfed into a pointless, irrelevant incident of his life. He felt that he ought to be out in the world, doing bigger things than hunting gold that somehow always refused at the last minute to be found. He stirred restlessly. He was free; there was nothing to hold him if he wanted to go. The war—he believed he would go over and take a hand. He could drive an ambulance or a truck ——

"Current Events," however, came abruptly to an end, and presently Bud's vagrant, half-formed desire for achievement merged into biting recollections. Here was a love drama, three reels of it. At first Bud watched it with only a vague, disquieting sense of familiarity. Then abruptly he recalled too vividly the time and circumstance of his first sight of the picture. It was in San José, at the Liberty. He and Marie had been married two days, and were living in that glamorous world of the honeymoon, so poignantly sweet, so marvelous—and so fleeting. He had whispered that the girl looked like her, and she had leaned heavily against his shoulder. In the dusk of lowered lights their hands had groped and found each other and clung.

The girl did look like Marie. When she turned her head with that little tilt of the chin, when she smiled, she was like Marie. Bud leaned forward, staring, his brows drawn together, breathing the short, quick breaths of emotion focused upon one object, excluding all else. Once, when Frank moved his body a little in the next seat, Bud's hand went out that way involuntarily. The touch of Frank's rough coat sleeve recalled him brutally, so that he drew away with a wincing movement, as though he had been hurt.

The picture flickered on through scene after scene that Bud did not see at all, though he was staring unwinkingly at the screen all the while. The love scenes at the last were poignantly real, but they passed before his eyes unnoticed. Bud's mind was dwelling

upon certain love scenes of his own. He was feeling Marie's presence beside him there in the dusk.

"Poor kid; she wasn't so much to blame," he muttered just above his breath, when the screen was swept clean and blank at the end of the last reel.

"Huh? Oh, he was the big mutt right from the start," Frank replied, with the assured air of a connoisseur. "He didn't have the brains of a blue jay, or he'd have known all the time she was strong for him."

"I guess that's right," Bud mumbled; but he did not mean what Frank thought he meant. "Let's go. I want a drink."

Frank was willing enough; too willing, if the truth were known. They went out into the cool starlight, and hurried across the side street that was no more than a dusty roadway to the saloon where they had spent the afternoon. Bud called for whisky, and helped himself twice from the bottle which the bartender placed between them. He did not speak until the second glass was emptied, and then he turned to Frank with a purple glare in his eyes.

"Let's have a game of pool or something," he suggested.

"There's a good poker game going back there," vouchsafed the bartender, turning his thumb toward the rear, where half a dozen men were gathered in a close group around a table. "There's some real money in sight tonight."

"All right; let's go see." Bud turned that way, Frank following like a pet dog at his heels.

At dawn the next morning, Bud got up stiffly from the chair where he had spent the night. His eyeballs showed a network of tiny red veins, swollen with the surge of alcohol in his blood and with the strain of staring all night at the cards. Beneath his eyes were puffy ridges. His cheek bones flamed with the whisky flush. He cashed in a double handful of chips, stuffed the money he had won into his coat pocket, walked with that stiff precision of gait by which a drunken man strives to hide his drunkenness to the bar, and had another drink. Frank was at his elbow. Frank was staggering, garrulous, laughing a great deal over very small jokes.

"I'm going to bed," said Bud, his tongue forming the words with a slow carefulness.

"Come over to my shack, Bud; rotten hotel. My bed's clean, anyway." Frank laughed and plucked him by the sleeve.

"All right," Bud consented gravely. "We'll take a bottle along."

CHAPTER X.

Bud had spent a good many months in pushing all thoughts of Marie out of his mind, all hunger for her out of his heart. He had kept away from towns, from women, lest he be reminded too keenly of his matrimonial wreck. He had stayed with Cash and hunted gold, partly because Cash never seemed conscious of any need of a home or love or wife or children, and therefore never reminded Bud of the home and the wife and the love and the child he had lost out of his own life. Cash seldom mentioned women at all, and when he did it was in a purely general way, as women touched some other subject he was discussing. He never asked Bud any questions about his private affairs, never seemed to care how Bud had lived, or where. And Bud thankfully left his past behind the wall of silence. So he had come to believe that he was almost as emotion proof as Cash appeared to be, and had let it go at that.

Now here he was, with his heart and his mind full of Marie—after more than a year and a half of forgetting her! Getting drunk and playing poker all night did not help him at all, for when he woke it was from a sweet, intimate dream of her, and it was to a tormenting desire for her that gnawed at his mind as hunger gnaws at the stomach. Bud could not understand it. Nothing like that had ever happened to him before. By all his simple rules of reckoning he ought to

be "over it" by now. He had been, until he saw that picture.

He was so very far from being over his trouble that he was under it; a beaten dog wincing under the blows of memory, stung by the lash of his longing. He groaned, and Frank thought it was the usual morning-after headache, and laughed ruefully.

"Same here," he said. "I've got one like a barrel, and I didn't punish half the booze you did."

Bud did not say anything, but he reached for the bottle, tilted it, and swallowed three times before he stopped.

"Gee!" whispered Frank a little enviously.

Bud glanced somberly across at Frank, who was sitting by the stove with his jaws between his palms and his hair tousled, regarding his guest speculatively.

"I'm going to get drunk again," Bud announced bluntly. "If you don't want to, you'd better duck. You're too easy led; I saw that last night. You follow anybody's lead that you happen to be with. If you follow my lead to-day, you'll be petrified by night. You better git, and let me go it alone."

Frank laughed uneasily. "Aw, I guess you ain't all that fatal, Bud. Let's go over and have some breakfast—only it'll be dinner."

"You go, if you want to." Bud tilted the bottle again, his eyes half closed while he swallowed. When he had finished, he shuddered violently at the taste of the whisky. He got up, went to the water bucket, and drank half a dipper of water. "Good glory, I hate whisky!" he grumbled. "Takes a barrel to have any effect on me, too." He turned and looked down at Frank with a morose kind of pity. "You go on and get your breakfast, kid. I don't want any. I'll stay here for a while."

He sat down on the side of the cheap, iron bedstead, and emptied his pockets on the top quilt. He straightened the crumpled bills and counted them, and sorted the silver pieces. All told, he had sixty-three dollars and twenty cents. He sat fingering the money absently, his mind upon other things—upon Marie and the baby, to be exact. He was fighting the impulse to send Marie the money. She might need it for the kid. If he was sure her mother wouldn't get any of it—— A year and a half was quite a while, and fifteen hundred dollars wasn't much to live on these days. She couldn't work, with the baby on her hands——

Frank watched him curiously, his jaws still resting between his two palms, his eyes red-rimmed and swollen, his lips loose and trembling. A dollar alarm clock ticked resonantly, punctuated now and then by the dull clink of silver as Bud lifted a coin and let it drop on the little pile.

"Pretty good luck you had last night," Frank ventured wishfully. "They cleaned me."

Bud straightened his drooping shoulders and scooped the money into his hand. He laughed recklessly, and got up. "We'll try her another whirl, and see if luck'll bring luck. Come on; let's go hunt up some of them marks that got all the dough last night. We'll split, fifty-fifty, and the same with what we win. Huh?"

"You're on, bo; let's go." Bud had gauged him correctly; Frank would follow any one who would lead. He got up and came to the table where Bud was dividing the money into two equal sums as nearly as he could make change. What was left over—and that was the three dollars and twenty cents—he tossed into the can of tobacco on a shelf.

"We'll let that ride—to sober up on, if we go broke," he grunted. "Come on; let's get action."

Action, of a sort, they proceeded to get. Luck brought luck of the same complexion. They won in fluctuating spells of good cards and judicious teamwork. They did not cheat, though Frank was ready if Bud had led him that way. Frank was ready for anything that Bud suggested. He laughed and drank when Bud suggested that they drink. He laughed and played whatever game Bud urged him into. He laughed and agreed with Bud when

Bud made statements to test the credulity of any man. He laughed and said, "Sure! Let's go!" when Bud pined for a change from one saloon to another.

On the third day Bud suddenly stopped in the midst of a game of pool which neither was steady enough to play, and gravely inspected the chalked end of his cue.

"That's about enough of this," he said. "We're drunk. We're so drunk we don't know a pocket from a prospect hole. I'm tired of being a hog; I'm going to go get another drink and sober up. And if you're the dog Fido you've been so far, you'll do the same." He leaned heavily upon the table and regarded Frank with stern, bloodshot blue eyes.

Frank laughed and slid his cue the length of the table. He also leaned a bit heavily. "Sure," he said. "I'm ready any time you are."

"Some of these days," Bud stated, with drunken deliberation, "they'll take and hang you, Frank, for being such an agreeable cuss." He took Frank gravely by the arm and walked him to the bar, paid for two beers with almost his last dollar, and, still holding Frank firmly, walked with him out of doors and down the street to Frank's cabin. He pushed him inside, and stood looking in upon him with a sour appraisement.

"You are the derndest fool I ever run across—but at that you're a good scout, too," he informed Frank. "You sober up now, like I said. You ought to know better'n to act the way you've been acting. I'm sure ashamed of you, Frank. Adios; I'm going to hit the trail for camp." With that he pulled the door shut and walked away, with that same circumspect exactness in his stride which marks the drunken man as surely as does a stagger.

He remembered what it was that had brought him to town—which is more than most men in his condition would have done. He went to the post office and inquired for mail, got what proved to be the assayer's report, and went on. He bought half a dozen bananas, which did not remind him of that night when he had waited on the Oakland pier for the mysterious Foster, though they might have recalled the incident vividly to mind had he been sober. He had been wooing forgetfulness, and for the time being he had won.

Walking up the steep, winding trail that led to Nelson Flat cleared his fogged brain a little. He began to remember what it was he had been fighting to forget. Marie's face floated sometimes before him, but the vision was misty and remote, like distant woodland seen through the gray film of a storm. The thought of her filled him with a vague discomfort now when his emotions were dulled by the terrific strain he had willfully put upon brain and body. Resentment crept into the foreground again. Marie had made him suffer. Marie was to blame for this beastly fit of intoxication. He did not love Marie; he hated her. He did not want to see her, he did not want to think of her. She had done nothing for him but bring him trouble. Marie, forsooth!

Halfway to the flat, he met Cash walking down the slope where the trail seemed tunneled through deep green, so thick stood the young spruce. Cash was swinging his arms in that free stride of the man who has learned how to walk with the least effort. He did not halt when he saw Bud plodding slowly up the trail, but came on steadily, his keen, blue-gray eyes peering sharply from beneath his forward-tilted hat brim. He came up to within ten feet of Bud, and stopped.

"Well!" He stood eying Bud appraisingly, much as Bud had eyed Frank a couple of hours before. "I was just starting out to see what had become of you," he added, his voice carrying the full weight of reproach that the words only hinted at.

"Well, get an eyeful, if that's what you come for. I'm here—and lookin's cheap." Bud's anger flared at the disapproval he read in Cash's eyes, his voice, the set of his lips.

But Cash did not take the challenge. "Did the report come?" he asked, as

though that was the only matter worth discussing.

Bud pulled the letter sullenly from his pocket and gave it to Cash. He stood moodily waiting while Cash opened and read and returned it.

"Yeah. About what I thought—only it runs lighter in gold, with a higher percentage of copper. It'll pay to go on and see what's at bed rock. If the copper holds up to this all along, we'll be figuring on the gold to pay for getting the copper. This is copper country, Bud. Looks like we'd found us a copper mine." He turned and walked on beside Bud. "I dug into quite a rich streak of sand while you was gone," he volunteered after a silence. "Coarse gold, as high as fifteen cents a pan. I figure we better work that while the weather's good, and run our tunnel in on this other when snow comes."

Bud turned his head and looked at Cash intently for a minute. "I've been drunker'n a fool for three days," he announced solemnly.

"Yeah. You look it," was Cash's dry retort, while he stared straight ahead up the steep, shadowed trail.

CHAPTER XI.

For a month Bud worked and forced himself to cheerfulness, and tried to forget. Sometimes it was easy enough, but there were other times when he must get away by himself and walk and walk, with his rifle over his shoulder as a mild pretense that he was hunting game. But if he brought any back to camp it was because the game walked up and waited to be shot—half the time Bud did not know where he was going, much less whether there were deer within ten rods or ten miles.

During those spells of heartsickness he would sit all the evening and smoke and stare at some object which his mind failed to register. Cash would sit and watch him furtively, but Bud was too engrossed with his own misery to notice it. Then, quite unexpectedly, reaction would come and leave Bud in a peace that was more than half a torpid refusal of his mind to worry much over anything.

He worked, then, and talked much with Cash, and made plans for the development of their mine. In that month they had come to call it a mine, and they had filed and recorded their claim, and had drawn up an agreement of partnership in it. They would "sit tight" and work on it through the winter, and when spring came they hoped to have something tangible upon which to raise sufficient capital to develop it properly. Or, times when they had done unusually well with their sand bank, they would talk optimistically about washing enough gold out of that claim to develop the other and keep the title all in their own hands.

Then one night Bud dreamed again of Marie, and awoke with an insistent craving for the oblivion of drunkenness. He got up and cooked the breakfast, washed the dishes and swept the cabin, and measured out two ounces of gold from what they had saved.

"You're keeping tabs on everything, Cash," he said shortly. "Just charge this up to me. I'm going to town."

Cash looked up at him from under a slanted eyebrow. His lips had a twist of pained disapproval.

"Yeah. I figured you was about due in town," he said resignedly.

"Aw, lay off that told-you-so stuff," Bud growled. "You never figured anything of the kind, and you know it." He pulled his heavy sweater down off a nail and put it on, scowling because the sleeves had to be pulled in place on his arms.

"Too bad you can't wait a day. I figured we'd have a clean-up to-morrow maybe. She's been running pretty heavy——"

"Well, go ahead and clean up, then. You can do it alone. Or wait till I get back."

Cash laughed, as a retort cutting, and not because he was amused. Bud swore and went out, slamming the door behind him.

It was exactly five days after that when he opened it again. Cash was mixing a batch of sour-dough bread

into loaves, and he did not say anything at all when Bud came in and stood beside the stove, warming his hands and glowering around the room. He merely looked up, and then went on with his bread making.

Bud was not a pretty sight. Four days and nights of trying to see how much whisky he could drink, and how long he could play poker without going to sleep or going broke, had left their mark on his face and his trembling hands. His eyes were puffy and red, and his cheeks were mottled, and his lips were fevered and had lost any sign of a humorous quirk at the corners. He looked ugly, as if he would like nothing better than an excuse to quarrel with Cash—since Cash was the only person at hand to quarrel with.

But Cash had not knocked around the world for nothing. He had seen men in that mood before, and he had no hankering for trouble, which is vastly easier to start than it is to stop. He paid no attention to Bud. He made his loaves, tucked them into the pan, and greased the top with bacon grease saved in a tomato can for such use. He set the pan on a shelf behind the stove, covered it with a clean flour sack, and opened the stove door and slid in two sticks.

"She's getting cold," he observed casually. "It'll be winter now before we know it."

Bud grunted, pulled an empty box toward him by the simple expedient of hooking his toes behind the corner, and sat down. He set his elbows on his thighs, and buried his face in his hands. His hat dropped off his head and lay, crown down, beside him. He made a pathetic figure of miserable manhood, of strength mistreated. His fine brown hair fell in heavy locks down over his fingers that rested on his forehead. Five minutes so, and he lifted his head and glanced around him apathetically. "Gee-man-*ee*, I've got a headache!" he muttered, dropping his forehead into his spread palms again.

Cash hesitated, derision hiding in the back of his eyes. Then he pushed the dented coffeepot forward on the stove. "Try a cup of coffee straight," he said unemotionally, "and then lay down. You'll sleep it off in a few hours."

Bud did not look up nor make any move to show that he heard. But presently he rose and went heavily over to his bunk. "I don't want any darn coffee," he growled, and sprawled himself, stomach down, on the bed, with his face turned from the light.

Cash eyed him coldly, with the corner of his upper lip lifted a little. Whatever weaknesses he possessed, drinking and gambling had no place in the list. Nor had he any patience with those faults in others. Had Bud walked down drunk to Cash's camp that evening when first met, he might have received a little food, doled out to him grudgingly, but he assuredly would not have slept in Cash's bed that night. That he tolerated drunkenness in Bud now would have been rather surprising to any one who knew Cash well. Perhaps he had a vague understanding of the deeps through which Bud was struggling, and so was constrained to hide his disapproval, hoping that the moral let-down was merely a temporary one.

He finished his strictly utilitarian household labor, and went off up the flat to the sluice boxes. Bud had not moved from his first position on the bed, but he did not breathe like a sleeping man. Not at first; after an hour or so he did sleep, heavily and with queer, muddled dreams that had no sequence and left only a disturbed sense of discomfort behind them.

At noon, or a little after, Cash returned to the cabin, cast a sour look of contempt at the recumbent Bud, and built a fire in the old cookstove. He got his dinner, ate it, and washed his dishes with never a word to Bud, who had wakened and lay, with his eyes half open, sluggishly miserable and staring dully at the rough spruce logs of the wall.

Cash put on his cap, looked at Bud, and gave a snort and went off again to his work. Bud lay still for a while longer, staring dully at the wall. Finally he raised up, swung his feet to

the floor, and sat there staring around the little cabin as though he had never before seen it.

"Huh! You'd think the way he highbrows me that Cash never done wrong in his life. Tin angel, him—I don't think. Next time, I'll tell the pinheaded world, I'll bring home a quart or two, and put on a show *right!*"

Just what he meant by that remained rather obscure, even to Bud. He got up, shut his eyes very tight, and then opened them wide to clear his vision, shook himself into his clothes, and went over to the stove. Cash had not left the coffeepot on the stove, but had, with malicious intent—or so Bud believed—put it away on the shelf so that what coffee remained was stone cold. Bud muttered and threw out the coffee, grounds and all—a bit of bachelor extravagance which only anger could drive him to—and made fresh coffee, and made it strong. He did not want it. He drank it for the work of physical regeneration it would do for him.

He lay down afterward, and this time he dropped into a more nearly normal sleep, which lasted until Cash returned at dusk. After that he lay, with his face hidden, awake and thinking.

He asked himself why he had chosen a spree as a relief from his particular bunch of ghosts. Trading one misery for another was all you could call it. Doing exactly the things that Marie's mother had predicted he would do, committing the very sins that Marie was always a little afraid he would commit. There must be some sort of twisted revenge in that, he thought; but for the life of him he could not quite see any real, permanent satisfaction in it, especially since Marie and her mother would never get to hear of it.

For that matter, he was not so sure that they would not get to hear. He remembered meeting, just on the first edge of his spree, one Joe de Barr, a cigar salesman whom he had known in San José. Joe knew Marie; in fact, Joe had paid her a little attention before Bud came into her life. He had been in Alpine between trains, taking orders for goods from the two saloons and the hotel. He had seen Bud drinking. Bud knew perfectly well how much Joe had seen him drinking, and he knew perfectly well that Joe was surprised to the point of amazement—and, Bud suspected, secretly gratified as well. Wherefore Bud had deliberately done what he could do to stimulate and emphasize both the surprise and the gratification.

Bud had no delusions concerning Joe de Barr. If Joe should happen to meet Marie, he would manage somehow to let her know that Bud was going to the dogs—on the toboggan—down and out—whatever it suited Joe to declare him. Well, what was the odds? Marie couldn't think any worse of him than she already thought. And, whatever she thought, their trails had parted, and they would never cross again—not if Bud could help it.

Of course it was not at all certain that Marie and Joe would meet, or that Joe would mention him, even if they did. A wrecked home is always a touchy subject; so touchy that Joe had never intimated in his few remarks to Bud that there had ever been a Marie, and Bud, drunk as he had been, was still not too drunk to hold back the question that clamored to be spoken.

Whether he admitted it to himself or not, the sober Bud Moore who lay on his bunk nursing a headache and a grouch against the world was ashamed of the drunken Bud Moore who had paraded his drunkenness before the man who knew Marie.

He rolled over and glared at Cash, who had cooked his supper and was sitting down to eat it alone. Cash was looking particularly misanthropic as he bent his head to meet the upward journey of his coffee cup, and his eyes, when they lifted involuntarily with Bud's sudden movement, had still that hard look of bottled-up rancor that had impressed itself upon Bud earlier in the day.

Neither man spoke nor made any sign of friendly recognition. Bud would not have talked to any one in his present state of self-disgust, but for all that Cash's silence rankled. A moment their

eyes met and held; then, with shifted glances, the souls of them drew apart—farther apart than they had ever been.

When Cash had finished, and was filling his pipe, Bud got up and reheated coffee and fried more bacon and potatoes, Cash having cooked just enough for himself. Cash smoked and gave no heed, and Bud retorted by eating in silence and in straightway washing his own cup, plate, knife and fork, and wiping clean the side of the table where he always sat. He did not look at Cash, but he felt morbidly that Cash was regarding him with that hateful sneer hidden under his beard. He knew that it was silly to keep that stony silence, but he kept telling himself that if Cash wanted to talk he had a tongue and it was not tied. Besides, Cash had registered pretty plainly his intentions and his wishes when he excluded Bud from his supper.

It was a foolish quarrel, but it was that kind of foolish quarrel which is very apt to harden into a lasting one.

CHAPTER XII.

Domestic wrecks may be a subject taboo in polite conversation, but Joe de Barr was not excessively polite, and he had, moreover, a very lively hope that Marie would yet choose to regard him with more favor than she had shown in the past. He did not chance to meet her at once, but as soon as his work would permit he made it a point to meet her. He went about it with beautiful directness. He made bold to call her up on long distance from San Francisco, told her that he would be in San José that night, and invited her to a show.

Marie accepted without enthusiasm, and her listlessness was not lost over forty miles of telephone wire.

He went into a flower store, disdaining the banked loveliness upon the corners, and bought Marie a dozen great, heavy-headed chrysanthemums. Fortified by these, groomed and perfumed and as prosperous looking as a tobacco salesman with a generous expense account may be, he went to San José on an early-evening train that carried a parlor car in which Joe made himself comfortable. He fooled even the sophisticated porter into thinking him a millionaire, wherefore he arrived in a glow of self-esteem, which bred much optimism.

Marie was impressed—at least with his assurance and the chrysanthemums, over which she was sufficiently enthusiastic to satisfy even Joe. Since he had driven to the house in a hired automobile, he presently had the added satisfaction of handing Marie into the tonneau as though she were a queen entering the royal chariot, and of ordering the driver to take them out around the golf links since it was still very early. Then, settling back with what purported to be a sigh of bliss, he regarded Marie, sitting small and still and listless beside him. The glow of the chrysanthemums had already faded. Marie, with all the girlish prettiness she had ever possessed, and with an added charm that was very elusive and hard to analyze, seemed to have lost all of her old animation.

Joe tried the weather and the small gossip of the film world and a judiciously expurgated sketch of his life since he had last seen her. Marie answered him whenever his monologue required answer, but she was unresponsive, uninterested—bored. Joe twisted his mustache, eyed her aslant, and took the plunge.

"I guess joy ridin' kinda calls up old times, eh?" he began insidiously. "Maybe I shouldn't have brought you out for a ride—maybe it brings back painful memories, as the song goes."

"Oh, no," said Marie spiritlessly. "I don't see why it should."

"No? Well, that's good to hear you say so, girlie. I was kinda afraid maybe trouble had hit you hard. A sensitive, big-hearted little person like you. But if you've put it all outa your mind—why, that's where you're dead right. Personally, I was glad to see you saw where you'd made a mistake, and backed up. That takes grit and brains. Of course we all make mistakes; you

wasn't to blame—innocent little kid like you——"

"Yes," said Marie, "I guess I made a mistake all right."

"Sure. But you seen it and backed up. And a good thing you did, too. Look what he'd of brought you to by now if you'd stuck!"

Marie tilted back her head, and looked up at the tall row of eucalyptus trees feathered against the stars. "What?" she asked uninterestedly.

"Well, I don't want to knock, especially a fellow that's on the toboggan already. But I know a little girl that's aw-fully lucky, and I'm honest enough to say so."

"Why?" asked Marie obligingly. "Why—in particular?"

"Why in particular?" Joe leaned toward her. "Say, you must of heard how Bud's going to the dogs. If you haven't, I don't want——"

"No, I hadn't heard," said Marie, looking up at the Big Dipper so that her profile, dainty and girlish still, was revealed like a cameo to Joe. "Is he? I love to watch the stars, don't you?"

"I love to watch *a* star," Joe breathed softly. "So you hadn't heard how Bud's turned out to be a regular souse? Honest, didn't you know it?"

"No, I didn't know it," said Marie boredly. "Has he?"

"Well, say! You couldn't tell it from the real thing. Believe me, Bud's some pickled bum these days. I run across him up in the mountains a month or so ago. Honest, I was knocked plumb silly—much as I knew about Bud that *you* never knew, I never thought he'd turn out quite so——" Joe paused, with a perfect imitation of distaste for his subject. "Say, this is great out here!" he murmured, tucking the robe around her with that tender protectiveness which stops just short of being proprietary. "Honest, Marie, do you like it?"

"Why, sure I like it, Joe." Marie smiled at him in the starlight. "It's great, don't you think? I don't get out very often any more. I'm working, you know, and evenings and Sundays baby takes up all my time."

"You working? Say, that's a darned shame! Don't Bud send you any money?"

"He left some," said Marie frankly. "But I'm keeping that for baby when he grows up and needs it. He don't send any."

"Well, say! As long as he's in the State you can make him dig up. For the kid's support, anyway. Why don't you get after him?"

Marie looked down over the golf links, as the car swung around the long curve at the head of the slope. "I don't know where he is," she said tonelessly. "Where did you see him, Joe?"

Joe's hesitation lasted but long enough for him to give his mustache end a twist. Marie certainly seemed to be well "over it." There could be no harm in telling.

"Well, when I saw him he was at Alpine; that's a little burg up in the edge of the mountains, on the W. P. He didn't look none too prosperous at that. But he had money; he was playing poker and that kind of thing. And he was drunk as a boiled owl, and getting drunker just as fast as he knew how. Seemed to be kind of a stranger there; at least he didn't throw in with the bunch like a native would. But that was more than a month ago, Marie. He might not be there now. I could write up and find out for you."

Marie settled back against the cushions, as though she had already dismissed the subject from her mind. "Oh, don't bother about it, Joe. I don't suppose he's got any money, anyway. Let's forget him."

"You said it, Marie! Stacked up to me like a guy that's got just enough dough for a good, big souse. He ain't hard to forget, is he, girlie?"

Marie laughed assentingly. And if she did not quite attain her old, bubbling spirits during the evening, at least she sent Joe back to San Francisco feeling very well satisfied with himself. He must have been satisfied with himself. He must have been satisfied with his wooing also, because he strolled into a jewelry store the next morning and priced several rings which he

judged would be perfectly suitable for engagement rings. He might have gone so far as to buy one, if he had been sure of the size and of Marie's preference in stones. Since he lacked detailed information he decided to wait, but he intimated plainly to the clerk that he would return in a few days.

It was just as well that he did decide to wait, for when he tried again to see Marie he failed altogether. Marie had left town. Her mother, with an acrid tone of resentment, declared that she did not know any more than the man in the moon where Marie had gone, but that she "suspicioned" that some fool had told Marie where Bud was, and that Marie had gone traipsing after him. She had taken the baby along, which was another piece of foolishness which her mother would never have permitted had she been at home when Marie left.

Joe did not take the matter seriously, though he was disappointed at having made a fruitless trip to San José. He did not believe that Marie had done anything more than take a vacation from her mother's sharp-tongued rule, and for that he could not blame her, after having listened for fifteen minutes to the lady's monologue upon the subject of selfish, inconsiderate, ungrateful daughters. Remembering Marie's attitude toward Bud, he did not believe that she had gone hunting him.

Yet Marie had done that very thing. True, she had spent a sleepless night fighting the impulse and a harassed day trying to make up her mind whether to write first or whether to go and trust to the element of surprise to help plead her cause with Bud; whether to take "Lovin Child"—and she spelled it without the apostrophe—with her or leave him with her mother.

She definitely decided to write Bud a short note and ask him if he remembered having had a wife and baby once upon a time, and if he never wished that he had them still. She wrote the letter, crying a little over it along toward the last, as women will. But it sounded cold-blooded and condemnatory. She wrote another, letting a little of her real self into the lines. But that sounded sentimental, and she knew how Bud hated cheap sentimentalism.

So she tore them both up, and put them in the little heating stove and lighted a match and set them burning and watched them until they withered down to gray ash, and then broke the ashes and scattered them among the cinders.

After that she proceeded to pack a suit case for herself and Lovin Child, seizing the opportunity while her mother was visiting a friend in Santa Clara. Once the packing was begun, Marie worked with a feverish intensity of purpose and an eagerness that was amazing, considering her usual apathy toward everything in her life as she was living it.

Everything but Lovin Child. Him she loved and gloried in. He was like Bud—so much like him that Marie could not have loved him so much if she had managed to hate Bud, as she tried sometimes to hate him. Lovin Child was a husky youngster, and he already had the promise of being as tall and straight-limbed and square-shouldered as his father. Deep in his eyes there lurked always a twinkle, as though he knew a joke that would make you laugh—if only he dared tell it; a quizzical, secretly amused little twinkle, as exactly like Bud's as was possible for a two-year-old twinkle to be. To go with the twinkle, he had a quirky little smile. And to better the smile he had the jolliest little chuckle that ever came through a pair of baby lips.

He came trotting up to the suit case which Marie had spread wide open on the bed, stood up on his tippytoes and peered in. The quirky smile was twitching his lips, and the look he turned toward Marie's back was full of twinkle. He reached into the suit case, clutched a clean handkerchief, and blew his nose with solemn precision; put the handkerchief back all crumpled, grabbed a silk stocking and drew it around his neck, and was straining to reach his little red Brownie cap when Marie turned and caught him up in her arms.

"No, no, Lovin Child! Baby mustn't. Marie is going to take her lovin' baby boy to find"—she glanced hastily over her shoulder to make sure there was no one to hear, buried her face in the baby's fat neck, and whispered the wonder—"to find him's daddy Bud. Does Lovin Man want to see him's daddy Bud? I bet he does want! I bet him's daddy Bud will be glad—— Now you sit right still, and Marie will get him a cracker, and then he can watch Marie pack him's little shirt and him's little bunny suit and him's wooh-wooh and him's 'tockin's——"

Marie flew to her hopeful task of packing her suit case, and Lovin Child was quite as busy pulling things out of it and getting stepped on and having to be comforted and insisting upon having on his bunny suit and then howling to go before Marie was ready.

Nearly distracted under the lash of her own eagerness and the fear that her mother would return too soon and bully her into giving up her wild plan, Marie, carrying Lovin Child on one arm and lugging the suit case in the other hand, and half running, managed to catch a street car and climb aboard all out of breath and with her hat tilted over one ear. She deposited the baby on the seat beside her, fumbled for a nickel, and asked the conductor pantingly if she would be in time to catch the four-five to the city. It maddened her to watch the bored deliberation of the man as he pulled out his watch and regarded it meditatively.

"You'll catch it—if you're lucky about your transfer," he said, and rang up her fare and went off to the rear platform just as if it were not a matter of life and death at all.

But Marie reached the depot ahead of the four-five train. Much dishevelled and flushed with nervousness and her exertions, she dragged Lovin Child up the steps by one arm, found a seat in the chair car, and, a few minutes later, suddenly realized that she was really on her way to an unknown little town in an unknown part of the country, in quest of a man who very likely did not want to be found by her!

CHAPTER XIII.

Bud Moore woke on a certain morning with a distinct and well-defined grouch against the world as he had found it; a grouch quite different from the sullen imp of contrariness that had possessed him lately. He did not know just what had caused the grouch, and he did not care. He did know, however, that he objected to the look of Cash's overshoes that stood, pigeon-toed, beside Cash's bed on the opposite side of the room, where Bud had not set his foot for three weeks and more. He disliked the audible yawn with which Cash manifested his return from the deathlike unconsciousness of sleep. He disliked the look of Cash's rough coat and sweater and cap that hung on a nail over Cash's bunk. He disliked the thought of getting up in the cold—and more, the sure knowledge that unless he did get up, and that speedily, Cash would be dressed ahead of him and starting a fire in the cookstove. Which meant that Cash would be the first to cook and eat his breakfast, and that the warped ethics of their dumb quarrel would demand that Bud pretend to be asleep until Cash had fried his bacon and his hot cakes and had carried them to his end of the oilcloth-covered table.

He wondered how long Cash, the old fool, would sulk. Not that he gave a darn; he just wondered is all. For all he cared, Cash could go on forever cooking his own meals and living on his own side of the dead line painted down the middle of the cabin floor.

Just this morning, however, the fact of Cash's stubbornness in keeping to his own side of the line irritated Bud. He wanted to get back at the old hound somehow without giving in an inch in the mute deadlock.

At that moment Cash pushed back the blankets that had been banked to his ears. Simultaneously Bud swung his feet to the cold floor with a thump designed solely to inform Cash that Bud was getting up. Cash turned over, with his back to the room, and pulled up the blankets. Bud grinned maliciously and

dressed as deliberately as the cold of the cabin would let him. To be sure, there was the disadvantage of having to start his own fire, but that disagreeable task was offset by the pleasure he would get in messing around as long as he could, cooking his breakfast. He even thought of frying potatoes and onions after he cooked his bacon. Potatoes and onions fried together have a lovely tendency to stick to the frying pan, especially if there is not too much grease and if they are fried very slowly. Cash would have to do some washing and scraping when it came his turn to cook. Bud knew just about how mad that would make Cash, and he dwelt upon the prospect relishfully.

Bud never wanted potatoes for his breakfast. Coffee, bacon, and hot cakes suited him perfectly. But just for meanness he sliced the potatoes and the onions into the frying pan, and, to make his work artistically complete, he let them burn and stick to the pan—after he had his bacon and hot cakes fried, of course.

He sat down and began to eat. And presently Cash crawled out into the warm room filled with the odor of frying onions and dressed himself with the detached calm of the chronically sulky individual. Not once did the manner of either man betray any consciousness of the other's presence. Unless some details of the day's work compelled them to speech, not once for more than three weeks had either seemed conscious of the other.

Cash washed his face and his hands, took the side of bacon, and cut three slices with the precision of long practice. Bud sopped his last hot cake in a pool of sirup and watched him from the corner of his eye, without turning his head an inch toward Cash. His keenest desire just then was to see Cash when he tackled the frying pan.

But Cash disappointed him there. He took a pie tin off the shelf and laid his strips of bacon on it, and set it in the oven, which is a very good way of cooking breakfast bacon, as Bud well knew. Cash then took down the little square baking pan, greased from the last baking of bread, and in that he fried his hot cakes. As if that were not sufficiently exasperating, he gave absolutely no sign of being conscious of the frying pan, any more than he was conscious of Bud.

The bacon came from the oven juicy crisp and curled at the edges and delicately browned. The cakes came out of the baking pan brown and thick and light. Cash sat down at his end of the table, pulled his own can of sugar and his own cup of sirup and his own square of butter toward him; poured his coffee, that he had made in a small lard pail, and began to eat his breakfast exactly as though he was alone in that cabin.

A great resentment filled Bud's soul to bursting. The old hound! Bud believed now that Cash was capable of leaving that frying pan dirty for the rest of the day! A man like that would do anything! If it wasn't for that claim he'd walk off and forget to come back.

Thinking of that seemed to crystallize into definite purpose what had been muddling his mind with vague impulses to let his mood find expression. He would go to Alpine that day. He would hunt up Frank and see if he couldn't jar him into showing that he had a mind of his own. Twice since that first unexpected spree he had spent a good deal of time and gold dust and consumed a good deal of bad whisky and beer in testing the inherent obligingness of Frank. The last attempt had been the cause of the final break between him and Cash. Cash had reminded Bud harshly that they would need that gold to develop their quartz claim, and he had further stated that he wanted no "truck" with a gambler and a drunkard, and that Bud had better straighten up if he wanted to keep friends with Cash.

Bud had retorted that Cash might as well remember that Bud had a half interest in the two claims, and that he would certainly stay with it. Meantime, he would tell the world he was his own boss, and Cash needn't think for a minute that Bud was going to ask permission for what he did or did not

do. Cash needn't have any truck with him, either. It suited Bud very well to keep on his own side of the cabin, and he'd thank Cash to mind his own business and not step over the dead line.

Cash had laughed disagreeably and asked Bud what he was going to do—draw a chalk mark maybe?

Bud, half drunk and unable to use ordinary good sense, had said yes, by thunder, he'd draw a chalk line if he wanted to, and if he did Cash had better not step over it, either, unless he wanted to be kicked back.

Wherefore the broad, black line down the middle of the floor to where the table stood. Obviously he could not well divide the stove and the teakettle and the frying pan and coffeepot. The line stopped abruptly with a big blob of lampblack mixed with coal oil, just where necessity compelled them both to use the same floor space.

The next day Bud had been ashamed of the performance, but his shame could not override his stubbornness. The black line stared up at him accusingly. Cash, keeping accusingly upon his own side of it, went coldly about his own affairs and never yielded so much as a glance at Bud. And Bud grew more moody and dissatisfied with himself, but he would not yield, either. Perversely he waited for Cash to apologize for what he had said about gamblers and drunkards, and tried to believe that upon Cash rested all of the blame.

Now he washed his own breakfast dishes, including the frying pan, spread the blankets smooth on his bunk, swept as much of the floor as lay upon his side of the dead line. Because the wind was in the storm quarter and the lowering clouds promised more snow, he carried in three big armfuls of wood and placed them upon his corner of the fireplace, to provide warmth when he returned. Cash would not touch that wood while Bud was gone, and Bud knew it. Cash would freeze first. But there was small chance of that, because a small, silent rivalry had grown from the quarrel; a rivalry to see which kept the best supply of wood, which swept cleanest under his bunk and up to the black line, which washed his dishes cleanest and kept his shelf in the cupboard the tidiest.

Knowing that it was going to storm, and perhaps dreading a little the long monotony of being housed with a man as stubborn as himself, Bud buttoned a coat over his gray, roughneck sweater, pulled a pair of mail-order mittens over his mail-order gloves, stamped his feet into heavy, three-buckled overshoes, and set out to tramp fifteen miles through the snow, seeking the kind of pleasure which turns to pain with the finding.

He was tramping along through the snow, wishing it was not so deep, or else deep enough to make snowshoeing practicable in the timber, thinking, too, of Cash and how he hoped Cash would get his fill of silence, and of Frank, and wondering where he would find him. He had covered perhaps two miles of the fifteen, and had walked off a little of his grouch and had stopped to unbutton his coat, when he heard the crunching of feet in the snow just beyond a thick clump of young spruce.

Bud was not particularly cautious, nor was he averse to meeting people in the trail. He stood still, though, and waited to see who was coming that way—since travelers on that trail were few enough to be noticeable.

In a minute more a fat old squaw rounded the spruce grove and shied off, startled, when she glimpsed Bud. Bud grunted and started on, and the squaw stepped clear of the faintly defined trail to let him pass. Moreover, she swung her shapeless body around so that she half faced him as he passed. Bud's lips tightened, and he gave her only a glance. She had a dirty red bandanna tied over her dirty matted hair and under her grimy double chin. A grimy gray blanket was draped closely over her squat shoulders and formed a pouch behind, wherein the plump form of a papoose was cradled, a little red cap pulled down over its ears.

Bud strode on, his nose lifted at the odor of stale smoke that pervaded the

air as he passed. The squaw, giving him a furtive stare, turned and started on, bent under her burden.

Then quite suddenly a wholly unexpected sound pursued Bud and halted him in the trail—the high, insistent howl of a child that has been denied its dearest desire of the moment. Bud looked back inquiringly. The squaw was hurrying on, and but for the straightness of the trail just there her fat, old canvas-wrapped legs would have carried her speedily out of sight. Of course, papooses did yell once in a while, Bud supposed, though he did not remember ever hearing one howl like that on the trail. But what made the squaw in such a deuce of a hurry all at once?

Bud's theory of her kind was simple enough: If they fled from you, it was because they had stolen something and were afraid you would catch them at it. He swung around forthwith in the trail and went after her, whereat she waddled faster through the snow like a frightened duck.

"Hey! You come back here a minute! What's all the rush?" Bud's voice and his long legs pursued, and presently he overtook her and halted her by the simple expedient of grasping her shoulder firmly. The high-keyed howling ceased as suddenly as it had begun, and Bud, peering under the rolled edge of the red stocking cap, felt his jaw go slack with surprise.

The baby was smiling at him delightedly, with a quirk of the lips and a twinkle lodged deep somewhere in its eyes. It worked one hand free of its odorous wrappings, spread four fat fingers wide apart over one eye, and chirped, "Pik-k?" and chuckled infectiously deep in its throat.

Bud gulped and stared, and felt a warm rush of blood from his heart up into his head. A white baby, with eyes that laughed, and quirky red lips that laughed with the eyes, and a chuckling voice like that, riding on the back of that old squaw, struck him dumb with astonishment.

"Good glory!" he blurted, as though the words had been jolted from him by the shock. Whereupon the baby reached out its hand to him and said haltingly, as though its lips had not yet grown familiar with the words:

"Take—Uvin—Chal!"

The squaw tried to jerk away, and Bud gave her a jerk to let her know who was boss. "Say, where'd you git that kid?" he demanded aggressively.

She moved her wrapped feet uneasily in the snow, flickered a filmy, black-eyed glance at Bud's uncompromising face, and waved a dirty paw vaguely in a wide sweep.

"Lo-ong ways," she crooned, and her voice was the first attractive thing Bud had discovered about her. It was pure melody, soft and pensive as the cooing of a wood dove.

"Who belongs to it?" Bud was plainly suspicious.

"*Don'* know—modder die—fadder die—ketchum long ways—off."

"Well, what's its name?" Bud's voice harshened with his growing interest and bewilderment. The baby was again covering one twinkling eye with its spread pink palm, and was saying "Pik-k?" and laughing with the funniest little squint to its nose that Bud had ever seen. It was so demoralizing that to relieve himself Bud gave the squaw a shake. This tickled the baby so much that the chuckle burst into a rollicking laugh, with a catch of the breath after each crescendo tone that made it absolutely individual and like none other—save one.

"What's his name?" Bud bullied the squaw, though his eyes were on the baby.

"Don' know——"

"Take—Uvin—Chal!" the baby demanded imperiously. "Uh—*uh—uh?* Take!"

"Uvin Chal? Now what d'yuh mean by that, ole-timer?" Bud obeyed an overpowering impulse to reach out and touch the baby's cheek with a mittened thumb. The baby responded instantly by again demanding that Bud should *take.*

"Pik-k?" said Bud, a mitten over one eye.

"Pik-k?" said the baby, spreading his

fat hand again and twinkling at Bud between his fingers. But immediately afterward it gave a little, piteous whimper. "Take—Uvin Chal!" it beseeched Bud with voice and starlike blue eyes together. *"Take!"*

There was that in the baby's tone, in the unbabylike insistence of its bright eyes, which compelled obedience. Bud had never taken a baby of that age in his arms. He was always in fear of dropping it or crushing it with his man's strength or something. Yet when this baby wriggled its other arm loose and demanded him to *take,* Bud reached out and grasped its plump, little, red-sweatered body firmly under the armpits and drew it forth squirming with eagerness.

"Well, I'll tell the world I don't blame yuh for wanting to git outa that hog's nest," said Bud, answering the baby's gleeful chuckle.

Freed from his detaining grip on her shoulder, the squaw ducked unexpectedly and scuttled away down the trail as fast as her old legs would carry her, which was surprisingly speedy for one of her bulk. Bud had opened his mouth to ask her again where she had gotten the baby. He left it open while he stared after her, astonished, until the baby put up a hand over one of Bud's eyes and said "Pik-k?" with that distracting little quirk at the corners of its lips.

"You son of a gun!" grinned Bud, in the tone that turned the epithet into a caress. "You dog-gone little devil, you! *Pik-k!* then, if that's what yuh want."

The squaw had disappeared into the thick undergrowth, leaving a track like a hippo in the snow. Bud could have overtaken her, of course, and he could have made her take the baby back again. But he could not face the thought of it. He made no move at all toward pursuit, but instead he turned his face toward Alpine, with some vague intention of turning the baby over to the hotel woman there and getting the authorities to hunt up its parents. It was plain enough that the squaw had no right to it, else she would not have run off like that.

Bud walked at least a rod toward Alpine before he swung short around in his tracks and started the other way. "No, I'll be dog-goned if I will!" he said. "You can't tell about women no time. She might spank the kid or something. Or maybe she wouldn't feed it enough. Anyway, it's too cold, and it's going to storm pretty pronto. Hey! Yuh cold, old-timer?"

The baby whimpered a little, and snuggled its face down against Bud's chest. So Bud lifted his foot and scraped some of the snow off a near-by log, and set the baby down there while he took off his coat and wrapped it around the baby, buttoning it like a bag over arms and all. The baby watched him knowingly, its eyes round and dark blue and shining, and gave a contented little wriggle when Bud picked it up again in his arms.

"Now you're all right till we get to where it's warm," Bud assured it gravely. "And we'll do some steppin' now, believe me! I guess maybe you ain't any more crazy over that Injun smell on yuh than what I am, and that ain't any at all." He walked a few steps farther before he added grimly: "It'll be some jolt for Cash, dog-gone his skin! He'll about bust, I reckon. But we don't give a darn. Let him bust if he wants to; half the cabin's mine, anyway."

CHAPTER XIV.

It happened that Cash was just returning to the cabin from the Blind Ledge claim. He met Bud almost at the doorstep, just as Bud was fumbling with the latch, trying to open the door without moving Lovin Child, now asleep in his arms. Cash may or may not have been astonished. Certainly he did not betray by more than one quick glance that he was interested in Bud's return or in the mysterious burden he bore. He stepped ahead of Bud and opened the door without a word, as if he always did it just in that way, and went inside.

Bud followed him in silence, stepped across the black line to his own side of the room, and laid Lovin Child carefully down so as not to waken him. He unbuttoned the coat he had wrapped around him, pulled off the concealing red cap, and stared down at the pale gold, silky hair and the adorable curve of the soft cheek and the lips with the dimples tucked in at the corners; the lashes lying like the delicate strokes of an artist's pencil under the closed eyes. For at least five minutes he stood without moving, his whole face softened into a boyish wistfulness. By the stove Cash stood and stared from Bud to the sleeping baby, his bushy eyebrows lifted, his eyes a study of incredulous bewilderment.

Then Bud drew a long breath and seemed about to move away from the bunk, and Cash turned abruptly to the stove and lifted a rusty lid and peered into the cold fire box, frowning as though he was expecting to see fire and warmth where only a sprinkle of warm ashes remained. Stubbornness held him mute and outwardly indifferent. He whittled shavings and started a fire in the cookstove, filled the teakettle and set it on to boil, got out the side of bacon and cut three slices, and never once looked toward the bunk. Bud might have brought home a winged angel or a rainbow or a casket of jewels, and Cash would not have permitted himself to show any human interest.

But when Bud went teetering from the cabin on his toes to bring in some pine cones they had saved for quick kindling, Cash craned his neck toward the little bundle on the bunk. He saw a fat, warm, little hand stir with some baby dream. He listened, and heard soft breathing that stopped just short of being an infantile snore. He made an errand to his own bunk, and from there inspected the mystery at closer range. He saw a nose and a little, knobby chin and a bit of pinkish forehead with the pale yellow of hair above. He leaned and cocked his head to one side to see more, but at that moment he heard Bud stamping off the snow from his feet on the doorstep, and he took two long, noiseless strides to the dish cupboard, and was fumbling there, with his back to the bunk, when Bud came tiptoeing in.

Bud started a fire in the fireplace, and heaped the dry limbs high. Cash fried his bacon, made his tea, and set the table for his midday meal. Bud waited for the baby to wake, and looked at his watch every minute or two and made frequent, cautious trips to the bunk, peeking and peering to see if the child was all right.

His back to that end of the room, Cash sat stiff-necked and stubbornly speechless, and ate and drank as though he was alone in the cabin. Whenever Bud's mind left Lovin Child long enough to think about it, he watched Cash furtively for some sign of yielding, some softening of that grim grudge. It seemed to him as though Cash was not human, or he would show some signs of life when a live baby was brought to camp and laid down right under his nose.

Cash finished and began washing his dishes, keeping his back turned toward Bud and Bud's new possession, and trying to make it appear that he did so unconsciously. He did not fool Bud for a minute. Bud knew that Cash was nearly bursting with curiosity, and he had occasional fleeting impulses to provoke Cash to speech of some sort. Perhaps Cash knew what was in Bud's mind. At any rate, he left the cabin and went out and chopped wood for an hour, furiously raining chips into the snow.

When he went in with his arms piled full of cut wood, Bud had the baby sitting on one corner of the table, and was feeding it bread and gravy as the nearest approach to baby food he could think of. During occasional interludes in the steady procession of bits of bread from the plate to the baby's mouth, Lovin Child would suck a bacon rind, which he held firmly grasped in a greasy little fist. Now and then Bud would reach into his hip pocket, pull out his handkerchief as a makeshift napkin, and would carefully wipe the border of gravy from the baby's mouth

and stuff the handkerchief back into his pocket again.

Cash cocked an eye at the two as he went by, threw the wood down on his side of the hearth, and began to replenish the fire. If he heard, he gave no sign of understanding or interest.

"I'll bet that old squaw must 'a' half starved yuh," Bud addressed the baby while he spooned gravy out of a white enamel bowl onto the second slice of bread. "You're putting away grub like a nigger at a barbecue. I'll tell the world I don't know what would 'a' happened if I hadn't run across yuh and made her hand yuh over."

"Ja—ja—ja—*jah!*" said Lovin Child, nodding his head and regarding Bud with the twinkle in his eyes.

"And that's where you're dead right, Boy. I sure do wish you'd tell me your name, but I reckon that's too much to ask of a little geezer like you. Here. Help yourself, kid; you ain't in no Injun camp now. You're with white folks now."

Cash sat down on the bench he had made for himself, and stared into the fire. His whole attitude spelled abstraction; nevertheless, he missed no little sound behind him.

He knew that Bud was talking largely for his benefit, and he knew that here was the psychological time for breaking the spell of silence between them. Yet he let the minutes slip past and would not yield. The quarrel had been of Bud's making in the first place. Let Bud do the yielding, make the first step toward amity.

But Bud had other things to occupy him just then. Having eaten all his small stomach would hold, Lovin Child wanted to get down and explore. Bud had other ideas, but they did not seem to count for much with Lovin Child, who had a way of insistence that was scarcely to be combated or ignored.

"But listen here, Boy!" Bud protested after he had for the third time prevented Lovin Child from backing off the table. "I was going to take off these dirty duds and wash some of the Injun smell off yuh. I'll tell a waiting world you need a bath, and your clothes washed."

"Unh, unh, unh," persisted Lovin Child, and pointed to the floor.

So Bud sighed and made a virtue of defeat. "Oh, well, they say it's bad policy to take a bath right after yuh eat. We'll let it ride a while, but you sure have got to be scrubbed a plenty before you can crawl in with me, old-timer," he said, and set him down on the floor.

Lovin Child went immediately about the business that seemed most important. He got down on his hands and knees and gravely inspected the broad black line, hopefully testing it with tongue and with fingers to see if it would yield him anything in the way of flavor or stickiness. It did not. It had been there long enough to be thoroughly dry and tasteless. He got up, planted both feet on it, and teetered back and forth, chuckling up at Bud with his eyes squinted.

He teetered so enthusiastically that he sat down unexpectedly and with much emphasis. That put him between two impulses, and while they battled he stared, round-eyed, at Bud. But he decided not to cry, and straightway turned himself into a growly bear and went down the line on all fours toward Cash, growling "O-o-*o-o-o-o-o-o!*" as fearsomely as his baby throat was capable of growling.

But Cash would not be scared. Lovin Child crawled all around him and growled his terriblest. Cash sat stiff, as though he had turned to some insensate metal. From when he sat watching—curious to see what Cash would do—Bud saw him flinch and stiffen as a man does under pain. And because Bud had a sore spot in his own heart, Bud felt a quick stab of understanding and sympathy. Cash Markham's past could not have been a blank; more likely it held too much of sorrow for the salve of speech to lighten its hurt. There might have been a child——

"Aw, come back here!" Bud commanded Lovin Child gruffly.

But Lovin Child was too busy. He had discovered in his circling of Cash

the funny buckles on Cash's high overshoes. He was investigating them as he had investigated the line, with fingers and with pink tongue like a puppy. From the lowest buckle he went on to the top one, where Cash's khaki trousers were tucked inside with a deep fold on top. Lovin Child's small forefinger went sliding up in the mysterious recesses of the fold until they reached the flat surface of the knee. He looked up farther, studying Cash's set face, sitting back on his little heels while he did so. Cash tried to keep on staring into the fire, but in spite of himself his eyes lowered to meet the upward look.

"Pik-k?" chirped Lovin Child, spreading his fingers over one eye and twinkling up at Cash with the other.

Cash flinched again, wavered, swallowed twice, and got up so abruptly that Lovin Child sat down again with a plunk. Cash muttered something in his throat, and rushed out into the wind and the slow-falling tiny white flakes that presaged the storm.

Until the door slammed shut, Lovin Child looked after him, scowling, his eyes a blaze of resentment. He brought his palms together with a vicious slap, leaped over and bumped his forehead deliberately and painfully upon the flat rock hearth, and set up a howl that could have been heard for three city blocks.

CHAPTER XV.

That night, when he had been given a bath in the little zinc tub they used for washing clothes, and had been carefully buttoned inside in a clean undershirt of Bud's for want of better raiment, Lovin Child missed something out of his sleepy-time cuddling. He wanted Marie, and he did not know how to make his want known to this big, tender, awkward man who had befriended him and filled his thoughts till bedtime. He began to whimper and look seekingly around the little cabin. The whimper grew to a cry which Bud's rude rocking back and forth on the box before the fireplace could not still.

"M'ee—*take!*" wailed Lovin Child, sitting up and listening. "M'ee take—Uvin Chal!"

"Aw, now, you don't wanta go and act like that. Listen here, Boy. You lay down here and go to sleep. You can search me for what it is you're trying to say, but I guess you want your mamma maybe or your bottle, chances are. Aw, looky!" Bud pulled his watch from his pocket—a man's infallible remedy for the weeping of infant charges—and dangled it anxiously before Lovin Child.

With some difficulty he extracted the small hands from the long, limp tunnels of sleeves, and placed the watch in the eager fingers.

"Listen to the tick-tick! Aw, I wouldn't bite into it. Oh, well, darn it, if nothing else'll *do* yuh, why eat it up!"

Lovin Child stopped crying, and condescended to take a languid interest in the watch, which had a picture of Marie pasted inside the back of the case, by the way. "Ee?" he inquired, with a pitiful little catch in his breath, and held it up for Bud to see the busy little second hand. "Ee?" he smiled tearily, and tried to show Cash, sitting aloof on his bench beside the head of his bunk and staring into the fire. But Cash gave no sign that he heard or saw anything save the visions his memory was conjuring in the dancing flames.

"Lay down, now, like a good boy, and go to sleep," Bud wheedled. "You can hold it if you want to—only don't drop it on the floor—here! Quit kickin' your feet out like that? You wanta freeze? I'll tell the world straight it's plumb cold and snaky outside to-night, and you're pretty darn lucky to be here instead of in some Injun camp, where you'd have to bed down with a mess of mangy dogs most likely. Come on now; lay down like a good boy!"

"M'ee! M'ee *take!*" teased Lovin Child, and wept again, steadily, insistently, with a monotonous vigor that rasped Bud's nerves and nagged him with a vague memory of something familiar and unpleasant. He rocked his body backward and forward, and frowned while he tried to lay hold of

the memory. It was the high-keyed wailing of this same man-child wanting his bottle, but it eluded Bud completely. There was a tantalizing sense of familiarity with the sound, but the lungs and the vocal chords of Lovin Child had developed amazingly in two years, and he had lost the small-infant *wah*-hah.

Bud did not remember, but for all that his thoughts went back across those two years and clung to his own baby, and he wished poignantly that he knew how it was getting along, and wondered if it had grown to be as big a handful as this youngster, and how Marie would handle the emergency he was struggling with now—a lost, lonesome baby boy that would not go to sleep and could not tell why.

Yet Lovin Child was answering every one of Bud's mute questions. Lying there in his "Daddy Bud's" arms, wrapped comically in his Daddy Bud's softest undershirt, Lovin Child was proving to his Daddy Bud that his own man-child was strong and beautiful and had a keen little brain behind those twinkling blue eyes. He was telling why he cried. He wanted Marie to take him and rock him to sleep, just as she had rocked him to sleep every night of his young memory, until that time when he had toddled out of her life and into a new and a peculiar world that held no Marie.

By and by he slept, still clinging to the watch that had Marie's picture in the back. When he was all limp and rosy and breathing softly against Bud's heart, Bud tiptoed over to the bunk, reached down inconveniently with one hand and turned back the blankets, and laid Lovin Child in his bed and covered him carefully. On his bench beyond the dead line, Cash sat, leaning forward with his elbows on his knees, and sucked at a pipe gone cold and stared abstractedly into the fire.

Bud looked at him sitting there. For the first time since their trails had joined he wondered what Cash was thinking about; wondered with a new kind of sympathy for Cash's lonely life, that held no ties, no warmth of love. For the first time it struck him as significant that in the two years almost of their constant companionship, Cash's reminiscences had stopped abruptly about fifteen years back. Beyond that he never went, save now and then, when he jumped a space, to the time when he was a boy. Of what dark years lay between Bud had never been permitted a glimpse.

"Some kid—that kid," Bud observed involuntarily, for the first time in over three weeks speaking when he was not compelled to speak to Cash. "I wish I knew where he come from. He wants his mother."

Cash stirred a little, like a sleeper only half awakened. But he did not reply, and Bud gave an impatient snort, tiptoed over and picked up the discarded clothes of Lovin Child that held still a faint odor of wood smoke and rancid grease, and, removing his shoes that he might move silently, went to work.

He washed Lovin Child's clothes, even to the red sweater suit and the fuzzy red "bunny" cap. He rigged a line before the fireplace—on his side of the dead line, to be sure—hung the little garments upon it, and sat up to watch the fire while they dried.

While he rubbed and rinsed and wrung and hung to dry, he had planned the details of taking the baby to Alpine and placing it in good hands there until its parents could be found. It was stolen, he had no doubt at all. He could picture quite plainly the agony of the parents, and common humanity imposed upon him the duty of shortening their misery as much as possible. But one day of the baby's presence he had taken, with the excuse that it needed immediate warmth and wholesome food. His conscience did not trouble him over that short delay, for he was honest enough in his intentions and convinced that he had done the right thing.

Cash had long ago undressed and gone to bed, turning his back to the warm, fire-lighted room and pulling the blankets up to his ears. He either slept, or pretended to sleep, Bud did not know

which. Of the baby's healthy slumber there was no doubt at all. Bud put on his overshoes and went outside after more wood, so that there would be no delay in starting the fire in the morning and having the cabin warm before the baby woke.

It was snowing fiercely, and the wind was biting cold. He worked hard for half an hour, and carried in all the wood that had been cut. He even piled Cash's end of the hearth high with the surplus, after his own side was heaped full. A storm like that meant that plenty of fuel would be needed to keep the cabin snug and warm, and he was thinking of the baby's comfort now, and would not be hampered by any grudge.

When he had done everything he could do that would add to the baby's comfort, he folded the little garments and laid them on a box, ready for morning. Then, moving carefully, he crawled into the bed made warm by the little body. Lovin Child, half wakened by the movement, gave a little, throaty chuckle, murmured "M'ee," and threw one fat arm over Bud's neck and left it there.

"By glory," Bud whispered in a swift passion of longing, "I wish you was my own kid!" He snuggled Lovin Child close in his arms and held him there, and stared, dim-eyed, at the flickering shadows on the wall.

CHAPTER XVI.

Three days it stormed with never a break; stormed so that the men dreaded the carrying of water from the spring that became ice-rimmed but never froze over; that clogged with sodden masses of snow half melted and sent faint wisps of steam up into the chill air. Cutting wood was an ordeal, every armload an achievement. Cash did not even attempt to visit his trap line, but sat before the fire, smoking or staring into the flames, or puttered about the little domestic duties that could not half fill the days.

With melted snow water, a bar of yellow soap, and one leg of an old pair of drawers, he scrubbed on his knees the floor on his side of the dead line, and tried not to notice Lovin Child, and failed only because Lovin Child refused to be ignored, but insisted upon occupying the immediate foreground and in helping—much as he had helped Marie pack her suit case one fateful afternoon.

When Lovin Child was not permitted to dabble in the pan of soapy water, he revenged himself by bringing Cash's mitten and throwing that in, and crying "Ee? Ee?" with a shameless delight because it sailed round and round until Cash turned and saw it and threw it out.

"No, no, no!" Lovin Child admonished himself gravely, and got it and threw it back again.

Cash did not say anything. Indeed, he hid a grin under his thick, curling beard which he had grown since the first frost as a protection against cold. He picked up the mitten and laid it to dry on the slab mantel, and when he returned, Lovin Child was sitting in the pan, rocking back and forth and crooning "*'Ock*-a-by! *'Ock-a*-by!" with the impish twinkle in his eyes.

Cash was just picking him out of the pan when Bud came in with a load of wood. Bud hastily dropped the wood, and, without a word, Cash handed Lovin Child across the dead line, much as he would have handed over a wet puppy. Without a word Bud took him, but the quirky smile hid at the corners of his mouth and under Cash's beard still lurked the grin.

"No, no, no!" Lovin Child kept repeating smugly, all the while Bud was stripping off his wet clothes and shucking him into the undershirt he wore for a nightgown and tying a man's size pair of socks on his legs.

"I should *say* no-no-no! You doggone little rascal, I'd rather herd a flea on a hot plate! I've a plumb good notion to hog tie yuh for a while. Can't trust yuh a minute nowhere. Now look what you got to wear while your clothes dry!"

"Ee? Ee?" invited Lovin Child, gleefully holding up a muffled little foot lost in the depths of Bud's sock.

"Oh, I see all right! I'll tell the world I see you're a dog-gone nuisance! Now see if you can keep outa mischief till I get the wood carried in."

Bud set him down on the bunk, gave him a mail-order catalogue to look at, and went out again into the storm. When he came back Lovin Child was sitting on the hearth with the socks off, and was picking bits of charcoal from the ashes and crunching them like candy in his small white teeth. Cash was hurrying to finish his scrubbing before the charcoal gave out, and was keeping an eye on the crunching to see that Lovin Child did not get a hot ember.

"H'yah! You young imp!" Bud shouted, stubbing his toe as he hurried forward. "Whatcha think you are—a fire eater, for gosh sake?"

Cash bent his head low; it may have been to hide a chuckle. Bud was having his hands full with the kid, and he was trying to be stern against the handicap of a growing worship of Lovin Child and all his little ways. Now Lovin Child was all over ashes, and the clean undershirt was clean no longer, after having much charcoal rubbed into its texture. Bud was not overstocked with clothes; much traveling had formed the habit of buying as he needed for immediate use. With Lovin Child held firmly under one arm, where he would be sure of him, he emptied his "war bag" on the bunk and hunted out another shirt.

Lovin Child got a bath that time, because of the ashes he had managed to gather on his feet and his hands and his head. Bud was patient, and Lovin Child was delightedly unrepentant—until he was buttoned into another shirt of Bud's and the socks were tied on him.

"Now, dog-gone yuh, I'm goin' to stake you out, or hobble yuh or some darn thing, till I get that wood in!" he thundered with his eyes laughing. "You want to freeze? Hey? Now you're goin' to stay right on this bunk till I get through, because I'm goin' to *tie* yuh on. You may holler—but you little son of a gun, you'll stay safe!"

So Bud tied him, with a necktie around his body for a belt, and a strap fastened to that and to a stout nail in the wall over the bunk. And Lovin Child, when he discovered that it was not a new game, but instead a check upon his activities, threw himself on his back and held his breath until he was purple, and then screeched with rage.

He howled for an hour, and had both men nearly frantic before he suddenly stopped and began to play with the things he had scorned before to touch; the things that had made him bow his back and scream when they were offered to him hopefully.

Bud, his sleeves rolled up, his hair rumpled and the perspiration standing thick on his forehead, stood over him with his hands on his hips, the picture of perturbed helplessness.

"You dog-gone little devil!" he breathed, his mind torn between amusement and exasperation. "If you was my own kid, I'd spank yuh! But," he added, with a little chuckle, "if you was my own kid, I'd tell the world you come by that temper honestly. Darned if I wouldn't!"

Cash, sitting dejected on the side of his own bunk, lifted his head, and after that his hawklike brows, and stared from the face of Bud to the face of Lovin Child. For the first time he was struck with the resemblance between the two. The twinkle in the eyes, the quirk of the lips, the shape of the forehead, and, emphasizing them all, the expression of having a secret joke, struck him with a kind of shock. If it were possible—— But, even in the delirium of fever, Bud had never hinted that he had a child or a wife even. He had firmly planted in Cash's mind the impression that his life had never held any close ties whatsoever. So, lacking the clew, Cash only wondered and did not suspect.

What most troubled Cash was the fact that he had unwittingly caused all the trouble for Lovin Child. He should not have tried to scrub the floor, with the kid running loose all over the place. As a slight token of his responsibility

in the matter, he watched his chance when Bud was busy at the old cookstove and tossed a rabbit fur across to Lovin Child to play with; a risky thing to do, since he did not know what were Lovin Child's little peculiarities in the way of receiving strange gifts. But he was lucky. Lovin Child was enraptured with the soft fur, and rubbed it over his baby cheeks and cooed to it and kissed it, and said "Ee? Ee?" to Cash, which was reward enough.

There was a strained moment when Bud came over and discovered what it was he was having so much fun with. Having had three days of experience by which to judge, he jumped to the conclusion that Lovin Child had been in mischief again.

"*Now* what yuh up to, you little scallywag?" he demanded. "How did you get hold of that? Consarn your little hide, Boy——"

"Let the kid have it," Cash muttered gruffly. "I gave it to him." He got up abruptly and went outside, and came in with wood for the cookstove and became exceedingly busy, never once looking toward the other end of the room, where Bud was sprawled upon his back on the bunk, with Lovin Child astride his middle, having a high old time with a wonderful new game of "bronk riding."

Now and then Bud would stop bucking long enough to slap Lovin Child in the face with the soft side of the rabbit fur, and Lovin Child would squint his eyes and wrinkle his nose and laugh until he seemed likely to choke. Then Bud would cry, "Ride 'im, Boy! Ride 'im an 'scratch 'im! Go *get* 'im, cowboy; he's your meat!" and would bounce Lovin Child till he squealed with glee.

Cash tried to ignore all that; tried to keep his back to it. But he was human, and Bud was changed so completely in the last three days that Cash could scarcely credit his eyes and his ears. The old surly scowl was gone from Bud's face, his eyes held again the twinkle. Cash listened to the whoops, the baby laughter, the old, rodeo catch phrases, and grinned while he fried his bacon.

Presently Bud gave a whoop, forgetting the feud in his play. "Lookit, Cash! He's ridin' straight up and whippin' as he rides! He's so-o-me bronk fighter, buh-lieve *me!*"

Cash turned and looked, grinned and turned away again, but only to strip the rind off a fresh-fried slice of bacon the full width of the piece. He came down the room on his own side the dead line, and tossed the rind across to the bunk.

"Quirt him with that, Boy," he grunted, "and then you can eat it if you want."

CHAPTER XVII.

On the fourth day Bud's conscience pricked him into making a sort of apology to Cash, under the guise of speaking to Lovin Child, for still keeping the baby in camp.

"I've got a blame good notion to pack you to town to-day, Boy, and try and find out where you belong," he said, while he was feeding him oatmeal mush with sugar and canned milk. "It's pretty cold, though——" He cast a slant-eyed glance at Cash, dourly frying his own hot cakes. "We'll see what it looks like after a while. I sure have got to hunt up your folks soon as I can. Ain't I, old-timer?"

That salved his conscience a little, and freed him of the uneasy conviction that Cash believed him a kidnaper. The weather did the rest. An hour after breakfast, just when Bud was downheartedly thinking he could not much longer put off starting without betraying how hard it was going to be for him to give up the baby, the wind shifted the clouds and herded them down to the Big Mountain and held them there until they began to sift snow down upon the burdened pines.

"Gee, it's going to storm again!" Bud blustered in. "It'll be snowing like all git-out in another hour. I'll tell a cruel world I wouldn't take a dog out such weather as this. Your folks may be worrying about yuh, Boy, but they ain't going to climb my carcass for packing

yuh fifteen miles in a snowstorm and letting yuh freeze maybe. I guess the cabin's big enough to hold yuh another day—what?"

That day went merrily to the music of Lovin Child's chuckling laugh and his unintelligible chatter. Bud made the discovery that "Boy" was trying to say "Lovin Child" when he wanted to be taken and rocked, and declared that he would tell the world the name fit, like a saddle on a duck's back. Lovin Child discovered Cash's pipe, and was caught sucking it before the fireplace and mimicking Cash's meditative pose with a comical exactness that made Bud roar. Even Cash was betrayed into speaking a whole sentence to Bud before he remembered his grudge. Taken altogether, it was a day of fruitful pleasure in spite of the storm outside.

The next day it was still storming, and colder than ever. No one would expect Bud to take a baby out in such weather. So he whistled and romped with Lovin Child, and would not worry about what must happen when the storm was past.

All day Cash brooded before the fire, bundled in his Mackinaw and sweater. He did not even smoke, and though he seemed to feel the cold abnormally he did not bring in any wood except in the morning, but let Bud keep the fireplace going with his own generous supply. He did not eat any dinner, and at supper time he went to bed with all the clothes he possessed piled on top of him. By all these signs, Bud knew that Cash had a bad cold.

Bud did not think much about it at first, being of the sturdy type that makes light of a cold. But when Cash began to cough with that hoarse, racking sound that tells the tale of laboring lungs, Bud began to feel guiltily that he ought to do something about it.

He hushed Lovin Child's romping that night, and would not let him ride a bronk at bedtime. When he was asleep, Bud laid him down and went over to the supply cupboard, which he had been obliged to rearrange with everything except tin cans placed on shelves too high for a two-year-old to reach even when he stood on his tiptoes and grunted. He hunted for the bottle of turpentine, found it, and mixed some with melted bacon grease, and went over to Cash's bunk, hesitating before he crossed the dead line, but crossing nevertheless.

Cash seemed to be asleep, but his breathing sounded harsh and unnatural, and his hand, lying uncovered on the blanket, clenched and unclenched spasmodically. Bud watched him for a minute, holding the cup of grease and turpentine in his hand.

"Say!" he began constrainedly, and waited. Cash muttered something, and moved his hand irritatedly, without opening his eyes. Bud tried again.

"Say, you better swab your chest with this dope. Can't monkey with a cold such weather as this."

Cash opened his eyes, gave the log wall a startled look, and swung his glance to Bud. "Yeah—I'm all right," he croaked, and proved his statement wrong by coughing violently.

Bud set down the cup on a box, laid hold of Cash by the shoulders, and forced him on his back. With movements roughly gentle he opened Cash's clothing at the throat, exposed his hairy chest, and poured on grease until it ran in tiny rivulets. He reached in and rubbed the grease vigorously with the palm of his hand, giving particular attention to the surface over the bronchial tubes. When he was satisfied that Cash's skin could absorb no more, he turned him unceremoniously on his face and repeated his ministrations upon Cash's shoulders. Then he rolled him back, buttoned his shirts for him, and tramped heavily back to the table.

"I don't mind seeing a man play the mule when he's well," he grumbled, "but he's got a right to call it a day when he gits down sick. I ain't going to be bothered burying no corpses in weather like this. I'll tell the world I ain't!"

He went searching on all the shelves for something more that he could give Cash. He found a box of liver pills, a bottle of Jamaica ginger and some

iodine—not an encouraging array for a man fifteen miles of untrodden snow from the nearest human habitation. He took three of the liver pills—judging them by size rather than what might be their composition—and a cup of water to Cash and commanded him to sit up and swallow them. When this was accomplished, Bud felt easier as to his conscience, though he was still anxious over the possibilities in that cough.

Twice in the night he got up to put more wood on the fire and to stand beside Cash's bed and listen to his breathing. Pneumonia, the strong man's deadly foe, was what he feared. In his cow-punching days he had seen men die of it before a doctor could be brought from the far-away town. Had he been alone with Cash, he would have fought his way to town and brought help, but with Lovin Child to care for he could not take the trail.

At daylight Cash woke him by stumbling across the floor to the water bucket. Bud arose then and swore at him for a fool and sent him back to bed and savagely greased him again with the bacon grease and turpentine. He was cheered a little when Cash cussed back, but he did not like the sound of his voice for all that, and so threatened mildly to brain him if he got out of bed again without wrapping a blanket or something around him.

Thoroughly awakened by this little exchange of civilities, Bud started a fire in the stove and made coffee for Cash, who drank half a cup quite meekly. He still had that tearing cough, and his voice was no more than a croak; but he seemed no worse than he had been the night before, so on the whole Bud considered the case encouraging, and ate his breakfast an hour or so earlier than usual and went out and chopped wood until he heard Lovin Child chirping inside the cabin like a bug-hunting meadow lark, when he had to hurry in before Lovin Child crawled off the bunk and got into some mischief.

For a man who was wintering in what is called enforced idleness in a snow-bound cabin in the mountains, Bud Moore did not find the next few days hanging heavily on his hands. Far from it.

CHAPTER XVIII.

To begin with, Boy got hold of Cash's tobacco, and was feeding it by small handfuls to the flames when Bud caught him. He yelled when Bud took it away, and bumped his head on the floor and yelled again and spatted his hands together and yelled and threw himself back and kicked and yelled; while Bud towered over him and yelled expostulations and reprimands and cajolery that did not cajole.

Cash turned over with a groan, his two palms pressed against his splitting head, and hoarsely commanded the two to shut up that infernal noise. He was a sick man. He was a very sick man, and he had stood the limit.

"Shut up?" Bud shouted above the din of Lovin Child. "Ain't I trying to shut him up, for gosh sake? What d'yuh want me to do?—let him throw all the tobacco you got into the fire? Here, you young imp, quit that, before I spank yuh! Quick, now; we've had about enough outa you! You lay down there, Cash, and quit your croaking! You'll croak right if you don't keep covered up. Hey, Boy! My jumpin' yellow jackets, you'd drown a Claxon till you couldn't hear it ten feet! Cash, you old fool, you shut up, I tell yuh, or I'll come over there and shut you up! I'll tell the world—— Boy! Good glory! *Shut up-p!*"

Cash was a sick man, but he had not lost all his resourcefulness. He had stopped Lovin Child once, and thereby he had learned a little of the infantile mind. He had a coyote skin on the foot of his bed, and he raised himself up and reached for it as one reaches for a fire extinguisher. Like a fire extinguisher he aimed it, straight in the middle of the uproar.

Lovin Child, thumping head and heels regularly on the floor, and punctuating the thumps with screeches, was extinguished—suddenly, completely silenced by the muffling fur that fell from the

sky, so far as he knew. The skin covered him completely. Not a sound came from under it. The stillness was so absolute that Bud was scared, and so was Cash a little. It was as though Lovin Child, possessed of a demon one instant, was in the next instant snuffed out of existence.

"What yuh done?" Bud ejaculated, rolling wild eyes at Cash. "You——"

The coyote skin rattled a little. A fluff of yellow, a spark of blue, and "Pik-k?" chirped Lovin Child from under the edge, and ducked back again out of sight.

Bud sat down weakly on a box and shook his head slowly from one side to the other. "You've got me going south," he made solemn confession to the wabbling skin—or to what it concealed. "I throw up my hands, I'll tell the world fair." He got up and went over and sat down on his bunk, and rested his hands on his knees and considered the problem of Lovin Child.

"Here I've got wood to cut and water to bring and grub to cook, and I can't do none of them because I've got to ride herd on you every minute. You've got my goat, kid, and that's the truth. You sure have. Yes, *'Pik-k,'* dog-gone yuh—after me going crazy with yuh, just about, and thinking you're about to blow your radiator cap plumb up through the roof! I'll tell yuh right here and now, this storm has got to let up pretty quick so I can pack you outa here, or else I've got to pen you up somehow, so I can do something besides watch you. Look at the way you scattered them beans over there by the cupboard! By rights I oughta stand over yuh and make yuh pick every one of 'em up! And who was it drug all the ashes outa the stove, I'd like to know?"

The coyote skin lifted a little and moved off toward the fireplace, growling "Ooo-ooo-ooo!" like a bear—almost. Bud rescued the bear a scant two feet from the flames and carried fur, baby, and all to the bunk. "My good Lord, what's a fellow going to *do* with yuh?" he groaned in desperation. "Burn yourself up, you would! I can see now why folks keep their kids corralled in high chairs and buggies all the time. They got to or they wouldn't have no kids."

He studied the small cuts of high chairs in a mail-order catalogue and set out to make one. An ax, a big jackknife, a hammer, and some nails left over from building their sluice boxes—these were his tools. He took the ax first, and, having tied Lovin Child to the leg of his bunk for safety's sake, he went out and cut down four young oaks behind the cabin, lopped off the branches, and brought them in for chair legs. He emptied a dynamite box of odds and ends, scrubbed it out, and left it to dry while he mounted the four legs with braces of the green oak and a skeleton frame on top. Then he knocked one end out of the box, padded the edges of the box with burlap, and set Lovin Child in his new high chair.

He was tempted to call Cash's attention to his handiwork, but Cash was too sick to be disturbed, even if the atmosphere between them had been clear enough for easy converse. So he stifled the impulse, and addressed himself to Lovin Child, which did just as well.

Things went better after that. Bud could tie the baby in the chair, give him a tin cup and a spoon and a bacon rind, and go out to the woodpile feeling reasonably certain that the house would not be set afire during his absence.

Fair weather came, and days of melting snow. But they served only to increase Bud's activities at the woodpile and in hunting small game close by while Lovin Child took his nap and Cash was drowsing. Sometimes he would bundle the baby in an extra sweater and take him outside and let him wallow in the snow while Bud cut wood and piled it on the sheltered side of the cabin wall, a reserve supply to draw on in an emergency.

It may have been the wet snow; more likely it was the cabin air filled with germs of cold. Whatever it was, Lovin Child caught cold and coughed croupy

all one night, and fretted and would not sleep. Bud anointed him as he had anointed Cash, and rocked him in front of the fire and met the morning hollow-eyed and haggard. A great fear tore at his heart. Cash read it in his eyes, in the tones of his voice when he crooned soothing fragments of old range songs to the baby, and at daylight Cash managed to dress himself, though what assistance he could possibly give was not all clear to him until he saw Bud's glance rove anxiously toward the cookstove.

"Hand the kid over here," Cash said huskily. "I can hold him while you get yourself some breakfast."

Bud looked at him stupidly, hesitated, looked down at the flushed little face, and carefully laid him in Cash's outstretched arms. He got up stiffly—he had been sitting there a long time, while the baby slept uneasily—and went on his tiptoes to make a fire in the stove.

He did not wonder at Cash's sudden interest, his abrupt change from moody aloofness to his old partnership in trouble as well as in good fortune. He knew that Cash was not fit for the task, however, and he hurried the coffee to the boiling point that he might the sooner send Cash back to bed. He gulped down a cup of coffee scalding hot, ate a few mouthfuls of bacon and bread, and brought a cup back to Cash.

"What d'yuh think about him?" he whispered, setting the coffee down on a box so that he could take Lovin Child. "Pretty sick kid, don't yuh think?"

"It's the same cold I got," Cash breathed huskily. "Swallows like it's his throat mostly. What you doing for him?"

"Bacon grease and turpentine," Bud answered him despondently. "I'll have to commence on something else, though; turpentine's played out. I used it most all up on you."

"Coal oil's good. And fry up a mess of onions and make a poultice." He put up a shaking hand before his mouth and coughed behind it, stifling the sound all he could.

Lovin Child threw up his hands and whimpered, and Bud bent over him anxiously. "His little hands are awful hot," he muttered. "He's been that way all night."

Cash did not answer. There did not seem anything to say that would do any good. He drank his coffee and eyed the two, lifting his eyebrows now and then at some new thought.

"Looks like you, Bud," he croaked suddenly. "Eyes, expression, mouth; you could pass him off as your own kid, if you wanted to."

"I might, at that," Bud whispered absently. "I've been seeing you in him, though, all along. He lifts his eyebrows same way you do."

"Ain't like me," Cash denied weakly, studying Lovin Child. "Give him here again, and you go fry them onions. I would—if I had the strength to get around."

"Well, you ain't got the strength. You go back to bed and I'll lay him in with yuh. I guess he'll lay quiet. He likes to be cuddled up close."

In this way was the feud forgotten. Save for the strange habits imposed by sickness and the care of a baby, they dropped back into their old routine, their old relationship. They walked over the dead line heedlessly, forgetting why it came to be there. Cabin fever no longer tormented them with its magnifying of little things. They had no time or thought for trifles; a bigger matter than their own petty prejudices concerned them. They were fighting, side by side, with the Old Man of the Scythe—the Old Man who spares not.

Cash was tottery weak from his own illness, and he could not speak above a whisper. Yet he directed and helped soothe the baby with baths and slow strokings of his hot forehead, and watched him while Bud did the work, and worried because he could not do more.

They did not know when Lovin Child took a turn for the better, except that they realized the fever was broken. But his listlessness, the unnatural drooping of his whole body, scared them worse than before. Night and day one or the other watched over him,

trying to anticipate every need, every vagrant whim. When he began to grow exacting they were still worried, though they were too fagged to abase themselves before him as much as they would have liked.

Then Bud was seized with an attack of the grippe before Lovin Child had passed the stage of wanting to be held every waking minute, which burdened Cash with extra duties long before he was fit.

New Year came and passed and won nothing in the way of celebrating from the three in Nelson's cabin. Bud's bones ached, his head ached, the flesh in his body ached. He could take no comfort anywhere, under any circumstances. He craved clean white beds and soft-footed attendance and soothing silence and cool drinks—and he could have none of those things. His bedclothes were heavy upon his aching limbs, he had to wait upon his own wants, the fretful crying of Lovin Child or the racking cough of Cash was always in his ears, and, as for cool drinks, there was ice water in plenty, to be sure, but nothing else.

Fair weather came, and storms and cold; more storms and cold than fair weather. Neither man ever mentioned taking Lovin Child to Alpine. At first, because it was out of the question; after that because they did not want to mention it. They frequently declared that Lovin Child was a pest, and there were times when Bud spoke darkly of spankings—which did not materialize. But though they did not mention it, they knew that Lovin Child was something more; something endearing, something humanizing, something they needed to keep them immune from cabin fever.

CHAPTER XIX.

Some time in February it was that Cash fashioned a crude pair of snowshoes and went to town, returning the next day. He came home loaded with little luxuries for Lovin Child, and with the simpler medicines for other emergencies which they might have to meet, but he did not bring any word of seeking parents. The nearest he came to mentioning the subject was after supper, when the baby was asleep and Bud was trying to cut a small pair of overalls from a large piece of blue duck that Cash had brought. The shears were dull, and Lovin Child's little rompers were so patched and shapeless that they were not much of a guide, so Bud was swearing softly while he worked.

"I didn't hear a word said about that kid being lost," Cash volunteered, after he had smoked and watched Bud a while. "Couldn't have been any one around Alpine, or I'd have heard something about it."

Bud frowned, though it may have been over his tailoring problem.

"Can't tell; the old squaw might 'a' been telling the truth," he said reluctantly. "I s'pose they do, once in a while. She said his folks were dead." And he added defiantly, with a quick glance at Cash: "Far as I'm concerned, I'm willing to let it ride that way. The kid's doing all right."

"Yeah. I got some stuff for that rash on his chest. I wouldn't wonder if we been feeding him too heavy on bacon rinds, Bud. They say too much of that kinda thing is bad for kids. Still, he seems to feel all right."

"I'll tell the world he does! He got hold of your old pipe to-day and was suckin' away on it I don't know how long. Never fazed him, either. If he can stand that, I guess he ain't very delicate."

"Yeah. I laid that pipe aside myself because it was getting so dang strong. Ain't you getting them pants too long in the seat, Bud? They look to me big enough for a ten-year-old."

"I guess you don't realize how that kid's growing!" Bud defended his handiwork. "And time I get the seams sewed and the sides lapped over for buttons——"

"Yeah. Where you going to get the buttons? You never sent for any."

"Oh, I'll find buttons. You can donate a couple off some of your clothes, if you want to right bad."

"Who? Me! I ain't got enough

now to keep the wind out," Cash protested. "Lemme tell yuh something, Bud. If you cut more saving, you'd have enough cloth there for two pair of pants. You don't need to cut the legs so long as all that. They'll drag on the ground so the poor kid can't walk in 'em without falling all over himself."

"Well, good glory! Who's making these pants? Me or you?" Bud exploded. "If you think you can do any better job than what I'm doing, go get yourself some cloth and fly at it. Don't think you can come hornin' in on my job, 'cause I'll tell the world right out loud you can't!"

"Yeah—that's right! Go to bellerin' around like a bull buffalo and wake the kid up. *I* don't give a cuss how you make 'm. Go ahead and *have* the seat of his pants hangin' down below his knees if you want to." Cash got up and moved huffily over to the fireplace and sat with his back to Bud.

"Maybe I will at that," Bud retorted. "You can't come around and crab the job I'm doing." Bud was jabbing a needle eye toward the end of a thread too coarse for it, and it did not improve his temper to have the thread refuse to pass through the eye.

Neither did it please him to find, when all the seams were sewn, that the little overalls failed to look like any garment he had ever seen on a child. When he tried them on Lovin Child next day, Cash took one look and bolted from the cabin with his hand over his mouth.

When he came back an hour or so later, Lovin Child was wearing his ragged rompers, and Bud was bent over a Weinstock-Lubin mail-order catalogue. He had a sheet of paper half filled with items, and was licking his pencil and looking for more. He looked up and grinned a little, and asked Cash when he was going to town again, and added that he wanted to mail a letter.

"Yeah. Well, the trail's just as good now as it was when I took it," Cash hinted strongly. "When I go to town again, it'll be because I've got to go. And far as I can see, I won't have to go for quite some time."

So Bud rose before daylight the next morning, tied on the makeshift snowshoes Cash had contrived, and made the fifteen-mile trip to Alpine and back before dark. He brought candy for Lovin Child, tended that young gentleman through a siege of indigestion because of the indulgence, and waited impatiently until he was fairly certain that the wardrobe he had ordered had arrived at the post office. When he had counted off the two days required for a round trip to Sacramento, and had added three days for possible delay in filling the order, he went again and returned in one of the worst storms of the winter.

But he did not grudge the hardship, for he carried on his back a bulky bundle of clothes for Lovin Child; enough to last the winter through and some to spare. A woman would have laughed at some of the things he chose; impractical, dainty garments that Bud could not launder properly to save his life. But there were little really-truly overalls, in which Lovin Child promptly developed a strut that delighted the men and earned him the title of Old Prospector. And there were little shirts and stockings and nightgowns and a pair of shoes and a toy or two that failed to interest him at all after the first inspection.

It began to look as though Bud had deliberately resolved upon carrying a guilty conscience all the rest of his life. He had made absolutely no effort to trace the parents of Lovin Child when he was in town. On the contrary, he had avoided all casual conversation, for fear some one might mention the fact that a child had been lost. He had been careful not to buy anything in the town that would lead one to suspect that he had a child concealed upon his premises, and he had even furnished what he called an alibi when he bought the candy, professing to own an inordinately sweet tooth.

Cash cast his eyes over the stack of baby clothes which Bud gleefully un-

wrapped on his bunk, and pinched out a smile under his beard.

"Well, if the kid stays till he wears out all them clothes, we'll just about have to give him a share in the company," he said dryly.

Bud looked up in quick jealousy. "What's mine's his, and I own a half interest in both claims. I guess that'll feed him—if they pan out anything," he retorted. "Come here, Boy, and let's try this suit on. Looks pretty small to me; marked three year, but I reckon they don't grow 'em as husky as you, back where they make all these clothes."

"Yeah. But you ought to put it in writing, Bud. S'pose anything happened to us both, and it might. Mining's always got its risky side, even cutting out sickness, which we've had a big sample of right this winter. Well, the kid oughta have some security in case anything *did* happen. Now——"

Bud looked thoughtfully down at the fuzzy, yellow head that did not come much above his knee.

"Well, how yuh going to do anything like that without giving it away that we've got him? Besides, what name'd we give him in the company? No, sir, Cash, he gets what I've got, and I'll smash any man that tries to get it away from him. But we can't get out any legal papers——"

"Yeah. But we can make our wills, can't we? My idea is that we ought to both of us make our wills right here and now. Each of us to name the other for *guardeen,* in case of accident, and each one picking a name for the kid and giving him our share in the claims and anything else we may happen to own." He stopped abruptly, and his jaw sagged a little at some unpleasant thought.

"I don't know; come to think of it, I can't just leave the kid all my property. I—I've got a kid of my own, and if she's alive—I ain't heard anything of her for fifteen years and more, but if she's alive she'd come in for a share. She's a woman grown by this time. Her mother died when she was a baby. I married the woman I hired to take care of her and the house—like a fool. When we parted she took the kid with her. She did think a lot of her, I'll say that much for her, and that's all I can say in her favor. I drifted around, and lost track of 'em. Old woman, she married again, and I heard that didn't pan out, neither. Anyway, she kept the girl, and gave her the care and schooling that I couldn't give. I was a drifter.

"Well, she can bust the will if I leave her out, yuh see. And if the old woman gets a finger in the pie, it'll be busted all right. I can write her down for a hundred dollars, perviding she don't contest. That'll fix it. And the rest goes to the kid here. But I want him to have the use of my name, understand. Something-or-other Markham Moore ought to suit all hands well enough."

Bud, holding Lovin Child on his knees, frowned a little at first. But when he looked at Cash, and caught the wistfulness in his eyes, he surrendered warm-heartedly.

"A couple of old he-hens like us; we need a chick to look after," he said whimsically. "I guess Markham Moore ought to be good enough for 'most any kid. And if it ain't, by gosh, we'll make it good enough! If I ain't been all I should be, there's no law against straightening up. Markham Moore goes as it lays—hey, Lovins?" But Lovin Child had gone to sleep over his foster fathers' disposal of his future. His little yellow head was wabbling on his limp neck, and Bud cradled him in his arms and held him so.

"Yeah. But what are we going to *call* him?" Methodical Cash wanted the whole matter settled at one conference, it seemed.

"Call him! Why, what've we been calling him the last two months? If he's satisfied with Lovin, we oughta be. Lovin Markham Moore ain't half bad. Then if he wants to change it when he grows up, he can."

"Yeah. I guess that's as good as anything. I'd hate to see him named Cassius, like I was. Well, now's as good a time as any to make them wills, Bud. We oughta have a couple of wit-

nesses, but we can act for each other, and I guess it'll pass. You lay the kid down, and we'll write 'em and have it done with and off our minds. I dunno —I've got a couple of lots in Phoenix I'll leave to the girl. By rights she should have 'em. Lovins here'll have my share in all mining claims; these two I'll name 'specially, because I expect them to develop into paying mines; the Blind Ledge, anyway."

"All right; put it that way. Only, when you're writing it down, you make it read 'child of Bud Moore's' or something like that. You can will him the moon, if you want, and you can have your name sandwiched in between his and mine. But get this, and get it right: He's mine, and if we ever split up, the kid goes with me. I'll tell the world right now that this kid belongs to *me*, and where I go he goes. You get that?"

"You don't have to beller at the top of your voice, do yuh?" snapped Cash, prying the cork out of the ink bottle with his jackknife. "Here's another pen point. Tie it onto a stick or something and git to work before you git to putting it off."

Leaning over the table, facing each other, they wrote steadily for a few minutes. Then Bud began to flag, and finally he stopped and crumpled the sheet of tablet paper into a ball. Cash looked up, lifted his eyebrows irritatedly, and went on with his composition.

Bud sat nibbling the end of his makeshift penholder. The obstacle that had loomed in Cash's way and had constrained him to reveal the closed pages of his life loomed large in Bud's way also. Lovin Child was a near and a very dear factor in his life, but when it came to sitting down calmly and setting his affairs in order for those who might be left behind, Lovin Child was not the only person he must think of. What of his own man-child? What of Marie?

Cash finished, glanced curiously across at Bud, looked down at what he had written, and slid the sheet of paper across.

"You sign it, and then if you don't know just how to word yours you can use this for a pattern. I've read law books enough to know this will get by all right. It's plain, and it tells what I want, and that's sufficient to hold in court."

Bud read it over apathetically, signed his name as witness, and pushed the paper back.

"That's all right for you," he said heavily. "Your kid is grown up now, and besides you've got other property to give her. But—it's different with me. I want this baby, and I can't do without him. But I can't give him my share in the claims, Cash. I—there's others that's got to be thought of first."

CHAPTER XX.

It was only the next day that Bud was the means of helping Lovin Child find a fortune for himself, which eased Bud's mind considerably and balanced better his half of the responsibility.

They were romping around the cabin, like two puppies that had a surplus of energy to work off. Part of the time Lovin Child was a bear, chasing Bud up and down the dead line, which was getting pretty well worn out in places. After that Bud was a bear and chased Lovins. And when Lovin Child got so tickled he was perfectly helpless in the corner where he had sought refuge, Bud caught him and swung him up to his shoulder and let him grab handfuls of dirt out of the roof.

Lovin Child liked that better than being a bear, and sifted Bud's hair full of dried mud and threw the rest on the floor and frequently cried "Tell a worl'!" which he had learned from Bud, and could say with the uncanny pertinency of a parrot.

He had signified a desire to have Bud carry him along the wall, where some lovely lumps of dirt protruded temptingly over a bulging log. Then he leaned and grabbed with his two fat hands at a particularly big, hard lump. It came away in his hands and fell plump on the blankets of the bunk, half

blinding Bud with the dust that came with it.

"Hey! You'll have all the chinkin' out of the dang shack, if you let him keep that lick up, Bud," Cash grumbled, lifting his eyebrows at the mess.

"Tell a worl'!" Lovin Child retorted over his shoulder, and made another grab.

This time the thing he held resisted his baby strength. He pulled and he grunted, he kicked Bud in the chest and grabbed again. Bud was patient, and let him fuss, though in self-defense he kept his head down and his eyes away from the expected dust bath.

"Stay with it, Boy! Pull the darn roof down if yuh want. Cash'll get out and chink 'er up again."

"Yeah. Cash will not," the disapproving one amended the statement gruffly. "He's trying to get the log outa the wall, Bud."

"Well, let him try, dog-gone it. Shows he's a stayer. I wouldn't have any use for him if he didn't have gumption enough to tackle things too big for him, and you wouldn't, either. Stay with 'er, Lovins!"

"Tell a worl'!" chuckled Lovin Child, and pulled harder at the thing he wanted.

"Hey! The kid's got hold of a piece of gunny sack or something. You look out, Bud, or he'll have all that chinkin' out! There's no sense in lettin' him tear the whole blame shack to pieces, is there?"

"Can if he wants to. It's his shack as much as it's anybody's." Bud shifted Lovin Child more comfortably on his shoulder and looked up, squinting his eyes half shut for fear of dirt in them.

"F'r the love a Mike, kid, what's that you've got? Looks to me like a piece of buckskin, Cash. Here! You set down a minute, and let Bud take a peek up there."

"Bud—pik-k?" chirped Lovin Child from the blankets, where Bud had deposited him unceremoniously.

"Yes, Bud pik-k." Bud stepped up on the bunk, which brought his head above the low eaves. He leaned and looked and scraped away the caked mud. "Good glory! The kid's found a cache of some kind, sure as you live!" And he began to claw out what had been hidden behind the mud.

First a buckskin bag, heavy and grimed and knobby. Gold inside it, he knew without looking. He dropped it down on the bunk carefully, so as not to smash a toe off the baby. After that he pulled out four baking-powder cans, all heavy as lead. He laid his cheek against the log and peered down the length of it, and jumped down beside the bunk.

"Kid's found a gold mine of his own, and I'll bet on it!" he cried excitedly. "Looky, Cash!"

Cash was already looking, his eyebrows arched high to match his astonishment. "Yeah. It's gold, all right. Old man Nelson's hoard, I wouldn't wonder. I've always thought it was funny he never found any gold in this flat long as he lived here. And traces of washing here and there, too. Well!"

"Looky, Boy!" Bud had the top off a can, and took out a couple of nuggets the size of a cooked Lima bean. "Here's the real stuff for yuh. It's yours, too, unless—— Did old Nelson leave any folks, Cash, do yuh know?"

"They say not. The county buried him. And nobody ever turned up to claim him or what little he left. No, I guess there's nobody got any better right to it than the kid. We'll inquire around and see. But seein' the gold is found on the claim, and we've got the claim according to law, looks to me like——"

"Well, here's your clean-up, old prospector. Don't swallow any is all. Let's weigh it out, Cash, and see how much it is, just for a josh."

Lovin Child had nuggets to play with there on the bed, and told the world many unintelligible things about it. Cash and Bud dumped all the gold into a pan and weighed it out on the little scales Cash had for his tests. It was not a fortune, as fortunes go. It was probably all the gold Nelson had panned out in a couple of years, working alone and with crude devices. A little over twenty-three hundred dollars it

amount to, not counting the nuggets which Lovin Child had on the bunk with him.

"Well, it's a start for the kid, anyway," Bud said, leaning back and regarding the heap with eyes shining. "I helped him find it, and I kinda feel as if I'm square with him now for not giving him my half the claim. Twenty-three hundred would be a good price for a half interest, as the claims stand, don't yuh think, Cash?"

"Yeah—well, I dunno's I'd sell for that. But on the showing we've got so far—yes, five thousand, say, for the claims would be good money."

"Pretty good haul for a kid, anyway. He's got a couple of hundred dollars in nuggets right there on the bunk. Let's see, Lovins. Let Bud have 'em for a minute."

Then it was that Lovin Child revealed a primitive human trait. He would not give up the gold. He held fast to one big nugget, spread his fat legs over the remaining heap of them, and fought Bud's hand away with the other fist.

"No, no, no! Tell a worl' no, no no!" he remonstrated vehemently, until Bud whooped with laughter.

"All right—all right! Keep your gold, durn it. You're like all the rest; minute you get your paws onto some of the real stuff you go hog wild over it."

Cash was pouring the fine gold back into the buckskin bag and the baking-powder cans.

"Let the kid play with it," he said. "Getting used to gold when he's little will maybe save him from a lot of foolishness over it when he gets big."

That night they discussed soberly the prospects of the claim and their responsibilities in the matter of Lovin Child's windfall. They would quietly investigate the history of old Nelson, who had died a pauper in the eyes of the community, with all his gleanings of gold hidden away. They agreed that Lovin Child should not start off with one grain of gold that rightfully belonged to some one else, but they agreed the more cheerfully because neither man believed they would find any close relatives of Nelson. A wife or children they decided upon as rightful heirs; brothers, sisters, cousins, and aunts did not count. They were presumably able to look after themselves just as old Nelson had done. Their ethics were simple enough surely.

Barring, then, the discovery of wife or children, their plan was to take the gold to Sacramento in the spring and deposit it there in a savings bank for one Lovins Markham Moore. They would let the interest "ride" with the principal, and they would—though neither openly confessed it to the other—from time to time add a little from their own earnings. Bud especially looked forward to that as a compromise with his duty to his own child. He intended to save every cent he could and to start a savings account in the same bank for his own baby, Robert Edward Moore—named for Bud. He could not start off with as large a sum as Lovins would have, and for that Bud was honestly sorry. But Robert Edward Moore would have Bud's share in the claims, which would do a little toward evening things up.

Having settled these things to the satisfaction of their desires and their consciences, they went to bed well pleased with the day.

CHAPTER XXI.

One time or another the abject poverty of language becomes tragically apparent. To attempt putting some emotions into words is like trying to play "Ave Maria" on a toy piano. There are heights and depths utterly beyond the limitations of instrument and speech alike.

Marie's agonized experience in Alpine—and afterward—was of that kind. She went there under the urge of her loneliness, her heart hunger for Bud. Drunk or sober, loving her still or turning away from her in anger, she had to see him; had to hear him speak; had to tell him a little of what she felt of penitence and longing. Or that is what she believed she had to do. Once she

had started she could not turn back. Come what might, she would hunt until she found him. She had to or go crazy, she told herself over and over. She could not imagine any untoward circumstance that would turn her back from that quest.

Yet she did turn back, and with scarce a thought of Bud. She could not imagine the thing happening that did happen, which is the way life has of keeping us all on the anxious seat most of the time. She could not—at least she did not—dream that Lovin Child, at once her comfort and her strongest argument for a new chance at happiness, would in ten minutes or so wipe out all thought of Bud and leave only a dumb, dreadful agony that hounded her day and night.

She had reached Alpine early in the forenoon, and had gone to the one little hotel to rest and gather up her courage for the search which she felt was only beginning. She had been too careful of her money to spend any for a sleeper, foregoing even a berth in the tourist car. She could make Lovin Child comfortable with a full seat in the day coach for his little bed, and for herself it did not matter. She could not sleep, anyway. So she sat up all night and thought, and worried over the future, which was foolish, since the future held nothing at all that she pictured in it.

She was tired when she reached the hotel, carrying Lovin Child and her suit case, too—porters being unheard of in small villages, and the one hotel being too sure of its patronage to bother about getting guests from depot to hall bedroom. A deaf old fellow with white whiskers and poor eyesight fumbled two or three keys on a nail, chose one, and led the way down a little, dark hall to a little, stuffy room with a door opening directly on the sidewalk. Marie had not registered at all, because there was no ink in the inkwell and the pen had only half a point, but she was rather relieved to find that she was not obliged to write her name down—for Bud, perhaps, to see before she had a chance to see him.

Lovin Child was in his most romping mood, and Marie's head ached so badly that she was not quite so watchful of his movements as usual. She gave him a cracker, and left him alone to investigate the tiny room while she laid down for just a minute on the bed, grateful because the sun shone in warmly through the window and she did not feel the absence of a fire. She had no intention whatever of going to sleep; she did not believe that she could sleep if she had wanted to. But she must have slept for at least half an hour, perhaps longer.

When she sat up, with that startled sensation that follows unexpected, undesired slumber, the door was open and Lovin Child was gone. She had not believed that he could open the door, but she discovered that its latch had a very precarious hold upon the worn facing and that a slight twist of the knob was all it needed to swing the door open. She rushed out to look for him. Though unaware of how long she had slept, she was not greatly disturbed. Marie had run after Lovin Child too often to be alarmed at a little thing like that.

She went the whole length of the one little street, and looked in all the open doorways and traversed the one short alley that led behind the hotel. Facing the street was the railroad, with the station farther up, at the edge of the timber. Across the railroad was the little, rushing river, swollen now with rains that became snow on the higher slopes of the mountain behind the town.

Marie did not go near the river at first. Some instinct of dread made her shun even the possibility that Lovin Child had headed that way. But a man told her, when she broke down her diffidence and inquired, that he had seen a little tot in a red suit and cap going off that way. He had not thought anything of it. He was a stranger himself, he said, and he supposed the kid belonged there maybe.

Marie flew to the river, the man running beside her and three or four others coming out of buildings to see what was the matter. She did not find Lovin Child, but she did find half of the

cracker she had given him. It was lying so close to a deep, swirly place under the bank that Marie gave a scream when she saw it, and the man caught her by the arm for fear she meant to jump in.

Thereafter, the whole of Alpine turned out and searched the river bank as far down as they could get into the box cañon through which it roared to the sage-covered hills beyond. No one doubted that Lovin Child had been swept away in that tearing, rock-churned current. No one had any hope of finding his body, though they searched just as diligently as if they were certain.

Marie walked the bank all that day, calling and crying and fighting off despair. She walked the floor of her little room all night, the door locked against sympathy that seemed to her nothing but a prying curiosity over her torment, fighting back the hysterical cries that kept struggling for outlet.

The next day she was too exhausted to do anything more than climb up the steps of the train when it stopped there. Towns and ranches on the river below had been warned by wire and telephone, and a dozen officious citizens of Alpine assured her over and over that she would be notified at once if anything was discovered; meaning, of course, the body of her child. She did not talk. Beyond telling the station agent her name, and that she was going to stay in Sacramento until she heard something, she shrank behind her silence, and would reveal nothing of her errand there in Alpine, nothing whatever concerning herself. Mrs. Marie Moore, General Delivery, Sacramento, was all that Alpine learned of her.

It is not surprising, then, that the subject was talked out long before Bud or Cash came down into the town more than two months later. It is not surprising, either, that no one thought to look upstream for the baby or that they failed to consider any possible fate for him save drowning. That nibbled piece of cracker on the very edge of the river threw them all off in their reasoning. They took it for granted that the baby had fallen into the river at the place where they found the cracker. If he had done so, he would have been swept away instantly. No one could look at the river and doubt that—— Therefore no one did doubt it. That a squaw should find him sitting down where he had fallen, two hundred yards above the town and in the edge of the thick timber, never entered their minds at all. That she should pick him up with the intention at first of stopping his crying, and should yield to the temptingness of him, just as Bud had yielded, would have seemed to Alpine still more unlikely, because no Indian had ever kidnaped a white child in that neighborhood. So much for the habit of thinking along grooves established by precedent.

Marie went to Sacramento merely because that was the closest town of any size where she could wait for the news she dreaded to receive, yet must receive, before she could even begin to face her tragedy. She did not want to find Bud now. She shrank from any thought of him. Only for him she would still have her Lovin Child. Illogically she blamed Bud for what had happened. He had caused her one more great heartache, and she hoped never to see him again or to hear his name spoken.

Dully she settled down in a cheap, semiprivate boarding house to wait. In a day or two she pulled herself together and went out to look for work, because she must have money to live on. Go home to her mother she would not. Nor did she write to her. There, too, her great hurt had flung some of the blame. If her mother had not interfered and found fault all the time with Bud, they would be living together now—happy.

She found work without much trouble, for she was neat and efficient looking. The place did not require much concentration—a dentist's office, where her chief duties consisted of opening the daily budget of circulars, sending out monthly bills, and filing those that came in and telling pained-looking callers that the doctor was out just then.

Her salary just about paid her board, with a dollar or two left over.

For three months she stayed, too apathetic to seek a better position. Then the dentist's creditors became suddenly impatient, and the dentist could not pay his office rent, much less his office girl. Wherefore Marie found herself looking for work again, just when spring was opening all the fruit blossoms and merchants were smilingly telling one another that business was picking up.

Weinstock-Lubin's big department store gave her desk space in the mail-order department. Marie's duty it was to open the mail, check up the orders, and see that enough money was sent, and start the wheels moving to fill each order—to the satisfaction of the customer, if possible.

At first the work worried her a little. But she became accustomed to it, and settled into the routine of passing the orders along the proper channels with as little individual thought given to each one as was compatible with efficiency.

One morning in early June her practiced fingers were going through the pile of mail orders, and they singled out one that carried the postmark of Alpine. Marie bit her lips, but her fingers did not falter in their task. Cheap table linen, cheap collars, cheap suits, or cheap something or other was wanted, she had no doubt. She took out the paper with the blue money order folded inside, speared the money order on the hook with others, drew her order pad closer, and began to go through the list of articles wanted.

This was the list:

XL 94, 3 Dig-in-the-mud suits, 3 yr. at 59c $1.77
XL 14, 1 Buddy tucker suit, 3 yr..... 2.00
KL 6, 1 Bunny pumps infant, 6..... 1.25
KL 54, 1 Fat Ankle shoe infant, 6 ..... .98
HL 389, 3 Rubens vests, 3 yr. at 90c..... 2.70
SL 418, 3 Pajamas, 3 yr. at 59c..... 1.77
OL 323, 1 Express wagon, 15x32 in..... 4.25

$14.72

For which money order is inclosed. Please ship at once. Very truly,

R. E. Moore,
Alpine, Cal.

Mechanically she copied the order on a slip of paper which she put into her pocket, left her desk and her work and the store, and hurried to her boarding house.

Not until she was in her own room, with the door locked, did she dare let herself think. She sat down, with the copy spread open before her, her slim fingers pressing against her temples. Something amazing had been revealed to her—something so amazing that she could scarcely comprehend its full significance. Bud—never for a minute did she doubt that it was Bud, for she knew his handwriting too well to be mistaken—Bud sending for clothes for a baby boy!

"3 Dig-in-the-mud suits, 3 yr——" It sounded to the hungry mother soul of her exactly like her Lovin Child. She could see so vividly just how he would look in them. And the size—she certainly would buy them three-year size if she were buying for Lovin Child. And the little "Buddy tucker" suit—that, too, sounded like Lovin Child. He must—Bud certainly must have him up there with him! Then Lovin Child was not drowned at all, but alive and needing dig-in-the-muds!

"Bud's got him! Oh, Bud *has* got him! I *know* he's got him!" she whispered over and over to herself in an ecstasy of hope. "My little Lovin Man! He's up there right now with him's Daddy Bud——"

A vague anger stirred faintly, flared, died almost, flared again, and burned steadily within her. Bud had her Lovin Child; how did he come to have him, then, unless he *stole* him? Stole him away, and let her suffer all this while, believing her baby was dead!

"You devil!" she muttered, gritting her teeth when that thought formed clearly in her mind. "Oh, you *devil,* you! If you think you can get away with a thing like that—— You devil!"

CHAPTER XXII.

In Nelson Flats the lupins were like spilled bluing in great, acre-wide blots upon the meadow grass. Between cabin and creek bank a little plot had been spaded and raked smooth, and already

the peas and lettuce and radishes were up and growing as if they knew how short would be the season and meant to take advantage of every minute of the warm days. Here and there certain plants were lifting themselves all awry from where they had been pressed flat by two small feet that had strutted heedlessly down the rows.

The cabin yard was clean, and the two small windows were curtained with cheap white scrim. All before the door and on the path to the creek small footprints were scattered thick. It was these that Marie pulled up her hired saddle horse to study in hot resentment.

"The big brute!" she gritted, and got off and went to the cabin door, walking straight-backed and uncompromising, every mental and physical fiber of her braced for the coming struggle. She even regretted not having a gun; rather, she wished that she was not more afraid of a gun than of any possible need of one. She felt, at that minute, as though she could shoot Bud Moore with no more compunction than she would feel in swatting a fly.

That the cabin was empty and unlocked only made her blood boil the hotter. She went in and looked around, at the crude furnishings and the small personal belongings of those who lived there. She saw the table all set, ready for the next meal, with the extremely rustic high chair that had "DYNAMITE" painted boldly on the side of the box seat. Fastened to a nail at one side of the box was a belt, evidently kept there for the purpose of strapping a particularly wriggly young person into the chair. That smacked strongly of Lovin Child sure enough. Marie remembered the various devices by which she had kept him in his go-cart.

She went closer, and inspected the belt indignantly. Just as she expected —it *was* Bud's belt; his old belt that she bought for him just after they were married. She supposed that box beside the queer high chair was where he would sit at table and stuff her baby with all kinds of things he shouldn't eat. Where *was* her baby? A fresh spasm of longing for Lovin Child drove her from the cabin. Find him she would, and that no matter how cunningly Bud had hidden him away.

On a rope stretched between a young cottonwood tree in full leaf, and a scaly, red-barked cedar, clothes that had been washed were flapping lazily in the little breeze. Marie stopped and looked at them. A man's shirt and drawers, two towels gray for want of bluing, a little shirt and a nightgown and pair of stockings, and, directly in front of Marie, a small pair of blue overalls trimmed with red bands, the blue showing white fiber where the color had been scrubbed out of the cloth, the two knees flaunting patches sewed with long, irregular stitches such as a man would take.

Bud and Lovin Child. As in the cabin, so here she felt the individuality in their belongings. Last night she had been tormented with the fear that there might be a wife as well as a baby boy in Bud's household. Even the evidence of the mail order, that held nothing for a woman and that was written by Bud's hand, could scarcely reassure her. Now she knew beyond all doubt that she had no woman to reckon with, and the knowledge brought relief of a sort.

She went up and touched the little overalls wistfully, laid her cheek against one little patch, ducked under the line, and followed a little, crooked path that led up the creek. She forgot all about her horse, which looked after her as long as she was in sight, and then turned and trotted back the way it had come, wondering, no doubt, at the foolish faith this rider had in him.

The path led up along the side of the flat, through tall grass and all the brilliant blossoms of a mountain meadow in June. Great, graceful mountain lilies nodded from little shady tangles in the bushes. Harebells and lupins, wild-pea vines and columbines, tiny, gnome-faced pansies, violets and the daintier flowering grasses lined the way with odorous loveliness. Birds called happily from the treetops. Away up next the clouds an eagle sailed, serene,

alone, a tiny boat breasting the currents of the sky ocean.

Marie's rage cooled a little on that walk. It was so beautiful for Lovin Child up here in this little valley among the snow-topped mountains; so sheltered. Yesterday's grind in that beehive of a department store seemed more remote than South Africa. Unconsciously her first nervous pace slackened. She found herself taking long breaths of this clean air, sweetened with the scent of growing things. Why couldn't the world be happy, since it was so beautiful? It made her think of those three weeks in Big Basin and the never-forgettable wonder of their love—hers and Bud's.

She was crying with the pain and the beauty of it when she heard the first high, chirpy notes of a baby—her baby. Lovin Child was picketed to a young cedar near the mouth of the Blind Ledge tunnel, and he was throwing rocks at a chipmunk that kept coming toward him in little rushes, hoping with each rush to get a crumb of the bread and butter that Lovin Child had flung down. Lovin Child was squealing and jabbering, with now and then a real word that he had learned from Bud and Cash. Not particularly nice words —"Dog-gone" was one, and several times he called the chipmunk a "sunny-gun." And of course he frequently announced that he would "Tell a worl'" something. His head was bare, and shone in the sun like the gold for which Cash and his Daddy Bud were digging away back in the dark hole. He had on a pair of faded overalls trimmed with red, mates of the ones on the rope line, and he threw rocks impartially with first his right hand and then his left, and sometimes with both at once, which did not greatly distress the chipmunk, who knew Lovin Child of old and had learned how wide the rocks always went of their mark.

Upon this scene Marie came, still crying. She had always been an impulsive young woman, and now she forgot that Lovin Child had not seen her for six months or so, and that baby memories are short. She rushed in and snatched him off the ground and kissed him and squeezed him and cried aloud upon her God and her baby, and buried her wet face against his fat little neck.

Cash, trundling a wheelbarrow of ore out to the tunnel's mouth, heard a howl, and broke into a run with his load, bursting out into the sunlight with a clatter and upsetting the barrow ten feet short of the regular dumping place. Marie was frantically trying to untie the rope, and was having trouble because Lovin Child was in one of his worst kicking-and-squirming tantrums. Cash rushed in and snatched the child from her.

"Here! What you doing to the kid? You're scaring him to death—and you've got no right!"

"I have got a right! I have too got a right!" Marie was clawing like a wild cat at Cash's grimy hands. "He's my baby! He's *mine!* You ought to be hung for stealing him away from me! Let go—he's mine, I tell you! Lovin! Lovin Child! Don't you know Marie? Marie's sweet, pitty man he is! Come to Marie, boy baby!"

"Tell a worl' no, no, no!" yelled Lovin Child, clinging to Cash.

"Aw—come to Marie, sweetheart! Marie's own lovin' little man baby! You let him go, or I'll—I'll kill you! You big brute!"

Cash let go, but it was not because she commanded. He let go and stared hard at Marie, lifting his eyebrows comically as he stepped back, his hand going unconsciously up to smooth his beard.

"Marie?" he repeated stupidly. "Marie!" He reached out and laid a hand compellingly on her shoulder. "Ain't your name Marie Markham, young lady? Don't you know your own dad?"

Marie lifted her face from kissing Lovin Child very much against his will, and stared, round-eyed, at Cash. She did not say anything.

"You're my Marie, all right. You ain't changed so much I can't rec'onize yuh. I should think you'd remember your own father, but I guess maybe the beard kinda changes my looks. Is this true, that this kid belongs to you?"

Marie gasped: "Why—father! Why —why, *father!*" She leaned herself and Lovin Child into his arms. "Why, I can't believe it! Why——" She closed her eyes and shivered, going weak, and relaxed in his arms. "I—I— I can't——"

Cash slid Lovin Child to the ground, where that young gentleman picked himself up, indignant, and ran as far as his picket rope would let him, whereupon he turned and screamed "Sunny-gun, sunny-gun!" at the two like an enraged blue jay. Cash did not pay any attention to him. He was busy, seeking out a soft, shady spot that was free of rocks, where he might lay Marie down. He leaned over her and fanned her violently with his hat, his lips and his eyebrows working with the complexity of his emotions. Then suddenly he turned and ducked into the tunnel, going after Bud.

Bud heard him coming, and turned from his work. Cash was not trundling the empty barrow, which in itself was proof enough that something had happened. But ran to meet him.

"What's wrong? Is the kid——"

"Kid's all right." Cash stopped abruptly, blocking Bud's way. "It's something else. Bud, his mother's come after him. She's out there now—laid out in a faint."

"Lemme go!" Bud's voice had a grimness in it that spelled trouble for the lady laid out in a faint. "She can be his mother a thousand times——"

"Yeah. Hold on a minute, Bud. You ain't going out there and raise no hell with that poor girl. Lovins belongs to her, and she's going to have him. Now, just keep your shirt on a second! I've got something more to say. He's her kid, and she wants him back, and she's going to have him back. If you git him away from her, it'll be over my carcase. Now, now, hold on! H-o-l-d *on!* You're goin' up ag'inst Cash Markham now, remember! That girl is *my* girl! My girl that I ain't seen since she was a kid in short dresses. It's her father you've got to deal with now—her father and the kid's *grandfather.* You get that? You be reasonable, Bud, and there won't be no trouble at all. But my girl ain't goin' to be robbed of her baby—not whilst *I'm* around. You get that settled in your mind before you go out there, or —you don't *go* out whilst I'm here to stop you."

Bud swore viciously, and thrust Cash aside with one sweep of his arm, and went down the tunnel. Cash, his eyebrows lifted with worry and alarm, was at his heels all the way.

"Now, Bud, be calm!" he adjured as he ran. "Don't go and make a dang fool of yourself! She's my girl, remember. You want to hold onto yourself, Bud, and be reasonable. Don't go and let your temper——"

Bud snorted contemptuously and leaped the dirt pile, landing close to Marie, who was just then raising herself dizzily to an elbow.

"Now, Bud," Cash called tardily when he had caught up with him, "you leave that girl alone! Don't you lay a finger on her! That's my——"

Bud lifted his lips away from Marie's and spoke over his shoulder, his arms tightening in their hold upon Marie's trembling, yielding body.

"Shut up, Cash! She's my wife. Now where do you get off at?"

That, of course, lacked a little of being the exact truth. Lacked a few hours, in fact, because they did not reach Alpine and the railroad until that afternoon, and were not remarried until seven o'clock that evening.

"No, no, no!" cried Lovin Child from a safe distance. "Tell a worl' no, no!"

"I'll tell the world yes, yes!" Bud retorted ecstatically, lifting his face again. "Come here, you little scallywag, and love your mamma Marie. Cash, you old fool, don't you get it yet? We've got 'em both for keeps, you and me!"

"Yeah—I get it, all right." Cash came and stood awkwardly over them. "I get it—found my girl one minute, and lost her ag'in the next! But I'll tell yuh one thing, Bud Moore. The kid's goin' to call me grampaw, er I'll know the reason why!"

The Green Pond

By Arthur Gleason

Author of "The Wandering Eye," "Growler," Etc.

A master bit of short-story writing that has a combination of horror and humor. A mystery story, with the key to the mystery in an ominous verse introduced in "The Bullfrog Song" by a vaudeville singer:

"There's a wise old frog in a lonely bog,
Close to the forest road,
Where the green scum hid what the stranger did
When he shifted his guilty load."

CHAPTER I.

MY night had been broken by evil dreams. I had dreamed of a frog that grew ever larger till it became man-sized and monstrous, a vast, impending creature at which I struck fiercely. That woke me. Another time the frog came hopping toward me, swift and menacing. The face was human. Again I struck and woke. Somewhere back of the frog was the presence of a forest pool, heavy with surface slime, deep as the pit of the earth. In its foul depths something white and human kept restlessly turning, then slowly settled to the mud of the bottom. As so often in dreams, all things were either white or black; the color green could not burn through. The frog was black. The pool was black. But always there was the white thing somewhere in the background, somewhere in the depths.

Half sick, I roused myself in the morning and went down to my early breakfast. I opened the morning paper with a sense that I should find something to add to my inner unrest. There it was on the first page; a message aimed at me. It was in the form of one of those "Personals," which always seem to carry implications unclean or threatening. It held the top of the column, and read:

Will gentleman who sat in right end seat, front row, middle, at Coliseum yesterday afternoon please communicate with gentleman who sat on his right across the aisle. Box 12, 974.

So he had seen what I saw. And more than I, for he had seen that I saw. It had been unmistakable—that drag and rat-tat of the little dancer's little foot, more a scraping than a kick. And with the motion, her drawling of the lines:

"There's a wise old frog in a lonely bog,
Close to the forest road,
Where the green scum hid what the stranger did
When he shifted his guilty load."

Then came the regular business of the chorus, with all the strings, "as he grunts to the waning moon." And so on to the next verse of swamp adventure. My readers will remember that the "Bullfrog Song" was then at the dizzy height of its popularity. Everybody was singing it. Its throaty chuckle was admirably adapted to the wail of the ukelele. But the song was light enough, pretty, and insignificant. Then suddenly that dancing singer had inserted the ominous verse so out of key, so charged with horrid memories

which I had believed no one in all the world shared, save for one person. And here were clearly two more who knew —the singer and the man behind the "Personal."

In my mind I had already planned to see the singer that afternoon, to send in my card after the performance and insist on talking with her. She must stop singing that verse. That was clear to me. But this "Personal?" Should I answer it? Would not that be placing myself in the power of the unknown? But if I did not answer it, I should carry the sense that one who knew was somewhere near and watching. Any hotel lobby, any restaurant might have him watching me. He knew me, in any case. It would be better if I knew him. At least I should be facing an enemy, instead of being trailed by him. Yes, I would answer his "Personal." But evidently he did not know my name. No need to play into his hands. So I typewrote my reply:

Kindly state nature of business. Box 2781, General Post Office.

I sent it by special delivery to the box number of the unknown at the newspaper office. Having done that, I decided I would not call on the singer that afternoon. One thing at a time.

Late in the day I went down to Fulton Street and opened my box. I put the letter, which I knew would be there, in my pocket and came home with it. I did not care to give myself away in public. Once indoors, I tore it open. It read:

You are putting me to time and expense by not giving your name and address. But the expense will be met and the time will be short till I find you.

Two hours later came a ring on the phone.

"Mr. Hamilton?" said a voice.

"Yes," I replied.

"May I call at once?"

"Who are you?" I asked.

"You know who I am," the voice answered; "your visit to your post-office box enabled my men to locate you at once."

"All right," I said. "You might as well come now and get it over with."

"Oh, it's only a beginning," replied the stranger. "Nothing sudden, you know; just a little meeting by way of introduction."

I put up the phone. Well, let him come. I would know what was going to break. Perhaps he was proceeding on the faintest of suspicions, a noise in the night, a dusty traveler, and nothing else. Why, all that was nothing. The years had held the secret well. If I kept myself together, there was no reason why any leak should come so late as this. What could he prove, or any other man? A surmise—that was what he was holding as if it was a trump card. Let him play it. Challenge him to prove anything. A wild story out of the past.

The doorbell rang. I opened to a strong-set, elderly man. His face was deeply lined. There were passion and cruelty in it, I thought, but perhaps I was reading into it the flurry of my own emotions.

"Ah, Mr. Hamilton himself!" said the stranger. I motioned him into the sitting room.

"You have the advantage of me," I returned.

"Very much," he answered, with a grin. "I intend to keep it."

"I mean——" I began.

"I know what you mean," he interrupted. "My name is Montague—Basil Montague."

"Perhaps you will tell me to what I am indebted for the pleasure of this call," I suggested.

"Yes," he said, "that's why I came."

He paused a moment, as if weighing his words.

"I was interested in watching your face yesterday, as Maysie sang the 'Bullfrog Song.'"

"Yes, very good, isn't it?" I agreed.

"I was interested in you," he went on, "when she sang the fourth verse."

"Let me see," I hesitated. "That's the one where the frog sings to his girl in the moon, isn't it?"

"I'll repeat it, if you prefer," Mon-

tague replied. "It says that 'the green scum hid what the stranger did.'"

"Yes, certainly, I remember now," I said.

"Of course you do," he retorted.

"It's an odd bit," I went on.

"You looked odd while she was singing it," said Montague. "You went white as that blotter. You crumpled up in your seat. I thought you were going to faint."

"Really," I returned, "I wasn't aware of any unusual behavior. Aren't you stringing me, Mr. Montague?"

"Cut that out!" retorted Montague. "I've got your number."

"That will be enough," I said, rising. "If you've come here to insult me, you've got the wrong party. Now, go!"

He remained sitting, very much at ease.

"Very well, then, I'll call the police," I said.

He reached over to my desk, and lifted the telephone toward me.

"The number is 2000 Spring," he volunteered. "But why bring in strangers to a friendly talk? They don't know what you and I know."

"Know what?" I asked.

"Oh, the green pond, for instance," he answered.

"The green pond," I faltered.

"Exactly," he replied. "I see that you do remember. Fifteen years isn't a long time, is it, when good fellows get together?"

"I've had enough of your cheap threats!" I shouted.

"Threats, Mr. Hamilton, threats!" he responded smoothly. His voice was as smooth as silk on glass. "You are a little strained."

"What do you want of me?" I asked.

"A friendly chat, only that," he answered. "I am pained at your reception. You are nervous, even violent. Why, this is only our first meeting, and we are to become fast friends. But you make it hard for me, very hard."

"What are you driving at?" I asked.

"Green ponds are sometimes drained," he retorted, "even when they're off the main road and hidden in the woods.

"Strange what things you find," he went on, after a little. "If you could see my old iron trunk, it would be as good as Old Home Week for you. Sorry I haven't it here. It's still up in Waco, Maine. But it keeps things fine, and things keep, you know."

"But—the—the——" I stuttered.

"I know what you're thinking, Mr. Hamilton," returned the man. "Your eager mind is always ahead of the scent. You're too imaginative by half. I'm not speaking of the perishable matter. Do you remember that song of Shakespeare? Funny how we keep getting around to songs, but it's a good deal like the 'Bullfrog Song'—in a way, you understand. Let's see how it runs:

> "Full fathom five, thy father lies,
> Of his bones are coral made.

"You see, there was hard stuff there, as well as fish food. When a mortal puts on immortality, sometimes hastily, Mr. Hamilton, his flesh sees corruption, so we are told. But there is that about him which moths do not touch. I admit it was a year later when we did the job."

"How could you tell?" I exclaimed hastily.

"Clever," Montague commented. "It's fortunate I have the facts with a man like you. You'd be too much for me, you really would. You'd be the death of me. But clothing, my dear man; you forget the clothing. Well, this is only a first call, and I must be going. Later, when we know each other better, we'll get down to business. By the way, it's very embrarrassing, but could I trouble you for a small loan, say, a hundred dollars? I know what your generous heart is going to urge—a thousand, two thousand. But not now; I really can't. Next week, if you insist, we'll say a thousand. Next Monday, perhaps. But only a hundred now—quite enough."

"I refuse," I replied firmly.

"You have real humor, Mr. Hamilton, and your face never shows it,"

said Montague. "I can see we are going to get on fine."

He looked around the room.

"Of course," he went on, "you must understand that I have only had an hour or so to work up your case. But I did happen to glance into the telephone book, and picked up your office address. Excellent! I congratulate you. Then there was the Directory of Directors. Of course you're no Chauncey with a hundred scores on your card. But three isn't so bad. And of course you subscribe to 'Who's Who.' All members do, I believe. Yes, your connections are all satisfactory. I accept your letters of recommendation."

"I will not be blackmailed," I repeated.

"Of course you won't be blackballed," he responded. "You're admitted. You're too modest. That's the only trouble with you. You don't realize how well established you are—nice connections, honorary degree, a comfortable home. You don't want to give these things up; of course not. I want you to keep them. I'm here to help you. My fee for taking your case is one hundred dollars—just a retainer, a mere matter of form. Later there will be expenses."

"I'll take my chances," I said angrily. "Now, for the last time, go!"

"You forget my old tin trunk," drawled Montague. "Exhibit A, I call it. A wire will bring it, but it will build stone walls around you."

I paid him one hundred dollars.

"I'd say 'Auf wiedersehen,'" he remarked, "but *boche* talk is unpopular just now, and I'm nothing if not patriotic."

CHAPTER II.

Miss Maysie Maydock was then in the dawn flush of her metropolitan success. I have never thought she had great talent. Her voice was sweet, an excellent thing in a vaudeville artist, and her dancing was agile, but by no means startlingly original. No, her charm and vogue did not rest in outstanding ability. It was the youth in her which fascinated the great modern city, so world weary itself, so fed on sophistication. She was just a bright bit left over from childhood, with all the grace notes unspoiled. When she smiled, it wasn't teeth and rouge. It was the gladness in her that befriended a thousand strangers. She was young and good, and we that were old and selfish liked to come into her presence. Of course she had a measure of competence to be able to put her naturalness over the footlights and into our hearts. If she had gone blank or blushing, not all her youth could have saved her. Plenty of ardent schoolgirls assail the white lights every season, and few are chosen for a city's homage. But Miss Maydock had enough technique to be herself in a blaze of light on a vast and empty stage in the face of a critical and crowded house.

Then, too, she had struck great luck in having the "Bullfrog Song" passed over to her for safe-keeping. The season's hit would have swung even a feeble performer into a trail of glory, and her gifts of good cheer were far from feeble. The Song and the Girl had met, and an obscure filler-in became a stampede and a star.

I called early next afternoon. The management of the Coliseum had given Miss Maydock a large receiving room, and Fifth Avenue had been pillaged to fill that room with flowers. The door of her dressing room opened, and she came toward me—a child. She was what she seemed to be in the limelight—a creature of bright girlhood. My suspicion of her died. This could be no clever tool of Basil Montague. My plan of wary approach changed in that instant. Only open sincerity could live in her presence. I had prepared elaborate compliments. I forgot them, and spoke from the heart.

"Your success," I said, "is giving pleasure to a million people, and I am one of the million. But one of the verses you sing is different from the rest. It pains me. I wish you wouldn't sing it."

"Oh, that horrid verse!" she replied.

"You object to it?" I asked eagerly.

"I hate it."

"So do I," I agreed. "Why sing it?"

"That's just the trouble," she answered. "I have to."

"You have to?" I echoed.

"I mean, mother asked me to. I said 'No. Of course I would not sing anything so dreary in the middle of a good time.' Then she begged me with tears in her eyes. And I said, 'But, why? Why must I sing the horrid thing?' And she said, 'I can't tell you, but you must. If you don't, something dreadful will happen to me,' and she cried and cried. I said, 'But what will Hopkins think?' He's the manager, you know. And she said, 'Oh, he will let you get by with anything.' And he did. He growled a little, said it would queer the pitch. But no one seemed to notice much. So I've been singing it the last month."

"I must see your mother," I said. "I must see her at once."

CHAPTER III.

The St. Elmo Hotel is either a gaudy or a glorious affair, depending on one's taste for the pseudo Renaissance. But, either way, it is correct, aboundingly correct and respectable, with that note of the irreproachable which generally means the unapproachable. It is the sort of place one does not care to visit on foot. Nothing short of a contemporaneous limousine seems quite fitting for effecting an entrance. But I am a walker by habit and training. So I walked in to the home of Maysie's mother. To my surprise, she sent word to me in the lobby to take the elevator to her apartments. I had expected she would come to me in one of the public reception rooms. The maid ushered me into a spacious room, done in the quieter reds of our modern hotels. A fine type of elderly woman rose to meet me, a woman of poise, but with settled sadness in the face. I am sensitive to what a face expresses. There was something else in the look of her face. I felt it at once. It was a look as if sudden horror had once struck her down and left for all time a faint shadow of its darkness. I could see, too, that she was suspicious of me.

"I am Mrs. Hallowell," she said. "My daughter has told me you wish to see me. Of course she has explained to you that her rather flowery stage name is just for public use."

Surely I could not be mistaken; this mature, experienced woman was ill at ease and covering her embarrassment with talk. She remained standing, so I had to plunge boldly.

"I have come," I said, "to beg you not to let your daughter spoil her great success by what seems to me a blunder. I refer to one of the verses in her charming song."

Mrs. Hallowell's look tightened; I don't know any other word for it.

"May I ask," she replied coldly, "if it is a stranger's right to edit my daughter's performance?"

"I frankly admit my impertinence," I urged, "but I plead my sincerity as excuse. Your daughter is marring a beautiful performance."

"I am not aware," she replied, "that you are my daughter's guardian."

"Your daughter, in singing a particular verse in her song, is playing with fire," I answered, stung to impatience. "She is doing a horrible thing."

Suddenly Mrs. Hallowell took a step nearer me, and great anger came into her face. She reached out her arm and pointed at me.

"You are Basil Montague," she said in a low, intense voice.

"Good Lord, woman!" I replied. "Why, Montague is hounding me. What do you know of Montague?"

"What do you know of him?" she countered as swiftly.

"I know that he is a blackmailing crook," I answered. "I know that somehow or other I shall square accounts with him. I don't care whether you are in his pay or not——"

"In his pay!" she interrupted bitterly.

"I am tired of playing the under dog," I went on in a fury. "I am tired of being hushed. I defy you and all your gang to keep me quiet any longer.

Go as far as you like with your talk of green ponds——"

"Green ponds!" she breathed.

"Yes, green ponds," I answered back.

A change came over her, a musing look. Her anger had gone.

"Do sit down," she said. "I have not been courteous. You will admit you come on a strange mission."

"Not half so strange as your daughter's song."

"Who are you?" she put in abruptly.

"You have my card. I am Ralph Hamilton. I am not absolutely unknown in New York. Perhaps you would like to call up my club or my banker's."

"Oh, I know of Ralph Hamilton," she responded; "even a woman sometimes reads the newspapers. I know of Ralph Hamilton. And, what is more, I know him."

"Know me?" I asked in amazement.

"That is what I mean to find out," she replied in a tone of decision. "If you are here in good faith, if you are Ralph Hamilton really, you will not object to my questions."

She sat with downcast head a moment, no longer embarrassed, but thoughtful. Then she looked up with a glance of great directness, and she spoke as if she were shooting arrows at me.

"Mr. Hamilton," she said, "can you go back in your mind to a place and a time fifteen years ago? Mr. Hamilton, do you remember the forest road from Waco?"

The room went indistinct before my eyes. Mists like many waters swept over me and submerged me. Slowly I swam up through the depths to a surface of air and light. The room cleared. Mrs. Hallowell sat before me, gazing intently into my eyes.

"You are the woman of the wood?" I asked, but it was more a statement than a question.

"I am the woman of the wood."

"And with you, standing at your left, was a little child," I prompted.

"Yes, it was Maysie; she was three years old."

"We must be very sure," I pleaded. "There is death in any mistake. You said 'Strike quick. He comes.'"

"Yes," she answered, "and you took the——"

"Don't—don't——" I said brokenly.

"And now we have met again," she went on. "I have been wishing for it, and lately I have wished for it with all my heart. But I couldn't bear to bring a new terror into your life. You had done so much. You were the one that had suffered most. So I went on, hoping there was a way out. Soon after the—soon after this man, Montague, began blackmailing me. I left Waco within a week. I couldn't bear to stay another instant. Every tree, every leaf, seemed to me to bear witness. I went back home with May. But it didn't matter where I went, this Montague got track of me, and sent me letters, demanding money."

"He knows something," I agreed, "and guesses the rest."

"He knows all, Mr. Hamilton," Mrs. Hallowell replied. "I tell you there isn't a detail he hasn't hinted at."

"He told me he emptied the pond a year later."

"Nonsense!" she returned. "He was somewhere in the wood that night, and saw and heard. Do you think I would have been bled on any vague threats? I have his letters, all of them. For fifteen years they have come. He found out my people are well to do and I could pay, and he has made me pay up to the limit."

"Why didn't you hand the stuff over to the police and call for his arrest?" I asked.

"Now, stop a moment," she returned. "Where would we be, Maysie and I, if we did that? He knows all. God only knows how. But he does. Suppose he comes out with the charge, where would Maysie's career be?"

"Of course you're right; but by the same way of reasoning he could—why, he might——"

"I know," she broke in. "Don't think I haven't thought of that. I should kill him if he tried it. No one gets to Maysie. But as long as it was money I let it run, hoping something

would turn up. Recently all the mail to the theater has been read before it reaches us. You know the salary Maysie is getting?"

"It is said to be two thousand a week."

"The press agents always paint the landscape, don't they?" Mrs. Hallowell said. "But it's fifteen hundred, and he takes five hundred of it. You can read his letters, if you like. They're easy reading, all typewritten, signature and all. Maysie gives me all her money, anyway; gives it up without a word. I've never told her where it goes."

"The song," I asked; "what happened there?"

"That is his latest," she answered; "he made me put that verse in. Some change has come over him lately. He is growing more threatening."

"By that song he found me," I said.

"Ah!" she sighed. "Then I have brought you new trouble."

"We are at the beginning of our trouble," I responded. "Our account is fifteen years overdue."

CHAPTER IV.

I had felt the pull of the place for all the years, but a more potent horror sheered me off. So I had never gone back. But now I knew I must go. I had always known I would go some day. Well, the time had come. There was something there for me, something calling.

It was late afternoon when I came into the little old Maine village of Waco for the second time in my life. There lay the main street, sun-baked, with its splattered dust and noisy flies—the wide white houses and the long green blinds, the Congregational meetinghouse, and the general store with shirts and sugar, dollar watches and sarsaparilla, and the trim thin-wood letter boxes of the post-ma'am.

Just so I had come once before when the day was ending and the long evening light falling on the fields and woods. But then I was on foot for all the journey from village to village through a week of summer days. Walking was my one recreation, sometimes with a well-tried companion, often alone. And on that former visit I was alone. Well, I meant to make an end of those memories. I would relive that distant, unforgotten hour and probe the shadows that had gathered then upon my inner peace and never lifted since. I would act boldly, and then, if the worst fell, I could at least live the little time remaining like a man, not a hunted creature.

The train by which I came had brought the day's mail, and all the village was gathered in the post-office store and on the street in front, waiting the sorting. Now was the time for me. I entered the drug store, half a block away from the clump of people. It was deserted, as I thought it would be. Only the proprietor was there, a grizzled old-timer, friendly and shrewd. He had installed a soda fountain and was proud of it. My way was made easy. I had a soda, and congratulated him on its quality. He accepted me.

"I once met a man," I began, "who said he came from Waco. His name was Montague."

"Montague," repeated the druggist. "Yes, stranger. He's lived here off and on for ten year or so. Let me see —more'n that, more'n that. Nearer fifteen year, I reckon. So you know him."

"Oh, not well," I answered; "just happened to meet him."

"Yes," went on the druggist; "queer sort. He owns a house here, you know, over on the hillside. Do you know the Green Pond?"

"Green Pond," I stammered.

"You needn't appear so surprised; green ponds ain't no rarity in these parts. Thought you had been around the village a little mite. Well, as you go Bethel way, out of the village, you come to an old wood road. Used to be for hauling timber. Ain't used any more; not for teams. Hasn't been for nigh twenty year. But the folks use it for walking, those as live out that way. It leads by the Green Pond. 'Tis a little old swamp. You can hear the bullfrogs at night. Well, this man,

Montague, has a house right back of that road, just by the pond. Not close, you understand me. It's on the hillside. But there's a queer thing about that. He had the bushes and trees and suchlike cut down on his side of the pond, so he can look down into it."

"Why did he do that?"

"Well, we've often figured about that. Some say he's one of those naturalist fellers—bugs and plants; you know what I mean. But that doesn't sound sensible. He'd be down in the swamp grubbing the stuff he wanted. I know how those fellers work. Why would he be watching from his window? Answer me that."

"You mean he watches from his window? How do you mean he watches from his window?"

"I'm telling you," answered the druggist. "The boys say he has one of those long glasses—binoculars, you call 'em—rigged up in his second story, and when he was here he used to glue himself to it. Not so much lately. But I've got an amazin' long memory, and I ain't never forgot how Montague, in the old days, used to watch that swamp. It gave me the creeps."

"Did—did anything ever happen around the pond?" I asked.

"Nothing that we ever heard of. The young folks use it for loving up on a Sunday afternoon. But, shucks, that's nothing."

"Anybody live there now?" I asked. "Montague's place, I mean."

"Nope; he hasn't been around for most a year."

"Well," I said, "I must be getting along."

I took the main road west. I remembered it as well as if my former walk had been yesterday. Just so the quiet twilight had dropped. How I had paced the miles; only a knapsack on my shoulders, and the stout Alpine walking stick in my hand—that stick so perfectly balanced that the weight of it never wearied me. I was carefree and light-packed and easy of foot then, and I would make the next village before bedtime. So I had thought as I turned into the wood road, as I was turning now. Yes, it is overgrown with tough grasses where the old rut of wheels had become green turf. And suddenly fifteen years fell away, and I became the young man again who entered the dusky chill of the forest.

And this is what I see and hear and do as I go forward into that night which has never lifted. I hear a woman's sob, low, hopeless, continuing, and the answering sob of a child, sharp and terror-stricken. Then a man's voice, muttering. I come to the bend of the road, and I see a woman on her knees, and, clinging to her, a tiny child, and standing over them a man. The figures are clear in the twilight, but the faces are not clear. I come near. The man springs away, back into the shadows of the trees.

"He will kill me!" cries the woman to me. "Help, for God's sake!"

She puts out her hand and seizes me. Suddenly the clutch tightens, and she screams:

"Look! He comes! Strike quick!"

And she turns toward the child.

But even as I think he is on me, a figure large in the dark, with death in his hand, he swerves a little to one side and seizes the child. I hear the sharp ripping of the little cambric dress as the mother's hand clings fast. But the man is swift and strong, and, with the child in his arms, he is running down the road.

"Kill him!" cries the woman, and in a sob that rose to a wail, she calls: "Maysie, my Maysie!"

I plunge after him, and, with the full force of my running speed, I strike him on the head with my walking stick. Fright and frenzy go into the blow. He goes down, and there is no life in him. The sideways swinging blow has fallen on the temple. I test him at mouth and pulse and heart.

"He is dead," I tell the woman.

"Thank God!" she says. "I am glad."

"But the body——" I mutter.

"The Green Pond," she says, "in the woods there."

The body is dressed in light-colored summer material; I can see it faintly

white in the gathering gloom. I catch the heavy frame under the arms and drag it through the bushes. The feet catch in the tangled growths. We tear them up by the roots. Our hands are bloody from thorns. Always it is his feet that give trouble. The uneven ground makes them beat a rat-tat on the turf. Night has utterly fallen on the wood. We stumble to the pool. A bullfrog plunges into the water, and I drop my burden in fright. The pond has croaking voices. I step to the edge, and heave the body in. There is a splash of water, and then silence. The frogs are stilled. The water is motionless. The wood is black upon us.

"I'm scared," sobs the child.

Together we run back to the road.

"No one will ever know," says the woman.

I pick up my stick. There is wetness on the tip.

"Oh, it is dark!" shudders the woman. "Go with me to the village."

I carry the child, her arms very tight about my neck. We come to the edge of the settlement.

"Here is my card," I say; "we shall need each other if anything comes of it."

"Nothing will come of it," the woman replies in a trembling voice, and swiftly runs from me, dragging the child.

So she passed out of my life forever. Forever? It is a long while, which time and chance have a way of carving up in their own fashion.

CHAPTER V.

Yes, here was the place where I had come suddenly on the group. And yonder was the thicket through which we had pushed with our load. It seemed to me that I should still find traces of our hard-fought way, the broken twigs and uprooted thistles, though fifteen years had passed over the place. But nature is kinder by far than man's consciousness, and healthy green things had long since covered our trail. The wood carried no memory of that far-away night. But the pond? Could one ever be sure? I meant to know before the night was over. The light was still clear in the open, though dim in the wood—so dim that I came suddenly on the Green Pond out of the thick shadows. But across the green-scummed water, on the other side, was the clearing of which the druggist had told me. Weeds and grasses were there of a one year's growth, but all things else had been ruthlessly cut away—trees and shrubbery. And I looked through and up to a green hill, perhaps a fifth of a mile away, and on the hill an old gray stone house. The sun was no longer on the lower hillside or the meadow or anywhere on the level earth. But the last flicker of the dying sun smote full on a window of the house that stood there as a sentinel, and the reflected ray was like a burning eyes that looked down on me kneeling at the Green Pond.

I would wait for the dark for the work I still must do. But I would not wait here. I skirted the pond, and began to circle the hill. The meadows were lush with the early-summer grass. Under an oak of the field, I ate the little supper I had packed. I had no wish to be seen in a farmhouse and talked of through the neighborhood. Chill fell out of the clear sky, but still the light lingered. The early-summer days are long days. At last the dusk came and the dark. The winking lights of lonely, scattered farms went out one by one. There was no moon to betray me. The stars were very far away—a faint radiance, casting no shadows. My time had come.

I climbed the lonely hill, where the old stone house stood solitary. I crept around to the rear. I am not skilled at housebreaking, but many a night on the road in my youthful tramping days had taught me the trick of a door or a window in deserted barn and abandoned farmhouse. It was a window this time, low and rickety, absurdly easy. All was going well. I stepped inside. The dankness of unoccupied rooms, the loneliness of an uninhabited place, swept over me with a faint shudder of chill. I had come to the heart of

my quest. This house had held something for me for fifteen years. I would have it out—drowned, buried, destroyed, somehow ended forever—if I died for it. No use living, with that in existence. From the moment Montague had spoken of it, I had known he was telling the truth. I should find it here.

I had brought my pocket flash light and candles, screw driver, auger, and hammer. I was ready for an all-night job. The kitchen was my first room—empty except for the ancient, age-defying range and the tinware in the cupboard. Next the dining room. Nothing here that mattered. The front living room—bare and homeless except for the solid table, the dreary chairs, a disheveled book on the floor. No, I had not yet come to the heart of the house. I climbed the stairs—how they creaked!—and one stair gave out a sharp report that sounded like musketry in the dismal emptiness.

Front room first—the room that looked out on the pond. I knew before I opened the heavy, whining old door that I had come to the end of my search. I had been using my flash so far. I stepped in and shot it swiftly around the walls. Each stab of the round eye picked up strange things. Hastily I set it down on the floor, where it pricked out the dust. I lighted candles, all the candles I had. On the wall nearest the door was a clear photograph, large size, of the Green Pond. Another showed the stretch of lonely wood road, just at the bend where the look of the world had changed for me. Around the other walls were pictures, torn from Sunday papers and the old illustrated "family story papers," of murders, of men shot down and bludgeoned, of men in the death chair.

It was a collection of such horrors as only a diseased mind could have gathered together. It must have represented the work of many months. In the wall opposite the window was a closet with closed door. And next it stood "the old iron trunk" I had come so far to find. It was a strong tin affair, fully two feet high. I thrust the screw driver under the lip, and bore down with my full weight. The tin shrieked under the pressure, but slowly gave. I pried an opening and broke the inner lock with my hammer. A smell of moth balls nearly suffocated me. There were layers of brown preservative paper. I lifted them out. And there, loosely folded, was an old, light-colored suit, and crusted on it were faint, green streakings of swamp scum. I lifted the coat and carried it toward the door. A step sounded behind me, a voice said:

"The green scum hid what the stranger did."

I turned. My shaking hands dropped the coat. Montague stood before me. The closet door was open behind him.

"I always knew you would come," he said. "I've been waiting a long time for you. I had this room fixed up for your welcome—little touches to make you feel at home. Where you fooled me was in waiting so long. You had to come, but why the delay? I figured you'd drift back that first year and see if anything had turned up. I got tired of waiting sometimes. But here you are."

His voice took on an ironic heartiness:

"You will forgive my seeming inhospitality—not meeting you at the train and that sort of thing. The fact is, you got one train ahead of me, and unfortunately there's only one train a day in these parts. But I did the best I could with a motor from Portland. And now I'm ready to play the host. I will show you the places of interest. You will not find me neglectful, though I noticed you have already visited our famous Green Pond. I was hoping you would let me be with you there. But here I am, forgetting what you came for. Go right ahead with the trunk, Mr. Hamilton; there's plenty more. You've only begun. This is only unbleached linen, you know. The bleached stuff comes later."

"You devil!" I shouted. A sudden determination had come to me while he was talking. No one knew he was here. No one knew me. What I had

done before I could do again, and so be clear of both deeds once for all. I drew myself for a spring on him.

"There's blood on your hand!" he shouted swiftly, pointing at the hand I had uplifted to strike him down. I fell back against the wall. The day had brought me more memories than I could bear, and he had suddenly struck me in the center of consciousness.

"That's better," he said. "Never use violence. Use literature. It's more deadly. Take me, for instance. I've kept you going on a selection of poetry. Here's one more I suggest for your nightcap: 'Out, damned spot.' You're not a success as a killer, Mr. Hamilton. You're too imaginative. Now, about that little matter of the loan. I don't suppose you've got it with you. No, of course not, not on a little trip home like this. I wouldn't want to take your loose change. You'll need it across Boston, and lunch on the train. But our date still holds for Monday. I'll come to you after the matinée Monday, say about six. I think I'll hear the Bullfrog croak once more at the Coliseum. Will you be there? Oh, I beg pardon. I see you won't. Well, six o'clock Monday, then. I'll light you downstairs."

I was glad to walk on and on through the night. Fifteen miles I had covered by morning—fifteen miles away from Waco, nearer home.

CHAPTER VI.

Mrs. Hallowell and Maysie were in my sitting room late Monday afternoon. They had motored up directly after the daughter's "turn." At my request, Mrs. Hallowell had shared our secret with the girl.

"What you and mother both need is a good little detective," observed Maysie, "and I'm your one best bet."

"Do you know," said Mrs. Hallowell, "right after you called on me at the hotel, Montague wrote me he was glad two old cronies had met up. He said we would have a lot to talk over."

"That is exactly why I have asked you to come," I answered. "We can't go on this way. The man is working us up to another tragedy. Now my suggestion is, we place all our cards on the table with him. It's the only way. Together, we'll offer him a lump sum. If he won't take it, we'll dare him to do his worst. That's better than being bled poor and driven crazy. I mean just that. He'll go on winding us up till we break. But if he sees we really mean business, he will talk terms. Now I'm willing to make him happy for life. That's how glad I'll be to be rid of him. What sum are you and Maysie willing to bid for freedom?"

"No, Mr. Hamilton," replied Mrs. Hallowell. "It is absolutely impossible. I'm sorry. It won't work."

"Why not?" I urged. "We'll take the chance of exposure. If he does that, he loses his opportunity of blackmail for keeps. He's no fool. Suppose it does come to trial. Suppose he was a witness and can prove his case. You're clear as a summer's day. You were merely the unwilling witness to a murder, and the man killed was a dirty kidnaper in the act of running away with your child."

"His child, too, Mr. Hamilton," replied Mrs. Hallowell. "The man you killed was my husband."

"You never told me," I said.

"How could I?" she answered. "It was all a sudden terror."

She was silent a little while.

"I must tell you," she then began. "He was never truly husband of mine. I was a girl and fascinated by certain gifts he had. But I found him out as soon as we were married. I had left him three years before that awful night—just the time Maysie was born. I went back to my people and put the 'Mrs.' before my maiden name. I traveled some, too. But it didn't matter where I went he used to turn up unexpectedly and wheedle money out of me. I was spending that summer with friends in Waco, so he sent a letter to meet him outside the village and we'd have a talk. I knew what the talk would be about, but I didn't dare not go. He came from over Bethel way.

He had a habit of hovering near when he got hard up. We met on the Bethel Road, and walked off the highway into that old, deserted wood road. It was just like a dozen other talks. Money, always money. Then he threatened to take the child because I didn't pay him all he wanted. That was what turned me against him. I wished him dead."

We three sat in the early-evening light, held in silence. What was there to say? I saw no way out of the tangle that was wrecking us. Mrs. Hallowell was long past hope.

Silently, stealthily, Montague entered the room and came toward me with a smile and outstretched hand of greeting.

"I came right up," he began. "The maid wanted to send up my name. But nothing like that with old friends."

"Jim!" shouted Mrs. Hallowell, and broke into crying and laughter.

Montague wheeled like a flash. His face went white.

"Damn!" he said.

"Don't you see," sobbed Mrs. Hallowell. "That's the man you killed! That's Jim. That's my husband."

CHAPTER VII.

After his first chagrin, "Montague" was rather proud and boastful about the affair.

"I look on the whole thing as the biggest and best idea of my life," he said to me. "It came to me in a flash that evening when you showed up at Waco and began to take a hand in a game where you didn't know the cards. I saw the layout as clear as a map. You come along and think a poor, helpless mother and child are being attacked by a thief and kidnaper. You get in the game hard. Then it turns out you've damaged a husband and father going about his lawful occasions. That's the way I dope it out, good for a few hundred dollars.

"What I don't figure is the size of the whack you give me. That was some blow, and there wasn't any play acting about me being dead till you got threading me through the bushes. I came to on a thistle spike, and blame near spoiled the best graft ever. But I sized up what was happening, and let you flounder on. You thought you had done me in, and were covering the traces. The whole depended on whether you were an old hand at the game. You're not a success as a killer, as I've told you. You're too imaginative. First off, your examination was probably good. I can't say, not being there to see. A man hit on the head will fool anybody but a doctor. I let you by on that.

"But where you were careless was on the pond. I grant you it was dark as Hades. But why didn't you make sure it was deep and I was under? When I said that ponds are sometimes drained I made a general statement. Nothing really to do with this case. This pond was shallow. That's the particular statement here. Ponds are generally shallow near the edge. I had no trouble keeping my nose out after the first splash. If it had been deep, I'd have had to float. Either way, if you'd put a match on me, you'd have got wise. You were guilty as hell. That was the trouble with you. You wanted me dead, so you saw me dead. You weren't thorough. Conscience doth make cowards. Uneasy thinks the head that cracks a crown.

"Well, after you beat it, I saw I had the both of you dead to rights. I could screw more money out of Wife Winnie here than when we were so happy together. 'Being dead he yet speaketh,' you know, that sort of thing. And as for you, the blond hero—well, but wait. All I had to do was to lay low. Gradually I worked it up in my mind, the biggest idea a man ever had. My heart called me home to Winnie, but my better self said 'Be firm. Be patient. It's better for both.'"

"Then you reached me by sheer chance!" I exclaimed.

"Chance nothing!" he returned. "The song business was one of a dozen lines I had out with bait. I felt sure

you would come to Waco. I was banking on the way the place would keep calling to you. So I settled there, and kept watch. A stranger in the village is a novelty; I knew I'd have no trouble in finding out if you came. I fixed the two drivers at the station and the boys that hang out at the store, so they'd let me know about folks. And I rigged up a few things at the house to keep an eye on the scenery, and I made the room attractive, so when you did come you'd know I was a mason. I thought sure you'd make it the first month. Then I gave you a year. Then I got tired of the old hole. Nothing showed up but drummers and two schoolma'ams from Boston. The feast is spread, but the wedding guest delays. My life is dreary, he cometh not, I said.

"But I hadn't wasted the time. It was a fine center for getting money from Winnie. That little old postmark of Waco sure made her shell out. 'Tis the place and all around it. It was easy enough to keep track of her, because I know who her folks are in the Iowa town. It was a cinch to find out what address they were writing to. Being a lawyer, you know how that's done."

"I know how shyster lawyers do it," I answered. "Sometimes it's a clerk in the post office."

"Yes," he grinned, "and sometimes it's a servant girl. There's always some one can make the connections for you. Well, it was the easiest money of my life. Before you smashed me it was tough picking to get the old girl to hand over. But now she was sure I was dead, and this chap, Montague, on her trail, she fairly ran to get rid of her pile. I tell you I look on the whole thing as the best idea of my life.

"But I knew the big thing, the big money, was still missing. If I could once get hold of you, I was on Easy Street for the rest of my days. It didn't matter who you were; you'd have to grind your eyeteeth out working for me. I was sure you'd get into touch with Winnie, so I covered that end. But you never came. So that was shot Number Two wasted.

"Then I was fairly stumped. I kept pumping Winnie for funds, and I had a few other side lines. But I was never forgetting the big chance, the biggest a man ever had. When did a murdered man ever come back and cash in on his murder? Believe me, I was always watching. Then the kid broke through big on the boards, and I knew my time had come. Why, man, it was sure! Sooner or later, all the world was hearing her. Then, another thing: Something nasty that concerns you always reaches you. You must have noticed that often. So I figured you was sure to be hearing the kid, if not today then to-morrow, and if I could get the right words into her mouth, you'd do the rest."

"One chance in a hundred," I objected. "I grant you the lights are good in a variety show, and you can see faces. But you can't see a thousand faces. It was pure luck."

"You're simple," he returned. "I was on deck for the performances, and I could have lasted about another week. The trained dogs were getting on my nerves. That was just a long shot. But suppose I hadn't seen you, what would you have done? You'd have written or called on the kid."

"Yes," I admitted. "I was going the next afternoon."

"There you are," he retorted. "Maybe you think I didn't keep track of the kid's theater letters and her callers."

"I know you did," said Mrs. Hallowell.

"Maybe you think I didn't have her hotel covered," Montague went on. "It wasn't luck at all. I had tacks in twelve of the chairs, and you had to sit down on the thirteenth. With any one else but you, I'd have landed years ago on one of the other combinations. If you're talking luck, luck was against me from the start, but I had science."

"And you haven't had much of a run for your money, after all," I said.

"No," he confessed regretfully. "If I'd met you sooner, it would have been

the richest pickings since the early spiritualists.

"It isn't the people you 'do,' dear,
It's the folks you haven't 'done,'
That give you a bit of a heartache,
At the setting of the sun."

"For all your smartness, you're stranded now," I went on.

"I admit I didn't figure on this combination," he said. "I didn't figure on getting into the same room with the old girl. I wanted you and her to get together and get worried, but this reunion stuff is poor. I admit it. I'm getting careless, that's what. You see, she's always tried to dodge, and I didn't see her suddenly running to welcome me."

He turned to Mrs. Hallowell, with an expansive smile.

"But all is not lost; the unconquerable will, nerve, new schemes, to-morrow's sun, and you, my dear. We climbed the hill together, and hand in hand we'll go and sleep together at the foot. John Anderson and Old Dutch are nothing to the way I'll stick. I can see a happy life yet. Grow old along with me. The best is yet to be. I can feel it coming. Maysie is doing fine. I'm proud. Her wandering father is tenting on the old camp ground to-night. Home is the sailor, home from sea, and the hunter home from the hill."

"Now," I said, "I am willing to come to terms with you. You can make trouble, though not fatal trouble, and put us to expense and all that."

"I can take the kid," he boasted.

"You're talking to a lawyer now," I retorted, "not to a man who believes he has committed murder. You know perfectly well that the divorce and possession of the child—she's of age next month, by the way—are merely an automatic process. All you can do is to give Mrs. Hallowell delay and publicity. In return, let me point out if you do that you leave us with no more dirty linen to be washed, and I shall be free to jail you for blackmail. It's a counter, you see, and in the end I shall get you. But what's the use? I'll give you one thousand dollars to clear out for good."

"Not enough, Mr. Hamilton," replied Montague. "If it was only ourselves, I might listen to you. But when I think of my wife here, and when I think of Maysie—above all, when I think of Maysie—I must say no. A thousand is a lot too little. You overlook the fact that I am a father. I must never let myself forget Maysie's career, her future. Shine out, little head, sunning over with curls."

Mrs. Hallowell came over and whispered to me.

"We'll make it five thousand dollars," I said; "not one cent more. And if you butt in later—why, we're both of us willing to bring the matter into court by jailing you."

"I'm not a hard man," he said. "If I had been, I'd have got on better than I have. A soft heart, that's what has stood in the way of my success. The kid there is just like me—all heart. I've never had innocent blood on my hands, unlike yourself, Mr. Hamilton. I couldn't kill a mouse, I couldn't. You people don't want me around, I can see that. I know what you're planning. Well, I'll take your five thousand. I was thinking of a trip over to the Savoy, in London, anyhow. There's some fine pickings there these days. I'll go over and sell them a submarine destroyer. Shall we say six thousand and a speedy farewell?"

"No!" I shouted. "It's five thousand or the police."

"You're a rough man, Mr. Hamilton," he said. "You'll be the death of me yet."

CHAPTER VIII.

Montague set sail for England on the *Aquatic*.

"So he gets off free and happy, after all," had been the comment of Mrs. Hallowell. "Six months in London, and some poor woman hounded and then back here."

But the ironic Fates sometimes intervene to happy issues. It was that dolorous month when the U-boats aimed accurately and often. To be sure, half the ships from New York nosed through. But the *Aquatic* was among

the doomed. Some of her passengers were saved, some of her crew.

"Just our luck," said Mrs. Hallowell. "He's sure to be saved. If there was one rescue, he'd be the sole survivor. Poor Mr. Hamilton here couldn't kill him, nor yet drown him, though he tried both, and, I'm sure, did his best."

"Well, I'm going to find out, anyway," I said, and I spent one hundred and fifty dollars in cables.

The only satisfaction I could get was that nothing was yet heard of "your friend," as the admiralty courteously replied, but every effort to trace him would be made. They "feared the worst."

A later message was more to the point. The boatswain of the hapless *Aquatic* was returning to our shores in charge of a crew on a freighter, and was even now due.

I got into touch with the line, found the boat docked in Brooklyn, and started to hustle the astonished boatswain, a British tar of purest ray, up to Mrs. Hallowell's home. He refused to come alone, and brought "Bill," one of his old crew, with him.

It was a long story with him. The adventure had pleased him. We had hot whisky three times around, and two pipefuls of tobacco that must have grown where the woodbines twine, before we had ceased sighting the periscope. Gradually this became a "tin fish," which bellowed orders to take to to the boats.

Then I described Montague. Although he was the only man not a Britisher on board, my picture of him failed to register.

"Wait," said Mrs. Hallowell. "I'll tell you how he talks," and she spun a couple of sentences.

"Oh, him! You mean the Yank," said the bos'n. "You said American."

"So I did," I admitted. "I meant the Yankee. Was he saved?"

"Him saved!" roared the sailor. "No fear. He was the bloke what crawled into the lifeboat and shoved the little lass, her from Devon, you remember, Bill?"

"Aye," said Bill. "You cracked him one."

"I did that," agreed the bos'n. "Well, I was telling you. He took his hands to the lass, and I cracked him on the crown with a bit of old iron. You remember the piece, Bill?"

"Aye," said Bill, "suddenlike."

"We left him on the deck—port side it was—and we slued the boat off with the women. When the old craft was sinking, we jumped for it. The other lads picked us up."

"Are you quite sure he wasn't saved?" insisted Mrs. Hallowell.

"Sorry, lady. Didn't know he was none of yours."

It was hard steering for the old salt, for Mrs. Hallowell was certainly sobbing, and who was I to tell him that the tears were not a sorrow's crown of sorrows, not by the distance from Gehenna to the throne.

Mrs. Hallowell opened her little black bag.

"Help me out, Mr. Hamilton," she said.

Between us we counted out one hundred dollars, and she handed it to the bos'n.

"For you and your friend," she said. This was too much and too rapid for the bos'n.

"We didn't save him, lady," he objected. "We cracked him."

"You and I are members of the same club," I explained to him. "Only your batting average is higher than mine. Shake!"

He shook.

The Salmon Spearer

By Theodore Goodridge Roberts

Author of "Master of the Moose Horn," "The Icicle," Etc.

The kindness of an old Indian, who gives away a fish spear, is responsible for a strange sequence of happenings on Beaver House Lake

IN that country the king of fish may now be taken only by certain methods, under certain conditions, and in certain seasons of the year. The methods of killing, reduced now to the stationary net and the feathered hook, and the conditions, are not the same on all rivers. They vary wisely with the varying natures of the waters; but, under no conditions and on no water do they permit the killing of the great fish by means of the luring torch and the jabbing spear.

Tom Hazzard had learned to spear salmon and green bass when he was a boy down on the big river. Peter Sacobie had initiated him into the thrills and subtleties of the sport, and for many years afterward, even when a grown man and married, the memories of those exciting nights remained with him. He was a man of active and daring ways of life; since the days of his boyhood he had experienced many thrills. He had hunted bigger game than the silver fish and tricked death in the hunting, and yet the pictures of those nights on the big river with the old Maliseet were always alert at the back of his head, ready to flash bright to the eyes of his mind. Again he could see, clear and vivid as reality, the drifting canoe with its patched and resined sides, the red glare of the smoking torch on the black water, the stir and rise of vague shapes from the depths, and at last the quick, downward plunge of the spear.

Tom worked as a chopper in a lumber camp on the Tobique for several winters, and it was there he met Ellen Kay. Ellen was the sort of girl that any sane man would want to marry, and Tom was sane enough, in spite of a certain whimsical vein in his nature. So he obtained the grant of one hundred acres of forest land within fifteen miles of Ellen's home and set himself strenuously to the tasks of felling timber, burning brush, sowing, fencing, and building a cabin. In the winter he trapped fur and worked at "lumbering" for his own hand on a small scale. In the spring he married Ellen.

Tom Hazzard's was the only clearing on Beaver House Lake. This lake feeds the right branch of the Tobique River by way of a short "thoroughfare" not more than two miles in length, and, in its turn, is fed by a string of ponds which dwindled successively in size in their gradual ascent of the watershed, by spruce-flanked valley and cedared flat, to the height of land.

Trout are to be had in Beaver House Lake, but no salmon. So it is with the ponds and connecting links of narrow water farther up. But the Tobique is rich in salmon, and one of the best salmon pools on the right branch of that river lies, black and smooth, just below the point of entry of the thoroughfare. This pool is private water. The fish in it, and the right to kill the same within the season and conditions as laid down by the game laws of the province, belonged, and still belong, to Mr. W. Tuffington Meyers, of New York City. He pays the provincial government handsomely for these regal privileges.

As the years passed, Tom Hazzard prospered slowly, but steadily, and his contentment grew without a check. He had chosen his wife as wisely as his land; or, to speak more accurately, he had been as lucky in his swift and ardent conquest of Ellen as he had been discriminating in his selection of the hundred acres. She was a remarkable young woman, this Ellen—a good playfellow as well as a reliable helpmate. She was at once serious and lighthearted. Though a capable housewife, she did not make a drudgery of her commonplace tasks, and was always ready to leave them to go fishing or shooting or any outdoor adventure with Tom.

The clearings on the lake extended; the log barns and stables behind the brown cabin increased in number and size; and, in the course of time, cradles were added to the furniture of the cabin and tiny garments, far too small for either Ellen or Tom, flew, white and blue and pink, from the clothesline.

One evening in early spring an old Indian named Gabe Sollis called at the Hazzard cabin on his long way out to Plaster Rock. For years he had lived far back in the wilderness, beyond the height of land; but now he had turned his back on those secluded hunting grounds forever. Now it was his intention to spend whatever years remained to him amid the sheltered conditions of the settlements, moving at his pleasure from the home of one son or daughter to that of another, always with a hot stove to sit beside, always with pancakes and fried pork of another's cooking to eat, and always with some one else's tobacco with which to fill his pipe. He had been a father on a generous scale; all his offspring had deserted the deep woods for the fringes of civilization, and now he planned to take his reward.

Gabe came to the Hazzard cabin across the hard and bright March crust, drawing all his worldly goods on a toboggan at his heels. He found Tom, Ellen, the three-year-old baby, and the one-year-old baby all at home. His acquaintance with the family was of the slightest, but this fact did not embarrass him at all. He removed his mittens, and sat down by the glowing stove, with his fur cap still on his weather-beaten head. He looked at the table, all laid for supper with a white cloth and blue and white dishes. He looked at the big bowl of batter, at the browning cakes on the griddle, and the crisping bacon in the pan.

"How do," he said. "Fine night."

Gabe enjoyed his supper, Tom Hazzard's tobacco, and his shake-down on the kitchen floor. He enjoyed his breakfast in the morning, and to show his appreciation of the Hazzards' hospitality he made a gift to Tom before continuing his journey.

"You have um," he said. "No good to me. No good to no one no more."

Then he took up the rope of his toboggan, and set off over the gleaming crust, leaving behind him a vanishing trail of tobacco smoke.

"It's a fish spear," said Tom. "A salmon spear. That's just like an Injun —to give away something that's no use to him nor any one."

Ellen laughed. "But he was honest about it," she said. "He told you that it was no good to him. What shall we do with it?"

"Best hide it in the loft," replied Tom. "A fish spear ain't a healthy thing to be seen with these days, and that, I'll bet a dollar, is the very reason he give it to us. He hadn't the heart to throw a good spear away, nor he hadn't the nerve to take it to Plaster Rock."

So Gabe Sollis' gift was put away in the loft under the cabin roof, where it lay forgotten and undisturbed for more than a year.

II.

One golden July morning of the year following old Gabe Sollis' visit to the Hazzards' cabin, Tom Hazzard was possessed by an urgent spirit of restlessness. He felt inclined toward almost any form of activity in the world except the hoeing of turnips. So, after contemplating the objectionable young roots for a few minutes, he turned his

back on them and seated himself on the top rail of the fence. He filled his pipe, and before it was half smoked out he came to a decision. He would go fishing up beyond Pappoose Lake and take Ellen and the children with him. But the canoe leaked. He had noticed it two days before down on the river. So he descended from the fence with more enthusiasm than he had felt in ascending it, and hastened to the cabin. He warned Ellen to get herself, the children, and a cold dinner ready for the trip, and then inquired for the resin pot.

"I put it in the loft last Sunday," she said. "You left it on the top of the stove."

He went up the ladder, and felt about in the dark loft for the pot. As his right hand encountered it his left hand struck the shaft of the forgotten fish spear. The spear fell and struck him a sharp blow across the neck. He descended to the kitchen with the resin pot in one hand and the spear in the other.

"What are you doing with that?" asked Ellen.

He set the pot on the stove, then twirled the spear, balanced it, poised it as if to strike at an imaginary object on the floor.

"It's a dandy," he said. "I bet it's as good as any old Peter Sacobie ever made." He looked at Ellen with a whimsical, questioning glint in his dark eyes. "Did you ever spear a salmon?" he asked.

"You know I never did," she replied. "You know that it was against the law long before my time."

"Sure it was," he said. "But it is great sport. How would you like to see it done?"

"What is in your mind, Tom?"

"Well, girl, I'll tell you. When this here present from old Sollis took a fall onto the back of my neck a minute ago the thought just popped into my head that one salmon more or less ain't goin' to hurt the government none."

"But you've always been dead against breaking the game laws."

"Sure thing. I hold with the game laws because they're mostly right; but suppose I wanted to go fishin' for a salmon with a rod and fly? The game laws ain't against that. But where'd I go to, with any sort of chance of hookin' a fish? A devil of a long ways! You was born on the Tobique and I was born on the St. John, Ellen, and we own land here and live here and raise good crops and good little citizens; but we can't take a salmon out of Tobique River with a fly, as the game laws allow, nor with a spear, as they don't allow, for the simple reason that rich men who don't live in this country own the pools. And some of them rich men ain't citizens of this province, nor even subjects of the king. I hold with the game laws, but I sure would like to take a salmon out of Meyers' pool, and as it's the sport I'm after I'd like to take it with a spear."

"And go to jail," said Ellen.

"Not likely," replied Tom. "I'd have to pay a fine if I was caught, but I don't see myself gettin' caught. Meyers ain't come onto the river yet. Leastways he hadn't two days ago. I went ashore and took a look at the camp, and it was still all boarded up."

"We'll go trout fishing on Pappoose Lake and forget all about Mr. Meyers' pool and Gabe Sollis' salmon spear," said Ellen.

"You're right, girl," said Tom, but his left eyelid flickered as he said it.

He took the resin pot from the stove, and went down to his canoe on the shore, whistling cheerily as he went.

They had a fine day's sport on Pappoose Lake, and did not get back to the cabin until seven o'clock in the evening. The children went to bed and instantly to sleep immediately after supper. Tom lit a lantern and left the cabin, presumably to split kindlings for the morning, but when he returned fifteen minutes later he brought no kindlings with him.

"Come along, girl, for a bit of a paddle," he said.

"But we've been paddling all day," protested Ellen.

"That's right—but it's a fine night for the water."

"A fine night? Why, it is as black as the inside of a pot!"

"True, the moon ain't shinin', but what of that? Come on, girl. We'll only be gone an hour or so, and the youngsters won't mind, even if they chance to wake."

"I know what you mean to do, Tom."

"Sure thing, and I'm just bound to do it once sooner or later. I want to know if it's as good sport as it was when I was a lad, and, by thunder, I want to cheat Meyers of a fish!"

"Once, Tom?"

"Only once, girl; I give you my word."

So they extinguished the lamp and the fire in the stove, and went down to the canoe. The stars were dim, and there was no moon, but Tom knew his way without a light. Upon reaching Meyers' pool on the river, the canoe was run into the bank, and Tom stepped ashore. He soon returned.

"Safe as a church," he whispered. "The camp's still all boarded up and there ain't another camp or house within three mile of here."

Ellen trembled with excitement as she moved to the stern of the canoe and took up Tom's paddle. Tom knelt in the bow and fixed and lit a torch of birch bark and oil-soaked pine of his own construction. Then he gave the word to Ellen, and the canoe slid smoothly out from the shore onto the smooth, black surface of the pool. The flaming torch threw a red glare into and over the deep water. Shapes moved in the depths like shadows—vague, uncertain, vanishing.

"There!" whispered Ellen.

But Tom did not strike. His keen and eager glance probed downward and forward. His left hand grasped a gunwale of the canoe, his right, held high as his head, gripped the shaft of the spear.

"There! There!" whispered Ellen again.

And Tom struck. The thrill of it ran through the frail craft from bow to stern. Then followed frantic splashings as the great fish was drawn to the surface, then the thud of it on the bottom of the canoe.

The children were still sleeping peacefully when they reached the cabin. Tom cleaned the salmon and placed it in the cool spring house. When he returned to the kitchen he found the fire burning in the stove.

"Hot coffee," explained Ellen. "I think we need something after that."

"You're right," said Tom. "But where's the spear?"

She pointed at the stove in answer.

"Did you think I'd use it again?" he asked, smiling.

She shook her head, then moved close to him and placed her hands on his shoulders.

"It was exciting," she whispered. "And I was afraid."

"Afraid of what, girl?"

"Afraid that I might ask you to take me to Mr. Meyers' pool again some night—so I burned the spear."

"But I wouldn't ever have risked that game again," said Tom, "no matter how much you asked me, girl. I guess I ain't as young as I used to be. I ain't got the nerve I once had, anyhow. I felt real scart to-night, and it seems to me that salmon spearin' ain't the fine sport I thought it."

Ellen laughed and kissed him.

"I am glad of that," she said.

III.

Illness kept Mr. W. Tuffington Meyers in New York City until well along in the month of August. As soon as his doctor let him out he sent a wire to his man at Plaster Rock and started north, taking the doctor with him. They found the camp aired and provisioned and the canoemen and cook in attendance. Everything seemed to be normal, and the fish were hungry.

One night after dinner, five days after the arrival of Meyers and the doctor on the pool, a worthless old man by the name of Jim Splint appeared at the back door of the camp and told the cook that he wanted to see Mr. Meyers on important business.

"Glad to hear ye've got a business

at last, Jim," said the cook. "Go around to the front and ye'll see Meyers and the doc on the veranda, a-smokin' fifty-cent cigars. Maybe they'll give ye one."

"Maybe they will," returned the worthless old man.

He found Meyers.

"I see queer goin's-on hereabouts one night, mister," he said, with a conciliatory grin, "and I sez to myself, sez I, the big gent from New York will hear about this as soon as he comes back to the river. Jim Splint ain't the sort to conceal crime nor unpleasantness, he ain't. Howsomever, I ain't here as soon as I looked to be, mister, owin' to the fact that I did a job of work in the rain one day and was laid flat on my back in bed with a stroke of rheumatics."

Meyers leaned forward in his canvas chair, and stared at the old fellow in the ray of lamplight slanting from a window behind his shoulder. He removed the half-dollar cigar from his lips.

"What the mischief are you babbling about?" he asked.

"That's what I'm tellin' ye," said Splint. "I see queer goin's-on one night in this here identical pool—durned queer. It was quite a spell back—yes, mister, quite a spell. It was the night of the day my daughter Susan's husband finished cuttin' his upland hay—and a starvation poor crop it was. That would put it somewheres along in the third week of July, I reckon."

Meyers turned to the silent man in the chair beside him.

"Wake me up, doc, when he comes to the story," he said.

"But ain't I tellin' ye?" cried Jim Splint. "The world warn't made in a day, mister!"

"Six days," returned Meyers wearily. "But how long it would have taken if you'd had the job I hate to think."

Splint tried to express injured dignity in voice and attitude.

"As I was sayin'," he continued, "I see a canoe on yer pool one night—a canoe with a burnin' torch in her bows—yes, mister, and folks in that there canoe a-spearin' yer salmon. Now ye've heered it, mister! Be that worth listenin' to?"

W. Tuffington Meyers was a fat and flabby person, but now he bounced out of the sagging embrace of his chair with the agility of a gymnast.

"Come inside, where I can see you!" he exclaimed. "Come along in, doc. This old guy may really be saying something worth hearing."

He seized Jim Splint by a scrawny elbow and propelled him into the lighted living room of the camp. The silent doctor followed.

"Now out with it—and cut the trimmings!" ordered Meyers. "Sit down. Have a cigar. Now—who were the people you saw spearing my salmon? Get on with it!"

"Well, mister, this was the way of it," began the old man, grinning at the expensive cigar in his fingers. "I just happened like to take a notion to walk over and have a look at this here camp to see if everything was as it had ought to be, for I take a deal of interest——"

"Cut that!" cried the big man. "Pull yourself together, you old driveler! I want to know this—who were the people you saw spearing my fish?"

"Well, mister, I didn't see who was paddlin', but I see the man with the spear right enough. I see his face in the light of the torch. I see him make a jab down into the water and strike a big fish—a huge big fish—and h'ist it inboard."

"Name?" exploded Meyers.

"Name, d'ye say? Well, mister, his name be Tom Hazzard. I see his face that night as clear in the light of the torch as I see yer face to-night."

"Would you swear to that?"

"Yes, mister—if circumstances was such that I'd feel it my duty to go that far. I be a poor man, ye know, and ——"

"Would you swear to it?"

"Yes, mister. Before the Almighty I'd swear to it—or even before a magistrate."

"Tom Hazzard, of Beaver House Lake?"

"That's him. That's the identical

cuss. A smart young feller that. He married Dave Kay's girl, Ellen, six year ago come next May—or was it seven? —or maybe it was along late in April ——"

"Turn off that tap! Pull yourself together! Have you anything more to tell me about that spearing?"

"Ye're a sight too hasty, mister. I never was one to be driv and hustled. There's some folks I wouldn't stand it from a single minute. Yes, I got more to tell—heaps more. Now there's Gabe Sollis, the old Injun. D'ye happen to know Gabe Sollis?"

"No. What about him?"

"Well, I see him one day in Plaster Rock. He used to live way back in the woods, but he come out to the settlements a year back last spring. Yes, it was along toward the end of March. He was tellin' me, was Gabe—and he's a durned respectable old Injun—how he stopped a night with them Hazzards on his way out and give them a present. Yes, mister—and the present he give to Tom Hazzard was a salmon spear what he hadn't no more use for."

Meyers pulled a ten-dollar note out of his pocket and pressed it into Jim's ready hand.

"Perhaps there's more for you where that came from," he said. "It's up to you. Bring Gabe Sollis here to see me as soon as you can—by day after tomorrow at latest. Good night."

He pulled the old man from his chair and pushed him out of the camp, across the veranda, and down the steps.

"Beat it!" he said. "And keep your mouth shut about this affair."

Meyers cautioned his friend, the doctor, not to mention Jim Splint's story to the canoemen or cook, for he knew that these backwoods folk had a stupid habit of sheltering one another from the just indignation of outsiders and the rigors of the law. They worked their way up through the thoroughfare next morning by themselves, and paid a furtive visit to Tom Hazzard's clearings on the lake. They obtained long-range views of Ellen and the children, but saw nothing of Tom.

Jim Splint returned to the camp on the evening of the following day, bringing Gabe Sollis with him. Meyers found Gabe to be as reticent as Jim was talkative, but after a few well-considered questions he learned that Jim had told the truth concerning the gift to Tom Hazzard. He then dismissed the old Indian with a five-dollar note, and took Jim Splint up to Beaver House Lake.

This time Meyers led the way straight to the cabin, and knocked on the open door of the kitchen. Ellen came to the threshold.

"I want to speak to your husband," said Meyers.

"He's not at home," she replied.

"When do you expect him back? My business is important."

"I don't know when he'll be back. If your business is urgent, I think you had better tell me about it."

Meyers read anxiety in her fine eyes.

"It will keep," he said, and turned away.

At this time Meyers was of the opinion that Tom Hazzard was no farther away than the woods behind his clearings. So, without making known his business to Ellen, he went back to his camp. He was a man of quick and suspicious mind and clouded soul. The very fact that Hazzard's record on the river was good made the crime of the salmon spearing look doubly black to his eyes. He saw it in the light of an insult to himself and a threat to all private sporting interests on the Tobique. He saw in it the establishment of a dangerous precedent. Should this flagrant offense be allowed to pass unpunished—this sin at once against the game laws and the laws of property—the country would soon fall into a sad state of outlawry. He was not a fool. His reasoning would have served him well enough in twenty cases of the kind out of twenty-one, but this was at once the first and the twenty-first. The great fault in his attitude and reasoning lay entirely in the fact that he did not know Tom Hazzard.

It was his duty to catch Tom Hazzard "with the goods." Splint's evidence and old Gabe's story about the

spear were not enough to set the grim machinery of the law in motion. He decided to work by himself until his case was stronger, unknown to game wardens and magistrates. He was determined to nip this menace to private rights in the bud, no matter what the cost might be to his pocket and his comfort. To this end he announced his immediate intention of returning to New York. He dismissed his cook and canoemen, and closed the camp. He impressed upon Jim Splint the importance of forgetting all about Tom Hazzard's deed of darkness until such time as he should be asked to remember it again. Then he went out of the Tobique country by way of Plaster Rock. He parted with the doctor at a wayside station on the St. John River, and there, next morning, old Gabe Sollis met him by appointment.

Gabe had a canoe. The two made their way furtively back to the salmon pool. They took up their residence in the camp, but unboarded only one of the back windows. Beds, bedding, and provisions were all there. There they slept well and ate well during the bright days, and from there they spied on the pool and Beaver House Lake at night. No smoke went up from any chimney of the camp, for Gabe did the cooking in a cleverly constructed retreat set well back in the woods.

It was nuts to old Gabe Sollis. It was two dollars a day to him, good grub, tobacco, a soft bed, and light work. And it amused him greatly, though his amusement never showed on his face.

The nights and days wore on and nothing happened to reward all that spying and hiding, that sleeping by day and roving by night. Nobody came to the deserted pool with flaming torch and jabbing spear. Not so much as a footprint in the mud was seen of Tom Hazzard. Ellen's father and youngest brother came to the lake from fifteen miles downriver to cut and house the hay. Later they came again and harvested the oats and buckwheat. They dug the potatoes, but just before they pulled the turnips Meyers gave up in disgust for that season. He really went away this time, and Gabe Sollis, left to the inferior cooking and tobacco of his children, felt sincere regret at the parting.

IV.

In June of the next year Gabe Sollis received a wire from the rich man. His youngest daughter read it to him. Again he and his canoe met Meyers at the wayside station on the main river, and again the two made their furtive journey to the camp on the salmon pool. Again only one window was unboarded and the old life of sleeping by day and spying by night was taken up where it had been laid down. They spied on Beaver House Lake. Ellen and the children were still there, but they saw nothing of Tom. When questioned as to whether or not Tom had spent the winter at home, old Gabe displayed the profoundest ignorance.

"I see that the crops are in and everything looks shipshape," said Meyers. "Who did the work?"

"Maybe her folks. Maybe Tom," replied Gabe.

"Do you suppose he has deserted his wife and children?"

"Maybe."

Two weeks of spying brought no reward. Then Meyers lost patience. He and Gabe visited the cabin on Beaver House Lake in broad daylight, and again he knocked openly on the kitchen door. When the woman opened the door he read anxiety in her eyes again, and noticed that her face was thinner and paler than when he had last seen it.

"Hasn't your husband come home yet?" he asked.

"No," she said. "What do you want of him?"

"Tell him that he may as well come back and take his medicine."

"His medicine?"

"He is wanted for spearing salmon in my pool."

The blood flamed in Ellen's cheeks.

"Your pool!" she cried. "Is this your country?"

"No; but the fish in that pool are

mine, and I am protected by the laws of this country."

"Then set the law onto me. I am here and he isn't. I was with him that night he speared the salmon in your pool."

"Nonsense! I must deal with him. Where is he?"

The color went out of Ellen's face, and tears dimmed her eyes.

"You can't touch him where he is," she said in a faint voice. "He is overseas—in Flanders."

Meyers stared. "Good heavens! Did I frighten him as badly as that?"

"You? He joined up before you came in last year—before you knew anything about the salmon he speared. Do you think he would have left us for fear of you—or of a thousand like you? He went because of what he read about the Germans. He said that it was his duty."

At that she turned away and covered her face with her hands.

Meyers lost his air and expression of self-possessed superiority. He turned to Gabe Sollis.

"Did you know this?" he asked.

Gabe nodded.

"Then why the devil didn't you tell me?"

"No business of yours. Tom Hazzard want to fight, he fight."

"But why have you kept me wasting my time looking for him?"

"Two dollar a day, that's why."

Meyers glared at the unabashed old Maliseet. Gabe met his glare with unwavering eyes. Presently the corners of Meyers' mouth twitched and he turned away. He laid a plump hand on Ellen's shoulder.

"I am sorry," he said. "I did not know your husband. I have a queer name, I know, but I want to tell you that the man who is fighting in Flanders is welcome to every salmon in my pool when he comes home. As for the salmon he killed last summer—well, I want to forget about it."

"That's right," said Gabe Sollis. "You talk pretty good sense at last, but I lose two dollar a day, what!"

SPEAKING AGAINST ODDS

"BILLY" MASON, one of the wittiest speakers and keenest debaters in public life, has been elected as a representative at large from Illinois to the sixty-fifth Congress. Mason, who is powerfully and thickly built, is long on brains, but short in stature. He knocks no star from the heavens when he stands up.

When he was a member of the United States Senate some years ago, he was invited as one of the guests of honor to a banquet given by a club in Baltimore. Billy went to Baltimore, threw himself into his evening clothes, and rushed to the banquet table in total and blissful ignorance of the fact that this organization made it a practice to amuse itself by inviting prominent men to speak and then to interrupt them and make good-natured fun of them at every stage of their remarks.

He was the first man called on. He had prepared himself with flights of oratory and a fusillade of wit. Standing upon his feet, he seemed to be about the height of all the other diners when they were seated. Scarcely had he opened his mouth when the interruptions began. Although somewhat staggered, Billy stuck to his job, giving thrust for thrust as the repartee was hurled at him. But his memorized oratory and wit were never uttered. He surrendered and sat down when a giant with a big, bass voice arose opposite him, and, looking down upon him as from a great height, bawled out:

"Who the thunder ever told you to come over to this banquet and make a speech sitting down?"

Efficiency—Plus

By William Almon Wolff

A business story which indicates that blood is thicker than water—and profits are thicker than either. The attempt of an ambitious nephew to help out his uncle with the latest efficiency methods

STEVE BARNARD didn't talk with a lisp. He had never been caught with his handkerchief tucked into his cuff. He had equivalent vices, so to speak—or so they seemed to be to the Briscoe organization. He always looked as if he'd just been turned out by a valet. He was one of those infuriating men who never look hot, even when the temperature and the humidity are having a race in the hill-climbing event. And he had not only manners, but manner as well.

In spite of a general belief that it isn't so, a lot of men do get up in a crowded car to give a woman a seat, if they happen to see her and to feel like it. But they do it in a perfunctory, shamed sort of way, as if they didn't want to be caught at it—or else they sidle toward the door, so that the recipient of the seat will think they meant to get off the car at the next corner, anyhow. Possibly there is a really chivalrous impulse back of that sort of behavior, too. But the point is that Steve, when he yielded his seat, did it in such a way that the woman he rose for would go around all the rest of the day feeling good about it, and, if she happened to be married and the mother of a family, with a sneaking resolve to take a good look in the mirror later, and see what it was about her that still made her attractive to young men. And naturally the other men, the ones who hadn't give up their seats, would have voted to have him boiled in oil or something.

It had never occurred to people in Mount Rochelle that Steve would ever really go to work somehow. They didn't associate him with work. He was old Eben Briscoe's nephew, and Eben was a bachelor. People didn't know as much about the affairs of Steve's family as they thought, however. His mother did have money—only she didn't. She was a pretty self-willed person, and she spent a lot of her time quarreling with her brother. So she hadn't let him handle her money for her, because he had once ventured to express a vague doubt as to whether Judge Vincent was the best possible custodian of his sister's funds. When his guess about the judge was confirmed by the event it was rather late to do anything about it, because the way it was found out that there was anything wrong was this: The judge, having come to the end of his rope, went to South America. And when they put people on his books it was found that about all the money a number of trusting clients had let him handle had disappeared.

Eben Briscoe, being human, scarcely appreciated Steve's manner. Steve, he said, was old enough to go to work, and if he would call at his, Eben's, office promptly at nine-thirty on the following Monday, a choice line of work would be laid out for his inspection.

So far, so good. Eben Briscoe had the conventional idea about his nephew. He expected Steve to be ungrateful, to object to soiling his hands and mixing with the low persons who kept the Briscoe business going. And he had a complete repertory of language prepared for use. The trouble was that Steve didn't know his lines, and therefore didn't give the proper cues. Eben

greeted him on Monday morning in a highly portentous fashion.

"Young man," he said, clearing his throat, "there is one thing you must understand from the start. Do you know the meaning of the word nepotism?"

"Of course," said Steve, his eyes growing wide.

Eben was in trouble right at the start. He had only come upon that word himself about two weeks before, and he had intended to explain its meaning to Steve in a highly impressive speech. Now he had to begin again, and he had lost his place.

"Well—er—that is," he said, "in this office I am not related to you. Do you understand that? I am Mr. Briscoe—not Uncle Ben."

"Exactly, sir," said Steve. "I meant to speak about that."

Mr. Briscoe glared at him, almost speechless with anger. It is a distressing thing to know that your resentment is unjust, your righteous anger unwarranted, especially when you feel that your victim has tricked you into being in the wrong.

"Well, in this business every one starts from the bottom," he managed to say. "I did—so did every man who now has a desk and a private office. There are no exceptions to that rule. You will start in the shipping room, at—well, say ten dollars a week. I guess you'll earn that much."

"I've got to earn at least fifteen to have any right to be on the pay roll at ten," said Steve thoughtfully.

"Eh?" said Mr. Briscoe.

"Oh, nothing, Mr. Briscoe; I was just thinking aloud. Sorry; it's a bad habit. May I start in this morning?"

What was Eben to do? Kick his wastebasket across the room obviously. He did, as soon as Steve had gone. He was in the case of a man who steps down when there isn't any step, or an opponent of Mr. Frederick Welsh, the boxer, who delivers a mighty blow at the spot occupied a fraction of a second before by Mr. Welsh's chin.

For one week Steve worked in the shipping room. He got along pretty well, although both girls and men misunderstood him. The girls weren't used to having a man jump up and stand at attention, so to speak, when they came around, and there were other things about him that were—trying. But on the whole he did well, and the foreman found no fault with him. He did watch things a good deal, and a few people jumped to the conclusion, knowing that he was the nephew of Eben, that he was a sort of spy. In this they were both right and wrong.

Steve finished his week. And on Sunday evening, in Mount Rochelle, he went around to call on his uncle after supper, and found him in his library. Eben was genial. He had no fault to find with the world. And the special report the foreman had made about Steve had made him think that perhaps he had been unfair to the boy.

"Well, Steve," he said, "what's on your mind?"

"Lots of things, Mr. Briscoe," said Steve.

"H'm! Keep that for the office, Steve," said Mr. Briscoe.

"Oh, this is a business call," said Steve cheerfully. "I haven't time to see you during the day, you see. So ——"

Mr. Briscoe bristled slightly, and looked displeased.

"I've kept my eyes open this last week, down in the shipping room," Steve went on. "And the inefficiency of the system is ghastly. If the rest of the plant is run the same way——"

"Eh?" said Mr. Briscoe. "Young man, are you crazy? Do you realize that we had the biggest turnover and the biggest net profit, proportionately as well as actually last year, that we've ever shown?"

"I can't help that. I'm dealing with facts. I suppose you don't know that I specialized in commercial courses in my last year in college and then took some special work in efficiency—office and factory methods—after that?"

"Efficiency!" said Briscoe contemptuously.

"Well, I'll tell you what happened last week. The factory speeded up production to get out the Chisholm or-

der. Six cars were in the siding Monday morning. One of them's still there, unloaded. With efficient methods all six could have been out on the line Tuesday night. You can figure up the demurrage for yourself."

Eben Briscoe jumped. He despised "efficiency" like a good many rule-of-thumb business men. But he would just as soon have held a judge of the supreme court in contempt as a dollar bill.

"How do you make that out?" he asked. And his tone was the tone he used toward business equals—not that which he usually adopted toward his nephew.

"It's not Cantwell's fault; I'm not knocking him," said Steve, noting the changed tone. "He's a crackajack foreman, and he does as well as he can, considering the prehistoric working conditions you force him to put up with. Here—I've got a floor plan of the shipping room. I'll show you what I mean."

He went to work, making sketches and diagrams as he talked.

"Take the grade C varnishes, for instance," he said. "The cans come in here. They've got to be carried back here to be crated, and then the boxes are stenciled over here. Then there's another trip, back over the same ground, to get them out. It ought to be like this. And it's the same with practically everything that's handled in that room—varnishes, enamels, oils. Why, right there in the shipping room, without any costly structural changes, about half the time that's needed now for every packing operation can be saved—just by changing the routing. I'm not talking about the inefficiency of the way the actual work is done. That's for later."

He had a good deal more to say. And the things he said were unanswerable. He proved his case to the hilt. Eben Briscoe stared at him, wide-eyed with astonishment. And when he had finished, Steve grinned at his uncle.

"Now, I'm ready to talk turkey!" he said. "If things hadn't happened as they did, I'd intended coming to you and asking for a job, anyhow. As it was, I thought I'd start in and do it this way. You see, I knew something about your factory. So I've specialized on it; I've applied the theory I've learned to your practice. Now I'm ready to start in as an efficiency engineer. Being your nephew is rather tough for me."

That was Eben's first chance for a long time to get angry. He proceeded to take advantage of it.

"It's simple enough—if you'll try to be fair about it," said Steve. "I've trained myself as an efficiency engineer. I know this particular line better than any other. If I go around hunting for a job among your competitors, they'll wonder why I'm not with you, and be disposed to think I can't be any good. If I weren't your nephew, I'd be considered on my merits. That's all I mean."

There was about one more kick in Eben Briscoe. He hated to admit, even to himself, how completely Steve had conquered him.

"Well, it's all very interesting, Steve," he said. "I'm free to admit that you've surprised me. I misjudged you, my boy. We may be able to try out some of these ideas of yours. But I can't show any favoritism, of course. Bad for discipline; very bad. Suppose you stay in the shipping room another week, and then work your way through the plant. You'll have suggestions to make; bring them to me. And after a few months we can find a desk for you——"

Steve sighed.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I agree with you that nepotism is a bad thing. So, to begin with, I shan't ask for more than seventy-five a week. But my position's got to be regularized from the start, of course. If I stay with you at all, it will have to be as efficiency engineer, with complete authority. I think you can safely leave it to me to convince any possible critics that I'm standing on my own feet. Otherwise I'll have to go see Landreth or the Payne-Franklin people——"

Eben Briscoe hadn't built up his busi-

ness by letting good things or good men get away from him. He didn't surrender very gracefully. But he did surrender. And Monday morning saw a room cleared out for Steve in the office building and his installation as efficiency engineer of Eben Briscoe, Incorporated.

It isn't easy to make an organization that is setting new marks for business and profits every day realize that it isn't efficient. And that was what Steve's job came to really. Inevitably he had to do a lot of unpopular things. He went through the whole business like a clean wind from the west. Nothing was too small for his eye; no change too radical to be ordered. He spent five thousand dollars and closed a whole department for a week to alter the method of mixing certain enamels. And he closed a contract for carbon paper and put each stenographer on an allowance of that product. He installed a complete interior-telephone system of the automatic type, and he abolished the system of personal stenographers for executives and salesmen and put all the girls under a manager, who assigned them to the men who needed their services.

All sorts of people in the organization hated him cordially before he had gone very far. A good many of the changes and reforms he introduced involved the doing of more work by fewer people, consequently the discharge of extra hands for whom there was no longer anything to do. In a small way there was repeated in the Briscoe organization what happened when machines were introduced into industry. The period of readjustment wasn't an easy one. But Steve had his way because he was showing results, and with Eben Briscoe naturally results counted. They counted, too, with lesser executives, men like Hampton, the production manager, and Burgess, the head of the sales force. When he had incorporated the business Eben Briscoe had tied such men to him and to it by giving them a few shares of stock, so that they had a share in the profits as well as their salaries to work for.

Steve didn't stay long at seventy-five dollars a week. It seemed criminal to Eben Briscoe to pay a boy—he persisted in thinking of Steve as a boy—anything like five thousand a year. But he couldn't dispute Steve's claim to the money. He was earning it beyond any reasonable doubt.

Steve, during the time when he was reorganizing the business, worked about twelve hours a day and lived with his job most of the time that he was away from the factory. He delved into everything. He went over the whole road territory covered by the salesmen with Burgess, and the result of that trip was a new schedule to which salesmen had to adhere or—resign. But the real test of his work, of course, was that that first phase of it came to an end at last, and left him, for a time, feeling as if he had nothing to do. There was inevitably a period of reaction.

For a while things worked smoothly; the whole organization ran on roller bearings, so to speak. It was geared to high speed and high efficiency; all that was necessary now was to keep it running so. It was like a machine, or seemed to be, that needs only an occasional oiling to make it do its work.

Steve had some excuse for feeling satisfied with himself. He found a reason for feeling so when he looked over the reports of production that came daily to his desk; the statements of sales and costs, the superb showing that was made on the right side of the balance sheet every week. He had less to do now, and he took things pretty easy for a while, with no one to challenge his right to do so. He had made good emphatically.

But—there was a knock in the engine, though it was so tiny a one that it took a delicate ear to detect it. The Briscoe business was running along at high speed; its mechanical efficiency was fairly damnable. But it had lost something; a spirit that inefficient old Eben Briscoe had managed somehow in his inefficient way to put into it in the old days. Things were done now according to charts and formulæ. In the old days girl stenographers had stayed

late cheerfully to finish a batch of letters for an overdriven chief, that they might catch the night's mail. Now they didn't have to do anything of the sort. The work was so closely systematized that overtime work was unthinkable. That was a good thing, of course. And yet——

It was so all along the line. The whole business had become mechanical, impersonal. The old, inefficient, personal touch had been eliminated. It had been wasteful, slovenly, out of place. But it had, in some ways, made life about the office and the factory pleasanter than it was under the new régime. In the old days stenographers in the office had never gone into hysterics in the middle of the afternoon, as they sometimes did now. And they had felt free, if they weren't up to their work because of some trouble at home, to say so, and to draw upon a ready fund of sympathy. It was different now. There was so much work to be done—those who couldn't do their share got demerits, and, after they had a certain number of demerits, a form letter of warning and exhortation, and, if that didn't reform them, a notice of discharge in their pay envelopes.

Temperament in salesmen was discouraged now. In the old days Burgess had overlooked the tendency of Forshay to get mysteriously "sick" while he was on the road. He had known as well as any one that Forshay yielded periodically to the temptation to look upon the wine when it was red and the Scotch whisky when it was pale brown. But—Forshay sold more stuff than any member of the sales force. That did him no good after the rule of efficiency began. Efficiency didn't dispute the fact that nature, which is notoriously inefficient, does cause a man to become sick at times. But it pointed out that sickness wouldn't prevent a salesman from telegraphing the facts to the home office; wouldn't make him appear to vanish from the earth entirely for one, two, three, or four days, to the confusion of its carefully devised system of nightly telegraphic reports. So Forshay had succumbed to the efforts the Payne-Franklin Company had been making for five years to wean him away from his allegiance. This was immoral as well as inefficient, but it was true. Steve had to put down the case of Forshay as a regrettable incident.

Blood is thicker than water, and profits are thicker than either. Eben Briscoe was getting pretty old. He needed some one to lean upon. So, after a while, Steve, having nearly abolished his own job by the efficiency with which he had attended to it, got a new one. He became vice president and general manager, and got some stock, and was told gruffly that he could have a pretty free hand.

"I don't often make a mistake, but I did about you, Steve," said Eben Briscoe. "I thought you were a sap-headed dude. It used to make me sick sometimes to think I might leave this business to you. But now it doesn't worry me to think about that. You'll get all my stock when I pass out. So you might as well have some of it now and get your hand in at running the whole business."

Queer things were happening in the business world. Never had the demand for Briscoe products been so keen; salesmen weren't seeking prospects any longer. They were employing help to keep prospective customers in line instead, and they accepted orders and promised deliveries in the manner of theatrical box-office men selling tickets for a successful show. It looked to Eben Briscoe like a good time for him to take the vacation upon which his doctor had been insisting for years. He couldn't go to Europe because of the war, so he went to South America, partly because of the long sea trip, and partly with a view to laying the foundations for export trade after the war, when domestic demand would grow slack probably and new markets would be acceptable.

Left to himself, Steve drove the organization harder than ever. He accomplished a few feats that were almost miraculous. With prices of raw materials, of everything that went into

the Briscoe line, climbing to the skies, with the need of raising wages to meet the rising cost of living, he still managed to keep selling prices below those scheduled by his principal competitors. He did it by introducing new economies, by reducing overhead costs, by speeding up production in extraordinary ways. He had something like a mutiny to deal with when he refused to raise prices, but he made his point.

"I can't see it!" said Burgess. "Good Lord, these people will pay anything we ask! Price schedules are a joke, anyhow. The whole trade's putting stuff up at auction practically. Purchasing agents are offering a bonus for deliveries——"

"I'll forego profits of that sort," said Steve, with decision. "This war isn't going to last forever. There'll be a scramble for business when it's over. Who's going to be favored? The house that gouged its customers and worked for easy, quick money—or the one that played fair?"

"That's a perfectly good theory," said Burgess. "But I'll tell you who'll be favored when the supply exceeds the demand. Whoever cuts his prices nearest to the bone. I may be old-fashioned and inefficient——"

"Not a bit of it; you're only wrong, Burgess," said Steve suavely. And had his way, because he was in complete control.

And then, on a night in January when the thermometer had dropped below zero, Steve was awakened, just after midnight, by his telephone.

"Fire?" he said sleepily. "All right —I'll come down."

He wasn't much disturbed, for various reasons. But he dressed, and got his car out and went south without regard for speed limits toward the Bronx. He was pretty complacent as he drove along. Efficiency had considered the possibility, even the probability, of fire in a plant devoted to the handling of varnishes, enamels, oils, all the other highly inflammable stuff in the Briscoe line. Efficiency had replaced old buildings, according to a carefully devised schedule, with new structures of reenforced concrete. Efficiency had provided automatic sprinklers, so that even the contents couldn't burn.

And yet Steve turned a corner to see a dull glare against the sky and all the windows of the main building lighted up by the flames within; to see half the plant hopelessly wrecked. He finished his trip in a rush, gripped, for a moment, by sheer panic, and slipped through the lines to meet the hopeless despair of Burgess and Hampton, Cantwell and Scott, his general staff, so to speak, who had reached the fire ahead of him.

"The sprinklers!" he said, his face white.

"It couldn't happen—only it did," said Hampton grimly. "There was some street-repair work; this cold snap caught every one unprepared. A six-inch supply main froze and burst—and our sprinklers didn't get a drop of water. One night in twenty years, and that night our fire had to start!"

The worst of it was that there was nothing for Steve to do. He could only move about helplessly and watch the firemen as they worked calmly and efficiently, despite the terrific cold that froze their streams almost in the air to limit the fire. They did well; more than half the plant was saved. By an ironic twist of fate the older buildings, the ones that had not yet been replaced, were untouched. The fire began and ended in structures that couldn't burn—that stood, in the cold dawn, when the fire was definitely out, gaunt shells sheathed with ice.

One stroke of fortune lightened the gloom of the morning. The office building had survived. And there, in Steve's room, he and the men who with him and under him ran the business gathered to discuss the situation. Hampton had the floor.

"Our reserve stocks are wiped out," he said. "Shipments coming in will take care of orders for two months ahead. There are freight embargoes on half the stuff we'll have to have. You can figure for yourselves how much chance there is to get the machinery we need to reëquip."

The Briscoe strength had lain largely in enormous reserve stocks and Steve's consistent application of the rule not to touch them for current needs, but to continue buying in the market, no matter at what price. And now that reserve was wiped out. Only a week before Steve had given permission to begin drawing on it, the market having been swept clean of certain supplies.

Steve listened to report after report. Each seemed to make the case worse, more hopeless. He was numb, dazed somehow by the extent of the disaster. And he was obsessed by the—unfairness of it. He had taken every precaution that efficiency and human foresight could dictate. He had buttressed the business against the assaults of war; he had looked far into the future and prepared for the period of readjustment that was bound to follow the hysteria of the moment. And now disaster had come, literally like lightning out of a clear sky. A freakish mischance, a combination of circumstances that might not be repeated in a hundred years, had been needed to nullify all he had done—and it had come.

He tried to rouse himself. And he couldn't. He was dull, apathetic. The rest looked to him. And in all that room there was, it seemed, no one dynamic, forceful, capable of rising above disaster, able to sound the clear call to renewed effort that might yet save the situation. Here was a crisis that no efficiency system, no chart, could meet. Emphatically, it was a condition, not a theory, that they confronted. Steve stirred himself to a semblance of energy.

"You'd better see what you can do, Scott," he said. "Get on the wire and try for whatever can be picked up."

"But if we can't resume manufacturing——" said Hampton.

"How about the salesmen?" asked Burgess. "I sent out wires to all of them, telling them to take all orders subject to cancellation——"

"That's enough for them, then," said Steve. He turned to Hampton. "Try the Brathwaite office," he said. "They may be able to help us out. It's important to get things moving." He hesitated. "We—we don't want to shut down? To quit——"

Silence greeted him, until Burgess spoke.

"I don't see any use in not facing the facts," he said gruffly. "We're all grown men. We're licked. It's no one's fault; you took every precaution any one could. We might beat any one or any two or three of the things we're up against. But not the whole lot——"

He stopped, as the door opened. In it stood Forshay—Forshay, the star salesman who had practically been fired by Steve for being unable to live up to the efficiency régime. His derby hat was dented on one side; his eyes were bloodshot; on his chin was the stubble of a two days' growth of beard. He swayed a little as he came into the room, and, instead of sitting down, he made for a chair, and rested his two hands on its back.

"Heard about the fire," he said. "S'tough; blamed tough. Came around say I was—sor-sor-shorry."

Forshay had been drinking. But—he wasn't drunk. That was all over. He was in the recuperative stage in which Burgess had often seen him.

"Wanted to offer services—help out—emergency," Forshay went on. "Old place—warm feeling for you all still. You, too," he said, looking at Steve. "Great man, you are. Young—that's all. Came round—take off my coat—help out."

He took his coat off, and stood there in his shirt sleeves, looking at them, blinking solemnly. And in spite of the grim earnestness of the situation a smile ran through the group.

"That's white of you; darn white, Jim," said Burgess. "Afraid there isn't much you can do, though. We—well, we've just about decided that the only thing to do is to close down and wait till things get back to something like normal——"

"What?" Forshay's voice broke in. It was like the crack of a whip. Its thickness had vanished. "Quit! Close down old Ben Briscoe's business when he isn't looking? You're crazy!"

He abandoned his chair. Straight across the room he went to where Steve sat, and shook his fist in Steve's face.

"You can't do it—hear me?" he said. "You think you can quit? You fired me—made me fire myself—because I was in-in-ineffishunt! Right, too. Now I'm coming back to work! Scott, you call up my place and tell 'em I've quit. Tell 'em Jim Forshay's gone back to work for Ben Briscoe, where he belongs."

"All right—sure, Jim," said Scott soothingly.

"You do it; do it quick, before I smash you one in the jaw!" said Forshay. "I mean it!"

He turned to Steve again.

"I'm going out on the road," he said. "I'm going to hold our customers in line. We'll divide up what stuff we've got out now—give each just enough to keep him going. Your job's to keep the goods coming out. You can do it. Forget your fool effishuncy and—and get to work! Are you going to lie down on this bunch that you've made think you amounted to something? Me, too! Yes, you made me think it. You made me sore at myself because I wasn't good enough to keep on working for you. I've been getting ready to quit drinking because of you. You've made me think I was a bum and wish I was like you. How about it? Are you going to make good to me?"

Steve jumped up.

"I don't know," he said. "But I'm going to try. Burgess—Forshay's your assistant, effective immediately. Hampton, dig up some one to drive my car, if you can't drive it yourself, and go round this town getting machinery. Buy up all the junk that's been condemned. We can adapt it for temporary use, anyhow. Scott, remember that offer we turned down last week from the Cathcart people? Go and live with them till that stuff's delivered; meet every offer any one makes. We turned it down because they were trying to make us bid against Landreth; we'll bid against the whole trade now."

It was as if a window had suddenly been opened in a room filled with stale air and with tobacco smoke. Weariness, discouragement, seemed to fall from the little group of beaten men. They stirred, they roused themselves to meet and match the challenge of the hope, the authority, the determination that had come into Steve's voice and bearing.

Hampton paused a moment.

"You're planning to abandon all your systems——" he said.

"A system isn't efficient because it's a system!" snapped Steve. "It's efficient, when it is, because it's efficient! The efficient thing now is to start producing again within forty-eight hours! Beat it!"

There was nothing polite about Steve during the rest of that fevered day. Manners and manner both fell from him; he threw them off and stripped for action. At the psychological moment he saved the day for Scott, seeking to buy essential raw materials. He fought his way into the private office of the importer with whom he had to deal.

"I know all you're going to tell me," he said. "Fairness to other customers, all the rest of it. Man, consider yourself! If we go down now, we may never start up again. Do you want to reduce the number of big concerns you can sell to in the future? Or do you want me to sign a contract right now to buy a certain minimum quantity of supplies from you for five years to come at an average price one per cent above the market?"

The contract was signed, and one vital supply was assured. And all along the line he repeated that success. Before dark that night the forlorn hope was won; it was as sure as anything could be that Briscoe's would remain in the field, supplying its customers. The last thing Steve did was to watch the shift that was already at work clearing out the rubbish of the fire from the concrete buildings, getting them ready for the installation of the new machinery that would begin to arrive in the morning. At midnight, utterly worn out, he went to sleep on a sofa in his office; at six in the morning he was up.

Hampton found him at eight, when he arrived. He was at work at a draftsman's table; before him were spread blue prints and charts.

"Good Lord!" said Hampton. "What now?"

"Simple enough; I'm mapping out the temporary layout of the plant, routing raw material in, figuring up the fewest operating motions in manufacture and assembly. See here——"

"But you don't expect to keep efficient management in force during this emergency work——"

Steve laughed at him.

"Talk to Forshay about it, if you can catch him," he said. "I'll let you in on a joke, Hampton. It was Forshay who asked me about temporary charts. It was he who made me see that if there was anything in efficiency engineering this was the time to prove it. And—he's taught me something else. Hereafter there's going to be some of the most efficient inefficiency around this plant you ever saw. I've learned a few things since I saw that fire against the sky. And if we ever have this business running smoothly again, the way it was before the fire, I—I'm going to create an emergency a week myself to keep the dry rot out of it."

But probably only Forshay could fully have understood that remark.

AN ECHO OF YESTERDAY

IT is a steadily growing custom in America to forget yesterday. From shop windows, from street-car signs, from post cards and framed mottoes come the blazing fact that "yesterday is dead, to-morrow never comes, to live to-day." And, perhaps, nowhere in American life is the fact more amplified than in that world of canvas, spangles, dust, work, and trials—known as the circus.

There, every day begins a new life. The happinesses of the day before, the tribulations, the toil on the part of those who bring joy and splendor into the life of the small boy, depart forever when the long trains grind out of town at night, and begin their journey to a new town and a new day. Joy, sorrow—even death, is forgotten.

It was night in Riverside, California. Down on the lacings of the "big top" men were working, that the great canvas might be loaded on the heavy wagons and hauled along the torch-lit streets toward the waiting trains. Suddenly a shout, a scurrying of men, and a hurry call for the circus "fixer." Some one had accidentally cast off a guy line. A center pole had fallen, and two workmen were dead.

But the trains went out on time. The "fixer" attended to that by assuming all responsibility before the authorities, and remaining for the inquest, while the rest of the workmen hurried about their tasks. The trains went out on time and came into the next town on time, and——

That afternoon, in a new town, a great crowd gathered beneath the spreading canvas, to laugh at the pranks of the clowns, to applaud the "world's champion lady somersault rider," as she leaped from horse to horse. The ticket sellers joked. The clowns really enjoyed their own jollity. And blotting out the yellow of the sun on the stretches of canvas above were splotches of red, and then two long streams of splattered dots—the echo of a day that was dead, the blood of the two men who had perished the night before, dripped there as they were carried to the ambulances.

Esperanza

By Roy Norton

Author of "The Reata," "The Phantom U-Boat," Etc.

SYNOPSIS OF OPENING CHAPTERS

It being in his blood, Tom Hale followed the sea. After the death of his father, an old salt who had established a line of sailing vessels, Tom has his own ship, the *Esperanza*, as his chief inheritance. With the outbreak of the great war his fortunes mount. Carrying munitions and supplies to the Allies affords him fat income. He is particularly lucky in dodging submarines. But he decides to quit the dangerous business and stick to coastwise trade. In his crew he has a singular character, Twisted Jimmy, chief engineer, who signs on only with the understanding that he can devote his spare time to secret experimentation on an invention from which he expects world renown. Hitherto his inventions had been stolen, and Twisted Jimmy insists on absolute privacy aboard the *Esperanza*. Before they fairly set sail for Maracaibo a plot is discovered to rob Jimmy, but the machinations of the enemy are thwarted. Jimmy hints darkly that a certain government is after his plans. Well under way, another attempt is made to steal Jimmy's papers. This time the culprit is Cochrane, an oiler, though Captain Hale and Jimmy had suspected Klein, assistant engineer. Cochrane confesses that he had heard that the invention would be detrimental to the welfare of free Ireland, so had taken his chance in this fashion to serve his country. Both Hale and Jimmy doubt the yarn and feel that there is a concerted effort aboard to get the plans of the invention. They decide to discharge Cochrane at Maracaibo. Arrived at the Venezuelan port, Captain Hale is informed by a Yankee shipping agent that the richest and most eccentric resident of the region, one Hector de la Perigord, has been inquiring about him, wanting to know Hale's life, circumstances, and character The captain of the *Esperanza* is at a loss to know the reason for such interest.

(A Four-Part Novel—Part Two)

CHAPTER VIII.

BRIGHT and early one morning, a visitor appeared at the *Esperanza*, asked for me, and said in rather faulty Spanish that he would highly esteem the favor of being permitted to inspect my ship. Although I did not like visitors, I had no reasonable ground for refusing such a request. He made his way to the deck, and with a most punctilious and exaggerated bow introduced himself. "I am Monsieur Hector de la Perigord," he declared, and then extended his hand.

You may be sure I looked at him with far more interest than I had hitherto shown, and what I saw was a most absurd little man, certainly more than seventy years of age, withered, dried, wrinkled, tanned like old leather, and a most inordinate fop. I do not mean by this latter that he was loud in his jewelry, so much as in the immaculateness of his attire. He wore a panama hat of the utmost fineness I had ever seen. He wore a high collar with an elaborate cravat. He wore a fine flannel suit with a check more suitable for a young college man than for such a withered old crow, and his feet were incased in white spats and pointed patent-leather shoes with high Cuban heels. He carried a pair of the yellowest chamois-skin gloves I ever saw, with black stitching on the back, and flourished a walking stick that had a band of brilliants around the head.

He declared he knew nothing whatever about ships, and was merely curious to look one over; but I am a Dutchman and a landlubber if he did not forget himself and ask certain questions about her engines, power, speed, and so on, that indicated to me that Monsieur Hector de la Perigord was not so ignorant as he pretended. He complimented me in my very softest spot by remarking that the *Esperanza*

was as neat and well found as a first-class man-o'-war.

We had returned to my cabin, where I tried to prove a hospitable host, before ever he spoke a word of French, and then asked me, with the utmost suavity, whether I understood his native language. It is about the one accomplishment of which I am proud, and he expressed his unbounded delight at my knowledge of it, and now in most excellent French talked volubly of France and her position in the war. He made this an excuse to invite me to dine with him that night at his home.

"Ah, M'sieur le Capitaine, it is such a great pleasure to hear one's own tongue again when so fluently spoken. You will give an old man a great deal of pleasure by conversing with him for just one little evening. I implore you to come. You who have been on the other side so frequently since the beginning of this terrible war must have much to tell an exile whose heart still beats for his country," he declared, thumping himself on his shrunken chest with both his hands, gloves, and stick. He seemed totally unaware that he had let slip a remark betraying knowledge of my exploits concerning which I had given him no information. But I concealed any sign of notice, which was not difficult for one whose face is always distressingly wooden. I knew no reason why, if he was chasing me for his own purpose, I should not do likewise with him. Therefore, without any hesitation whatever, I accepted his invitation to dinner. He insisted on sending his private car for me, but I did not propose to take a chance of that kind.

"Very well, m'sieur," he said, "ask anybody to bring you to my residence or direct you. Every one in Maracaibo knows Monsieur Hector de la Perigord," and with that we parted.

Plainly, from the ease with which he relinquished his design to convey me in his own automobile, this was no cheap abduction plot; but I took the precaution, just the same, to slip an automatic pistol into my pocket that night and to notify both my chief mate, Rogers, and Jimmy that I was going to dine with Monsieur Hector de la Perigord, and that nothing short of a serious accident could prevent my sleeping aboard the ship that night.

The heat of the day had given way to the balm of a tropical evening when I made my way from the Plaza with its chattering groups, its young cavaliers who ogled sly, twittering señoritas, mantilla-crowned, while a band played most vehemently that fine old Spanish air, "The Scissors Grinder."

The residence of Monsieur Perigord befitted a man of his wealth. Huge iron gates opened into a splendid driveway that wound itself in beautiful curves through a most exquisite garden to the front of the house, which was a pillared one, more like a governor's palace than the abode of an involuntary exile from his country. The floors of Monsieur Perigord's home were of imported tile laid with that cunning of which the Italians are masters. The statues in the broad and ample hall of Monsieur Perigord's home were priceless. And the patio of Monsieur Perigord's house was one that would have filled a Pompeiian aristocrat with envy. There were palms, pergolas, and colored fountains within it, and the table, with subdued lights, stood, white, cool, and inviting, in a little loggia. I observed that preparations had been made for two persons.

My host himself met me in the patio and in person conducted me directly to the table. There was nothing in the conversation that followed which sounded either interrogative or enigmatical. The only questions he asked were those pertaining to what I had seen or surmised as to the French situation. Discretion itself could have admired his turn of conversation. At the beginning of our repast he had commanded the shutting off of the fountain lest the sound of its torrent disturb us, and it was not until we had come to black coffee and liqueur, of which he was very worthily proud, that he beckoned a servant and said to him: "The other servants have all gone, have they not? Good! Then you may turn

on the fountain again and go yourself. I wish to be alone with the señor. See to it that we are not interrupted."

I surmised that all that had preceded was but a preliminary sparring for the main event. The clash of the falling water when the fountain resumed seemed inordinately loud after the well-ordered silence of the patio. It was almost disturbing to me, and I think he appreciated this, for he leaned across the table and remarked: "When two men wish to hold a confidential conversation, m'sieur, there are but two places where it may be held in safety. One is in the midst of a crowded street, and the other where the splashing of innumerable drops of water into a great basin disturbs the eavesdropper's auditory capacities. Not that it matters so much here, where my servants are all, I hope, trustworthy, and where also I believe none knows or speaks French, in which we shall converse. Ah! You think this has a formidable sound? But you are wrong. You have no occasion to suspect me or my motives; but I rather admire you for that. It assures me that you are cautious."

Very abruptly he thrust his *petit noir* aside, tenderly put the Venetian glass with its liqueur out of harm's way, leaned his elbows upon the clean whiteness of the table, bent his head toward me, fixed me with searching eyes, and said: "M'sieur, you have been patient with me thus far, and I implore the continuance of your courtesy while I give you confidence. I have trust in you because I have taken the liberty of making inquiries concerning you in various quarters. See, I know all about you!"

He suddenly lifted his elbows, shoved a hand into an inner pocket of his coat, and produced some papers, among them several that were obviously cablegrams, and, beginning with the first, referred to them as he talked:

"You are thirty years old; your father gained renown for honesty; you have a home left you by him in Cotuit, Massachusetts, where your mother died some two years ago. You were an experienced sailor before entering the United States navy, where you gained nothing but praise. You have established a reputation for honesty and courage that is without blemish. You are presumed to be struggling to establish yourself in a line of your own which will put you beyond the necessity of captaining your own ships. You have had a most noteworthy success thus far. You are in Maracaibo most unexpectedly, and for me most opportunely."

I was dumfounded by the amount of knowledge that my host had obtained.

"Whether you are justified in probing into my private affairs, or as to who and what I am, Monsieur Perigord, it is not for me to say," I replied; "but what interests me most is why you have taken the pains to make such inquiries regarding a mere skipper of a freight boat who has come to Maracaibo."

"Patience, patience, M'sieur le Capitaine," he said, with a faint smile. "I crave an old man's indulgence. It is necessary that I make you my confidant, and I lay upon you one embargo, that you shall not betray my trust in you as a gentleman in case nothing comes of our conversation. I may seem to have been impertinent in thus investigating your history, but to me, at least, my own situation has warranted it. Had you been better informed of France, and, I might almost say, ancient history, you would have known my name. In my youth I was the leader of a most turbulent Royalist Party, resolved by any possible means to restore the throne and seat upon it a legitimate successor. I was expelled from France, and have never been able to return. I may add that my great ambition is to pass the few remaining years that may be allotted to me in the land of my birth. I have been unable to accomplish this, despite all my wealth and my properties. And I have learned, too, that my youthful ambition was a great mistake. France is struggling for her life. She battles against odds. She is a helpless virgin assailed by a brutal aggressor. Her soil is redly soaked with the blood of her valiance. Her lands have been trodden upon by the heels of a clumsy and ruthless in-

vader. She needs the service of such as I who have but shrunken and withered arms to give for her physical defense."

He stopped speaking, and suddenly thrust his sleeves upward, exposing two attenuated, skinny arms that he held toward me, while his hands, clawlike, trembled and repeatedly opened and shut, obedient to a vigor of mental agitation that was very expressive.

"My country," he said, resuming, "needs gold, not so much for its credit, which is amply provided for by the bulwark of Great Britain's strength, but for her own immediate use at home. Every million francs in gold in her treasury to-day strengthens her purpose twofold. I wish to send you to France with just three million dollars' worth of gold, which I have laboriously accumulated through all possible means at my disposal."

He slapped his hand on the table by way of emphasis, and leaned back in his chair. To say that I was completely swept from my feet by this entirely unexpected proposal would be putting it mildly. I had come to his house apprehensive of menace, fearful that some new attack was to be made upon my friend, the engineer, believing that possibly I was to be confronted by another tool of the great European power, only to find that this peculiar old exile had brought me there, after making so many inquiries regarding my probity, to intrust me with the conveyance of a fortune into the war zone which I had forsworn. It took me a full minute to adjust my mind to the change. I thought him foolish.

"But," I protested, "why not let me convey it to New York? It is safer. You must be aware that at this stage of the war it is a very risky procedure to attempt to land such a cargo in France across waters that are thoroughly infested with the most modern and devilish submarines that man has ever invented."

Very stubbornly he replied: "Yes, m'sieur, I am aware of the difficulties and the risks. And that if I chose I could send my money to New York; all of which does not alter my original premise that gold in France to-day is more potent than anywhere else."

For a long time he sat with downcast, brooding eyes, and then, as if ashamed of a perfectly natural desire, spoke in a queer, embarrassed tone of voice:

"Besides, you fail to consider that I have a double purpose. I have, first of all, a fervent desire to assist the land that I still claim as my own, and I should do that without hope of reward were it not for that cry of memory which makes me trust that there are men in France to-day who, because of my unexpected action, will think more kindly of one who made so many serious mistakes in his life, has now repented, and—perhaps they will forgive. Oh, you do not know what it means," he said, almost fiercely, "to be a hopeless exile from your own country, barred out as unfit, conscious that your span of life draws near its end, and longing, with an ineffable yearning, to be pardoned and to return once more to the land in which you were born. It is a very terrible tragedy, m'sieur, one which I should not wish inflicted upon the worst enemy I ever had. My most fervent desire is to be permitted to return home."

I appreciated then, to the full, his terrible homesickness. He had sagged in his chair, and looked old and broken. His shrunken fingers pecked at the edge of the tablecloth, and his voice came to me brokenly through the noise of the fountain that suddenly had grown louder. I got but fragments of his sentences.

"Dead—wife—children—all gone but me—money, but that is nothing—strange land—no hope other than this—France!"

The lights in the fountain had made their endless round again, and now filled the patio with a melancholy blue, which, pervading his face, made of it something ghastly and hopeless, like one on the verge of death. The colors shifted to a pale green, and then to

the warmer shade of red in their slow round before he again spoke in a voice indicating that he had recovered and curbed his emotions. Now he became very matter-of-fact in reviewing his purpose.

"My investigations concerning you have been thorough. One must needs be sure of a man to whom he intrusts so much. You are able, experienced, fearless, and are fighting to make profits. I offer you an enterprise which will bring you more return than any in which you have ever embarked. Just one successful trip and you are a made man. Your risks are great and your reward will be in proportion. I am rich enough to make it immensely worth your while. If you will take full charge of this shipment, land it in France, and deliver it, together with a letter which I will give you to the minister of treasury, I will pay you one hundred and fifty thousand dollars. And, m'sieur, there is another reward which, I believe, will appeal to you—that reward which comes to a decent man in the knowledge that he has done an inestimable service to one who stands in crying need. That is I."

I submit that the temptation was great.

"But suppose I fail?" I said. "Suppose they were to sink the *Esperanza* and such a cargo were lost? Can you get insurance to cover it?"

"Perhaps," he answered, "by the payment of an inordinate sum. You and your honesty, however, are my best insurance. Whether or not I decide upon other shall be for me to judge and does not enter into your and my bargain. Will you undertake it?"

Even then it took me a long time to give a decision. The war had assumed a phase where no ship that crossed the seas, no matter what her flag or her cargo, stood equal chances of ever reaching her destination. And yet, so touched was I by this man's need, and so tempted by the possibility of gain, that in the end, in one reckless impulse, I cast all questions aside and answered him very simply: "I will."

CHAPTER IX.

Monsieur Perigord again proffered me the use of his car for my return to the docks, but I was in a somewhat thoughtful mood and chose to walk.

Reaching the wharf, I blew my whistle for a boat and heard sounds of movement aboard the *Esperanza* as the men climbed overboard and took to the oars. I watched its progress, hailed, went down the weathered oak steps after it had touched, got into it, called "give way," and leaned back, still absorbed in my meditations.

Despite the lateness of the hour, I was confident that Jimmy would be awake, so went direct to his cabin. In response to my knock he opened the door to a mere crack until he identified me, and then threw it wide and invited me to enter. He bolted it carefully, and then returned to his laboratory, where, as if careless of my presence, he continued the work upon which he had been engaged. He was wearing a heavy eye shade, such as jewelers wear, and his face, silhouetted against the shaded light, was as strongly featured as that of a Sioux Indian's. He had apparently been in the act of completing something that looked to me like nothing more than an elliptic-shaped glass, or lens, and I waited for him to speak. It must have been fully ten minutes before he pushed the eye shade to the top of his head, turned toward me, and asked: "Well, what is it?"

He lounged on his elbows, with his back against the bench, as I told him of Monsieur Perigord's remarkable offer, and, when I had concluded, said without hesitancy: "Of course you are going to accept it. It sounds to me like a chance you can't afford to lose. That old chap is right, for if any man can get his swag across for him you are the one."

"I did accept," I admitted; "but somehow, thinking it over since then, it seems to me I was both hasty and selfish."

"Selfish! What do you mean by that?"

"Why, just this; that it doesn't look

decent to put your work into such risk."

"Risks! I have been taking them all my life, and"—he grinned toward me—"particularly since I've been with you. One more trip won't hurt me."

"But," I objected, "suppose they get us this time? What about your invention?"

"I would hate to lose it," he said slowly, "but there is nothing in this world that can't be replaced. No more talk of risks now. You have stuck by me through thick and thin, and if you think I'm not going to stick by you you're badly mistaken."

"Then," I began, "it's only just to you that you get a pretty big share of the profit if we pull it off. And I propose ——"

"Oh, never mind all that," he interrupted me. "We will count our chickens after they are hatched."

I went to bed considerably impressed with his faith in me, having thus eliminated one obstacle. On the following morning I called the crew together and told them that we had a chance to make another very profitable trip to a French port, but that if they didn't want to risk it they would be given full pay and a good clearance, just as if we were back in New York harbor. To my gratification they declared they would stick to the ship.

Hitherto the *Esperanza* had traveled the seas without guns, but this time I determined she should go with a fighting equipment, if I could, by any means, purchase guns. I called away a boat and went ashore, where I consulted Farnes, the agent.

"You are giving me a pretty big contract," he said, "because guns of any kind are about as scarce in Maracaibo as hen's teeth; but there is a chance—just a chance, mind you—that I can buy something out of the government arsenal by paying about three times what it is worth. How high am I to go?"

"To the limit," I answered.

"All right. Be here in my office at four o'clock this afternoon," he said.

I put in the intervening time at lunch with Monsieur Perigord at his house, and told him of my plan. He thoroughly agreed with me as to the advisability of arming the *Esperanza*, and his eyes glowed with something like a warrior's fervor on admitting, rather boyishly, that he should like to be along with me to participate in any hazard that might appear. I left him at the gate to return to the broker's office, and found the latter awaiting me.

"Well," said Farnes, "they stung me for a ridiculous price, but in one way we are fortunate. We can get one three-inch gun and one eighteen-pounder, high velocity, and fifty rounds of ammunition each, and that is all."

I closed the bargain immediately, and arranged for the guns and ammunition to be brought aboard on the following night. Also I put in the rest of the evening drawing plans for the plates and bolts that must be made for their fitting, and as a reward, in addition to his rather liberal commission, dined my broker aboard the ship. It was now necessary for me to contract for a cargo of rubber and cocoa, in which I was assured there would not be the slightest difficulty. I went to sleep that night as joyously as a boy embarking upon a holiday. Thus far I had no cause for complaint. To Farnes' own hands I intrusted a letter which would apprise Monsieur Perigord of what had been accomplished.

Before noon of the following day exporters had not only taken up all the cargo space aboard the *Esperanza*, but were being turned away, and before the afternoon waned winches were grinding and thumping, and the picturesque Venezuelan stevedores, chattering like a lot of monkeys, and performing prodigies of physical effort to accomplish little, were filling up the hold. As I went out to the wharf in the evening after the day's work I found Farnes in conversation with one who was quite evidently a searfaring man, and was introduced to him, to learn that he was the master of a sturdy British tramp which had come into port on the previous night.

"I hear you are taking on a cargo

for a French port," the Englishman said, with a quiet smile, and, surmising that the broker had given him this information, I said, "Yes."

"Captain Roberts is an old friend of mine," Farnes said, as if explaining why he had been so free-spoken, "and you can trust him all the way through. He might possibly prove of assistance."

"Yes, and anything I can do for you, command me, Captain Hale," said Roberts, "for, you see, we are all of us more or less in the same enterprise. I am not entirely in the trade for financial gain, because I retired from the sea before the war broke out, and came back to it because it was the only way I could find of serving my country."

I liked him for that.

"Our friend here," Captain Roberts continued, "tells me that you are making what preparations you can for defense." He gestured with his thumb at four big cases which were piled on the wharf, and as I looked at them the broker said, scarcely above a whisper: "Those are your guns. I was waiting here to see you. I suppose you wish to get them off to-night?"

"I certainly do," I answered, and there was a moment's pause.

"Captain Hale," said the Englishman, "I believe that if I were in your case I should try to get these guns aboard without anybody knowing it. I am fairly well informed that there are several spies of the Central Powers hanging round here with the deliberate purpose of getting news to their submarines as to what ships are sailing. You, being an American ship, may possibly stand a better chance of success if it were not known that you were armed."

I agreed with him that this was true, but was somewhat perplexed as to how to convey the guns aboard and mount them without any one becoming cognizant of the work.

"Perhaps I could help you with that," he said, with his slow smile. "They know who I am. I have an all-British crew that I can trust from top to bottom. How would it do for me, using some of my men, to come over here to-night and get these cases, row them out as if taking them aboard my own ship, pull round to the far side, where they would be more or less out of sight from the shore, and then bring them round to the port side of the *Esperanza*, where you can be ready to take them aboard?"

His offer was so whole-hearted and feasible that I speedily accepted it, for it relieved me of considerable difficulty, and quite naturally I desired to take all the precautions possible.

As far as care, diligence, and foresight could see, we carried the plan out at midnight of the following night.

The last task of all was when, on that night, with our ostensible cargo aboard, we took on the real cargo of gold—five or six tons of it in small boxes that were back-breaking to lift. I could not share this secret with either the broker or my newly made friend, Captain Roberts, and I was compelled to conduct the job with my own men, unaided by any outside assistance. If ever there was a tired crew, it was mine when, in the darkness of the early-morning hours, the last of the treasure was aboard.

Monsieur Perigord had made me promise that I would report to him the moment the task was consummated, regardless of the hour. I had cleared my ship in the late afternoon preceding and was determined to get away by dawn. Therefore I lost no time in hurrying through the quiet streets to the Frenchman's residence, where, in person, he admitted me.

"Well, it is done," I said, "and so far so good. We shall be off within an hour or so. Have you any further instructions to give me?"

"None whatever," he replied. "I leave it entirely to your skill and tact. Please take this letter to the minister of treasury, in France, and give it to him when you make your delivery. If, by any chance, that delivery is never made, destroy the letter, please, unopened."

Again I was almost overpowered by the responsibility of my task, but I

was to a certain extent relieved by his next speech:

"During the last few days I have thought over what you said about insuring it and tried, notwithstanding the enormous premium, to place the insurance with the only reputable firm here. They would gamble on no more than one million dollars of it, and I surmised that this was placed through their connection with Lloyds. Considering the exorbitant price I must pay I did not close with them."

I pointed out to him that he was taking desperate chances on my honesty.

"I know an honest man when I see one," he said simply. "Go now, and God bless you! I shall hope for your safe return, and if your mission is well done I do not think that, regardless of the stipulated sum which I am to pay you, you will lose much in the future for having befriended one who, while very helpless in his exile, has the means to reward those who serve him."

In my haste to get aboard the *Esperanza* I almost ran through the town and down the long dock, the sound of my footsteps reverberating from every side. My boat was waiting where I had stationed it, and as I threaded my way through the huge, misshapen piles of freight with which the dock was cluttered they seemed like the monstrous forms of strange animals, ready to pounce upon me. I got into the boat, and the men pulled away. Dawn was approaching with tropical swiftness as I looked back toward the dock from which I had embarked. Suddenly I saw something that made me shut my teeth in anger. A man had stepped out from behind one of those huge, ungainly piles of freight, and now stood clearly outlined while he rested his arm on a post. The other arm was lashed, and held up by a white sling round his neck. There could be no mistake. Mike Cochrane was there watching us off. For a moment I was sorry that I had not broken his neck instead of his elbow, for the sight of him on this night was in itself suggestive and menacing.

CHAPTER X.

We got the *Esperanza's* anchors up, and as quietly as possible moved down the harbor. We swung to the east'ard, laying our course close to the land line, until we came to the cove which Captain Roberts had suggested as a suitable place for me to mount my armament. It proved to be an ideal spot, for from the time we began our work until it was finished we were undisturbed. I superintended the mounting of the guns, and with my own hands tested the mechanism. It was in perfect order, and it was now that my long experience in the navy came into good play. My second mate was fortunately a man who had done eight years' service in the United States navy, wherein he had a gunner's rating. I discovered also that we had two other men aboard who had served on men-o'-war, and I proceeded, therefore, in that sequestered bay, to gun drill. My first mate, Rogers, was a man thoroughly competent to handle the ship in emergency, and I therefore decided to manage the heavy gun myself in case we were attacked. I was convinced from remarks that came to my ears that most of the members of my crew were rather eager to meet a submarine and try conclusions, when, at last, our work was done, and we placed the tarpaulin covers over the guns, took steam, and started on our long voyage for Bordeaux.

The first night out I was sitting in my cabin writing a letter when I was disturbed by Jimmy, who came rushing unceremoniously up the bridge steps and into my door, and paused inside. He was like a man suffering from a mental tremor. He came close to my desk, reached across, and, with an emphatic thump on my blotter, said hoarsely: "I've got it! By heavens, I have got it!"

"Got what?" I said. "If I did not know that you were a teetotaller I should be tempted to say that you had the jimjams."

As if this were a joke, he laughed in a high, unusual key, straightened up, and then, with a great air of triumph

and secrecy, bent forward again until his face was close to mine, and declared: "The invention—my invention—is completed. My life work, friend. Come to my cabin; come quickly!"

He led me back to his laboratory, after taking great precautions to assure himself that no one could spy upon us. The intricate brass apparatus had been added to by another since I had last stood in the laboratory, and these two were standing close to the inner door of the laboratory, this giving for his experiments the full length of the room.

Suspended from the ceiling from one of the overhead girders was an iron plate, a full half inch in thickness, and of such weight that I wondered how he had succeeded in hoisting it up alone, until I discovered that each side was suspended by a system of pulleys. At the farther end of the laboratory was a square of paper covered with print, quite large, but not of a size to permit my reading from where I stood. The iron plate was so close to the camera-like eyes of the two brass mechanisms as to shut off any view through them. The plate itself was nearly four feet square.

Jimmy turned to a battery of switches on the wall behind him, over which was suspended a closely screened toy light, giving merely enough illumination to distinguish the switches after the main lights of the laboratory were turned off. He switched the lights on again, as if satisfied that everything was in working order, and bade me stand behind one of the machines and look through the eyepieces, which, in outward appearances, were like binoculars with shields above them.

"Now keep your place and look through them," he said, as he again stepped back and switched off the lights, leaving the room in utter darkness. Naturally I could see nothing. I heard the click of one switch after another behind me, and the room was filled with sharp, spluttering sounds not unlike those thrown out by Röntgen rays, but more vicious and reaching a pitch of sharpness somewhat higher than the rasping staccato given forth by wireless apparatus. It was of such piercing quality that my eardrums throbbed, and I cried at last:

"Hold on a moment! I shall be deaf if this keeps up."

Instantly he threw the switch, the noise ceased, and again the room was filled with light.

"Oh, I forgot that your ears are not attuned to such a note, although I suppose that mine are from having experimented so many years."

He went to one of his cupboards, took out some absorbent cotton of which he made two pads, and slightly solidified them by an application of some plastic wax.

"Here, stuff these in your ears, and it will deaden the sound," he said, and I obeyed, and again took my place in front of the eyepieces.

This time, when he resumed his experiments, I heard nothing more distressing than a low, buzzing noise, which impressed me as having the character of separate shocks repeated with such rapidity as to be almost prolonged into one note. For a time I saw nothing but a positive blackness in front of me, and then there came a definite change in the quality of the sound as if another and distinct note had been added to and blended with it. My utter amazement of all that followed can be imagined. I was not only looking through the iron screen in front of me, but saw, standing in the darkness and shining in a vivid green light, the piece of printed paper fastened at the end of the laboratory. Moreover, its letters had now, under intense magnification, leaped in size until they stood a full inch in height. I could read them as easily as one might read the letters on a hoarding across the street. The edges of the redly illuminated paper seemed writhing and twisting with some curious refraction of light, as if the vibration were being thrown from it and flowing over the borders into the blackness. The somber blackness against which the card was fixed had taken on a curious and ghastly green. For but an instant I stared, and then jerked my

head away from the eyepieces and looked around me. The room was as black as ever. It seemed incredible; for again when I looked through the same eyepieces, the paper still stood out, an inexplicable phenomenon.

The buzzing ceased as abruptly as it had begun, save that it dropped in a whining crescendo, and I turned toward Jimmy just as he threw the last switch illuminating the laboratory. I saw that his lips were moving, and pulled the wads from my ears in time to catch the end part of a sentence.

"——and another point is that you were looking *through* that iron plate, and that plate is actually a section taken out of the side of a ship. My invention is, therefore, just as startling as was Röntgen's. In fact, I have gone him one better in a more difficult direction. With these two machines, mostly made with my own hands"—and he shook both his hands, palms upward in front of me, as if to impress upon me the work they had done—"I can look through the side of this ship into the water beyond. I can look through the water itself as easily and to as great a distance, I believe, as can a man on the deck of this ship see with the aid of a powerful searchlight. That man could see only upon the surface of the water. I tell you, Tom Hale, I can see beneath it. Think of the possibilities! I can revolutionize a thousand undertakings that have hitherto been done by clumsy methods, and I can undertake a thousand others that have hitherto been impossible."

For a full three minutes he ran on volubly, singing a pæan of exultation.

I was standing like a man half stunned when he concluded:

"Gets you, does it? I don't blame you. It will have the same effect on a lot of others some time. I shan't try to explain it to you to-night. In fact, I am a little bit too much upset myself to explain it lucidly; but I will tell you this—that some of my ideas have been proved, and, Tom Hale, if ever any of them succeed commercially I am going to share with you, because you have stood by me more loyally than any man I have ever met. Others have derided me for more than twenty years—men that should have known better. You backed me up on blind faith, and as sure as there is a God in heaven your faith shall not be misplaced."

CHAPTER XI.

We were plowing steadily through a sea as smooth as an inland lake, with the morning sun shining flawlessly upon us from a clear, soft, blue sky, and but a few minutes before had raised land, presumably the head of Martinique.

Suddenly from the crow's nest, where we kept a man constantly stationed, came a hail to the bridge:

"Something just come up off the port bow, sir, that looks to me like a submarine."

I jumped to my feet, seized my glasses, and ran out to the bridge, where the mate was focusing the long glass on a distant object. There was no doubt about it. To an experienced eye the two thin tubes that were slowly coming upward could be nothing else than the twin periscopes common to the latest type of U-boat. I had given the general alarm before her periscopes and superstructure had reared themselves above the lazy, rippling water. From the stokehole came the clang of shovels, and from the *Esperanza*'s funnel a cloud of black smoke. Men aroused from the sleep off-watch came running to the deck. The boatswain's whistle shrilled in quick, staccato treble, and the whole ship seemed suddenly aware of menace, yet bravely resolute in her determination to meet any odds. Her screw began to turn to its utmost speed, and men ran to the quarters I had previously assigned, all with as much precision, I flatter myself, as if we were a man-o'-war. The submarine appeared to pause for a moment, and then displayed German colors and signaled us to heave to. I was astonished at an odd hesitancy on the part of the U-boat, but suddenly from a gun that was hoisted up from her back forward a shot was fired across our bows.

I waited no longer, but ran down the bridge steps to the heavy gun aft, and as the *Esperanza* swung on a port helm that brought her stern in line with the submarine, myself aimed the gun and fired. The shell leaped away, struck short, ricocheted from the water, rebounded completely over the submarine, and exploded on the far side, raising a column of water. The *Esperanza* twisted like a fish on a starboard helm, and I listened for the discharge of the smaller gun in the bow. Something was wrong forward, and I heard curses, exclamations, and then came a shot. The gun fired, and the shell, well aimed, took the water but a yard or two in front of the U-boat's bow, and did not explode! I waited, expecting it to be followed by a torrent of others, for the man at that gun knew his business, and with such a fair mark could not fail to score hits; but instead I heard his voice above all the tiny turmoil, roaring objurgations, and now he came running to meet me, for I had started forward to learn the cause of his failure.

"The charges are all dead, sir," he shouted. "Somebody has done for us fair! And even the shot I fired, with the shell that was in the chamber, didn't blow!"

I called to the chief mate on the bridge to swing to port and give me another chance with the eighteen-pounder, which was now our only hope. The *Esperanza* yawed sharply, and we swung the gun to catch the submarine, now submerging rapidly, and again we fired. There was a splash so close to the forward periscope that the men cheered, but there came no spout of water announcing an explosion that would have finished our enemy for that combat at least, and possibly forever. This shell also had failed. We thrust another shell into the breech, the men around me, including the veteran gunner, voicing their disappointment with deep-chested shouts, and again we fired. There was no fault of the range. I take credit for that, at least, because it was visibly proven. The for'ard periscope was shot away as cleanly as if cut with a knife. But again there was no explosion. We were as impotent as if we had been using ancient ball shot! I bent over and examined the shells that had been spread in readiness behind. Outwardly they were perfect. Reckless of consequences, the old gunner unscrewed one, examined it but a moment, and thrust it toward me.

"The tortional spring and piercing needle have been cut clean away! And not long ago, sir, because—see! The place where the knife clipped them has scratched into the metal and is still bright and fresh. The percussion fuses are no good."

I looked. There was no doubt of it. We had been betrayed.

"Examine the others," I ordered, "and if you can find one that isn't defective, use it and fire at will!"

I ran to the bridge. There was no hope left us save in maneuver, luck, and speed, and the chances were all against us. There was not the slightest use in bellowing down the tube for speed, for the telegraph had stood at "Full speed ahead," ever since the German boat had been sighted, and the *Esperanza,* tuned and strung to the utmost, obeyed the master hand of Twisted Jimmy as she had never before obeyed in her adventurous life. She fled like a frightened thing, running as she had never before run, twisting and dodging as never before had she twisted and dodged, quite as if, endowed with individual intelligence, she fought for existence.

A lean-jawed, clean-shaven, gray-haired man, born to the seas from the Cape Cod rocks, stood at her wheel, alert, obedient, and capable, as we flung her straight away through the blue waters toward our only goal. She was doing a clean sixteen knots—a full knot and a half of speed more than she had ever attained, and I began to hope. She ripped the water in twain with her poor, blunt, futile bow, leaving a spreading line of waves abeam, while her wake foamed and boiled as if with fury. I was proud of her in that brief time, this first steamship I had ever owned!

I think I came to love her, as if she were animate and endowed with soul.

And then, as if to deride us and our efforts, there uprose from the still seas on the port quarter a single lean line of gray—the remaining periscope of our enemy. It came as a shock, as a humiliating answer to our pride; for the submarine, running on a straight, undeviating course, submerged, had outdistanced the brave old *Esperanza,* and lay in wait.

It was as if a half dozen men sighted it at the same time, for they raised a warning roar in unison, mingled with my order to the wheel: "Hard to starboard!"

The *Esperanza* shifted responsively to the hands of the lean-faced man from good old Cape Cod, presented her stern, and there came a roar as the gunner, seizing the shifting chance, let go another shell that, like its predecessors, was worth no more than a round shot, and missed by feet rather than fathoms. We seesawed violently through the blue waters, exercising all ingenuity, all resource, and intent on reaching refuge; but the enemy was also ingenious and alert, and was now certain that we were overpowered. She, too, ran zigzags on the surface, making it almost impossible to score a hit. Splashes astern, abeam, and by her bows told the excellence of our marksmanship, but she took all risks as bravely as did we, and relentlessly closed with at least a twenty-knot speed. Now we ran ahead, and then slowly she gained and closed up abreast until we ran parallel. The aft gun was brought to a tangent that was clearly impossible. We fell to our zigzag course again, and for a time tried to outmaneuver each other as in a great game of play on favorable waters, rather than intent on life and death. Always, however, our enemy closed in, and now, at last, when the outline of the land was distinct and clear beyond us, and safety almost in sight, she came to her opportunity.

As if wearied and beaten by impossible odds, the *Esperanza* was again twisting to expose nothing more than the small target of her stern, when there came a sharp cry from a man on deck, and I saw the thin, rapidly advancing line of foam that told of the progress of a torpedo. I watched it as if fascinated, and found that my hands were clenched tightly around the bridge rail. Faster! Faster! If we could but turn a few feet—and—it was hopeless! I held my breath, waiting for the inevitable explosion that must be our undoing. It came like a geyser of water on the starboard, directly amidships, and the shock twisted and shook me, and I found myself still clinging to the rail, and a sudden stillness had succeeded all those choral sounds of our flight.

The *Esperanza* was still under way, but from her hollows came no longer the whir and clash of machinery full driven and full working. Steam suddenly puffed upward from her escapes. Jimmy had opened her valves. The screw had stopped, and we traveled forward in ever-lessening momentum. Men, blackened and begrimed with oil and grease, streaming perspiration, came running out from the engine room and stokehole. Last of all came Twisted Jimmy, as blackened and sweaty as the others, and trudged heavily to the deck beneath the bridge.

"We're hulled! Hopelessly hulled! The engine room's a mess, and she can't float for more than ten minutes," he said calmly.

I ordered the boats away, seized my ship's papers, and ran down from the bridge. Already the *Esperanza* was settling with sickening rapidity, and the men, muttering savage imprecations, but as cool in demeanor, now that the fight was finished, as if it had been a mere game of pitch and toss, were in the lowered boats and waiting for me. I rushed to Jimmy's cabin. The door was wide, and inside the laboratory that he could use no more he stood glaring at his bench.

"Look! Look!" he roared. "It's open! They've robbed us at last!"

There was no doubt of it. The door of the secret receptacle stood wide, and it was empty. I had no time to comment, for suddenly there was a sicken-

ing lurch of the deck, and it was plain that the *Esperanza* was going.

"Come on! Run!" I shouted; but Twisted Jimmy stood like a man bewildered by a great loss. I seized him by the arm, and fairly forced him from the cabin and through the door. The ship was quivering in her death throes, her bows rising slowly into the air for'ard, and her stern settling. The slant of her deck beneath was so great that we had to jump for the port rail to keep from sliding amidships, and together we climbed over it, planted our feet to get the greatest possible take-off, and sprang into the sea. The boats had pulled hurriedly away, lest they be swamped, and just as I hit the water I heard the men in the port boat shout encouragement.

Then came a suction that was like the clutch of a million tiny hands dragging me under, and I knew that the ship was taking her final plunge. I caught my breath, held it, and fought with mad upper strokes as I felt myself going down, ever deeper and deeper.

The pressure was becoming unendurable. From every direction, upon every surface of my body, tons of weight were rushing forward malevolently to crush me. No compress of torture could have been so complete; no hopelessness more entire than what I suffered. The half of me that strove for life was exhausted and despairing; the half of me that reviewed my life had finished its task, and, wearied, paused to rest. And then, with reeling senses, resigned to death, I was abruptly thrown upward as if on the swirl of a gigantic bubble, and all senses resumed, somewhat languidly and annoyed, the never-ending struggle for life. I was on the surface, breathing great drafts of air, sore as if bruised, dazed by the unexpected, marveling at reprieve, and moving with mechanical motions of legs, lungs, and arms. Shouts that sounded a long way off, and faint, battered at my ears. A harsh hand caught me by the folds of cloth covering my back and lifted me higher. I had lived an age in those few seconds, and was back again, and my mind was resuming its sway in exact proportion to the timing of my lungs that gasped and fought for air. My senses were swinging back to normal and back to life that had so narrowly escaped being torn from me.

"Put your hand on my shoulder!" a voice familiar and yet unfamiliar shouted. "Thought you were never coming up! The boat is almost here!"

And now it dawned upon me that the hand and the voice were Jimmy's and that it was he who supported me. I was obedient. I put my hand on his shoulder, and as he swam felt the hard-working muscles beneath. Sturdily he swam, with far-flung arms, and I felt other hands and the drag of hard, firm wood, and awoke as from a dream to find myself hanging across the side of a boat, with my men tugging me aboard.

"We'd given you up, skipper," said a sailor, and I sagged to a thwart.

"And I guess he'd have gone, all right, if the chief hadn't been there on the spot when the last air in the good old *Esperanza* vomited him up," declared another voice.

"Is he all right?" queried some one else, and another reassured him: "Sure he is! They all act like that when they've been under for three or four hours. That is, if they act at all!"

I rather fancied the qualification. I laughed. Then for a minute I was very sick. I crawled to a sitting position, looked around, steadied myself by an effort, and saw but three objects on the immediate sea—the starboard boat pulling leisurely toward us, a great whirl of water in which there eddied, round and round, pieces of wreckage of a ship, and, slowly coming toward us, a shining, gray, and monstrous shape, the exposed portion of the submarine that had sunk us, running light. A voice from her deck hailed us in a brawling shout of clear English: "Pull alongside here, you men! In which boat is your captain?"

I was fully revived.

"Here!" I shouted, and, knowing that we were helpless, ordered my men to

make way toward the gray shape that was now coming to a stop.

"We're all safe but Klein," some one said, and for this I was thankful.

I moved over to where I could reach Jimmy, who sat, huddled and dripping, on a seat. "Jim," I said, and then couldn't speak. All the words of gratitude that were in my mind rushed so rapidly together that they were confused and unutterable. I could but thrust my hand toward him and catch his hand that came up instinctively to meet mine. All that I might have said, and all that he might have replied, went into the contact of our palms.

"Which boat is the captain in?". a harsh voice called, and I turned to see that we were nearing the submarine, on whose moist deck stood a half dozen men in the uniform of the German navy.

"In that one, you slob! You were told once before!" exclaimed the angry voice of the chief mate, Rogers, from the other boat that was converging with us to the meeting point.

Fearing reprisals for this outspeaking, I got to my feet and answered in person:

"I am the master of the ship you sunk! You have done about all you could; so what do you want now?"

"Pull alongside and come aboard," was the order, and from the men around me came varied, fragmentary, earnest, and muttered advice: "Scrag him, sir!" "Kick him into the sea and we'll bash him with our oars!" "Don't you hesitate to do it, sir!" "Grab him and hand him over to us, captain, and then they dassent hurt you."

Knowing that this was a time for certain, though unwilling, diplomacy, I quieted my men and bade them put me aboard. The submarine had a tiny landing platform, with steel steps arranged so nicely in conformity with her awash surface that I mentally admired them, and I stepped to the thwart of my boat, caught the wet rail in my hand, and mounted. I stood on her surprisingly large deck, and looked for her commander. I gasped with surprise. The man who confronted me was Count Waldo von Vennemann. Of the two I was by far the most perturbed and "off my feet." He gave me a chance to recover.

"I wondered," he said, with a grin, "if the man I was supposed to intercept was my old friend, Commander Thomas Hale."

I was still staring at him.

"It is the fortune of war. I am rather sorry, in a way, for I used to like you. I'm glad you were not drowned when your ship went under."

Certainly I could find no objection to that. He had changed but little in appearance since last I saw him in Torquay, although I fancied the smile was not so free. There was an air of hesitancy and embarrassment about him, due, I thought, to our relative positions, for he seemed to thwart me at every turn, and that without malice. Two loves I had known, that of a woman and my first steamship, and he had robbed me of both. I think my manner repelled him, for he became most carefully punctilious.

"It is necessary, captain, for me to search each of you individually," he said. "My cabin is at your disposal."

He bowed toward the commodious hatch of the conning tower, and said to a waiting officer in his own tongue: "Captain Hale was once a friend of mine. See that he is treated with all the courtesy that the occasion permits. Take him to my cabin, where he may strip for examination."

"I thank you, count," I said, bowing to him, and had started down the steel ladder when his voice again arrested me, and in its tone, I fancied, was something of sympathy for a bested rival: "If you will permit me, commander, I should like to place a dry suit of clothing at your disposal. I may have to detain you some time, and will have one of my men dry yours."

I was convinced that the count was doing his best to extend a kindness, and, although he was my enemy, saw no reason why I should not accept his proffer, and did. It was very strange to be shown such attention as was given me. It was strange, too, to go below

in that huge submarine, larger than any I had ever seen, for I estimated her to be something more than two hundred and fifty feet in length, a veritable submersible cruiser of the latest type. I had no chance to look about me with more than a passing glance, but saw that the boat was infinitely superior to any I had ever seen. There were tiny cabins for the officers and a recreation room for the men in which stood a "baby" piano and a gramophone. The count's cabin, into which I was ushered, was small, but well fitted.

"The Herr Captain speaks German?" queried my conductor, and on my admitting it added: "You will please take off all your clothing and let me have it for inspection."

I should have protested, but saw the futility of it when a prisoner and subject to an inexorable order. I wondered why this careful search. Another man, evidently a steward, entered and assisted me to remove my dripping garments. He opened a drawer in the neat little dresser, took from it a suit of civilian clothing, and laid it by my side. He disappeared and returned with a large bath towel, and would have assisted me to dry my moist body had I permitted. When, this task completed, I turned around, my own wet belongings had been removed, and the officer had disappeared. The steward said, in his lisping Saxon, "Excuse me, sir," and withdrew, closing and locking the door after him. I donned the clothes that were comforting after my experience of immersion, sat for a moment on the tiny chair, and then got to my feet and looked about me.

Almost the first object upon which my eyes fell was a photograph of Marty Sterritt, as I had known her. Marty, with the frank and fearless eyes, with the quizzical little smile on her lips, with the free poise of the fine head on the rounded throat! There was nothing whatever written upon it. For a long time I sat there, looking at it with a great pain and loneliness in my heart where she reigned; for no matter how harshly one grips and controls his thoughts, and tries to adjust them to the irrevocable, there are many wounds which never heal, and must, on occasion, throb with pain.

I was aroused from my reverie by the sound of voices in the narrow passageway, one of a man talking a very broken English, and the other Twisted Jimmy. I heard the door of what I presumed was the tiny recreation room being shut, and then there was silence.

It was nearly an hour before the steward, who had taken my clothing, returned with it, dry and warm, over his arm. He told me I could rehabilitate myself, and without further comment departed. I had barely resumed my own apparel when he appeared at the door again, held it open, and said I was to follow him. At first I suspected that I was to be conducted to prison quarters, but soon discovered that we were retracing our steps and about to climb upward. I stepped out on the commodious deck of the monster submarine, and found myself facing the count. My impression was that he was vastly annoyed by something at the moment when he turned and saw me, and then he assumed an appearance of complacency.

"Captain Hale," he asked quietly, "did you call the roll of your men after you took to your boats?"

"No, but my men have."

"And are any missing?"

"One only, our engineer."

"And you don't know what became of him?"

"Naturally not. Otherwise he would have been in one of the boats," I said none too graciously and thinking of poor Klein's fate that but for good luck might have been my own.

"So it was your engineer you lost, eh?" And then caught himself and hesitated, giving me room for thought.

The count stood looking about him for a moment, and it gave me an opportunity to appraise the scene. The two boats of the *Esperanza* were still alongside, with my men seated in them, all in a watchful silence. From the deck of the submarine two machine guns were pointed threateningly toward the boats, although the big gun that had

been visible when we boarded had been lowered into its shaft and the plates reset above it.

"I'll say this for your men, Hale," he said, suddenly turning toward me again. "They are the sullenest, most uncompromising, unresponsive set that I have ever encountered at sea. And, one and all, they must have lied, because they insisted unanimously that not a man was missing."

Mentally I grinned at their stubbornness, for I knew they had lied to merely keep him thinking that their losses had been nil; a sort of, "Ya! Ya! You didn't get any of us, after all! What are you going to try next?"

Clumping feet were coming up through the conning tower, hammering the steel steps, and Twisted Jimmy appeared. His clothing also had been dried, a decided compliment to him as well as me, the only two men of the *Esperanza* who had been immersed. Count Vennemann gave an impatient gesture toward the boats, and Jimmy was escorted to the little side ladder and told he could get aboard. The count motioned to the men nearest him, and they withdrew as far as possible.

"Hale," he said, "you can thank your stars that you used to be a friend of mine. We don't always take such pains with prisoners." There was a very grim significance in his remark that sat sourly on my mind. He must have divined my thought, for he hastened to offer an apology: "Oh, I make no excuses; war is war. You people don't see it as we do because you are on the opposite side; but don't think for a moment that I am in the least bit proud of this berth of mine. I'm merely doing what I conceive to be my duty by my country. I'm not a believer in war, but if my government decides on war I'm for it to the hilt. The more horrible we make it the sooner will this old world get sick of it."

He paused a moment, and when I did not answer he went on: "I shall not hold you a prisoner. Had that engineer of yours survived, I might have —— Go! Get aboard one of your boats, Captain Hale. I wish you a very good day, if not an *auf wiedersehen.*"

"Thank you," I said, and returned his bow as if we were still in dress uniform in two punctilious services that were at peace. I made my way to the nearest boat, and stepped into it. The men began to mutter grinning congratulations, but I silenced them. As if eager to lose sight of me, Count Vennemann whirled, gave a curt order, and then actually stood there and smiled at us as his undersea craft, running light, took on way. The men at the oars of our boat fell to them to clear the wash, then rested, and we watched the submarine swing gracefully out in a wide arc and head westward. With enviable speed she swam out into the distance until the men on her deck appeared to walk upon the sea, and then we sadly began the long, hard work of a thirty-mile pull toward the nearest land, with my boat in the lead and Jimmy sitting close by me and staring back at the chief mate's boat in our slow wake.

"What happened after I left?" I asked the second mate, who was nearest to me.

He spat disgustedly over the side and said: "They came and hauled the chief out because that stiff-backed skipper of theirs said he would give him some dry duds. Then, after that, they took us up, one by one, made us strip to our hides and stand there while they went through our clothes like a lot of professional pickpockets. They even ripped the linings out of my coat. Look at this!"

He pulled the lapels of his jacket open and displayed the damage.

"They kept all my letters, sir, but gave back everything else. They didn't spare any of us. They made all the men in one boat climb aboard their sneaking sub, and I'll be blest if two men didn't get into it and go through it as if searching for a fortune rolled up in bank notes and jammed into a crack. A wood ant couldn't have escaped from them if it had bored a hole in the wood and calked the entrance with oakum. Then they made us pull off about twenty feet, and did the same

to the other crowd and the other boat. After that their skipper and a couple of his officers held a confab and acted puzzled. They asked for the chief officer, and when Rogers told 'em he was it, wanted to know if any men were missing. Rogers tells 'em 'No. Don't you think we were smart enough to save all our men? What do you take us for? A lot of bargemen with no more discipline than rats or submarine smuts and tinkers?'

"'Not too much lip there,' says their skipper, and Rogers shut up, because maybe I think he had an idea he might get you and the chief in bad; but he does a lot of talking to himself. On this boat we took the line of talk from what we heard, and swore we were all here. We didn't say a word about poor old Klein being lost, because we weren't going to give 'em any satisfaction. If they hadn't taken you and the chief below, we'd have made a try for 'em, and got their cussed boat. The bos'n said he'd get the skipper, and the third said he'd put the conning-tower hatch out of commission so they wouldn't dare submerge; but we decided it was too risky. If you and the mate had been on deck, it would have been different. Then, while we were trying to make a plan, they got those two machine guns out, and we saw that we hadn't a chance on earth. That's all. Just stripped us, searched the boats, and put us back."

I looked at Jimmy, who had twisted about in his seat to listen, and he shrugged his shoulders; then, with an air of the utmost depression, said: "It's all right. But they've got me, just the same, and the worst of it is I don't know who is the traitor. They were handed the plans by some man they took aboard their craft. You can bet on that!"

"Plans? Plans?" queried the second mate.

But Jimmy reverted to his usual silence, and for a long time sat bent forward and utterly dejected. We were quite certain that Klein could not have been the traitor, and, after our encounter with Mike Cochrane, whom we had trusted, did not know whom to suspect. But it seemed possible that the theft had been worked out to completion by some one who had kept Jimmy under surveillance.

I sat for a long time trying to reason out each useless feature of the situation. It was very confusing, and did not exactly dovetail. If we had a spy among us, why hadn't he imparted the information that the chief engineer, whose plans the Germans had so long coveted, was aboard? Yet, if the plans had been surrendered by the man who stole them, why care further for Jimmy or what became of him? That being so, why was it that the spy had not declared himself when the others of us were put aboard the boats? What need for further watch on Jimmy? These and other questions came to my mind, but I put them aside as unanswerable.

It was all disastrous, no matter from which angle it was viewed. Disaster seemed to have settled upon me at last, after all my efforts. The springs of my luck had run dry. Hitherto I had regarded such possibilities and speculated as to what I should feel did I lose my ship. Then I had regarded catastrophes with equanimity; but now that I had suffered realities there was a most distressing difference. My own loss for a time overwhelmed all others. Then came a great sympathy for Twisted Jimmy Martin, who sat huddled before me, with his broad shoulders sagging and his head bent forward and drooping. And after that, and as poignant as any sorry thrust of fate, my failure to accomplish the hopes of the man who had so strangely trusted me with not only his gold, but his honor, Monsieur Perigord.

Slowly, as the afternoon progressed, the land toward which we moved grew less dim. Its mountains rose higher from the sea, became defined by proximity to sharpened blue lines suggesting eternal shelter and security. The men shifted seats, and the new oarsmen pulled more vigorously. I became aware of their more hopeful comments. Their lives were beginning over again, and the past vicissitudes lost. We had

escaped with our lives. Most of us had youth and the strength of youth. But one man aboard the boat had lost his life's work, and old Jimmy Martin was still sitting, absorbed, despondent, hopeless, when we caught a slowly moving wave, were rolled shoreward, and felt our keel grate on the sands of the beach. We stepped ashore and stretched our cramped limbs on the earth of Martinique, that island which has passed into tragic fame. But a little walk around a friendly shoulder of land lay a tiny port of refuge, a village containing other and kindly men, and we who had survived had nothing physical to fear.

We pulled our boats high and dry to certain security, and, in straggling procession, and directed by a ragged native fisherman, trudged away across the sands, while out there to the west, very flat and still, the waters swept languidly, as if loving that which they had clasped to themselves, my first real ship, the *Esperanza*.

CHAPTER XII.

Fortunately for us we were but a short distance from a good-sized village, where it was possible to get cable connection. I found there also, by another stroke of good fortune, a shipping agent who knew me and could identify me at the local bank, so that within a few hours our needs, so far as finances were concerned, were supplied. It was a discouraging prospect at the best, for the war had so disrupted all services that we might be there, practically marooned on the island, for a period covering any time between one and six weeks.

I decided to lose no time in notifying Monsieur Perigord of our misfortune, and so, as soon as I had given all those dependent upon me ample money to provide for their needs, I went to the cable office. I found it in charge of a French cable officer, evidently a man from the reserve list or one who had been in retirement at the outbreak of the war, and was now serving his country in quasimilitary capacity. I got a form and wrote my message, announcing the loss of the *Esperanza,* and stating that she had been submarined. I passed it through the little wicket to the girl clerk, who took it to the desk where the officer stood grimly erect, with his glasses perched down on the end of his nose, and he, after glancing at it, pursed his lips, readjusted his glasses, and then came over to the wicket.

"You are Captain Hale?" he asked in French, and when I said, "Yes," added: "I have heard of your misfortune and am very sorry for you. I understand you were en route to my country?"

"To Bordeaux," I replied, "laden with cocoa and coffee."

"Then the misfortune is my country's as well as yours," he said, with a shake of his head.

He had been holding my cablegram in his hand as he talked in his kindly way, and now thrust it through the wicket to me.

"I am very sorry, Captain Hale, that I cannot permit this to be sent for you. We have been given rigid orders that the loss of any ship by German submarine attack can be reported to the French government only, which, if it deems it expedient, privately notifies the shipowners. In this case, you, being the owner of the vessel, require no notification."

"But, monsieur," I protested, "the *Esperanza* had a very valuable cargo on board, and it is of the utmost importance that I should immediately notify the shipper. He has private reasons for being particularly anxious concerning its delivery. Can you not urge upon your admiralty the request that the news be given him?"

He shook his head doubtfully, and pointed to the address on the form.

"I fear, Captain Hale," he said, "that you, not being a Frenchman, will not understand quite what that name means to the French government. You are not aware, perhaps, that at one time it was as well known as any name in France. Many have forgotten it, but probably not the government. Under

some circumstances it might notify an owner, but not, I am sure, where that owner is *persona non grata* in France."

I felt a hot impulse to defend Monsieur Perigord, and resolved to break the seals of silence imposed upon me in his behalf.

"Monsieur," I said, "is it possible for you to give me a little of your time in some place where we may talk privately? I have much to say to you concerning Monsieur Perigord that I feel it a duty to say."

"Certainly," he answered. "Come this way." He opened a door in the wire partition, and conducted me through into a small private office, where he gave me a chair.

"Monsieur Perigord is as loyal a Frenchman as lives," I said. "He is himself broken-hearted by his exile. The loss of the *Esperanza* is nothing; the loss of her cargo of cocoa and coffee is nothing compared with what her real cargo consisted of."

He opened his eyes widely, and looked at me inquiringly.

"The real cargo of the *Esperanza* consisted of three million dollars in gold that Monsieur Hector de la Perigord, the aged, lonely, old exile, had collected together and was sending across as a voluntary contribution to France. I myself was to take it from Bordeaux and deliver it to the minister of the treasury."

The officer leaned back so suddenly that his glasses dropped from the top of his nose, and he fairly exploded a most expressive: "*Mon Dieu*—fifteen million francs in gold voluntarily, you said! And asking nothing in return."

"Voluntarily, and asking nothing in return," I declared. "There was no proviso whatever connected with his gift. The one thing he did ask me to do for him, if I might, was, after his gift had been made and accepted, to gain for him the removal of that ban which exiles him. He is very old, monsieur, and his one inordinate love is for the land of his birth. He asked nothing more than the privilege of returning there that he might die on French soil."

More I said to him, speaking with an eloquence inspired by my sympathy for the old Frenchman. I did not speak in vain, for the officer clasped my hand almost violently, and declared: "Captain Hale, I shall break all official rules, if necessary, and take the risk of incurring the displeasure of my superiors by doing my utmost in behalf of your friend. I shall do even more than that; I shall enlist the services and personal advocacy of one who is a friend of mine and not without influence in our native land. That friend will, in person, reach and appeal to the President of France himself. If I fail, it shall be through no lack of honest effort on my part. Furthermore, I should like to say to you, sir, that I admire you for the quality of your friendship."

I was almost embarrassed by the deferential manner in which he bowed me through the door, and went away with a somewhat lighter heart in the hope that at least a portion of my mission to France, and that by far the most important to Monsieur Perigord, should not fail.

I was now come to another very sorrowful duty—that of finding poor Jimmy Martin and doing what I could to encourage him and make him stop brooding over his great loss. I went back to the little hotel where we had taken rooms, and on inquiry was told that he was out in a little arbor overlooking the sea. I found him there, with his elbows on his knees and his head resting in the palms of his hands, looking for all the world like a man hopelessly defeated. He seemed actually to have become old and shrunken in a few hours, and when, upon hearing my footsteps upon the gravel path, he lifted his head, I saw that his eyes were sunken and his face haggard and lined. I threw myself on the little rustic bench beside him with the feeling that anything I might say would be awkward and futile, but resolved, notwithstanding, to brace him up, if possible.

"Jimmy," I said, "it is pretty hard luck. There is no use in trying to gloss that over in the least; but to me

it doesn't look so absolutely hopeless as you seem to think. The plans, of course, are gone, but surely you can make others?"

"Yes," he said wearily, "I can. But you don't understand what it means. Why, Tom, it might mean years of work. There were formulas in that so exact and so fine as to be utterly beyond the capacity of one's memory, and some of which cost me probably ten thousand experiments. Those plans and papers you saw contained every detail, and there are details which I could no more recall than I could the figures in a book of logarithms."

"Just the same," I replied, "you don't propose to give up, do you?"

He shook his head as if in doubt, with an air of the utmost despondency and discouragement.

"Come," I said, "you are no quitter! Besides, as you know, I am fairly well off. I will back you with all the money you want, and you can have all the time——"

He turned toward me almost angrily, and exclaimed: "Money—time! Don't you understand that both of these would be useless if the Germans succeeded in getting those plans? With that invention of mine a submarine would not need to come to the surface to find its prey and discharge its torpedoes. Or, on the other hand, a cruiser equipped with that apparatus could discover a submarine at any depth to which the latter could go, and by following it constantly and observing it could ultimately destroy it. You are not fool enough to suppose that any country at war would hesitate to make use of such an invention as that, without very many qualms of nicety as to the poor devil of an inventor."

"But," I insisted, "we are not even positive that the plans were ever delivered aboard the submarine. I think not."

"Well, then, what became of them? You are just as certain as I am that it was those plans they were after rather than the mere sinking of the ship. I believe those plans are at this moment being carried as fast as that submarine can travel toward Germany. The first thing that will be heard of my invention, by anybody, will be that German submarines are known to have put in use a new method for sinking ships without ever appearing on the surface. It is a hellish loss, that's what it is! And, what is more, it goes double with me, because my sympathies are all with the Allies. And here I have gone to work and spent my life perfecting something for those murderous cusses to use, not only against my friends, but possibly against my own countrymen. Humph! I would rather have died than perfected that thing and then let it fall into their hands."

He jumped to his feet, and began pacing savagely to and fro in front of the arbor, kicking the gravel as if by physical action to vent his anger on something. I waited for him to cool down a bit, and also because I found it difficult to say anything reassuring. After a time he paused and dropped back into his dejected attitude, leaning grimly against the doorpost, with both hands thrust into his pockets and his head bent forward.

"Who do you suspect?" I asked, looking up at him. "You think somebody delivered those plans. Well, if so, we can at least have the satisfaction of trying to find out who it was, and we can certainly make it hot for that gentleman."

"Yes, and mighty small satisfaction that would be," he grunted derisively. "That would not bring the plans back and would not prevent the Germans from using them. And they have got them. I am absolutely sure of it from the way that slick commander grinned at us when he bade us good-by. The man was exultant. What in the devil could he be exultant over if it was not that he had got the best of us? Answer me that, will you?"

He stopped and glared at me, and I, finding it rather impossible to offer any sane response, stood silent. He seemed to gloat over my inability to answer, and resumed his argument almost as if sneering at my being worsted.

"Besides, how are you going to find

out who the thief was? It could not have been poor old Klein, because he is dead."

"Well," I declared, "that ingrate, Mike Cochrane, the oiler, must have had a finger in it. I know he was there on the end of the dock in Maracaibo the night we sailed. Do you suppose that having himself failed to steal the plans he succeeded in bribing some of the other men of the crew to make a try for them?"

"Why not?" he answered. "That's just about the way most men show their gratitude. I kept you from murdering him, and didn't chuck him overboard myself. I kept you from putting him off at Samaña; I got you to carry him on to Maracaibo and turn him loose. I gave him money aboard the *Esperanza,* and one day when I met him with his crippled wing, there in the plaza at Maracaibo, feeling sorry for him, I gave him a hundred dollars more. Good Lord! Haven't I done enough for him to make him an enemy? The surest way in the world to make a man hate you is to do something for him!"

I saw that he had reverted to his old cynicism and distrust of humanity at large, but could not resist a parting shot at him.

"I suppose, then, that because I have tried to be decent to you, you hate me?"

It rather took the wind out of his sails, and he turned and gasped at me for a moment, as if speechless.

"Good heavens! No, Tom!" he exclaimed. "I am talking like a fool; but, hang it all, I am hard hit. I am done. I am whipped. I am clean knocked out. I will take back everything I have said."

Thinking that this was a pretty good point at which to drop the conversation, I got up and joined him in the doorway of the arbor.

"One thing is sure," I said, "that we are not going to gain anything by brooding over something that is done and can't be altered. Come on; let's walk down toward the beach."

We did so, and it was not the first walk that we were to take along the more or less deserted reaches of that shore, for on that day, and the day following and the day after that, having nothing better to do, we trudged aimlessly backward and forward. Despite the physical beauty of the island, it was a most deadly place in which to contemplate passing six weeks of waiting. The town itself afforded nothing in the way of amusement, and I could offer but little in the way of conversation to brighten up the spirits of Twisted Jimmy, who threatened to develop melancholia. He grew more taciturn even as he drooped physically, and the worst of it was that it seemed impossible to offer him any substantial encouragement.

It was on the third day, in the afternoon, that we had taken a longer walk than usual toward the northernmost point of the island, and the tide was running in, when we discovered here and there on the white sands evidences of the ill-fated *Esperanza.* A life belt with her name shining grimly, a broken stool, a section of deck plank, and some other little pieces were scattered about on the white sands. A native beach comber, who had been collecting salvage, dashed into the surf to recover some prize as we passed. Supposing that he was salving a mere piece of wreckage, we did not pause to watch his efforts, but continued on our way. Jimmy, steadily walking, was staring absently ahead into the distance; but I, cherishing an affection for the faithful old *Esperanza,* looked back over my shoulder, idly speculating meanwhile as to what remnants had been spewed up by the sea. It was then I saw something which made me stop abruptly.

"What do you suppose he has got?" I said, turning fully around, and Jimmy whirled to look back, and exclaimed: "Dirty swine! Come on; let's get him," and began running down the beach. There was no mistaking what the beach comber had pulled ashore, nor what he had been doing; for he instantly raised himself and took to his heels with a speed which could easily outdistance the efforts of either Jimmy or myself. He had been rifling the pockets of a

corpse, and that corpse was Klein, the engineer. Being somewhat more fleet of foot than Jimmy, I was the first to arrive. On the sand beside the body lay the articles which the ghoulish beach comber had taken from the engineer's pockets and discarded as useless to him. There was a bunch of keys, a toothbrush, a pocket handkerchief, a ball of twine, a sodden packet of letters, and a big, flat packet of white papers. Upon these Jimmy fell with a shout, and carefully spread them open on the beach, regardless of the proximity of the dead man. There, clearly defined and unblurred by the water—being done in waterproof ink—were the missing plans. It was Klein, after all, for whom we had mourned, who was the thief. Germany had not secured that for which she had struggled so persistently, and Twisted Jimmy, on his hands and knees over the plans, suddenly lifted his head and laughed in a high, hysterical key.

CHAPTER XIII.

Our relief upon discovering that Klein was the thief who had made away with Martin's plans was very great; for there is scarcely a greater tragedy of the mind than mistrust of one's fellows, and I doubt if either Jimmy or I could have been entirely frank and free with our men had not proof of their innocence been so unexpectedly given us. Retribution in Klein's case had come swiftly, and in a most unexpected manner. The cause of his death was very apparent, for the whole back of his head was crushed in as if by some flying fragment of metal hurled by the explosion of the torpedo that had sent the *Esperanza* to the bottom. It was, of course, impossible to conjecture in what portion of the ship he had been at the time of the explosion, but it was quite certain that he had not been seen in the engine room. He was the only man who had gone to his death. We searched his body for other evidences, but found nothing whatever of an incriminating nature, and were placing the sodden letters and personal belongings back in his pocket when Jimmy came upon a tiny black case and withdrew therefrom a curious little square of silk, embroidered with a yellow cipher. He stood with it in his hand, nonplused, but I took it from him, striving vainly to remember where I had seen identically such a square once before. Of a sudden memory responded.

"That," I said to Jimmy, "is the final proof. And the odd part of it is that Klein was no ordinary, casual spy, but actually a permanent secret-service agent on the Prussian staff. I saw one of these once before, in Plymouth, since the war broke out. It was shown me as a curiosity by a friend of mine who is a high officer in the British navy. With that little square of silk Klein could have gone aboard any German ship and made demands instead of requests. He could have gone anywhere in Germany with that as his sole passport."

"It proves another thing, too," said Jimmy; "that the people who employed this man were not only pretty high up, but knew a whole lot more of what I was trying to do than I had any idea anybody on earth could have guessed."

"They certainly took no chances," I added, "because the fact that they selected a man of such importance for the job shows that they were not gunning for an elephant with a mosquito gun. All the other chaps were probably mere subsidiaries, but in any event they were determined to watch you to the last minute, and catch you at the moment when your invention was perfected."

"But if that is so," declared Jimmy, "they must have been mighty badly misinformed, or else somebody bungled. Otherwise they would not have made an attempt in New York harbor, which thereby put us on guard, and, again, they would not have employed Cochrane to try to nip the incomplete plans before we reached Maracaibo. You see, they really were not completed until three or four nights ago."

"It seems to me that Klein must have been playing a lone hand and unaware of the possible interference of other

men," I reasoned; "for his method would have been to allay all suspicion and to keep actual tab on your work until he was fairly sure you were at the goal, when he trusted to opportunity to enable him to clean the whole thing up in one reckless dash. It is probable that he was immensely annoyed by the efforts made in New York harbor, and again by Cochrane, both of which seriously upset his own plans of campaign."

"Perhaps that's true," he agreed, and proceeded to cut open the other little square of black. Inside it was some thin paper on which we made out—broken, faint, scarcely legible—the words:

The—was made by—and recep—left front leg—press knot—right cor—top—than—opens with spring.

This was all that it contained. It was plainly the instructions how to open the secret receptable in Jimmy's laboratory and was, therefore, proof that no precautions had been overlooked by the secret agent and his subordinates. It made it definitely certain also that he had been assisted in New York by some one who had found it necessary to convey the news to him in writing, because had he himself made a memorandum there would have been no need for him to have filled in the name of the maker. Thus another point which had been obscure was cleared up; for now we knew that Klein had been in possession of Jimmy's secret previous to the time he had signed on as engineer aboard the *Esperanza.*

We reasoned it out that Klein and his assistants had kept Jimmy under constant espionage for a long time, and it was not unlikely that even our conversation in the restaurant on that night when Jimmy had first given me his confidence had been overheard and reported. Probably from that hour onward there was never a moment ashore, be he awake or asleep, where Jimmy's every movement was not noted. Klein had decided to take no risk whatever of Jimmy's escaping him, and so, having at some period of his life been a very competent marine engineer, had forged his papers, giving himself a clean record of constant employment, and thus made his way into the engine-room staff of the *Esperanza.*

In the long, idle days that followed, when we were as helpless as any men very well could be, Jimmy's spirits seemed to revive to their accustomed pitch. The certainty that his secret had not been stolen from him, and that all plans and memoranda were in his possession, which would enable him to resume work as soon as we could get away from the island, were sufficient in themselves to render him cheerful, although vastly impatient.

It seemed to me that I had come to know every inhabitant of that island, had exhausted every place of interest, and grown tired of hoping in the twenty-two days which we actually endured before anything bearing either sail or smoke came in, and then, very early one morning, Jimmy came jubilantly thumping on my door and shouted: "A ship! There's a ship blew into harbor last night! Hurry up! Show a leg!"

He had no need to arouse me with that old-time phrase of the sea, because my feet had struck the floor, and I was leaping into my clothes before he had halfway finished his sentence. We hastened down to the beach to find out who she was, and learned that she was a little tramp schooner with an auxiliary engine which plied independently up and down the Windward, Leeward, and Lesser Antilles; also that she would probably be in port at least two days, which seemed a very long time to men who were so eager to get away. She was bound for Barbados, that, while not altogether in the direction we should have chosen, would, at least, ensue our finding a passage more speedily on some commodious packet bound either northward or southward. We returned to the hotel and had breakfast, after which we sent out a runner and had all members of the old *Esperanza's* crew assembled where we lodged and asked the men their individual wishes, and before noon that day knew that all, without exception, were as well "fed

up" with the island as we were and would gladly avail themselves of the chance to get away from it. I therefore sought the skipper of the *Reina del Mer*—for under this pretentious name that dingy little windjammer sailed—and surprised him by offering him such a passenger list. He threw up his hands in a Spanish gesture, and said that while I honored him with my patronage he thought it would be almost impossible to entertain twenty-four men aboard a schooner whose own crew consisted of but eight men, and it took a vast amount of persuasion to get him to undertake the task. We solved it by agreeing to stop on deck in watches and take our own chances of a drenching, for we were resolved not to pass further time on the island if it could be avoided.

On the very morning of the day we were due to sail a messenger came hurrying from the cable office, requesting my presence immediately. Wondering what new obstacle could have been put in my way, and somewhat "grumpy," I responded. The gray-haired reserve officer in charge of the cable office, with whom I had become somewhat friendly, took me for the second time into his little private apartment, and I noted that his air was one of great exultation.

"Captain Hale," he said, eager to impart his news, "I have something which I am certain will give you as much delight as it does me, for you have been the active agent in securing justice for a much misunderstood countryman of mine. I have the extreme satisfaction to tell you that the unfortunate and so-long-misguided man, Monsieur Hector de la Perigord, has been granted amnesty. In recompense for the splendid and munificent attempt he made to be of service to France, the French government has not only given him an unqualified pardon, but the president himself has further honored him by a message of thanks."

He stood beaming at me, as if overjoyed by the success of his efforts, but said nothing whatever of the part he had played in the entire affair. To me there could come no more gratifying news, for that I had so disastrously failed in delivering Monsieur Perigord's gold was now offset by the certain knowledge that I had rendered him a service of value. I had thought and brooded over it so much that I was actually as happy as if the pardon had been for myself. We stood smiling like a pair of successful conspirators.

"But, monsieur," I said, "it is to you that the credit is due, for alone I could have done nothing. I did no more than tell you the truth concerning one who is old and sorely distressed, whereas you risked your official position to send his appeal across the wires."

He shrugged his shoulders; but, still smiling happily, turned to his desk and took up some papers, which he held in his hands as he replied. "What I did," he said, "is merely what one Frenchman would do for another. I tried to be, as you said that day when you told me the truth of this affair, not only a Frenchman, but one who had an opportunity to perform a kindly act. I did not tell you at the time that it was to my own brother I should appeal, and that he is a man of a most prominent position in France. I do not know what difficulties he has had to overcome or what efforts he has been compelled to make; but, Monsieur Hale, all that doesn't matter. It is results that count. We have them here."

He tapped the papers suggestively, and then, as if amused and yet not unashamed, exclaimed: "After all, what a lot of children we Frenchmen are! Sentiment! Always sentiment! Monsieur, I have here before me an unusual proof of how far the France of a Frenchman can go when once sentiment is involved. Something I said in my numerous messages may possibly have had influence, but here it is."

Again he turned to the papers, which he had bound together with a clip, and said: "If you wish, it is to you that the privilege is given of conveying the news to Monsieur Perigord that all his citizenship and all his honor have been restored, and that a welcome worthy

of such a man awaits him in France. Already he has been notified of the loss of his gold through the sinking of your ship, but news of his pardon has been withheld, both courtesy and kindliness deeming it best that the conveyance of his pardon be through you. This, I am told, is to be your reward. For, being an American, those who knew of the part you have played believed that you would not care for the baubles of decoration so much as you would for the opportunity of telling Monsieur Perigord personally that your mission was not a failure. It is all very unofficial as far as documents go, because we are unfortunately, at the present time, without that easy communication by mail which prevails in time of peace; but I am privately informed that the first mail which reaches Maracaibo will include an official letter to Monsieur Perigord that will end his exile, as well as bestow upon him the grateful thanks of the French government for what he attempted to do."

He folded the papers and placed them in an official envelope.

"Do you care to undertake the mission?" he asked, holding it toward me. "If so, these are copies of the messages which will confirm the news you carry. Official confirmation, as I said before, will come by the first available mail."

It is not given to every man in his life to convey news of great import and joy to a fellow being, and suddenly a vivid picture of Monsieur Perigord as I had last seen him came to my vision. I reached forward impulsively and seized the envelope from his hand, and thrust it into my pocket.

"Will I undertake it, monsieur?" I said. "Of course I shall. I would rather be the bearer of this packet than any other in the world!"

CHAPTER XIV.

The *Reina del Mer* conveyed us without incident, but with some discomfort, to Barbados, where I made arrangements for the transport of the *Esperanza's* crew to New York, they traveling as passengers on a real steamship. Jimmy Martin announced that he would accompany me to Maracaibo, and the crew, in a body, announced they would not take another ship until hope had been exhausted for again coming under my command; for as Rogers, their spokesman, put it: "You can't keep a sailor from the sea any more than you can keep a squirrel on the ground." I was touched by their loyalty, but doubtful as to our ever being together again.

And so, in due time, Jimmy and I arrived in Maracaibo, feeling as if we had been away from it for years rather than weeks. Almost the first man I met was Farnes, the agent, who, in characteristic way, gave me the distressing news that Monsieur Perigord was ill.

"The old fellow seems to have crumpled up all of a sudden," he said, "as if something had knocked the props from under him. He has shut himself up in his house for weeks, where he sits with his chin on his breastbone, and his eyes as blank as the wall over there. Nobody seems to know what is the matter with him. It is just as if he had made up his mind it was time for him to die, and is doing it in his own way. I went to see him two or three times, but gave him up as hopeless. Too bad! Not a bad chap, old Perigord! You have come none too soon to see the last of him."

It was, therefore, with a profound sense for his well-being that I turned toward his house that evening, made my way through the plaza, which was unchanged and occupied by the usual crowd of loiterers, and passed upward through the dark streets for my visit.

The mansion of Monsieur Perigord seemed to have partaken of its owner's misery, and was vastly different from the one I had left on that night when I bade him good-by. Not a light shone from any window nor from the two road lamps at the entrance to the drive. As I came to the entrance I found the door closed, and from within came no sounds of occupance. I fumbled for the push button of the bell, and at first pressed very lightly, fearing lest it might disturb the sick man by its

clamor, and then, receiving no response, pressed it more firmly. Surmising at last that the bell had been disconnected, I rapped on the door, and again nothing responded save the hollow echoes created by my own thumping.

I made my way to the servants' private entrance, and there a light shone through a transom. Again I rapped, perhaps with less caution, so intent was I on gaining admittance, and the door opened with an almost startling vehemence, and a voice whispered harshly in Spanish:

"For the love of the Virgin! Can't you come in without making a noise like an earthquake? Do you want to kill the padrone?"

The gray-headed old footman whom I had seen on my previous visit stood bending fiercely toward me, and as I stepped to where the dim light fell upon my face, drew back with a startled exclamation.

"I beg your pardon," he said. "I thought it was one of those careless servants. What do you wish?"

"I tried to gain entrance by the front door," I said, "because it is very necessary that I should see Monsieur Perigord."

The footman reached to the side of the door and switched on the electric light above the entrance, exposing me to its full glare. Again he peered forward, scowling at me from beneath his bushy eyebrows. He threw up his hands.

"Ah, you are the American captain, the friend of Monsieur Perigord!" He bowed with the utmost respect, as if to make amends for his churlishness. "You are the only living man besides the doctor whom I believe I am entitled to admit, and my instructions do not cover you. I shall take the responsibility upon myself, despite the doctor's orders. I do not believe in doctors. They can cure ills of the body, but not of the mind, and, *por Dios*, señor, it is a doctor for the mind that my master needs. He dies for want of something which no one can understand. It is as if he willed it and was intent upon rest. Come!"

Through many passages and many turnings he conducted me, as through a maze, until I found myself in the patio, which was now dark and still. It was quite like a place of death now that the subdued lights were all extinguished, and the huge fountain black and still. The old Spaniard paused irresolutely, as if thinking over something, and turned to me for advice, mumbling his perplexity in a low undertone:

"Monsieur Perigord refuses to go to bed. For two days he has rested on a couch in his library. He is sunken in some strange, brooding lethargy. He doesn't look up when I enter. Sometimes he doesn't hear me speak. I beg you to advise me—is it better that I go in and announce you, or is it not possible that the surprise and shock of seeing you, his friend, would act as a medicine, better than that which comes from the chemist, and stir up the embers of a mind that threatens to die? Would it cure him, señor, or would it kill him?"

"I bring him good news," I replied. "I believe there is an old saying that joy never kills. I will go with you to him."

The old fellow, without a word, released his hold on my coat, led the way across the patio, through the hallway, and to a door upon which he tapped. A tired voice bade us enter, and we stepped inside. Monsieur Perigord was no longer on his couch, but was settled in the depths of a huge leather chair with his hands folded in front of him and his legs sprawled toward the fireplace, in which, despite the warmth of the night, a tiny blaze was running. He did not lift his eyes as we entered, nor seemed aware that his servant had brought a visitor. The servant nudged me to speech.

"Monsieur Perigord," I said, almost recklessly, "I have returned," and stepped across the intervening space until I was close to his chair. He started like one aroused from sleep, lifted his eyes, and for a moment stared at me in bewilderment. I feared he had not recognized me, and then his eyes flashed with something of the old

fire. He jerked his legs back, sat stiffly erect, and tottered to his feet, supporting himself with one hand on the arm of the chair.

"Hale! Captain Hale!" He almost fell forward as he attempted to take my hand in both of his, and his servant, alarmed, sprang forward and assisted his master to a seat, after which he nimbly got a large decanter from the taboret, poured a tiny glass of some stimulant, and held it to Monsieur Perigord's lips. Then, reading some new look of interest on his master's face, he smiled with quiet satisfaction, and fell to rubbing his hands.

"Juan, stop kneading your fists. You are not a baker!" exclaimed Monsieur Perigord testily, and at this his footman was almost transported with delight, clucked his tongue dryly between his teeth, looked across at me, and shook his bald old head as if thoroughly satisfied with the results thus far attained by my unexpected visit.

"He is better, señor, already; better, I tell you. Out there in the patio you said you would come unannounced, and —doctors are no good, no good, I tell you, señor: I will——"

Monsieur Perigord had been staring at him with a look of amazement, as if suddenly convinced that his servitor of forty years had gone insane, and now interrupted with a "There! There! Juan, pull a seat up for Captain Hale, and leave us." The faithful Juan was still chuckling in self-approval when he passed out and left us alone.

Monsieur Perigord attempted, with a trembling hand, to reach the decanter of stimulant which I was compelled to pour out for him, and seemed to have recovered himself somewhat as he leaned back in his chair and looked at me.

"Well," he said, "we failed, and it was very thoughtless of me not to have told you before this that I commiserate you on the loss of your ship. You did your best. I am informed that you made a gallant effort and that you crowned it with the kindness of having me notified at the earliest possible moment of all that had happened. I have been childish and selfish in brooding more over my own griefs than over your loss. For the sparing of your life I am most thankful. For my own failure, which is irrevocable and irredeemable, I am desolated. For you there is youth and hope, for me there is age and——"

He threw up his hands with an eloquent gesture of despair, and threatened to again submerge himself in a sea of despondency. I took the papers from my inside pocket and held them toward him.

"You have there," I said, "a more complete report than has yet been given you." He took them and held them listlessly, while I, eager to have him open them, waited to see what he would do.

"They can wait," he said, holding them in his hands.

"But it is important that you should read them," I declared. "Important that you should read them before we proceed." He half opened them, and then, plainly disinclined for their perusal, refolded them with an excuse.

"The frailty of old age! I can't read them without my glasses. To-morrow ——"

"Where are they?" I demanded. "I will get them for you."

Palpably annoyed, but willing to concede in the face of my obstinacy, he gestured toward the library table from which I took the glasses, and handed them to him. He fixed them on his high, fine nose, and with the attitude of one about to be hopelessly bored, but still yielding to my wish, unfolded and spread the French official documents upon his knees. I watched him expectantly. His eyes opened wide as they fell upon the heading of the first letter, his air of lassitude vanished, and with a nervous jerk he again drew himself from the depths of his chair and held the little file of papers higher. I felt it indelicate to witness his emotion, and so got to my feet, walked across the spacious library, took the liberty of opening the heavy shutters, threw the window up, and stood looking out into the night.

Below me, here and there, could be seen the arc lights of the city, and faintly came the sounds of the band in the plaza. It played a noble air, quite a fitting accompaniment to a climax of a noble effort. The stars appeared to shine more brightly, and a tiny, joyous breeze stirred the polished fronds of the palms beneath the window, and rustled as if whispering of great things through the waiting shrubbery. The faint perfume of flowers crept upward from the night, almost as illusive as a memory of flowers that had not survived, and seemed to invade the room.

Something like a prodigious sigh aroused me. Alarmed, I swung on my heels and looked at the old exile. He had collapsed like a shut clasp knife, and fallen forward. The papers had fluttered from his hand to the floor by his side, and the hand itself hung listless and drooped over the arm of his chair. I was frightened. I ran to him, seized him beneath his arms, and rested him back in the seat; then, distracted, took the decanter, held it to his lips, and trickled some of its contents down his throat. I picked his glasses from the floor, where they had fallen, and, I believe, clumsily attempted to replace them on his nose, when I saw that down his white cheeks were rivulets where tears had fallen. I could not bear that he should know how fully I had been aware of his emotion, and took his handkerchief from his pocket and wiped them away even while he was recovering. Still distracted, I returned to the window, closed it, and then the heavy shutters, as if to shut out into the darkness everything that might intrude upon this fine old man in his great hour.

The window closed, I returned to my seat and dropped into it, fixing my eyes on the tiny fire that, although slightly uncomfortable, was still companionable, like a living, leaping, exultant sharer of our little scene. Glancing furtively at Monsieur Perigord, I saw that he was mentally alert again, but that he was making a desperate fight to recover from his emotion.

The silence that followed was prolonged and awkward. I could say nothing lest to him in his stress it seem banal, and he, I think, dared not speak lest he betray sentiment. And of sentiment betrayed most men of worth stand in dread. Finally he reached the arm nearest me across the chair, found my hand, and clutched it.

"Hale! Hale——" he began, and then choked and stopped and struggled to compose himself. But it seemed as if what he had tried to say had broken the ice of that uncomfortable, tense pause, and I found my tongue.

"It's all right, Monsieur Perigord," I declared, with a nervous jubilation. "Everything is all right now. I didn't fail altogether. I didn't do much, but I did the best I could. You owe it all to a man in Martinique, and a very good man he is. You will find his name on those papers here and there. I did nothing. I lost your gold. It would have been indecent in me not to have tried to accomplish the rest, but it doesn't matter now, any of it. You are no longer an exile. You are a citizen of France, and an honored citizen. They want you back there. Gold would have been something; but, don't you see? The president himself thinks that the other part of it is the biggest of all; that you want to come back; that you were ready to give your gold to France in her hour of need, but that, biggest of all, you gave your heart! It is that that counts, Monsieur Perigord."

I can't find the indelicacy to repeat what he said. There are speeches in this world that one must not repeat, and of these were the ones which Monsieur Perigord poured out to me that night. The extravagance of his declarations might seem absurd to one who felt less poignantly than I their meaning.

Promising to call upon him the next day, I made my departure. Long before this the lights of the plaza had been extinguished, and the streets were deserted, but the night itself was endowed and englamoured with a mysterious sense of quietude and peace, quite like the feeling that a sailor has on reaching port after a violent storm.

CHAPTER XV.

It is rather odd, but true, that a sailor in port without a ship invariably turns toward the water front for a stroll. So it was that on the following morning Jimmy and I wandered toward the dock from which we had taken on the last cargo that the *Esperanza* was ever to carry. The first man to greet us was the one who had been the night watchman when we were last there.

"There is a letter there for you, sir," he said.

Wondering who could have written me to such an address, I stood talking to Jimmy in the rather grateful shade of the overhanging eaves of the building until the watchman returned and handed me a very grimy missive.

"That letter should have been given you before you left, sir," said the watchman. "It was the fault of the darky who sweeps up the place at night. He is about a hundred and fifty years old, and has almost forgotten that he is alive. He found this letter two days before you sailed. Whoever delivered it shoved it under the door of the harbor master's office. When the nigger came to sweep up, about four o'clock in the morning, he put it in his pocket and forgot it for two whole days. In the afternoon after the day you sailed he asked my advice on whether it was better for him to tear up the letter or to go to the harbor master and confess. I was afraid they would fire the old fellow, so I took it from him and kept it in the hope of being able to send it to you if I could learn your address."

Thinking that it could be of no importance, I shoved it in my pocket, and, after thanking the watchman and giving him a tip for his trouble, Jimmy and I continued our walk. I didn't think of it again until we were seated on a bench under the shade trees in the deserted plaza, and then idly I tore it open. My carelessness disappeared before I had deciphered the first half dozen lines, for it read:

DEAR SIR: I accidentally stumbled on to something to-day that I think maybe you ought to know. You bought some stuff from the arsenal. The carter who hauled some ammunition for you in the last load was stopped just as he was coming into the town by a man with a clipped mustache, about five feet ten inches high, and with three scars on the side of his face. He told the carter that you had sent him to examine the stuff before it was hauled to the dock, but that he had lost his way and had not got to the arsenal in time. He told the carter you would not pay him for hauling it down there until it had been examined. The carter hated to pull it back up the hill, because it was heavy for his horse, and the man with the scars said maybe they could find some other place where he could look at it. The carter's stable was not far away, and he drove it there, and unloaded it. The man told the carter that it would take him an hour or two, and that if he had anything else to haul he could go and do it and then come back. The man stopped in the stable and opened all the boxes, and there were shells in them. The carter's wife saw him at the job, and says he took nearly every one apart, whatever that means. Then he packed them all up again, the way they had been, and after the carter came back told him they were all right, and that he could go ahead, and told him that he mustn't say anything about him, the man with the scars, because you would be sore at him for not getting to the arsenal in time. Said he might lose his job, and gave the carter two dollars for himself, to keep his mouth shut. You are welcome to this information. A FRIEND.

I had read the letter aloud, and the last words were not out of my mouth when Jimmy exploded: "Klein! That scoundrel deserved to lose his life."

"Klein, of course," I asserted. "The description fits him perfectly. See! 'A man with a close-clipped mustache and three scars on the side of his face.' That shows how he did the job."

"And if that fool nigger hadn't forgotten the letter and shoved it in his pocket, we should have found out the shells were no good, and the chances are that the *Esperanza* would have reached the other side before this," growled Jimmy.

There was no disputing the truth of his statement, and I sat somewhat moodily trying not to cry over spilled milk. That blundering black had made the most expensive mistake of his life. We fell to discussing the author of the anonymous letter, but of course could arrive at no conclusion, for it was of those indefinite things which nothing

but time and patience could ever solve. And now it was too late. We were still conjecturing, and were convinced of but one feature, which was that our informant did not know Klein's name or would have stated it when we left the plaza bench and went to our hotel for luncheon. As we passed through the office the clerk called to Jimmy, and, when the latter stopped, said: "There was a man here to see you this morning, sir; a man with his arm in a bandage."

"Must have been Cochrane," said Jimmy, looking at me.

"He left a card for you," added the hotel clerk, and took a scrap of paper from a pigeonhole behind him, and handed it to Jimmy.

The latter read it, and vented a low whistle of surprise. I had already started up the stairs to my room, and he followed after me.

"Well, Tom," he said, with a grin, "I was right, and you were wrong, about Cochrane. It was Cochrane who wrote that anonymous letter. You mistrusted him and thought he lied, but I didn't."

He held the card toward me. It was a mere scrawl, saying:

> Called to see you this morning, but found you away. Will be here at eight o'clock tonight. M. COCHRANE.

I took the anonymous letter from my pocket, spread it out on the window ledge, and laid the latest missive beside it. A single glance afforded indubitable proof that the handwriting was the same. The cramped and distorted letters were such as a man would write with his left hand by painful effort. In the face of such evidence my suspicions of the oiler were perforce swept away; but I wondered, nevertheless, why he had been standing there on the dock that night when the gold was shipped. Twisted Jimmy was rather exultant over his judgment of character, and throughout the meal delivered me a lecture on "going slow before condemning a man unheard," as if he himself didn't have the reputation of suspecting everything and everybody in the world without either rhyme or reason. I was rather glad to get away from him, and consideration of Cochrane when, obedient to my promise, I left him to visit Monsieur Perigord.

I found the house strangely rejuvenated, as if its owner had taken a new lease of life. The fine doors of the main entrance were flung wide, as were also all the front windows, as if letting in light and air after a long period of gloom. The gnarled old footman was at the door to receive me before I rang the bell, and now came, with a satisfied grin on his face, and bowed before me more deferentially than ever.

"Señor," he said, "it is unbecoming in an old servant to thank you, but I trust you understand. My master, praise be to the Virgin, is a new man. He slept all this forenoon, had a hearty breakfast, and is now sitting out in the shade of the patio, waiting to receive you. You have the gratitude, sir, of my master's household staff, for there is no other such man."

He was actually voluble, and chattered perpetually while ushering me through the long hallway, and out into the cool shade of the patio, where the first thing I observed was that the fountain had again been started and played as if it, too, had been resurrected from the dead.

It was a very smiling Monsieur Perigord who received me, and I could scarcely credit the change on his face.

"Monsieur Perigord," I said, "you have found the fountain of youth, which the illustrious Ponce de Leon failed to discover. You are five years younger."

He actually laughed as he held up his hand and replied:

"You are mistaken, Captain Hale, in your reckoning. To be exact, I am forty-two years younger, inasmuch as forty-two years of my life have been canceled out and I am starting again and taking up the threads at just where I left them off. And I owe this to you, my friend."

I was embarrassed by his gratitude, but felt a very great happiness for what I had accomplished. I could not divert him from the subject, try as I did, and

finally had to let him exhaust himself of speech before I had the opportunity of giving him the details of the sinking of the *Esperanza* with his gold aboard. He was intensely interested by my account of our efforts to give battle to the submarine that had destroyed us, and agreed with me that the traitor, Klein, had come to a merited end.

"But one must not forget," he said meditatively, "that, after all, the man is entitled to some forgiveness and to some admiration for the courage with which he tried to serve his country. It must have required much bravery, Captain Hale, to fight such men as you and your crew single-handed, and at the same time take a chance on his own life, all for—what did you say? Some plans? What plans? That is the part I don't understand. You have not made it clear."

I bit my lip, realizing that I must have said more than I intended.

"I thought," said I, "that I made it understood that it was probably the gold he was after," but Monsieur Perigord shook his head and declared:

"No, for him to have any knowledge of that gold would have been utterly impossible. I saw to that. There was not a man connected with that enterprise who was not a confidential and trusted employee of mine. However, you evidently have some secret which you don't care to confide in me, and therefore we will let the matter drop, because I have other and more important things to discuss with you."

I saw that he took my silence as a just privilege of my own, and waited for him to proceed.

"I thought the entire matter over last night," he said evenly, as if he had also measured the words he would use, "and came to the conclusion that you have earned as much certainly as was agreed upon by us, provided you delivered the gold and accomplished your mission. That portion of your enterprise which failed was not through your fault, and that part which you accomplished meant more to me than anything else possibly could have. I therefore intend to pay you the one hundred and fifty thousand dollars agreed upon."

It was a very big temptation, but I still flatter myself that I had the strength to resist it.

"That," I declared, "is impossible. I shall not accept it. I did not return to you as a beggar, nor did I come with the hope of reward. I came simply and solely as the bearer of news which I knew would bring you at least some recompense for your loss—a loss that had taken place under me, while I was, in a sense, your trustee. You had faith enough in my honesty to take a chance that not one man in ten million ever takes with another fellow being. Therefore I should feel it a smirch on my memory if I accepted one penny of payment for something I didn't fully and unqualifiedly earn."

He started up in his chair, and for a long time looked at me. His remarkable sense of delicacy undoubtedly caused him to speak as he did, for he made no insistence, but bent toward me, and said, almost humbly:

"You are right; I was wrong. I beg your pardon, Captain Hale. The courtesies prevalent between gentlemen should have prevented my making such an offer, because obligations between gentlemen are not paid in coin. I must find some other way, but I honor you for your refusal."

I never warmed to this fine old gentleman more than I did in that moment. He put his hand over, caught mine, gripped it hard, and stared at me with very warm eyes, and then, with that remarkable shift of demeanor that characterized him, became suddenly again an executive and a man of affairs, accustomed to big financial enterprises.

"As I understand it, Captain Hale, you are still at liberty?"

I nodded my head, wondering what was coming next.

"Good!" he said. "I now have another commission for you. The duration of this war is uncertain. It would be practically impossible for me to obtain passage from Maracaibo direct to France. I have no inclination to wait

for perhaps a year or two until peace is declared. I am abundantly able to sail on my own ship. Ships can be had here by neither charter nor purchase. I trust you and your judgment completely. I therefore propose to commission you to buy for me a ship suitable for my purpose, and such a ship as could be utilized during the progress of the war at a profit, and disposed of thereafter without too great a loss. What would you suggest should be her tonnage?"

Thus consulted as a seafaring man who had owned vessels I could but come back to the purely business side of the question, and give him my judgment. A boat of three to five thousand tons, I suggested, and went into details for his benefit.

"That much for the business side of it," I concluded. "But here again enters the friendly advice in what you propose. And that is that in times like these you take no risks whatever by trying to cross the Atlantic Ocean. It is dangerous."

"We are not discussing that side of the venture," he asserted somewhat stubbornly. "That is for me to decide. And I may warn you also that I am dealing with you purely from the financial basis; for if you don't accept this commission I shall straightway go to your fellow countryman, Farnes, the broker here, and employ him as a purchasing agent and with instructions to sign on a crew."

For a moment he looked his challenge at me, and I saw a surprising and defiant determination written large upon him. I knew that no words of mine could dissuade him from his purpose.

"As far as you are concerned," he said at last, "I shall treat you merely as a confidential agent. You shall have the regular commission on the purchase of such ship as you deem suitable, and if you will become the master of her I shall pay you a very liberal salary and a bonus for yourself and crew, the same as I should pay any stranger were he to carry out my wishes. I am going to France on a ship of my own, and with the most trustworthy men that I can find. That part is positive. The sole difference that I shall make between you and any other broker is that I shall give you carte blanche to buy and outfit on your own judgment."

I realized at once that he was so resolute, and a blade of such fine steel, that he would have sailed for France on a raft if nothing else had been forthcoming. There was not the slightest use in combating such obstinacy. Entirely aside from reasons of friendship, there was no sense in my declining such a profitable offer. I was without a ship, and without a commission. He had put it upon a business basis, but so liberal that I could not afford to let such an opportunity pass by. And then, as if to offer me a further inducement, he advanced something more.

"I should not expect any man as competent as you to take charge of a ship I owned on any other than a profit-sharing basis. It would not be fair to ask a man to venture so much unless he were on a profit-sharing basis. I will give you one-half of the profit you can make with any ship you buy."

"But that," I said, "would be too generous."

"That again is for me to decide," he retorted, with the same obstinacy. "And I tell you that if you do not accept this, it is the offer which I shall make to any other man who carries out my wishes."

I knew he meant it, and would fulfill his assertion. I left his house that afternoon, having agreed to become his confidential broker and also to become the master of his ship, but I carried with me a mental reservation, which was that I should make but one trip across the Atlantic Ocean, and that to humor this old man's desire. I could foresee in my commissions and one voyage a profit larger than could be made in any other way for the time being, and it had the advantage of enabling me to hold together the crew of the old *Esperanza* that I had so carefully selected. I had entered, through sentiment in the first instance, into an attempt to assist one for whom I had

a very great pity, and saw no reason why I should not have the personal satisfaction of seeing it through to the end.

Although in an amicable mood, I was not at all eager to meet Cochrane that evening, and so made an excuse to leave Jimmy alone for his appointment; but I was not to escape meeting the oiler, after all, for when I returned to the hotel, after a long and lazy stroll which embraced not only the water front but the plaza, almost the first two men I saw were the engineer and Cochrane. They were seated at one of the little marble-topped tables on the pavement, and talking earnestly when I started to pass them with the intention of going directly to my room, but Twisted Jimmy saw me. He called, and asked me to come to the table and join them, with the remark that there were certain things I should know. Cochrane rose to his feet as I approached, and did not seat himself until I had found a chair and ordered a light refreshment, that being the custom of one occupying space in the busy hours of the evening. The oiler was painfully embarrassed, while Jimmy seemed secretly pleased over something. The latter broke the strain by turning to me and saying:

"Captain, I thought perhaps you might have a question or two you would like to ask Mike?"

"I have," I asserted, and then, facing the oiler, asked: "I should like to know what you were doing on the dock at that hour of the morning when my boat pulled off? I saw you there."

Cochrane looked shamefacedly at the table for a moment before he answered: "For two reasons, sir. One that I hoped that I could be of some use to you, and the other because I was homesick to see the old ship that had all my friends aboard and was pulling out and leaving me alone."

"And you had no idea what we were loading, I suppose?" I interrogated dryly.

"Yes, sir, I knew it was the ammunition for the guns."

He had lifted his eyes to mine, and, studying them, I was driven to the conclusion that he was telling what he believed to be the truth.

"Another thing I should like to know," I said. "When you learned we were being bunkoed with the ammunition, why was it that you did not come to me and tell me of it, instead of doing such a fool thing as to write an anonymous letter?"

He flared up at this, with all the heat of the savage, fearless Irishman.

"You want to know the truth, sir, don't you? Well, then, I will give it you. You are a fine man, Captain Hale, to have for a friend, but you are a mighty unforgiving one when you become an enemy. After my one dirty trick aboard the *Esperanza* I told you the truth of it all. You didn't believe me. I knew that if I went to you personally you might not believe me again, and in addition to that might treat me like a dog and tell me to get away and out of your sight. I liked you, sir, but you didn't like me. I admired you, but you thought I was a Judas. That's why I didn't come to you, since you have asked."

It was like a blow in the face to my self-esteem. It shocked me that any man should believe me vindictive and unforgiving, when I have prided myself throughout my life on trying to be fair, just, and decent. I felt that I had failed in more ways than one; that my aloofness had been mistaken for arrogance, and my terseness of speech for mental ugliness. Well, it had cost me my ship, for had I been friendly, forgiving, or merely just to this man whom I had crippled, his desire to make amends would have impelled him to come to me direct and give personal knowledge of the danger which threatened me. A strange and almost ridiculous impulse made me wish to square myself in his estimation.

"Cochrane," I said, "I am going to thank you for saying what you did. You've taught me a lesson. It doesn't matter how, and I am not going to explain. You've proven to be a broader man than I, because you did your best, in spite of my treatment of you, to do me a service. There are two things I

would like to have you do. The first is to still consider yourself my man, for I expect to have another ship, and the second is to take this."

I stretched my hand across the table toward him, and his hand promptly came to mine, while we stared into each other's eyes with a very fine understanding, I hope. Indeed, it must be so, because we are still very good friends, Mike Cochrane and I. The Irish do have wit and diplomacy, after all, for he relieved that very embarrassing situation with a droll grin and an apology, reverting, as he was apt to do in certain moments, to his native brogue: "It's sorry I am, sir, to have to give ye me left hand, but by a very unfortunate accident me right one has so gone out of business that I can't lift it as high as the breadth of the black of my finger nail."

TO BE CONTINUED.

SUBMARINE CHASERS

TWO years before the outbreak of the European War a thirty-five-foot motor boat, the *Detroit,* made a six-thousand-mile run from the city of her nativity to St. Petersburg under her own power. Her performance was watched by naval experts with keen interest. Hardly had the war begun before the Russian and British governments were placing orders with American motor-boat owners for squadrons of motor craft with which to combat the submarine peril, and to patrol their coasts. The *Detroit* had proved conclusively the seaworthiness of a type of craft that had been looked upon as a toy or luxury. The new war craft were not twice the length of the *Detroit,* but they speedily proved their worth for the dangers of the patrol. They were about sixty feet in length, with a strong forward deck on which were mounted rapid-fire or machine guns, and carried a mast for wireless and signals.

With speed double that of the submarine, and able to turn on their heels with double rudders, then to twist and turn like eels, they offered little mark for the guns of the submarine, none for her torpedo, and could flit over a mine field in safety. The shallow draft of the submarine chaser is, next to its speed, its greatest defensive asset. Its wireless and its guns are its offensive tactics, for one can summon the alert destroyer, and the other is a match for the submarine's tender hull. A patch of oil or the wake of a periscope, and the patrol squadron circles fanwise about the spot, weaving its net.

The type of boat best adapted for this work is but one of a series of evolutions in the development of the motor boat. The application of the so-called V-bottom idea, cutting down both resistance of hull and friction of water, produced from the racing hydroplane a more seaworthy type. Motor-boat enthusiasts adapted it to the slow runabout and the stanch cruiser, and evolved the swift express cruiser, the type that Russia and Great Britain sought in the American shipyards. The submarine chasers also found the round bilges of the Swasey type not only fast enough for patrol work, but even more seaworthy. With the one-hundred-and-ten-foot craft that the navy department is building for the outer patrol, and the smaller ones for the immediate coast, there should be no recurrence of the hysteria that seized the Atlantic seaboard in 1898. Working with sea planes they can discover mines, trap U-boats, make it a precarious task for an enemy force to lay mines in American waters, run harbor defenses unseen, or maintain a submarine base along our coast.

The Pigtail of Chun Yau

By Louis Esson

A comedy-drama of China; being the adventures of a notorious Oriental who at last finds himself in the clutches of the terribly stern Chinese law

LITTLE Wang shouted to a group of urchins making mud pies on the edge of the gutter. *"Hi shan!"* he cried. "Get up!"

He had been running, and paused, almost out of breath, but the other children hardly looked up. China is very indifferent, and it takes something out of the common to arouse the curiosity even of a child.

Little Wang repeated his cries. His schoolbooks were on his back, but he was not going to school. He was on the road to the city.

"Come on!" he cried. "We will be late."

"What for?" the children asked.

Little Wang's eyes shone with excitement. "The execution!" he shouted. He didn't know what an execution was, but he thought it must be a great show.

"An execution!" That word roused the children. There was going to be an execution in Canton. That should be something worth seeing.

"Come with me," said Wang. He was the son of a petty merchant, and went to school, while the others were only ragamuffins, children of porters and coolies. He knew he was doing wrong, playing truant, and he was glad of any companions for the journey.

"Quick! *Ching-Ching!*" he cried.

The children rose, and all set off at a jog trot, one behind the other. It was a few miles to the city. Little Wang felt very important. He took the lead, shouting out the news, and his words were repeated all down the ragged line:

"An execution! Chun Yau, the pirate, Chun Yau!"

Already, along the narrow lanes, a strange crowd was hurrying to the execution ground. The great pirate, Chun Yau, whose name was a terror to the river population, at last had been captured, and was now to be beheaded. It was a great event. It was two months since there had been any execution in Canton. So everybody found his way to the city as if to a religious festival.

It was an interesting spot, the execution ground. It stood right in the center of the city, and round about it were houses and shops; but, as it was an open piece of ground, it was often used as a potter's field. Vessels still lay about, but were now put beside the fence. That afternoon the site would be required for other purposes. Children often used the field as a playground, and came there to bowl a hoop or fly a kite. In some respects it was a quiet spot in the midst of the bustling, multicolored, and noisy life of the southern Chinese capital. Sometimes a skull appeared in a wooden cage, the remains of some executed criminal, a gruesome spectacle meant to encourage the others, but sending a shudder down the spine of many an American visitor.

But when little Wang and his ragged companions arrived, the scene was crowded. Merchants had left their sedan chairs, and coolies their burdens, and now stood round, waiting for the drama to commence. Blind beggars felt their way with bamboo sticks. Storytellers attracted a little audience by relating the exploits of famous pirates of history, legendary tales two thousand years old. Peddlers cried their wares. Some carried a table on one end of a

pole, and on the other end some cooking utensils—a traveling restaurant, where meat and vegetables were always ready. Others sold cakes and sweetmeats. Jugglers, acrobats, and contortionists performed the most amazing feats, the crowd throwing them a few cash.

Little Wang was delighted with everything he saw. Living on the outskirts of the town and having few holidays, it was only on special occasions that he was taken to the city. Whatever his punishment might be, he had no regrets at having played truant.

There was no sign yet of the prisoner, but the crowd, with the infinite patience of Asia, made no complaint. There was no hurry. In good time the show would begin. Chun Yau would not disappoint the spectators.

Chun Yau was known as the "Dragon of the South Seas." He made raids on ships returning from Java, Borneo, the Philippines, and the Malay Peninsula, often capturing rich booty of opium, pearls, and spices. From Hongkong to Thursday Island, he scoured the seas, trafficking with Singapore smugglers, Dutch traders, Japanese pearlers, and all varieties of Malays, Dyaks, and South Sea islanders. But he was not unpopular—for a pirate. Though possessed of extraordinary physical strength, and, when compelled, a desperate fighter, he was no lover of useless turmoil. He was never wantonly cruel, and preferred to secure his treasures without bloodshed. He was a well-bred man, quite a different being from the ordinary run of pirates that infested the coast and rivers of China, orthodox in religion, and it was admitted by the crowd that it was his sense of duty to his parents that first drove him to piracy. In China all things are forgiven for the sake of filial piety. His old father, a peaceful farmer, had been accused by a despicable magistrate, seeking a bribe, of sheltering a young American missionary and his wife during one of the numerous risings against the foreign devils. The old man had been cruelly persecuted, and finally driven off with his wife and family, after his goods had been confiscated. Chun Yau had spoken of the bitter poverty they had endured through injustice. His mother and a younger brother had both died of want. That was a long time ago, but he remembered his father's last words commanding him to revenge the family disgrace.

Chun Yau was a powerful, strong-willed young man. He had been brought up on the river, among the junks and sampans that form the houses of literally a floating population of millions. There are more boats in China than in all the rest of the world; people are born on the river; they live, marry, and work on the river; they die on the river. When he was four or five Chun Yau could handle an oar, and he was a skillful fisherman. Water was as much his element as the land. When he grew up he went to sea, traveling to strange lands and seeing the wonders of the world. He had had some desperate adventures, and after an encounter with the authorities he took to piracy in self-defense. But while in Canton he always waited for an opportunity to take his revenge on the cruel and corrupt magistrate who had ruined his father.

One day he learned that the magistrate would be sailing up the Pearl River to the Feast of Lanterns. With a few trusted comrades, Chun Yau got engaged as a coolie on the boat. In the soft, moonlit night the gayly decorated boat, with paper lanterns suspended from bamboo poles, and many twinkling lamps, sailed softly up the river to the sound of flutes and gongs. The magistrate, a fat little man, with an ivory fan in his hand, reclined on the deck, surrounded by singing girls.

Suddenly gongs beat fiercely. The magistrate knew that sound. It meant pirates.

Chun Yau had rushed on deck, knocked the wheelman on the head, and brought the boat to a stop. His companions joined him with swords and daggers. Some of the passengers showed fight, and there was a fierce scuffle. The crowd got so mixed up it was difficult to tell friend from foe.

But Chun Yau marked down his enemy, and, rushing on him, drove his sword at his chest. The magistrate dropped to the deck. In the midst of the scramble and shouting, Chun Yau and his companions easily escaped.

Now he had avenged his father's honor, he could give up his desperate career. A little Cantonese singing girl, affectionately named Plum Blossom, with whom he was in love, prayed him to risk his life no more. Chun Yau listened and agreed. But he would make one more trip, his last. He would bring gold and jewels for a marriage present. True, his revenge had been satisfied, but Chun Yau was Chinese, and, therefore, conservative. It was difficult for him to change his ways. At last he yielded to Plum Blossom's pleading. He would make one more trip—just one more—but alas! that last trip had proved fatal.

The authorities got wind that Chun Yau was near the coast, and his high, square junk, with its three masts, its clumsy but picturesque sails of bamboo matting, and its two staring eyes painted at the bows, was run down by a government "fire wheel" boat, or steamer.

The famous pirate had been brought before the old and scholarly mandarin, Ho Kai, and, after a fair trial, had been ceremoniously condemned to the *ling chih,* or the lingering death.

Chun Yau, the "Dragon of the South Seas," was now lying in the dirty little prison, waiting to be led forth to the execution ground.

The day before the execution of Chun Yau, Miss Plum Blossom, a singing girl, sat in her little room in White Rice Street.

It was a quaint little nook of a room, with red flooring tiles, and stucco work beneath the roof. The doorway was shaped like a pear and ornamented with fruits and flowers. Pots of fragrant flowers stood on delicately molded flower stands. Everything was soft and fragile and very feminine.

She was a famous beauty, and, according to the canons of Chinese taste, noted for her sweet voice, her skill on the guitar, and her delicate charm of manner. She was the daughter of a poor scholar, and had been modestly reared. At feasts and entertainments given by rich merchants, she was in great request, and she often sang in fashionable tea gardens, in the houses of high officials, and in the flower boats that sailed down the river to welcome rich travelers from afar. Many a sedate merchant had lost his heart to this fascinating beauty, and the gilded youths showered presents on her and sent her elegant copies of verses. She was charming to all her admirers, but they sighed in despair of winning one smile of favor. She sang and played to them—that was all. Only one man had touched her heart, a strange and wonderful man, the "Dragon of the South Seas," whose name was a terror to the timid city dwellers of Canton. She was in love with the pirate, Chun Yau.

Now Plum Blossom was reclining on softly woven cushions, fingering nervously the strings of a guitar. Her cheeks were pale, her almond eyes were moistened. She was very sad. Her lover, her hero, had been captured; he was now lying in the hideous prison, loaded with chains, waiting for an ignominious death to-morrow on the execution ground.

She knew this would be the end. Often had she urged Chun Yau to give up his desperate profession, but he would not listen. "Some day," he would say; "not yet." She cared nothing that Chun Yau was a pirate, a robber of the seas, the terror of Malay and Chinese traders; she thought only of his danger, for a price was on his head, and the lingering death, the *ling chih,* had been decreed to Chun Yau if he were captured alive. And now it had turned out as she had predicted. Chun Yau had been captured and condemned. Why had he not listened to her before? They could have gone away together to some distant part of the Flowery land, or even across the seas, to Honolulu, perhaps, the beauty of which Chun

Yau had described to her in gorgeous Oriental colors.

Plum Blossom fell back on the cushions and wept. Her dream had been shattered like a summer cloud. At last she sat up and dried her tears. There was a determined look on her face.

"What is the use of lamenting?" she said to herself. "The question is how can I save my lover?"

But what could she do, this little Chinese singing girl, with her tiny feet, the "golden lilies" so belauded of the poets, her soft body, and all her dainty ways? Yet she did not quite despair. She would trust to her woman's wit. She would save him yet. He was her lover. She would save him.

She tapped a gong, and her little maid appeared.

"What is it, mistress?"

"I go out this afternoon. I must look my best."

With deft fingers the maid employed the numerous instruments of the Celestial toilet. From time to time Plum Blossom examined herself in a hand looking-glass.

"Beautiful mistress!" rapturously exclaimed the little maid. "You are the lantern of loveliness."

"I hope so," sighed Plum Blossom. "To-day I would be beautiful." Her cheeks were carefully rouged, her eyebrows were penciled, and her graceful body was decked out in the brightest of colors.

"Call my chair," she said. "I go to the mandarin."

"Oh, mistress, the mandarin! Are you not afraid?"

"No, I am not afraid. I have a plan."

The delicate little Plum Blossom was helped into her chair. Two strong, half-naked bearers supported their light and pretty burden, and started at a jog trot through the narrow lanes. She did not see the exuberant street life of the swarming city—the open alcove shops, the spicy restaurants, the curio shops with silk and embroidery, carved ivory and lacquer, the barbers shaving in the streets, the water carriers, the shouting coolies, bending under boxes strung from stout bamboo carrying poles; she passed through Jade Stone and Silk Thread and other famous streets, with her eyes closed and her thoughts concentrated on one great purpose. Life, the great life of China, was flowing on as it had flowed for thousands of years; men were toiling in the streets and in the fields, women were spinning, children were playing in the alleyways, but these things had lost their meaning. Only one thing mattered. To-morrow Chun Yau was condemned to die, and Plum Blossom must try to save her lover.

The bearers, their backs glistening with sweat, came to a halt, and gently let down their burden. Plum Blossom entered the ornamental garden of the house of the mandarin. Servants crowded round her, asking what her business might be. "I would see Ho Kai," she said.

"Impossible. He is lying down."

"He will see me," she replied firmly. "Tell him who has come."

"Your name?"

"Plum Blossom."

The servants chattered among themselves, not knowing what to do. At last one remembered that Plum Blossom was the famous singing girl, and, with a broad grin, went into the house. A little later he returned, and beckoned Plum Blossom to follow him. She was escorted through many apartments till she came to a beautiful inner room where the great mandarin, Ho Kai, was reclining on a couch, a long pipe at his side.

Plum Blossom trembled, and fell on her knees.

Ho Kai watched her with a smile. He was an old man, with a long but very thin gray beard. His eyes were bright, but his face was pale and worn with study, for he was a great scholar, erudite in the ancient classics and a connoisseur of Chinese art, whose collection of porcelain and painting was the envy and admiration of the European residents. And he was also a connoisseur of beauty. Though he knew philosophically women should be considered little more seriously than

flowers and butterflies, yet was he a slave to their charm and fascination, feeling, yet unable to resist, the folly in his heart, like many a great scholar before him.

"So you are little Plum Blossom," he said at last.

"Yes. You said some day I must call to see you."

Ho Kai puckered his brow. Had he been so foolish? At the tea gardens, a moon since, Plum Blossom had been singing, and he had had some wine. He had admired her singing.

"That is good," he said. "You have come."

Ho Kai spoke in a monotonous but not unkindly tone of voice. He had been smoking, and was still drowsy from the effect of his opium pipe.

"I have a song of your great ancestor—Yuan, the scholar, who wrote poetry for the emperor."

Ho Kai claimed descent from Yuan, who flourished fifteen hundred years ago, and was vain, to a degree, of his ancestry.

"It is his song of the 'Faithful Wife.'"

"Sing," said Ho Kai.

Plum Blossom picked up her guitar, and to a melody curious to Western ears sang in a low but impressive voice the ancient Chinese ballad.

She was a graceful figure, bending over her instrument, and a skilled artist. Her costume was exquisite in form and color. Her face expressed the dramatic feeling of Yuan's song. The old mandarin was enraptured. He thrilled with pride at the thought of belonging to the honored family of Yuan. And Plum Blossom was beautiful, worthy of a wise admiration.

Ho Kai stroked his beard when the last strains of the melody had floated away.

"It is beautiful," he reflected; "the song of love and death. Only the happy ones know love, but death comes to all."

"Death must come," replied Plum Blossom, "but it is very sad if it comes before love."

"Think not of death, little one, not yet!" said the old mandarin kindly. "You have sung. I would give you a reward."

"You are too gracious," said Plum Blossom, bowing low.

"What is your desire?"

Plum Blossom fell on her knees. "One boon I crave. Spare Chun Yau."

"Chun Yau! That is the pirate."

"Oh, save his life!" cried Plum Blossom. "We are betrothed."

"Impossible, little one, impossible! I have condemned him to the *ling chih.*"

"That is too horrible," she cried. "He is not a bad man. Save him!"

Old Ho Kai shook his head. "I have sanctioned the decree," he said.

"You have all power. Life and death are in your hands. Spare his life."

The mandarin reflected. "You have pleased me," he said, "and I would grant you a boon. The law must take its course, but I will order that Chun Yau be spared from the *ling chih,* the death by *slüng,* reserved only for the lowest of criminals. He shall be beheaded."

Plum Blossom prayed and pleaded, but in vain. Ho Kai, the august magistrate, could go no further. "You have pleased me," he said, "and I have been generous. Chun Yau will be grateful."

"He will die to-morrow," Plum Blossom wept. "I could not save him."

"He will be beheaded," said Ho Kai. "It is easy."

"I am afraid," said Plum Blossom, still weeping.

"Have no fear, little one," replied the old man, with a touch of humor. "Wong Fu never fails; his touch is sure. Many have passed through his hands without complaint. He takes only one stroke."

Plum Blossom rose from her knees. "Promise me," she cried, "that the executioner takes only one stroke."

"One is enough," said the old man.

"Have I your promise?"

"Yes."

"You promise he brings down his sword only once?"

"You have my word."

"I thank you for your favor," said Plum Blossom, bowing before taking

her leave. The old man nodded, and when Plum Blossom departed languidly took up his opium pipe.

Plum Blossom reached her chair, and ordered her servants to carry her to see Wong Fu, the executioner. Wong Fu lived in a little house at the back of the prison. He was a tall man, dark and grim, but less ugly than might have been expected. He looked on his trade in a prosaic way, as a matter of business, of money. He boasted that he had killed more people than any other man in the world, but he hated killing for its own sake. An execution meant work to him, drudgery; it gave him no pleasure, except the thought of the money it would bring in. In some respects he was not an evil-natured man; he even had a sense of humor, and when tourists were visiting the execution ground on off days he would always appear with a long sword and look scowlingly formidable, especially when ladies were present, with an excellent chance of obtaining a tip, a percentage of which went to the judicious guide as a "squeeze."

Plum Blossom found him drinking tea. When she entered he rose at once and bowed. It was Miss Plum Blossom, the famous singing girl. He could hardly believe his eyes.

Plum Blossom knew what she wanted and the right way to go about it. She could not confess she was in love with Chun Yau. That would be fatal. She would use a little strategy. She would wheedle Wong Fu.

"You are the famous executioner," she said, "and you will behead Chun Yau, the pirate, to-morrow."

"It is not beheading," he replied.

"Yes, beheading. I have come to tell you. I have seen Mandarin Ho Kai, who admires my singing, and he says Chun Yau will only suffer beheading."

"All the better," said Wong Fu.

"And now I would ask you a favor." Plum Blossom looked at him with an oblique glance.

Wong Fu smiled. He was highly flattered at her visit. He had tried before to attract her attention, but had met only with scorn.

"I am only a poor singing girl," she continued, "but here is money. It is all I have." She put a pile of coins on the table. Wong Fu looked eagerly at the coins. It was difficult for him to refuse money. But he was gallant.

"No," he said, "I am a friend."

"My request may look foolish, but I am a woman. You are going to behead Chun Yau to-morrow. Chun Yau once kissed me in the street. I would like his pigtail."

"His pigtail! Why?"

"It would be my revenge. I could show it to my friends and say, 'This is the pigtail of the pirate, Chun Yau. He was beheaded by the famous Wong Fu.'"

Wong Fu pondered a moment.

"The money is yours," said Plum Blossom.

"No," he said, "I will not take it. Not money. I will call on you to-morrow night, and you will sing and play for me."

"Good!" replied Plum Blossom, with a sweet smile.

"The pigtail will be yours."

"Listen, Wong Fu, be sure that you cut off his pigtail first. I would have Chun Yau see that I had my revenge."

Wong Fu laughed. "I will be careful. I will cut it off nicely. You will be pleased. And then the beheading!"

Plum Blossom shivered with fear, but she drew herself up tight. "Keep the money," she said. "I shall be honored. And here, as a token of favor, take this little bracelet."

Wong Fu saw her to the door. "Will you not have tea?" he asked.

"No. I go to the prison to mock Chun Yau."

"To-morrow night," he said, "you will sing for me."

Plum Blossom smiled at the executioner, and again entered her chair. This time she was carried to the prison.

The prison was a small building, guarded only by wooden bars and wooden doors. In the courtyard, amid piles of rubbish, prisoners in chains sat on the ground. Some were cook-

ing scraps of food, others were talking and smoking cigarettes.

Though China can be unnaturally cruel, it is not altogether inhuman. Though torture has been used more than in any other land, it must be remembered that opium is procurable, and that the victim is drugged into a state of unconsciousness. A prisoner is regarded as a human being, and is allowed to see his friends and relations, to receive presents, to gamble with the jailers, and to talk with the passing crowd. He is not quite shut out from the life of his fellows.

Plum Blossom had no difficulty in seeing Chun Yau. She was taken from her chair and escorted into the dirty little courtyard.

Chun Yau, imperturbable as ever, was dicing with his jailer. He looked up with a flashing look when Plum Blossom approached, but she made a quick sign to him to take no notice.

"Where is the pirate?" she inquired of the jailer.

The jailer pointed to Chun Yau, who nodded his head. "Pretend not to know me," she whispered to him. "I shall save you."

"I die to-morrow," he said. "It is too late."

"Have no fear," she continued, speaking rapidly. "You will not die. I have a plan."

The handsome giant, helpless in his chains, looked curiously at the delicate little woman who still thought of saving him. "That cannot be. But you are good, Plum Blossom. You do not desert me. I shall die happy."

"Trust me," she said. "I shall save you."

Chun Yau smiled and shook his head.

"I see Wong Fu watching us," she said. "I must pretend to mock you."

Wong Fu was talking to the jailer, but he kept a corner of his eye on the charming Plum Blossom.

"You are a pirate!" cried Plum Blossom in a louder voice. "You are a bad man! You insulted the little singing girl! You stole a kiss from her!"

"I will kiss you again," replied Chun Yau.

"Very good," she cried, making a low bow. "I will have your pigtail to-morrow."

Wong Fu laughed at this little scene.

"To-morrow," repeated Plum Blossom, retiring to her chair.

Wong Fu and the jailers gathered round the prisoner.

"She has mocked me," said Chun Yau. "No matter. She is only a singing girl. Let us have a gamble to pass the time. Where are the dice?"

"Loi la!" (Come here!) cried little Wang excitedly to his companions. "They're coming." It was the hour of the execution.

Gongs beat. The crowd shouted. Down the narrow alley the mandarin, Ho Kai, was carried in his sedan chair. Minor officials attended him, carrying banners and the "boards of office," signifying his rank and power. Behind him rushed a rabble of loafers, followers of the mandarin, who, in return for useless but noisy services, received a few crumbs of his bounty.

The old mandarin ascended his chair of state to a wild hubbub of shouting and clanging instruments. Soon the shouting became louder, but now imprecations were mingled in the cries. Chun Yau, loaded with chains, a big wooden collar round his neck, and guarded by his jailers, walked slowly to the execution ground. Wong Fu followed close behind.

Chun Yau betrayed no sign of emotion. His face was an impassive mask. People wondered at his giant frame, his immense strength and agility, some fearing he might break loose, and others assailing him with cries of "Pirate!" "Murderer!"

Chun Yau was brought before the mandarin. He bowed gravely, and his look was calm and dignified. Ho Kai nodded to his attendants, and Wong Fu received his final instructions.

The old mandarin waved a thin, aristocratic hand. Chun Yau's chains and the heavy wooden collar round his neck were removed. He was led to his place in a small, open plot of ground. There he kotowed to the mandarin,

and remained in a kneeling position. The executioner, Wong Fu, his keen and glittering sword in his hand, stood over him.

The crowd was breathless with excitement. It was a day worthy to be marked with a white stone, the day of the execution of Chun Yau, the pirate.

Wong Fu lifted his sword, and, smiling darkly, deftly cut off the pigtail of Chun Yau.

The crowd broke into a discordant cry of joy and disappointment. But, though cheated of their prey, most were glad that the fatal blow had not yet been struck. While Wong Fu picked up the pigtail there was a scream from a sedan chair, and little Plum Blossom rushed up on her tiny feet to the chair of state, and fell on her knees before the mandarin.

Wong Fu again raised his sword, flashing in the sunlight.

"Stop him!" she cried to the mandarin. Wong Fu looked round.

Attendants tried to push her aside, but old Ho Kai made a sign to Wong Fu, who lowered his weapon.

"Who are you?" asked the mandarin.

"I am Plum Blossom, a poor singing girl."

The old mandarin, swaying gracefully in his long robes, commanded silence from the crowd.

"I remember," said the old aristocrat. "What is your business with us?"

"I have your august promise that the executioner would only strike once."

"That is so."

"He has already brought down his sword."

Old Ho Kai stroked his long, thin beard. He was confronted with a problem unprovided for in the ethics of Confucius. But the case was clear, and his promise could not be broken. After due reflection he nodded gravely, and pronounced his decision.

"Chun Yau was to receive only one stroke. The sword has fallen once. I saw it with my own eyes. The conditions have been fulfilled. I am satisfied."

Plum Blossom bowed very low. "Your generosity overwhelms me. I offer you my very humble thanks."

Ho Kai gave orders to his attendants, and Chun Yau was brought before him. The pirate made an elaborate kotow.

"You are free," said the old mandarin. "Plum Blossom's wit has saved you. You may go."

"I am singularly unworthy," said Chun Yau, "to receive your magnificent bounty."

Ho Kai, drowsy as usual with opium, was lifted into his chair.

"Some day," he said to Plum Blossom, "I would hear again your classical singing."

Gradually the crowd dispersed, wondering at Chun Yau's dramatic escape. It had been as good as an execution; better, for the Chinese, like most other people, are usually good-natured and appreciate a lucky turn of events.

Fat merchants were carried in their chairs; coolies shouldered their burdens, shouting down the narrow lanes, blind beggars tapped their sticks, hawkers cried their wares, and the busy, multicolored life of the strange old town went on as it had gone since time immemorial.

Little Wang was delighted. With his ragged companions he ran to his home, talking all the way of the great pirate, Chun Yau, the "Dragon of the South Seas," who had now become a great hero. What a day he had had! What a spectacle he had seen! Then a sudden fear smote him, and he started to cry.

"What's wrong?" cried the urchins.

"Oh, what can I say now for playing truant?" murmured little Wang.

The same evening Miss Plum Blossom was sitting in her little room in White Rice Street. At her feet reclined Chun Yau, the great pirate, who looked up in adoration at the tiny little figure of the singing girl who had so miraculously saved his life.

Plum Blossom was radiantly happy. She picked up her guitar, and sang dainty love songs. They were together now, and could not be separated. When

they were married they would go away. "Ah, where shall we go?" she asked softly. "We have our choice, and the world is very beautiful."

"To Honolulu," replied Chun Yau. "It is wonderful. I have friends there. I will roam the seas no more. We shall have peace!"

"What bliss!" exclaimed Plum Blossom.

Her little maid brought tea and cakes and sweetmeats. Everything was charming, everything that Plum Blossom touched—the red tiles of the floor, the carvings of fruits and flowers, the pear-shaped doorway, the screens, the vases filled with fragrant flowers. The stern and terrible pirate had become as gentle as a child. Plum Blossom was again singing to him, and he heard the rustle of the bamboos in the languorous tropic night.

"Tell me," he said at length, "how did you see Ho Kai?"

"Ho Kai is an old man," replied Plum Blossom. "He smokes the drug. And he is an admirer of my singing. He is easy to dupe."

"But there was Wong Fu. He has a hard heart."

"I tempted him, too, even Wong Fu. Am I not clever? It was the only way."

Chun Yau sat up and felt his head. "What will I do without my pigtail?" he asked.

"It will grow again. But I have the old one," she answered, clapping her hands, "and we will keep it as an august emblem of our happy delivery."

Visitors to Honolulu have sometimes noticed an old Chinese of gigantic stature and dignified aspect, who still wears the queue. Despite revolutions and the overthrow of the usurping Manchus, he could not be persuaded to abandon this antique emblem of subjection.

"A new China is awaking," people would say, "but an old Chinese is hopelessly conservative."

They are wrong. If they called on Madame Plum Blossom, who, perhaps, would be sitting on the veranda of a charming villa and watching her children playing in the garden, she could tell them the true reason why her husband, Chun Yau, the rich merchant, refused, even after the revolution, to cut off his pigtail.

"It was cut off once before," she might say, with a quaint smile, "but, then, instead of the pigtail, it might have been his head. It is too precious to sacrifice for nothing."

And Chun Yau, as usual, would agree wth his wife.

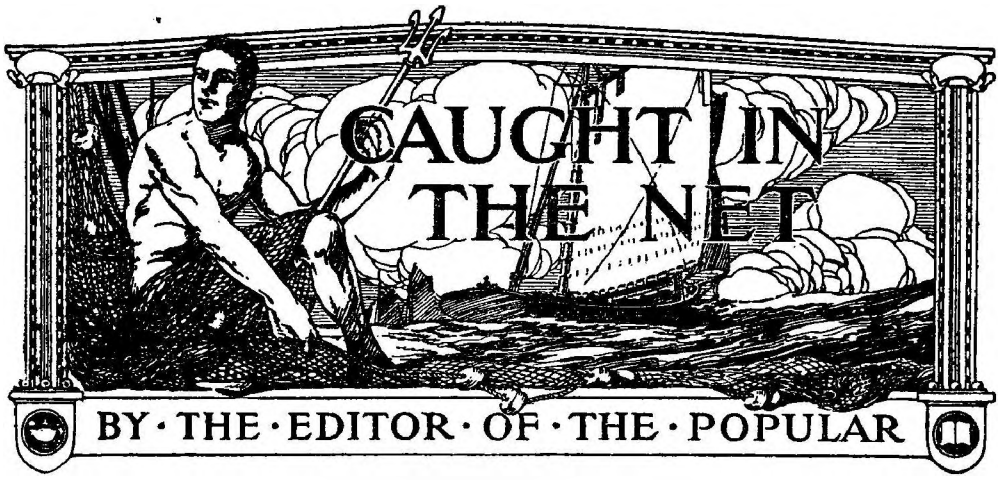
PASSING ALL DESCRIPTION

THE strict manner in which a superintendent of nurses looks after the young women who are working in her hospital is proverbial. Also, the manner in which the young women who are studying to be real nurses break the rules and regulations is emphatically proverbial.

In a New York hospital the rule was that, when the student nurses were allowed an "evening off," they had to be back again at ten o'clock. On one occasion a certain nurse got back with her escort in an automobile just about two minutes ahead of ten o'clock. And then and there, taking advantage of the small leeway of time, the young man kissed the girl good night, not taking the precaution to get out of the glare of the headlights of his machine.

The nurse was dismissed from the hospital as a result of that farewell kiss.

"My dear," said the superintendent of nurses, in explaining the dismissal to a friend, "I never saw anything like it—not even in the moving pictures!"



THE SPEED LIMIT

TWENTY millions of us live on the sea or in constant access to it. The rest of us live within sight of a great river or high hill or wide forest or chasm or immense oceanic stretch of level land. We are in contact with vastness, with nature in full grandiose expression, instead of nature doing pretty little restricted tricks of vest-pocket mountains and streams you can step across, with every square mile parceled and labeled. There is nervous stimulus for us in that natural setting. Then, too, we live in the sunshine in a vibrant tonic climate. The European learns to go a little sadly in his "blasted" English-Belgian-Bavarian drizzle. Sunshine is rarer and briefer than with us. Grayness pours in on the human spirit. Finally, to key us up to the last notch, comes the economic opportunity of an undeveloped country, the new industries, the business chances, the daring experiments, the ease of change from failure to success. Out of all this spiritual climate has emerged the modern American, whose aim is not money nor power, but acceleration, speed. To go and keep going, to hit it up faster, till the scenery becomes a mist, and life a Marathon, run as if it were a one-hundred-yard sprint. Whatever goal there was, was passed in the first lap, and the end and aim have become the momentum itself.

One has this sense of feverishly propelled humans shot from a catapult into space, in coming home from Europe. Over yonder, the people are conducting a world war soberly, methodically, and very slowly. The day is long enough. The premier of a quarter of the globe comes in to breakfast unhurried, untroubled, talks in charming poetical reminiscence for two hours, and leisurely takes the boat to France to a conference of half the powers of Europe. But back home in Manhattan, the humblest clerk is dashing down Broadway at full tilt, with a sense of directing vast issues and speeding up the terrestrial system before supper time.

THE GLOUCESTER SAILOR

THE schooner of the Gloucester fishermen, in these days of the revival of shipping, alone upholds the old memories of the days when the American clipper swept the seas. True to the type of the early privateersmen that called for speed and cargo capacity, it also has the lines and the spread of sail that brought in the packet and the clipper ship, and later the racing yacht. The first schooner was launched at Gloucester two hundred and four years ago. The news that the two-masted craft would be launched with

sails set drew a large crowd to the shipyard. As she slid gracefully out into the stream an enthusiastic Yankee cried: "Oh, how she scoons!" The quick-witted designer retorted: "A scooner let her be."

The modern Gloucester schooner carries auxiliary power to make her independent of calms and light airs, but when the wind sweeps over the sea she carries sail that would scandalize more timid skippers. The only other improvement that the passing years have made in this admirable type is the knockabout bow. Many sailormen good and true were lost off the fishermen when they made their way out on the old bowsprit, hampered with sea boots and heavy clothing. The knockabout bow, innocent of bowsprit, has enhanced the striking resemblance of the fisherman to a racing schooner yacht.

Out from Gloucester the schooners jog to the fishing grounds of the Grand Banks off Newfoundland and the George's off Cape Cod, with only a leadline, chart, and compass. Before the war these modern vikings showed their topmasts off the Norway coast. The dories are nested on deck, and when the fishing grounds are under keel the crew take to the dories, two to a boat, leaving the captain and the cook to man the schooner. The lines, or trawls, are run out, buoyed, and anchored at one end. When the end of the trawl is reached, the dories go back and haul in. The captain and cook jog along, picking them up at the day's end. With hold filled, the catch is iced down, and then the fleet makes every yard of sail for the race home. The first to enter port skims the cream of the prices, and the Gloucester fishermen are run on the coöperative scale, each man with his shares.

BOTH SIDES OF SALESMANSHIP

AN advertising solicitor was trying to close a contract renewal with a Michigan refrigerator manufacturer. There came an interruption in the way of a telegram.

"Maybe you can advise me on this," suggested the manufacturer. "A concern down in Chicago wants to make a moving picture of my plant to show in picture houses over the country. It looks like an inexpensive proposition to me. What do you think of it?"

"In your case, don't do it," was the retort. "People pay money to get into movie theaters. They pay to be amused, not to be compelled to sit through a film that is an out-and-out paid advertisement. Didn't you ever start to read a very interesting news story and find it ending in a patent-medicine ad? Remember how sore it made you? That's what your proposed film will do—not only make the audiences sore at the theater, but also——"

"Sore at me and my customers, too, the retail men, anybody handling the line. You're right. This tip of yours has saved me about twenty-five hundred dollars in cash and Lord only knows how much of a saving in good will.

"Do you know," went on the refrigerator manufacturer, "it's gotten so we not only have to figure on what's good for us, but what's good for our dealers also. We sell them a line of refrigerators, then have to go into their stores personally or by booklet, and show the clerk how to handle customers and sell our line, then show the store manager how to advertise. We give him window displays. We may get our money right off the bat, for the wise merchant discounts his bills, but the sale isn't really closed until the goods have been sold by the store and found satisfactory by the housewives. We have to follow our refrigerators

into the homes and urge complaints, for, if one refrigerator goes bad and we don't make good, the woman of the house starts talking, and kills ten sales we'd otherwise have made.

"A salesman used to be a drummer—who went around and closed up orders. Once we had a man's name on the dotted line, we considered everything settled for all time. There was no backing out and canceling orders then—he took the goods and paid up or we sued. To-day everybody is a salesman, and the goods aren't really sold until they wear out. Why, this year we've even started giving our customers booklets on how to cut ice bills and keep food from spoiling by proper use of our refrigerators."

THE NEW WEST

THE death of Buffalo Bill completed the passing of the wild-and-woolly West.

The West has become obsessed with reform. Statutes have stripped Reno of its glory as "the divorce town." Arizona's legislature is seriously considering a bill to make bridge playing a penal offense. In Texas the law provides jail for carrying a deck of cards in public, and a man is allowed to play cards in his home only one night a week.

Whisky, women, and cards gave the West its bad name in the old days, and the West is eliminating them—with Western thoroughness. Watch the West lead the East in reforms; it is doing its own thinking—its political convulsion in the last presidential election was proof positive of that.

The virility of America still springs from the Sunset Trail, but it is a new brand of virility. The crack of the buffalo gun and the eight-horse lash are gone forever. Billy the Kid no longer rustles twenty thousand Mex cattle across the Rio Grande at one swoop. Holdups prefer the L. & N. Railway to the Deadwood stage. The one-hundred-and-one-thousand-dollar Chinese lottery has shifted headquarters from Cheyenne to New Albany, Indiana.

Buffalo Bill was by no means the greatest figure of the West during frontier days. His fame was more the result of his instinct as a showman than from actual deeds. Wild Bill Hickok, a two-gun man, known from the Panhandle to the Bad Lands, was more typical of stagecoach days.

And there was Bat Masterson, whose story was graven on time by the late Alfred Henry Lewis. Masterson, in his marshal days, was the quickest man with a gun in the entire West.

The spirit of Bat Masterson, Cherokee Hall, Buffalo Bill, Texas Thompson, and Custer may be only slumbering under the quilt of Western reform legislation. War on the scale of national peril would soon determine.

JOHN NORTH WILLYS

IN automobile circles it is pretty generally accepted that if anybody ever gives Henry Ford a run for his money, it will be Willys, the Overland man. He has plenty of time—he is only forty-four years old. Right now he is tramping on Ford's heels in the number of cars turned out, and, as his car costs more than a Ford, his yearly income is possibly greater.

Willys was born at Canandaigua, New York, in 1873. It is peculiar that he and Ford both started in the same kind of business—bicycles. Willys was seven-

teen at the time. His first business venture had been two years before that, when he and a boy friend bought a laundry; they sold out at the end of the first year and divided the profits—one hundred dollars. Other boys at that age were dealing mostly with junk men.

Next, John North Willys was a book agent; then a bicycle man. In 1906 he was selling automobiles in Elmira. He took over the marketing of the entire Overland output—1906 was the banner year, forty-seven cars being produced. In December, 1907, his order for five hundred cars was delayed; hastening to Indianapolis, he found the plant about to shut down for lack of three hundred and fifty dollars to make up the pay roll. The panic was on, and banks had suspended payment, but Willys finally cashed his personal check for the amount: the hotel dumped out every cash register, and gave him about a bushel in small coins. It kept the plant going, though.

Willys soon acquired the Overland plant. He also picked up the old Pope works at Toledo, whence he moved the Overland plant. Toledo woke up to find Willys its biggest citizen. In 1915 he was offered eighty million dollars for his share in the Overland business. Over seventy-five thousand men work in his factories and agencies. His yearly income is around six million dollars.

He has other vast interests all over the country. The Garford Company, at Elyria, and the Federal Motor Works, at Indianapolis, long ago passed into his hands. He owns rubber works and scads of other businesses.

Willys is a great clubman. He likes the good things of life—owns yachts and the most valuable collection of oil paintings in Ohio.

Dayton is a one-man town because John H. Patterson lives there. Toledo is a one-man town because John North Willys lives there. Toledo boasts that it is Willys' town.

He is easily the second greatest automobile man in the United States. Ford has a good start, but Willys is running strong at the quarter-mile post, and the third in line is away behind both of them.

Willys does not get in the limelight because he walks too much on the ground. Ford is a dreamer, and makes better newspaper copy. Willys is all business.

He works quietly and he is quiet. Success hasn't changed him a bit is his friends' greatest tribute. He is still the same "Johnnie" that he was back in barefoot days in Canandaigua. He is smooth shaven; his hair is whitening; he wears glasses. A kindly smile plays about his lips and in his eyes. Of medium size, weighing about one hundred and sixty pounds, he gives you the impression that he realizes he has the good things of life and appreciates his lot. Then, too, he is turning out a thousand automobiles a day.

The Sniper

By "Sapper"

The unvarnished tale of a gentleman who graduated from the position of floor-walker to take his place with "scornful men who dice with death" in the firing line

A HOT morning sun shone down from a cloudless sky on the outskirts of the town. Nothing moved, nothing stirred; a silence as of the tomb brooded over the houses that once had been hives of industry. Now their only occupants were rats. The little vegetable gardens at the back were dank with unchecked weeds, save where a great conical hole showed the clean brown earth. And at the bottom of each of these holes lay a pool of fetid green water. The walls were crumbling, decay was rampant, the place breathed corruption. Occasionally the silence would be broken by a crash, and a little heap of brick rubble would subside into the road, raising a cloud of thick, choking dust. Occasionally there would be another sound like the drone of a great beetle, followed by a dull, echoing roar and a bigger cloud of dust. Occasionally would come the ping-phut of a stray bullet; but of human life there was no sign.

Not, that is to say, to the casual observer. But to the man who looked out of the aëroplane circling above much more was visible. To him there came the vision of an occasional move behind some moldering wall; sometimes an upturned face—sometimes the glint of steel. In one garden, by a broken cucumber frame, a man was polishing his bayonet, and the flash from it caught the observer's eye. Just opposite—thirty yards away—two or three men were sitting round a small fire from which the smoke curled slowly up. And the bayonet cleaner was clothed in khaki, while the cookers had on a dirty field gray; between them lay No Man's Land. But to the casual observer—silence; silence and death and the dreadful stink of corruption. Others had cleaned bayonets and cooked stews before them, and in the doing thereof had gone suddenly and without warning into the great Silence. For it was a sniper's paradise, as the victims—could they have spoken—would have testified. As it was, they lay there lightly buried, and the same fool men made the same fool mistakes and came and joined them.

Into this abode of joy came a very superior young Briton, who aforetime had been floorwalker for Mogg's Mammoth Emporium. It was principally owing to the fact that Miss Belsize—the lady who dispensed camisoles or some equally seductive garments in Mogg's—had flatly refused to accompany him any longer to the High Street Picture Palace if he remained in his frock coat, that this very superior young gentleman had donned khaki. For a long while he had stoutly affirmed that he was indispensable; then the transfer of affection on the part of Miss Belsize to a dangerous-looking corporal from the wild and woolly West decided him. He did not like that corporal. No man who met a comparative stranger, beat him on the back painfully, and, having looked his latest glad rags up and down, had remarked with painful distinctness, "Say, bo, is it your bicycle-cleaning night this evening?" could possibly be considered a gentleman. But Miss Belsize had laughed long and laughed loud, and—well, to the story.

In due course the superior one found himself in the haunt of death I have

briefly described above—full of self-importance, and as inconceivably ignorant as the majority are who come for the first time to the game in France.

Recently arrived with a draft, it was his initial experience of war; in fact, the morning in question was his first visit to the trenches. And because many better men than he have endeavored to conceal a peculiar sinking of the stomach by an assumed bravado let us not blame him for the attitude he endeavored to take up.

"Pretty quiet, isn't it, corporal?" he remarked airily, as his section came to rest in a trench behind a mass of broken brick and cobblestones. "Lor', look at that glass up there hidden in the stones!" For a moment curiosity mastered him, and he reached up toward it with his hand. The next instant he gave a cry of anger, as a jolt in his ribs with a rifle doubled him up. "What the deuce——" he began angrily.

"Don't you deuce me, my lad," said the corporal dispassionately, "or you and me will quarrel. Just you do what you're told, and I'll write and tell your ma you're a good little boy." The corporal—a man of few words—went on his way, leaving the superior floorwalker, whose name, by the way, was Percival Simpkins, fuming.

"If that blighter hits me again," he remarked when the N. C. O. was out of hearing, "I'll——"

"You'll what?" An old soldier looked at him scornfully. "He goes an' saves yer moldy life and then yer bleats. Got yer bib, Percy, darling?"

"Not so much of your row!" The corporal had come back again. "This ain't no colony of rooks in the nesting season. Now, Simpkins, you and Ginger—first relief. There's your periscope; you can relieve the other two."

"Where's the periscope?" asked Percival of his companion in a whisper.

"The glass up there, you flat-faced perisher—hidden in the stones. Wot d'you think it is? A royster laying eggs!"

The trench settled down to silence as the company relief was completed, and Percival morosely nursed his grievance. Much of the gentle flattery to which he had been accustomed at Mogg's Mammoth seemed conspicuous by its absence in this new sphere in which he found himself. Not to put too fine a point on it people seemed positively rude at times. He confided as much in an aggrieved whisper to the unsympathetic Ginger.

"Rude!" That worthy spat with violence and accuracy. "You wait till you bump into Shorty Bill. Rude! 'E's a 'oly terror."

"Who is Shorty Bill?" queried Percy, his eyes fixed on the glass whose mysteries he was beginning to understand.

But Ginger was in no mood for further confidences. "You'll find out fast enough 'oo Shorty Bill is. 'E's down 'ere to-day. You watch that there periscope. This ain't no rest cure—this bit 'ere. It's 'ell."

"It seems pretty quiet," ventured the watcher after a short silence.

"Yus! That's wot the last man said wot I was with behind the wall. Black Fritz drilled him through the brain!"

"Who's Black Fritz?" asked Percival barely above a whisper, and he shuddered.

"Black Fritz," answered the other. " 'E's a sniper, what lives opposite, and 'e's paid for 'is keep, I tell you. Charlie Turner an' 'Arry an' Ginger Woodward an' Nobby Clark an' the sergeant major an' two orficers. Yus—'e's paid for 'is keep, 'e 'as—'as Master Black Fritz."

"And he's over there!" said Percy a little breathlessly.

"Yus. Where do you think 'e is? In an aeryplane?" Once again Ginger spat dispassionately, and then relapsed into a silence from which he refused to be drawn until the presence of two more men beside him indicated that the hour of relief had come.

"Now look here, Simpkins," said the corporal when the relief was completed, "this is your first visit to the trenches, isn't it? Well, you can sit down now and have a sleep or you can write or read, if you like. But—whatever you do—don't go showing your ugly face over the top, because this place ain't

healthy." He turned away, and Percy was left to his own resources.

"Come round the corner," said Ginger in his ear. "I'll show you a spot to sleep. I know this 'ere bit like me own back parlor."

And so—had any one been sufficiently interested in his doing to report the fact—it might have been noted that ten minutes later Percy was sitting on the fire step writing a lurid epistle to Miss Belsize, while Ginger lay peacefully asleep beside him, breaking the complete silence with his snores.

At last the letter was finished, and Percy gave way to meditation. Everything was so utterly different to what he had anticipated that he could hardly believe he was actually in that mystic place, the trenches. To his left a crumbling wall ran along until it bent out of sight, a wall which in most places was three or four feet high, but which at one spot had been broken down until it was almost flush with the ground and the bricks and rubble littered the weeds. In front of him lay the town, desolate, appalling with a few rooks cawing discordantly round the windowless houses. And over everything an oppressive, hot, stinking stillness that almost terrified him.

After a while his gaze settled on the place where the wall was broken down, and his imagination began to play. If he went there—it was only about ten yards away—he would be able to look straight at the Germans. So obsessed did he become with this wonderful idea that he woke up the sleeping Ginger and confided it to him. That worthy warrior's reply, when he had digested this astounding piece of information, is unprintable; it is sufficient to say that it did not encourage further conversation, nor did it soothe Percy's nerves. He was getting jangled—jangled over nothing. It was probably because there was such a complete nothing happening that the jangling process occurred. A shell, a noise, anything; but not this awful, silent stagnation. He bent down mechanically and picked up half a brick; then just as mechanically he bowled the half brick at the hump of débris behind the broken bit of the wall.

He watched the brick idly as it went through space; he watched it idly as it hit the ground just by a clump of dock leaves; and from that moment "idly" ceases to be the correct adverb. Five seconds later, with a pricking sensation in his scalp, and a mouth oddly dry, he was muttering excitedly into the ear of the now infuriated Ginger.

"A man where, you ruddy perisher!" he grunted savagely. "Fust yer tells me if you goes and looks at the 'Uns you can see 'em, and then you says there's a man in the nettles. You ought to be locked up."

"There is, I tell you. I heaved a brick at that bunch of leaves, and it hit something that grunted." Percival was still clutching his companion's arm.

"Un'and me, Clara!" said the other peevishly. "This ain't a sixpenny op."

He got up—impressed in spite of himself by the other's manner, and peered at the mass of débris. "Wot d'yer want with 'eaving bricks for, anyway?" he continued irately after a long inspection which revealed nothing. "This 'ere ain't a bean feast, where you gets the bag of nuts."

"Watch this time, Ginger." Once again a large fragment came down with a dull thud in the neighborhood of the dock leaves, only to be followed by an unmistakable groan.

"Lumme, mate," said Ginger hoarsely. "Wot is it?" The two men stood peering at the rubbish not ten yards away. "I'll go and get the corporal. You——" But he didn't finish his sentence.

Two shots rang out almost simultaneously. One was from behind them—a German shot—and there was a short, stifled scream from the other side of the traverse. The other was from the rubbish heap ten yards away, and the blast made a piece of hemlock rock violently. Otherwise the rubbish heap was lifeless, save for a sepulchral voice —"Got him." There was a crash of falling brick from the German lines—the sound of what seemed to be a body slithering down—and then silence.

Ginger's grip relaxed, and he grinned gently. "Gawd 'elp you, Percival; you 'ave my blessing. You've been dropping the brickyard on Shorty Bill's back." He faded rapidly away, and Percival was left alone, gazing with fascinated eyes at the miraculous phenomenon which was occurring under his very nose. Suddenly and with incredible swiftness a portion of the rubbish heap, with dock leaves, nettles, old cans, and bricks adhering to it, detached itself from the main pile and hurled itself into the trench. With a peculiar, sliding movement it advanced along the bottom, and then it stopped and stood upright.

Speechless with amazement, Percival found himself gazing into the eyes of a man, which were glaring at him out of a small slit in the sacking which otherwise completely covered him. A pair of dirty, earth-stained hands gently laid down a rifle on the fire step—a rifle with a telescopic sight. Then from the apparition came a voice:

"Say, kid, are you the son of a coyote who has been practicing putting the weight in my back? Don't speak, son, don't speak, or I might forget my manners. Once in the ribs—and once in the small of the back. Listen to me, my lad! If I'd missed Black Fritz, after lying up there for him for eight hours as part of the scenery, I'd have ——"

"'Ollo, Shorty!" The corporal rounded the traverse. "Fritz has got another. Poor old Bill Trent. Copped clean through the 'ead."

The corporal and the strange, uncouth being in sacking, with his leaves and bricks hanging about him, moved away, and Percival followed. With his heart thumping within him, he looked at the dreadful thing that ten minutes before had been a speaking, seeing man, and as he looked something seemed to be born in his soul. With a sudden lightning flash of insight he saw himself in a frock coat in Mogg's big store, a very superior gentleman indeed; then he looked at the silent object on the step, and his jaw set. He turned to Shorty Bill.

"I'm sorry about that brick, but I'm new to the game, and I had no idea you were there. Didn't you say you'd got Black Fritz?"

"'Ave you, Shorty; 'ave you got the swine?" An eager chorus assailed him, but the man in the sack had his eyes fixed on the very superior young gentleman. At length he turned to the men around.

"Yep—I got him. Half left—by the base of that red house. He came out of the top window. You can see a black thing there through a periscope." The men thronged to have a look, and Shorty Bill turned to the stone thrower.

"Can you shoot?"

"A little; not much, I'm afraid."

"Like to learn the game? Yep? Good! I'll teach you. It's great." He moved slowly away, and turned up a communication trench, while into the eyes of Mogg's pride there came a peculiar look quite foreign to his general disposition. A game—a great game! He looked again at the poor, still thing on the step, and his teeth clenched. Thus began his fall from gentility.

It was not a very rapid descent. The art of sniping and its attendant pastime scouting is not learned in a day. Moreover, in company with the other games that are played in the trenches, it has the one dominant feature about it. One mistake made in the rules is one too many; there is no chance of making a second.

Percy could not have come under a better master than Shorty Bill. Poacher and trapper, with an eye like a lynx and a forearm like a bullock's leg, Bill was undoubtedly a tough proposition. What should have made him take a liking to Percival is one of those things which passes understanding, for two more totally dissimilar characters can hardly be imagined. Percy—at the time of the shooting of Black Fritz—was essentially of that type of town-bred youth who sneers at authority behind its back and cringes to its face. Such a description may sound worse than the type deserves, for all that it is a true one of the street-bred crowd;

they've been reared on the doctrine. Shorty was exactly the reverse. Shorty on one occasion had blocked six miles of traffic with a fractious mule, and, being confronted suddenly by an infuriated staff officer who howled at him, smiled genially and electrified the onlookers by remarking pleasantly: "Dry up, little man; this is *my* show."

That was Shorty in front of authority. Behind its back—well, his methods may not have commended themselves to purists in etiquette, but I have known officers sigh with relief on certain occasions when they have found out unofficially that Shorty had taken some little matter or other into his own personal care. There are many little matters—which need not be gone into—and which are bound to crop up when a thousand men are trying to live as a happy family, where the unofficial ministrations of our Shorty Bills—and there are many of them—are worth the regimental sergeant major, the officers, and all the N. C. O.'s put together.

"Say, kid, do you ever read poetry?" remarked Bill to his pupil one night as they sat in an estaminet behind the lines. "I guess your average love ballad leaves me like a one-eyed codfish, but there's a bit I've got in me head writ by some joker who knows me and the like o' me:

"There's a whisper on the night wind,
There's a star agleam to guide us,
And the wild is calling, calling . . .
Let us go."

Shorty contemplatively finished his beer. "'The wild is calling.' Ever felt that call, kid?"

"Can't say I have, Shorty." Percy's tone was humble; gone was the pathetic arrogance that had been the pride of Mogg's. In its place the beginnings of the realization of his utter futility had come, coupled with a profound hero worship for the man who had condescended to notice him. "When are you going to teach me that there sniping game?"

Shorty looked at the eager face opposite him and laughed.

"You'd better quit it, son. Why, to start with, you're frightened of the dark."

"I assure you I am not." The aggrieved Percy waxed indignant.

"Oh, cut it out! I don't mean you're frightened of going to bed in the dark or that you want a night light or a nurse. But yours is a town dark; standing under lamps gettin' the glad from a passing skirt. But in the real dark, when it's pressing round you like a blanket, and there are things moving, and people breathing near by, and you don't know whether it's a German or a pal or where the wire is or which way your own trenches are—what then, son, what then? Apart from that, d'you even know which the Pole Star is or what it's there for?"

"I guess not, Shorty," remarked the other, abashed. "But I'd soon learn, if you'd teach me."

"Well, I'll see. An' there's that blamed old woman with a face like a wet street tryin' to shut up the shop. Give me another, mother darling; no good your na-poohing me—I'm going to have it if I takes it."

Being what he was, he got it, and that evening the lessons began. Going back to their billet, they had to cross a field. It was a pitch-black night, and before they had proceeded twenty yards Percy could hardly see his hand in front of his face.

"Dark, Shorty, ain't it?" he remarked.

There was no answer, and he stopped and repeated the question. Still no answer, though he seemed to feel some one close by. Something brushed his face, and then silence. With a short laugh he walked on—a laugh which had just the faintest touch of bravado in it. Four times in the distance to the billet did that something brush his face again, and though each time he felt that there was some one near him, yet he heard nothing. The fourth time he stopped and spoke.

"Is that you, Shorty?" The next instant he gave a jump of pure nervous fright. From within six inches of his ear came the single word, "Yep."

"Jove, you did give me a start!" He

laughed a little shakily. "Where have you been?"

"Circling round you, son, dusting your face with me glove. Understand now what I meant by helpless in the dark?"

Thus ended the first lesson.

Many other things Percival Simpkins learned that were not in the curriculum of Mogg's: The correct way to crawl through grass so as to avoid being mistaken for a rhinoceros going to water; the power of observation so as to be able to spot a change in the German trenches—maybe only a few sand bags moved, but just enough to place the position of a machine gun—the value of disguise to defeat the curious on the other side; patience, the way to fire a rifle, the use of his eyes. All these and certain other things was he taught.

And the certain other things were mysterious and secret. They occurred at odd times and in odd places, and the intruder was always Shorty Bill personally.

"Some men," he would say, "like killing with a rifle; I do for one. Some like killing with a revolver; not bad, either, and essential, son, when you're out on the tiles by night and can't carry a rifle. A rifle is a blame nuisance at night if one's on patrol, whatever any one says to the contrary. An' if you don't carry a gun you can't use a bayonet, which is a beautiful method of sticking 'em." Shorty thoughtfully removed his pipe. "I was almost converted to the bayonet one day by a pal of mine. He's dead now, poor devil, but he lived well. He was givin' tongue over the beauties of picking Huns out of dugout entrances with the bayonet like winkles out of their shells with a pin. Gosh! It was great—that boy's palaver! He 'most converted me, an' then I showed him a couple o' little tricks of mine." Shorty put his pipe in his pocket. "Come here, son, an' pay attention. It was through not payin' attention and forgetting in the excitement of the moment that the winkle plucker went west."

Thus the mysterious lesson would start. "There'll come a time one night, boy, when you're out in the dark an' you're crawling near the wire, when you'll feel on a sudden there's a Boche near you. Well—then it's up to you to make good. You can plug him with your hand gun when you've got his face dead set; but if you start shooting practice in No Man's Land the audience join in. So I'll just show you a couple o' little tricks—silent tricks—which you can use when you get your hands on him. They kill just as clean, if not cleaner, than a gun, and no one's the wiser. Now come at me, son, as if you meant to hurt me. No, not as if you were out pushing the baby in the pram, but just as if you was goin' all out to kill me. That's better, son; an' where are you now?"

To be correct, our one and only Percy was lying on his face with the unpleasant knowledge in his brain that if he moved an inch his left arm would snap at the elbow, and that, kneeling above him, Shorty held a villainous weapon of his own invention, which resembled a cross between a bill hook and a kukri, in the neighborhood of his kidneys.

"You see the idea, bo, don't you? Now you ask him if he'd like to surrender, and if you don't understand what he says or he seems doubtfullike, put your clasp knife in there." Percival felt a prick under his right ear. "Right in—you take me. Get up, an' we'll do it again."

"Where did you learn that, Shorty?" asked the pupil as he got up.

"A Jap taught me that an' a good few more in Los Angeles, son. Jujutsu, he said it was, a darn good sense I call it. Come on—it takes practice."

And Percival Simpkins practiced. With an ever-growing feeling of confidence he practiced day in, day out. Mogg's had faded into the limbo of forgotten things; Percy's horizon consisted of a fetid shell hole, a panting, writhing Hun fighting for his life in the darkness of the night, a cracking arm, and then—— His imagination never took him beyond that point. Sufficient of the old Adam of gentility still remained to prevent him picturing

the final tableau. Percival Simpkins had not as yet killed anything larger than a rat, and even then he had bungled.

As was proper and fitting, his first head was gained cold-bloodedly and from a distance. It was his blooding into the ranks of the snipers. His probationary period was over; Shorty Bill had professed himself satisfied. The battalion had moved from the place in which we found them, and had gone farther north. The country was flat and desolate; periodically the ground would shake and tremble, and in No Man's Land chalk and rubble and the salmon-pink fumes of ammonal would shoot upward, showing that the men of the underworld still carried on. Slag heaps, sandbags, and desolate mounds of earth formed the scenery for his début, while the orchestra consisted of rumjars and rifle grenades.

Company D it was who had lost a sergeant through a German sniper, and the fact was duly reported. Now, when a German sniper takes the life of a man in a battalion which goes in for the art itself, it is an unwritten law that from that moment a blood feud exists between the German and English snipers opposite. Though it takes a fortnight to carry out, yet death is the only finish to the feud.

Wherefore one morning, just as the first pale glints of dawn came stealing over the silent land, Percival Simpkins climbed carefully into a great mound of sandbags which had conveniently been deposited just behind the front line by the miners. But it is doubtful if Miss Belsize, of the camisole department, would have recognized him. Gone were the frock coat and pearl tie, gone were the patent-leather boots and immaculate trousers. In their place a dirty-faced man in khaki tastefully draped in flapping sandbags, his boots covered, his hands stained. With infinite caution he made himself comfortable; with immense care he laid his rifle—also covered with sacking—in the direction he required, and then he covered his front and sides with filled bags. Through a hole—also carefully arranged—his screened telescope covered the bit of German trench where the day before the German sniper had lain. Then he waited.

The mists cleared away; the morning sun shone down. From his point of vantage—for he was seven or eight feet above the trenches below—he watched the German lines. His fingers itched to pull the trigger two or three times, and once when he saw a German officer come out of his dugout in the second line and lean against the back of the trench, smoking a fat cigar, he almost yielded to the temptation. But the crack of a periscope glass below him told him that the sniper was there—hidden somewhere, and watching, too, and he knew that perfect though his position was for *one* shot, that one shot would probably give him away. And that *one* shot was for the sniper, and not to be wasted on a fat Ober Leutnant.

Three or four hours passed, and the silence was complete. The perspiration trickled down his neck as he lay there motionless, and clouded the eyepiece of his telescope. Then suddenly he saw a little black object shoot up into the air from the junction of two branches near the German support line—an object which turned over and over in the air—and fell with a soft thud fifty yards to his right. A roar—and some sandbags and lumps of chalk flew in all directions, while fragments pattered down on Percival out of the sky.

"Hope to glory they don't come any closer," he muttered, watching the next rumjar shoot up. "Anyway, I've marked the place they're coming from." His eyes came back to the sniper's locality, and as they did so a quiver of excitement ran through him. Utterly regardless of the second rumjar which burst with a crack behind him, he knew for the first time the feeling of the big-game man who has stalked his quarry successfully. There, five yards to the left of where he had been looking, a little, stunted bush was moving—*and there was no wind.* Trembling with excitement, he focused his telescope on the bush, and even as he did

so he knew his vigil was over. The thing, which up to that moment he had taken for a log, was a man—*the* man, the sniper. He could see the faint outline of his face—now that his attention was drawn to it, and with infinite care he drew a bead on the center of it. The German moved again, as another rumjar burst, confident that the English would have gone to ground to escape the trench mortaring.

It seemed to Percival that his pressing the trigger and the wild, convulsive lurch of the man opposite were simultaneous. With his eye still glued to the telescope, he watched the log that writhed and squirmed; then it grew still, and the disguise had gone. No more a log; just a motionless, twisted form, while something that showed dark and ominous through the telescope spread round its head. The sergeant of Company D was avenged.

With a feeling rather as if he personally had won the war, Percy slipped backward into the boyau beside him, and went in search of Shorty Bill. Two hours later he found him and poured out the story. Shorty listened in silence; then he spoke:

"I've heard men talk like you, son, when they've kissed their first woman. Have you reported where that trench mortar is?"

"Shorty, I clean forgot! I'll go and do it now," remarked Percy, his ardor somewhat damped.

"I should think you'd better." Shorty relit his pipe, and grinned amiably. "Well done, kid; but for holy Mike's sake don't crow over one lonesome Boche. When you've touched three figures we'll celebrate."

That was Percy's first cold-blooded victim. His first hot-blooded one occurred about six weeks later in the same part of the line. As a mark of special favor he had been allowed to accompany Shorty on one of his nightly prowls. That worthy was wont to remark that two men on a joy ride in No Man's Land was one too many; wherefore it must be assumed that Percival had grown in wisdom and cunning, and found favor in the sight of his taskmaster.

They slipped over the top about ten p. m. Shorty was armed as usual merely with the villainous bill-hook kukri of his own design, while Percival carried a revolver and a clasp knife which resembled a young bayonet. It was not a reconnoitering patrol as laid down in the book of the words; it was merely a pleasure ramble as Shorty put it, as they passed silently out of a sap and disappeared in the darkness.

The first thing Percy did was to kick a tin, and fall into a shell hole, where he was joined by Shorty.

"Frightening rooks, son," he remarked kindly, "or rehearsing as a knock-about comedian? About twenty-five yards from here on our left is a German sap party, whom I am visiting to-night. I like 'em to know I'm coming."

"Sorry, Shorty," muttered the delinquent. "I never saw the ruddy thing."

"You don't say. I thought you'd done it on purpose," returned the other, with ponderous sarcasm. "Now you stop here. I'm goin' to that sap—an' I'll come back for you."

Like a wraith Shorty faded into the night, leaving Percival alone with his thoughts. A Lewis gun was firing away down the line in short bursts, while Very lights and flares went up every now and then with a faint hiss. Above the low-flying clouds scudded over the sky, and the erstwhile genteel floor manager lay back in his shell hole and pondered. With an inward chuckle he wondered what the beautiful Miss Belsize and the other fair ones of Mogg's would say if they could see him at that moment. A sense of physical well-being was on him, and he stretched himself luxuriously. The next instant he was struggling impotently in a grip that throttled him.

"Quite so," remarked a voice as the grip relaxed, and by the light of a flare he found Shorty occupying the shell hole once again. "A peachy lot o' good you are! Killed and dead as mutton by now, if I'd been a Boche."

Percy reddened in the darkness with shame. "I wasn't thinking, Shorty—I —er——" His words died away.

"Thinking! You flat-footed loon—this show ain't a debating society for spreadin' the gospel of peace and good will to men!" Shorty snorted with rage. "Go over to that sap head there —d'you see it?—an' see what thinking does." His hand pointed to a low hummock of chalk behind a crater. "Go an' look in, I tell you, an' if ever you sit out here again dreaming like a lovesick poet I hope to thunder it happens to you. You'll deserve it."

With a push like the kick of an elephant's hind leg he propelled the wretched Percy in the required direction. Puzzled and surprised, but feeling very ashamed of himself, he moved cautiously toward the low mound that stood up dimly outlined against the night sky. Once on the short journey he crouched, motionless, while a flare burned itself out twenty yards away, only to move forward, immediately the darkness settled again, with quickened step. There is no time so good to movement as the few seconds after the eyes of possible watchers have been dazzled——

And so he came to the sap head, and with infinite caution raised his head and peered in. Under ordinary circumstances his action was that of a fool, but Shorty had ordered, and those who knew Shorty got in the habit of carrying out his instructions. For a while in the blackness he could see nothing. He noted the sap running back toward the German lines, but at the head of it there was no sign of life. He cautiously stretched farther over, and as he looked at the bottom of the trench he made out a dark, huddled figure. Then the next flare went up, and Percival Simpkins got the shock of his life.

The green, ghostly light came flooding in, and then went out as abruptly as it had come. But the moment was enough. Clear stamped on his brain, like a photographic exposure, was the image of two men. One lay at the bottom of the trench and grinned at the sky with his throat cut from ear to ear; the other huddled in a corner with his hand still clutching a bomb, was, even as he looked, turning on his head and his knees, only to subside in the mud, kick spasmodically, and lie still.

"Right in—you take me?—with your clasp knife?" Shorty's words came back to him, and he gasped. So this was what his teacher had meant when he'd sent him to see the dangers of thinking.

It was just as he was visualizing the scene—the sudden, ghostly appearance of Shorty on top of the unsuspecting Germans, the sudden stroke of that awful weapon, the feeble attempt to get the bomb, the—well, it was just then that Percy found himself contemplating from about six inches' range the glaring face of a Prussian N. C. O., who had suddenly materialized. By the light of a flare way down the line he could see, as he lay on top of the ground with his head over the edge of the sap, the ring of the Prussian's revolver as it moved up toward his face.

What happened happened quickly; most of these things are touch and go. The bullet whizzed past his face into the night—his left hand hit the revolver just in time; and even as the bullet went wide his right hand struck sideways with his knife. It sank into the Prussian's neck; he felt a rush of something warm and sticky, and then he was grabbed from behind.

"Quick!" muttered Shorty in his ear. "Hop it; hop it like hell! I'll guide you."

Blinded and dazed by the shock of the revolver, he stumbled mechanically after his leader. "Into this shell hole for a moment," whispered Bill imperatively, as a machine gun let drive with a few rounds which passed over them like a flight of cockchafers. "Now come on. Home this trip, my boy; I didn't know that swab was there."

"I killed him, Bill," said Percival half an hour later, as he sat rubbing his eyes on the fire step of their own trenches to get the stinging out.

"You done well, son," said Bill, "an'

if any one doubts it, show 'em your hand."

By the light of a match Percy looked at it, and he shuddered. It bore, as Bill implied, the proof of death.

He was silent, too, a while; the first hot-blooded one is more rattling to the nerves than a stranger three hundred yards away. Then a great thought struck him, and he cursed.

"I've left my knife in his neck, Bill. What a blasted idiot."

Thus ends my tale of Percival Simpkins, sometime very superior young gentleman of Mogg's Mammoth Emporium. He is an interesting character study because he is quite a common one. And the problem which arises from him and *"les autres"* is a problem which Shorty Bill's poetical joker has written some lines about:

For shoulders curved with the counter stoop
will be carried erect and square;
And faces white from the office light will be
bronzed by the open air;
And we'll walk with the stride of a new-born
pride, with a new-found joy in our
eyes;
Scornful men who have diced with death
under the naked skies.
For some of us smirk in a chiffon shop, and
some of us teach in a school;
Some of us help with the seat of our pants
to polish an office stool;
The merits of somebody's soap or jam some
of us seek to explain,
But all of us wonder what we'll do when we
have to go back again.

BATTLESHIPS

NONE of the giant battleships or battle cruisers being laid down by the powers in the race for naval supremacy is the work of any one man, or the product of any one shipyard. With us its inception begins in the offices of the general board of the navy department. With the lessons of the Jutland, the Falklands, the Coronel, and the Heligoland Bight engagements, the greater efficiency of underwater attacks, and the tremendously increased ranges at which modern sea fights are waged, the experts of the general board decide on the main characteristics of the new ship. Her length, tonnage, armament, and motive power are then recommended to the secretary of the navy, who transmits the advice of the experts to the House committee on naval affairs. After the naval bill, as framed by the House, has run the gantlet of House, Senate, and conferees, and has been signed by the president, the various bureaus of the navy department are ready with plans and specifications for the new ship.

The navy yards and private shipbuilding firms, with these plans to guide them, then submit their estimates of time and cost for the construction of the new sea fighter. The estimates mean an outlay of a few thousand dollars before they are in shape for submission. When the sealed bids are opened, and the award made, the winner puts his maximum force at work on the detailed drawings. He places orders for his materials, and a corps of specialists outside of the shipyard are called on to do their bit. Some furnish steel plates, others hoisting machinery. From electrical specialists come dynamos, motors, ventilating fans, bake ovens, and laundries. From other specialists are bought chain, furniture, hawsers, china, and a thousand and one of the items that go into a modern warship.

Only twice in the story of the building of a warship is the public privileged to peep behind the screen from the time the general board begins its work until the finished ship flies her captain's pennant and takes her place in the fleet. The first is when the keel is laid with much ceremony. The second time is when the ship is launched. All the rest is carried on without pomp or publicity.

The Bay of Pearls

By H. de Vere Stacpoole

Author of "The Luck of Captain Slocum," "Stories of the Legion," Etc.

Stacpoole says that of all the cold and disagreeable businesses in the world hunting for seed pearls is perhaps the worst. But sometimes the result is well worth the hardship: A single find may be worth ten thousand dollars.

CAPTAIN GADGETT came out of the Paris House with Bobby Tillman. The captain was a big man, broad of beam, slow of speech, and with a fixity of eye that spoke less of high intelligence than steadfastness of purpose. He stood for a moment watching Sydney passing by, then he took a red bandanna handkerchief from his pocket, and, removing his hat, wiped his forehead.

"Well, that's settled and done with," said the captain.

He referred to the engagement just entered into with Tillman over a glass of gin and tonic water in the Paris House, an engagement to help in working Tillman's schooner, the *Gleam*, on a pearling venture to be conducted on grounds known to Tillman and lying close to Cape York, on terms of fifty dollars a month and ten per cent of the catch.

Tillman, whose father had been a wealthy ship's chandler of Sydney, was just then dissipating the last of his patrimony, or rather of his loose cash, for five hundred pounds a year had been tied up to him so tightly by a father with a fine knowledge of Sydney and its ways that his capital was, literally, secure for life.

He was a joyous and youthful-looking individual, with a hand on every one's shoulder. This gentleman, who is still remembered as partner with a certain Captain Hull in one of the most successful treasure-salving expeditions ever undertaken was, despite his horse-racing and money-spending propensities, no idler and looker-on at life. Bobby, to use the expression of his friends, was always "on the make." Anything with excitement in it and a chance of money found him ready. With a flower in his coat, his straw hat on the back of his head, and his elbow on a bar counter, you never would have reckoned him as a man of imagination and resource, yet he was both resourceful and imaginative, dowered with that lust of the mind for adventure which distinguished the old Elizabethans and which they have handed down to us undamaged.

Martin Telfer had come to him a fortnight ago with a suggestion.

Telfer was a waterside character, a lean man, used to the sea and more used to all the shady ways of ports, more especially of the port of Sydney.

Nobody would have given more than a dollar for the clothes this gentleman stood in, yet it was darkly hinted that Telfer had money from all sorts of crooked dealings hid away somewhere, and a wife in San Francisco who ran a joint out of which he received the profits.

Telfer possessed a boat, and he had often taken Tillman out fishing for trevally, and one day, a fortnight be-

fore, taking advantage of their acquaintanceship, he had come to Tillman with his proposition. He was a free-speaking man with every one, and said he:

"What's er use in your hummin' round Sydney with all them race sharks and sich? There's money to be made better'n that. I tell you, them race sharks is rotten; backin' horses is no game except for the bookies. Now if you have any money to burn, put it into a sure thing with some life in it. I can put you on. See here, I've got the location of a pearlin' bay south of Cape York, a bay that hasn't been used nor skinned. You and me, with some blacks to do the divin', and maybe another white man to help work the boat, might do a good stroke up there."

Tillman became interested at once.

"Where did you get the news of the bay from?" asked he.

"You never mind," replied the other. "I got it safe enough. All we want is a boat, and I know of one to be had cheap, some grub, a crew, and another chap to help us. I'm game to go on half profits, and I'll stand for half the grub. I'll put that much money in it."

"There's something in it," said Tillman. "Pearling is all right if you get a good pitch. I was reading somewhere the other day that a good diver will fish up seven ton of shell in a season."

"You was *readin',*" said Telfer. "Some tinhorn was stringin' you. There isn't a diver will bring up more than one ton of shell, if that. Fifteen or twenty pairs of shell is a good day's take for one man. There's no use in gettin' away with things. It's not the shell, besides; it's the pearls. Pearls is a venture; you might pick up a ton of shell and get fifty dollars' worth of pearls, or you might get fifty thousan'. Get me? It's a venture. Just like gold minin'."

Tillman understood, and it was the venture that appealed to him and held him, so that, meeting Captain Gadgett, a captain without a ship, as captains sometimes are, he found himself enlarging on Telfer's proposition with an enthusiasm that almost surprised himself.

Gadgett, hard up, with a stained certificate and no prospect but the fo'c's'le before him, fell in with the idea. The pair had come to an agreement, and they were off now to inspect the *Gleam,* which Tillman had all but agreed to purchase for the expedition.

They came down to the waterside, where Telfer was waiting, by arrangement, for Tillman. He was introduced to Gadgett, and they rowed off to inspect the prospective purchase, which was lying a little way out.

The *Gleam* was a fifty-foot schooner of forty-eight tons, an old pearling boat, broad-beamed, and with nothing gleaming about her with the exception of her name.

"She's not a beauty," said Telfer, as they stood on her deck, Gadgett inspecting the spars with his nose uplifted like a sniffing dog.

"No, she ain't," replied Gadgett; "there's no truer word than that."

"But she's sound enough," went on the other; "you couldn't break her, not on a reef. Her sticks are sound; not an inch of dry rot anywhere. I've examined them. There's many a likely looking boat rotten from truck to garboard strake on the market, painted and gayed up to look like new; the old *Gleam's* not that."

Gadgett, without replying, put his head down the hatch and sniffed at the kerosene-oil-scented cabin. Then he went down the companionway and vanished.

They heard him poking about below.

"One might think that chap a passenger bookin' on a swell liner," said Telfer, "instead of a chap that's broke and out of a job. I know him, though I didn't pretend to. There's not an owner would touch him except on a sinkin' job—and he's too well known for that."

"Oh, he's all right," said Tillman; "he says himself it's nothing but the booze that ails him, and he won't get any chance of that. If we were to start hunting for plaster saints, we'd be stuck here a year. Every man has his failing."

The man with a failing appeared now, hoisting himself through the hatch opening and knocking the dust off his knees.

"I reckon she'll do," said he, "but it'll be a fight for life with them cockroaches. Fumigation is what she wants."

"I'll see to the cockroaches," said Tillman. "Well, that's settled. I'll take her, and we'll begin getting the stores on to-morrow and looking after the crew."

"I'll see to them," said Telfer. "You leave that to me. I'll do the provisioning, too; save you half your money and won't charge no commission."

They rowed ashore, sealed the bargain with drinks, and ten days later, one bright morning, with Telfer at the helm and Gadgett working the crew, the old *Gleam* picked her anchor out of Sydney mud and spread her frowsty sails to a wind blowing straight for the Heads.

II.

They had fair weather and favorable winds till they reached the latitude of Port Macquarie, when a calm held them for two days, only to release them for head winds to play with so that the crawl to the latitude of Great Sandy Island was a slow one.

Here, however, the gods smiled upon them. Blue seas held them and following winds favored them till one morning, in a dawn tinted like the lips of a haliotis shell, Telfer, on the lookout, cried:

"That's her; that's the bay. Mark that there reef with the hump at the end of it; it's a deep-water passage by the hump. I reckon we'd better tow her in when we get her in closer. Mind your steerin', you black swab! Here, gimme the wheel!"

He pushed the black fellow at the helm aside and took the wheel, and Tillman put his head down the hatch and yelled for Gadgett, who came on deck attired in a wonderful yellow suit of pajamas with red stripes.

All to starboard lay a sea of gold, all to port a vast meadow of ruffled azure in which the darkness of night seemed still to linger; the foam on the reef showed to the sun, and a great white gull, passing shoreward, was the only sign of life in all that desolate scene.

The *Gleam,* turning her stern to the sunrise, drew in till, on the order of Telfer, the halyards were let go, the sails stowed away, and the boat lowered for towing.

It took them an hour before she was through the reef opening, and as the anchor fell in shallow water, Telfer, who had remained on board, shouted to the others in the boat:

"It's a shell bottom sure enough. This is the place. Hump yourselves an' get aboard so's we may get on to the work."

At breakfast, half an hour later, he was in great feather.

"It's the only pearlin' bay on this coast," said he, "and it's known to none but us and the chap who let out the location to me. Y'see, the warm water from Torres Straits sweeps right roun' here; at least I expect's that's the reason. My hat! They set up a shoutin' you could hear from Sydney to Brisbane when pearls were found at Port Darwin. Wonder what they'd say if they knew of this traverse."

"Well, we haven't touched the shell yet," said Gadgett.

"You wait," said Telfer.

The *Gleam* had two boats, and at half past seven they put out, Telfer in command of one and Gadgett of the other.

Telfer was not wrong. The first black fellow to go down—Jupiter was the name he went by—brought up at his second dive a tremendous pair of shells, true pearl oyster and of the second best kind—golden tipped.

In ten minutes the water was dotted with bobbing black heads, and the shells were coming in, being flung into the boat, while the divers hung on to the gunnels between dives to rest and to take breath.

Tillman, who was in Gadgett's boat, looked on at the work, charmed and surprised at the apparent easiness and swiftness of the whole business. Here

was a going concern started right off, an hour and a half after dropping anchor, pearl oysters being picked up as people pick mushrooms and no one to let or hinder, and nothing to pay with the exception of the pearling license. He forgot the expenses of the *Gleam*, the dangers of the voyage, everything but the fascination of the business before him.

Pearl oysters are found right down to fifty fathoms. Here the depth ran only from five to eight fathoms, the water was clear and warm, and the work was easy, or rather comparatively easy.

Four of the crew of the *Gleam* had been on this business before as divers; the rest of the party, with the exception of Telfer, were new to it and required coaching. Even the old hands this first morning were not in full working trim, their lungs, eyes, and ears not being fully salted to the work.

When working in excessive depths earache is the greatest enemy of the pearl diver. After the first day or two the diver all at once has a bursting sensation in the ears, something seems to break, and from that moment the earache vanishes. But in these shallow depths the men worked untroubled even by the fear of sharks, and when work was knocked off that evening three hundred and twelve pairs of shells was the result of the day's work.

They were placed on deck in a heap, and after supper they were handled by the whole crew under the light of a full moon heaving up over the reef. Every oyster was cleaned and scraped on the outside, and then they were stacked in a huge heap for opening on the morrow.

III.

Next morning after daybreak the crew were sent off to do the diving under the presidency of Jupiter, and the three white men, with a black boy to help, attacked the pile of shells.

Opening a pearl oyster is a delicate business; injury to the shell and to any possible pearl inside it has to be avoided, but the invaluable Telfer was able to direct them. They were large shell, averaging eight hundred or a thousand to the ton, and Telfer and Gadgett, who proved the handiest at the business, opened them and passed them on to Tillman and the black boy.

But before they were passed the openers searched each oyster in case of a large free pearl being there. It was Tillman's duty to hunt for seed pearls and to explore the body of the oyster thoroughly in the hope of finding a pearl embedded in it.

He started on this work with enthusiasm, but after an hour or so this fit passed. Of all the cold and disagreeable businesses in the world hunting for seed pearls is perhaps the worst.

Telfer and Gadgett were absorbed, the gambling instinct was aroused in each of them, and they worked without talking, opening the shells, feeling the bodies of the oysters, moving their fingers under the mantels, and then passing the shells on to Tillman and the boy for further search. Tillman found a good many seed pearls, but nothing of any size.

That find was reserved for Gadgett, who, at the end of an hour and a half, running his thumb under the mantel of a newly opened oyster, gave a sudden jump, as though some one had run an awl into him through the deck planking, at the same moment a pearl hopped into his hand like a pea from a pod.

It was smaller than a pea, but of perfect color, and absolutely spherical —a valuable find. So valuable that work was knocked off while they smoked and discussed it, passing it from hand to hand.

"What is it worth?" asked Tillman.

"Maybe two hundred dollars," replied Telfer. "Maybe a bit more or less; it depends where you market it. It's not big, but it's the shape and color makes the price."

They had a tin box full of cotton wool ready for the takings, and they put the pearl in and went on with the work.

It had been arranged that Tillman should act as honorary treasurer, he

being financier of the expedition, and that night the treasury, when he put it away in his locker, contained three pearls—the perfect one and two others, one a baroque worth maybe twenty-five dollars, the other a black pearl fairly large, but of irregular shape, worth, Telfer considered, fifty dollars or maybe a bit less.

Tillman was in high feather. He reckoned that twenty-five dollars a day would soon make them rich men. Telfer was not so jubilant; he did not consider that the luck would hold like that. He was right. For the next seven days not an oyster showed a pearl bigger than a seed. Then, as is the way with pearling, the luck changed, and the following week brought them in a catch reckoned by Telfer as worth fifteen hundred dollars. There was one great point about this bay: The white pearls, however irregular in size, were splendid in quality—that is to say, in purity of color, luster, and translucency, or rather the power of returning some light from the layers immediately below the surface. Another fact, though this is common to all grounds, the size of the oyster had nothing to do with the size of the pearl.

This was startlingly proved at the end of the first six weeks. It was after a run of bad luck that had lasted for some days, and Gadgett, seated on the deck, was engaged in opening quite a small oyster. He was abusing luck when, the shells coming apart, he saw under the mantel something like a big bubble. In a moment it was in his dirty palm, a loose white pearl, absolutely spherical, perfect in color, and weighing over a hundred grains.

Tillman and Telfer were so astonished that for a moment they said nothing; the contrast between the grimy palm of Gadgett and the purity and loveliness of the thing that lay in it struck Tillman like a touch of the uncanny.

The thing was passed from hand to hand, weighed and discussed; but there was a curious reservation in their words, an absence of jubilation accounted for by the fact that each man was facing a problem that had suddenly confronted all of them.

Gadgett had found the pearl, but he had signed on for only ten per cent of the takings and a salary.

Of course he had found the thing only in the execution of his duty. Still, he had found it.

He intimated the fact frankly.

"Look here," said he, "where do I come in?"

"What d'you mean?" asked Telfer.

"Well, I found the thing; how about my share in it?"

"You signed on for ten per cent," said Telfer. "What more do you expect? It's only part of the takings. I might have found it just as easy as you, or Tillman might have found it."

Tillman cut in.

"How much is it worth?" asked he of Telfer.

"Ten thousand dollars," said Telfer, "or maybe more. It's worth all that."

"Well," said Tillman, "let's leave the thing over till we get back to Sydney. I'll see you don't lose by it, Gadgett. It's true you signed on only for ten per cent, but this is no—shipping office; we are all partners in a way, and you found the thing. I'll work the thing out in my head, and I promise you won't grumble at your pull."

Telfer seemed about to dissent; then all at once he acquiesced.

"Maybe you are right," said he. "I don't want to be no dog in a manger; what's right is right, and what's wrong is wrong. I don't want to wrong no man out of his dues. Leave it over till we get to Sydney, and let's push on with the work."

Gadgett agreed. They put the pearl away with the others and went on with the work.

But the finding of the big pearl seemed to have exhausted the luck of the bay, for during the next fortnight the catch proved extraordinarily poor, and so it went on with a few lucky finds till at the end of two and a half months they reckoned their takings at roughly twenty-five hundred dollars,

exclusive of the big pearl. This was the sum, as set out by Tillman:

Big white pearl	10,000
Shell	750
Medium, small, and seed pearls	$1,750
Total	$12,5000

Against that had to be set the purchase of the *Gleam,* bought for twenty-five hundred dollars, and which could be sold again, Tillman reckoned, for the same amount, the pearling license, provisions, and pay of the crew.

With the big pearl the venture would prove profitable to each man; without it the takings would have proved scarcely worth the trouble and danger.

Just that one lucky find had made the business a success, and in that fact lies the whole business of pearling as conducted in these waters and with a limited supply of labor.

The little bay was now fairly skinned, and one bright morning, ten weeks and a day after dropping anchor, the windlass was manned and the *Gleam* towed out from the bay.

Outside, the sails were set and a course laid for Brisbane, where they had settled to call and pick up fresh provisions for the homeward run.

IV.

One morning, two days out from the bay, Tillman came bursting on deck, where Gadgett and Telfer were smoking and yarning. A light, favorable wind was blowing, and the sea was flat calm but for a vague, underrunning swell.

Tillman's face was a picture.

"The pearl's gone!" cried he.

"What's that you say?" cried Gadgett.

"Gone! The big pearl's gone! It's not in the box with the others; some one has taken it."

They all went down below.

Tillman showed the box; everything was there but the pearl of price. They took the cotton wool out carefully and examined it; they hunted about the cabin, in the lockers, on the floor. Then they sat down to hold a consultation.

"It's either one of us three," said Gadgett, "which ain't likely, or it's one of the blacks. Jim is the only one that comes here; let's have him in."

Jim was called below and cross-questioned. He knew nothing. It was quite evident to them, from his manner and their knowledge of the aborigines, that he was speaking the truth. Then they searched him for form's sake, even to his wool. They found nothing.

That was the beginning of the business. Every one of the crew was searched in turn. The fo'c's'le was turned out, the galley, every pot, pan, and pannikin was inspected, every hole and corner explored.

The fine weather held fortunately, for if a squall had struck the schooner in the disordered condition of the after guard no man knows what might have happened.

The search lasted on and off for three days, and then one morning a luminous idea struck Telfer.

"Look here," said he, "we've hunted everywhere. There's one more thing to be done; we've got to search ourselves. No offense. I'm willin' to strip; how about you?"

Gadgett flew into a temper.

"D'you mean to suspect me?" said he.

"I'm not suspectin' no one," replied the lean man. "I say we've searched the blacks, we've turned the ship inside out, and to complete the bizziness we've got to search ourselves. Where's your objection? I ain't objectin'."

"He's right," said Tillman. "Each of us three is under suspicion. There's no doubt about that, and it's due to every one of us to be sure that the other two are all right. It's a question of ten thousand dollars. Come on. I'll start."

Gadgett could say nothing to this, and they went below, where Tillman began the business by divesting himself of every article of clothing.

In half an hour it was demonstrated that wherever the pearl might be it was not on the person of either of the three adventurers.

The thing had vanished, and, though

the search was never entirely given up, when they reached Brisbane the fact still remained. Here they watered and took in more provisions, starting ten days after their arrival with a fair wind for Sydney.

It was not a happy ship. Distrust was everywhere, in the fo'c's'le no less than in the cabin.

The thing had been stolen; there could be no doubt at all of that or of the fact that some one of them was the thief.

Tillman was the most aggrieved party. He had put the money into the adventure. He was vaguely conscious now of the fact that the *Gleam,* put to auction, would not return him his twenty-five hundred, and there were few private buyers likely to bid for the old tub. She was a good boat, but your buyer, not in a hurry, and unstimulated by fantastic dreams of a fortune to be made out of pearling, would pick a hundred holes in her canvas and find a hundred objections in the general neglect that spoke loud in paintwork, spars, and standing and running rigging.

Telfer had been the tempter in the business. Only for Telfer's urgent representations and subtle suggestions he would never have gone into the venture.

After everything was paid and settled, and supposing he only got fifteen hundred for the *Gleam,* which was quite possible, he stood to lose money over the business.

He said all this the day they anchored in Sydney harbor, and Telfer, to whom he addressed all his remarks, flew into a temper.

"That's as bad as to say I chowsed you," said he. "I'm not a man without a repitation to lose, and I won't listen to that talk. I tell you she's worth three thousand dollars—six hundred British pounds—any day. I know a man was able and willin' to give twenty-five hundred dollars for her, and is still. Don't you go round the town sayin' Martin Telfer has put you up to lose money, for he hasn't. I'll get you twenty-five hundred for her in a wink soon as ever we've divided up the profits."

"Who's your man?" asked Tillman, with a sneer.

"Never you mind. I'll bring him aboard when all's settled and done, and I'll guarantee you your twenty-five hundred. I'm no poor man myself, you mark that, but I'm not goin' to have no one goin' about Sydney sayin' I chowsed him. I told you when you bought the boat she were worth twenty-five hundred and more. Well, you'll see."

When the port arrangements were finished they went down to the cabin to arrange about the shares and profits.

On a rough calculation the takings were under twenty-five hundred; on an equally rough calculation Tillman and Telfer's shares, after Gadgett's money was deducted and the crew paid off and the provisions settled for, would not amount to more than five hundred dollars apiece.

When next day they sold shell and pearls to a dealer they found they had overshot the mark, and that the actual sum to be divided between Tillman and Telfer was only seven hundred dollars —three hundred and fifty dollars apiece.

But Tillman was recompensed by the fact that Telfer made good his word, introducing him to a gentleman named Alonzo Perirez, who, after extraordinary haggling, took over the *Gleam* for twenty-two hundred dollars, cash down.

Perirez also took the remains of the provisions at a hundred dollars, that sum being divided between Tillman and Telfer.

When the money passed hands, and when Gadgett was paid his bit, the three adventurers shook hands and parted, Tillman going off to the Paris House to meet friends and tell of his "lucky stroke," Gadgett making for the nearest saloon, and Telfer returning to the waterside with Perirez.

Perirez was a bearded gentleman with a skin like old parchment and an eternal cigarette between his lips.

He was really a partner of Telfer's, and when he got the word to pay twenty-five hundred for the *Gleam* he had gone into the business absolutely certain that everything was all right.

He knew that the *Gleam* was not worth more than fifteen hundred, but he had absolute trust in the rascality of his partner.

"Well," said he, when they had reached the waterside, "what is it?"

"Wait till we are aboard," said Telfer, with a chuckle.

They rowed off.

The dealer had finished unloading the cargo, and the schooner was deserted except by the old shellback they had put on board as caretaker.

The cabin hatch was fastened. Telfer opened it, and they went below. They could hear the sea gulls crying through the half-open skylight as they took their seats, while Telfer proceeded to unfold a piece of the blackest rascality that ever had disgraced a user of the sea.

He told of the expedition and of the finding of the pearl. He described it so that the eyes of his listener glistened.

"Tillman, he put it in the box with the others," said he. "I nicked it and hid it. They searched the very wool of the niggers, they searched the whole blessed ship; we turned out our pockets, we stripped. I tell you, if that thing had been anywhere to be found they'd 'a' found it."

"Where did you put it?" asked the other, blowing smoke through his nose and gloating on his partner.

"I always had a far eye for things," said Telfer, going to the lazaret and opening it. "I planned all this out from the first in case of comin' across any big pearl. D'you remember when I ordered the stores from you I got a jar of water and told you to mark it 'olive oil?' Well, look!"

He fished out the jar.

"It's in this," said he. "They never had ideas enough in their heads to think of it. Look!"

He drew the cork, clapped his hand over the opening, and inverted the jar. A gush of yellow liquid came as he withdrew his hand, holding in its palm a thing like a boiled cod's eye.

"It's vinegar—you blazing idiot!" cried Perirez.

The smell told that—and the pearl. The once lovely pearl, corroded and eaten away, and worth now not one brass farthing.

In the scene that ensued Telfer drove home with his tongue into the head of Perirez the fact that the latter's storekeeper had served the *Gleam* with a jar of vinegar instead of a jar marked "olive oil" and filled with water.

Also that they had paid twenty-five hundred dollars for the *Gleam,* and stood to lose a thousand just for the sake of making absolutely sure of obtaining possession of a thing that was worthless.

Perirez tried to argue the point, but Telfer had him at once.

"Them two would never have let me take more than my own belongin's off the ship," said he, "unless she'd changed hands. It was gettin' his money back on her that made Tillman let up with his suspicions and watchfulness. You're outpointed. You've put us both in the soup, you and your fool man. Here, take your pearl and put it in your pocket and let's get off the hooker. Sick I feel."

He looked it, and so did Perirez, sitting in the stern of the boat that rowed him ashore and counting up his losses.

SPEAKING OF HOTELS

A TRAVELING man, having landed in the railroad station of a town in Oklahoma, asked one of the natives:

"Are there any hotels in this town?"

"Yes, sir," the native informed him. "There are two."

"Which one would you advise me to go to?" pursued the visitor.

"Well, my advice won't help you none," contributed the native. "Whichever one you go to, you'll wish, before the night's over, you'd gone to the other."

The Wolf Cub

By Patrick and Terence Casey

Authors of "The Last Conquistador," Etc.

(*In Four Parts—Part Four*)

CHAPTER XXIX.

ONE of the uncouth serranos bent over Quesada. To mitigate the fever he poured some febrifugal concoction down his burning throat.

Morales' tossing head came to an abrupt stop on the pillow. A sudden hope bourgeoned in his distracted eyes. He was like a man falling down a cliff-side, clutching madly at an adnascent shrub. His eyes glowed from their deep sockets like pulsing coals. Here was help in his hour of need. His eyes seemed fairly to devour the serrano.

Ferou, watching all, bent sharply toward him.

"But you forget again, monseñor!" he whispered. "You have burned their dead. You have transgressed the teachings of their religion, walked rough-shod over all their superstitious dreads. They are my men, heart and soul.

"Ah, Morales, I have told you I lay the strings of my plots long in advance! It was I who gathered these serranos and egged them on at that rebellion on the rock. I have whispered to them in the long nights. They believe all your sanitary methods are tricks of the devil, which have aided, rather than lessened, the ravages of the plague. The fact that the cholera has stricken you and Quesada and Carson is to them as a sign from on high. With the death of you three they look for the lifting of the scourge. Sooner than aid your recovery, they would poison you."

A fit of retching, sudden and violent, seized Morales. Ferou moved away. When Morales recovered from the griping vise of the fit, the Frenchman was proffering a cup of some darkish mixture to the convalescing banderillero on the matador's left hand.

"Here, Alfonso Robledo," he said quite loudly, "drink this narcotic and you will sleep like a babe. It is only fine old brandy with a pinch of opium."

It was just the mild form of opiate Morales craved. Ferou looked over at the matador with the words. He was tormenting Morales with the afflictions of a Tantalus. He went down the lane between the platforms, most solicitously dosing each sufferer in turn.

Behind the Frenchman's back surreptitiously, the banderillero, Alfonso Robledo, proffered his opiate to Morales. Morales shook his head.

"I thank you a thousand times, my son," he said in a feebly husky whisper; "but it is not right that I should rob you of that which your debilitated system needs. We are both sick men."

"But I am recovering, growing stronger hourly. Maestro, you have just slapped down!" The banderillero became quietly yet earnestly impassioned. "Ah, it breaks my heart to see my brave espada so weak! I want to help. Should you die through sacrifice to me, I will not care to live. I am only a peon of your cuadrilla; you are the great matador. My loss will not be felt. Take it, take it, please, Don Manuel of my soul!"

Morales hesitated. But only for a trice.

"No," he decided, with heroic stubbornness. "This Frenchman can't have so black a heart. He is but teasing me to test my caliber. If I must, rather than rob you, Alfonso, I shall pay the hawk."

This story began in the July 7th POPULAR.

"Eh?" broke in the thin, nasal voice of Ferou. Unaware, he had returned and overheard Morales' words. "And you have changed your mind, Don Manuel? You are willing to pay? That is good! Now let me see; what was it you wanted?"

"The walls of my intestines are being torn to pieces, Señor Ferou. I think your joke a little cruel. I would have you give me a mild opiate."

"Ah, yes; brandy and an opium pill. That will cost you now just one thousand pesetas! This wait, which you think such a cruel joke, Monseñor Morales, has cost you precisely five hundred pesestas more."

The man was altogether inhuman.

"You hawk, you vulture of the slime, you blood leech!" execrated Morales in a furious voice that shook through his lungs like a hoarse wind. "I shall rot in hell before ever I put one centesimo into your filthy claws!"

The Frenchman shrugged his shoulders. His face was stiff and livid with restrained bile.

"I leave you now, Don Manuel," he said, with acid politeness, "to visit that other Eldorado, Señor Carson. Perhaps *mon Americain* won't think so much of his peseta bills. And who knows? Perhaps the great espada will also change his mind by the time I return."

At the door, he turned and called out bitingly to the two sullen serranos:

"You will see, *mis paisanos,* that Monseñor Morales, who burned your dead, will want for everything and get nothing. When he changes his mind one of you may come for me."

He smiled toward Morales his peculiar, aggravating smile; then, twisting the spikes of his straw mustache, swaggered out the doorway.

There was a soft thud up near the altar, at the end of one platform. The mountain boy, Gabriel, had rolled off upon the ground. On discolored hands and knees quaking from the disease, he came creeping, with stealthy quietude and laborious feebleness, down the passageway. Half tilted between rigid teeth, he held a tin cup containing a preparation in wine of powdered aromatic chalk.

He had achieved half the length of the runway when, on the sudden, one of the serranos discovered him. The fellow roughly swung the boy up under one arm. The contents of the tin cup were spilled. The boy began a frenzied squirming and kicking. In a tumult of febrile revolt and piteous pleading, he wailed:

"Let me go, let me go to him—to Don Manuel of my heart! He is good, he is brave, he is like the very God Himself! He is sick only because he helped me and the knife slipped. Ah, Diego Lerida, I have known you since I was born. Won't you let me go, won't you let me give him something to ease the pain? He did the same for the wife of you, ere the good *Dios* called her. Only a little chalk, Tio Diego, only a little chalk and wine.

"No? You won't let me go! Then may Satanas claim you—you and all your vile spawn! And may——"

Came a hoarse shout from Morales:

"Hola, my brave little golden one! I drink to you, Gabriellito!"

And accepting the lesser of the two sacrifices, Morales lifted from between the banderillero and himself the cup containing the partly finished brandy, and quaffed it down in one great draft.

He was none too soon. With an oath of commingled surprise, anger, and dismay, the second serrano leaped forward and lunged at the matador. He only succeeded in knocking the empty cup from Morales' hand.

Save, then, for the feverish Quesada and those who slept under the assuasive influence of narcotics or the cold pall of death, the whole sick bay chortled with nightmare hoarseness at the frustrated and suddenly apprehensive serranos.

The hours snailed by. While Manuel Morales tossed and tumbled in painful slumber, the mountain boy watched him steadily from down the lane of blanketed figures. There was in his unblinking, deep-socketed eyes that highest emotion one can exercise toward another human being. Morales had called

him his dorado, his brave little golden one! In his eyes was a reverence that amounted to venerating love, wistful adoration.

CHAPTER XXX.

It was a strangely assorted trio. Over the lip of the great rock on the brink of the village of Minas de la Sierra extended the athletic shoulders and sharp, ashy face of Jacques Ferou, lying flat on his stomach. Below in the gorge at the foot of the corkscrew goat path, straining their necks backward and looking up, were the two Guardias Civiles, Pascual Montara and Sergeant Esteban Alvarado. All three were deeply absorbed in a distance-spanning conversation.

"That Americain lied!" The Frenchman was shouting down with heated earnestness. "Jacinto Quesada is himself in this village. He has been sick with the great illness and with a mad fever, too; but this morning his head is once more his own and he is repairing rapidly in strength. He is here, I tell you!"

"*Muy bueno!*" shouted back the old sergeant, with glad resolution. "We will come up for him immediately."

"But, no! There is the pestilence to fear, and there is also my revolver which barks nō, no!"

"What would you, then?" asked sullenly the apelike one, Montara.

Now, so thoroughly were the trio engrossed they did not hear the clatter of a horse's hoofs approaching up the gorge. When that clatter abruptly ceased, their unheeding ears received no sensation of change or difference.

They did not know that, five yards behind the policemen, concealed from above by the leafy branches of pines and alders and from the guardsmen ahead by a thick underwood of tall buckthorn and entangled genista, a horseman had halted and was observing them attentively.

He was quite a rememberable-looking man. His hair was white; his skin, from exposure to wind and weather, was a deep swarth, and his eyes were gray. Not many Spaniards have gray eyes. The eyes of Don Jaime de Torreblanca y Moncada were a clear, cold, agate gray. All in all, there was about his appearance, especially the long, aquiline nose, the stony eyes, and pointed white beard something which seemed to hearken back to the days of ruffs and ready swords—the days of the terrible Spanish infantry, the Armada, the Bigotes, the "Bearded Men," the Conquistadores.

He strained his eyes through the greeny plait above him. As he glimpsed the man sprawled on the great rock, a look of savage ferocity leaped into his eyes; his hand strayed back to the heavy horse pistol slung from the saddle.

But abruptly his reaching hand stopped. A few random words of the trio's conversation had impinged upon his ears.

Ferou was speaking. "What would I have you do? Oh, a very little, monseñores policemen—I would merely have you attend to the simple matter of my reward. I will do all the rest. For the reward, I will deliver Quesada up to you—I will deliver him walking upon his own two legs, so you will not have to touch his infectious clothes. It is good, what? And you will give me the reward of ten thousand pesetas, eh?"

"When you have done all that you say you will do," returned the old sergeant, sternly noncommittal, "then, and not before, shall you have earned the ten thousand pesetas. But you need have no fears for the money. When I shoot down this sacrilegious, swollen toad of a Quesada I shall make my report to headquarters at Getafe. Your name——"

"It is Jacques Ferou."

"I will remember, Señor Don Jacques Ferou. You shall be given all due credit. In two weeks' time from the day you deliver Jacinto Quesada to us, you can collect the reward by presenting yourself at Getafe. Most certainly Spain shall consider herself the best off in the bargain!"

"*Très bien!*" exclaimed the Frenchman, lapsing with emotion into his na-

tive tongue; then recovering: "It is good. I agree."

"When may we expect you with the heretical dog?" asked Montara.

"To-morrow at noon. When this great rock is hot with midday glare I will force him out here, my gun nuzzling his back. You policemen can shoot him from below."

Vigorously the old sergeant nodded his polished tricorn hat.

"Muy bueno!" he approved heartily. Then in adieu: "Go thou thy way with God!"

"Always at the feet of the Guardia Civil, who keep the peace of Spain," ended the man on the rock, after the fashion of Spanish courtesy. He withdrew from view thereupon, much as a turtle's head withdraws from view between its carapax and plastron shells.

Don Jaime crashed his rawboned old horse through the tall buckthorn and entangled genista.

"Alto a la Guardia Civil!" thundered Montara, springing back and jerking his carbine to his shoulder.

"Down, you apelike one!" commanded the aged sergeant. "Can't you see? It is the hidalgo doctor, Don Jaime de Torreblanca y Moncada!" And he swept his tricorn hat off his close-clipped white head.

Don Jaime reined in his horse to a quick stop. He disdained altogether the mortified Montara. He looked down at the bared white head, the knife-sharp white beard, and the lean and haughty face of the aged sergeant.

It was, then, as if he looked down upon a singular edition of himself. Don Jaime was a grandee by birth and breeding, and these things amount in Spain; but the old sergeant was no less grand with adamantine adhesion to principle, with eagle sternness and eagle haughtiness. They eyed each other with mutual recognition and respect. They were both of the same old Spanish imperial school, unforgiving of injury, inexorable to avenge.

Said the doctor:

"Peace be to you, *mi sargento.*"

"And to you peace, Don Jaime of my soul."

"But what is this scheme I hear you hatching?"

"It is a way we have of keeping the peace of Spain."

"Cannot you drag down the Wolf Cub without the aid of this bloodhound, Ferou?"

"We of the Guardia Civil are not *podencos* that can drag down the Wolf in the open. We have tried and each time failed."

"But the man Ferou is a human leech. Oh, I overheard your secret talk. I tell you, the Frenchman sucks life-blood for money!"

"It is thief catch thief, Don Jaime. The Wolf Cub, Quesada, is a cancer in the side of Spain. And Spain must be healed. We will loose the leech to suck this evil cancer from the side of Spain."

"You are hatching a snake's egg, *mi gran caballero.* The fruit of it shall stink in the nostrils of all brave Moors. You may take your oath on that, Don Esteban. I for one will be no party to it."

"God forbid, proud Torreblanca y Moncada, that we of the police should expect your aid. You have a higher call. Up in Minas de la Sierra there is wailing and much sickness—ah, so many men have slapped under and died, and so many more suffer in earthly purgatory!"

"God's will be done!" muttered Don Jaime.

The sergeant looked up at him, old eyes alive with strange fervor.

"They say of you, Don Jaime—and of me, too—that we have granite bowlders for hearts. But I know. Torreblanca y Moncada is very tender with the sick. He has hands of gold for calling one back to life and for closing softly the lids of the dying. Go thou in the companionship of the Sublime Christ and Mary, the All Compassionate!"

He stepped to one side. Don Jaime bade him a courteous adieu. Then, with all the hauteur of one riding an Arabian barb, sitting rigid in the saddle, the señor doctor loped his raw-

boned old nag up the winding goat path toward the barrio.

The policemen looked after him. Pascual Montara chewed fiercely the ends of his black mustache. He muttered:

"To-morrow at noon, when that great rock is hot with midday glare, this hombre Jacques Ferou will force the Sacrilegious One out upon the brink."

"Yes!" grimly agreed the old sergeant. "And we of the Guardia Civil will shoot him from below!"

CHAPTER XXXI.

A man wasted from disease sat, all this while, in the morning sunlight on a chair tilted back against one white-washed wall of the village chapel. His young, haggard face was screwed up, and he frowned through Moorish amber eyes toward where, some distance below, the Frenchman sprawled on the great rock at the brink of the village. He could not account for the unseemly posture and gesticulating hands and head of the Frenchman.

No word of Ferou's bartering reached him. He lacked even one clew to the strange and absorbing business going forward. He did not know that the waiting members of the Guardia Civil had advanced up the gorge, and now, out of sight down at the foot of the goat path, were making cold-blooded arrangements with the Frenchman for the delivery of his own living body.

Quesada lacked the strength which would urge him boldly to investigate. And he was too weak to concentrate his mind for any length of time on an apparently unsolvable problem. He shrugged aside his perplexity after a little, and sank back into that trick of strategic plotting so natural to the feeble in body but strong in spirit.

Twisting his head about, he looked through the doorway into the hospital. Within, in that fetid, moaning place where lay the sick Morales, there were no attending serranos; they had finished their rounds for the nonce. Below on the great rock, the engrossing and unaccountable business had every appearance of engaging Ferou for some time. The way was clear.

Quesada thumped down his tilted chair and walked on weakly, rickety legs to where, near the cork-oak tree in the center of the uneven street, a number of the villagers were brewing a puchero in a great iron pot.

"Come, *mis paisanos!*" he said in a voice surprisingly commanding for one so enervated from disease. "Ladle out to me a bowl of the stew."

"We have no orders to refuse you, Don Jacinto," answered one of the men obsequiously. "We only mind that Morales and the Americano should get none."

The bandolero snorted, but held his peace. He took the steaming earthen bowl proffered him; then, quaking like one palsied, exerting a deal of effort so as not to spill a drop of the precious haricot, he slowly retraced his steps toward the sick bay.

Here he glanced back over one shoulder. The serranos had returned to the business of stirring the puchero; they were not watching him. In he staggered, through the chapel doorway, to share the soup of the stew with the sick matador, Manuel Morales.

Minutes clicked by—a good ten minutes.

Within the cabaña where Carson convalesced, Felicidad was sitting in a chair at the American's bedside, her golden head nodding with drowsiness, when the sound of approaching feet on the earthen floor startled her into alertness. She saw the slim, gray-suited form of the Frenchman darkening the doorway. Her blue eyes widened and filled with apprehension and deep abhorrence. She shuddered involuntarily and shrank back in the chair.

But Ferou only bowed in mock respect.

"Señor Carson," he addressed the American, "my serranos are stewing out in the street a fine savory ragout of meat and lentils. Would you care for some of the soup? It would be very strength-giving."

Carson, his angular, hollow-cheeked

face white as the pillow pressed about it, made no answering movement of head or mouth. With eyes deep sunken and chilly blue as high mountain lakes, he looked up at the Frenchman unblinkingly.

"It will be very simple, monseñor," continued Ferou suavely, the hard lines deepening about his mouth in a grim smile. "All you have to do is to give me one of your five-thousand-peseta bills. Since yesterday the price of lentils and meat has soared on these mountains. But to you, who are so rich, that is of no importance. Only five thousand pesetas for a bowl of soup!"

All at once, like an unexpectedly loosed avalanche, the girl was on her feet, her blue eyes coldly ablaze like points of steel.

"You—you thief! You know he has left only one bill of five thousand pesetas! You have taken all the others! Oh, you rapacious hawk, you vile, vile vulture!" she cried out, shuddering with horrid remembrance and a sudden increase of detestation. "You would rob him of his all, everything! You would have him end his days in want and misery, just like the pobre padre of me!"

The Frenchman did not wither beneath her scorn. He shoved his sharp, blond head nearer her.

"You baggage! You treacherous snake! I'll show you what! When I get done my work in this barrio you'll go with me!"

She recoiled from him, sidled along the edge of the bed, and fled through the doorway. The Frenchman bounded after her.

The American attempted to lift his head from the pillow. He fell back like a load of lead. He worked his hands together and groaned aloud at his helplessness.

Came a sudden clatter of horse's hoofs out in the village; then the loud, shaking voice of a man:

"*Alto!* Halt, you nameless wench! You have soiled my honor, profaned my name, defiled my blood! You must die!"

It was not the voice of the Frenchman. It was the voice of Don Jaime de Torreblanca y Moncada. The terrible doctor had come!

Sitting stark upright upon his horse on the great rock at the brink of the village, his narrow face a cinder gray, Don Jaime was leveling his huge horse pistol at the backing form of the golden-haired girl.

"Ha!" exclaimed the Frenchman, his eyes lighting up like sunlight on ice, his grimacing face wreathing into an outrageous smile. "It is the haughty hidalgo come to wipe out his dishonor in the blood of *ma chérie* Felicidad."

With a laugh that was worse than brutal, that was pitiless and fiendish at such a time, he sprang back into the dark shelter of the doorway.

The frail slip of a girl was left, unaided and alone, to face the avenger.

CHAPTER XXXII.

Attracted by the vibrant, loud outcry of the terrible doctor, Jacinto Quesada put down the earthen bowl of stew, left the bedside of the sick Morales, and showed himself in the doorway of the hospital. His rickety legs tottered under him; the world reeled and swam before his eyes. He shaded his eyes with a pale and unsteady hand, and peered out into the cold sunlight.

He understood thereat. Down at the end of the uneven street, on the great rock at the brink of the village, bulked Calamity on horseback!

Quesada clutched at the jamb of the door, then out into the street he lurched. With every leaden stride he seemed to gather to his need what scattered rags and tatters of body strength he yet possessed. His legs straightened under him somewhat; his heavy, toppling shoulders came up.

On the sudden he slued completely round. Back the way he had come, back toward the sick bay, he pitched. "Give me strength!" he whispered. "Señor Don Dios, give me strength to do that which I now must do!"

On he sped back toward the hospital. And his feet pounded down and up, down and up without infirmity, without

numb and leaden shuffle. Gone were the staggering lurch, the sagging shoulders, the rolling, giddying head. Gone utterly all the various stigmata of disease-engendered weakness.

He was like a man who, suddenly overwhelmed by an ocean of water, casts off his movement-clogging garments and strikes out nimbly and heartily. He was altogether a new man, agile to move, galvanically energized. He was mighty with an unwonted strength.

Something must be done to thwart the granite will of the implacable Don Jaime. There was need for a man. There was no time to lose.

Quick as an ape, Quesada bounded through the hospital doorway. Down the runway between the platforms and the dying men he dashed. At the end of the smelly place, near the dingy altar, he halted. There, on the slant of the pine slabs, lay the disease-wasted form of little Gabriel, the mountain boy.

He bent over the pitifully sick child. Carefully, round and round the puny little body, he swathed the tossed and crumpled blanket. Then up in his two arms he lifted the blanketed boy and bore him back along the runway, out the hospital door.

"Ah, forgive me, niño of my soul!" he whispered. "I do not desire to be brutal. I desire only to save our good Felicidad from cruel death at her father's hands."

Gabriel snuggled his arm about the bandolero's neck. It was a mute but trustful answer. Quesada looked over one shoulder to call back through the doorway:

"Alfonso Robledo! You can walk. Lend a hand here, man! Follow me!"

Then down the long, uneven street he ran, the blanketed form of Gabriel borne before him in his tight but tender arms.

Everything was happening with breathless velocity, in a rush, in hardly an appreciable flicker of time.

The two principals in the onsweeping tragedy stood mute and motionless as bowlders of basalt, transfixed against the background of cold sky and glacial, desolate mountains—the one bulking high on horseback like some black-browed Destroying Angel, the other petrified below him in the street, a pale flower of a girl.

Don Jaime's hand tightened on the heavy butt. There was the sharp click of an old-fashioned pistol being cocked.

Harshly the sound cracked against the ears of Jacinto Quesada. His running body lurched forward in a desperate spurt. He stumbled against the startled nag. He held up in his arms to the doctor the blanketed form of Gabriel. And hoarsely he cried out:

"God forbid, Don Jaime! Wait—for the love of Our Lady of Pity, wait! You are a physician, and we are sick here. We are sick with the dread cholera, sick unto death. Your first duty is to us. You must help us. We need you urgently, woefully. Have pity on this boy, Don Jaime. Eleven years old, innocent as a babe, and yet wrinkled and wan and all crumpled in a heap like a disease-riddled old man. You are a priest of the body, a servant of mankind. Your first duty is to this mortally sick child, to all the mortally sick in this village. After that, if you must, you may kill!"

Don Jaime hesitated. The horse pistol shook violently in his hand. His agate eyes softened.

Then, all at once, an appalling change swept over Don Jaime. Deep in the crypts and catacombs of his brain, old, rankling memories stirred—old, painful, and dolorous memories got up and walked about and paraded back and forth in somber procession. He could have screamed, so tortured was he that moment.

Why should he, grievously outraged, show pity? Why should he turn aside from his scheme of vengeance to succor this dying child, these wretched people? Once before had he been robbed when he sought revenge for a mortal wrong. This jade's mother had run off with a gypsy picador. And though the hand of God had intervened in that elopement as a sublime instrument of vengeance, always had he regretted, through the dreary and bitter years, that his own

hand had not slain the mother of Felicidad.

Not another time would he suffer himself to be turned aside. He was like that awful Jehovah of the Jews! He would be revenged up to the hilt, paid back in full!

He tore his eyes from the piteous face of the boy Gabriel. He freshened his grip on the horse pistol, lifted it up. Slowly over the level of it he eyed the waiting girl.

Rose suddenly a shout from Quesada:

"Take the boy away, Alfonso Robledo! He is only a peasant's sniveling cub, a mountaineer's orphan brat. What cares the grandee of Spain for our little Gabriel? Take him away; the hidalgo Don Jaime will have none of him. Let him die!"

Robledo tottered forward. He took the blanketed child in his arms. Turning about, he went slowly back toward the hospital.

Quesada lifted his haggard face. With a contempt biting and goading in its virulence, he cried:

"Proceed, proud Torreblanca y Moncada! You have your high, knightly honor to defend, your name and blood to purge. Shoot!"

CHAPTER XXXIII.

As he was borne away in the arms of Robledo, the boy Gabriel took an abrupt turn for the worse—a cramping fit seized him in its formidable vise.

Violent spasms shook and threw him about like a tossed bean bag; his teeth clenched together with the paralysis of lockjaw. All in a trice, and ere Robledo could prevent, he writhed out of the bullfighter's grasp and fell, squirming, upon the ground, his fingers clawing at the yellow earth.

Blind to everything else, Quesada leaped toward him. But some one bulked before the bandolero, blocked his way, dashed, head bent, for the boy's side.

That some one held in his hand an instrument of gleaming silver, needle sharp at one end. He dropped to his knees beside the pitifully contorted Gabriel. He shoved the needle point into the boy's knotted arm above the wrist; gave it a quick jab. That some one was the hidalgo doctor, Don Jaime.

With swift, harsh hands he rubbed desperately the boy's arms, legs, and spine. On a sudden the little fellow kicked out, then lay rigid as one who stiffens in the petrifying clutch of death. All breath had fled his nostrils. He was in the asphyxial stage of the cholera.

Don Jaime, kneeling beside the collapsed form, strove to force air into the sunken, empty lungs. He lifted the reedlike arms above the boy's head, then back to his sides and up again.

He worked feverishly, he worked heroically. He reached for the black leather box he had thrown behind him. The broken straps on that box showed where it had been torn with sudden violence from the cantle of his saddle.

Quesada hastened to aid his groping hand. He picked up the box and held it open.

"Ammonia!" snapped the doctor. "Hold it to his nose!"

Quesada withdrew from the box a labeled blue bottle and held the pungent salts beneath the slightly fluttering nostrils.

"Build a fire! Heat water!" Don Jaime exploded, never ceasing his labors. "Quick! We must give the boy a hot bath to circulate the blood and save him from dying."

"We have a fire going night and day," returned Quesada. "We have only to remove the heated stones to the bathing pool."

"Where is it, this pool? Lead the way!"

The haughty doctor leaped afoot. He had no thought but for the urgent business at hand. He was a thrall to grim and importunate necessity. Even as his personal honor was to him more precious than life, so was his physician's honor a covenant with Jehovah, tyrannical and imperious to command him.

Quesada, flinging his rickety legs wide apart, went swaying and floun-

dering up the uneven street. Don Jaime followed after the bandolero, the little Gabriel in his own hidalgo arms.

The heat of the bath circulated the lad's blood. By slow degrees, he drew out of the chill collapse. Don Jaime wrapped him snug in a blanket. Once again, in his own hidalgo arms, the grandee doctor carried the boy back to the sick bay. At the upper end of the chapel, near the dingy altar, he laid the boy down.

What of the hot bath and resultant circulation of blood, the injection of morphia was now at last achieving its purpose. No sooner had the lad touched the pine slabs than he passed blissfully into the dwelling place of sleep.

Don Jaime looked down the two platforms of blanketed sick. Slowly and gloomily he shook his white head. He turned to Quesada, following doglike after him. His narrow face was a cinder gray.

"You have spoken aright, Wolf Cub," he said. "I came nigh to forgetting my duty. I am a priest of the body. My first duty is to the suffering and dying here. After that——"

He paused ominously. He looked about as if in search of something. Of a sudden his roving eyes became focused, riveted; they flashed like cressets of fire. Through the hospital doorway, out into the cold sunlight, he gazed.

He saw Felicidad down the village street. From the spell of terror and despair she was only then recovering. She glanced quickly about her. It was as if she had been away on a long journey and was astounded now to find everything as it had been before. She shuddered visibly, like one starting to life who had been dead for intolerable moments.

Lip quivering, but head held with a quiet, proud demeanor, she turned toward the cabaña wherein the American lay. As she entered the low doorway, Jacques Ferou, luring in the dark, sidled past her and out.

The Frenchman's whole malignant soul was bunched and crouched in his eyes. He threw after the golden form of the girl a look searing and blasting. It was as if, now that the vengeance of the hidalgo had failed him, he would kill the girl himself with that one glare from his slaty eyes.

Don Jaime's lips clicked together. Looking piercingly through the doorway, his agate eyes lunged like sharp knives at the venomous Frenchman and the white, trembling girl. In a voice chill as a glacial wind he spoke.

"After I have fulfilled here my duty to the sick," he said; "after that, by the Life, I slay!"

He would say no more. His lips tightened into a line thin and grim as if chiseled in stone.

He went down and up the line of platforms, dosing each sufferer in turn. To some he gave stimulants and astringents; to those in the more severe stages of the disease he doled out opiates.

He went from cabaña to choza outside, bringing brandy and nutritive food to the convalescing. He was leaving the choza of one villager when Quesada, dogging his steps, plucked him by the sleeve.

"You have seen, señor don hidalgo?" asked the bandolero. "The Frenchman Ferou is up here also."

"I know," nodded Don Jaime austerely. "He is wherever trouble is. He is a human leech!"

Quickly then, as they approached the next cabaña, he related, with characteristic frankness and bitter contempt, all he had seen and heard that morning in the gorge at the foot of the goat path.

Quesada showed little surprise. What could one expect from the vulture?

But what did surprise him no little was to find, upon putting his hand inside his sheepskin zamarra, that the small, mahogany-colored leather purse of the doctor was no longer there. *Carajo!* What had become of the purse and money of Don Jaime?

"It is that Frenchman!" he quickly surmised. "Don Jaime, he has stolen your money for a second time. I took the purse from him in that affair of the Seville-to-Madrid; I was holding

all those five-thousand-peseta bills for you, my señor doctor, but while I was down sick and knew nothing, Ferou must have gone through my pockets."

Don Jaime only grunted.

They entered the obscurity of the next cabaña. Within, Felicidad was sitting at the bedside of the convalescing American, explaining all that had occurred. At their appearance she abruptly quieted.

Pointing to the American upon the leaf-stuffed couch, Quesada explained in a few sketchy sentences just who Carson was and all he had done. Then the bandolero told how Ferou had charged Carson for the medicines so vital to his recovery and even for the bare necessities of life.

"The Frenchman is a plunderer, an extortioner, Don Jaime. He charged prices, exorbitant prices. He robbed this man of all his ready money. It was outrageous, detestable! There was no need of prices; the man was down on his back, helpless, well-nigh dead; there was no need of prices of any kind. But what could we do? In all the barrio Ferou was the only one armed."

The hidalgo doctor lifted Carson's heavy hand to feel his pulse. He said no word. He never once looked toward Felicidad, who had arisen to her feet and stepped to one side.

Yet Quesada knew. In this exposé of Ferou's execrable character, it was plain by comparison that the man had artfully cajoled Felicidad and then used her as a cat's-paw to pluck golden chestnuts out of the fire. The girl had been duped and ensnared by the creature's wiles. Even to the adamantine mind of the señor doctor, the blow and blot of his daughter's conduct must inevitably pall before the odiousness of Ferou's villainy.

But again Don Jaime said no word. He only prescribed a certain diet for Carson. Without so much as a softening glance toward the pale and fearful girl, he marched out of the cabaña, his boots clamping down in firm, measured strides.

They returned to the hospital only to find Gabriel suffering, once more in the vise grip of the plague. To ease the poor lad's griping pangs and still the heart-tearing cries for his dead mother, the señor doctor dropped a few beads of spiritus chloroformi down his retching throat.

"Do not despair, my precious little man," encouraged Morales in a husky voice from his place down the platform. "Have a high, fearless heart and the great Torreblanca will yet pull you through."

With deep gratitude at having won such inspiriting words from the matador whom he so venerated, the boy thanked Morales with black eyes that were smoldering great coals in their deep pits.

Don Jaime turned to Quesada. Morales had tossed off the upper end of his blanket and the hidalgo had suddenly noticed the gold-braided green jacket about the matador's torso. With that charactertistic frankness of his which so often sounded brutal and coarse, he queried:

"Who is this hombre in gold tinsel and green that has such faith in the ability and concoctions of Torreblanca y Moncada?"

"*Que, que!*" exclaimed the bandolero, distinctly surprised. "What, what! Does not the señor doctor know?"

But the doctor did not even remember having seen the man in the excitement of his first rounds.

"That is Morales, the bravest espada in all the Spains!"

"Morales! Manuel Morales, that great murderer of bulls, that supremely dexterous one with the sword? And here!"

Don Jaime went at once to the side of the wanly smiling matador.

"My Manuel Morales," he exclaimed, "all Spain mourns for its lost pastime while you lie helpless here. We must quickly get you well. But no poor few remedies of mine will work the miracle half so speedily as that own brave golden Moorish heart of you!"

Quesada interposed quietly: "Jacques Ferou robbed our Manuel, too. And you know the great Morales, Don Jaime! He would rather starve than

play the mouse to this hawk. Yet he had to pay! Ah, Torreblanca y Moncada," he added, with rising vehemence, "this hombre Ferou is a human blood-sucker, as you say. He is a greedy, foul buzzard!"

Don Jaime snapped erect. A portentous gleam was in his stony eyes.

"He robbed Manuel Morales, too!" he exclaimed. "That's enough; not another word! We will give the creature short shrift. *Carajo!* I have a plan."

Quesada and Morales looked about to see that no henchman of Ferou had chanced to overhear. The doctor understood their wary glances. He lowered his voice.

"All the short jump up the goat path," he said in even tones, "ever since this morning when I heard the French ringworm's conversation in the gorge, I have been formulating this plan. And it is a good plan; it will attain many ends at the one time. It will blight the treacherous plot of Ferou, save you from the Guardia Civil, Quesada, and in the same breath win back for me my stolen money. Ah, it is almost divine in its justice!"

Quesada gasped.

"You mean to kill the French leech? But, my señor doctor, in the whole pueblo Jacques Ferou is the only man armed. God forbid, yet I fear he will slay you first."

"I have a horse pistol," said the physician, with grave significance. "Yet I do not mean to sully these hidalgo hands of mine by killing him myself. *Seguramente,* no! He shall die, but from no bullet of mine!"

He shook his white head slowly, as if fixing something definite in his mind.

"To-morrow noon," he added imperiously. "To-morrow noon he shall die."

It was the hour Ferou himself had bargained with the Guardias Civiles for the killing of Quesada.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

Don Jaime worked that day. That night he slaved. About eventide Alfonso Robledo, the banderillero who so bravely had seconded Quesada that morning, suffered all at once a severe relapse. Perhaps it came from the overheating excitement of that crucial time upon the rock; perhaps the abrupt exposure in that intrepid try to avert Felicidad's cruel and barbarous fate had brought it on. At any rate and all on a sudden, his weakened body began writhing in an agony of cramps.

There was nothing else for it. The hidalgo doctor gave the bullfighter a hypodermic injection. The paroxysms lessened, altogether ceased. The eyelids of the banderillero rolled down heavily, and he slumped into a deep, stertorous sleep.

That reawakened in Don Jaime the Fear. He made once more a round of the hospital. He went from choza to cabaña outside, seeking new cases. Where a man could not sleep or a woman persisted in moaning he administered narcotics.

When morning dawned through wisps of rain, the long night of taxing and intolerable work showed plainly in the doctor. His narrow face looked thin and long as a ferule; the cheek bones were high, the aquiline nose never more imperious. What of all the coffee he had drunk like a good Moor, to accelerate the action of his brain and steady the movement of his hand, his skin seemed tinged to a deeper swarth.

Quesada awoke early and with a renewed strength. He brewed for the grandee another pot of fresh, aromatic coffee.

Don Jaime had gone down behind the cabañas to release his hobbled old skate of a horse and lead him to water. When he returned, his huge horse pistol was strapped to his waist.

He quaffed two cups of the coffee in quick succession. He stained, with marked and aloof indifference, his usually immaculate white point of a beard. Then, without a word, with feruled face determined and grim, he returned to the hospital to his urgent ministry.

It was coming noon. Quesada was sunning himself before the hospital, according to his daily wont, when Ferou appeared around one mud wall with the suddenness of a jack-in-the-box.

In his right hand the Frenchman showed a revolver. He pointed the revolver at Quesada. With a politeness that seemed more deadly than the gleam of the gun, he said:

"You will arise, Señor Don Jacinto: You will do all that which I tell you to do. *Aupa!*"

The chair, tilted against the mud wall, banged down upon its forelegs. Quesada got to his feet.

"March forward past me. Now stop. It is good, my brave bandolero. Now, with me behind you, march toward that great rock on the brink of the pueblo!"

Everything was happening as the doctor had foretold. The tall Frenchman nudged Quesada with the muzzle of the revolver in the small of his back. They started on. And then, all at once, from the gloom of the chapel behind them, came the galvanic voice of the hidalgo:

"*Alto!* Drop that gun, you leech!"

Quesada did not dare turn round. But Ferou, his blond lids fluttering with stupendous surprise, gave a quick glance back over his shoulder. He saw the hidalgo doctor standing in the low doorway, the huge horse pistol leveled in one harsh fist, his eyes gleaming like quartz in the sun.

The Frenchman gave a precipitant leap to one side. He was quick as an ape. He slued round, his revolver lifted.

An explosion burst from the pistol of the doctor. Ferou's revolver dropped to the mud. He clutched his right wrist. It was trickling blood from where a bullet had creased the flesh like a branding wire.

"Quesada!" cracked the thin lips of Don Jaime. "Pick up that revolver. You, Ferou, march in here!" He menaced the Frenchman with that huge gun which was loaded and ready for more quick work.

Quesada turned and lifted the revolver from the mud. He shook off the clinging silt and pointed it at Ferou. His ashy face working like a monkey's with abrupt and nervous apprehension, the Frenchman marched into the hospital.

Once inside, in the runway between the blanketed figures of plague sufferers, Don Jaime snapped out a terse and inexplicable command. Ferou thought himself the only one that understood its purpose. A shuddering fit seized him. He knew that, in the receptacles beneath his armpits, were concealed the small, mahogany-colored leather purse he had taken from Quesada and the peseta bills he had pitilessly mulcted out of Carson and Morales. He thought that the doctor was searching for them.

"Undress!" repeated the hidalgo.

The Frenchman's slate-colored eyes fluttered about. He saw Quesada threatening him with his own revolver. There was no help for it. With fingers suddenly thick and clumsy with nervousness, he began to unbutton his gray tweeds.

"And you, too, Quesada!" ended the doctor. "Give the Frenchman's revolver into the keeping of Morales, and undress, too!"

Quesada did not at all understand. He saw Morales sitting up, as if prepared to lend aid, a pillow bolstering his back. He passed the Frenchman's revolver into the hands of the matador. Then bewildered, but blindly obedient, he began to doff his alpagartas, rough corduroys, and sheepskin zamarra.

The Frenchman stood forth in his nether garments, a tall, quaking, and almost ludicrous figure. He watched Quesada, a nameless fear sharpening his slate-colored eyes.

"Hand over the money, Señor Ferou," said Don Jaime, with frosty politeness; then explosively: "All of it! Pronto!"

The eyes of the Frenchman flashed like the eyes of a ferocious animal about to be robbed of its meat. But quickly he got himself in hand; the baleful gleam dulled. He shot a questioning glance toward the disrobing bandolero. Perhaps this thing he sensed and dreaded was only a grisly figment of his imagination. Perhaps, after all, the doctor only wanted the money. It were wise to obey.

With an astonishing readiness, he

produced, from the receptacles cunningly prepared beneath his armpits, the purse of the doctor and the bills belonging to Morales and Carson.

Don Jaime did not wait to open the purse and inspect its contents. He shoved the wallet into his pocket. He cast the roll of loose bills upon the platform beside Morales.

"They belong to you and the American. You can take what is due you and return the others to Señor Carson. But hola! Let the division go till later."

He kicked the gray tweeds of Ferou over the hard-tamped earth floor toward Quesada.

"Put them on!" he commanded bluntly.

The bandolero nodded, though as yet he did not comprehend the whyfore of it all. With dispatch, he commenced to garb himself in the tweeds of the Frenchman, which, despite the hard usage of the last few weeks, still showed the ineradicable signs of good material.

"You, Ferou!" the doctor bit out. "You don the clothes of Quesada!"

The growing, nameless fear in Ferou's brain bourgeoned, at that command, into noisome bloom. His jaw slacked and began an incontrollable quivering. His eyes glittered in a pasty, sweating face.

"Mais non, mais non!" he cried, lapsing in his extremity into his native tongue. "Not that, monsieur! You cannot demand that! The clothes, they are dirty, foul!"

It was only the subterfuge of a time of dire peril. His eyes darted wildly about. They sought Morales. Morales had been very tender with the sick. Perhaps——

But Morales was leveling his own revolver at him with a hand only a trifle less steady than that of the doctor. His face, parchment dry and sunken of flesh from the ravages of disease, was forbidding with grim determination.

"Put them on!" persisted Don Jaime.

Solemnly, then, and very laboriously, with jaw still quivering and shaking hands, Ferou dressed in the sheepskin zamarra, rough corduroys, and alpagartas of the bandolero. Don Jaime himself clapped upon Ferou's blond head the high-pointed hat of Quesada.

"Now march!" he exploded. "March toward that great rock on the brink of the village!"

All the Frenchman's dismal fears became quick and instant. He was sure now. The nostrils of his predatory nose twitching and working, his whole pasty face working and grimacing with unrestrainable fear, like a horrible mask of rubber, he groveled on his knees and held out his two arms to the doctor in abject supplication.

"Mercy, Don Jaime! *Mon Dieu,* you would not have me shot like a dog!"

"March!" the hidalgo insisted. His voice rang with metallic timbre; his gray eyes flashed as if they were bits of flint upon which steel had struck. He shoved the muzzle of his pistol against the Frenchman's chest.

Ferou stumbled to his feet and backed out the doorway. The doctor followed him step by step. Quesada, a great light coruscating in his brain, recovered the revolver from the bedridden Morales and bounded out in the wake of the two.

Thus, the Frenchman retreating before the importunate muzzle of the señor doctor's pistol, Quesada following after, they went down the muddy street toward that great rock which glared, in the noontide sunlight, on the brink of the village.

Once the Frenchman paused. Imploringly he lifted his still bleeding right hand.

"Monseñor!" he cried. "Pity—pity! For the love of——"

Came the sharp click of a pistol being cocked. Then, like a sharper echo of it, the command of the doctor:

"March!"

A mad notion to turn and run for it seized Ferou. But no! They would shoot him down ere he could take ten steps. They were too close.

The police, on the other hand, would be far below in the gorge. Maybe their carbines would miss. There was always hope.

He backed out upon the hot, glaring rock.

Came a yell from the hidalgo, sounding shrill and bodiless in the thin air, and carrying back and far away in ringing echoes:

"*Hola, mis Guardias Civiles!* Jacinto Quesada—he is here!"

An answering shout spiraled up from the deeps of the gorge. Then, on the heels of it, one long, slithering shaft of sound. The crang of a carbine!

Ferou threw up his arms, and, his face black with congested blood, half spilled forward as if he had been struck by a blow between the shoulders. He swayed back and forth on the balls of his feet, caught himself, hung still for intolerable moments. Then, as is usually the case with a man killed by a bullet, he tottered backward, slipped on the crumbling lip of the rock, and went over, clutching with white, clawing hands at the brink, twisting, turning, and shrieking—shrieking for minutes afterward, shrieking hideously.

CHAPTER XXXV.

Doctor Torreblanca y Moncada strategically overcame the trouble engendered by cremation. He had the serranos burn whole trees, and from the ashes, by percolation through water, produce a leaching of lye. Then, a goodly distance from the water supply coursing through the old Moorish flume, on the lip of the gorge where a void had been left by the dismantling of the two infected cabañas, he had the men of the pueblo dig a deep pit. Therein he purposed burying the dead in sheets of the burning alkali.

On the morning following that on which poetic justice had come to Ferou, he approached Quesada, who was superintending the work of digging the pit. Save for a certain wolfish gauntness, the bandolero was almost himself.

"Jacinto," he said, "do you feel hardy enough, my haggard one, to journey down these hills to my casa near Granada?"

The Moorish oblong eyes of the bandolero showed surprise and a shade of fear.

"I am easily strong enough by now, Don Jaime. But——"

"Is it the police you fear? They rode away immediately after the killing of Ferou."

Quesada shook his head.

"I am frank with you, my hidalgo doctor. Should I absent myself from the barrio, I would fear for Felicidad of the gold hair and heart of fire!"

With his cold gray eyes, the grandee looked at Quesada and through and through him. As if mouthing some religious dogma, he returned haughtily:

"No man can halt a Torreblanca y Moncada once he says, I will! It is thus with my vengeance. The ancient name of my house, the blood of my veins, must be cleared of all tainture! Felicidad must die!"

"God preserve you, Don Jaime! You are still the soul of granite, unforgiving and unsparing even though your stolen money is all returned to you now and your daughter's disgrace altogether wiped out by the death of Ferou."

The hidalgo laughed harshly. He refused in his lordly pride to argue. Cleverly he countered:

"And you, Jacintito; you are still the Wolf Cub, ever leaping to the jade's defense as you did when you were a bantling! But it is not because I wish to be rid of you that I ask you to journey," he went on. "You have reminded me that I am a priest of the body. It is of my profession I speak. I need medicines. The supply is nearly exhausted."

"But I carted up such a lot, fully four canvas packs!"

"I know. But *mi gran espada Manuel* and the Señor Carson, both well meaning, but untutored, made extravagant inroads on the treasures you brought. And hearing from old Tio Pedro that you had stocked yourself so well, I rode extra light to make speed."

"Yet things are going better now," objected Quesada. "There are fewer deaths and more recoveries."

"Thank God for that! But one can never tell. The present even tone of the weather may suddenly change and cause the scourge to redouble its havoc. I must not run short."

"That is true," nodded Quesada. Yet it was evident that he still hesitated to go for fear of leaving Felicidad unassisted and helpless before the cold, implacable wrath of her father.

Said Don Jaime, commencing to offer inducements, plainly weakening before the obstinacy of the bandolero:

"If you will go, Jacinto, you may take my horse. No other has ridden him in over ten years. He will carry you well, though only at a snail's pace."

Quesada realized what that offer meant.

"I will take the horse," he agreed. "That horse of yours shall be as a bond given in hand to me, Don Jaime, that you will remain here and stay your vengeance until I return."

"My vengeance? Well, like the Judgment Day, that can wait."

"Is it a promise?"

"It is a promise."

Garbed in the once-elegant clothes of the dead Frenchman, even to his slouch traveling hat, Quesada sat deep in the doctor's saddle and carefully guided the old, rawboned nag down the loops of the goat path.

He kept a wary eye out for the policemen. The Guardias Civiles might chance to be lingering on in the gorge. But the trampled space about the alder tree was wholly deserted; the ashes from the breakfast fire of the day before were being rapidly dissipated by the drafty wind.

He pushed on down. Crackling over the fallen leaves in the gorges, clattering along the stony hogbacks and ridges, he came, in the waning afternoon, to the bowlder-strewn pocket of the Christ of the Pass. And suddenly from below, louder than the ring of his horse's hoofs, there echoed up to him a sharp sound like the report of a pistol.

Come of long outlawry, Quesada was circumspectly cautious. The report might have exploded near at hand; the chances were that, with the odd carrying knack of sounds high on mountains, it had echoed, clear and distinct, from far away. But he would take no chances.

The ragged, prickly gorse and huge bowlders, which bestrewed the pass about the foot of the cross, furnished unusual hiding places. He dismounted hastily, tied his horse behind a sumac bush, and, behind a tall bowlder, hid himself.

Twilight deepened quickly into full dark night. Save for the wind sweeping through the pass with little shrill noises, nothing stirred or sounded in the long defile.

After a little, Quesada conquered his vague apprehensions sufficiently to sup upon the cold sausages, dry bread, and bota of wine which he had had the forethought to sling to the cantle of his saddle. Then it was on again, through the dark night and the savage, uncouth pass, in haste to accomplish his errand for the doctor.

A piece of moon came up and shot long pale slithers of light down the rock walls. Ahead, in the sudden wan light, he made out the bent and bundled figure of an old, shawl-wrapped peasant woman. She was coming toward him up the gorge. She seemed making little, catching sounds, as if softly weeping.

"Adios, mother," he greeted, as he rode past.

She gave him neither answer nor notice. Her few wisps of white hair streaming in disarray from under her flat, worsted cap, she went by, sobbing quietly, as if utterly oblivious of his presence.

Quesada looked after her bent form, and shook his head commiseratingly.

"Ah, there has been some little domestic trouble in her cabaña this night!" he remarked to himself. "And she is going on, the poor creature, to seek strength and consolation from the lonely Christ of the Pass. It is the way they have in these desolate hills. Hola! What's the matter, my bony Pegasus?"

The nag beneath him, suddenly shy-

ing, had come to a dead stop, and now was shivering in every limb. They had just rounded the bend which portaled the pass. Leaping afoot in the stirrups, Quesada gazed over the lifted, frightened head of the horse. Ahead in the open road and shapeless in the vague moonlight, he saw something lying still and black.

Ever wary of ambush, resultant from long outlawry, he sprang out of the saddle, and, getting the horse by the bridle, shoved him violently back into the shadow of the spur. For an intolerable fraction of time he peered round the bend and watched.

The black, shapeless huddle in the road never moved. Was it some animal, sleeping or dead? He crept forward cautiously, Ferou's old revolver in hand. He put out his fingers toward the vague outline of it. He touched soft cloth, he touched a yielding mass. It was the body of a man!

His hand jerked back in a superstitious fear. The man did not move; he was lying on his face. Quesada put out his hand again and touched the still thing with a braver and more prying touch. All at once he turned it over.

Stark in the moonlight showed a short, knife-sharp white beard, a fine-chiseled, imperious nose, and a swarthy face, lean and haughty as a griffon vulture's. The revolver fell from his palsied hand.

"Sangre de Cristo!" his dry lips fluttered. "It is Don Jaime himself!"

But, no! Don Jaime could not be here. Had he not left the hidalgo doctor that very morning in the village above in the sierras? Who was the man? Somehow his features seemed familiar. Was it only because of that striking resemblance to Don Jaime?

He noticed, all at once, that there was visible on the body, under the powdering of dust from the road, a kind of red-edged blue jacket. On one sleeve was a single red chevron, and to one side, almost hidden in the dust, the shimmer of a patent-leather hat. With a stifled gasp, recognition leaped full-fledged into his brain. The man was Señor Don Esteban Alvarado, the aged sergeant of the Guardia Civil!

No more than a few weeks before Quesada had seen the sergeant in the gorge below Minas de la Sierra, dominant with life and lording it over the apelike policeman, Montara. To find the sergeant now only a still, black huddle in the road was a distinct shock to the bandolero. He knew that just the day before either the sergeant or Montara had shot Ferou.

Almost incredulous, Quesada felt the body for signs of life. But the sergeant was dead.

"It was that shot I heard," the bandolero surmised. "But who killed him? And why?"

On the sudden he remembered the old woman who had passed him in the road, crying softly to herself. He bounded back around the bend. But in the intervening jiffy of time the shadows of the defile had swallowed her from sight.

"She is the sergeant's poor old wife," he said to himself. "She must have come upon him, slain like a dog in the road. I knew Don Esteban, his wife, and son lived in these hills. Now the poor old woman is gone to pray before the Christ of the Pass for the eternal welfare of his departed soul. May it rest in peace!"

He came back to the black huddle, still profoundly puzzled as to whom had done the killing. He turned the body over into that posture in which he had found it. He retrieved his fallen revolver.

He was about to mount and ride on, when abruptly he halted, one foot in the stirrup. An enlightening but bitter thought had suddenly shocked his brain.

For a long time now crimes had been committed which he never had a hand in, but which in every case had been laid at his door. Automobiles had been held up, toreros' chapels invaded, men robbed and even killed by a young man described as Jacinto Quesada when, all the time, Quesada himself had been quarantined in Minas de la Sierra.

There was a sinister purpose, a foul

plan underlying the criminal's habit of masquerading and posing as Jacinto Quesada. Behind the personality of Quesada, he was cloaking his own identity and committing crimes without a suspicion pointing toward himself. What could be more probable than that this same criminal had killed the old policeman?

"It was that masquerader!" the bandolero exclaimed to the night.

All at once, from down the road, his ears were assailed by a startling sound —the hoofbeats of approaching horses.

Dragging his horse by the bridle after him, he concealed both nag and himself completely in the deep, shadowy elbow of the spur.

Came to him then, on the vagrant breaths of the night wind, the sound of voices. They were men's voices, loud above the steady hoof falls of the horses, as if raised in some wordy contention:

"But I tell you, Pascual Montara, the Wolf Cub is not dead!"

"And I tell you, mi capitan, Quesada *is* dead! Right now, were you not my superior officer, I should be on my way down to Getafe to file Don Esteban's report."

"You say the sargento, Don Esteban, has returned to his home in these mountains?"

"Yes. His work is accomplished. After killing the Wolf Cub, Quesada, is he not entitled to a good rest? Test the truth of my statement, el capitan; ask his son, young Miguel there, if his father does not live in these hills."

"It is most certainly true, mi Capitan Guevara," answered a new voice. "I, myself was born and raised in a portilla of the Picacho de la Veleta."

"Za, this is the wild-goose chase!" exclaimed the raucous voice of Montara. "This is the wild-goose chase, I tell you—this chase after a man already dead. Down in Getafe by now, ten thousand pesetas should be awaiting the Frenchman as a reward for having brought about the killing of Jacinto Quesada."

"And that was when, you say?"

"I have told you twenty times. It was but yesterday."

"Then answer me this, apelike one! I have asked it of you a hundred times before. How is it that the diligence from Granada to Montefrio was held up only last night and the bandolero announced that he was Jacinto Quesada himself? He fled into these hills, and we hot after him."

The men of the Guardia Civil usually ride in pairs, but this was a troop of the Guardia Civil, an extraordinary troop. Peering around the spur, Quesada made out eleven uniformed men riding smartly toward him through the dim moonlight.

One was, of course, that apelike policeman, Pascual Montara, whom Quesada last had seen in the gorge below Minas de la Sierra with Don Esteban. It appeared, from the tenor of the conversation, that Montara had been on his way down to headquarters to file the sergeant's report of Quesada's death when he had been met on the road by the troop and turned back by the order of the captain.

Quesada well knew this captain as one Luis Guevara. Eight others he recognized as gendarmes with whom he had had an occasional brush. The eleventh was the dead man's son, Miguel Alvarado, youthful, tall, smoothly brown of face, and as subtle and gallant looking in the vague moonlight as a sword of Toledo.

Now, such a large body of the Guardia Civil could be seldom seen on the main-traveled highroads, let alone in the gorge-pierced sierras of the Nevada. Something untoward was afoot. But it was not the mysterious murder of the old sergeant which had called them together. Not one of the approaching policemen had discovered as yet, close to the entrance of the pass, that huddle lying still and black in the road. They did not know Don Esteban was dead.

They were riding after Jacinto Quesada, whom Montara believed he had killed, for a crime that Jacinto Quesada himself was positive he never had committed!

CHAPTER XXXVI.

The party of policemen discovered, all at once, the body in the road. Hastily, from their huddling, quivering horses, they dismounted. They turned the body over. With amazement and deep consternation, they saw that it was one of themselves, the haughty sergeant of police, Señor Don Esteban Alvarado!

Miguel, the dead man's son, stood over his father's body.

"It is that Jacinto Quesada!" he said, terribly moved. "He has come upon my poor old father alone in the road, and he has killed him without ruth."

"This proves that Montara is mistaken," said Luis Guevara; "the Wolf Cub is still alive. As you say, mi pobre Miguel, without ruth he has killed your father, an old, honored, and brave member of the police.

"*Carajo!* Only once before, in the case of that traveling Englishman, has Quesada killed a man. His conscience will be more disturbed by this atrocity than by his usual crimes. Surely now, after this vile deed of blood, will he seek out a priest and beg forgiveness of God.

"Pronto, *mis camaradas!* Don Esteban has not been long dead. If we ride to the nearest church, we may be in time to capture Quesada while he makes his confession."

"But there are few men of the cloth in these hills, and fewer churches," objected Miguel Alvarado. "I know; I was born in the portilla above this pass. My old mother still lives there."

"You do not think that Quesada is a heretic, despite his sacrilegious abuse of the bullfighters' chapel of Seville."

Miguel shook his head.

"No. I think that he will go straightway to the shrine of the Christ of the Pass. It is but a little way on, in a lonely pocket of this gorge. For miles around serranos burdened by sins kneel before the shrine and pray and beg absolution or ease of mind."

"*Muy bueno!*" said the captain. "We will go at once to this shrine and wait there in ambush for Jacinto Quesada to come and confess his sin. We will listen, and then we will kill him."

There was a creaking of leather as the men leaped into the saddles. Quesada shrank back into the dark elbow of the jutting bend. He pressed the nervous horse in against the rock wall. To still any outcry he vised his hand over the trembling nostrils of the animal. He waited, hardly daring to breathe.

The gendarmes, following the lead of the captain, filed into the pass, and, looking straight ahead, unsuspecting the dark, went by him almost within arm's length.

He waited until they had all gone on and the shadows of the pass had engulfed them. Then he did not dodge around the bend and pursue the decurrent way he had been going. He was seized with an unreasoning and irresistible impulse to follow the troop and witness whatever might be the outcome of their expedition to the shrine. Loosening, but not removing, his hand from the horse's nostrils, he stalked a goodly distance behind the party like a quiet, long-legged shadow.

As they neared the bowlder-hedged and gorse-whelmed pocket which sheltered the shrine, a whisper sibilated through the ranks of the policemen. Some one was kneeling before the moon-wan cross!

Noiselessly the gendarmes halted, dismounted, quickly hobbled their horses with the long reins, and crept stealthily forward between the bowlders and the ragged, prickly shrubbery. Quesada followed, a safe distance behind.

But it was only the old, white-haired wife of Don Esteban who knelt before the pale figure of the Christ, with its crown of black horsehair and red-painted wounds. As he crept nearer, behind the police and between the weeds and rocks, Quesada heard her voice. In quavering tones, she was speaking aloud. She was confessing that she was the murderer of her husband, Sergeant Esteban Alvarado!

Thinking herself alone before the moon-white effigy of the crucified Savior, in an anguish of soul she was

pouring out the whole pitiful story. For some time she had been tortured by a harrowing secret. Her son, the darling of her life, although a member of the Guardia Civil like his father, was also a base poseur and highwayman.

It was his infamous plan to doff the policeman's uniform and steal out at night dressed to resemble the bandolero, Jacinto Quesada. Then, his crimes consummated, he would put the uniform on again. That honored uniform and the fact that all his crimes were laid, successfully and invariably, at the door of Jacinto Quesada, kept suspicion from resting upon him.

It had smote her with desolation to discover that her son was a stealthy outlaw. Since that long-ago time when her ancestors had been reclaimed from brigandage and become Miquelets, no one in her family ever again had turned criminal. They had all been policemen.

Her husband, the haughty Don Esteban, was fiercely proud of the record of his family of policemen. It had harassed her poor old soul, filled her with overwhelming terror lest Don Esteban should discover the perfidy of his only son. Pride of house and long years as an officer of the Guardia Civil had made him unforgiving of crime, unsparing and inexorable to mete out justice even to his own kith and kin.

That afternoon, after a lengthy absence on police duty, Don Esteban had come home for an interval of rest. He had just parted from Pascual Montara, he said, who was to take his report down to Getafe. Between them, the morning prior, they had killed the Wolf of the Sierras, Jacinto Quesada!

The old mother, aghast lest by mistake he had killed his own son masquerading as Quesada, had thereupon, in distracted fear and wild grief, blurted out the whole truth.

The righteous indignation and awful rage of the old sergeant knew no bounds. Solemnly he swore that he would have his son's life for this outrageous conduct. She had pleaded with him, wept and prayed. But he had cast her from him and gone out into the twilight to hound down the son.

She had followed him down the mountainside, insane with fear for the life of her only child. He had discovered her and commanded her to go back. But she crept after him, stifling her sobs.

As he reached the road, and the slice of moon came out in the sky, she saw him take out a revolver and examine it to see that it was loaded and ready for use. She heard, on top of this, the clatter of an approaching horse. It was Quesada, mounted on the doctor's nag. But she did not know. She thought it was her son, her pobre Miguelito, returning home to pay her a visit between duties.

Carried beyond herself by the sudden crystallizing of all her fears, she had dashed out upon her husband and struggled with him to wrest the revolver from his hands. The eagle-stern sergeant had forgot himself then. He went mad with a barbarous fury. He rained blows upon her old, tear-stained face. Even did he try to choke her.

But her terror lent her strength superhuman. She clung to him, pulled and wrenched at the revolver. She was like some tigress fighting for her young.

All at once there was a sharp, hideous explosion. Don Esteban slumped in her arms. He clutched his chest, made a gurgling sound in his throat, slipped to the ground, rolled over, and was dead.

Now in a terrible turmoil of soul, she cast her gnarled, work-worn hands out to that compassionating Figure on the Cross.

"What shall I do? What shall I do?" she cried. "I have suffered in the last few hours all the torments of the damned, like a soul lost a thousand years in purgatory! Oh, what shall I do?"

Her voice fainted away. She got to her feet at last. Muttering feverish prayers, weeping like a soft rain, swaying and stumbling, she made up the path.

The policemen shivered out of their state of suspended animation. They recovered their wits; their dead eyes glinted. Savagely they turned to look at the man among them who had caused the whole pitiful tragedy—the son of the dead sergeant and the poor old heartbroken mother, the masquerader and the traitor, Miguel Alvarado.

He was gone.

Seeking him, they dashed wildly among the bowlders and bushes. They beat the ragged gorse with their carbines. They called loudly one to another. Suddenly, into the wan moonlight, stepped forth Jacinto Quesada.

"You seek Miguel Alvarado?" he asked.

"Yes—yes!"

"Then come with me."

They did not recognize Quesada. Not only because of the pallor of the moonlight, but more because he was garbed in the gray tweeds and foreign slouch hat of the Frenchman. He led them down the path to where they had hobbled their horses.

Here, supine in the weeds and bound hand and foot, lay the policeman, young Miguel. In the midst of his mother's pitiful confession he had crept back down the road, and, just about to mount his horse and ride away, had been captured by Quesada.

"Oh, Paquita, maiden of my soul!" he was wailing. "I am undone—undone! Your love has robbed me of my father and broken the poor old heart of the mammacita of me."

Quesada started visibly.

"What is that!" he exclaimed. "You speak of Paquita, daughter of Pepe Flammenca?"

"I speak and dream of her always. I love her—yes! And she told me she adored Jacinto Quesada because he was a bandolero; she told me she despised my uniform. I thought to emulate Quesada and thus win her love. But I have only caused the death of my old father and brought sorrow and heartbreak to my poor old mother in her last years. Ah, Señor Don Jesu, pity me!"

But there was that in the glint of the eyes of the clustered policemen which spelled death for Miguel Alvarado. He was a traitor to all the ethics of the Guardia Civil. He had dishonored and defiled the uniform they wore. He was a wolf in sheep's clothing. More, he was a shepherd dog turned poacher, depredator, wolf!

"He must die!" said the captain.

"*Seguramente,* yes! And we all must bind ourselves to keep the matter secret."

The captain nodded grimly. "This is an affair of honor between us of the Guardia Civil." He turned sharply upon Quesada.

"Hombre, you are the only outsider. Will you swear to tell no one, to lock all you have heard this night in your own breast?"

Quesada evaded taking the oath of secrecy. Why should he, the Wolf of the Sierras, make covenant with the podencos of the Guardia Civil? Besides, a higher emotion stirred him. In his unknowable Spanish soul he was moved to pity for Miguel Alvarado.

"Mi capitan," he said, "if you kill this man, you will do a wrong. He is young; he has youth and true penitence to help him reform. It is a terrible lesson he has received this night. He is the dupe of a woman, a wench of the Gitano——"

"A plague on the yellow witch!" muttered Montara.

"Señores," Quesada appealed to them, "you cannot right what is now an irreparable wrong, you cannot bring Don Esteban back to life. Would you rob the poor old mother, then, of her only paltry happiness and hope? Heed me, you of the Guardia Civil! This man has outraged Jacinto Quesada more than he has you. Yet I know that if Jacinto Quesada were to have this Alvarado's fate in his hands tonight he would let him go."

He had done what he could. He moved off to where he had tied his horse to a bush. The policemen conversed together in low tones. As he mounted, Captain Guevara exclaimed:

"But who are you that you tell us all this?"

He kicked his nag and started away. Through the moon-filtering dark he flung back:

"Jacinto Quesada!"

Ere they could recover from their stupefaction, he was only a clattering noise in the night.

He was circling presently by the dead body of the old sergeant in the road. Of a sudden a volley of rifle reports detonated between the rock walls behind him.

"That will be Miguel Alvarado," he said gloomily. He shook his head. "Ah, Paquita!" he exclaimed to the night. "You have exacted a fearful payment for my rash scorn of you; you have killed two men this night and broken the heart of a poor old woman!"

He rode thoughtfully on.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

Laden with medicinal supplies, Quesada returned to Minas de la Sierra. He found the American walking about on his own two legs, and able, at a pinch, to lend a hand to the doctor. Morales, attenuated, but rapidly repairing in strength, occupied the bandolero's old chair tilted against one mud wall of the sick bay. For long hours the matador thus sat in the crisp sunlight and held astraddle on his knees the slowly recovering, oddly wrinkled little Gabriel. Like some sweet Sister of Mercy, Felicidad moved solicitously among the convalescing serranos, two pale roses of health constantly mantling her smooth, ivory cheeks.

The bane was lifting. A period of continuous, mild warmth, free of neblinas and snowstorms and icy blasts, had assisted and incalculably sustained the efforts of the hidalgo doctor in driving the pestilence from the pueblo.

Ensued more days of sun sparkle, more nights clear as crystal, and the hospital at last was empty. Announced Don Jaime thereupon:

"The barrio must endure five more days of quarantine. We must make sure the plague is snuffed out, buried. There must be no new cases."

Two days passed; then three. No man slapped under. They entered upon the fourth.

The scourge was being weighed in a hair-fine balance. It was a deciding interval. It was a terrific time of waiting and dread and hungry longing that tried the blood and iron of every man.

Quesada, shaking with the apprehensive contagion, buttonholed the American as he came out of one of the cabañas after completing some mission of the doctor.

"How goes it, Señor Carson?"

"All right so far. But, gad, it's tough! It wasn't so bad when they were dying. These days when there are no stricken and the sick bay is empty and each man watches the next in fear lest he should succumb—that's maddening!"

They talked jerkily. Quesada wanted to forget the trial of waiting, to ease his mind of the strain. To change the subject he said:

"I have learned something. About the man who was sticking up persons and saying he was I, Jacinto Quesada. He was a member of the Guardia Civil, named Miguel Alvarado. Down by the shrine of the Christ of the Pass, his own kind, the Guardia Civil, shot him to death."

The American understood. When Quesada first had returned to the village, poisoned with worry at what he had overheard from the policemen then waiting in the gorge, he had told Carson the beginning of the story of the masquerader. Now, at hearing its tragic end, Carson merely nodded. All the while, as he listened, he eyed Don Jaime with fearful anxiety as the physician moved in and out from choza to cabaña.

The racking strain—the long torture of work and travail of waiting—showed plainly in the hidalgo doctor. In the high cheek bones, almost bursting through the deep, swarth skin, in the thin-chiseled nose and the gray eyes that seemed crystallized to a hard quartz. He was working arduously, Don Jaime—prodigiously, epically, like a true son of Hispanus, that first Spaniard sprung from the loins of Hercules.

Hardly daring to breathe, the barrio entered upon the fifth day. Twenty-four hours more of immunity from disease and the tension would be over, the iron clutch of the quarantine lifted.

Night shut down, black, breathing, full of the nameless. Groups collected. The suspense was on them like thumbscrews.

Dawn came slowly, a leaden wash. Don Jaime went his final rounds. In the night no man had gone under from the plague. The grip of the horror was broken.

"Infected Minas de la Sierra is once again clean and whole," announced Don Jaime. And he breathed fervently: "Thank God!"

The final requiem had been said. The last to waste away and wear forever the cold cerement of death was the banderillero, Alfonso Robledo, who had aided Quesada in halting, for the while, Don Jaime's cruel vengeance. That had been six days gone.

Now that the slavish and heroic labor was over for Don Jaime, the great good accomplished, he quietly got his horse prepared for the return to his lizard-haunted, gloomy, and lonely casa outside Granada.

Mounted and ready, he paused on the great rock at the brink of the village to bid the thankful serranos a saturnine adieu. All the while, unwaveringly, his gray quartz eyes remained fixed on the certain cabaña which had been given over to Felicidad. And then, as loudly the villagers chorused their gratitude and well wishes, that eventuated which Don Jaime knew would surely eventuate.

Her low, white brow wrinkled with perplexity, Felicidad appeared in the doorway of the cabaña. The hullabaloo had bewildered and attracted her.

"Felicidad!"

As if drawn and irresistibly compelled by the electric fluid of some hypnotic influence, slow as in a trance Felicidad moved toward the avenger. Watching her, Don Jaime's thin-edged ferule of a face slowly iced into rigid and pitiless lines.

Yet, deep in his heart, the great passions that once had made Don Jaime so formidable—those classic passions of ire and resentment—like hard but friable rock had been slowly worn away. Too often, altogether too often, had his wrathful hand been stayed. Time and his prodigious struggle with the plague had combined to crush and crumble to bits the fury in his rock-ribbed soul.

No longer was he strong with faith in the righteousness of his cause. He was only motivated and moved now by a determination to fulfill his solemn word, to live up to the oath he had sworn. Pride alone possessed him. He was being swept along toward a damnation of crime by the momentum of an inexorable pride.

He raised the heavy horse pistol.

The serranos fell from about him like chaff. They could not speak. They were blind of eye, and blind and black of brain as to what to do.

The scene was much as before. On the great rock of the village, Don Jaime sat rigid in the saddle like some black-browed Destroying Angel and menaced, with his huge pistol, the pale, trembling lily of a girl.

But this time it was not Quesada who intervened. The bandolero long had brooded upon the coming of this inevitable moment, yet now, when ultimately it had struck, the moment found him standing off to one side and a good twenty feet from the great rock where bulked up Don Jaime. Ere the bandolero could interpose himself to obstruct Don Jaime's will, ere he could dash forward to shoulder the perilous rebuttal, came interposition from an unexpected and astonishing source. Stepped forward the American, John Fremont Carson!

Big, broad-shouldered, and wornly angular of face, Carson stepped before the agitated girl, wholly between her and the threat of the leveled gun. He lifted dauntless blue eyes to her Hebraic Jehovah of a father.

"Señor Don Jaime, you have no longer the right to seek retribution on Felicidad," he said, with quiet but positive defiance. "Ere you can retaliate

on her, you must deal with me. She is now my affianced bride!"

Don Jaime's jaw sagged; an astounded gleam zigzagged across the hard quartz of his eyes. But quickly came to his aid the iron composure of the hidalgo born. Without lowering the pistol, he turned eagle-sharp white head and stony eyes to look down frigidly at the square-jawed American facing him in the street. With a forced politeness he returned:

"In Spain, know you, Señor Americano, one must ask the father for the hand of his daughter. Should the father agree, the consent of the girl follows as a matter of course. We are very hidebound in these conventions, we Moors; no other ways command honor. The plighted word of a mere chit of a girl! Who would think of respecting that?"

He laughed harshly.

"Grandee of Spain," answered Carson in the same lofty Spanish manner as that used by the father, "in my country, should a man desire a girl, he asks that girl in marriage. If the girl reciprocates, they bother asking by your leave of no one else. Neither man nor American woman would consider for a moment allowing a parent to select the companion and helpmate of a lifetime.

"This is not America; this is Spain. I know that, hidalgo doctor, and whenever I can, I try to obey Spain's laws of conduct. I would have sought your agreement and your blessing but for one good reason. Felicidad is no longer your daughter. Because you believe she has dishonored your ancient name you have publicly disclaimed her as a Torreblanca y Moncada.

"Good Heaven, man!" Carson exclaimed, the untenable and even outrageous incongruity of the doctor's position suddenly hitting him like the smash of a bludgeon. "How can *you* contend for a father's rights over Felicidad after the harsh and cruel way you have used her? Why, at this very moment, you seek her life!"

That struck home. A murderous gleam leaped into Don Jaime's eyes. His eyes blazed like chips of glass.

"Señor Americano," he said huskily in shaking voice, "do you not know that you are very rash? I am armed and ready; I look at you and see no weapon in your hands. Do you think that a Torreblanca y Moncada will long endure a quarrel in words? I warn you, my cheeky one! Cease challenging my prerogatives! Else shall you provoke me to kill you."

It was more than a threat. Don Jaime de Torreblanca y Moncada, grandee by birth and breeding, hidalgo of the old, granite-jawed, eagle-stern, and eagle-haughty Spanish sort, trained the huge horse pistol, with the words, upon the square-jawed American facing him in the street.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

It exasperated and incensed Carson —this high-handed attempt of the hidalgo to gag and stop his mouth, to cow and overawe his soul. It electrified like a circuited battery every voltaic pole of recklessness in his being.

He did not bother now to temper or any way mollify his words. Bluntly, boldly, he asserted:

"I know your sort of man, Don Jaime. We have them in my country —the Kentuckians, for instance. You do not really desire to kill Felicidad. Your pride goads you, but your heart is no longer in the work. And now you are more pleased than chagrined that I have stepped forth as her champion; you think to satisfy your pride by working up enough venom against me to bump me off and let the matter end there.

"I'll take my chances, proud hidalgo. I'll fight you every move until bitten by your lead. But you are not going, as you say, to wage much longer this war in words. Very soon you are either going to get hot enough to plug me, or you are going to throw up the sponge. Oh, I know your sort! You'll do one or the other. But one thing you will not do—you will not allow yourself to be made ridiculous."

Don Jaime was staggered. The American's talk was a talk strange and utterly new to him. John Fremont Carson fought him with weapons that he had not known existed.

Don Jaime lowered the heavy horse pistol to his knee. A spirit of sardonic deviltry entered into him. He would worst this cheeky American on his own ground! His lips curling half in smile, half in sneer, a strange light in his eyes, he said:

"Señor Americano, I will combat you and crush you with your own kind of weapon. I will vanquish you with words—with one question. But it must be understood for the nonce that I possess unqualifiedly and absolutely the right to speak as Felicidad's father."

The American nodded, a kind of bewildered wonder crowding his eyes.

"For the nonce that prerogative is yours," he agreed.

"*Bueno!* Then straightway I challenge you to prove yourself of fit birth to be Felicidad's husband. This is Spain, señor. I speak now as a Spanish father. More, I am a hidalgo and I speak for my daughter, who is the daughter of a hidalgo of Spain. She has an inheritance of blood and pride which you cannot gainsay, but which you must equal if you would marry her."

Don Jaime spoke with a Latin fluency of exposition, in a rushing torrent of words. His eyes sparkled like vitreous slag.

"Look you, my cheeky one! No man of common birth may hope to aspire to my daughter. We Spanish grandees are a feudal race, caste-bound and arrogant of birth. Perhaps you do not understand the true color of the situation, eh? Then know you that even in Spain there are not more than a score of men who are my equal in seignior blood and ancient, knightly name.

"Now, for any one outside this aristocratic circle to yearn and quest for my daughter's hand would be a sundaring presumption. Take this Manuel Morales, for an instance." Momentarily his eyes leaped up the street to where the matador stood, his wasted form propped against the mud wall of the hospital.

"Morales is the hero of the peninsula, as you know—a popular idol, a famous and distinguished man. Royalties and hidalgos ask after his health, greet him by name and with handshake. He is the most renowned of modern bullfighters. And he is a rich man—richer far than are most grandees; for much, much gold has come to him along with his well-deserved success.

"Yet never would Morales dare to look for a wife among blooded folk. Indeed, should he be so mad as to presume so far, the hidalgo whom he thus affronted would kill him without ruth, as for a deadly grievance. And at once that hidalgo would be acquitted of all wrong by the public opinion of Spain. Aye, though Morales is the idol of all Spaniards!

"That is right, and as it should be, for when all is said he is only a bullfighter. And bullfighters have no social standing; they are not men of birth nor breeding; they are a low caste. Ask Morales himself. Even now he is nodding agreement to my every word."

Carson did not trouble to turn his head to gain corroboration of the doctor's statement from the matador up the street. He realized already the poser Don Jaime was soon to spring. He eyed the haughty hidalgo fixedly, a peculiar smile slowly parting his lips.

"And Quesada," Don Jaime swept on; "Jacinto Quesada is in the same case as Morales. My words apply to him as much as they do to any bullfighter. Not because he is the Wolf of the Sierras, a bandolero and outlaw. *Seguramente,* no! But only because he is of common birth."

Don Jaime paused. He looked down at the American. The half smile had altogether fled his lips. His lips were palpably and contumeliously sneering.

"Now as to yourself, my cheeky one!" he said, with biting sharpness. "It is often said that the Americans are a nation of canaille. Can you prove yourself worthy of the daughter of a Spanish hidalgo and grandee? I ask you that. I wait for your answer."

"You ask me to prove to you that I am not of common birth?"

Don Jaime nodded vigorously. *Caspita!* This was indeed a trump card! All the venom of his embittered spirit showed.

"You cannot prove that, eh? Then it is true, is it not, that the Americans are a nation of——"

"One moment, Don Jaime. Your Spanish royalty is the keystone, the fountainhead of Spanish society, is it not? Alfonso, your king, is as good and better an aristocrat than any of his hidalgos——"

"There are some that would dispute you there. Myself, I know my line is older. My ancestors——"

The American was broadly smiling.

"You will admit, however, that Alfonso is of uncommon birth?"

"*Seguramente,* yes! Is he not my master and lord?"

"Well, then! I was born in the same year as Alfonso—1886. He was the son of a king; I the son of an American millionaire. Because Alfonso was such a high and mighty infant, his birth was a long-heralded public affair. And so was mine. When I was born the newspapers of America remarked that here was no common birth. In long articles they compared it to the birth of Alfonso, citing statistics to show the principalities in mines and manufactories I would rule, the kingly revenues that would pour annually into my coffers of state. Alfonso's actual birth was marked by great pomp and a certain ceremony. To prove that he was truly the son of his royal mother, that everything was aboveboard and as it should be, in the room with the queen, when Alfonso first put in an appearance, were a round dozen and more hidalgos——"

"That is our Spanish custom when royal infants are born."

"Just so. A very uncommon birth! Well, with my mother, when first I put in an appearance, were a round dozen doctors and nurses of all kinds, trained and practical, wet and dry. Quite an uncommon birth, too, don't you think?"

What could Don Jaime do? Carson had worsted him signally. The grim drama had become almost a comedy, a farce.

Don Jaime feared longer to persist. It would not do for him to be made ridiculous and laughable.

All at once he lifted his head and looked beyond Carson, beyond Felicidad. In a great voice he called out:

"Put up your gun, Quesada! I am a wineskin squeezed dry; I am empty of all words and all passions; I am done. Put up your gun, you Wolf Cub, you, and I will put up mine. I had meant to beat you to the first shot—to kill Felicidad and then have you kill me. But now—*Carajo,* I am done!"

Like mechanical toys on clockwork pivots, every man and woman within sound of the doctor's great voice turned simultaneously to look for Quesada.

There, twenty feet away, stood the wolfishly gaunt bandolero, a revolver in his right hand trained rigidly on Don Jaime. That revolver had once been Jacques Ferou's.

Not before had John Fremont Carson noticed the revolver in Quesada's hand. He was taken completely by surprise. Little had he realized how close to black tragedy had been the drama in which he had enacted so prominent a part.

In the American's eyes, in the eyes of every man there present, the hidalgo on horseback loomed up, then and on the sudden, with a new and imposing dignity, a rare nobility and magnificence. Don Jaime alone had known of the imminent threat of Quesada's revolver. All the while he had striven to attain his vengeance, all that while Don Jaime had trusted his life to a hair. Quesada had him covered. The mere press of a finger on the trigger and Don Jaime would have toppled out of the saddle —a dead man!

Quesada had thought Don Jaime all unaware. Now, for the first time, he comprehended the sublime insolence of the hidalgo's persistency. Abashed and shamefaced, he lowered the revolver and shoved it back into his belt.

Don Jaime lifted the horse pistol from his knee and slipped it into the

holster slung from the saddle. Then, without another word and without even a glance toward his daughter, he turned the old nag's head about and went deliberately down the goat path.

He never once looked round. But his back seemed not quite so rigid, nor his old white head so erect. All at once there were about him the unmistakable signs of an old, old man. And in the slow pace of the faithful nag there seemed something that wanted to linger yet was urged on by pride, inexorable and pitiless.

"Oh, *mi pobre padre!*" wailed Felicidad after him. "His heart breaks and he is lonely! And there is only old, whining Pedro and the childish Teresa to welcome him back to the gloomy casa!"

Save for the creaking of the saddle, the soft pad-pad of the horse's hoof falls, nothing answered from down the goat path. For the first time, then, in all that intolerable eternity of death and disease and lusting vengeance, Felicidad wilted in a swoon to the ground.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

"By gad!" exclaimed Carson, leaping to the side of Felicidad and lifting her tenderly in his arms. "There will yet be a wedding down in the casa of Torreblanca y Moncada outside Granada. Come, Jacinto; lend us your aid. Get horses! We must overtake the hidalgo doctor!"

"There are no horses in Minas de la Sierra," returned Quesada. "There are only mules and borricos which the serranos use to sleigh their cords of pine down to the lower torrents, and to carry their panniers of white manzanilla into the towns."

"Anything!" urged the American. Felicidad, in his arms, was showing signs of recovering consciousness. "Mules, borricos, anything upon which we can ride!"

"*Muy bueno,*" assented Quesada readily. "It is very good, and I will go along with you. They say Jacinto Quesada is dead; I can ride the roads with impunity. And the roads are paved with gold for such as I."

"I will go also," volunteered Morales; "I and what remains of my cuadrilla. In his offices down in Seville sits my manager, the Señor Don Arturo Guerra, signing contract after contract, and these contracts I must soon fulfill or lose much money and much prestige with the presidentes of the bull rings and the aficionados of Spain."

"*Hola, mis serranos!*" called Quesada. "Fetch forth your beasts. The caballeros would look at them and pay you well in golden notes on the Bank of Spain."

A little later the cavalcade wound down the loops of the goat path. In all the pueblo there had proved to be only three burden-bearing animals—two mules and one ass. However, Morales' cuadrilla had been depleted by the loss through the plague of Alfonso Robledo and Coruncho Lopez and the death in the rebellion of the banderillero, Baptista Monterey; so the party managed, by doubling up, to make shift.

There were altogether seven of them. Morales and the three surviving men of the cuadrilla paired off on the two mules. Felicidad, still pale from her faint and pensive with longing, jogged behind Carson on the crupper of the sturdy, surefooted ass.

Quesada laughed when they begged him also to mount one of the mules.

"It would be too much for the animal. And besides," he added, with a return of his old pride, "I am the Wolf of the Sierras. My long, mountaineer's legs are swifter to move now and even more tireless than the slow hoofs of any stupid borrico. Hold your peace, *mis camaradas.* Ere nightfall you shall see."

Accoutered in the neat gray tweeds and slouch hat of the deceased Frenchman, he led the way with swinging strides. Long after they had disappeared down the gorge, the mountain boy, Gabriel, yellow of skin and oddly wrinkled of face, stood on the rock at the brink of the village and sought to follow them with his wistful eyes.

The cavalcade convoluted through

the gorges. Never once did they sight the señor doctor. Mounted as he was on the nag, slow with age yet swifter-paced than the ambling donkeys, the hidalgo had easily put dust and distance between them, and buried himself in the lower passes.

They came, in the due course of nights and days, to the mournful Pass of the Blessed Trinity. There were three diverging roads leading out and down from it. Quesada, many yards in the lead, waited until the cavalcade overtook him. Then, pointing to that dusty road which snaked most sweepingly to the left, he said:

"Felicidad will now recognize the way. That road winds through the Alpujarras and directly down into Granada. For myself I bid thee adios."

Felicidad exclaimed in surprise and deep disappointment:

"You are going to desolate us, Jacintito, by absenting yourself?"

"And you are not going to help us assault the hidalgo doctor's casa with bell and book and ring?" from Morales.

Said the American, with quiet appeal:

"I intended you for my best man, Jacinto."

But to all Quesada shook his head in dissent.

"Down in Getafe," he returned, "there are ten thousand pesetas awaiting me—the reward for my own death."

"But that affair of the Christ of the Pass!" exclaimed Carson. "You there proclaimed yourself to the police as still alive. The Guardia Civil must know now that Montara and the dead sergeant made a mistake. They may even guess it was Ferou that was killed. To go to Getafe, after all this, will be to put your head into a noose."

Quesada smiled grimly.

"But they may have taken me for a rank impostor. They may have thought me some serrano friend of the Alvarados, who, overhearing the old mother's story, and, lacking ingenuity, announced myself as Jacinto Quesada just to dumfound the police and save poor Miguel."

"Hardly likely," remarked Carson dryly.

"Well, then! How about the fact that the honor of the Guardia Civil was jeopardized by young Alvarado's treachery and that, before my very eyes, Capitan Luis Guevara and his troop swore themselves to secrecy? Señor Carson, you do not know the Spanish police as do I. Even as Don Jaime and Sargento Esteban Alvarado thought more of their personal honor than they did of the lives of their offspring, even and just so do the Guardia Civil think more of their honor and good name than they do of capturing a mere bandolero, of keeping secure the peace of Spain.

"That troop of police has not told headquarters. I am even taking the chance that Montara filed his report as if nothing had happened that night at the shrine. Getafe will not know of my resurrection until I play this little trick. For the interval I am Monseñor Jacques Ferou."

"It is a coup!" enthused Morales.

"But a tremendously risky one," qualified the American dubiously. "You stand to win ten thousand pesetas, Quesada, but you stand by far longer odds to lose your life. For what do you need money so badly, Jacinto, that you should stake red alfonsos against your precious neck?"

"Am I not forever risking everything to gain mere gold?" countered Quesada. "But *carajo*, that is not my reason! I have a higher incentive."

His gaunt face became priestly with a sudden somber tenderness.

"Up in Minas de la Sierra," he went on, "there is a mountaineer's orphan bantling with heart of fire and soul of gold. To-day he dreams to be a great man of Spain. But the God of Spain smiles derisively upon a son of the people who would seek to rise above his fellows. Spain is a country of limited opportunities. Here there are only two careers open for a son of the soil. My little mountain brat may become a bullfighter, a gran espada like our Manuel; or he may become a bandolero like me. There is naught else for him. I know,

Señor Carson; I have lived Spain myself!

"Up here in these desolate hills, my lad is too far removed from the cities of the plains. Never will he see the brutal, savage encounter of bull and man; never will be waked in him the glamour and ambition for the blood and sand of the arena. Never will he be a bullfighter.

"But *carajo,* never shall he be a bandolero! I, Jacinto Quesada, say it. I will not have him go houseless in the wind and rain, forever hounded by the podencos of the Guardia Civil."

"What would you, then, Jacinto?" asked Felicidad, with the quick sympathy of a woman.

The matador interposed with a sudden, deep interest:

"Of what child do you speak, Quesada?"

"Of the boy Gabriel. Half of the blood money shall be used to send him to the great University of Salamanca. I will make our little Gabriel a superb señor doctor like Felicidad's own haughty father, Don Jaime."

"I will put an equal amount to the furtherance of the noble project," Morales pledged himself enthusiastically.

"But the other half, Quesada?" questioned Carson, with characteristic acuteness. "What do you purpose doing with the remaining five thousand pesetas?"

"I have a plan wherewith to use them," returned Quesada evasively.

He started away. He would say no more. Waving his hand to them in adieu, he called back:

"Go thou with God, my friends. The orange trees of the Alpujarras are in white and fragrant bloom. To thee, Señor Carson, and to mia camarista Felicidad, I wish all the blessings of God on thy new and great happiness!"

A week later a wolfishly gaunt man in gray tweeds and slouch traveling hat invaded the headquarters of the Guardia Civil at Getafe and presented himself before the desk sergeant.

"I am Monseñor Jacques Ferou," he said. "I come to claim the reward for the killing, up in Minas de la Sierra, of the bandolero, Jacinto Quesada."

The desk sergeant was very glad to meet Señor Ferou. He shook his hand warmly. He knew from the foreign swagger of his clothes that the man was an outlander. As with all Spaniards, he had two guesses as to the country of the stranger's nativity. From the man's name, then, and swarthy complexion, he decided, by some unaccountable quirk of the mind, that he was an Englishman!

To secure the authority and money, he dispatched one of the policemen waiting in the room to the office of the Ministro de Governacion. Meanwhile, making conversation, he politely inquired whether Señor Ferou liked the country.

"Si; I like Spain very much," the pseudo-Englishman returned, smiling pleasantly. "I have made many good friends here, and—Dios sabe!—perhaps a few poor enemies. I shall remain here for some time."

"That was a very brave thing you did up in the Sierra Nevadas. Jacinto Quesada has long harassed and terrorized us poor Moors. All Spain thanks you and feels you will merit the reward. But have you any plans for the spending of all those pesetas?"

"I have two plans. One is to aid a protégé of mine, a motherless little child; the other to pay the costs of a certain fête. There is going to be a wedding over in the foothills of the Sierra Morena. It is to be a wedding among the gypsies. You know how costly and lavish are the marital feasts of the zincali. They celebrate for two weeks hand running just like the Jews of Barbary. You see, sargento mio, I am to marry a girl of the Gitano, one Paquita, daughter of Pepe Flammenca, count of a gypsy clan."

"Ah!" exclaimed the sergeant, his face wrinkling into a broad smile. "Most certainly are you English both eccentric and adventurous. But you seek your love in such strange places! Do not our white, soft-eyed maids of Andalusia captivate you?"

"They do not," returned the man in the gray tweeds with vehemence. "When your Andalusian virgins caress me with languishing looks and their tongues drip liquid flattery and love, my masculinity rebels at the thought of being wooed by a woman. You know we Englishmen joy in being the seeker, the stalker, the predatory one."

"Eh, eh! This gitana treated you with disdain, what? She fled from you, was cold to your kisses, took on as if you were a dust mote in her eye, no? Perhaps she even prodded a knife between your ribs—it is a way they have, these soft brown leopards of the zincali."

"She did more than that. She stabbed at my pride. She made love to another man, a sad fool, whom she had imitate and ape me just to show how little *importa* I was——"

The policeman returned just then, holding in his hand two five-thousand-peseta bills and a receipt to be signed. The man in the gray tweeds affixed his name with a flourish. Then the sergeant handed him the bills, and, although his eyes were greedy, he politely said:

"Go thou with God, my brave Englishman, and may Heaven bless your coming happiness."

He looked after the man as he went out the door, and sighed heavily.

"Ah, I knew them well when I was young, the brown maidens of the zincali! They are wine to kiss and soft silk to caress, but the very tigers when aroused. But I am getting on now—getting on and too old for such thoughts."

He looked down at the receipt in his hand. He started.

"Dios hombre!" he ejaculated.

The policemen crowded around him. But he had recovered.

"It is nothing," he said.

He went back to his desk. There, for a long time, slyly and secretly, he eyed the receipt the man had given him. Upon it was written:

Received payment, Jacinto Quesada.

Very stealthily the desk sergeant tore the paper into a thousand little bits.

THE END.

RALPH D. PAINE has written a great novel of the sea—"THE CALL OF THE OFFSHORE WIND." It will be published in the POPULAR in four big installments beginning with the September 7th issue.

ONE WAY TO MAKE AN ENTRANCE

PARKER R. ANDERSON, the North Carolina journalist and politician, is a high-strung, chivalric Southern gentleman in every sense of the term. But the one thing that grates upon his artistic sensibilities is a fat woman. Confronted by a woman excessively fat, all of Mr. Anderson's chivalry oozes from his finger tips, and he is left a wilted and discouraged brave.

One afternoon, walking along Broadway, he saw coming around the corner a woman who, at a conservative estimate, must have tipped the scales at two hundred and eighty pounds.

The high-strung Mr. Anderson groaned aloud.

"What's the matter?" asked his companion.

"It's awful," confided Anderson. "It depresses me to see a woman coming around a corner hip by hip."

Bo-Rees, Accessory After the Fact

By Charles A. Bonfils

Author of "Lovin' Kindness in the Hoss Country," Etc.

A strenuous trip with "The Gentleman Train Hold-up" in the Red Desert country—a picturesque highwayman whose soft Southern drawl and captivating manners were only two of his characteristics. Ed Morgan, "the foxy sleuth of Bitter Springs," discovers a third.

WHEN he came in sight of a sheep schooner half a mile away on the flat, the brand "7b" painted in one large black symbol on the rounded white canvas top, Deputy Sheriff Ed Morgan got down off his horse. It was a difficult feat, as the horse was unusually tall and the deputy, short and fat, was a little stiffened by middle age. He was also encumbered by an overcoat, heavy and long; for, despite the bland, insinuating smile of the sun, the voice of winter spoke distinctly in the chill of vagabond, uncertain breezes that sprang up suddenly, as if awakened from sound sleep, fled away with hollow scouring among the sage, twisting the stiff bushes spitefully, and vanished in the vastness of the desert.

Leading the big, sedate black horse, he began to circle the wagon, keeping his eyes on the ground in front of him. He had gone only a few steps before he came upon what he was looking for. It was the print of a well-shaped shoe, rather small for a man, plainly indented in the soft dirt at the edge of a snow bank, and pointed directly toward the wagon.

The deputy shielded himself behind the shoulder of his horse, and, keeping out of range of the little window in the rear of the wagon, he approached it rapidly. He halted fifty feet away, and, guarding the closed canvas door with his rifle poked under the horse's heavy neck, he called out:

"Come outa there, you Gentleman Holdup, an' come out with yo' han's high above yo' head, er I'm gonna do some shootin'!"

For a moment there was neither sound nor movement in the wagon.

"Come on out, you vanishin' bandit," the deputy insisted, "er I'll cut loose through the wagon. I'll sieve her, too, you'd better believe. Come a-jumpin' er I'll have you dodging some steel-jacket thirty-thirties, an' you'll sho have to hop in the wind to do it."

A pan rattled on the stove; there was a shuffling of feet; the canvas door was unlatched and thrown back, and a pair of arms, the hands open, were thrust out of the dark interior of the wagon.

"Hop down on that wagon tongue, you bold, bad train robber," jeered the deputy, "an' come on about ten feet. Then turn round, with yo' back to me an' the hoss, so's you' turrible eyes won't skeer us. Be shore to keep them hands up, though. If they so much as waver, I'll blow yo' spine in two."

Ducking his head to get through the low door, the man in the wagon did, without protest, as he was bid. His hands high above his head, he accomplished the difficult feat of jumping

down on the slanting wagon tongue, and thence to the ground, with the easy agility of an acrobat. With military precision he stepped off three paces, reversed, and clicked his heels together, a satirical smile crinkling his smooth, boyish face; he stood with his back to the armed deputy sheriff hiding behind the big horse, the sun shining in his eyes and gilding his blond hair. A moment later his strong wrists were manacled by a pair of worn, stout handcuffs. The deputy rapidly passed his hands over him, and, finding no weapons, stood back, surveying him.

"The Gentleman Train Holdup!" he sneered.

There was little about the bare-headed youth, dressed in overalls, heavy shoes, and a sheep-herder's coat, to suggest either the gentleman or the bold highwayman.

"An' now I guess—I guess," the deputy emphasized, "that yo' aire my bacon. What yo' guess?" he challenged the prisoner.

"I guess you are about right," the latter admitted.

"Oh, that Southe'n drawl, that soft Southe'n drawl!" the deputy exclaimed in mock admiration. "Ain't that what the paper's b'en talkin' so much about? 'He's mos' courteous to ladies, speakin' with that delicious Southe'n drawl that is so captivatin',' " the deputy quoted, chuckling, " 'reassurin' them, quietin' their fears with such urbanity that many of them fall desperately in love with him; a Rocky Mountain Jack Sheppard, a Bret Harte hero, sparing women and children, but stern and commanding with men.' I guess I got the right man."

The prisoner smiled, but said nothing.

"An' now, what you reckon the paper's goin' to say about Depity Ed Morgan ketchin' you single-handed?" he gloated. "Depity Ed Morgan, the foxy sleuth of Bitter Springs, takes Gentleman Bandit single-handed in the desert," he bragged. "Say, got any coffee?" he broke off hurriedly.

"Pot on the stove."

"All right, Mr. John Oakhurst er Jack Hamlin er whatever it is the papers call you, you jest set yo'se'f down on that wagon tongue and don't move, while I step in an' take a late breakfast. Hit's purty near twelve now, an' I ain't had nothin' sence las' night. An' remember, don't make no false moves ner take no chance of gittin' me hostile, fer holdin' up in this State kin be punished with death."

He took a quart bottle of whisky from his pocket, and offered the prisoner a drink, which he refused.

"I always start my breakfast that way," the deputy grinned, and took a long pull at the bottle. Laboriously he climbed into the wagon, leaving the prisoner seated on the wagon tongue.

A pot of baked beans was warming on the stove, and a huge, blackened pot of coffee was steaming fragrantly. There were a half dozen mutton chops, already cooked, in a frying pan on the back of the stove, and a pan of well-browned biscuits in the oven. The one-legged table, slid out from under the bunk, was set for one with graniteware dishes and an iron-handled knife and fork. An open jar of jelly and a saucer of butter stood beside the plate.

"You cook all this?" the deputy asked, staring at the outlay.

"Yep, I'm cook for this wagon."

"Yes, like hell you aire!" the deputy mumbled in his cup. "Yo're a cook all right, but you ain't cookin' fer this outfit. You was jest gittin' yo'se'f a meal as you flew by, an' I got to admit it was a good one. You didn't expect no depity, did you?" The deputy, however, confined his meal to coffee and cigarettes, ignoring the food.

"How about my having some of it? You don't seem to care for my cooking," the prisoner suggested.

"Mr. Gentleman Jim Holdup, we ain't got much time," the deputy discouraged him. "I wouldn't enjoy my coffee at all if I had to have you in here. They's too many pistols and ca'tridge belts hanging round handy. But if you'll eat with yo' fingers where you aire, you're free to put away all you kin whilst I drink my coffee and smoke a couple cigarettes. If not, you'll have

to do without, fer we've got to hit the hike pronto."

"Remember, I tell you I'm cooking for this wagon. I'm not a bandit," the prisoner insisted.

"Is that so?" the deputy inquired sarcastically. "What's the name of yo' boss then? Who owns the Seven B's?"

The prisoner knitted his unlined forehead thoughtfully.

"Don't think so hard; you'll hurt yo' haid," the deputy advised. "I'll take my chances on you. Ain't even goin' to take you over to the herder and ask him about you. I'm in a hurry to be goin'."

He handed the prisoner a cup of coffee and a plate piled with food.

"You see, it's like this," he went on. "I don't want the sheriff an' that big posse of his'n to come up an' ketch me with you. I want to keep you all to myse'f. You're too val'able to share. They's about two hunderd of 'em out lookin' fer you; the sheriff an' all his depities fum Raw Hide, an' every man an' boy that could borry a hoss er tote a rifle, an' railroad detectives fum a hunderd miles east and west. They're scattered out all over the landscape like a passel of rabbit hunters, runnin' ahead, comin' back ag'in, gittin' in each other's way, an' everybody orderin' somebody else around.

"They started after you las' night, not two hours after you dropped off the train at Cliff. Ever'body knowed that you'd made a mistake gittin' off there, you see; knowed that when the train slowed down fer Cliff that you thought hit was Antelope Springs. The sheriff, wantin' to git even fer you makin' a fool of him so many times, started off night trailin' you with flash lights and lanterns. The railroad sent two er three specials cannon-balling down the line, loaded with men an' hosses, an' with right o' way over ever'thing, an' they pushed out after the sheriff, followed by all the men an' boys in town. They's certain a mob of 'em. The sheriff wouldn't 'a' had me along nohow, 'cause he's jealous of me, thinkin' I might be the next sheriff. Why, I wouldn't 'a' knowed nothin' a-tall about it ef I hadn't happened to be over to the depot when the 'leven pulled inter Bitter Springs an' heard about it fum the conductor." The deputy alternately sipped his coffee and sucked at his cigarette.

"How did you figure out where to find me?" asked the prisoner dispassionately.

"The telegraph operator give me the direction you was headed fer, an' that was all I needed. I jest slung on my ca'tridge belt, grabbed my thirty-thirty, set down on my hoss, an' come an' got you," the deputy boasted.

"Say, Mr. Oakhurst er Jack Sheppard, they call you a fox. Why, man, you a rabbit, you a rabbit, I tell you, not a fox! I'm the fox of us two," the deputy grinned. "Why, you lef' a trail as broad as a cloudbu'st. It didn't take me no time a-tall to figger it out. Once you got started out on the desert, they wasn't nothin' you could do but keep going. You couldn't go back. I knowed you'd hit the hike as fast an' as fer as you could, but you'd have to rest an' eat some time. Well, they ain't a house on the desert, nothin' but sheep schooners, en you'd sneak inter one of them, git somethin' to eat, steal a pair of shoes to th'ow 'em off the trail, maybe a coat to keep you warm, an' then you'd hit the hike ag'in. Hit was easy to figger about how far you'd git, an' jest about how far the sheriff'd git night trailin'. I jest cut in between you, th'owed my eye on the ground round a few sheep wagons, ast a few herders if they'd saw you, an' I overtuk you; easy as Columbus an' the aig. I tol' the boys over at the saloon first time I went out after you I'd git you." The deputy's round, red face was wreathed with a smile of self-satisfaction. He stood up, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand. The prisoner handed back the empty plate.

"Sorry we can't be perlite an' wash the dishes, as is customary, but we ain't got time fer it, Mr. Gentleman Jim," the deputy apologized. "We got to be goin', fer I'm playin' a lone hand an' I don't want to run inter them posses. If one man of 'em so much as seen

you, the whole passel would claim they ketched you. Jest walk off about twenty yards an' halt, with yo' back to me, till I git on my hoss," he ordered. "Some way I don't trust you as much as I ought sech a corteous holdup man."

"I've got to walk, have I?" demanded the prisoner.

"You certainly have," the deputy agreed.

"Well, don't you think it's pretty tough to expect a man, who, according to your ideas, has already walked thirty miles since last night, to start out on another thirty-six miles in twenty-four hours?"

"That ain't nothin' fer a sheepman," the deputy chuckled. "Why, a good herder'll take his bed on his shoulder an' step that off any day without thinking twicet about it. However, ef I'd knowed you was goin' to be sech all-fired easy meat, I might 'a' brought along another hoss. But I didn't know but what you might turn out to be a real he-holdup man, so I didn't bother myse'f with another nag," the deputy explained.

He brought the big black horse up to the wagon tongue, and climbed on heavily, keeping a close watch on the prisoner.

"When hit gits near dark, Mr. Chesterfield, I'm gonna let you ride, gonna take you right up on this hoss in front of me. But it's a long trip, an' my ole hoss's kinda lame, anyhow, so he can't carry us both. You'll jest have to act purty an' show some of yo' gallantry. Age comes before beauty, so you go on foot," he urged. "Besides, hit ain't goin' to be thirty miles. I'm hittin' fer Bitter Springs, which is only twenty-five, circlin' a little to avoid meetin' any of the aforementioned rabbit hunters."

The deputy's small blue eyes twinkled.

"An' now you kin drop them hands," he commanded. "To the left oblique, toward that flat top, hit the hike, you ballroom bandit!"

Without protest the prisoner started off briskly with long, easy strides, the deputy following a few yards behind, his rifle resting across the saddle horn. For an hour they went along in silence, the prisoner hurrying, swinging his manacled hands rhythmically before him like a trained heel-and-toe walker, seemingly as anxious to reach Bitter Springs as his captor.

"Purty good time; you shore are a walker!" the deputy admitted admiringly, as they rounded the top of the flat. "You keep up that swing an' we'll ketch that eight o'clock fer the county seat shore. An' that's jest the kind o' gait I want you to hit when we walk down Main Street to the jail," he bantered the youthful bandit. "I'll telegraph ahead, an' they'll be a crowd down at the depot to welcome you, an' when we march up that Main Street maybe the people won't stare. An' maybe the sheriff won't cuss when he hears of it," he gloated. "He'll be out somewheres still trailing you, an' I'll be walkin' up Main Street, right up the middle of Main Street, son, my rifle at yo' back, an' the crowd follerin' along behind. Mr. Ballroom Bandit, I'll git jest two thousand five hundred dollars when I lan' you at the jail door an' turn you over to the jailer. That'll be somethin', but, by gosh, man, I wouldn't take five thousand dollars fer the grief I'm gonna give the sheriff. He'll look like a houn' in the face when he comes back to town. An' I'll git his job next fall as shore as they's an election."

The deputy changed the bridle reins to his right hand, and with his left drew the quart bottle, half full of whisky, from the capacious pocket of his overcoat, and took a long drink. He then called to the prisoner, offering him some, but the young fellow shook his head.

"You'd better have a drink," the deputy urged. "Hit's gittin' chilly, an' besides it may be yo' last chance. Where you're goin' you'll git mighty little of this." But the prisoner again refused, obstinately silent.

"I been tolt many times to leave it alone myse'f," the deputy admitted, "but whisky'll never kill me. If it had been agoin' to hit'd done so long ago."

As they started on, the prisoner glanced briefly at the sky, which had silvered over with thin, lofty gray clouds, veiling the sun. A few miles farther, at Dead Man's Creek, a steep-banked channel, worn deep by spring freshets, now dry, save for occasional shallow pools, the deputy halted his captive while the horse drank. At the same time he drained the last drop from the bottle and threw it into a clump of sage. The prisoner waited in silence to take up the wearying march over the untracked, desolate open.

"Guess we're well out of the track of any stragglers fum the posse, so you don't need to walk yo' legs off," said the deputy genially. "We ain't got but little more'n twenty miles, I guess."

The horse tossed his head, and something cold dropped on one of the deputy's small, puffed hands. It was not until they came up out of the wide, shallow valley and on to the Sage Creek flats that he realized it was not a drop of water. A huge gust of wind swept down on them, bearing a blinding fog of gray dust. For a moment it held the prisoner in his tracks; it beat the deputy's hat brim down over his eyes, choked him, shrieked in his ears, and tugged at the skirts of his long coat. A whirl of snowflakes passed in its wake.

Looking ahead, the deputy saw that it was part of a narrow streak of gray sweeping across the flat. He turned a quick eye on the sky. It was evenly felted over with a seamless mass of dark-gray clouds. Looking more closely to the north, he now saw what looked like a soft light fog on the horizon. While he had been wasting precious time circling miles out of his way to avoid the posse, full of satisfaction at outwitting the sheriff and planning his complete humiliation, he had let another and stronger enemy come upon him softly and unawares.

His prisoner had pushed on and was nearly a hundred yards off, his head down, his heavy canvas sheep-herder's coat flapping open, stubbornly facing the rising wind and hurrying now in earnest. As a new gust burst upon him, blinding him, the deputy put spurs to the big horse, which, after the manner of cow ponies, broke at once into a smart gallop. It had not gone three strides before the deputy was suddenly catapulted over the animal's head and was rolling over and over in a patch of sage, while the big horse fell heavily behind him. The deputy leaped to his feet with remarkable agility for a fat man, his rifle still in his hands, but the prisoner had stopped. The horse was standing with his right forefoot lifted from the ground, and one glance showed that the leg was snapped at the ankle. He had stepped deep into a prairie-dog hole.

And even as the deputy looked, the storm swept down upon them. In the whirling white cloud of snowflakes the landscape disappeared as if by magic, and his whole view shrank to scarcely fifty yards. The prisoner made no attempt to escape, but returned and silently helped the deputy unsaddle and unbridle the horse. Then he drew off a few yards as his captor made ready his rifle and called the horse by name. Behind the crisp white shroud of snow one ringing shot completed the simple tragedy.

Together the men piled the saddle and bridle on the big black carcass. The deputy threw the cartridges out of the magazine of the rifle, pocketed them, and then kicked the rifle close under the horse's side.

"I guess they's a kinda bad time ahead of us." The deputy spoke in a friendly fashion, but if the prisoner noted the change in his tone he gave no sign.

"Looks like it," he admitted coolly.

"An' it's a full twenty miles to Bitter Springs. I jest lopped off five miles when I told you at the wagon it was only twenty-five," the deputy admitted frankly. For a moment neither spoke; words carried little force in a situation the seriousness of which both well understood.

"Looks like a real blizzard," the prisoner observed, without emotion.

"Shore does, an', believe me, this is the place they have 'em, too, this desert," the deputy agreed. "Sometimes they last a week. An' these flats is the worst part of the whole country fer wind and cold."

"Well, what's your pleasure?" asked the prisoner. "As you politicians say, 'I'm in the hands of my friend,'" he quoted grimly.

"Hit ain't my pleasure a-tall, but they ain't but two things we kin do, an' both of 'em's bad," the deputy informed him. "We kin stand still an' freeze to death er take a long chance an' walk. Whichever way you figger it you're in a bad fix out here afoot in a blizzard. If we walk, we got to drive right agin' this storm as near north as we kin go," he planned, "an' calklate on hittin' the railroad somewheres."

In his tone and manner, his use of "we," and his discussion of the matter with the captive the deputy admitted a radical change of relations between them. From an arm of the law and a malefactor being driven to justice, they had become two human beings facing a common and a deadly danger. But the bandit ignored the deputy's overtures; apparently he had no suggestion to make, and preferred to remain in his previous character as a prisoner, obeying orders without talk.

"As to the sheep wagon we started out from," the deputy went on reflectively, noting the young fellow's stubborn aloofness, "there ain't a chance in a thousand of findin' it. Why, man, in half an hour or so, when this storm gits goin' right, you won't be able to see five feet fum you in any direction fer the snow. You couldn't find a sheep wagon onless you run yo' nose jam inter it. Naw, we can't take no chance on anything smaller than the railroad. Ef we keep to the north, we'll run across it, fer she runs a hunderd miles straight as a string east an' west. We kin steer to the north by the wind. Well, let's don't burn no more daylight. Hit the hike." Again they were officer of the law and his captive.

And so, the bandit in front, boring into the howling gale, his bowed body shielding the deputy from the fierceness of its attacks, they started. The wind had increased as they talked, and soon was a steady, howling gale. As they plodded on, the snow thickened till it shut off all the world behind, a sweeping veil of dazzling, blinding flakes.

It was near dark before a word was said between them. Then the deputy shouted to the prisoner:

"Don't walk so fast." The prisoner slowed his gait a little, but pushed on steadily.

A little while later, the deputy called to him again:

"Let's rest."

The wind had increased, until at times they could only stand and wrestle with it. Even in the shelter of the gulch it thrust them back, buffeting and cuffing them like a great, moist hand.

"Hit's certainly fierce," panted the deputy. He broke into a gasping laugh as the bandit turned around, packed with damp snow from head to foot.

"You look like a cookie man, all white with icing in front and brown at the back." The prisoner met his friendly sally with silent indifference. Then the deputy began to beat the snow off his coat with his big hat, and wiped his wet face, unwholesomely red, with his glove. The prisoner insisted on pushing on, but the deputy delayed. He tried to roll a cigarette, and listened to the ominously increasing howling of the wind, killing time when every minute was precious. At last he buttoned up his coat again, grumbling because its length interfered with his walking, pulled his hat down over his face, and again plunged after his prisoner into the sweeping storm.

Night came upon them as they fell among a series of washes and steep-banked arroyos cut deep in the slope of a wide, shallow valley half hidden by ragged clumps of tall sage and greasewood. Here they had to go cautiously, wasting their strength climbing down into them and up again, for they were too wide to leap. The deputy rested frequently, panting, his hands trembling. It was pitch dark before they got across the dry bed of the

stream at the bottom of the valley and worked up the opposite slope. As they breasted the last steep bank, and came out upon the flat above, the wind seized upon them like a living, malignant thing. It had grown much colder, and burned their faces like lye. It froze the tears it forced from their eyes and the snow upon their eyelashes and eyebrows. Time and again they had to stop and break away the blinding, glassy masks, and, despite the driving chill, the deputy took his time at it, squatting down with his back to the wind, his shoulders hunched up, holding on his big hat with one hand, while with the other he dug away the snow mask in little fragments, cursing softly. And the snow piled around him in a close besieging circle as if to bury him.

At any time since night fell the prisoner, by a sudden dash, could have escaped easily, for once hidden by the thick snow and the darkness that walled them around he might have walked on unseen almost at the deputy's elbow. But if such a thing entered his mind he gave no sign. He measured his pace contemptuously to suit that of the laboring deputy behind him, or waited, with silent indifference, while he rested and wasted time. The prisoner seemed to have other plans that could wait patiently.

Close together, they struggled on blindly across the merciless flat, interminable, level as a floor, with not a gulch nor a shallow wash, not even a clump of sage where a rabbit might have found shelter for the night. And now and then the prisoner called back over his shoulder, as if afraid of losing his captor. The deputy answered with inarticulate grunts.

"——find—place—soon," the prisoner finally heard him gasp, the choking gale snatching away half his words. "Go — no — farther — feet — hands — froze."

"Peach of a deputy you are; quit like a dog!" the bandit howled back at him.

He started on again, and fell headlong over a knee-high clump of sage in a shallow hollow, the deputy falling, stiff and helpless as a dead man, on top of him.

"All in," he mumbled. "Can't make her." He lay where he had fallen, refusing to get up. The prisoner sat with his back to the wind, the prostrate deputy at his feet.

"Key—handcuffs—vest pocket," the deputy told him thickly. "Save yo'se'f. Law don't give right freeze you to death."

The young man extracted the key, unlocked the chafing steel from his wrists, and put the handcuffs in his pocket. Free, he began to taunt the helpless man at his feet.

"Fine arm of the law you are!" he jeered in the deputy's ear. "Some detective and thief taker, I don't think! You couldn't land a sick cat in jail on a bench warrant!"

"Can't go no farther," the deputy muttered sleepily. "Done my best."

"Oh, you have, have you?" railed the bandit. "You've done fine, haven't you? You expected me to walk sixty miles in a day, and you can't do fifteen or twenty in a little wind! What's wrong with you is you're only a bloated swine, a swine bloated up with booze. You cheap bar fly, that's what ails you! And you're a quitter, a yellow, mangy dog quitter! Can you hear that?" He leaned over the prostrate deputy and yelled in his ear: "You're a yellow dog!"

The deputy struggled up on his elbow and cursed.

"No livin' man kin call me that to my face!" he said.

"Can't, eh?" sneered the bandit. "I could call you that the best day you ever saw. You'll not land me in jail. I'd be ashamed to look a sneak thief in the face if I was arrested by such as you."

With a mighty effort the deputy struggled to his feet, leaning forward against the wind, groping for his pistol.

"Git up an' march, you," he ordered, "er I'll blow yo' head off!"

Obediently the prisoner rose and started off slowly. From time to time he turned and jeered at the deputy.

"Thief taker, detective!" he howled

above the wind. "'Tracked down by the sleuth of Bitter Springs,' the papers'll say, will they? I'll walk into Bitter Springs all right, but there won't be a deputy behind me. He'll be snoozing under a white shroud, his nose up to the sky."

"Walk!" the deputy commanded, saving his breath, and he staggered along after the captive.

"Poor mutt!" the bandit called back over his shoulder. "Ain't got the grit of a rabbit; quit because the cold pinches a little." The deputy made no reply. His arms swung at his sides, and he swayed drunkenly.

"You'd catch me the first time you got after me, eh?" the gibes continued. "Why, you poor brandy hound, I didn't make any mistake dropping off at Cliff. The government predicted this storm, and I took a chance on it to cover my trail. That wasn't nerve, was it? You poor fathead, you never had a chance to catch me."

But the deputy was silent to his insults. He had fallen prone again.

The bandit went back and kicked him.

"Going to parade me through the streets of Bitter Springs, were you, bar fly?" he yelled in the helpless man's ear. "Going to get a reward of twenty-five hundred dollars and be sheriff, were you? Well, get up, the parade's about to start, and I'm going to dress you up for it so you'll be a fine figure. First, I'll just relieve you of that heavy gun of yours, which don't seem to be of much use to you. You know what I'm going to do with it? I'm going to send it along with these nice little handcuffs of yours to the sheriff by parcel post. And I'll write him a little letter, telling him whose they are. I guess that will put the crusher on your idea of becoming sheriff, eh? He won't tell it around the county, will he? Why, you poor hound, instead of your marching me up the Main Street before your rifle, you'll be ashamed to show your face there. You won't be able to walk the streets of Bitter Springs without them setting the dogs on you. You won't even be deputy no more." He worked as he talked, unstrapping the deputy's pistol belt.

"Now I'll fix you up fine to go into Bitter Springs, if you ever get there," he went on. He drew out his knife, opening it with his teeth, and cut off the long tails of the deputy's coat. Then he set him up and slapped him time and again across the face with his free hand. The helpless man protested feebly, and begged to be let alone. With one last resounding blow, the bandit yelled in his ear:

"That's my way of saying good-by to you."

At four o'clock that morning the station agent at Bitter Springs sat in his silent office, staring at the blank white window that overlooked the deeply drifted tracks. Now and then he tried his key, useless, as he knew, for the wires were down in a dozen places east and west; traffic was stopped, and twenty trains were stalled along the line in the worst blizzard the Red Desert country had known in thirty years.

There came a soft thumping at the door of the little, boxlike waiting room, and a moment later a freezing gust that sent the yellow papers on his desk swirling up to the ceiling informed the station agent that the door was open. Something staggered in and fell, a formless bulk of white, upon the floor in front of the quivering, red-hot stove. He stared at it for twenty seconds before he could understand what it was. Then he saw. It was a man, two men, incased in snow and ice like something dropped from the heart of the howling blizzard. They lay lifeless, side by side, the arm of one around the neck of the other.

The bandit had made good his threat to disgrace the deputy. Through the streets of Bitter Springs he had "paraded" him, helpless, all but dead, robbed of his badge of office, his handcuffs and pistol, his coat tails cut away to shame him; but such was the night that no one, not even the station agent, saw his deeper shame—that the bandit carried him on his back.

Nor did any one ever learn of it. When the first train, white-bearded, hooded with drifted snow, a weird, viking-looking thing, crept into the station at Bitter Springs, bound for the west, two men standing alone on the cinder platform made ready to say good-by like warm and well-tried friends.

"Frien', I'll jest call you frien', fer they ain't no use in your passin' yo' name to me," the deputy was saying. "You know what a man owes to another that's saved his life."

"Deputy, you don't owe me nothing," the other protested. "Why, man, I just had to save you to save myself. I'd 'a' stood a fine show of getting by, coming into any town along this railroad by myself. I just had to bring you along to explain me. And you walked pretty good, too, after I cut those long coat tails off and insulted you to get your mad up; come right out of it."

"Yes, but I come in on yore back, an' I owe you a lot," the deputy insisted.

"You've already paid a lot, deputy," the young man recalled. "You're seeing the office of sheriff slipping out of your hands, and twenty-five hundred dollars along with it. That's something. And you're giving me a fresh start in life. You didn't have to do that, and I appreciate it."

The deputy waved his hand in disclaimer of any credit due him.

"You'd better let me slip you a few dollars," he insisted. "Hit's about all I kin do fer you, frien'."

"I have a plenty," the other man expostulated; "got more of other people's money now than I ought to have," he grinned. "But when that's gone I'm going to spend my own money from then on, like I promised you."

"Mr. John Oakhurst, Jack Hamlin, Lord Chesterfield, all the good names the papers called you—gallant enemy onct, now my frien'—don't bother no more trains. Ef you ever git in a tight pinch, jest drop me a line an' sign it 'Frien',' an' you kin have ever' cent I got."

"I know, deputy; I know. But I ain't ever going to need it." He gripped the deputy's hand. "And come to think of it, there's something else I don't need—a little satchel, you'll find——" He dropped his voice as the conductor passed and swung upon the coach. "Do what you think best with it," he concluded.

When the train pulled out, his one-time prisoner was waving his hand in a last farewell from the platform, and Deputy Ed Morgan was still promising that he would. And he did.

It will no doubt be forgiven him that a few days later he "found" the loot of the bandit. Also may be overlooked his statement, given at length in his favorite paper, that he would have caught the bandit himself, being close upon him, had the malefactor not had an accomplice in the storm—"Bo-rees, accessory after the fact," the paper charged, quoting the deputy.

The paper further made the positive statement that this particular bandit and all bandits who had been harassing the road would in the future retire from business, finding it too hazardous to cope with Ed Morgan, the sleuth of Bitter Springs. So fully was this statement verified by the events of the following months that at the autumn election there was only one choice for the office of sheriff.

A BRAND-NEW AFFLICTION

IN a Western city not long ago all the parents had become possessed by the mania for seeing to it that their children did not suffer from adenoids.

Little Johnny Jones, as a result of the rage for precaution, was sent to see the family physician.

"Mamma," he announced proudly upon his return, "the doctor says I've got anodynes."

The Affair of the Missing Mummy

By W. A. Shryer

Author of "The Affair of the Cuneiform Tablets," "The Elgin Mews Affair," Etc.

Of an extremely efficient queen who, scorning the feminine arts, wore a false beard and had herself addressed as "His Majesty"—and a murder mystery that stirred Detroit some thirty-four hundred years later. Josiah Simms, whose powers of research you are familiar with, links up the modern American mystery with the illustrious gentleman-lady who stirred the ancient world.

THE peculiar murder of old Simon Harkness created a mild stir of excitement when the Detroit newspapers carried a double-column story of the discovery of the body several days after the tragedy probably had occurred. For many years Simon Harkness had been something of a public character, though, it must be admitted, a decidedly notorious one. Also he was reputed to be a man of considerable wealth, although the source of the victim's fortune was much better known to the general public than its probable extent.

Until the passage of legislation preventing the sale of habit-forming drugs, Simon Harkness had been the body and brains of this nefarious business. With the determined enforcement of the recent regulations, however, he had ceased to figure in the public press, his numerous convictions, with their petty fines, ceased, and to all appearances he retired to a quiet and respectable private life in his small house in Glynn Court.

For such a rich man his home was exceedingly unpretentious, being a cheaply constructed frame house on a narrow lot among a dozen others of similar mediocrity on this somewhat narrow, uninteresting street. He was a confirmed bachelor, living entirely alone, except for the doubtful company of a large, ugly sheep dog, which he kept for the most part in the basement, whence it was released at rare intervals into the untidy little back yard inclosed by a high fence.

It was doubtless due to this vociferous animal that his body happened to be discovered as soon as it was. The determined and long-continued yelping of the agonized collie attracted the notice of a passing neighbor, whose investigation through a cellar window disclosed the fact that the dog was slowly being drowned. The weather was exceedingly cold, and, the furnace dying out, allowed the water pipes to burst, creating a situation that suggested immediate attention of an emergency character

Raising no one by loud and continuous knocking, the neighbor telephoned the Animal Welfare League. That efficient organization immediately dispatched an officer to investigate, who did so forcibly and at once, smashing a cellar door and releasing the half-starved and half-drowned animal. The latter declined to be tempted by any proffers of food, however, showing by

every possible evidence of canine intelligence that his one and only desire was to secure an entrance to the ground floor of the house. The officer, being quite as intelligent as the dog in this instance, humored the animal, forcing another entrance through the back door.

The dog bounded through this opening, and rushed to the front of the cold, still house, closely followed by the man. They reached the front room, which by courtesy might have been called a library, and there found the master, dead and stiff, in a high-backed oaken chair. His body slumped gruesomely to one side, but his grisly head was held upright by a thin, strong rope, which was tightly coiled around his neck, the ends passing through two small apertures in the chair back. The ends had been tied around a short piece of broom handle, which, used as a tourniquet, had allowed the murderer to twist the rope to a tautness sufficient to cause very certain death to the victim. The ends of the broomstick had been notched and another piece of rope fastened to each end with a sailor's half hitch. Each rope had in like manner been fastened to the knobs of the chair at each side of its high back, thus insuring a constant and deadly pressure on the rope around the dead man's neck.

This decidedly unexpected and disconcerting discovery caused the investigating official a slight but temporary panic, after which he sought the location of the telephone. He found the instrument in the entrance hall, and, with hardly a delay, secured the nearest police station, from which two officers and a lieutenant were sent at once to investigate.

Shortly following their arrival came a reporter from the Detroit *News*, the latter being a friend of the Animal Welfare investigator, who had taken the responsibility of tipping off the reporter to what he suspected would be an interesting story. To the four the officer explained the manner and cause of his discovery, after which he dragged the protesting collie with him and left.

With the departure of the latter, the police commenced a methodical search of the premises. The house contained but six rooms—a library or parlor, a dining room and kitchen below, and three small bedrooms on the second floor. The latter was in reality but a half story, and nothing suspicious or interesting was discovered there. Except for the victim and the room in which he had been found, the same might as well be said of the ground floor, as the furniture was old, meager, and ugly, for the most part typically representative of the dark ages of American household art of about the year 1880.

In the library, however, there was more than sufficient material to both interest and perplex the police officers. Beside the body of the victim they found several things that mystified them considerably. On the side of the room nearest the door lay a long, pine box, perfectly plain and very substantial. Except for being a trifle shorter and considerably narrower than the ordinary box used by undertakers, this one might have been a regular "rough" box. On removing the lid it was found to contain sand and bricks for about a third of its depth, requiring the strength of two officers to lift it with any comfort from the floor.

On top of the box rested what appeared to be a peculiar musical instrument. The sounding board was made of red wood, in the shape of a bowl, barbarically decorated. Stretched tightly across the mouth of the bowl was a piece of antelope skin with the natural hair thereon. Four gut strings were supported by a wooden framework, the latter decorated in a primitive fashion with colored beads. This instrument gave forth an odor unpleasant to a degree, suggesting filth and nauseous perfume in indescribable blending.

"New one on me," commented one of the officers. "If I owned it, I'd hang it in the alley."

"What do you make of these?" asked the other officer, holding up four ebony sticks he had picked from the floor.

"Them's easy," answered the lieutenant. "Chopsticks."

On the table near the window reposed a beautifully carved opium pipe of ebony inlaid with silver.

"Great guy for the hop, old Harkness was," suggested the lieutenant. "Rather fancy with his pipe, though. Think he might have spent a little more on the real comforts of home. Few chromos, maybe-plush rockin'-chair, and a few pillows here and there."

"But this pipe hasn't been smoked at all, lieutenant," remonstrated the reporter. "Looks like an antique, and if it ever has been used it must have been a long while ago."

"Can't tell about these dope fiends, sonny," the officer replied. "Probably cleaned it every time. Go ring up the doc, Spellman," he directed one of his men. "Ought to learn when this thing happened."

As the patrolman left to follow these instructions, his companion found an additional item of interest under the chair in which the victim sat. It was a large, blue object almost three inches across, made of some kind of pottery, glazed, and in the form of a beetle, slightly rounded on top and flat below. The wings of the beetle were attached to the body with strings through small holes.

"Some Chinee dingus probably," commented the lieutenant. "Put it with the rest of the exhibits, Frank. I'll frisk his clothes and see what I can find."

The pockets of the dead man contained very little. A bunch of keys, a stubby lead pencil, a few matches, and a letter. The latter was in its original envelope, and was postmarked "New York City," with a date of seven days before. The letter itself was on cheap bond paper, and read as follows:

MR. SIMON HARKNESS, *Detroit, Michigan.*

MY DEAR SIR: I am planning to leave for your city in two, three days.

I have with me the true body of Queen Hatsu, and I think you will enjoy it. You may be positively sure I will not forget it. Be sure to have me the money as agreement. Now may I tell you good-by for the present. Be sure to have me the money.

Hoping to see you soon,

F. K. EL-ABOUTIGI.

"Now what do you think of that?" the lieutenant inquired peevishly. "I suppose this Hatsu business is some new chink name for coke. The old guy still peddling the stuff probably."

The entrance of the doctor at this juncture prevented any further speculation on this interesting subject, as the physician inquired the facts and went about a businesslike examination of the body at once.

"Death by strangulation," he announced shortly. "Marks of fingers very evident, although final death doubtless caused by the twisted rope. He's been dead not less than three or four days, maybe more. I guess that's about all the help I can afford you, gentlemen."

The departure of the physician acted as a signal to the lieutenant, who gave orders to one of his subordinates to remain in the house, suggesting that he light the old-fashioned gas grate to keep from freezing to death. Just as the lieutenant and his other man were on the point of leaving, the reporter called them back.

"Just a minute, lieutenant. Here's a check book in this table drawer, with a stub showing a check to "Cash" for ten thousand dollars five days ago. Guess we'd better see what the bank says about it, hadn't we?"

"Sure," replied the officer nonchalantly. "What's the name of the bank?"

"First National," replied the reporter. "I'll run down with you."

The patrolman left them at Bethune Street, and the reporter, with the lieutenant, continued downtown to the bank. The officer asked for the cashier, who seemed willing enough to lend any aid possible in the way of information. After a consultation with the paying teller for the letter H, he returned and announced:

"Mr. Harkness called in person for the ten thousand dollars. He had telephoned the day before, and requested that we have the money for him in Canadian bills. We handle a great deal of Canadian money, and were glad to let him have it, as it saved us the transfer to Windsor. It was a rather unusual request, however, and I tell you

of it, since it may have some bearing on your investigation."

The lieutenant grunted his thanks, and the two left the bank.

"What do you make of this case, lieutenant?" the reporter asked as they were about to separate at the corner of Fort and Griswold Streets.

"Oh, had a run-in with some old hop fiend probably, and got his. Or maybe bumped up against a gang of tough chinks selling him some hop. Little early to say yet, but we'll run down the crook in a day or two."

"Well, keep me posted, lieutenant," replied the reporter, making his way back to the officer. "I'll call you up to-morrow."

"All right, sonny," grinned the policeman. "So long."

The reporter experienced no difficulty in writing a long and interesting story of the murder for the morning edition. Even without the unusual clews, which afforded plenty of material for almost a column of conjecture and guesswork, the very character of the man and his previous unsavory reputation insured enough interesting data for a police story of unusual prominence.

The next afternoon about four o'clock the managing editor sent for the reporter on the Harkness case.

"I read your morning's story on the Harkness murder with considerable interest, Bennett," he complimented the reporter on his arrival. "Looks like a good chance for a several-days' follow-up. What are the developments?"

"Not a thing, chief," mournfully responded Bennett. "The lieutenant's gone bughouse on the chink lay. If you ask me, it's a million-to-one shot that there was a single chink within three miles of the place, and you know as well as I do that the Chinese in this man's town are the best behaved of our whole melting-pot smear. You can take it from me, chief, this case has got the lieut with one hand above water and the other holding his nose."

"Shouldn't be at all surprised," acquiesced the editor. "Suppose you bring me a perfect description of everything you found there and secure the original of the note found on Harkness' body. Do you think you can get it?"

"Sure," swaggered the reporter. "The lieut doesn't know what to do with it, anyway. I'll have it up here within an hour for you."

True to his boast, the reporter delivered the note to the managing editor well within his stipulated time limit. Also a full description of everything he had observed at the scene of the crime. The editor first carefully read the report of his subordinate, and then directed his attention to the letter. The communication was rather badly written, but in a hand clearly legible. He held the paper to the light and scrutinized it from every angle, pursing his lips and puckering his brows as he thought.

"Hum!" he whispered at last. "I think old Josiah Simms may be the man for me on this. I'll just call him up."

He secured a number on the Hemlock exchange, and, asking for Mr. Simms, was informed by the latter's maid, Ellen, that her master was in New York, but expected back the next day. He left word for the latter to call up the *News* immediately on his return, and at about ten o'clock the next morning found Mr. Simms on the wire asking for him.

"Hello, Mr. Simms. I want to invite myself out to see you. How would this evening suit?"

"All right. All right. Been pretty busy and a little tired for a young feller, but a nap this afternoon will fix me up O. K. If you are coming, don't get here later than seven-thirty. Can't be robbed of my sleep."

"Thank you, Mr. Simms," replied the editor. "I'll be right on time. Good-by."

Punctual to the minute, the managing editor rapped with the antique knocker, and was admitted by the maid Ellen to the attractive home of Mr. Simms on Burlingame Avenue. He was ushered into the library, a large, cozy room lined with books from ceiling to baseboard, the very atmosphere of which

was studious and elegant, in spite of the fact that there didn't appear to be an extravagantly expensive article in the comfortable room.

He found Mr. Simms seated beneath a reading lamp, with a large volume of Rawlinson on his knees. The little old man was about sixty years old, but as he arose with alacrity and greeted his visitor with charming courtesy, you would have marveled at his nimbleness. He wore a long thin alpaca coat, huge carpet slippers, and thin, clinging trousers. He nervously wiped his old-fashioned steel spectacles with a large silk handkerchief, and waved the editor to a deep, comfortable chair opposite his own.

"Well, well, well!" ejaculated Mr. Simms. "Glad to see you, I'm sure, but out with it! Know you didn't run clear out here in the cold for a social call, eh?"

"You do me an injustice, Mr. Simms," laughed the amused editor. "You know very well I'd go a long way for the pleasure of an hour or so of your delightful company."

"Would, eh? Humph! Well, you partly answered my question, anyway. What's on your mind, eh?"

"I want to consult you, Mr. Simms, on a rather peculiar affair, but before doing so should like to talk about something else."

"Regular diplomat, eh? Well, fire ahead!"

"In one or two crimes that puzzled us you showed a predilection for picking out the salient points of a mystery with a degree of cunning that to me was uncanny. I should like to ask if you can explain how you did it?"

"My dear boy," Mr. Simms remonstrated reprovingly, "you have under you probably ten or a dozen reporters. If you assign any one of them to a certain story, you can sit down in advance of his return and write an account of his probable performance with an accuracy that would be play to you, but a mystery to him. Now, couldn't you?"

"Well, yes, within certain limits, I could," agreed the editor.

"Exactly. Well, I am in precisely the same boat. For practically forty years, before I retired to enjoy the rest of my youth, I did nothing but engage in the practice of criminal law. During that time I handled not less than fifteen thousand cases, I should guess. I could classify at least twelve thousand of them among ten distinct types. If a new one came in I figured out the type to which he belonged, after which I could invariably tell him the nature of the crime of which he had been accused or expected to be accused. If he ever came back I could usually guess not only the crime, but in all probability tell him how he committed it, barring a few minor details. That's the answer. Nothing occult or mysterious about it. Simply a fair working set of brain cells and a lot of observation and experience."

"I see," murmured the editor. "As a natural corollary, therefore, if you had the full description of a certain crime, you could tell who committed it?"

"Not necessarily at all. If it was committed by one of my clients, however, I would be perfectly willing to bet I could. Also, if it were committed by a pal of his, I could be pretty sure of finding out who he was if it became interesting for me to know, for all I had to do was determine the type of man who did it and seek out another of the same type. If he knew the man, or recognized his method, he would tell me in a minute."

"Well, just read these notes, after which I'll give you a letter. I want to test a certain idea, and assure you that before we get through you will agree with me I haven't taken up your time for nothing." The editor smiled as he handed the description of the surroundings in the Harkness murder to the keen little old man.

Mr. Simms read the notes very carefully, repeatedly wiping his glasses with his large silk handkerchief, and occasionally digging absent-mindedly at his thinly covered scalp.

"Very interesting, very!" exclaimed Mr. Simms, after a second perusal of

the papers. "This crime was never committed by a Detroit crook. I'll take my oath on that. The conflicting exhibits scattered around—almost a stroke of genius. Certainly an evidence of thorough preparation and design. Let's see your letter now."

As the old man took the note he jumped to his feet with extreme excitement as he read the superscription.

"Old Simon Harkness, dead and murdered!" he cried excitedly. "When did it occur, and I wonder why I didn't know all about it?"

"He died about a week ago, but his body was not discovered until yesterday. You were in New York, or would have known. I didn't know you were a friend of his, however."

"Friend! Friend!" the irate little man yelled. "Friend of that crooked, low-down, underhanded, unscrupulous ghoul? I should say not! No! Not! Nix! Never! I am unfortunate enough to be his second cousin, and God knows I have wished him dead a thousand times. It would have saved us the shame of many wretched years. Pardon my feelings, but you can never know half of what that devil has done to make life miserable for myself and my niece. I'm glad he's dead, and it's no wonder I haven't been told. Every friend I've got knows I'd rather hear about Beelzebub himself."

"I hope I have committed no unpardonable faux pàs?" the editor apologized.

"Course not. Course not. I'm an old man, and have to shoot off steam. Forget it. Let's see this letter now."

The old man conquered his agitation, and was soon deeply immersed in the problems evidently suggested by the communication he held in his hand.

"Curious. Very curious," he muttered. "What do you find especially significant about this letter?"

"Well, there are enough curious features to it, but there was just one that caused me to think of you at once. The reference to Hatsu, which the police seemed to think referred to something Chinese, was very clear to me in connection with the name signed to the letter. It couldn't very well refer to anything or anybody but Queen Hatshepsowet. I'm nothing of an Egyptologist, but I know enough to connect Hatsu with that remarkable ruler. She is very commonly known as Hat-a-su, and this writer simply left out the 'a.' At least that is my deduction."

"Sure, of course," Mr. Simms jerked out. "And there he made his first mistake. Aboutigi is a very common and very respectable Coptic name in the vicinity of Assuit. There is a town of that name just above it, and the Mudiriyeh, or province, of Assuit has been governed by an Aboutigi more than once. A Copt intelligent enough to write such a letter as this might *say* 'Hatsu,' if talking in a hurry, but he would never write it so. Moreover, there is another bit of evidence that convinces me that the writer has assumed a personality he does not possess. No Copt, nor even an Arab or Syrian, would think of writing such a letter without making some reference as to the state of health in which he hopes the recipient will find himself. These two points alone are enough to assure me that the writer is not what he pretends to be. It also suggests a previous correspondence. We must, of course, find the rest. They haven't by any chance shown up, have they?"

"No," replied the editor.

"No," repeated Simms, "they wouldn't—not with Simon, but they have never been destroyed by him, and we shall find 'em without much trouble probably. If the rest reflect the same peculiar aspect of this one, it will make locating the criminal vastly more easy, too. If they don't, we shall have to conclude this is purely a coincidence. I am referring to the paper, which you doubtless noted?" Mr. Simms queried with a rising inflection.

"Yes," replied the editor. "I noticed that the small watermark fixed its identity with a peculiarly local paper, the 'B. of T.' bond. That paper has a very limited custom, and I doubt very much whether it is for sale in New York at all. Of course, any piece of paper might find its way to any city

in the world, but it seemed significant to me."

"Exactly," replied Simms. "By the way, I should like to take a look at these particular exhibits. Do you know where the police have them?"

"Yes, they are still in the house in Glynn Court. The lieutenant has a weird theory that this criminal is bound to return to the scene of the crime, and has everything kept as it was found, with a plain-clothes man on guard. I think the lieutenant is losing his faith, however, and that about to-morrow he will close up the place and move the stuff to headquarters."

"That being the case, hadn't we better get down there? I should like to see everything just as it was, if possible. It's only a quarter to nine," suggested Mr. Simms, consulting a huge hunting-case watch.

"All right," assented the other. "We can run down there in my electric in about five minutes."

The officer was up, and seemed more than glad to have them break the monotony of his uninteresting vigil. Mr. Simms carefully examined each of the objects with considerable interest, paying the least attention to the chopsticks and the opium pipe.

"Hah!" he commented, picking up the peculiar musical instrument. "Bisharin banjo. Of little value, but interesting from an ethnologic viewpoint. Dirtiest and most handsome people in all Africa. You can smell them for half a mile, if the wind's right. Fine odor this, but shouldn't care to live with it. And what have we here?" he exclaimed, picking up the glazed beetle. "On my soul, a perfect heart scarab! Genuine, too—eighteenth dynasty probably. Well, well, let's measure this box."

After taking the length and breadth of the rough box, Mr. Simms turned to the patrolman.

"Let's see the objects taken from the body of the victim, please."

"Yes, sir," assented the policeman. "Here they are in this cigar box."

Mr. Simms paid no attention to anything but the bunch of keys. He noted particularly two just alike, which he compared with two on his own key ring. After a few minutes in thought, he turned to his friend.

"Seen all I need to see here. Let's go back home. Certainly more cheerful, and I'll have Ellen mix up a couple of good hot toddies. Good night, officer; sorry I can't invite you to accompany us."

Back in his own library, Mr. Simms and the editor sat in silence for a few moments while they enjoyed the drinks quickly served by the maid. The silence was at last broken by the editor.

"What is your theory now, Mr. Simms?" he inquired.

"As to the general facts, no theory at all; know exactly what occurred. Number of fine points to ascertain, however. Very clever scheme, it strikes me, and I'll run over a few of the things I'd bet on."

"Go ahead," encouraged the editor. "I'm all attention."

"Well, in the first place Simon had a side that few people knew about. He was an inveterate collector of antiques, and had a collection that was a wonder. To be sure, it was about half genuine and half bogus, but that was because he was such a cautious and suspicious devil; he'd never ask any advice about anything. He kept his collection behind his office room down in Woodbridge Street. It's about the last place on earth you'd expect to find such a layout, and Simon kept it there for just that reason."

"I suppose you will inherit his collection now," suggested the editor.

"Never!" Mr. Simms returned emphatically. "It would be just like him to die intestate, though. He hated death like taxes, and I doubt if he ever drew a will. Dorothy and I are his only heirs, but if his dirty, filthy money comes to us we'll endow a hospital for drug addicts and their dependents. Nothing else would make him turn over in his grave so surely."

"To get back to our theory," smiled his friend. "What do you think happened?"

"Well, some smooth crook learned

of Simon's weakness for antiques and framed up on him. There are several missing links, but I feel perfectly certain that on the night of the murder he brought to Simon's house the box we saw and pretended it contained the genuine mummy of Queen Hatshepsowet. The other articles he brought with him for one of two certain reasons. The first might have been for the purpose of leaving clews an ordinary policeman would be sure to stub his foot over. The second would be in more perfect keeping with the Oriental personality he represented himself to be. It would have been quite in character for an Egyptian, Arab, or Copt to have preceded the final bargaining by the giving of gifts. It is quite customary, and with Simon was bound to be a sure winner."

"But why just the articles found?" asked the editor.

"Well, no one can be absolutely sure of that, of course. The crook may have brought the easiest things he could procure, but I think he must have had a deeper design. He knew the reputation of Simon, and to have thrown in a few Chinese things would serve exactly the purpose they have served, balling up the police right on the jump. The heart scarab, I think, fulfilled another purpose. It is more than likely that he never expected to get so far as opening the box, and exhibited the scarab as the genuine one he had taken from the mummy. He had to get Simon to produce the money, of course, and some scheme was absolutely necessary. If he ever opened the box, it was all off naturally, for it contained nothing but bricks and sand."

"What about the Bisharin banjo?"

"Well, because of that I am inclined to favor the gift theory. It was inexpensive, added local color, and smelled badly enough to disconcert most anybody."

"But do you think Harkness would be willing to pay so much as ten thousand dollars for a mummy?" inquired the editor incredulously.

"Ten thousand dollars for the mummy of Hatasu!" the excited little man almost yelled at the editor. "Why, man alive, that mummy would be priceless, ab-solute-ly above price! Heavens above, man, haven't you even a mild conception of who Hatshepsu was?"

"I'm afraid you must have more patience with me, Mr. Simms," his friend replied. "As I've said before, I'm no Egyptologist, and, beyond knowing that she was a queen of Egypt who lived about 1533 B. C., my information isn't very extensive. Nothing would be more welcome, however, than a little enlightenment on the subject, such as I know you can so well afford."

"Since you know her date in history, I naturally assume that you know her dynasty, which was the eighteenth," Mr. Simms replied, sailing into his subject with a delight that was manifest. "That dynasty, by the way, produced more efficient warriors and added more provinces to the kingdom than any other Egyptian dynasty that ever ruled. It also contained one of the first kings to make a dream of empire a reality."

"I seem to remember him as the father of Queen Hatasu," commented the editor.

"Yes," confirmed Mr. Simms, "he was Thothmes the First. He annexed a great part of Syria, and was a very strong ruler, but from an Egyptian viewpoint he possessed a great royal weakness. Strength of succession came from the female side, and the mother of Thothmes was of somewhat dubious extraction. Peculiarly enough all of Thothmes' sons were presented to the king by concubines equally low born, and his only child by a royal mother was his daughter Hatasu. The latter, in fact, was considerably 'better born' than her father, and even before her majority it became necessary for Thothmes to allow her to take precedence, and she accordingly became ruler with him."

"Was there any element of weakness in Hatasu's pretensions to the throne?" queried his interested listener.

"Yes, there was, but the ingenuity of this remarkable woman overcame it by arranging a timely miracle. A Pharaoh was expected to trace back his

lineage to the dominant god in his name, and as neither of Hatasu's parents had ever claimed such a distinction, Hatasu took it upon herself to repair this oversight. She 'discovered' that her mother had been secretly courted by the god Ammon Ra, and, that having looked with favor upon her heavenly suitor, had been presented with the highest token of his benignity, the result of which was Hatasu herself. Every step of this interesting proceeding Hatasu emblazoned on the temples."

"Did she attempt to establish any other revolutionary precedents?" the editor asked.

"Yes, and one in particular gave the scholars a lot of bother later. She had herself declared a *king,* assuming among other titles that of King Makeri. She wore a false beard, and caused herself to be addressed as 'His Majesty.' On all her buildings she had herself depicted as a man, with a man's chest and the keffieh, short loin cloth and false beard. As the story of her many activities covered the walls of a great many buildings erected by her, it took a long time for Egyptologists to convince themselves that she was really Queen Hatshepsowet, instead of some extremely efficient king whose exact place in Egyptian history they could not explain."

"There were rather conflicting theories as to her connubial relations, too, weren't there?"

"There certainly were," replied Mr. Simms, "but it is pretty generally agreed now that she was married to but one of her immediate family. The facts as now accepted seem to prove that she reigned for a while jointly with her father. She then married a younger brother, Thothmes the Second, and reigned jointly with him. Some think she murdered this brother husband, but it is not very well sustained. After his death, however, she reigned alone for a while, and then caused her nephew to marry her own daughter. She reigned jointly with him thereafter. This nephew son-in-law became a most powerful ruler as he grew older. It was Thothmes the Third, and there is no doubt that he grew tired of the shrewish domination of his mother-in-law and at last rebelled against it."

"Isn't it supposed that he murdered her at last?" asked the editor.

"That is something no one can produce a fact to sustain. All of a sudden she simply disappeared, and at a time when she must have been in the height of her intellectual power, too. It is very mysterious, and as there is all the evidence in the world that Thothmes the Third hated her with a consuming passion, his subsequent acts make the quest for Hatasu's mummy a task that has engrossed many a scholar's deepest interest. Thothmes the Third gave orders to remove her name from every temple and building, and, while this was not an uncommon practice, no king before or after pursued such a policy with equal spleen or similar thoroughness. He even had her beautiful obelisk at Karnak completely walled up, thus preserving for future generations an artistic record more clear and undefiled than any ever discovered."

"Do you think there is a chance that he also destroyed her mummy?"

"There is every chance in the world that he *might* have done so. He certainly nursed a hate for her that would find its supreme expression in thus depriving her of the joys of the hereafter. It would have been the one culminating stroke of execration. But there is no evidence of it whatever. The fact that her mummy has never been found does not furnish the slightest indication that it has been destroyed. When I tell you, however, that the mummies of every one of her immediate family have been found, as well as those of most of her dynasty, you may appreciate what a wonderful thing it would be to find the mummy of the greatest queen Egypt ever possessed. In fact, she is one of the most remarkable queens of history."

"You have told me quite enough," the editor interjected, "to convince me that the mummy of this remarkable woman is an antiquarian relic of priceless value. I suppose old Simon Hark-

ness knew as much of her as you have told me, and that being the case I have some difficulty in making myself believe he could really hope to have such a marvelous find delivered at his very door for ten thousand dollars."

"Well," mused the old man, "I never said I thought he did, for I don't think anything of the kind. In the first place, though, I doubt if he knew as much about Hatshepsowet as you do right now. In the second place, we haven't the slighest evidence that he expected to possess her earthly remains for ten thousand dollars, if he expected to secure the mummy at all; the ten-thousand-dollar check may have had nothing on earth to do with this transaction. In the third place, I think he did know enough to hope that if the mummy wasn't that of Hatshepsowet it *might* prove to be a genuine royal mummy in any event, when it would be well worth dickering for. In the fourth place, and, most certain of all, it wasn't his nature to pay the price for anything without trying to steal it or secure it through some nefarious chicanery first. In the fifth place, it's getting late, and I'm going to bed, so you may go home and get some sleep."

"You needn't retire on my account," laughed Mr. Simms' guest. "I'll be going, however, as I may want to come again."

"All right. All right," nodded Simms. "I'll run down in the morning to my old friend, Judge Durham, and get myself appointed administrator of Simon's estate. I'm the next of kin, and can wind up the formalities in ten minutes. It isn't a position I shall be proud of, however, and I want you to see to it that no mention is made of it in any of the papers. As administrator, I'll secure an order for his keys, and make a still hunt for a little information we need badly. I'll keep you posted as anything turns up."

"Good night, Mr. Simms, and let me thank you for the information you have given me. I'll see that you get no 'undesirable publicity,' and shall expect to hear from you in the course of the day."

It was not until after three o'clock the next afternoon, however, that the editor received any word from Mr. Simms, when the little old man appeared in person to report his discoveries of the day.

"Got appointed all right," the latter announced, "and secured the keys. Went right down to Woodbridge Street first thing. I'm almost sorry I went. Getting cold feet already. I certainly covet that collection. Less junk than I expected. Beautiful! Simply be-auti-ful! It's going to be a pull at my heartstrings to see them go to some one else."

"But did you find anything bearing on the missing-mummy problem?" asked the editor.

"Yes. Yes, of course," replied the old man, with an attempt to throw off his feeling of covetousness. "Right near the door I found the most beautiful mummy case I ever saw. Its condition is almost perfect, and its decorations simply superb. It's a genuine eighteenth-dynasty case, and I haven't a doubt contained a royal mummy, too. A large figure of Anubis extends down the center of the top from the ankles to above the waist, and just over its head was a large cartouche in blue and gold. It is undeniably a genuine cartouche of Hatshepsowet, but where it came from, and to what it may have been attached, I haven't the ghost of an idea."

"But I thought you said it was attached to the top of the mummy case?" the editor expostulated.

"It was. It was," replied the old man impatiently. "Mortised in and fastened with most amazing cleverness. I got it off after about an hour's work, and found the top of the case grooved to take a most ingenious spreading wedge, which held the cartouche in place in a way to deceive any one not seeking to discover exactly the sort of substitution that had been practiced. Here it is. Ain't it a beauty?"

The editor was forced to express his admiration in no uncertain terms, for the cartouche in itself was a most remarkable bit of Egyptian art. The old

man handled it with a degree of affection that reflected most expressively the controversy going on within him.

"Well, well!" sighed Mr. Simms. "Let's forget it. Simon had a safety-deposit box, as I suspected, and I found there exactly what I knew I should find somewhere. There were fourteen letters from our friend Aboutigi, and copies of five from Simon to him. The correspondence started over five months ago. Here they are, but you needn't take the trouble to read 'em. Just notice, though, that all but two are on B. of T. bond, and that the other two are on Jupiter bond. I didn't know the latter paper, but found out it is made in Michigan and distributed through a Detroit jobber."

"Ah, ha!" exclaimed the editor. "All of those letters, then, were probably written here and sent to New York for mailing to Harkness?"

"That's what I have thought from the first," replied Simms. "Two of the letters, by the way, according to the postmarks, were mailed the day before they were written, which seems to indicate that the arithmetic of friend Aboutigi is hardly as strong as his ingenuity."

"Hadn't I better read the letters?"

"Can if you want to, but it will save time if I tell you the gist of 'em," replied Simms, after which he detailed to his interested listener the main points covered by the letters.

It appeared that the first five notes had to do with selling a mummy case. The writer told a long-winded, involved, but fairly convincing, story about his living in Egypt all his life, going to the American mission school, and at last becoming a dragoman. In the latter capacity some Arabs living at Luxor approached him regarding the disposal of a royal mummy they had unearthed among the Tombs of the Queens back of Deir el-Bahri. He stated that he bought it from them, and kept it hidden for five years, as it would belong to the government, of course, and naturally he'd have a terrible time getting it out of the country.

In regard to the final solution of this problem, he became rather vague, but hinted that the mummy had been smuggled out with a caravan across the Sinai Peninsula into Syria, and shipped from there to Greece. He claimed it had been held for him in Greece for over a year and that after the war broke out he had at last managed to escape from Egypt himself and land in Piræus, where he found the mummy awaiting him, but no one with any money to buy it. The most unlikely part of the whole story related to the ease with which he succeeded in leaving Greece for America, where he claimed to have landed safely about six months before, in spite of all the dangers of being blown up on the long voyage through the Mediterranean and across the Atlantic.

"Do you think Harkness swallowed all that without any suspicion?" the editor inquired at this point.

"Of course not. What he thought, I'd bet on," Mr. Simms responded. "He figured out that this poor, ignorant dragoman had stolen the mummy, and, that being the case, any story he told about it would be a lie, anyway. Because he felt sure it was stolen he figured he could buy it at his own price, or maybe bluff the native out of it completely. The smoothness of this writer, however, is one of the most interesting features of the whole deal. He didn't try to sell Simon the mummy at all. He let Simon sell himself."

"What do you mean, 'sell himself?'" inquired the interested listener.

"Just what I say. He wrote Simon he had only the mummy *case* to sell. He guaranteed it a genuine royal mummy case of the eighteenth dynasty, and offered it to Simon for one thousand dollars. Simon's first letter says to rush it on instantly, but this guy was too smooth. He told Simon to deposit one thousand dollars with Benzoni, the Antoine Street banker, who finances all the wops from southern Europe who infest that part of Detroit. He promised to ship the case then, subject to Simon's entire satisfaction. As Simon couldn't lose, he did it. His curiosity was too strong for him."

"Pretty smooth," the editor laughed.

"Yep. And Simon fell immediately, just as it was figured out in advance he would. When he saw that cartouche of Hatasu he probably sent a special delivery, asking where the mummy was, could he get it, and how much. He wrote the letter, anyhow, as I have the copy, and that's exactly what he asked.

"A regular Oriental gab fest followed. Aboutigi wrote nine letters. First the mummy was sold. Then he discovered his cousin had it. Next learned his cousin had given an option on it, but in the final wind-up claimed he could secure it for Simon, but would have to reimburse his cousin for half its value. The cousin declared it was worth at least fifty thousand dollars, but agreed to take twenty thousand dollars for his half share. Simon's last copy says he will look the mummy over and if it's in good condition and so forth he may consider paying forty thousand dollars for it. The letter found on his body was the last one, and within a day or two after its receipt the exhibits we looked at were probably carted up, and Aboutigi with 'em. We're now ready to nab the crook."

"Sounds simple enough, but how do you propose to do it?"

"Don't know yet. Tell you better to-morrow. Good-by." And with no further information to gratify the curiosity of his friend he padded out and took a street car for home.

That evening after dinner Mr. Simms announced his intention of going downtown on business, a decision that surprised and worried his model servant, Ellen, considerably. Since retiring from the active practice of law, he had never been known to do such a thing, and to the maid this break in his orderly habits spelled calamity. It was with decided reluctance that she brought his old-fashioned arctics, which the old man drew over his loose congress gaiters with a spirit of bravado that intensified her apprehension. She helped him into his tight short overcoat, beneath which the flapping tails of his alpaca coat protruded, and as he trotted out the door asked him how soon he would return.

"Don't know. Going down to Mike's saloon. Go to bed and put out the lights when you're ready. I'll be back perfectly sober." Mr. Simms chuckled to himself as he took this parting shot to intensify the concern of his devoted servitor. Not getting out often, he proposed to enjoy every moment of it.

His suggested intention, however, was far from his real purpose, although his first call was, in fact, at the café and saloon of Mike Drake. "Mike's Place" was located in Cadillac Square, and, on entering its brilliantly lighted bar, the casual visitor would not have been struck by anything to distinguish it from any other. At this early hour very few habitués were in evidence, but later in the evening the skilled observer would have experienced no difficulty in picking out of the crowd a number of high-grade confidence or "sky" men, and even the average man of the street would have been struck by the preponderance of prosperous, flashily dressed "sports" whose very atmosphere suggested the gambler.

Under favorable conditions games of chance ran full blast in the room above the saloon, but from the dejected appearance of the proprietor, as he leaned on the end of the bar, Mr. Simms concluded the lid was on.

"Evening, Mike," he greeted the saloon keeper.

"Well, well, Mr. Simms! You're a sight for sore eyes!" he was welcomed effusively by the diamond-bedecked Mr. Drake. "Ain't seen you in a month of Sundays. Come in and set down and rest your feet."

He led the little old man to a soundproof private den in the rear, where he insisted on a round of drinks before his visitor had time to seat himself.

"What's the good word, and how's every little thing? I say, Joe," he called through the door, "bring us a couple and a box of smokes worth smoking."

"Much obliged, Mike; much obliged," protested Mr. Simms. "Have him make mine a mineral water."

The drinks and cigars having been properly served, Mr. Simms requested

Drake to close the door, after which he asked:

"I want to see One-lamp Sam, Mike. What time will he be on to-night?"

"He won't be on at all, Mr. Simms," replied Mike sadly. "The dinge got winged during a lot of wop gun play over on Mullet Street last night. It's put me on the fritz right. Tried a new outside man last night and the bulls pulled us when the bank was twenty-eight hundred dollars ahead. Must 'a' been a ringer, though you got to hand it to Sam. No phonys ever got by him. Best lookout I ever seen. Knows 'em all, and from yegg to sky men."

"I thought some calamity must have overtaken you," the old man smiled. "But how did Sam happen to get in a mix-up with the wops?"

"Just tough luck, Mr. Simms," replied the saloon keeper earnestly. "He walks under a ladder that morning, and at five o'clock he gets word his girl's in a jam in Toledo. Gets out of stir only the week before, and they give her the hours, so it's up to her to lam the town quick, and she gets here a little after seven. Sam he meets her at the interurban station and hikes her over to some friends of his on Mullet Street, and just as they gets to the corner of Mullet and Antoine—blam! blam! blam!—a brace of gats lets loose and one of the wops wings 'im. He flops, and the skirt makes her get-away, but before he knows what hits 'im the bulls come tearin' up and nabs 'im."

"But a shot in the hand didn't put him out of business, did it?" asked Mr. Simms in some perplexity.

"Naw," answered Mike. "But he's hurt some, and they gives 'im a ride to the receivin' hospital, and as usual hands 'im the third degree while he's losin' blood like a stuck pig. He's got a regular elephant gat on 'im at that, and he can't give no account of hisself a-tall. If he tells the truth they nabs the skirt, and if he hands 'em the bull they catches 'im at it, see? One of the wops is all but bumped off, and ain't got a chance. The dicks got to do something to make a play, so they puts out a rap on Sam, and there you are!"

"Well, well," responded Mr. Simms feelingly. "I'll just run over and see what I can do for Sam. If the nigger has had sense enough to keep his mouth shut, he's all right, and I'll see he doesn't get the worst of it."

"Will you now, Mr. Simms?" Drake cried, with an appearance of contentment that was instantaneous. "You're the guy to bull the dicks! If you take Sam on, he's as good as sprung right now. And, Mr. Simms," he whispered, "if you need any stuff, call on Mike. You know me."

"That's all right, Mike. I'll do this all on my own, but I'm just as much obliged to you. I'll get right over there. Guess you'd better order me a taxi, though. It's a hard place to get to, and it's too cold to walk."

A taxi was at the door in less than a minute, and in three more Mr. Simms was landed at the receiving hospital, where a few words with the superintendent secured a private interview with the negro for Mr. Simms. The patient was in a private room, where he had been placed by the police to prevent his communicating with any one. He was pathetically glad in his welcome of the little old man, to whom he talked freely as soon as he was convinced there was no opportunity of being overheard.

"It's like dis, Mr. Simms," he confided. "I has to hand it some to Mike. Dis ain't no common wop scrap, and I don't dast tell Mike all I knows, see? Wot I tells 'im is right, so fer as it goes, but it happens to go a little furder. I gits winged by mistake, all right, and I knows exactly who done it, but dat don't git me nothin'. De guy wot gits me is Dago Frank, and I seen him as plain as day. He's gunnin' to top off a sky man I knows some, whose moniker's Luigi. Guess he gets 'im, too, though the nurse tells me they're still pumpin' the dope into 'im, hopin' he'll spill. Well, just as I see what's doin', and reaches for ma gat Sicily Dan rushes up and holds me down. 'You keepa yore trap closed, see?' he whis-

pers to me. 'Dat Frank, hea my pal. You not see a t'ing, see, or me bumpa you off, sure.'"

"Sicily Dan's a little, wizened-faced dago, with a twisted foot, isn't he?" interrupted Mr. Simms. "Must be forty years old."

"Dat's de guy," replied Sam, "an' he's some gunman, if he is old. Excuse me from gittin' mixed up with him. I lays dead and don't know a thing. The bulls cop us both while Dan's buzzin' me, and he says he just happens up, seein' me hurted, and is tryin' to help me up. Sounds good and reasonablelike, but they pinches us both. You knows de ropes and kin guess de rest."

"Yes," replied Mr. Simms, "I get you perfectly. Do you know anything about the wop Dago Frank shot up?"

"He ain't no wop, Mr. Simms. He's some other foreign guy. I hear 'im say one night up to Mike's he comes from a place by de name of Somerna. Looks more like a Greek to me, but talks half a dozen lingos. He's some game crap shooter, too. Never see him win a jitney, an' one night gets set back nine hundred dollars. He just hikes over to Benzoni's an' right back with a roll of Canadian bills big as a beer keg. We gets most of that, but he never turns a hair. Peels 'em off like he makes 'em hisself."

"He's from Smyrna, eh?" commented Mr. Simms. "A Levantine, then. Now listen to me, Sam. I looked you up to get a line on a guy I'm interested in identifying, and what you have just told me about this Luigi and his Canadian money is better luck than I expected. You keep a silent tongue in your head and don't say a word. Stick to your story that you were just walking along and stopped a stray bullet. The bulls can't do a thing to you whatever happens, but if they try to start anything I'll see that you are properly looked after."

"Much obliged, Mr. Simms. I knows you'll git dis nigger out if you says you will."

Before leaving the hospital the little old man interviewed the superintendent regarding the condition of the Levantine.

"He's in a very bad way," the superintendent advised. "He cannot live more than a day or two. We have been keeping him alive with stimulants, as the police hope to secure a confession from him; but if they do, it will be the first I ever knew of. These dagos never give up a thing."

Being assured that the condition of the Levantine precluded the possibility of an interview, Mr. Simms returned home, deciding on the way that his first duty of the morning should be a call upon his old acquaintance, Benzoni.

Before nine the next morning, therefore, he presented himself at the half pawnshop, half bank of the "Father of Little Italy," as Benzoni was called in the neighborhood. Mr. Simms had had occasion more than once to secure the coöperation of the old pawnbroker, always finding him courteous, reserved, and honest to a remarkable degree.

"Good morning, Mr. Benzoni," he greeted the latter. "You see me back in the harness again temporarily, and seeking your further good will and assistance."

"I am always glad to serve you, Mr. Simms," replied the Italian politely. "What is it to-day?"

"I believe you have some money on account for one Luigi, a Levantine, who has been in Detroit for less than a year."

"I haven't any money to his account exactly, Mr. Simms. He confided to my care a package, however, which I shan't deny I know to contain currency."

"So much the better," replied Simms, rubbing his hands with delight. "May I have a look at the inside of that package?"

The banker scratched his head, and showed conclusively that the request violated his conceptions of proper banking procedure.

"It's all right, Benzoni," Mr. Simms reassured him. "Luigi is as good as dead. They tell me at the hospital he can't live more than a few days. It will have to be opened soon, anyway.

I'll just confide enough to allow you to understand that what I am asking as a favor is only what I should have to demand as an act of justice otherwise."

Mr. Simms related to the interested banker his suspicion that Luigi was the murderer of Simon Harkness, and elaborated sufficiently to arouse in Mr. Benzoni a curiosity more than enough to insure his active coöperation.

"By all means, Mr. Simms, we shall investigate that package. It has been kept in my safe, and we shall together look at it immediately. It is somewhat irregular, of course, but no one need know but us, eh?"

The safe was opened, and the rather bulky package taken from the compartment allotted to his customer by Benzoni. The money was carefully wrapped in a newspaper, and, after untying it, the two first riffled the several smaller bundles it contained. Every bill apparently was Canadian money. The first bundle untied was the smallest. It contained exactly six hundred dollars. The next bundle was larger, and as the banker continued to count the bills rapidly he hesitated from time to time, and at last stopped completely, carefully scrutinized a bill, and then ran through the pack, as though comparing the rest with the one so carefully examined.

This comparison seemed to puzzle him considerably. He next untied each of the remaining bundles and compared the first bill with those in each of the bundles. As he concluded he turned to Mr. Simms.

"Each of these full packages contains five thousand dollars in Canadian bills. There are six of them. There is one bundle with only four thousand dollars, and the small package contains only six hundred dollars. If each of the eight originally held five thousand dollars, which seems probable, there was forty thousand dollars in Canadian bills in the lot. However, I want to call your attention to this bill I first looked at so closely. Do you see that?" Benzoni questioned, as he pointed to a particular part of the bill. "Well, all the bills are like that except those in one of the full five-thousand-dollar packages, and the bills in the small six-hundred-dollar one, which would mean ten thousand dollars in perfectly good Canadian money if the missing forty-four hundred dollars were the same as the remaining six hundred dollars in the small bundle."

Mr. Simms adjusted his large, steel-rimmed glasses, first rubbing them vigorously with his large silk handkerchief. He looked at the bill, then looked at Benzoni. Both of the old men burst into a laugh at the same time, which they continued for several minutes.

"The old fox arranged a trap that sprung even after death, not?" Benzoni wheezed.

"Benzoni, I'll give you my word I didn't know what the special game was he expected to put over on Mr. Abouti-gi-Luigi, but we'll have to admit this will make him smile, even among the flames. This is entirely too good to keep, so you must relieve me from my promise of secrecy."

"I guess no harm can come from it, my friend," replied Benzoni, wiping his eyes. "Go so far as you like. What shall we do with all this plunder?"

"Put it back in your safe," replied Mr. Simms. "I think we two should have an interview with this Luigi before he kicks in. I can't say I care a jackstraw about saving what appears to be fifty-six hundred dollars in good money belonging to Simon's estate, but I have a legal duty to perform that is above my private feelings. If you vouch for me to Luigi, he will probably come through and tell us all about it, especially when he learns the trick old Simon put over on him."

"I understand exactly how you feel about it, Mr. Simms," replied Benzoni, "and you may rely on me. Let us telephone and discover how early they allow visitors."

After some delay, Mr. Simms secured a connection at the hospital with some one willing to give him the information he sought. After a brief conversation, Mr. Simms turned to Benzoni.

"We're just an hour late. Luigi died at eight-thirty this morning. Unless

you know the scoundrel's heirs, it looks to me as though you are fifty-six hundred dollars richer. You can bet on one thing: I shan't be so foolish as to attempt proving the estate's ownership to that money on the meager evidence I possess, though I guess we both feel pretty certain who killed Simon all right."

"Sit down, my friend," replied Benzoni. "Now that Luigi is dead I shall not hesitate to tell you of a few things that are better evidence than our suspicions in this matter. So long as there was the slightest chance that I should have to appear as a witness I did not care to tell you everything. With my people it would mean business suicide, as you know. However, that money does not belong to me, and if you should like to know, why I shall gladly tell you."

"Tell me anything you know, Benzoni," cried the little old man earnestly. "It won't go a bit farther than right here."

"That I appreciate," responded the old pawnbroker simply. "It is not much that I know, but I think it is enough. This Luigi came to me five or six months ago with a letter from a Greek friend in New York. He told me that he was a dealer in antiquities, securing his specimens in Egypt, the Levant, Constantinople, and Greece, and selling them in Europe for a number of years before the war broke out. The war made business very dull for him, and he came to America. I am very certain that he did not confine himself to the sale of genuine antiquities entirely. As you, better than any one, should know, it is so easy to impose on the ordinary enthusiast."

"From the little I know of this man I should hesitate to think he did any legitimate business at all," replied Mr. Simms. "You are more than right in guessing how easy it is to pull the wool over the eyes of even the best of us, too."

"Exactly," dryly retorted Benzoni. "But it is not for me to judge of the moral qualities of my customers. I should make a very small living otherwise. However, this man advised me that he had come to Detroit to sell some mummy coffin to Mr. Harkness, and asked me what I knew about him. Well, we all know of Simon Harkness, and it is not to be wondered at that I more than smiled at the plan he confided to me as having been 'framed up' by him to insure a sale to that somewhat unpleasant person."

"You needn't apologize," grunted Simms. "I should have helped to string him myself."

"There was nothing like that, Mr. Simms. I simply listened to his plan. He had decided he would pose as an Egyptian, wrote letters here, and sent them to New York to his friend to mail. He kept the coffin here, and showed it to me. It was very nice, too. He said it was genuine, but worth nothing like the sum he asked, which was one thousand dollars. He told me, though, that a decoration he had affixed to the coffin would make Simon crazy for it, though I didn't understand why."

"I understand. It was a cartouche of Hatasu," murmured Simms.

"That is something I do not understand," Benzoni reiterated. "However, Mr. Harkness agreed to the plan of Luigi and deposited one thousand dollars with me. The mummy coffin was here all the time, but I followed Luigi's instructions, and in five days advised Mr. Harkness the mummy coffin had arrived. It had been in a rough box here, but when Mr. Harkness called, Luigi had unpacked it, and I showed it to him unpacked. He sent for a wagon at once and took it off, and I paid over the thousand dollars to Luigi."

"Did Luigi store any other antiquities with you?" asked Mr. Simms.

"When he first came he had quite a few things, but I paid little attention to them. He took nearly all of them off one by one, and for over a month he has come to see me only to borrow money. I think he sold all he had of value some time ago. The thousand dollars did not last him long, but as he had no security I loaned him nothing. About two weeks ago he called for the box in which the mummy coffin

had come, and took with him the five or six small curios that remained here. Two or three days after this murder must have occurred, he returned and deposited the bundle of money you have seen. I do not read the American papers, and no one had told me of the murder or I should have immediately suspected."

"Since there was never any mummy," commented Mr. Simms, "Luigi confided as much as he did to you simply to get all possible information regarding Simon. From the letters that passed between them I am inclined to think that his original intention was to sell him nothing but the mummy case at an inflated figure. Seeing how keen Simon was to secure the mummy, he 'stalled' for some time, but at last, becoming pretty hard up, he must have decided to make a bold attempt to secure a large sum at no matter what cost. Being unskilled in crooked deals on such a large scale, he resorted to the only means he could evolve, and murdered Simon as the only way to secure the money. From what I know of Simon, it isn't necessarily a reflection on Luigi's intelligence that he had to resort to murder, either, as I doubt any crook being able to separate him from forty thousand dollars in real money by any other means. I suppose we shall never learn just what happened, but if you will go with me for an inspection of the rough box, we may establish his absolute guilt."

"I shall be glad to do so," replied Benzoni. "I'll call my son and go with you now."

As the pawnbroker started to the rear of the store a little bell over the front door pinged twice as a young Italian girl entered furtively and softly closed the door after her. She motioned to Mr. Benzoni, with a suspicious glance at Mr. Simms, and a low but excited conversation followed between them for several moments.

After much gesticulating and many expressions of apparent reassurance on the part of the old man, the latter excitedly approached Mr. Simms.

"This girl," he announced in a stage whisper, "is the daughter of him you call 'Dago Frank.' They always come to me when in trouble, and he has sent that I may go to him and tell him what it is best that he should do. I shall be gone not longer than the hour. If you will wait, or return within that time, I shall be glad to go with you to identify that box."

"Go ahead," Mr. Simms instructed. "I'll just go over to the secondhand bookstore on Gratiot and be back in an hour."

On his return, Mr. Simms found Benzoni before him, and from the excitement of the latter it was patent he had important news to communicate.

"It is well that I went, Mr. Simms," exclaimed the old Italian. "It will save us that trip to look at the box, too. I found my compatriot very anxious because of his fear that Luigi, not being an Italian, might—what you call it? —'peach' on him. He was much relieved to learn of Luigi's death."

"Sounds very interesting," exclaimed Mr. Simms. "Go ahead and tell me all about it."

"Before I may do so, Mr. Simms, you must promise that what I tell you remains secret between us. I told Frank I should tell you if you gave such a promise, as only from you might he expect any intelligent curiosity regarding his culpability in any event. You see, I choose to tie your hands in advance."

"I'll trust you, Benzoni. You wouldn't ask me to promise anything that wasn't right, so go ahead."

Having established this mutual basis of esteem, the final link of evidence in connecting Luigi with the Harkness murder was supplied Mr. Simms by Benzoni.

Dago Frank had confided to the latter that he had met Luigi in a Greek gambling joint. Shortly thereafter Luigi had approached Frank with a proposition that the latter secure a small motor truck as well as the services of another man for a night job that required a certain amount of discretion. As the remuneration was to be one hundred dollars, neither Frank

nor his friend, Sicily Dan, made any embarrassing inquiries as to the object of the proposed enterprise, though neither of them had any illusions as to the possibility of official displeasure in the event of certain eventualities.

On the appointed night, Sicily Dan borrowed a one-ton truck from a friend of his. The two met Luigi in the alley behind his boarding house, where they loaded a long, empty box and a smaller pasteboard one. They drove north out John R. Street, and somewhere south of the Boulevard stopped in front of a building under course of construction, half filled the wooden box with sand and bricks, and proceeded on their way to Glynn Court.

The necessity for three men was easily apparent on arriving at their destination, as neither of them was large nor particularly strong, and it took the combined efforts of the three to carry the box into the house before which Luigi instructed them to stop. The labors of Frank and his friend ceased with the delivery of the box, which was keenly scrutinized by an old man who evidently met Luigi then for the first time. The two retired, but by agreement drove to the corner of Woodward Street and Chicago Boulevard, where they waited for Luigi and took him home.

Luigi rejoined them in about an hour, and, instead of paying them one hundred dollars, had paid them one thousand dollars. He appeared to be highly pleased with himself, and explained his generosity by saying that he had turned a trick much larger than he had hoped. He also explained that neither of them should ever breathe a word of their trip to Glynn Court to a living soul, and that to do so was bound to mean serious trouble for all three, the nature of which he left entirely to the imagination.

Neither Frank nor Dan possessed a conscience in any degree sensitive, and if neither of them failed to enjoy the fruits of their labor at once, it was simply because the payment had been in the form of Canadian money. This fact for some reason aroused a feeling of caution that bade them await a reasonable time for a development each seemed to expect.

A week having passed, with no signs of possible trouble, the two decided they were perfectly safe in catering to a number of appetites that called for such generous attention as their exceptional wealth made perfectly feasible, and together they started on a round of pleasure. The purchase of some seven rounds of poor whisky was attended with no results other than those to be expected, but a later visit to an Italian card club proved highly disconcerting. The banker was a man of some experience, and their tender of twenty-five dollars each for chips met with instant refusal. The money tendered was declared absolutely worthless. An examination of their entire pile was made at their request, and each bill accorded the same disquieting judgment. The explanation was simple and convincing, and with one accord the two decided that the generosity of Luigi was equally clear.

The next morning Dago Frank met Luigi in a crowd on Gratiot Avenue. He expressed his grievance in no uncertain terms, and was met with a suspicious hearing perfectly natural under the circumstances. The story of the Harkness murder had that morning appeared in the newspapers, and Luigi's first thought was that the demands of Frank were nothing but pure blackmail. He was more than justified in this belief, as none of his money had been questioned, as by luck he had been spending from a package of perfectly good bills, and had paid the two men from a package of bad ones. The misunderstanding would have been settled then and there except for the danger of immediate apprehension to the survivor. They parted with mutual expressions of murderous intent, and the same evening Luigi was shot.

Dago Frank had reported to his friend Dan the necessity for vengeance, which the latter had attempted to discourage. He had trailed Frank that night, however, hoping against hope to avert the clash he apprehended, but

arrived on the spot too late to accomplish anything except to give a warning of silence to the negro who had stopped one of the stray bullets, and to be arrested himself. Both had learned of the Harkness murder during the day, and Frank especially was spurred to greater wrath because of the apparent complicity to which their acceptance of a part of the stolen money seemed to convict them.

As Benzoni finished Dago Frank's explanation he emphasized the innocence of both in even a knowledge of the murder. It made perfectly clear the cold-blooded intention of Luigi, and to Mr. Simms it was no hardship to be bound to secrecy regarding the complicity of the two Italians.

"Just tell your friend Frank for me," he assured Benzoni, "that I have no more desire to bring him to the bar of justice than you have. If you want my private opinion, I think he saved the State a costly trial. I am certainly obliged to you for the help you have afforded, and if you will excuse me I'll run down to the office of my friend, the managing editor, and see that he winds up the story of this mystery in such a way as to direct the attention of the police about a thousand miles away from your two friends."

To the astute Mr. Simms, it was a simple matter to relate the results of his investigations in a manner sufficiently convincing to the managing editor. To Benzoni he gave the credit for the missing link between Luigi and old Simon, making no mention whatever of the two assistants Luigi had employed. As he completed hs report, he chuckled audibly.

"Whatever you do," he directed, "don't forget Simon's last joke on Luigi. All but a quarter of that forty thousand dollars was in the form of bank notes issued by the South Dominion Bank of Kitchener in 1889."

"What is the significance of that, Mr. Simms?" the editor inquired with perplexity.

"Significance?" laughed Simms. "Might as well have been Confederate bills. That bank busted in 1895, and when a Canadian bank blows nobody ever gets a cent back. Simon certainly figured he was playing safe. Expected to pay with bogus money and be as safe from prosecution as a babe unborn."

"Well, I'll be d-diddled!" the editor replied.

BACK FROM THE BORDER

SOON after the Virginia militia returned from service on the Texas border, one of the gallant men who had just left his armory that evening was talking in his sleep. Incidentally, he began to walk in his sleep, and made the rounds of the house while his bewildered wife followed him, afraid to awake him.

"Right, left; right, left," he was saying; and again: "Four steps to the rear, march. . . ."

When he came to a difficult maneuver, which required quickness, he fell down the front stairs.

This was too much for the terrified wife. She could hold her tongue no longer.

"My gracious!" she cried out. "Are you hurt, John?"

"Go away, woman!" replied John, still talking in his sleep. "What do you know about war?"

Pardners

By Edward Rutherford, Jr.

IT'S a lonesome life on a minin' claim, with only a dog at your side,
So I hit for town and hung around and fetched back home a bride;
'Course I liked the dog—he was tried and true—but weary week after week
It gets a guy, as time goes by, and he never hears nobody speak.

II.

Gee, the claim was fine with this wife of mine; it was novel and new to me—
The dog dropped out of my mind—almost—well, everything did but she,
And what fun it was for a lonesome cuss like I had been all of my life
To drop my pack in the rough old shack and eat my beans with a wife.

III.

'Twas the same old yarn that the years can't change: a stranger come by one day,
And et with us, and we liked the cuss, and invited him please to stay
For a week or two and help me through with rushing the work on the claim;
He hummed and hawed, but he finally thawed, 'cause tramping so much made him lame.

IV.

So he stayed along, and we liked him well—that is, excepting the pup—
He showed his teeth and curled his lip the minute the stranger showed up;
But he loved the wife and was faithful to me, and dogs has got funny ways,
And time dragged on and the work went well and we're glad that the stranger stays.

V.

Then come the day that I went away, and when I come back that night
The stranger was gone, and so was my wife—there wasn't a soul in sight;
But, pshaw, thinks I, they've gone for a walk, or over to Stony Log—
But they left a note: my mule was gone, and by Heavens! so was my dog!

VI.

It's lonesome as hell on a minin' claim, and more when you've had a wife;
The days are long and the nights are long, and monotony eats out your life.
The woman's gone—I don't know where—and, Lord! how she haunts this shack!
Still, it ain't so bad as it might of been—last night the dog come back.

The Snake Lover

By J. H. Greene

Author of "Creswick's Find," Etc.

A graphic bit of life from the bush country in Australia. The obsession of a man who had lived too long with reptiles and had made himself immune from snake poison

MASTERS was ringing gum trees at the back of his lucern paddock. His ax struck out deep wedges from the red, fragrant wood, and with each blow he half whistled, half sung a few notes from the "Anvil Chorus."

The rhythm of this one song he knew made his work easier. He had first heard it from a traveling opera company in Wangaratta, and the melody orchestrated by the ringing steel had so hammered itself into his memory that he had cleared his land, built his shanty and his fences to this tune of Verdi's.

The twisted fiber of the tree made hard cutting, and with the exertion his voice rang out above the magpies' and the choral squawks of a white flight of cockatoos disturbed from stealing grain from the paddocks. At an extra fortissimo, Masters seemed to recollect himself, and stopped and looked away through the timber, where thin blue smoke curled above the bush. Then he resumed his work silently, but soon was breathfully singing again.

He cut a deep ring round the gum, which showed like a wound—as, indeed, it was intended—to slowly kill the tree and make its clearance the easier. Back in the paddock were many such trees, their withered bark hanging in strips or wholly rotted off, bare, white, sapless corpses of what were once full-blooded gums, their barren, leafless branches stark to the sky. There were rows of them, standing like regiments of skeletons along his paddocks.

Behind this was the virgin bush, the gray, erect trunks of the blue eucalyptus and the knotted, carbuncular red gums lifting their graceful, tortuous branches and parachutes of arrow-headed foliage above the wattles and fern.

This bit of bush surgery accomplished, Masters turned toward the river, carrying besides his ax a fishing rod of willow with a long loop of line running through a wire at its end.

"River's still rising," he murmured, noting how the water ate its way up the clay banks, parched and crumbling from the long drought. Two days before he had walked across the sun-cracked mud to the opposite bank with dry feet. Midway had been a little streak of yellow, stagnant water easy to leap over. Snags of tree trunks, some black and blasted from old bush fires, others of pallid rung timber, lay athwart this dried-up watercourse, making bridges and throwing lines of shadow over the intermittent, straggling pools and stretches of mere wetness that are all that is left of an Australian river after a dry season. One of these pools had been Masters' water supply when his rain-water tank had run dry. There had been summers when even this had failed, and he had to cart his water from the Murray, sixteen miles away.

To-day, however, the change threatened. The heavy clouds clinging to the serrated edges of the distant ranges like wisps of wool to a comb were emptying their rain. All over the district the pools were linking and overflowing and joining into streams, cracks in the earth changed into creeks, and the ripple and movement of waters that seemed to live

again, the splashing of undermined banks, the wet subsidence of tracks, the unusual moisture underfoot proclaimed that the drought was over—with perhaps worse devastation of floods to follow.

The actual rain had not reached the plains as yet, and the sun blazed clearly to its setting as Masters walked along the bank.

Something quivered and disappeared in the grass of the thin track his steps alone had beaten from the scrub.

He put down his ax and reached out with a long stick, carefully manipulating the string till the noose dropped forward.

But the snake had gone.

Masters waited, knowing it was a fine big tiger, and began to quietly sing his one tune.

Presently the grass opened, the little, venomous head appeared with its blue tongue flickering like a flame.

Masters kept crooning slowly and insinuatingly, and the snake came forward; then, dropping the loop over the snake's head, drawing it tight, he lifted it from the ground, his captive. He held the rod high, bringing the snake near his face. The string had caught just behind the head, tight enough to hold, yet not to strangle. It was a fine specimen, and Masters' eye ran approvingly along the yellow and red stripes melting into the delicate green and white of the abdomen. Then he picked up his ax, and, guarding his catch almost tenderly from overhanging branches, came to his shanty.

This was built of logs and covered with bark, with a low, angled roof held down by pinned crosspieces. It was covered with creepers, convolvulus, and passion-fruit vines. There were pot plants and geranium beds whose watering in the dry season was his wife's anxiety.

On the hotter northern side were some boxes covered with wire netting. Rustlings came from these as he approached them. Opening one quickly, he lowered the tiger inside and closed the wire. Then leaning his pole against the wall, he came to the back door, where his wife met him.

"Got another, Dan?"

"Yes, a tiger—six feet."

Mary Masters was thin and sunburned, her skin drawn from overmuch tea, and as monosyllabic as himself. She was the daughter of a "cocky," and had married a "cocky," as the squatters derisively call the small farmer. Once she had been to Melbourne to see the Cup run, but her life had been spent under the gum leaves. She was born in the bush and bred in the bush, content to bake Masters his camp-oven bread, tend the fowls and the cows, with a trip into Wangaratta at Christmas and show time.

But a year ago the bush had betrayed her. Death had come out of it and taken their three-year-old, and there had been discontent between her and Dan ever since the little body was laid in the Wangaratta cemetery.

"Ain't yer got enough?" she said, looking up from her fire to where he was washing in the back doorway.

"Not till they take my antidote, I told yer."

The big silences of the bush do not develop repartee. Their matrimonial differences were long-drawn affairs. Retorts were meditated upon for days, ill temper kept smoldering like a bush fire that smoked all summer. They had mutton for tea that night, the remains of a quarter cut from their own sheep, purchased at the station and left there in the cool hanging room to keep.

Dan had eaten his chops before Mary spoke. "Government don't want it; what's the use?" she said.

Dan drank another cup of tea before replying—by rising and handing her a letter from his trousers pocket.

While she fumbled over it he took the milk jug and a saucer, and went out to his boxes. Pouring some milk in the saucer, he carefully lifted the wire from the one which held his last tiger, and quickly and deftly found a place for it between the overlapping coils. He withdrew his hand with a movement almost reptilian, and closed the

wire. Then he poured milk through their wires into the saucers of the other boxes, sometimes having to poke the scaly bodies aside with a stick through the meshes. Mary met him at the door when he returned. She was holding the letter out, and the paper quivered.

"You ain't going to be bitten again, Dan?" she said.

Dan was cutting up twist, and spoke with his briar in his teeth: "No, they won't believe me; you'd think that was enough."

He looked down at his lean, bare arm, red and twisted as a gum branch, marked with little white spots in pairs, each pair a record of Dan's exposure to the virus, each a triumph for his antidote.

He had been interested in snakes ever since an old mate of his hacked off a finger joint, ever since he had been taught in the settler's school how to distinguish the ragged scratches of the nonvenomous from the deadly two points of the venomous.

Every bushman, cocky, and station hand has his own treatment, mostly variations of the pocketknife and whisky, but Dan's antidote was compounded of the strychnine he had used for poisoning rabbits and some herbs told him by a Gippsland black fellow, in addition to the whisky.

When his boy was taken, the antidote became a mania with him, intensified by a government reward for an adequate specific, and vague rumors that the Indian government was also offering large sums to conquer its fatal cobra.

He had given demonstrations on himself before doctors in Melbourne, and had received enough notoriety to be offered a traveling engagement by a circus.

The doctors were hard to convince, and wanted time to try it on other patients, claiming Dan was immune from frequent bitings and because his system was saturated with his antidote.

Dan lit his pipe and sat by the door, the rank station twist smoking blue and strong.

"There's a man in Melbourne jail," he said, "for murder; he's to be hanged next month, and I want them to let me try it on him."

Mary cleared the table, and washed the dishes and lit the candle before she answered:

"Who did he murder?"

"A little girl near Geelong. I says, 'Ask him if he'll agree, and you kin let him go if I cure him.'"

"Will they?"

"Dunno yet. That's only them acknowledging my offer."

Then, her work finished, Mary came out and sat by her husband on the bench. The trees lined black against the sunset, streaked with strips of purple cloud, the advance guard of the gathering storm that rumbled in the ranges.

"River's rising," said Dan.

Mary did not reply at once. She was sitting in aboriginal quietness. "I'd rather be hanged, Dannie—if I was him," finally she said.

Dan puffed a little quicker. "You always go agin' me," he said, after his tobacco was burned up and he had to refill.

They had sat like this every evening since they had come to Malbrindi. There used to be the baby to think about, a little, owl-eyed child that had never known shoes, that delighted to fish for gabies—the mud crayfish in the water holes—crowing with delight when the strings tied to the sticks along the bank tightened and his father showed him how to draw on the fish by cunningly scooping it up from behind.

Now they were alone, and divided. One sat with his dreams, and the other with her memories, both as inscrutable and immobile as the encompassing sea of foliage surrounding them.

The thunder in the ranges continued, but the air was still. A distant mopok spoke his mournful note. The river rippled uneasily with an occasional splash. Possums bounced and scratched over the roof of the shanty. There were restless shudders and creepings in the scrub, twigs snapped, grasses rustled, and the land seemed full of little terrors.

Mary suddenly threw her apron over her head and sobbed—in little, hacking gasps. She did not cry often.

"What's up?" said Dan.

"I can't stand it; I've tried, but I can't. You was singing it to-day in the paddock. If you hadn't taught baby to sing, the snake wouldn't have come and bit him. Why did you teach baby to sing?"

Dan rose angrily. It was no new accusation; he bitterly threw it at himself often enough, but he had been hoping Mary was growing resigned.

He walked a few steps into the night till stopped by his fence.

Then he began to curse. A bushman's only fluency is in profanity, and Dan reeled off long strings of oaths, combinations invented by way-back bullock drivers, shearers, and roustabouts, each the verbal expression of some man's realization of the hopelessness of his own existence and the futility of everything.

He did not curse Mary, or even blame her in thought, and he was not loud. He did it quietly, as though the bush had laid its fingers on his lips, telling him that even reviling God or invoking the devil was useless. But the vocal exercise relieved him; it was his only rebellion against the silent endurance of years, and it acted on his spirit like a prayer. Then he heard the exhausted sobbing of the woman behind him, and he began to think of her and with her. He returned to the dim candlelight of the doorway and patted her bowed back.

"Buck up, Mollie," he said; "buck up. When the government believes in ——"

"The government won't bring baby back, Dannie; and every time you catch a snake and bring him home here—I hear Billie scream, and see his poor little feet——" She sobbed again, and as painfully, as though her spirit, like the land, was dried up.

A few drops of rain drove them indoors. The drought was breaking, and the souls of the two, so woven in with the climate, so part of every twisted, thirsty tree, dry creek, and baked paddock, were diverted, and they forgot themselves a little.

The rain fell heavier as they turned in to bunk. Before putting the candle out, Dannie stepped outside in his bare feet and nightshirt, and drew a sheet of corrugated iron over his snake boxes. When he came back Mary was turned to the wall and did not answer his good night.

Early in the morning both were awakened by a blinding flash and a terrific burst of tropic thunder.

Dan got out of bed, to find himself knee-deep in water.

"Floods!" he yelled, and waded to the table and lit the candle.

The water was pouring in through the cracks of the logs and the sides of the door in little cascades and rivulets. He could reckon its rising upon his bare legs.

Mary dressed, standing up, in the bunk, while Dan pushed open the door. Outside the lightning showed a turbulent swirl over his paddocks, reaching to the tops of his fence posts. The river had risen hurriedly, and was roaring down from the ranges toward the Murray banks.

After hastily dressing, he placed a ladder against the outside wall and carried Mary out to it, so that she could clamber onto the roof. It was still raining a little, but the night was not cold, and the gable was low and very secure with its pinned crossbeams. There was no rise nearer than the foot of the ranges, and any attempt to wade across the paddocks might plunge them in a hollow. Neither floods nor droughts were novelties. They knew what to do—quietly to wait till the river towns sent out relief boats that would carry them to the highlands. There they would have to wait till the water subsided, and they could return and rebuild their houses and start all over again.

Dan folded a possum-skin rug round Mary and tied her loosely with a rope so that she would not slip when the shanty floated off. It was near dawn when he descended the ladder and reentered the shanty.

The water was nearly up to his armpits. The matches he had put in his hat were still dry, and he wanted to build a fire, but everything was wet. He found some candles and stuck them up on a shelf, lit them all together, and managed to hang a billy on a nail over their combined flames. The only water available was the flood around him, and he used that and soon had a billy full of hot, strong tea.

The water was all the time rising, and Mary kept calling anxiously, till he crept out of his house for the last time, holding the billy over his head and barely lifting his chin above the flood.

As they drank their tea the shanty was struck by a floating log, and shivered. Dan held Mary tightly, and she clutched the billy of tea as the water washed away the shallow foundations and the shanty lifted from the soil and floated off in the current.

Dan had built the house, and knew its strength, but it was a perilous voyage they had entered upon. The wide currents of yellow water, where the trees stood up like box shrubs, took them a crooked course, with many bumps, snarls, and entanglements that called for Dan's most careful navigation to prevent them from capsizing.

As they were carried toward the Murray banks they were caught in the submerged tresses of the willows that clung to the shanty like seaweed. There were logs, snags, and creepers to fend off, great trees rolled toward them, rapidly revolving by some unknown agency of the current, their upturned roots and boughs striking the water like paddles. One big branch nearly foundered them. Dan was knocked down by a mass of wet leaves, and the roof dipped till the water reached Mary's feet.

But Dan's spirits seemed to rise with every difficulty. Several times he caught himself on the verge of singing his "Anvil Chorus," and when the roof bobbed and ducked he straddled the beam, saying this was not the first buck jumper he had broken in.

Mary remembered it was Dan's riding that had first drawn her to him, way back when he rode the station boundaries at Euabalong.

When they swept out into the more open waters of the river Dan cheered. His course was to keep afloat till he could find some safe mooring place or perhaps even sight some township.

But as the day wore on their ramshackle craft became more and more unseaworthy. Logs and planks were broken off, half of one side was staved in, and as the dried trunks of which it was made absorbed the water, it became less buoyant and sank lower.

All day no human sound had reached them, no sign of other refugees, nothing but treetops and swirling water and the distant ranges, and now the night was coming on.

Dan saw a heap of drifted timber caught and held by some peculiarity in the land below, probably a submerged island. In the midst rose a large gum with many wide branches spreading out from the central trunk. He managed to steer the shanty by a push here and a pull there till it landed in the middle of the mass. The shanty creaked and almost crumpled up with the impact, but held fast.

Then he and Mary climbed into an angle of the tree, whose rough bark, redolent and sticky with gum, covered the elbows and bosses that made a safer refuge for them than the half-submerged shanty. To Mary, exhausted as she was, the solid security of the eucalyptus so rooted in the river bed below, so broadly spreading over her head, calmed and soothed her, and after Dan passed a rope round her to prevent her slipping she closed her eyes. Then remembering how cheerfully Dan had behaved all day, realizing what a man he had been, she opened them again.

"Try and sleep, Dan; I'm all right."

"So am I, old woman," he said. "I ain't sleepy."

She waited a little longer, and then said:

"Say good night, Dannie."

He bent over and kissed her, and she closed her eyes and slept in content.

Dannie sat up beside her, his ears strained to every sound of the night. Sometimes he dozed, but woke up suddenly again, eagerly listening, as though he had missed something. Several times he crept down the slanted trunk and noted that the water was falling rapidly.

Toward morning he thought he heard a shot, and sent a loud cooey. Mary awoke with a start, but he hushed her.

There was no reply, no sound but the interminable flow of the waters sucking, dragging, drawing at the island of wreckage below them. Fresh logs and trees kept crashing into this island on one side and tearing away on the other, and the whole fabric creaked and snapped with each readjustment.

After Mary dropped asleep, Dan sat up, very wide awake. That shot could only be a searcher's signal. He thought of lighting a fire, but the matches were wet. To-morrow he would dry them in the sun, kindle a smoke somehow, and so signal his plight.

As he listened his ears became aware of a new sound, not higher or lower than the voices of the floods, the creaking of the timber, or the whisper of their roof of foliage, but different in quality.

He leaned out of his hollow in the tree, and tried to see detail in the black shadows below. As the darkness grew to gray he could make out the larger logs; then, as the smaller branches appeared, he guessed, before he saw, the cause of that restless, sliding, creeping sound that grew more and more distinct.

He waited for the light to verify his guess.

He was right. Tangled in the logs and writhing over the horizontal branches were hundreds of snakes, washed off the land and drifted hither like themselves on logs and branches or by their own swimming.

Mary was awakened by Dan's voice. He was leaning out of the fork of the tree and talking strangely. She caught his words.

"Copperheads, tigers; that black fellow is ten feet if he's an inch. Never saw a white snake before—must be one of those cave fellows—never see the sun."

Thinking him delirious, she sat up beside him, and saw—the snakes, and nothing but snakes.

Every twisted branch, every curved trunk, every twining bramble was unified in that first shock of horror with the slowly rolling black, brown, and green bodies that crept over them.

The police boatmen heard a woman's scream and a man's cry. Following the sounds over the water, they sighted the huge gum, with two struggling figures in its spreading fork. Uncertain whether it was crime or delirium or some rare tragedy of the bush, the men pulled rapidly against the strong current. The officer at the tiller hailed, and the woman's voice screamed one word which he caught:

"Snakes!"

As the boat drew nearer it seemed to the officer that the man was trying to get down from the tree, and the woman struggling with almost maniacal fury to prevent him.

He hailed again, and the woman again screamed a reply:

"Snakes! He doesn't want to kill them—he likes them best—he makes pets of them—he wants to catch them—he loves them!"

The boat's nose was about to push into the island when the officer understood, as he saw that that island was alive.

The woman kept on her mingled appeal and reproach as the policemen started striking right and left with their oars and boat hooks.

There was no fight in the reptiles; they were too exhausted, and, in a few moments, the police had cleared a landing place, and Dan and Mary were tumbled into the boat. But the police could not separate them. Mary's arm was round Dan's neck, and he held her tightly by the waist.

"He wanted to go down and catch them," she gasped, "and I wouldn't let him."

"No, I didn't, Mollie," he replied;

"I thought you wanted to let yourself get bitten, and go after Billie, and I wouldn't let you."

Then she collapsed for the first time in her life, and slipped to the bottom of the boat.

Brandy was given to her, but Dan refused food and drink until he had a smoke.

"Lost our kid; bitten by a black snake," he explained to the officer, who thought he knew the bush, but to whom this was a new story.

As the boat pulled toward the township Mary grew calm, and sat up beside Dan. He put his arm round her as they came in sight of a welcome landing stage, and whispered to her:

"I'll give up the bush, Mollie; let's go and live in the town."

The Flood Relief funds enabled Dan and Mary to start a small store. They have other children now, who are educated in a city and walk on stone pavements, and who have never seen a snake and whose holidays are spent at the seaside.

THE COAST GUARD

WE hear much these days of the auxiliary forces of the regular navy, aviation patrols, mosquito fleets, and submarine chasers. The navy itself cherishes the coast guard above them all. When Congress combined the revenue-cutter and the life-saving services into the coast guard in 1915 it provided that, in time of war, the new body should automatically become a part of the regular navy. With its four thousand trained officers and men, two hundred and eighty coast stations, and its forty-seven cutters, the coast guard is better equipped than ever to uphold its splendid traditions. Naval officers do not hesitate to admit that in seamanship, and in the actual time spent at sea, the coast guard sets the pace. While the men-o'-war keep to tropical waters in winter, the coast-guard cutters are out on the ice-fields patrol, rushing in a wintry gale to the aid of vessels in distress, or combing the sea for derelicts. The transfer of shipwrecked crews calls for seamanship of the superlative order, and the hunting of derelicts is as piquant with danger as running a mine field. Thirty dangerous derelicts a year, on an average, reward this hunt. On the ice patrol of the North Atlantic, two cutters cruise all winter long, wirelessing their warnings of bergs in the steamship lanes.

The cruising cutters are one-thousand-ton craft, much like the gunboat class of the navy, equipped with radio, and manned with six-pounder batteries. They have large capacities for water and coal to keep the sea for long periods. Their discipline is that of the man-o'-war. The same guns that in times of peace shoot life lines to imperiled vessels hurl a shell in time of war that would sink a submarine or tear through the hull of a raider.

While organized primarily to save life and property at sea, the coast guard has never failed us in war. It was organized in 1790 to prevent smuggling, and was our first armed sea service, as there was no regular navy at the time. In 1798 the *Pickering*, a hundred-ton cutter, captured ten prizes in engagements with the French. In 1812, the *Jefferson* captured the first prize of the war, the British topsail schooner *Patriot*. The revenue cutters won the praise of the navy in operations against the Seminoles, and for their blockade work in the Mexican War. It was a revenue cutter in the Civil War to which Secretary Dix sent his famous order: "If any man hauls down the American flag, shoot him on the spot."