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The Popular Magazine

NOVEMBER MONTH-END EDITION
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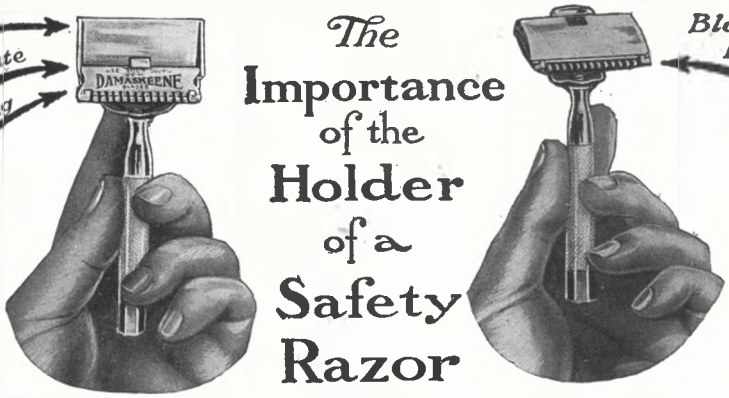

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MONTH-END EDITION

VOLUME XXX NUMBER 3

TWICE-A-MONTH

The Popular Magazine

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NOVEMBER 15, 1913

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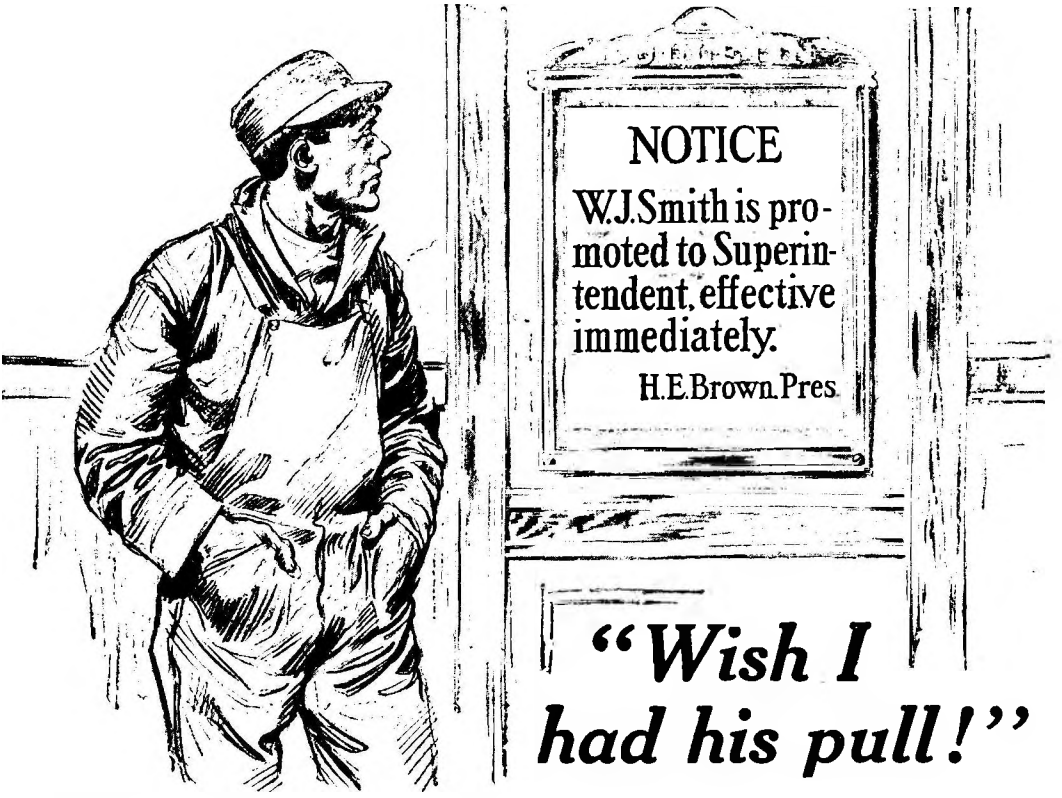

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THE POPULAR MAGAZINE

VOL. XXX. NOVEMBER 15, 1913. No. 3.

The Fur Farmer

By W. B. M. Ferguson

Author of "The Ditch of Hatred," "Garrison's Finish," Etc.

There is a mystery about this fur farmer. He is a lawbreaker and there is nothing in his make-up resembling human kindness, yet in his household is as lovable a maid as ever wore moccasins and gloried in the great outdoors. When young Gilchrist, seeking health in the big woods, stumbles upon the fur farmer and his kin it is but the beginning of a series of adventures romantic and unique. It's a rattling yarn of the North country, informative as well as exciting.

(*A Complete Novel*)

CHAPTER I.

A BABE IN THE WOODS.

PILLS and Spear with the toboggan were up and off before dawn, leaving young Gilchrist a sore heart and some parting advice. He was to remember and put out the fire if he left camp; and if he left he must be sure and not go beyond those landmarks he knew; this was impressed upon him particularly. He knew the bush for about three miles in all directions. For Pills, on the day of Gilchrist's arrival, had taken him out and shown him landmarks by which he could not fail to get his bearings. But there was no necessity of leaving camp at all, though Gilchrist had formed a definite idea of doing so.

Normally he was not one who scorned advice or who believed the sum total of earthly knowledge to be contained in his own mentality, but now he secretly derided the advice given by Spear and his partner. They had underestimated his ability and magnified the dangers of the big woods; they sought to discourage him because they believed him a physical incompetent, and did not wish to be burdened with him. And though he had said nothing, seemingly drinking in their words of warning and wisdom with due appreciation and respect, he had no idea of remaining a camp fixture until their return. He had his own trapping outfit, and would set a few of his own. He would not go far, however, and, traveling light without his pack basket—a favorite in the Adirondacks and an article at which Pills and Spear had poked some fun—could cover a good deal of ground and still return to the permanent camp that night. One fact, if nothing more, convinced him that the partners had been trying to magnify things; Pills had said a storm was com-

ing, while here the sun was shining in an amethyst sky, and all outdoors with its new ermine cloak was calling to him.

Thus the partners were hardly out of sight when Gilchrist was packing grub for the day, and making ready to follow, selecting Oneida jump traps on account of the lessened weight. He, however, would strike northeast instead of due west.

It was two o'clock before Gilchrist, three miles from camp, had finished setting his traps in a six-mile circle, and for the first time had opportunity to realize how tired he was. He had been too absorbed to notice it before, and, moreover, in his perverse humor he had pushed himself unsparingly. The physically handicapped are prone to overdo things merely by way of proving they are not handicapped.

He had not walked more than ten miles, if that, but the going had been heavy, and, unmindful of advice, he had stuck to the webs he had used in the Adirondacks. The ends of this odd little shoe are not filled, while the center filling is cut very heavy and strung in a wide, open mesh; the toe is broad and the heel narrow. In New York, where the snow is packy or crusted, Gilchrist had found these webs used exclusively, but Pills, who wore the type affected by the Cree Indians, told him that in loose, powdery snow of the North the Adirondack web would prove unsatisfactory, and Gilchrist had found it so.

Moreover, he was still suffering from blistered feet, acquired during the journey in, the longest trip on snowshoes he had ever made. Pills told him to discard all wool, and to wear smoked fawnskin socks ankle high, and shaped like a moccasin, but with no tops, welts, or seams; over this were worn two other shoe socks made of blanketing, a moose-hide moccasin drawn over all, and its top tied about the naked ankle. Gilchrist had protested that his feet would freeze, but Pills pointed out that the idea was to keep them from overheating, and that this and knitted socks were the cause of blistered feet. He himself had suffered for years until a Scotch half-breed passed him the hint. Indians will never offer advice, but breeds will.

Pills had also told Gilchrist to constantly change his socks and moccasins from one foot to the other; to beat out the creases and turn them inside out; also to remove them whenever possible, and permit his feet to cool thoroughly. He had found this valuable advice, and without doubt could not have gone so far had he neglected it, for, as the partners had pointed out, his feet were in no condition for prolonged travel, and he should rest up so long as there was no actual necessity for his hitting the trail.

It was hardly more than three miles back to camp, and yet Gilchrist found himself flinching at the mere thought of putting his toes within those rawhide cords. For he had made a fire while breaking his fast, and was following Pills' instructions about cooling his feet.

Thus he was sitting barefoot and Turk fashion, beating out his moccasins against a stick, when something impelled him to glance up. He had heard absolutely nothing, but had obeyed merely one of those nameless impulses. There before him, and not a hundred yards distant, stood the first caribou he had ever seen. He had just stepped into the barren ground, a magnificent stag, with at least forty-five points, fine brows, bays, and tops.

Gilchrist had been through "buck fever," that paralysis of the motor nerves that comes to a tenderfoot, but now for a moment he felt in the grip of the old impotence. He could do nothing but stare in admiration at the big fellow with his mighty spread of antler who had stepped out from the bush, standing motionless with uplifted head, the picture of arrested motion and dignified grandeur.

When Gilchrist came to himself it was to reflect that it was just his luck to catch sight of his first reindeer while squatting barefoot and beyond reach of his gun. He sat crouched behind a fallen tree in the shelter of which he had built his fire, and thus he had not

been seen; his Remington stood against another tree at least three yards off, and between the caribou and him; to reach it he must expose himself, and before he could take a step the stag would have vanished. It was humiliating to realize he was proving more of a tenderfoot than he had imagined; he should have known better than to place his rifle beyond instant reach.

Screened by the log, Gilchrist now did the next best thing; he proceeded to put on socks, moccasins, and webs, working silently, hastily, and surely. All thought of blistered feet and weary bones had vanished as if they had never been. But a few seconds had elapsed, and, peering over his shelter, he saw that the stag had turned, presenting almost a rear view.

Gilchrist, his eyes on the still unconscious caribou, arose and strode noiselessly toward his Remington. His hand was on the weapon when the stag turned. In the one instant Gilchrist jerked the lever and fired as the caribou disappeared in the bush with a single bound.

It was nothing more than a snapshot, and a poor one at that, and Gilchrist ran forward, knowing he had missed by a wide margin; thus he could hardly credit his eyes on finding a trail of blood in the snow, and realized by the quantity that his victim was hard hit.

It is strange how a difficult shot, no matter how freakish or accidental its execution may be, elates the perpetrator and fills him with profound pride. Gilchrist knew that under the circumstances he could not have hit a flock of barns at the distance and, that from the first by all the laws of the game, he had deserved to lose his meat; yet this knowledge was submerged, forgotten, and he plunged into the bush wildly excited, but with the air of one to whom such feats are an everyday occurrence. He was sorry Pills and Spear had not been present, for of course they would not believe him when he narrated the distance and difficulty of the shot. Very likely, with their poor opinion of him, they would claim he crept up on the animal while it slept, and stuck the gun into its unconscious ribs. Of course it was not an accidental shot! Hadn't he aimed at the target, and hadn't he meant to hit it? Well, then, where did the accident come in?

Like the majority of the younger generation, Gilchrist was an ardent advocate of the small bore, high-power gun, with its great velocity and flat trajectory, but now he reluctantly admitted it had one drawback—it made such a small wound and consequent scanty blood flow that a trail would be hard to follow if one were not tracking through snow. From the manner in which the ground was dyed where the stag took to the bush, Gilchrist imagined he had hit a vital spot, but as he pushed forward the crimson trail diminished in ratio, and after perhaps an hour's pursuit he abandoned the chase as hopeless, realizing from the tracks his quarry was going strong, and knowing how far a wounded buck can travel. He had heard of one shot through the heart running for a mile.

The tension relaxed, Gilchrist now became acutely conscious of his raw toes and aching muscles; conscious that he was farther from camp than ever, and that he had done a foolish thing. How far he had traveled he did not know; hostage entirely to the excitement of the chase, and hoping to come upon the stricken stag at every turn, he had pushed forward at a rapid pace, unheedful of surroundings, and now he was in virgin bush.

He felt for his compass; it was gone. It must have dropped from his pocket unheeded during the many times he had stooped. This discovery was disconcerting, but his chief emotions were humiliation and anger. Pills had told him to fasten it to his person with rawhide, but he had thought this advice superfluous, and, anyway, he had been in too much of a hurry in starting. Never before had he lost his compass—forgetting that never before had he gone into the "wild" without a guide.

He glanced at the sky; he knew the camp lay southwest, and he could get his position from the sun. But there

was no sun; he hadn't noticed that before. The sky was a universal mottled gray; after all, it looked as if Pills might be right, and that snow *was* coming. It was very cold, and he began to wish that caribou steak had not proved so tempting. Still, he wasn't in the least uneasy; he could not be more than ten miles from camp—if that—and he knew just where it lay—right over that hill with its giant hardwood trees which Pills had pointed out as a landmark.

He was very tired, and his toes were raw, but he could make the distance easily; in fact, he *must* make it, for a night in the big woods without grub or a blanket would be unpleasant. He would light his pipe to comfort him on the journey; a good smoke goes a long way.

Gilchrist felt in his mackinaw for the matches, but these, like the compass, had mysteriously vanished. Where had they gone? He certainly had them when lighting the fire after completing his traps and snow sets. He remembered putting the box on the fallen tree—and they were there yet. Pills had told him not to carry all his matches in one box, to have two supplies in case anything happened, and he had suggested a couple of "Painkiller" vials if one lacked waterproof boxes. Very sound advice, which he wished he had followed.

Gilchrist laughed grimly at his own incompetence; no wonder Pills and Spear had not wanted his company. They had sized him up better than he knew himself. A night in the open without a fire meant death; more than ever it was imperative he should lose no time in getting back to camp, for a few feathery flakes of snow were wetting his cheek. It must be three o'clock, and he knew how quickly the night shut down.

He set out doggedly and laboredly, sucking at his dead pipe and heading for the giant knoll. Blood was oozing through his moccasins, and freezing as it met the air, but he gave it no thought. He was becoming uneasy, and on reaching his objective point this uneasiness became alarm, for on close inspection the place had not the familiarity it had owned at a distance, and, looking for the marks he remembered Pills blazing on either side of a giant evergreen, he found them absent. This was not the landmark he had been so confident of knowing; he was lost, and had no idea in what direction he had been traveling or where the camp lay.

As the full truth of this was borne in on him Gilchrist told himself he must be calm, then promptly lost his head and set off at a furious pace as if by main strength and endeavor he could get his bearings. He would not permit himself to believe himself lost; he must be heading in the right direction. He *must;* he could not have become turned about. He must strike the camp at some point if he kept on. And so, panic-stricken and as one fleeing from his own fears, he shuffled along blindly while the snow flurry became a thick, steady, merciless fall, and night began to stalk him like a relentless, predatory animal.

The utter silence and vast desolateness worked upon him until he called aloud, though knowing that in all likelihood, with the exception of Pills and Spear, there wasn't another human this side of Silver City. There was nothing but himself, the snow, the trees, and the wolves. The loneliness and mystery of the silent places struck into his very vitals. Why hadn't he obeyed the partners, and stuck to the camp? Why had he not heeded their advice?

As Gilchrist shuffled along with bowed head, suddenly his heart gave a great leap. There on the snow before him was the dim outline of a trail! Some one had passed that way, and not so very long ago, for the falling snow had merely blurred the print of the webs. At first he was assailed by a nameless fear like Robinson Crusoe finding the print of Friday's foot; some one other than himself inhabited this desolate waste. Perhaps an Indian trapper or a white man; at least there was help in the neighborhood, and if he called or fired his gun he might summon it; or if he followed the trail it would lead him to shelter.

Then a vague fear fingered his heart.

Those web prints looked sickeningly familiar. They were not made by Cree or Algonquin shoes; neither Ojibwa or Chippewa nor even any type of "bear paw." They were made by a shoe with unfilled ends, broad toe, and narrow heel; in short, made by *himself*, for there could not be another person in that region who wore the Adirondack type.

With beating heart Gilchrist stepped into the blurred trail; it fitted his stride and webs as the scalp fitted his skull. There was no dodging the truth. These were his own tracks. He had been circling, and now he was lost with a vengeance.

Face to face with the worst, Gilchrist recovered his lost nerve, rallying all his forces to meet this crisis. He was ashamed of his panic; on first recognizing he was lost he should not have moved an inch from the spot where that unwelcome discovery was made; he should have sat down and lighted a fire —he now remembered he could do so without matches—and thought it over calmly instead of running amuck. It would not be the first time he had spent a night in the open, though it was the first time he was utterly alone, unequipped and in such a desolate region; still, if lost, one mile may be as bad as one hundred. The partners would not return to camp and institute a search for him until the morrow—perhaps longer. He must spend the entire night where he was. In the morning he could get his position from the sun, or, if it cleared before dawn, from old Polaris; meanwhile there was much to do if he desired to welcome that dawn in the flesh. He was hopelessly lost, and there was no use wasting time trying to think back over his weird trail and puzzle out his location; other than that he was somewhere in the Dominion this side of Silver City, he did not know where he was.

From the most remote recesses of memory he scraped together such knowledge as he had gleaned out of his own limited experience, together with all he had ever heard from woodsmen and the stray hints and information Spear and Pills had thrown out during general conversation. One thing, he had his belt ax, and without it the situation would have been hopeless. He had not been green enough to forget that; to know it was the one indispensable article. A man can live in the bush without a gun, but not without an ax.

The first thing to do was to get a fire going, and Gilchrist looked about until he found a dead tree, and, lifting the bark with his hunting knife, he whittled out a handful of fine trash; after which he took out an old cotton handkerchief, and picked it into lint or tow, cleaning away the snow and making a place for his prospective fire near the big log. Next he pulled out a revolver cartridge, extracted the bullet, and poured a portion of the black powder on some dry leaves and bark. It was very cold, and numb, inexperienced fingers bungled the job more than once, but he stuck to it. Into the forty-five Colt shell, in which he had left a little powder, he placed a piece of the tow, taking care it was not packed tightly, and, firing the shell a foot or so from the other piece of tow, set them both ablaze. The fine trash was now put on, and, blowing it sturdily, Gilchrist soon had a young fire going which grew steadily as he judiciously fed it the dry hardwood chopped out with his ax.

He was quite proud of himself, and, his pipe aglow, felt capable of anything. His self-respect had returned, and with it self-confidence; he had been a fool, but had profited by his experience, and, after all, there was nothing like being thrown on one's own resources. He would show the partners he could take care of himself, could come through a night in the big woods alone.

Gilchrist knew he must lie awake the entire night, for he was too fatigued and it was too cold for him to dare risking sleep; he must get some saplings and put them in the ground on the far side of the big log, letting them lean over his bed, which he would make of brush.

Gilchrist was not an experienced axman; also he was completely fagged out, though his dogged spirit would not

admit this truth. But for hours he had been existing on nerve alone. Whether it was due to inexperience or overtiredness he never knew, but in cutting his first sapling he neglected to make sure of a clear right of way, and the keen blade, deflected by an intervening branch, crashed through moccasin and socks—almost to the bone of his left ankle.

He lay where he fell, fainting with the pain which, coming on his long fast and arduous exertions, completed his physical collapse.

When he came around, the leg was numb, and, setting his teeth, he tried to drag himself to the fire, knowing that in its friendly arms alone lay a chance for life. He dragged himself over the snow like a dog with its back broken, and fainted again before he had gone a yard. This time he lay quite still, sprawled face down in the snow, his arms extended toward the distant fire, as if mutely pleading for some of its warmth.

But, curiously enough, he felt quite warm, and his foot had stopped throbbing. It was quite warm in the snow, and he was very tired; he would rest but a moment, and then replenish the fire. He never remembered being so delightfully sleepy; he felt no pain, no hunger, no physical exhaustion; nothing but a luxurious sense of repose.

And so the fire became red embers, and the snow came down gently, softly, and thickly, weaving its way through the trees, while all about lay the great hush of the silent places as Gilchrist slid into the sleep that frequently has no awakening.

CHAPTER II.

AN UNWELCOME GUEST.

It was a long return trip from the back of beyond, and Gilchrist fought hard against making it. He wanted to be let alone in his new-found land of make-believe, where he felt no pain. His mother's face was before him; he was a child again on her knee, and so real did the dream picture seem that when at length he opened his eyes resentfully with his throat on fire from brandy, and found his head on some one's breast, some one's arms about him, some one's face bending over him, he sighed contentedly, and thought it all true. Surely those fine, dark eyes so near his own, so tenderly solicitous, were those of his mother——

Gilchrist sat up abruptly as he realized he was in the arms of a man. "Hello!" he said weakly. "I—I guess I must have dropped off. Is that you, Spear? How did you fellows get here any——"

But he discovered it wasn't the partners; also that his tongue and mind were failing him.

When next he opened his eyes it was to find himself propped against the big log, a great fire roaring, and some one ministering to his wounded foot; a faint aroma of carbolic came to him, and he saw a little handmade surgical kit and a drinking cup full of steaming water. He lay back and watched his rescuer, a slender yet strongly knit figure in long, hooded mackinaw with sash tied about the waist—the kind worn by the Hudson's Bay trappers; trousers of mackinaw cloth, Chippewa moccasins, and wool-lined buckskin mittens passing over the neck by a knitted cord. He could not see his rescuer's face owing to the hood, but from the slender, supple fingers and the lithe grace bespoken in every line of the vigorous body he knew him to be a youth of his own age, if that. He felt curiously ashamed of his plight; of proving so helpless before one so young.

"This is awfully good of you," he blurted out at length. "Can't I help a bit? I'm all right now."

The boy—he could not be more than that—looked up, and Gilchrist, in the leaping firelight, caught a glimpse of the fine, dark eyes which he had confounded with those of his mother. The boy spoke simply, yet with authority: "No, you mustn't move until I've fixed this; it's a nasty cut."

He bent again to his task as if Gilchrist had not spoken. He had washed out the wound with warm water to

which had been added a few drops of carbolic acid, and he now brought the edges of the wound together with strips of adhesive plaster, bandaging it with carbolated vaseline, and leaving one end open for the escape of pus. His touch was as gentle as a woman's, and Gilchrist envied his surgical skill, his sure, deft fingers; the harmony of hand and eye, the perfect coördination of brain and muscle.

He thought of his own clumsy antics in making the fire, his own feeble carcass compared with this fine young animal. The boy interested him exceedingly; he seemed so self-possessed, so sure of himself, so entirely competent. Was he alone, and what had brought him to this place at this hour? He seemed a part of the wild, as much at home as one of its denizens, and yet he had spoken in a singularly clear and well-modulated voice.

"You got here just in time," said Gilchrist, "and lucky for me you did."

"Yes," said the other simply. "You were in the long sleep. I saw the fire and I was curious. Why did you stop here?"

"Stop here? Why—why, because there was no place else," said Gilchrist. "One spot was as good as another. I was lost—I am yet."

The boy nodded. "You are only a mile from Silver Lake as the crow flies, and half a mile from my—my father's place."

Gilchrist was astonished; he had heard the partners speak of Silver Lake, and knew it lay about ten miles directly east of their camp, while all the time he could have sworn he was northwest. Also there was something supremely ridiculous in the thought of his camping out for the night, while within half a mile of shelter; his exertions which had seemed so heroic now appeared absurd, and he laughed in rather a shamefaced way.

"I'm a green hand, as you can see," he said. "I tried to make out I wasn't, but it wouldn't go." He told of the camp, of Pills and Spear; of his pursuit of the caribou and losing his compass, while he munched pemmican and camp bread which the other had given him. He never remembered anything tasting so good as this "jerked" meat pounded into shreds and mixed with tallow and dried berries.

"Do you always travel with that?" he asked, pointing to the improvised surgical kit. The question was asked more with the desire of starting a conversation, for his new-found companion was proving as silent as an Indian.

The boy nodded. "You never know what may happen."

"What is your name?" pursued Gilchrist. He had given his own, but it had not elicited the expected and usual response. "My name is Gilchrist," he repeated. "Harry Gilchrist, and my partners' names are Spear and Pills ——"

"What a funny name!" said the boy doubtfully. "Is it a real one?"

"What—Pills?" laughed Gilchrist. "He got that name because once he made a pair of pants out of an oat sack and half-soled them on the rear with a Pillsbury's flour sack, name side out. I believe he wore them all over the Red River country until they wore out, and he didn't seem to care how many people laughed at him. He's an old Hudson's Bay man, I believe, and I don't know what his real name is. He doesn't seem to have any."

"You're an American?" said the boy.

Gilchrist nodded. "I'm from New York, and my father is—— Well, he's Gilchrist & Co.," he added apologetically. This company was one of the biggest fur houses in the world.

The boy nodded again, as if the name was no stranger. "But why do you leave the big cities when you don't have to?" he asked wonderingly. "Why come—here? There is nothing here. I've heard my—my father speak of Gilchrist & Co.; they are very rich. *You* must be very rich," he finished enviously.

"If I am, it's no credit to me," said Gilchrist, with a certain weariness. "Money isn't everything."

"But think what it can do!" exclaimed the boy. "Think where you can go, and what you can see—— Oh,

it *is* everything! Think what it can do——"

"I'm thinking," said Gilchrist dryly. "Could it have saved my life if you hadn't happened along? Could it give me, say, a figure like yours? Your health and strength——" He laughed. "Look at me; I've a shape like a frayed toothpick——"

"But you are good looking," said the boy.

"Good looking!" exclaimed Gilchrist. "I've a sore lip; don't make me laugh. I'll tell you how it is with me," he added, leaning against the log and not knowing quite why he spoke so freely to this young stranger. "You see, I've always been a bit sickly—or, at least, I'm so blamed sawed-off and skinny people think it a shame I should be beating the undertaker. You speak about what money can do; but I tell you all the money in the world couldn't put an ounce of flesh on my bones. One thing, I'm all there, for I can see every bone I've got. No, sir, I'm no Anna Held or Lillian Russell, and don't think I don't know it. You can't kid me."

These names were evidently unfamiliar to the boy, for he only stared. "I mean you have a good face," he stammered.

"Now you're shouting!" exclaimed Gilchrist. "Homely people always are good; that's an axiom."

"And you came up here because you were sick?" asked the other gently.

"No!" said Gilchrist violently. "I'm not sick, but my father seems to think so, and that I'll drop dead if I do a stroke of honest labor. Everybody thinks so. There's a conspiracy against me to keep me from working. That's what you get for being an only child, with no mother, and a father as rich as mud, who thinks the sun rises and sets in the bosom of his lone offspring."

"I wouldn't call that a hardship—some one to care for you like that," said the boy quietly.

"You're right," said Gilchrist quickly, "I've the best old dad in the world; but—— Well"—his face softening—"you see, my mother died of tuberculosis when I was a kid, and my father's afraid I'll go the same route. He's been told over and over again by the specialists that my lungs are good as wheat, but it's no use; I look the part, and if I happen to sit in a draft and cough—the high, cold places for mine! I've been to Saranac and Denver and California so often I know the family history of every conductor and engineer and just how they vote.

"But let's talk a bit about you," he finished, with a smile. "I've introduced myself down to the ground, and I don't know your name. I want to know to whom I'm indebted for my life," he finished, with a touch of formality.

The boy hesitated, glancing up shyly from under the hood. "Tita," he said.

"Tita?" echoed Gilchrist. "What an odd name—I mean, I never heard it before." He wondered whether it was a Christian or surname; but the owner did not supply the information, and Gilchrist was too polite to inquire further.

"You say your camp is only half a mile?" he pursued. "I suppose you're up after big game?"

"No," said the other, "my—my father is a trapper and fur farmer."

Again Gilchrist noticed the strange hesitation before the word "father."

The wound had been dressed, the sock and moccasin replaced, and the boy, sitting on his haunches, looked at Gilchrist gravely. "You say it's over ten miles to your camp?" he asked, pointing toward the west.

"Yes; but my partners won't be back till to-morrow—perhaps later," said Gilchrist. "I'm afraid I can't walk there."

The other hesitated. "You must come with me," he said at length, with sudden decision. "You have a fever, and you're not strong. You're not fit to be alone." He arose.

The invitation or command had been given reluctantly, if decisively, and Gilchrist felt if his camp had not been deserted the other would have traveled the ten miles for help in preference to the alternative. He felt touchy, too, about being called weak and unfit to be alone.

"I haven't any fever," he said, "and I can't think of imposing on you further. I'm all right, and if you can let my camp know some time to-morrow I can stay right here; there's no reason why I can't. I've grub and shelter, and——"

But the other calmly went forward with his preparations, fastening on his webs as if Gilchrist had not spoken.

"I'm not going," said Gilchrist. He felt quite defiant and peevish about it.

"Come!" said the boy.

"No," said Gilchrist. There was a lump of ice in his chest, and it hurt him to breathe. But his pride was in revolt. "I'm all right, I tell you. I never imposed on any one yet, and I won't begin now. I'll see that you're paid, all right, for what you've done." It was an unwarranted slur, and Gilchrist instantly repented.

The boy winced as if struck, standing very erect and in silence. Gilchrist saw his eyes glowing in the darkness of the hood.

"I'm sorry," said Gilchrist, flushing darkly. "I didn't mean that. Forgive me, won't you?"

For answer the other stepped behind the log and lifted Gilchrist in his strong, young arms. "It's only half a mile, and the going's easy," he said, as if nothing had happened. He scattered the fire, picked up Gilchrist's rifle—he himself carried no weapon—and without another word the two set off, the boy's arm about Gilchrist and almost supporting his entire weight.

That walk was like a dream to Gilchrist; he knew he was soldiering shamelessly; that the other virtually carried him in places; yet he could not help it. His head was whirling, and he was weak as the winter dawn. He marveled at the tireless strength, agility, and grace contained in that slender form. He no longer felt resentment; he welcomed the human companionship. He was content to be helped, to place all his reliance on this good Samaritan. He asked nothing but some spot to lay his head; some place warm enough to thaw that lump of ice in his breast; to remove the gravel from his lungs, gravel that gritted together at every breath.

More than once his companion warned him, saying there was a trap here, another there; and the words came to Gilchrist as down a long vista.

They emerged from the black fastness of the forest, whose evergreens seemed to his distorted imagination as mammoth pillars supporting the dark vault of heaven. They came into a large clearing, inclosed on three sides by the bush, while to the east lay a white glare, which he knew must be Silver Lake. Lights danced before his eyes, and a strong animal scent came to him down the wind.

The next Gilchrist knew he was seated in a large living room, which bore every evidence of comfort, and even some refinement; the log walls were covered with skins and cretonne curtains hung in the windows; there were rugs on the hardwood floor, pictures, bookcases, and even a phonograph. Before a great fireplace sat two men, a table between them, on which stood a bottle and glasses.

To Gilchrist everything looked blurred and fantastic. He did not know how he came to be sitting where he was, and he had a confused recollection that one of the men was Tita's father—though which he was puzzled to know—that he had been introduced and that he should say something. Also, that the men were eying him hard and fixedly, and that neither seemed overpleased at making his acquaintance. Their faces were particularly impressed upon him, like faces in a bad dream; one was older than the other, a small, thin man, with the eyes and long-pointed face of a weasel. The other was big boned and heavy set, with full crimson lips showing under a small, black mustache; he had thrown aside his mackinaw and sat in gray flannel shirt, open at the throat, and showing the matted hair on his chest. He was looking at Tita, and smiling, the teeth showing very white in marked contrast to the black mustache and crimson lips, the under one pendulous, and both satyrlike.

Tita had thrown back the hood of his mackinaw, but had not removed the

toque he wore; and for the first time Gilchrist saw his face in the full glow of the lamp. He was struck with its keen, vivid beauty; the fine, dark eyes; the firm, mobile lips and straight nose; the youthful contour of the dusky cheek with its faint, rich coloring. He reflected that if this boy had a sister, she must be good to look upon.

It was like a disconnected dream to Gilchrist, or a moving-picture drama, with many a frequent and inexplicable hiatus between the films. When next he opened his eyes—he had been unconscious of shutting them—another person was in the room, a small, fragile woman, with a kindly, timid face. A fine quarrel of some sort was in progress, and Gilchrist understood vaguely and in a quite impersonal manner that it somehow concerned himself. The quarrel was between Tita and the Weasel, and the woman seemed afraid to take sides, though from her expression Gilchrist felt that all her unspoken sympathies were with the boy. The Satyr lay back in his chair, pulling at his mustache in silence.

"It's nonsense!" the Weasel was saying, in a thin, angry voice. "I won't have it! He's all right. Let Lobo take him over to his camp in a tote sled; there's no room for him here."

"There is!" said Tita defiantly, standing very erect, his eyes flashing. "He may have my room. He's very ill. He can't make the back trip. Look at him——"

"Yes, yes; he's very ill," said the woman, coming forward timidly. "Poor boy! Poor boy! Please let him stay, Pierre——"

"Mind your business!" cried the Weasel, turning on her with the venom of an infuriated small creature. He gave her one look, and she shrank back through the doorway. The Satyr looked uncomfortable and bored.

"I say he won't stay—do you hear?" exclaimed the Weasel, turning to Tita.

"I guess he's drunk, that's all," put in the Satyr, with a laugh. "It wouldn't be the first time I'd known a hunting trip to be another name for a quiet booze party. It's a good excuse to get away and drink yourself blind. Phew! I can smell the brandy on him from here. You're too soft-hearted, Tita, and your inexperience——"

"I'll thank you to keep out of this, Mr. Fanning!" said the boy. "My father and I are able to settle it without your help. I told you," he added, turning to the Weasel, "there's no one at Mr. Gilchrist's camp. You wouldn't turn a sick *dog* out, and you shan't turn him out! He must stay here."

Gilchrist got up, trying to collect his scattered wits. He could not get his breath, and the room was in a whirl, a mere blot of lights, faces, and furniture. He did not know what he said; he tried to thank Tita for all he had done and wished to do; to tell the boy's father he would not remain under his roof if there was no other place in the world; to refute Mr. Fanning's reckless and unwarranted charge of intoxication. But his thoughts became confused, his thoughts jumbled up; everything went black, and he would have fallen but for Tita.

Afterward Gilchrist realized he was in bed, poulticed back and front with mustard; frequently he saw the kindly, motherly face of the Timid Woman bending over him. Back somewhere in the recesses of his befogged memory was the consciousness that the Weasel, in yielding to the inevitable, had anathematized Tita in language by no means choice.

CHAPTER III.

A MYSTERY OF THE NORTH.

Some days had passed, and with them the congestion which had threatened Gilchrist's lungs; his fever and delirium were over, he was able to show an intelligent interest in his surroundings, and the wounded ankle was mending nicely. In a measure, this quick recovery was due to the skilled nursing of Mrs. Leblac, mother of Tita, whom Gilchrist had mentally called the Timid Woman, lacking her proper name that first night; just as he had classified Mr. Leblac as the Weasel, and Mr. Fanning as the Satyr.

Mrs. Leblac's medical skill had been gained by practical experience; her remedies were simple, efficacious, and old-fashioned; and, added to this, was a world of sympathy and patience. Gilchrist could not have received more attention had he been her son. It had been many, many years since he had known a mother's love, and, apart from his gratitude, he felt strangely drawn toward this fragile little woman who had Tita's dark eyes and refinement of feature. She was not the hardy and ofttime blousy type identified with frontiers and outposts of civilization, yet peculiarly efficient in her own way. He wondered what life history lay behind those timid eyes which always held a look of incurable melancholy. What strange impulse or emotion had caused her to link her life with such a man as Pierre Leblac?

Gilchrist treasured a lively remembrance of Leblac's churlishness displayed on that first night; of the brutal manner in which he had addressed his wife; the epithets he had flung at his son; and it was this, coupled with his clean life and indomitable will, that helped Gilchrist toward a quick recovery. He knew this hospitality had been forced upon Leblac, and he wished to be quit of it as soon as possible.

He had seen nothing of Tita or his father, but he learned through Mrs. Leblac that the former had visited his, Gilchrist's, camp, and, finding that neither Spear nor Pills had returned, left a note acquainting them with their partner's whereabouts.

As he gained in strength, Gilchrist's thoughts busied themselves with this strange family into which he had been pitchforked by chance; was this a permanent camp, where they lived the year round, or had they come from Silver City, a small settlement, which he knew lay somewhere east of the lake? Tita had said his father was a trapper and fur farmer; fur farming was a new industry, and, if successful, lucrative. It did not make him any the more comfortable to know that Mrs. Leblac and her son were perhaps suffering on his account; that no doubt Leblac was venting his spite on them. More than once he had heard the man's vituperative tenor as he stormed about downstairs, and subsequently Mrs. Leblac had entered with reddened eyes. Gilchrist had felt hot all over, yet said nothing; for she never volunteered information.

Yet as he grew stronger and was able to talk without effort, Mrs. Leblac showed a keen and almost pathetic interest in the life of the great cities which Gilchrist knew, and when he spoke of Detroit her face flushed with pleasure.

"Did you live there?" he asked. It was his first question.

"Yes," said Mrs. Leblac. "A long, long time ago. I was born there." She questioned him closely concerning various stores, streets, theaters, and residential districts, exclaiming at the changes time had wrought.

After that, Detroit was the chief, if not sole, topic of conversation; Mrs. Leblac would never refer to it directly, but always in a devious manner, patent as the sun, but which her simple nature evidently thought the height of strategy. Gilchrist never let her see she was not fooling him a bit, but took the bait at the proper moment, as though unaware of the lures by which she had snared him.

Her visits were surreptitious, and conducted when her husband was away from the house; this Gilchrist suspected, for his regular attendant was Lobo, the Dog Rib Indian. This man resembled the wolf not only in name, for he was stealthy and silent—silent as though dumb. He moved as quietly as running oil. A vague and rather sickening animal scent emanated from him, which assisted in bearing out the resemblance. Gilchrist disliked him, a dislike which had in it something of the element of fear. Often when eating he would look up suddenly to find Lobo's eyes upon him—they were yellow with tiny little black specks—with their peculiar stare. And when curtly bidden to go, the Indian would slide out silently, showing no change of expression.

But from Mrs. Leblac Gilchrist

learned presently that he had misjudged his attendant in one respect: Lobo did not talk, for the very good reason that he lacked the power of articulation; he had been shot through the mouth and the vocal cords destroyed.

"He worships my husband," Mrs. Leblac added, as if welcoming the opportunity of saying a good word for her other half, "for it was he who saved his life. It was one winter when we were in the Mackenzie River basin that my husband found Lobo lying, wounded, in the snow."

"Who shot him?" asked Gilchrist. "Was it an accident?"

"I don't know," she replied, "and I don't think my husband knows, either. Lobo can't talk, nor can he read or write."

"Had your husband known him previous to that?"

"Oh, yes; he had employed him off and on that year. Lobo comes from the Mackenzie River basin. But I mean he didn't become attached to us until after his accident. He would have died if my husband hadn't found him and brought him home; after that there was no getting rid of him.

"I know," she added, "that the Dog Ribs have a bad name. The Chippewas are the best Indians in the North; they go to church at the missions, and they are thrifty and hard working. But the Dog Ribs east of Fort Resolution are shiftless and degenerate; they are as primitive to-day as two hundred years ago. Yet Lobo has proven an excellent employee, and I'm sure if my husband ordered him to cut off his hand he would obey. He takes entire charge of the fox pens, but he can do anything——"

"Foxes?"

"Yes, my husband farms foxes—breeds them for their pelts."

"Is it allowable in the Dominion?" asked Gilchrist. "I thought it was against the law to have fur bearers in captivity at any time."

"In most of the provinces it is," explained Mrs. Leblac. "You can't get a permit. In others some of the fur bearers aren't protected, and you can get a permit on payment of a certain fee. But here you don't need one; the only stipulation is that the animals be taken during the open season. We raise cross, black, and silver, and have had great success so far—perhaps owing to Lobo; he seems to know them like a brother."

"Well, it's cousin to the wolf," commented Gilchrist, "and certainly Lobo deserves his name. Fur farming is a new industry and a necessary one; I understand it pays big dividends to the man who works and knows. But you are the first lady fur farmer I've ever met."

"Oh, I've nothing to do with it!" exclaimed Mrs. Leblac. "Nor has Tita. We couldn't bear seeing the animals killed. But a woman can't choose her husband's business."

"It must have been lonely in the Mackenzie River basin," he commented. "This is bad enough."

"Yes, there are about one hundred and fifty white people there," she smiled. "You are of the cities, while I —well, I haven't been in what you would call a city for a dozen years. Silver City is only a settlement with a mission and a sawmill; I suppose that's our home, though I've been with my husband all over the North country; we're nomads, you might say. The spell of the North works into your blood, and I don't think I could be happy anywhere else."

Gilchrist said nothing, but he suspected Mrs. Leblac wasn't so happy as she would have him believe; the wonderful spell of the North at least had given her a pair of very sad eyes. Her longing for news of Detroit seemed to be that of the starved and expatriated soul clamoring for its own. And he could see, despite her warm commendation of Lobo, that she disliked the Indian and feared him.

CHAPTER IV.

THE UNMASKING.

On the fourth night Gilchrist awoke suddenly from fitful sleep; he had been aroused by the hum of voices be-

low stairs—or, rather, of one all-dominating voice—that of Leblac. He had heard an oath, the sound of a blow, the cry of a woman in pain.

Gilchrist sat up in bed, the blood in his face. He heard a door slam, and from some part of the house an unprotesting, muffled sobbing, which cut him to the heart. Shaking as much from anger as weakness, he arose and began to dress. His ankle did not bother him, but the fever had sapped his strength, and for a moment the room swam before his eyes. His mackinaw was missing—he remembered Mrs. Leblac taking it to mend a rent in the shoulder—and in flannel shirt, trousers, and moccasins he went to the door and listened.

The sobbing had stopped, and Gilchrist, after listening a moment, went downstairs. He made no effort to walk quietly, but the moccasins on the hardwood were practically noiseless. He was unfamiliar with the plan of the big double-decker cabin, having been unable the night of his arrival to take intelligent observation; but the stairs led into the living room, where a lamp was burning.

This room was vacant, and it was familiar as dream pictures are sometimes familiar, for he had been delirious on first making its acquaintance. In a corner stood an oddly shaped bundle, covered with wolfskins, and Gilchrist, unconscious of prying and with his thoughts far afield, lifted the fur covering. It proved to be a bundle of some two dozen stretching boards, all newly made but not the size used for fox. He eyed them a moment, and then replaced the wolfskins.

A slight sound from the stairs attracted him, and he turned. A girl was standing on the lower step, eying him fixedly. "Who are you? What are you doing here? What do you want?" she demanded, staring at him without fear.

And Gilchrist stared back, for this girl was the living image of Tita. He was looking into the same fine, dark eyes that now were veiled by a cloud of dusky hair that fell far below her slim waist. She wore vivid green flannel, open at the throat, and a woolen skirt of some hideous and indefinable color, and brief enough to display thick rig-and-fur stockings thrust into moccasins. Her clothing was coarse, ill fitting, even grotesque; the colors clashed discordantly, and yet Gilchrist found himself staring in frank admiration and thinking he had seldom seen so pretty a picture. Perhaps because youth loves youth, and he had not seen a girl for weeks. But no travesty on the modiste's art could hide the splendid lines of that young figure which owned the lissome grace and supple strength of a wild creature; no subtle touch of the pencil or puff was needed to enhance the piquancy of that dark face with its vivid coloring; with its magnetism of vibrant, passionate youth. Health, glorious and triumphant, and a spirit untamed, unyoked to the juggernaut of convention, were the messages conveyed by that waiting figure on the stairs. She had recognized Gilchrist, and a shy, hesitating smile was disclosing her small, strong teeth, clean and sound as those of a young hound. Her eyes, too, as she glanced up shyly through the dusky hair, were hesitant and inquiring, yet holding a certain defiance.

Gilchrist was no Solomon, neither was he a fool; and he knew that Tita and this girl were one and the same. Certain things appeared to him in a new light as, for instance, the character of the room he had occupied. He stepped forward and bowed.

"It seems that I'm not a burglar and that you are not—not what you seemed," he said. "I suppose you may call this a mutual surprise."

She flushed a little. "And I suppose you're not accustomed to seeing a girl in such a costume?" she challenged, a twinkle in her dark eyes.

"Well, after the harem skirt, I believe one may look for anything," said Gilchrist; "but I didn't expect to find the latest style up here."

"What is a—a harem skirt?" she asked naïvely.

"Oh, you know; one of those things you can't walk in, all slashed up the sides," he said doubtfully. "Don't you call them harem?"

"I'm sure I don't know," said Tita, perplexed. "I should think they'd be very cold if they're cut up like that. They wouldn't do at all here; this is bad enough," looking at her skirt.

Gilchrist thought so, too, but not in the way she meant.

"Why did you get up?" she asked. "It was very wrong. Why did you do it?"

He hesitated, finding it difficult to improvise under the scrutiny of those clear eyes. "Really, I'm all right," he said, "and I—I wanted to try out my legs."

"That isn't why you came down here," she returned calmly. "You heard something."

"I did," said Gilchrist. "I suppose I should mind my own business, Miss Leblac——" He stopped and looked away. "I heard the sound of a blow, and a woman crying—was it you?" he finished hotly.

Tita shook her head. At that moment she looked like a young savage. "I'm getting too old for beatings," she said quite calmly. "So he hit her? You heard him beat her? I knew he had, but she denied it; she said the marks were caused by a fall." Tita swallowed and turned to the window, her hands clenched.

"He knows better than to touch her when I'm around!" she added passionately, turning and speaking as if to herself. "He knows better than that!" She turned away again.

The consistent use of the pronoun instead of "father" and "mother" jarred upon Gilchrist. He felt as though he had lifted the lid of a caldron seething with primitive passions. At random he picked a book from the table; it was an elementary speller, well thumbed and marked. The flyleaf bore an imprint showing it to be the property of the Sacré Cœur mission in Silver City. In a round, childish hand was the name and inscription: "Tita Warrener Leblac; Her Book." Below, in the same childish hand, was the old rhyme, which brought back vividly to Gilchrist his own juvenile days:

> If I by chance should lose this book
> And you by chance should find it;
> Remember Tita is my name,
> And Warrener comes behind it.

He picked up another—an advanced Reader. Another—an elementary Arithmetic. Tita turned and saw him.

"Old schoolbooks, eh?" said Gilchrist lightly, trying to change the subject. "I like to look over them, don't you? We used to think we'd a hard time of it in those days; but we didn't know when we were well off. You've kept them remarkably well——" Her expression checked him. She was crimson.

"I'm learning out of those now," she said defiantly, but with quivering lip. "I'm nearly eighteen, but I don't know any more than a child! I haven't any education!"

Gilchrist would have liked five minutes alone in which to kick himself. He felt for her keenly; that labored, childish writing now appeared pathetic. But he did not make the mistake of attempting to apologize, acting instead as if such shamefully neglected education was quite a natural occurrence.

"All learning isn't contained in books," he said gently, "and what is in books must first be learned outside them."

Her eyes spoke her appreciation, but she would not accept the extenuating, softening touch. "I'm densely ignorant," she said. "I've never been in a city. I'm not like any other girl you ever knew. I'm a savage!"

He picked up another book—"Paul and Virginia" in the original. Also "L'Abbé Constantin."

"These are yours?" he asked.

She nodded.

"Then you're a rather well-educated little savage, Miss Leblac," laughed Gilchrist. "I wish I could read these in the original—and really enjoy myself."

She flushed. "I love reading; I read anything I can get my hands on. But that isn't education. I can't write decently; I can't spell, and I'm not through fractions. And I want to

learn. I want to learn!" she added passionately.

"What was the matter?" he asked gently, as she seemed eager to talk. "Was it sickness?"

She shook her head. "I—— But you must sit down, Mr. Gilchrist. Forgive me; I am so stupid. You should not be standing." She ran to get a chair, but he forestalled her, waiting until she was seated. Plainly she was unaccustomed to the little courtesies and deferences due her sex; accustomed to doing rather than being done for.

"I've never had a chance to learn anything," she said slowly. "I've been brought up like a boy. For a time when I was a child I was placed with the sisters in Sacré Cœur mission, Silver City; then my father took me away, and I forgot all I knew. My mother and he traveled a great deal, and I went with them. For years we were on the Mackenzie and Athabasca, and Edmonton is the largest city I've been in. We've been all over the far North: Fort Smith, Norman, Resolution, McMurray, Good Hope—all the Hudson Bay posts. I worked with my father, hunting and trapping; I dressed up as a boy and lived like one——" She checked herself; the animation died out of her face.

"All this is nothing to you, Mr. Gilchrist," she said quickly. "I'm boring you. Tell me if I am."

"On the contrary, I'm very much interested, Miss Leblac."

"Please don't call me that!" she said quickly. "I'm Tita; just Tita. I want you to call me Tita if—if you will."

"If I may," said Gilchrist, bowing. "I should think——" He hesitated. "I can't understand why your parents—I mean education is compulsory nowadays, isn't it?"

"My father didn't want me educated—at least he doesn't seem to care," said Tita dispassionately. "I was more useful to him on the trap line, I suppose. He hasn't any use for girls; I should have been a boy. It's hard to learn out of books when you're continually on the move and have a living to make. Mother taught me what she could at times, but it was a continual fight. She's just beginning to realize I'm grown up and that I'm appallingly ignorant. Really, she isn't to blame, for I suppose you've seen she isn't quite right here." And Tita tapped her forehead.

"What?" he exclaimed.

"Oh, yes!" said the girl matter-of-factly. "I've seen it for some time. She always had long, silent spells which I never understood; they frightened me until I got used to them. She wouldn't speak to me for days at a time, and it irritated her to have me around. But it isn't serious," she added quickly, noting Gilchrist's expression. "She isn't mad, you understand, and she's always very kind and gentle. She has never said an unkind word to me. She just gets spells, but you mustn't mind them. I think she's something like a monomaniac—I read about that in a book once—only not so bad. I mean she's all right except on one subject, and that is Detroit. She'll talk you to death about Detroit if you'll let her."

"Your mother has told me something about her wanderings," said Gilchrist, "and I understand Detroit is her native town. She's had a very lonely life——"

"Oh, very!" said Tita, nodding. "You don't know how lonely; nothing but snow and silence. Sometimes it was so silent it hurt. It was ghastly at first—such a change from Silver City! But children soon forget and become accustomed to things. I was busy hunting, trapping, and fishing, while mother was home alone. I can understand how lonely she must have been, and loneliness is bad; it eats like an acid."

"Yes," said Gilchrist. "I don't wonder your mother wants to hear about Detroit; but what I can't understand is why she doesn't go there. This country and life are all right for those who are born to it, or who like it; but to those who have known something different a little of it goes a long way."

"I don't know," said Tita, looking down at her passive hands, beautifully shaped like every part of her, but discolored by the weather. "You see," wrinkling her brows, "when you're poor you can't do just as you like, and from

what I've heard I'd rather be poor here than in a big city. Here you don't have to pay for room and sunlight and fresh air, and there's always plenty to eat. I'd rather work on the trap line than in a factory. You see, my father has always been a trapper, and, until a year or so ago, we had to work very hard. I suppose he had to go where the fur bearers were, and most of the valuable ones are up north.

"He couldn't afford to keep me at the Sacré Cœur," she continued, "and that's why he took me away when I was old enough to look after myself. Mother has always said she preferred this life; anyway, she wouldn't leave him, for he's everything to her. You know," she finished calmly, "if a woman loves a man it doesn't matter how he treats her; I've found that out. I used to think when I read that in books it was a lie; but it isn't; it's so."

Gilchrist eyed her curiously, no longer feeling uncomfortable at being made the recipient of such information supposedly sacred to the family. Tita spoke so candidly, so impersonally, that it relieved him of all embarrassment. Certainly she was like no other girl he had ever met. For one thing, her naïveté and sincerity were absolutely genuine.

"Do you still help your father on the trap line?" he asked.

"Oh, no!" she smiled. "You see, we're better off now. Some day we'll be rich, and I'm going to be a lady—a real one like the kind you must know. I'll go to school at Winnipeg—perhaps Montreal." She clapped her hands like a child.

"And all due to fur farming?" he smiled.

She nodded. "We came back to Silver City about two years ago, and father built this camp. He said I might go back to the Sacré Cœur, but he won't let me board there. I go every day, and Sunday I go to church——"

"What! Ten miles twice a day?" exclaimed Gilchrist. "Do you walk?"

"Of course," she nodded. "What are twenty miles a day? Nothing!" snapping her fingers like a boy. "I'd walk fifty to see Sister Rosalie and to learn to be like other girls. Look! I did this all myself." She jumped up eagerly, and from a little Indian basket brought out a piece of fancywork, displayed with pride, not unmixed with misgiving, as she offered it for his inspection.

"Is it really good?" she asked shyly.

"Oh, very! Yes, indeed!" he exclaimed, quite ignorant of the subject.

"You're not just saying that?" she asked doubtfully. "I remember," she continued, with sudden diffidence and self-consciousness, "that the other night you complained about telling me all about yourself and that I said nothing. But now I have been talking about myself and you have said nothing."

"But I told you all about myself," he laughed; "and, anyway, I'm a less interesting subject."

"Not to me," she said calmly. "I want to know why you came up here. I don't understand why any one should if he is rich and can go where he pleases. I'd go to Venice or the art galleries in Rome. You don't have to trap for a living——"

"Lucky for me I don't," he laughed. "You see, it's this way: Spear is an old trapper who's been shipping raw furs to our company for years, and he knew my father before dad made his pile. Pills I don't know. I only met him last week; but he's Spear's partner.

"Now, then, I'm ambitious, though I can't convince anybody of that fact. I want to do something; I want to learn the business from the ground up, and when I came out of college I went into the office. But that wouldn't do; dad was always afraid it was too confining, and when I achieved a cold and developed a cough—— Well, I told you about my pilgrimages to Saranac, Denver, and California.

"It's awfully hard for a rich young man to earn a living these days," he sighed, "especially if there's tuberculosis in the family and he's partial to colds. Colds are my long suit; a cold can multiply and fatten and grow rich on me where it would starve to death on any one else. There isn't any variety

so fast I can't catch it, and I can cough in forty-seven different languages. They never amount to anything, but they make me look very pathetic.

"So I thought if I couldn't learn the business from the inside I could do so from the outside, and when I developed my latest thing in coughs I induced my father to let me come up here instead of going to Saranac. Of course, Spear insisted upon regarding me as a precious package, to be handled with care, and he wouldn't let me go out with them on the trap line that day; so I went on my own hook, and that's how I came to get lost. I found I wasn't so almighty clever as I had imagined; but it turned out all right—thanks to you.

"I guess Spear will see that it's better to take me along; that I'm up here to work and that I'm able to do so. That's all I need—hard work; it's being treated like a hothouse plant that makes me catch cold so easily. And now let us return to you. What else are you learning to do?"

"I'm learning to play the piano," she said shyly. "I can play 'Ave Maria' without a mistake. Do you play?"

"A little."

"Oh, won't you play for me?" she exclaimed eagerly, jumping up in her impulsive way.

"Why, is there a piano here?" he asked as eagerly.

"Oh, yes," she said proudly. "Perhaps you won't think it much of a one," with sudden misgiving. "I got it from a saloon in Silver City, and father didn't seem to mind. It seems to do mother good when she gets her spells, and she doesn't care how often I play 'Ave Maria.'"

In a corner stood the instrument which, covered carefully from top to bottom with a variety of skins and rugs until it resembled some grotesque animal swathed in bandages, Gilchrist had overlooked. In fact, an observer would have been pardoned for not suspecting what lay beneath that strange and motley covering. These removed, Gilchrist saw an instrument that might have found some value in a curiosity shop, but which as a medium for evoking the spirit of Orpheus, lacked much.

"A few notes are missing," explained Tita, "but you won't mind that, will you? You get used to it, and I pretend they do sound." It was evident a concert grand could not have evoked in her more honest admiration than this venerable and decrepit relic, and Gilchrist did not smile.

"What shall we have?" he asked, sitting down and turning back the cuffs of his flannel shirt. He struck a cord at random.

"Can you play *anything?*" she exclaimed, staring.

"After a fashion," he laughed. "I don't say if you close your eyes you'll take me for Paderewski."

"No, for I never heard him," she sighed. "I wonder do you know something Sister Rosalie plays; it's splendid!" Her eyes were aglow, her cheeks on fire. "It sounds like the whisper of the wind in the big woods, and you can hear the birds singing and the voice of white water. You can see the sun, and you know the world is green and glad and——"

"The 'Spring Song'?" he suggested. "Or the 'Melody in F'?"

"No; it's a German name, and means the rustle of spring—*'Frühlingsrauchen!'*" clapping her hands. "That's right, isn't it?"

"Right!" said Gilchrist. "You beat me to it."

The pedals shrieked a protest, a note in the bass and two in the treble were chronic mutes, and, moreover, at certain unheralded intervals there occurred an intestinal upheaval which produced strange rumblings within the venerable carcass like an old dyspeptic troubled with flatulency. Yet the old piano gave out a sweet, resonant tone, and Gilchrist was an artist in soul, whatever he lacked in technique, and the roar and crash of Sinding's masterpiece echoed throughout the room while Tita, chin in hands, and a lost look in her dark eyes, listened, absorbed.

Gilchrist was also lost for the moment, and they did not see that Mrs. Leblac had crept downstairs, and was

standing in the room. There was a dull, blue mark on either cheek, and her eyes were red.

A crunching of snow came from somewhere without, and Mrs. Leblac, after listening a moment, vanished as quietly as she had come. Then the door opened, and Leblac entered, kicking the snow from his webs.

CHAPTER V.

BACK TO CAMP.

Leblac wore a dark scowl, and his eyes darted to the bundle in the corner, a covert glance which Gilchrist did not miss. Tita and he had arisen, the old look of defiance showing in the girl's eyes as she faced her father.

"So m'sieu is better?" said Leblac shortly, and with something like a sneer. "I understood he wasn't able to leave his bed." His eyes were dark and suspicious. Gilchrist could see that once he must have been a very handsome man, but he could find no feature that resembled Tita. Nor did the girl favor her mother; she was a distinct type, one of those anomalies or castbacks—a reversion to some ancestor—which occasionally crop out in families.

"Yes, I'm all right, thank you," said Gilchrist. "I'll be able to leave in the morning."

Tita made a protesting gesture, but Leblac nodded.

"I can't thank you enough for all your kindness," added Gilchrist. "I'm greatly indebted to you, indeed."

Leblac shrugged. He was not such a boor by nature; Gilchrist thought that in other circumstances or under other conditions he might even be a man of some culture and refinement, to whom courtesy came instinctively. His rudeness seemed studied.

"When do you start?" asked Leblac, as if anxious to speed the parting guest.

"Oh, early," said Gilchrist shortly. Tita's cheeks were crimson with shame.

"We breakfast at seven," said Leblac. "I can't spare Lobo or a toboggan."

"I intended walking," said Gilchrist coldly. He was angry, and but for Tita's presence would have spoken more openly.

"Tita, it's time you were in bed," said her father sharply. He waited with a certain dour grimness as her face darkened, and the old savage expression settled on it.

She moved sullenly, and with deliberate slowness, yet fearing to openly disobey. It was such a marked and unpleasant change from the vivacious, intelligent, and happy, naïve girl Gilchrist had known before her father's arrival; he seemed to foster and arouse the worst in her; under his eyes that flaming soul became bitter and vindictive.

"Good night, Mr. Gilchrist," she said in a hard, dry voice. She ignored her father.

Gilchrist came forward. "I may not see you in the morning, Miss Tita, so for fear I won't I'll say good-by as well as good night. I needn't try to thank you; there are some things it's impossible to say; impossible to repay."

The transformation took place again. She flushed; the wistful yet piquant smile returned; her face, her whole being was aglow with happiness, gratitude, and the joy of life. She put forth both hands impulsively.

"You have given me such pleasure," she said. "You don't know how much. I can't thank you enough——"

"Tita!" said Leblac sharply.

Gilchrist paid no attention, but escorted her to the stairs, bowing as he stepped aside for her to pass. He remained there, watching as she ascended. She smiled and nodded before vanishing, and he smiled and bowed again. He was still smiling when he turned to his scowling host.

"Since when, m'sieu, have you been addressing my daughter by her Christian name?" demanded Leblac.

Gilchrist raised his brows. "Since never," he said calmly.

"I beg to differ, m'sieu; I heard you. Do you think I'm deaf?"

"I said '*Miss* Tita,'" replied Gilchrist. "Your daughter gave me that permission."

"Indeed," said Leblac angrily. "She hasn't the wit or the wisdom to know what should be given or withheld from strangers."

Gilchrist reddened. He had no intention of quarreling with his host, yet he was angry, and could not let this pass. "I beg to differ with you there," he replied shortly. "I cannot be classed as a stranger when I've slept under your roof for three nights. In my opinion your daughter's wisdom is only exceeded by her courtesy and kindness."

Leblac made a contemptuous gesture. "I desire no outside opinion regarding my daughter, Mr. Gilchrist. I beg you to remember that if you are a guest it is only so by force of circumstance."

"I quite realize that, Mr. Leblac. You've never permitted me to forget it," flashed Gilchrist, now thoroughly aroused. "And through that same force of circumstance I've been compelled to accept hospitality, where you are concerned, which has been a humiliation. I don't know if this is your customary method of treating strangers, but I do know I've done nothing to deserve it except the fact of my being a stranger and in need."

"If you feel so humiliated there's a remedy," said Leblac curtly, his dark eyes satiric. "And perhaps the sooner you apply it, the better. I'm the last one to take the edge off a young bantam's spirit. If you don't like the company, m'sieu, there's always the door."

"I'll avail myself of the suggestion," replied Gilchrist, at white heat. "May I trouble you for my mackinaw, rifle, and shoes?" Always his verbal refinement grew in ratio with his anger.

"Certainly," said Leblac, as politely. "It has stopped snowing, and there's a full moon. There is a certain fascination about night travel; you will enjoy it, m'sieu."

He brought the articles in question, continuing his polite chatter as if nothing had happened. "You can't go astray, m'sieu; just turn to your left and keep on." He smiled.

In silence Gilchrist finished strapping on his webs. He stepped to the door. "Good night," he said politely.

"Good night, m'sieu," replied Leblac, with a courtly bow.

Gilchrist stepped out into the night. The brutality of this compulsory exodus was appalling; to turn adrift a man risen from a sick bed. And for what reason? None whatever. He had no compass, he was ignorant of the country, he had ten miles to cover, and yet his anger was such, his pride in such fierce revolt that he would have braved anything. He had been insulted, humiliated, degraded.

Gilchrist gritted his teeth, and, turning to the left, plunged into the bush. It was a clear, calm night, and, finding the Big Dipper, he located Polaris; with that in view he could keep from circling. His thoughts returned to the strange roof he had left, and he hoped Tita and Mrs. Leblac would understand that this hasty and unmannerly leave-taking had been none of his choosing.

A sound broke in upon his musings, and he turned to see, in the clear moonlight filtering down through the trees, a pursuing figure which gained upon him with swift, tireless strides. He waited until the figure approached. It was Tita, the long, sashed, and hooded mackinaw covering part of the hideous skirt. She was flushed, but, despite her pace, breathed without effort. For a moment they confronted each other in silence. She was the first to speak.

"I heard everything," she said simply. "I listened. I got out the back window."

"I can't return," said Gilchrist. "Don't think it's petty pride. I simply can't spend another night there."

"I know that," she replied dully. "I'm not asking you to. Come!"

"Where?"

"To your camp. I will go with you."

He shook his head. "Impossible! Please return at once."

"No. You are not fit to travel alone, or to spend a night in the open. Come!"

"Look here, Miss Tita," he said; "you've done more than enough for me, and this is out of the question. Does your father know you've come?"

She shrugged, standing silently and

stubbornly, with the stolid patience of an Indian.

"Go back before he finds out," urged Gilchrist. "Please do. I've caused enough trouble——"

"I won't go back till I'm ready!" she cried, stamping her foot. "I don't care if he knows or not! This is the least I can do after you've been turned out like a dog! It's barbarous, shameful! Do you think I don't know what's due a guest?" she cried. "Don't you see how I feel? He has outraged our hospitality. He has no decency. He knows you've been ill, that you aren't fit to travel; that you don't know the way. He never offered you a compass; he wouldn't care if you lost your way and starved to death. I'm going with you; you can't stop me!"

He saw she was adamant. She could be led, but not driven. "Can't we effect some sort of a compromise?" he smiled. "Really, I'm not so feeble as you think, and I can't get lost so long as I see the North Star. Suppose you come part of the way? I ask it as a favor."

"Very well," she replied. "Come!"

They set off together.

"What has your father got against me, anyway?" asked Gilchrist. "Doesn't he like my looks or style of breathing? I never saw him before, and I'm sure he doesn't know me from Adam; yet he seemed anxious to pick a quarrel with me; I could see it in his eyes. And I said to myself I wasn't going to oblige him, and—— Well, here I am."

"It would have been the same with any one," said Tita colorlessly. "It's been that way ever since I can remember. I never had any friends; it's impossible to have any when he goes out of his way to insult them. Wherever we lived no one ever came to the camp. They'll tell you in Silver City the kind of a man he is; that he won't speak to a soul unless it suits him, and he feels like it. Mr. Fanning is the only person around here who visits us; the others know they're not wanted. A stranger would never stop a second time at our door. Silver City is our nearest neighbor—and now your camp on the other side of us."

"Perhaps he doesn't like us near him," ventured Gilchrist, "though I don't see why. There's plenty for all, and he doesn't trap except for fox, does he?"

"No, it isn't that," said Tita slowly. "I'm sure I don't know what it is; it's just his nature."

"Mr. Fanning is the gentleman I met that night?" suggested Gilchrist.

"Yes. He's the forest ranger, fishery guardian, and game warden around here. Perhaps you can understand now," she added, "why I didn't seem anxious to bring you home—and I wouldn't if it hadn't been necessary. I knew you'd be made to feel uncomfortable, but I didn't think he would be so brutal as this."

"It is all right where I'm concerned, but it's you and your mother, Miss Tita. I've made things harder for you. I needn't pretend to have been blind; with all due respect I think your father a brute, and if I'd been present to-night when he dared to lift his hand against your mother——"

"Dared?" said Tita laconically. "You don't know him. When he gets in a rage it's not his hand, but the first thing that comes to it."

"What?" said Gilchrist. "Did he ever strike you?"

"Of course," she replied calmly. "But he hasn't for some time now," she added slowly. "I bit him once through the hand—when he beat me with a dog whip. Then he got a belt with a heavy buckle, and—and I got my gun——" She hung her head. "That was last year, and he hasn't tried to do it since, and he hasn't lifted his hand to mother before me. I told him I'd kill him if he did. You're sure he beat her to-night?"

Gilchrist was now sorry he had mentioned it, for there was no use aggravating matters. "No, I'm not at all sure," he replied. "I didn't see him, you know. I thought I heard something that sounded like a blow, but I'm not sure. You weren't home?"

"No. Sometimes it's very late when I get back from Silver City. When I came in to-night he had gone—in fact, I met him. He was going to Silver

City, but he must have changed his mind. Mother was crying. I told you she denied it."

"And is he in the habit of abusing her?"

"As a child I remember seeing him strike her once or twice. No, it isn't a habit. He has his good days and bad ones."

"It's monstrous!" exclaimed Gilchrist. "The law would soon put a stop to it. Why have you stood it?"

Tita shrugged. "The law is very far away. It's mother's affair, and she won't hear a word against him. I suppose she isn't different from many another woman; most of them suffer in one way or another. What does it matter whether it's the hand or the tongue? You can be abused in other ways than being beaten——" She turned abruptly and listened.

"Some one is following us," she said laconically. "I know it. Come!" She took hold of his arm, and they continued for a space until suddenly she stepped noiselessly behind a tree, taking him with her. They stood in silence, while the moon shone down on the evergreens with their mantle of snow.

Presently the faintest of sounds struck Gilchrist's listening ear, and a long shadow went flitting past silently some half dozen yards to their right. The girl stepped out.

"Lobo!" she called.

Another moment, and the Dog Rib stood before them.

"Did my father send you?" asked Tita quietly. She displayed no emotion, nor did the Indian. His yellow eyes were fastened on Gilchrist, and they gleamed greenish in the darkness.

Lobo shook his head.

"Then why are you here?" demanded the girl. "Why have you followed me?"

He made some reply in the sign language.

"I don't want you!" said Tita peremptorily. "I'm able to look after myself. Go!" She pointed an imperative finger.

Lobo stood stolidly.

"Do you hear me? Go!" she cried, stamping her foot and pointing to the west.

Lobo raised a hand, and then silently flitted away through the trees, Tita watching.

"Why did you send him back?" asked Gilchrist.

"He won't go," she replied. "I know him. He'll dog me back to camp. He must have seen me leave; nothing misses him."

"Will he tell your father?"

Tita shrugged. "I don't care if he does."

"Well, evidently he's a good watch-dog," said Gilchrist. "I can't say I like him, but I'm glad he's around, for, no matter what you say, this is no time or place for you to be alone, and I didn't know what I was going to do about it. I'm glad Lobo's in the neighborhood; he'll see you get back safely."

"Oh, yes," said Tita.

"You must return now," added Gilchrist, with determination. "You must not go any farther."

"Very well," she said submissively. She stood very close to him. "Some one comes; I think it's your friend."

Gilchrist turned. A man was approaching, his shoulders dragging at a toboggan. "Hello!" cried Gilchrist. "Is that you, Spear?"

"Yep!" came a voice which he recognized as his friend's. "What have you been doin' to yourself, anyway?"

Gilchrist turned as the other came up. Tita had vanished.

CHAPTER VI.

THE SHAME OF FUR FARMING.

"Hello!" said Spear, in surprise. "Are you alone? I thought I seen some one with you—or am I snow-blind?"

"Some one was with me," answered Gilchrist, rubbing his chin. "And some one is not. Hang me if I heard her go!"

"Oho!" whistled Spear. "'Her,' eh? That accounts for it; but I didn't know there was a skirt this side of Silver City."

"You're mistaken, Spear; this happens to be a lady."

The other stared. "What?"

"A lady," repeated Gilchrist, with emphasis. "Didn't you get that note?"

Spear nodded. "Yes; it looked as if wrote by a kid. It said you was laid up a half mile this side of Silver Lake—gave the exact route by compass—an' said you was with friends, an' to come over with a toboggan when we got in—so here I am. Did you send the kid?"

"What kid?"

"Why, the kid that wrote the note."

"It wasn't any kid!" said Gilchrist, almost angrily. "I'll tell you all about it after a bit. I—I guess you'll have to pull me a while."

"Sure," said Spear kindly. "That's what I'm here for. Sit down. Say, if I'd knowed you left camp——" He shook his head.

Gilchrist's head had begun to swim, his knees to buckle. He boarded the toboggan, pulled Spear's rabbit-skin blanket about him, and after some intimacy with the other's flask, began to feel better. "Did Pills and you just get in?" he asked. "What kept you?"

"An accident," said Spear. "Pills got laid out; he was cuttin' a saplin' an' the ax turned an' hit him in the foot. Nothin' but rank carelessness."

"Good!" exclaimed Gilchrist.

"I don't see nothin' good about it," grumbled Spear. "You try packin' a man of his weight twenty miles——"

"I only mean," interrupted Gilchrist, "that the very same thing happened to me, and that it's some consolation to know it can also happen to the wisest."

And at this point Gilchrist made a discovery; his Colt was missing. He remembered quite distinctly placing it in the holster; he remembered having it at the moment Tita acquainted him with the fact that some one was following them, for his hand had sought and found it. He was certain about that; also that it could not have fallen out.

In silence he puzzled over the loss until camp was reached. Pills was sitting in his bunk dressing the wounded foot, and as the bandages were removed Gilchrist saw it was a more serious wound than the one he had received.

"A couple of fine helpmates you are for a poor, old, nursin' mother," grumbled Spear, busy with the grub. "I s'pose I'll be busy all season packin' you in, first one an' then the other. Here you," he said, waving the frying pan at Pills, "takes partic'lar care to tell this young porky what not to do, an' then you goes ahead an' does it yourself, just to show him how. An' he, not waitin' to see, goes ahead an' does it—same foot an' same way. Mental telegraphy, I calls it."

"It certainly is funny," said Pills. "There must be some sort of affinity between us, Gilchrist. After this you won't put much stock in my advice."

"Your advice was all right," grinned Gilchrist, "and if I'd followed it my accident wouldn't have happened. I've learned a whole lot in the past few days."

He then told what had befallen him, making no excuses for his carelessness. But when it came to the part where Tita had found him, and the subsequent proceedings at Leblac's, he hesitated, and his vivid narrative became cloudy and vague. He had no intention of saying anything about those conditions which he had found in the Leblac home, nor of his host's inhospitable attitude; he had been a guest, and as such had, of necessity, learned things of which in other circumstances he would have been in ignorance. Toward Tita and her mother he felt a fierce loyalty and profound sympathy; if Mrs. Leblac was a little feeble-minded that was her business; if Tita was uneducated that was her business; if Leblac was a brute that was his business.

The partners had listened in silence, not unmindful of the boy's sudden reluctance and vague generalities.

"Well, this is surprisin'," said Spear, rubbing his fat, red face. "An ain't it romantic! Saved in the nick of time—whatever that means—by a be-u-tiful young gal dressed up in pants. What do you know about that? An' mebbe you wasn't just the young buck to play up to her, eh?" winking laboriously at Pills, who was smoking in silence.

Gilchrist was prepared to meet the

good-natured "joshing," which he knew would come, but now he felt himself growing nettled and resentful.

"I thought these were old friends of yours you'd run across," pursued Spear. "One of them high-toned huntin' parties. What does this Leblac do?"

"He's a fur farmer. He breeds fox."

"Makin' a go of it, eh?"

Gilchrist shrugged. "He seems to be in on a pretty big scale, and I understand there's money in it."

"Fifty to seventy-five per cent or total failure," said Spear. "All accordin' to how much a man knows and how hard he'll work. You can lose your shirt experimentin'."

"Oh, it's past the experimental stage with him," said Gilchrist.

"It seems impossible we've come to fur farming," remarked Pills soberly, "when I think of the yearly American output twenty years ago. It's a shame —a crying shame."

"A bleedin', blasted shame!" exclaimed Spear, who dealt in superlatives whether in speech or action. "But what can you expect? Look what they did to seal on the Pribilofs—four million head thirty years ago, and now there's about ninety thousand! Can you beat it for pig-headed, cold-blooded, murderous greed? They're one of America's biggest assets, an' they've tried their level best to exterminate them! It's the same way with the forests an' water power—all along the line. Our country was the richest in the world, an' it was handed over to a lot of pirates an' pinheads; nobody cares so long as he gets his! The future can go hang. The country's natural resources——"

"Now he's off!" said Pills, with a smile. "Spear's long suit is conservation. Just hear him talk; he's a wonder!"

Spear growled and lighted his pipe. "Well, I'm right, an' you know it!" he exclaimed. "At the present rate of extermination some of the fur bearers will follow the buffalo; the demand's steadily increasin', but where's the supply to come from? An industry that pays fifteen million a year should receive attention. They need better laws, and the enforcement of those we have. They need to get after these snide houses, with their early-bird price lists; that promise big money an' never pay it; that encourage an' urge every two-year-old kid to get out with a gun or club an' kill everythin' that wears hair. Houses that buy blue pelts, an' don't care how they're took. They want to get after the kind of game warden who does nothin' but draw his salary—there's too many of that kind—an' men that kill out of season. I'm talkin' now of our own glorious United States."

Gilchrist nodded. "Some dealers and manufacturers think the supply is inexhaustible, and that all a trapper has to do is go out into the 'wilds' and get all he wants. The last reports even from Siberia show that the fur bearers are becoming scarcer every year. It's natural, I suppose; the settlement of the country, draining of the swamps, clearing of the forests——"

"Listen!" interrupted Spear. "Half the American catch of raw fur is skunk, mink, an' muskrat, an' you know as well as I that they can do well in thickly settled regions—if they get any kind of a square deal. But they don't, an' that's just it. It isn't the professional trappers an' hunters, but the army of boys, amateurs, an' crooks who kill the year round. The scarcer the animal, the dearer the pelt; an' the dearer the pelt the more persistently they're hunted. It's an endless chain."

"When the Hudson's Bay Company had the entire say up here," put in Pills, "they had an efficient way of dealing with such things. If certain pelts became scarce by being overhunted they lowered the price instead of raising it; they made it so low it wasn't worth while for the Indians to take them. It's not so much new laws we need, as the strict enforcement of those we have. How long has your friend been in the farming business?"

"I don't know," said Gilchrist. "Over a year, I believe."

"He can't have been where he is very long," argued Spear, "for I was over this ground eighteen months ago, an'

there wasn't a camp of any kind between here an' Silver Lake."

"Well, I haven't been east of here for a couple of years," said Pills, "so I don't know. Is he an American?"

"French Canadian, I think," said Gilchrist. "His name is Leblac. He doesn't speak with much of an accent."

"Well, I didn't know we had neighbors," mused Spear; "an' it was a mighty lucky thing for you we have. But what about the kid?"

"What kid?" demanded Gilchrist.

"The kid that left the note."

"I tell you it wasn't a kid," said Gilchrist heatedly. "It was Miss Leblac."

Spear grinned and scratched his ear.

"A wife and daughter with him, eh?" said Pills slowly. "It's a mistake. The life's too lonely, and loneliness can breed anything." He sucked at his pipe and became silent, staring into space. Spear nodded significantly to Gilchrist, and turned the conversation, but Pills did not join it; he sat staring at nothing and sucking at his empty pipe.

CHAPTER VII.

PILLS' "BEAUTIFUL" DREAM.

During the following week Gilchrist had little time to think of the Leblacs, and he had no complaint to make regarding not sharing in the work, for, owing to Pills' bad foot, it was he who stayed in camp, and Gilchrist who accompanied Spear on the trap line.

The first two days Gilchrist's foot had kept him in camp with Pills, and, with Spear absent, he had opportunity of studying this big, quiet man who had interested him from the first—why he could not say precisely. But there was something about Pills that commanded attention; the impression he conveyed of vast physical strength and concentrated purpose; yet blended with this was an expression like that of a child who has lost its mother; it was a dazed, helpless look, and always came when Pills was taken with his periods of absent, staring silence. Gilchrist knew he was an old Hudson's Bay man, a veteran trapper, and one who knew furs and the fur trade as few are given to know it; yet he was a different breed from Spear, though the men were firm friends. Spear had never worked but with his hands, while Pills gave evidence of education and knowledge beyond the other's experience. Distinctly he was a man with a past, and Gilchrist felt that that past must have been interesting, perhap tragic. He meant to question Spear about it.

Nothing further was said concerning Gilchrist's physical inability or incompetence, for the partners, short-handed, were only too glad to have him in active service. Gilchrist, too, had profited by his salutary lesson, and if his figure was rather sketchy his constitution was sound; he wasn't much to look at, and there wasn't much of him; but what there was was all whalebone and grit. Up at dawn and to bed at eight, with plain food and the long day spent in the open air, Gilchrist began to feel better than he ever had, and the cough which had caused such concern steadily diminished and finally vanished.

One evening toward the end of the week, when Spear and Gilchrist came in, they found Pills sitting up in his bunk, and looking like one roused from a vivid dream. He stared at them without saying a word.

"Been asleep?" asked Spear casually.

"I don't know," said Pills slowly, and passing a hand before his eyes. "Have you just come in?"

They nodded.

"You haven't been here since you left this morning? You're sure of that?"

"Of course we're sure," said Spear. "Do you think we'd take a ten-mile hike without knowin' it, an' just for exercise?"

"That's funny," mused Pills, lying down and shading his eyes with his hand.

Spear bestowed that enigmatic look upon Gilchrist, and nodded significantly. "Been dreamin'?" he asked, with elaborate unconcern.

"I suppose so," said Pills; "and yet ——" He raised himself on an elbow. "I must have gone asleep about four o'clock. It was getting dark. And I

dreamed—oh, such a wonderful dream!" he said earnestly, his face lighting up with such a smile that Gilchrist wondered how he had ever thought the other taciturn and difficult of approach. "Such a wonderful, impossible dream!" he repeated.

"Dreamed Bryan was president, eh?" said Spear, busy with the beans.

But the other did not hear; he was staring into space, the wistful, tender smile on his lips. Spear gave Gilchrist another significant glance.

"It was so real!" sighed Pills.

Gilchrist was about to put a question when he caught Spear's eye, and, without knowing why, he remained silent. Evidently there was something the matter with Pills; something he had not suspected, but of which Spear was fully aware. He must ask him about it.

Later Gilchrist made a discovery; on a little table which Pills had fashioned with expert ax lay a Colt's revolver. Gilchrist examined it. It was his own. "I say, how did this come here?" he exclaimed, turning to the others. "I lost it that night on the way from Mr. Leblac's. Did you find it, Spear?"

"No, I didn't. I never knew you'd lost it."

"Well, some one must have found it," persisted Gilchrist, "for this is my gun, all right. Some one must have been here," he added, turning to Pills.

But Pills' humor had changed; he had turned his face to the wall. He paid no attention, showed no interest.

The trap lines were set in about a thirty-mile circle, with the permanent camp in the center, and thus the eastern boundary came within a few miles of Silver Lake. Two other camps had been erected along this route; rude, temporary shelters, provided with bedding and grub, where one might be secure against a sudden storm or pass a night if too far from the main camp. Gilchrist, with a well-defined idea in mind—perhaps not unsuspected by the partners—elected to cover the eastern half of the circle, pending the recovery of Pills, while Spear took the western.

Thus toward the end of that same week he found himself in the neighborhood of Leblac's camp, and, remembering what Tita had said of her daily trips to Silver City, he cut through the bush north of the clearing, and came out on the west shore of the little lake. He knew she returned about that hour, taking a southwesterly course that would bring her out approximately where he stood, it being the narrowest part of the lake. It was at this spot on that memorable night that she had seen the glow of his fire, and, investigating, had been the means of saving his life.

Gilchrist had not long to wait, for presently, on the opposite bank, Tita appeared, the rays of the dying sun making more resplendent the gorgeous colors of the hideous dress—or such portion of it as appeared below her long mackinaw. She was swinging along with that rhythmic, tireless stride, gained only by natural grace and habitual use of the webs, which Gilchrist had not yet achieved. A little bundle of books swung from a strap in her mittened hand, and a fierce pity gripped him as he thought of her stunted education, her passionate thirst for knowledge, and realized what strenuous, unceasing labor she went through to gain it.

Tita sang as she came, keeping time with her swinging arms and legs. Her voice was clear, sweet, and penetrating, quite uncultivated, but effortless. There was a curious dead stillness in the air, as if all nature were waiting breathless on the dying sun, and Gilchrist heard every word of the song:

"There was a King of Normandy,
  And he rode forth to war,
Gai faluron falurette!
  He had five hundred men—no more!
Gai faluron dondé!

There was a King of Normandy,
  Came back from war again;
He brought a maid, oh, fair was she!
  And twice five hundred men——
Gai faluron falurette!
Gai faluron dondé!"

Tita sang this song with such spirit that Gilchrist fell his heart thrill in response, the red blood leap within him, and he always remembered her as he

saw her then, swinging over the snow-laden ice, the scarlet sun behind her, head thrown back, and that song shrilling from her lips like a battle cry.

"Great!" he exclaimed, stepping out from the bush as she gained the bank. "You sing that in a way that makes me glad to be alive."

She started back, a hand flashing inside her mackinaw, staring at him through the gathering night. Then she laughed, and the blood surged to her dusky cheek in a crimson tide. "Oh, it's you, Mr. Gilchrist. Y-you frightened me." There was a very genuine and unaffected pleasure in her eyes.

"I'm sorry," he said; "but I never imagined anything could frighten you—and I don't believe so yet."

"Oh, you must remember my sex," she replied demurely; "even if it's successfully disguised," looking down at the hideous, abbreviated skirt and long mackinaw. "It is woman's privilege to be frightened—Sister Rosalie says so."

"Still, I don't believe you ever avail yourself of the privilege," smiled Gilchrist.

"Can't I make you believe I'm just like other girls?" she sighed. "Just like the girls of your world? I'm trying very hard."

"Really? In what way?"

"Oh, every way. For one thing, don't you see—this," pointing to her skirt. "It isn't very pretty, is it?" she laughed.

"No, it isn't," he agreed frankly.

"Still it's a skirt," she argued, "and, remember, Silver City isn't Detroit or New York. You don't like me to dress as a boy, do you? I know you didn't say anything, but I could see it. I never felt ashamed before until that—that night. It's funny, isn't it?

"You see," she confided, looking down and kicking at the snow with her webs, "skirts are a nuisance; you can't get around in them. I told you I was brought up like a boy, and I believe my father and mother think I'm a boy; they never seemed to imagine I should wear skirts. But when I went to the Sacré Cœur again Sister Rosalie didn't think it was right, and my mother, too, began to realize I was growing up, so I had to get one, though I never would wear it if I could help it. But now I'm going to all the time, and I'm going to get some nice dresses.

"How is your foot?" she finished. "I should have asked you that before. And what are you doing so far away from your camp?"

He told of the accident to Pills, and how all the work, for the time being, had devolved upon Spear and himself. "I meant to come over and see you long ago," he finished, "but I haven't had time."

"To see me?" she echoed doubtfully, flushing with pleasure. "But why to see me?" This was not coquetry.

"Because I haven't thanked you or your mother half enough," he said. "I've been thinking over all you did for me, and really it's monumental——"

"Please don't!" she exclaimed passionately. "I don't want you to talk like that! I'm—I'm sorry you feel that way. But I suppose it's—it's only natural after the way my father acted——"

"I wasn't thinking of your father. I'm sorry he doesn't like me, and I don't pretend to understand it, for I'm a most remarkable and worthy young man. But if he doesn't, that settles it, and my bleeding vanity must recover the best way it can. I deplore your father's taste, but then if we all had the same idea of things and people this would be a very tiresome world."

She smiled a little, but her eyes were troubled. "You're just saying that to be polite, Mr. Gilchrist. You were grossly insulted, and it's a wonder to me you would want to see any of us again. Don't you think I know how brutally my father acted——"

"And how admirably you acted—and that's all that concerns me. As for wanting to see you again, that's why I came."

"Just to see me?"

"Just to see you."

Her steady eyes finally wavered under his, and she looked away. She flushed a little, and her breathing became labored. "Nobody ever wants to see me," she said. And, glancing up, she saw Lobo standing silently before

her, looming gigantic through the gathering night.

CHAPTER VIII.

"TRESPASSING."

Gilchrist wheeled at her glance. He had not heard the Indian approach.

"Well?" demanded Tita.

The wolf made a rapid sign.

"I'll come when I choose!" said Tita. "And you can tell him so if you like. He never used to care what I did or where I went, and it's funny he should start now. I don't need a guardian. Go!"

Lobo vanished as mysteriously as he had come.

"Your father?" asked Gilchrist. "How did he know? I wasn't near the camp."

For answer she took a few swift paces to their right, and pointed to the snow, on which was the fresh track of webs.

"I came from the other direction," said Gilchrist, pointing to the north. "Was it your father?"

"No; Lobo," she said simply. "I know his shoes. See, there is where the toe has been spliced. He has been listening again. That's all he does—listening, waiting, and watching. Ugh! how I hate him! He's like a snake waiting to strike. He gets on my nerves." She shivered and turned away.

Gilchrist was astonished, and no little disturbed. He began to see certain matters in a new light. "I thought Lobo was a faithful servant," he protested. "Your mother spoke so highly of him. I don't particularly care for him myself, but I thought there wasn't anything he wouldn't do for you and yours. I understood your father saved his life, and that Lobo would cut off his hand for Mr. Leblac——"

"I believe he would, but my father is not us," said Tita quietly. "What Lobo would do for him and what he would do for me is entirely different. I'm afraid of him," she added, in a low voice. "You said you didn't believe I could be frightened, but I can; I'm afraid of him, though I don't let him see it."

"But why should he hate you?"

She shrugged. "It isn't hate," she said slowly.

"Oh!" said Gilchrist, his hands clenching instinctively.

"I've seen it in his eyes for some time," added Tita, without emotion. "He follows me. I thought it was he when you stepped from the bush—that's why I was frightened."

"Does your father know this? If not, why don't you tell him?"

"My father?" she asked bitterly. "What does he care? Don't you see he hates me?" she cried passionately. "Yes, hates me as much as I hate him!" She faced him with white, quivering lips and clenched hands.

"He has always hated me," she added. "He brought me up like a dog; he kicked and beat me whenever he liked and as long as he dared! I've scars on my body yet, and I'll carry them to the grave in loving memory of my adored father!"

Gilchrist felt physically sick. "It's impossible!" he exclaimed. "I never heard of such a thing!"

Tita laughed. "And because you never heard of it, it can't happen? Doesn't it ever happen in your cities? Does a family always go to law about such things? What law was there where we lived, lived like wolves or Indians wandering from place to place? There is no law but the Northwest Mounted, and how often do you see them? And didn't I know better than to say anything?"

"Did your mother know of this at the time?"

She shrugged again. "Perhaps. She knows better than to interfere. You can't judge us by any family you ever knew, Mr. Gilchrist; we aren't one any person would care to know. We're unnatural. Mother has always been kind to me in a way, but I can't say I love her like other girls love their mothers. I've never really known her. As for my father, I *hate* him! I know this is wicked, but I can't help it; I'm no good at pretending. We always got

along fairly well, for I soon learned to keep out of the way when he was in one of his moods. I was useful to him, and he knew it. But it's different now; I'm growing up, and I can't go around like a boy any more. Instead of helping him make money he has to send me to school, and he doesn't like it.

"I don't know why I tell you all this," she finished hurriedly. "It is nothing to you. I have never said anything to any one before. I have no friends. Perhaps that's why I tell it to you; because you are the first one who has ever treated me as if I were like other girls; as if I were a—a grand lady. You—you played for me, and you didn't make fun when you found how ignorant I was, and—— Oh, you don't know how much all that meant to me!" she finished tremulously. "You have been kind to me, and there isn't *anything* I wouldn't do for you!"

Gilchrist felt the old, fierce anger and pity grip him as he looked down at her pale, eager, childlike face, vibrant with passionate gratitude; the poor little bundle of schoolbooks; the cheap, hideous skirt and coarse stockings. And it was in no spirit of familiarity that he took her mittened hands in his and held them very tightly. "Little girl," he said, "all the kindness and goodness has been on your side, and more than I can ever repay. I want you to tell me something: Why did you take my gun the other night? I had it up to the moment Lobo appeared. Don't think I imagine it lost; you took it when my back was turned, and so cleverly I never knew it. Why did you?"

She hung her head, and did not answer.

"You were unarmed, and you took it to protect yourself from Lobo," accused Gilchrist in a low voice, "and I, like a blind and selfish fool, let you go back alone with him! Why didn't you tell me? Why didn't you say something——"

"Because there wasn't anything to say. Really there wasn't," she laughed lightly. "I imagine more about Lobo than what is true; he gets on my nerves occasionally. I don't want you to think I'm in any danger, for I'm not. You mustn't think anything like that. I was more afraid of the dark than of Lobo; you see, I'm very cowardly, after all."

"Yes, I see," said Gilchrist dryly.

They walked toward the clearing.

"I wish you could stay for supper," she said; "but I know how impossible it would be. And you wouldn't, would you?"

"In a minute, if your father would stand for it. Do you think he would? Do you think he's feeling any better than he did that night?"

She shook her head. "I'd love to have you, Mr. Gilchrist, but I wouldn't have you insulted again just to please me. I wouldn't allow it."

"I could stand it, but I don't want to make it harder for you," he replied. A thought came to him. "Was it you who returned my gun?"

"Yes. I meant to leave a note, but —I thought no one was there, so I went in. It was dark. Then I saw a big man in one of the bunks; he was asleep, and I put the gun on the table and ran out. Are you sure you can get back all right?" she finished anxiously. "Do you know your way?"

"Oh, I'm an old bushman by now, and I couldn't get lost if I tried," he laughed. "You should see me get around; there's no teacher like necessity." He took her hands again. "Listen," he said earnestly. "We've a temporary camp about three miles southwest of here—this side of Little Lake. You know where that is?"

"Of course," she nodded.

"One of us will generally be there," he continued, "or in the neighborhood. If ever you're in trouble; if ever there's anything I can do for you in any way, won't you let me know?"

"Why—why, are you going away?" she asked, with quickened breath.

"No, Miss Leblac."

"Don't call me that! I hate the name! I'm Tita! You promised to call me Tita."

"Tita," said Gilchrist. "I want you to know, Tita, that you have three friends close at hand—for I can speak for my partners as well as myself. If

your father dares to abuse you or your mother; if Lobo becomes a menace, you'll let me know? Will you promise?"

Tita nodded. "Go!" she whispered, and, pressing his hands a moment, she turned and sped toward the camp.

From the edge of the clearing where they had been standing, Gilchrist watched her. Had Lobo been listening again, and had she suspected? He remembered thinking he had heard a slight movement in the bush.

Gilchrist was to spend that night in Little Lake camp, and he now headed in that direction, but had not taken a dozen steps when a figure stepped from behind a tree and barred his way. At first he thought it Lobo, for it was getting too dark for identification, but a glance showed it to be Leblac himself, a Remington in the hollow of his arm.

"Good evening," said Gilchrist, attempting to pass.

"One moment, Mr. Gilchrist," exclaimed the other. "I thought I had made it plain that I don't want you around?" tapping his knuckles against the rifle stock by way of emphasis.

"You certainly did," said Gilchrist, taken aback by the other's directness. "I wasn't under the delusion that you wanted me for a guest."

"Well, then," demanded Leblac excitedly, "what do you mean by this?"

"By what?" asked Gilchrist. "Do you own Silver Lake? If so, I hadn't heard about it."

"M'sieu has a pretty wit," sneered Leblac. "You know my property rights. You're trespassing, and I won't have it. I won't have it!" he said violently, waving his arm. "I don't encroach on your grounds; I leave you alone, and I expect you to leave me alone!"

"Look here, Mr. Leblac," said Gilchrist, "what have you got against me, anyway? Am I doing any damage here? We're neighbors, and we should be friends——"

"I don't want any neighbors, and I choose my own friends," interrupted the other, in the same violent manner. "I won't have any young buck snooping around my daughter——"

"Mr. Leblac!"

"I've said it! I've said it!" exclaimed Leblac, with another wave of the arm. "If she doesn't know any better than to pick up with any trash that comes along I'm here to show her differently. I won't have it, I tell you! You keep away from here! You've no business around here, and I know how to protect my family and my rights, as you'll find out!" And, tapping the Remington, he strode toward the camp, muttering as he went.

He left Gilchrist bursting with indignation, and many a thing which he had had no opportunity of saying. He began to think Mr. Leblac was something of a lunatic, and not responsible for his actions. Certainly this was the strangest family he had ever known.

CHAPTER IX.

A BEAR TRAP SET FOR A MAN.

On the day Pills was able to resume work on the trap lines, Spear took the long hike to Silver City for some supplies—principally tobacco—and when he got in the following morning his naturally red face was crimson with suppressed anger. Gilchrist and Pills happened to be in the permanent camp, and Spear opened up without preamble.

"Say, what kind of a guy is that friend of yours, anyway?" he demanded of Gilchrist. "I mean this Leblac."

Gilchrist commenced to feel uncomfortable. He was sorry he had not dropped a hint concerning Leblac's surly nature in order to save his friends what he had suffered, but he had not thought it probable that either would come in contact with him, and, for Tita's sake, he had disliked to censure her father to strangers, however the other might deserve it.

"Did you stop at the camp?" he asked uneasily.

"Of course I did," bellowed Spear. "I thought I'd stop in an' see his fur farm an' say hello. Why shouldn't I? Ain't they partic'lar friends of yours,

an' ain't we neighbors?—the only folks within ten or fifteen miles of each other. An' instead of bein' glad to see me, that guy insulted me! That's what he did, an' he went out of his way to do it. What do you think he says when I says I was a friend of yours?"

"I'm sure I can't imagine," said Gilchrist innocently.

"You can't, eh?" said Spear darkly. "Well, then I won't tell you, son, for I've got some respect for my own soul an' your feelin's. But, pickin' out the personalities from the blasphemy, I gathered he weren't dead stuck on you, an' wouldn't care partic'lar if he never seen you again—nor me, either."

"He must be an odd character," said Pills.

"Odd?" bellowed Spear. "He was so odd I come near swingin' on him. Here I drops in neighborly, an' before I can open my mouth he asks what in blazes I want an' to get to so-and-so out of there. Fine, ain't it? I told him what he could do with his fur farm an' himself, an' that for two cents I'd do it for him. I'm long-sufferin', but I draw the line at bein' jumped on with both feet for nothin'. I wouldn't go near that dump again if I was starvin'. A friend of yours, eh?" he finished, eying Gilchrist.

"I'm sorry," said Gilchrist. "If I'd thought you would stop there I would have said something. He has no reason to dislike me, but he does." He then told how he had been virtually invited out of the house that memorable night, and of certain other matters which he had disliked to mention.

"In my case," he finished, "it may be that he objects to my knowing his daughter, though from the way he has treated her this sudden concern seems strange. And certainly I have shown nothing but the utmost respect and gratitude toward Miss Leblac. But all this should have nothing to do with you, Spear. He jumped you before he even knew you were my friend. Miss Leblac told me he acts that way toward every one."

"He does," said Spear. "I heard something about him in Silver City. He has the name of bein' bad medicine, an' nobody goes near him. An' that girl of his is a freak——"

"Hold on, now!" interrupted Gilchrist. "Miss Leblac is a very good friend of mine."

The partners exchanged glances, and Pills smiled indulgently.

"Well, she is, and I'm proud to have such a friendship," said Gilchrist, flushing. "It isn't her fault if she has such a father——"

"I ain't sayin' anythin' against her," cut in Spear. "I guess no one could have acted whiter than she done to you. I only mean they say she runs wild, an' dresses like a boy, an' she never had no schoolin'; she's like a young savage that——"

"And whose fault is that?" demanded Gilchrist, up in arms. "She never had a chance. Give her a year or two at school—a fraction of what has been denied her—and she'll shame no one in the matter of education or anything else—not even you, Spear. She's as keen and true as a wolf trap."

"Don't rub it in," said Spear good-naturedly. "I don't have to be told, son, that I ain't long on schoolin' myself. I didn't mean no offense."

"And I'm taking none," smiled Gilchrist. "But Miss Leblac isn't the kind of person her father would give you to suppose; you can't judge her by him. You don't know the sort of life's she had. It's a crime, that's what it is. A crime!"

"An' you say the old man abuses her?" demanded Spear.

"Not now, but he did. She knows we're her friends, and—well, she knows where to find help if she should need any."

"I hope she'll need it," exclaimed Spear. "Not that I'm wishin' her any hurt, mind, but it would do my soul good to have some excuse for goin' over there an' givin' that pa of hers a good, sound hidin'. An' I'm just the boy to do it!"

The "lost" expression had returned to Pills' face, and he was sucking at his empty pipe and staring into space. "I tell you this place and life aren't fit for

women," he said at length, as if talking to himself. "It may be all right for a time, but as a steady diet it's a mistake. It's too lonely; it brutalizes and degrades."

He roused himself. "It's a pity when neighbors are so scarce that this one should prove such a character," he said in his normal manner. "But there's no use making bad feeling worse, and the only thing to do is leave him alone."

Perhaps this was sound advice, but Gilchrist had no intention of following it as applied to Tita Leblac. His whole nature was opposed to clandestine proceedings of any sort, but if he could not see Tita openly he would do so without her father's consent.

Thus more than once Gilchrist waited for Tita of an evening on the bank of Silver Lake, in that same spot he had selected on the first occasion. A better one could not have been found for his purpose, for it was north of the clearing, and beyond range of Leblac's camp, and from it he could see the girl while she was yet a long way off. Nor did he make his presence known to Tita, for he knew, if discovered by Leblac, that she would be the one to suffer. His idea was to establish, so far as possible, a guard over her comings and goings, and without her knowledge; to furnish that protection which should have been her father's first thought. He did not like the idea of her long return trip from Silver City when she was utterly alone; when night was closing down ere she reached home.

Necessity lent Gilchrist skill and cunning, and he was satisfied Leblac did not know of his undertaking; of Lobo he was not so sure, this doubt being based solely on his knowledge of the Indian's subtlety and mastery of woodcraft. Yet it was but natural to suppose that if Lobo knew of this surveillance he would acquaint his master of the fact, and Leblac would have acted.

But a day came when Gilchrist no longer believed in his cleverness, and that he had been getting to windward of Leblac. This occurred when on visiting one of his traps, his webs removed, he came within an ace of stepping backward into another—a double-spring number-six bear trap weighing forty pounds, and cunningly attached to a heavy birch drag. There was no excuse for its presence; bears den up for the winter, and it would have been a singular exception had one been seen prowling about. The trap was new, and snow during the night had removed all tracks in the neighborhood. It was a miracle Gilchrist had not sprung it, and he had only refrained from stepping into the hidden jaws by another of those nameless impulses; then his suspicious eye had caught a glimpse of the chain holding the heavy drag.

His narrow escape frightened him; then he grew angry; not a blustering anger, but a cold, calculating, deadly one. He pulled out his pipe, and smoked while he thought it over. Obviously that trap had been placed there for his especial benefit, and by one who knew he occupied Little Lake camp, alone for the most part, and for days at a time. Spear and Pills were accustomed to his and each other's absence, and if the deadly jaws of that trap had closed about him he might have yelled his head off and no one would have heard him. He might have been maimed for life; he might have died from starvation and exposure. And it would not have been the first case of the kind.

Gilchrist knocked out his pipe, unfastened the trap from the heavy drag, slung it over his shoulder, and set off for the Leblac camp. Carrying forty pounds of steel for three miles is not a task calculated to improve one's temper, nor is it a gay, inconsequential pastime. Gilchrist began to think himself a fool, yet he was determined to face Leblac with the concrete evidence.

Nearing the clearing surrounding the camp, Gilchrist seated himself on a fallen tree to rest a moment and recover his wind; he did not wish to appear before Leblac hurried or excited; he meant to be quite cool, collected, and master of the situation, and he turned over in his mind just what he would say. And while he sat thus a distant sound attracted his attention, and, looking round the large cedar against which

he was leaning, he saw two men approaching—Leblac and Fanning, the forest ranger and game warden. They were walking slowly and talking earnestly, entirely absorbed in the subject under discussion. They were heading straight for the spot Gilchrist occupied, and he did not trouble to arise, knowing they must inevitably see him, once they passed the tree which screened him.

But to his surprise they halted while yet some little distance off, and as they made no attempt to lower their voices, Gilchrist heard every word. His first impulse was to make known his presence, his second to sit still in the hope they would retire without discovering him. His curiosity was aroused by the first words he overheard.

"It's no use making them suspicious," Fanning was saying earnestly, "for it's a question if they'll believe it's on account of Tita. You could show you don't want them around without making actual enemies——"

"You don't know," cut in Leblac, with an oath. "It isn't the others; one of them stopped in the other day, and I'll guarantee he won't come again. He's full grown, and knows when he's insulted, but that young cub doesn't. He's always snooping around, and half the time he's over in that camp on Little Lake. It isn't that he suspects anything, for he doesn't know enough to keep himself warm; but he's interested in Tita, and you never can tell what he may blunder on——"

"But they'll be out of here before spring, before the ice goes," argued Fanning. "That's all that concerns us."

"How do you know they will?" asked Leblac shortly. "They may hang on until it's too late for us risking anything—especially if that young fool gets running after Tita. It's all her fault; she seems to have taken a shine to him too——"

"But aren't you going to send her away before spring?" asked the other.

"I suppose I'll have to," growled Leblac, with another oath. "She's the most venomous, unnatural brat a parent was ever cursed with, and I daren't risk her knowing, for she'd blow the whole thing out of spite——"

"Board her in Silver City," urged Fanning. "It will look natural, and she'll be only too glad to go. She'll jump at the chance. Put her to school there."

"I'm a poor man," said Leblac sullenly. "I don't know what I'll do, but I'll get rid of her some way, you can bank on that. Or if it comes to it I'll see she keeps her trap shut; there are ways." He drew taut his thin, cruel lips.

"Now, look here," said Fanning; "you'll catch more flies with molasses than vinegar. Do as I say, and board her at school; she'll appreciate it, and you'll be gaining your point while doing her a favor. She's growing up, and you owe it to her, anyway——"

"I owe nothing to her!" said Leblac violently.

Fanning made an impatient gesture. "I don't know why you hate the girl so. She's your daughter, Leblac, but I warn you she's no longer a child, and you aren't in a place where you can do as you please. No, nor am I the man to stand you raising a hand to her——"

"Oh, aren't you?" snapped the other. He blazed out in violent anger. "What have you or any one to say about it? She's *my* daughter, isn't she? It makes me sick and tired, this newfangled notion that any stranger can step in and tell a parent what he should do or not do with his own child! I'd like to see any one interfere with my domestic affairs! I'll run my house as I choose."

Fanning laughed. "Well, I won't quarrel with you. I'm only showing you that the easiest way is the best. You've got a bad temper, Leblac, and you can't afford to indulge it. You can't afford to have enemies——"

"Enemies are what I want!" exclaimed the other. "Do I want any visitors or neighbors? Have I earned the reputation I have for nothing? I've lived here for over a year without being bothered by a soul; they know enough to give me a wide berth. Am I to make friends with these neighbors and invite them in? No, I'll make it so

warm for them they won't trap here another year. That's the only way, and you know it."

"I mean active enemies," said Fanning patiently. "Silver City considers you an eccentric, surly character, with a grudge against mankind, and they leave you strictly alone. That's all right. But if you make an active enemy, then look out. He'll try to hang something on you, and he won't stop until he does it. We can't afford just such activity. You can't afford to let personal spite or that temper of yours get the best of you."

Leblac had cooled down. "I suppose you're right," he said sullenly. "I tell you I wouldn't mind the others; it's that insufferable young whelp! I've noticed a change in Tita since he came, and the Lord knows she didn't need any humoring."

"What's his name—Gilchrist?"

"Yes."

"I suppose he couldn't be connected in any way with Gilchrist & Co?" pursued Fanning.

"Oh, no," said Leblac. "He's a pork eater, and I don't think he knows a cased skin from an open one. Came up here for his health—and he better leave it for his health. The other two are old trappers."

Fanning nodded, and they moved away toward the camp.

Gilchrist, abandoning his intention, picked up the trap, and returned to Little Lake, his brow puckered in thought.

CHAPTER X.

OUT FOR BEAVER.

That night Gilchrist, in the permanent camp, told how he had found the bear trap, and narrated the conversation he had overheard. The three of them sat about the fire, and discussed the problem from every angle, while out of his big tepee in the frozen north Wa-zo-ya, God of the Winter, blew forth his icy breath and sought an opening through the tamped moss.

Spear blew up in characteristic fashion, and was for going over then and there to Leblac's camp, but Pills, in his grave, quiet way, vetoed this measure. "We can't prove anything," he said.

"We can't?" bellowed Spear. "Have we a bear trap in our outfit? Is there another soul around here but Leblac to put it there? Hasn't the Kid"—he always referred to Gilchrist as the Kid—"heard him say he'd make it hot for us, and especially him? Is any one fool enough to trap for bear this time of year? Don't the Kid know the trap wasn't there yesterday——"

"Admitted," said Pills. "It isn't what we know but what we can prove. We can't prove it's Leblac's property, or that it was placed there with any evil intent. And if we are to find out what's back of all this it won't do to expose our hand."

"Suppose we got to wait until one of us has his leg bit off by one of them traps," growled Spear. "An ounce of prevention is worth a ton of proof."

But Gilchrist agreed with Pills. "That's why I didn't say anything to Leblac; a miss is as good as a mile, and I'm more concerned with the cause than the effect. I was beginning to suspect he had some reason for playing this isolation game; he's played it successfully with Silver City, and this is the first time neighbors have come on the other side of him. He doesn't want us around. Why? Because we may find out what he's up to. Fanning is in with him on some deal."

"Look here," said Spear; "it ain't known in Silver City that Fanning's thick with him. They ain't never seen together. In fact, when I was in there the other day I met Fanning—or I heard him talkin' in the store—an' he hadn't a good word for Leblac. None of 'em has; they leave him alone like poison."

"Sure. That's part of the game," said Gilchrist. "And the only game there can be is illegal trapping!"

The partners eyed each other. "But he ain't a trapper," objected Spear. "He raises nothin' but fox, an' that's legal here; it's legal if they're took in season, an' there's no gettin' round it. Anyway, we'd have seen his traps——"

"Yes; but what about beaver?" demanded Gilchrist. "That isn't legal at any time, and you don't need traps—I needn't tell you that. I've seen stretching boards in Leblac's camp that weren't meant for fox; they were covered up, and I noticed when he came in he looked at them and then at me, wondering, I suppose, if I'd seen them. He thinks I don't know anything about raw furs or a stretching board from a piano. There's beaver in Silver Lake under the ice—and that's what Fanning meant by saying it was all right, for we'd be gone before spring.

"That's the only explanation," he finished. "I've thought it all over, and it's the only logical one. You know what beaver's fetching this year—how scarce it is; and with Fanning winking at the game, who's to know what Leblac pulls off? He could breed and slaughter at will under cover of fox farming. With Fanning's help he could easily ship out the pelts—I knew of a case in Michigan where the skins were shipped out in trunks belonging to supposed guests. I'm not saying Leblac's fox farming is only a blind, but I do say he's making —or planning to make—his biggest haul off beaver."

To appreciate Gilchrist's declaration it may be necessary to say something concerning the beaver and its habits for the sake of those who are, perhaps, ignorant of the subject.

The beaver is one of the most important of the fur-bearing animals, and while once numerous throughout practically the United States and Canada, it has become rare—and in certain sections totally extinct—through the persistency with which it has been hunted. If protected, beavers multiply rapidly, yet if the laws are not strictly enforced the day is not far distant when this fur bearer will be extinct. Every Canadian province has a law protecting it, but there are many violations and evasions, and Leblac's is a case in point.

With him the breaking of the law presented no difficulties; rather everything made for its successful evasion; the complicity of Fanning, the isolation, his reputation, and the location of his camp. Beavers do not require feeding, but supply their own food. They are not given to roaming except in summer, when they always return before the cold weather sets in. They need no attention, but take care of themselves; they breed perfectly without supervision, and there is no danger of them killing their offspring as is the case with other fur bearers.

Silver Lake was alive with beaver, as Gilchrist had said. It was surrounded with their natural food—birch, willow, quaking aspen, cottonwood, and alder. It was a quiet lake on a quiet little stream, and at the outlet were the dams which are characteristic of the beaver, and which they always watch zealously and keep in repair. Below the main dam were several smaller ones, and when these backed the water up to the larger one the beavers, after the lake had frozen, dug a passage through the upper dam, thus making the water fall, and leaving an air space between the water and ice.

Silver Lake was frozen half the year round, and the beavers spent the entire winter under the ice, subsisting on the brush and green saplings they had stored up under water and in front of their houses. Beaver skins do not become prime so early as some other animals, and their fur remains in good condition until late in the spring, hence Fanning's remark.

All this Spear and Pills knew, and they saw that Gilchrist might not be making an idle or impossible contention; they realized as only professional trappers can the gravity of the offense, and its contemptible nature.

"If I knew this was so," exclaimed Spear with blazing eyes, "I'd—I'd——" Words failed him. "It's hard enough to get the laws enforced, but when a game warden deliberately sells out an' takes his profit by killin' the animals he's paid to protect, then lynchin's too good for him! It ain't the laws, as I've said all along, but the enforcement of them! We're supposed to keep our hands off so that crooks like these can hog it!"

"You must remember that all this is

only suspicion," reminded Gilchrist, "and I wouldn't have said anything unless I felt it to be true. I haven't any grudge against Leblac—no matter what he's done—and for his family's sake I wouldn't want to see him get into trouble. Yet it isn't as if he were taking beaver here and there; it's wholesale——"

"A man who deliberately breaks the law like that ain't in need of no sympathy!" exclaimed Spear. "What we have to do is find out if you're right, and catch him with the goods."

"And that won't be easy," put in Pills. "We must secure indisputable proof, and then prefer charges against Fanning in the regular red-tape way. Of course, the fact of there being beaver in Silver Lake isn't anything in itself, for there always has been, if I remember rightly. Properly speaking, they aren't in captivity, and we may not be able to prove that Leblac's breeding them. The only thing to do is wait until spring; until he begins knocking them on the head."

"But will he, if we're here?" asked Gilchrist.

"I think he will," said Pills. "He won't miss his market. We're far away, and he's taken care to keep us so. If we wait him out and don't let him suspect we know anything he'll go ahead; he wouldn't have any reason for not doing so. Of course, all this is on the assumption that these suspicions are correct, and all we can do for the present is to say nothing, lay low, and keep our eyes open. We must have proof."

In a measure Gilchrist was sorry he had aired those suspicions; rude to the point of brutality as Leblac had been to him and despite the incident of the bear trap; lawbreaker though he was, if these suspicions proved correct, still he was Tita's father, and Gilchrist did not relish the idea of waiting and watching in the hope of acquiring evidence that would mean his utter ruin and disgrace. Leblac was not a loving parent by any means, and the girl appeared to hate him and he her; yet this did not alter the fact, and her mother and she must suffer through him.

Undoubtedly this was what Tita had meant by saying they would be rich some day, when she would be able to go to school in Montreal or Winnipeg, and become a lady. She was ignorant of her father's lucrative side line, but no doubt he had boasted of his coming good fortune, and she had naturally attributed it to fox farming. Tita was to be put out of the way in some manner before the coming of spring as, in her father's words, "she would blow the whole thing out of spite." For Leblac or Fanning personally Gilchrist had no liking, but he found himself entertaining a sneaking desire to give them a word of warning sufficient for them to abandon their enterprise.

CHAPTER XI.

THE TRAGEDY OF A LIFE.

"What exactly is the matter with Pills?" asked Gilchrist bluntly one day, as Spear and he happened to be alone.

"How?" queried Spear.

"I mean," explained Gilchrist, "why does he have those funny moods when he won't speak, and he keeps staring at nothing? And then you look at me and nod as if I should understand—which I don't at all. I meant to ask you this long ago, but never had the chance."

"Why," said Spear slowly, "I thought it didn't need no explainin'; that you seen what no one couldn't help seein'—that poor old Pills ain't all there." He tapped his head.

"What? Nonsense!" laughed Gilchrist. "If Pills is crazy then I am. He's got an uncommonly shrewd brain, and don't you forget it. Why, he's educated, Spear; he's a man hard to get acquainted with, to feel that you really know, but occasionally when we've been alone and he's loosened up he has surprised me with the variety and accuracy of his knowledge."

"He ought to," said Spear calmly, stringing the lanyards in a pair of webs he was making. "'Cause he went through McGill, an' was factor of Fort la Plonge on the Churchill for a while."

"Oh!" said Gilchrist. He was keenly interested; he knew Pills' past must have been interesting.

"You must have knowed Pills ain't just an ordinary trapper like me," pursued Spear. "I don't know nothin' else. It's all I've done since a kid, when your pa an' me was bosoms. But Pills is different; you can see that." Spear squinted at the rawhide he held, while Gilchrist said nothing. He knew when to keep silent.

"Mind," pursued the old trapper, "Pills ain't crazy; not by a long shot. He's just a bit off on one partic'lar subject, an' when it's mentioned he gets them moody spells when he don't hear or see nothin' but what he makes up in his own mind. It's all along of an experience he had once, an' he ain't never goin' to get over it, I guess. I don't know if I've any business speakin' about it, for it's his story——" He eyed Gilchrist for a moment.

"It's a long story," continued Spear, stringing the snowshoe, "but I'll cut it short. It ain't a new one, an' it ain't a nice one, neither, an' I only heard it secondhand, for I didn't know Pills in them days. About fifteen years ago Pills was factor of Fort la Plonge. He had a wife an' two-year-old kid. The wife come from Detroit——"

"Detroit," said Gilchrist. It was not a question.

"Detroit," said Spear. "It ain't for me to say what kind of a woman she was, an', anyway, the best of us has evil in us, an' we all make mistakes. Fort la Plonge ain't Detroit; it's all-fired lonely up there, an'—— Well, women are funny, anyway. I've never been married, an' don't begin to understand 'em.

"Anyway, I guess Pills an' his wife got on all right until a feller by the name of Courcelles come along; he was nephew to one of the big guns in the company, an' come out on a visit to the post. That was the end of Pills' happiness."

"I see," said Gilchrist.

"Pills come in one day to find 'em gone—wife, kid, an' Courcelles," added Spear. "She left a note askin' forgiveness, an' sayin' it was useless to follow them—that she was goin' back to civilization with the man she loved——" Spear shook his head.

"Pills was awful sick for a spell," he continued, "an' when he come round he was a changed man. He resigned, scraped together everything he owned, an' set out after his lost happiness. He ain't caught up with it yet, an' he never will."

"Do you mean he's been pursuing them for fifteen years?"

Spear nodded. "He trailed them to Ottawa an' back again. He heard Courcelles' folks had thrown him off; that they'd come back here. Mebbe Courcelles knew Pills was followin' him. Anyway, Pills trailed them all over the North, never seein' 'em, an' always bein' too late. Of course, his money give out, an' he had to live by trappin'. He kept hearin' of them every so often."

"I see," said Gilchrist. "Was the child a girl?"

"Yes."

"And he never caught up with them? He hasn't seen this man Courcelles for fifteen years?"

"He has," said Spear. "He seen him about two or three years ago—an' that's where I come into the story. It was up on the Mackenzie that Pills at last came face to face with Courcelles in the bush; there was a scrap, of course, an' Pills would have killed him if an Indian who was trappin' with Courcelles hadn't joined in. The two of 'em set on Pills, an' he pretty near killed the Indian—shot him through the mouth, I guess. Pills was knocked over the head an' left for dead—I guess Courcelles thought he'd finished him. But me an' some other trappers found him by accident, an' we took him to our camp; that's how I met Pills, an' we've been pards ever since."

"I see," said Gilchrist again. "Then you never met this man Courcelles?"

"No. I tell you I never knowed Pills until we found him layin' there in the snow with his head busted in, an' it was weeks before he'd say who done it—an' then he only told it to me as a secret,

sayin' it was his affair, an' he didn't want no one but himself to settle with Courcelles. That's how I come to hear his story, him tellin' it to me."

"And has he given up looking for Courcelles?"

"Yes an' no," said Spear. "That knock on the head didn't do him no good, an' he gets spells when nothin' will do but he must start off lookin' for his wife an' child—as if they was just around the corner. No, I can't say rightly he's still lookin' for 'em, not the way he done. Seems like as if he knowed it was no use, an' he's content to stay an' trap with me. But he told me once he knowed the Lord wouldn't let him die without lettin' him see his wife an' kid again, an' he thinks it'll happen some time mebbe if he sticks around here."

"You mean he would take his wife back?"

Spear shrugged. "There's a lot of difference between sayin' an' doin', son. I don't know what he'd do if he was to see her—but I know there'll be murder done if he ever cuts Courcelles' trail again; it'll be one or the other of 'em. You can't blame him." Spear shook his head again.

"It's funny," he continued. "Sometimes I think Pills made the whole thing up out of that queer mind of his, that bump on the head makin' him imagine a whole lot that never happened. That ain't explainin', of course, how we come to find him the way we done."

"You mean no one has ever verified the story?"

"Yes, they have," said Spear. "We got proof in a way. I ain't been to the Mackenzie since that time we found Pills, but when I was there I asked around, an' there was folks who remembered some twelve years back about the factor of Fort la Plonge, an' how his wife an' kid had run off with a feller called Courcelles. That part of it's all right, but what I sometimes think is this: Is Pills that old factor of Fort la Plonge or, knowin' the story, does he just think he is? A bump on the head can make a feller think some funny things. You see, Pills ain't got no other identity of his own; he's just known as Pills along of makin' them pants. He ain't known around here by any other name." Spear permitted himself another shake of the head.

"An' he ain't said nothin' to nobody but me about his bein' that old factor of Fort la Plonge," he added, "an' I guess nobody down here knows it, or it's so old they've forgotten it. So of course you won't say nothin'."

"No, of course not," said Gilchrist slowly.

"An' so you understand Pills ain't what you'd call crazy," pursued Spear earnestly, "but he just gets spells. Seems like as if he blamed himself for bringin' his wife to live at Fort la Plonge; you notice how he's always sayin' how the life up here is too lonely an' unfit for wimmen, an' that loneliness can breed anythin'. An' then he sees things," added Spear, lowering his voice. "There was that day we come home an' he speaks about havin' such a wonderful dream—you remember that?"

"Yes, I remember. What was his dream? Did he tell you?"

Spear nodded. "Yes; he told me he seen his kid. That she come right through the door into the room, an' after starin' at him a moment, run out again. An' she had growed up into a beautiful young gal, he says; he described just what she looked like. You see, he weren't dreamin' at all, but just seein' things in his own mind."

"I see," nodded Gilchrist. "And what is Pills' right name?"

"Warrener," replied Spear. "I know that was the name of the factor of Fort la Plonge, an' Pills says it's his."

Gilchrist nodded again.

That evening, instead of waiting for Tita in the accustomed spot, and keeping his proximity secret, Gilchrist made a wide detour around Leblac's camp, and, crossing the lake, headed in the direction of Silver City, for he wanted an undisturbed talk with the girl. He did not see a dark, venomous face peer from the bush as he left the bank; nor was he aware that Lobo, waiting for him to cross the open space of the lake,

proceeded to dog him with all the skill and cunning of which he was master.

Gilchrist met Tita halfway, she recognizing him with a wave of the hand. "Are you going to Silver City?" she asked, her eyes alight with pleasure at what she considered a purely accidental meeting.

"No, I was in the neighborhood," he explained, "and I thought I'd take a walk in this direction, wondering if I should find anybody. But I didn't."

"You didn't? Don't you consider me anybody?"

"No—somebody."

"You mean nobody," she laughed.

He brought the conversation by gradual and skillful stages round to that subject which engrossed him; from inquiry concerning her lessons it seemed quite natural he should remark about the old rhyme he had seen in one of the schoolbooks. "I notice," he added, "that you write: 'Remember Tita is my name, and Warrener comes behind it.' Why your middle name? I admit Leblac doesn't scan, but then it's your name."

"But Warrener is my name, too," she replied. "I like it, and I hate the other. I've always hated the name Leblac; I don't know why, but I have—perhaps because it belongs to my father. To myself I've always called myself Tita Warrener."

"Then Warrener isn't your father's name, too?"

"No; it was my mother's before she married. She told me so one day long ago, and I always remembered because I liked it. Perhaps I like it because my father hates it, for one day he saw that rhyme I had written in my books, and he flew into a rage, asking where I had got that name, and what right I had to it. So I told him if it was my mother's I had all the right in the world, and I would use it if I pleased. That made him angrier, and he told me if his name wasn't good enough for me to get out and find another I liked better; the sooner the better," Tita sighed.

"Do you think it is very wicked to feel the way I do toward my father?" she asked earnestly. "I try not to—— Oh, you don't know how I have tried, but it's no use. I can't honor my father, and I never could. There doesn't seem to be anything between us but evil."

"Love can't exist without kindness," said Gilchrist, with a shake of the head.

"My father positively *hates* me; he really and truly does. I've often tried to understand why. I know I could be nicer to him, and I've tried, but he seems to make me say and do things I don't mean. And—and I can't forget those early beatings. It's awfully hard to be a Christian, isn't it?" she sighed. "I never knew it was so hard."

Gilchrist checked a smile. "Do you remember anything of your life before you first went to the Sacré Cœur?" he asked.

She shook her head. "I was very young. Why?"

He laughed. "I was just wondering if it should turn out that, after all, Mr. Leblac wasn't your father."

Tita looked up at him in unfeigned astonishment.. "What ever put such an idea into your head, Mr. Gilchrist?"

"Well, it's not impossible," he said lightly. "Such things happen; you hear or read about them every day—of children being stolen by gypsies, and all that sort of thing. Supposing somewhere your real father was living, and he loved you as much as Mr. Leblac dislikes you; supposing you had been stolen from him, or something of the sort, and he had been searching for you ever since, longing to give you that love and protection which seems to have been denied you."

Tita looked bewildered and doubtful, as if at loss to know if he was in earnest. "But what about my—my mother?" she asked, with a hesitating laugh. "Is she not to be my mother, too?"

"Well, I haven't made up that part of the story yet," said Gilchrist quite soberly. "In fact, I don't know just what to do about it."

"I'm afraid you are a very poor story-teller," laughed Tita. "You should know how it's to be ended before you begin. How could I be stolen or anything like that, and my mother

not know it? Isn't she here with me? How could I have a real mother and an —unreal father? Have you made up what my real father is to be? I suppose he's very wealthy and prominent—they always are in stories."

"Then for a change we'd make this story different. We'll be original," said Gilchrist. "Suppose your real father was just a poor man, who earned his living by trapping; who had a fairly influential position once, but lost it and whatever money he had in searching for you. Say, for instance, he was factor of a Hudson's Bay post." He eyed her hard, but the statement had no significance for her.

"You're very flattering," she said, "to even imagine that any one would sacrifice their position and fortune in trying to find me. But I wouldn't care how poor he was if he was good and—and loved me."

Later, as he lay alone in Little Lake camp, Gilchrist thought the whole matter over. There could be no doubt that Pills was Warrener, the former factor of Fort la Plonge, and the father of Tita; strange as the story was, it must be true. There was the fact of Lobo being shot through the mouth, the mother saying her name was Warrener, the nomadic life of the family, Leblac's rage at seeing that name, and his hatred for Tita. All this could not be coincidence.

He had heard two versions of the same story, that of Pills and that of Mrs. Leblac, and they dovetailed to a nicety. Beyond question Leblac was Courcelles, and he had ceased his nomadic life only after he believed Warrener dead; he had left Warrener for dead up on the Mackenzie, and, thinking himself no longer pursued, had settled in Silver City, and subsequently the camp he now occupied. There was no doubt he had feared and hated Warrener with the hatred of the scoundrel who has wronged his friend. And there was no doubt Mrs. Warrener, if cognizant of her husband's persistent pursuit, was ignorant of the tragedy on the Mackenzie, for Courcelles had said nothing concerning the manner in which Lobo came by his wound; as a matter of fact, he had not saved the Indian's life, but Lobo had saved his.

The problem which confronted Gilchrist was how best could justice be done; how best restore father and daughter to each other. He alone possessed the secret, and the task devolved upon him. How could he avoid acquainting Tita with the fact of her mother's sin? How could he tell Warrener the truth and not have murder done? These deadly enemies were neighbors, and ignorant of the fact; the man for whom Warrener had hunted over the entire North was at his door; they had not met, but how long would that continue? Warrener had actually seen his daughter, and thought it but a dream.

This problem would require delicate handling and infinite diplomacy if bloodshed were to be avoided, and he must be the go-between. He had at least broken the ground where Tita was concerned, and even if she thought he spoke wholly in jest he had, in remarking about Leblac, given her something to think about. The very probable fact of Leblac or Courcelles breeding and slaughtering beaver paled to insignificance before this mightier problem.

Gilchrist lay revolving all this in his mind when there came the swift patter of feet, the door was flung open, and some one sprang into the room.

CHAPTER XII.

THE ATTACK OF THE INDIAN.

The intruder had slammed the rude, ill-fitting door, and was leaning against it, breathing heavily. By the clear moon that shone through the window Gilchrist recognized Tita. The hand which had instinctively reached for the Colt under his pillow was stayed, and, throwing off the four-point Hudson's Bay blanket, he arose.

"What's wrong?" he asked sharply.

She turned and staggered as if shot. "I—I didn't know you were here, Mr. Gilchrist! I'm sorry—I'm glad——" She was laughing and crying in the one breath.

He made as if to light the single lamp, but she stayed him with appealing, imperative hand. "No, don't do that! He might shoot you through the window; I wouldn't trust him! He hates you!"

Gilchrist pulled forward the one and only chair the camp owned, and made her sit down. He could see that her hair was tumbled over her shoulders in great, dark waves, that her mackinaw was all awry—one sleeve was almost torn out—and that her face, showing white in the moonlight, was scratched and bleeding; also that her lip was cut, as if from a blow.

He was very gentle and patient with her, saying nothing until she had recovered some command over herself. "Is it Lobo?" he asked quietly.

She nodded. "Partly. I didn't know if you were here, but I—I came. You said if I ever needed help—I thought he might not find me; that perhaps I could hold the door——" Her words trailed off.

Gilchrist stepped to his bunk, and in silence strapped hunting knife and revolver over his mackinaw. His blood was singing, and he whistled a bar or two about the King of Normandy who rode forth to war. "Will he come here, do you think?" he asked almost gayly.

"I think so," said Tita passively. She shivered.

"Good!" nodded Gilchrist. "It will save the trouble of looking for him." He opened the door a little and leaned against the wall in such a position that he could look through the opening.

"Now tell me just what happened," he said.

"There was a great row over at the camp," replied Tita obediently, speaking hurriedly. "Mr. Fanning dropped in after supper, and my father and he sat up talking and drinking. Mother and I are always ordered to bed. These talks had made me suspicious, and I had felt for some time that father and Mr. Fanning were planning something that wasn't right; they always stopped talking if I came into the room——"

"Yes; go on, please," said Gilchrist, peering through the door over the white waste of snow.

"I went downstairs to the kitchen," continued the girl. "I didn't mean to spy, but my moccasins made no sound on the hardwood——"

"Same thing happened to me," said Gilchrist gayly. "You overheard them talking, and you found out they were going to take beaver in the spring against the law; that Mr. Leblac's breeding them."

"How did you know?" demanded Tita in astonishment.

He briefly explained how he had come by his suspicions and of the conversation he had overheard. "But I didn't know that I was right," he finished.

"You were right," said Tita in a low voice. "They talked over the whole thing. I always knew my father was cruel, but I never knew he could be criminal. I understand now why he wished to be let alone."

"What did you do?" asked Gilchrist as she paused.

"I was very angry," she continued, "but I went upstairs without saying anything, and waited until Mr. Fanning had gone. I didn't know what to do. You know I haven't any affection for my father—I needn't pretend otherwise—yet I didn't want him to get in trouble. He was planning to break the law wholesale, and I knew what that meant if he was caught. Besides, it was all wrong——"

"You mean that Mr. Leblac hasn't actually taken beaver? He didn't do so last spring?"

"No, I don't think he has," replied Tita. "In fact, I'm sure he didn't, for we've only been here a little over a year, and he wasn't ready last spring. Besides, I was here then, and I gathered from what I overheard to-night that I'm to be sent away before the coming spring."

Gilchrist nodded.

"I thought it best to tell father what I knew," continued Tita, "so I went downstairs. I'm sure I wasn't mean about it, and I didn't say anything nasty; I simply told him what I'd

learned, and left it for him to see that it was quite impossible for the thing to go on. He flew into one of his rages, wouldn't listen to argument, called me a sneak and a spy and a lot of other names. He defied me to prove anything, and then, in the same breath, said if I dared to hint outside a word of what I had learned he'd find a way of fixing me. He threatened and bullied and stormed around in his old way, but I told him simply that if he did not give up this scheme—which is nothing more than barefaced robbery and the meanest kind—I would go to the proper authorities and tell what I knew; but that if he promised and kept his word I wouldn't say anything—even about Mr. Fanning."

"And what did he say to that proposition?"

"He knocked me down," replied Tita calmly.

"He knocked you down!" repeated Gilchrist.

She nodded. "He was in one of his fine rages; I never saw him so mad. He threatened to kill me. I—I was very much frightened. Mother heard the noise, and came running downstairs; her heart isn't very strong, you know. He cursed us both, and ordered us upstairs.

"I made up my mind not to spend another night under the same roof with him; I had got over being frightened, and I was raging. He had struck me. I am no longer a child. I didn't care where I went; I really hadn't any plan; I only wanted to get away. But I thought I could spend the night with Sister Rosalie." Tita swallowed, and clenched her hands.

"I got out the back window like I did that other night," she continued, speaking in the same hurried, abrupt way. "I crossed the lake, and found Lobo was following me. I became frightened again, and, doubling, recrossed the lake. I couldn't go back to the house, and was afraid to go to Silver City. Then I thought of this camp and what you had said. Halfway here Lobo overtook me——" She stopped.

"Well?" asked Gilchrist, with forced composure.

"I—I can't tell you," said Tita in a strangled voice. "I don't know what happened; I only knew I must fight as I had never fought before, and that I had no weapon—I had left in such a hurry. It is all a nightmare. I screamed, but no one answered. We clinched and rolled over on the snow. It was terrible! I felt my strength going—and then something happened. Lobo must have sprung a hidden trap, for I heard the snap of steel, and realized he was caught somehow, and held fast. But I didn't wait to see; I came here as fast as I could. I called to God, and He must have heard me," she finished simply.

The sweat was standing on Gilchrist's brow. "Where did this happen?" he asked. "Was it near your camp? Did Mr. Leblac know you'd left?"

"I don't know," said Tita. "It was about half a mile this side of the camp, I think."

"Could he have heard you call? You know one can hear a good distance on a still night like this."

"I don't think he could have heard me," she replied passively. "But if he had it wouldn't have mattered. He wouldn't care what happened to me; in fact, I think he would be rather glad. He knew I had reason to fear Lobo, but he didn't care; he never said anything to Lobo."

"I don't think you need be afraid of Lobo coming here," said Gilchrist grimly. "That trap will hold him for a while."

"How can it?" she asked. "It can only be a small one; it must have caught some part of his clothing, and he could free himself without help."

"I don't think so," said Gilchrist. "You see, some one has been planting bear traps around here for my benefit, and I wouldn't be surprised if Lobo got some of his own medicine—sort of poetic justice. Mr. Leblac didn't want me around his camp, and he may have planted the trap where it would do the most good. Let us find out."

"Where are you going?" she demanded.

"To see Mr. Leblac," said Gilchrist cheerfully. "When you came in I had about made up my mind that it would be best to have a little talk with him, and recent events have confirmed that opinion."

Tita shrank away. "I—I will never go back there!" she exclaimed. "Never! I can't—I won't! Don't ask me to," she pleaded. "I will go anywhere, and do anything rather than go back there! I would rather live among strangers and work my fingers to the bone than eat his bread again! I don't mean to trouble you, Mr. Gilchrist, and I can go to Silver City alone. I'm not afraid any more——"

"I don't mean you to go back, not for a moment," said Gilchrist. "You'll never spend another night under that infernal roof if I can help it!"

"But if he says I must?" she said dully.

He laughed. "Wasn't your birthday last week, and aren't you of age? This is a free country, and children have just a few rights, as Mr. Leblac is going to find out."

He took her hands. "You need some one to look after these rights of yours, little girl, and I've appointed myself to that position—until the right man comes along."

"You have been very kind to me, Mr. Gilchrist," she said gravely, her eyes filling with tears. "I will do anything you say. But I don't want to be any trouble to you, and I don't want you to go near the camp; my father hates you, and Lobo hates you, and I don't know what they may do. You've done more than enough for me——"

"I've done nothing for you, but I hope to do something before I'm through. I must see Mr. Leblac tonight; I may be wrong, but it seems to me I should. Afterward I'll go with you to Silver City, where you can spend the night with Sister Rosalie. In the morning I'll have something to say to you; something to tell you, and it will be a big surprise. Now don't ask any questions," he laughed, "for I can't answer until the morning. In the meantime I can't leave you here alone, for, after all, Lobo may have got loose for all I know——"

"I'll go with you," interrupted Tita quickly. "If you must see my father, I will not let you go alone."

"Then let us form a mutual aid society," he laughed. "Come!"

They set out for the camp, following the route Tita had taken.

"You don't have to go in," explained Gilchrist. "In fact, I'd rather you wouldn't. You can wait for me outside, for I won't be long."

"But why must you see him?" she asked. "You must not say or do anything on my—my behalf that would get you into trouble. Please don't, Mr. Gilchrist; you don't know what a temper he has——"

"Hush!" said Gilchrist gayly. "There isn't going to be any trouble, for I come as a messenger of peace. I mean to do Mr. Leblac a good turn; he deserves it."

Tita eyed him, perplexed. He was smiling, but his eyes were sober.

They continued in silence, Gilchrist asking her to keep a sharp lookout for the spot where Lobo had overtaken her. And presently when within about half a mile of the camp they came to it, but the Indian had vanished. There were ample signs on every hand of the struggle that had taken place; the snow was trampled in all directions, and the bush broken down.

Gilchrist tripped over an object; it was a sprung bear trap, still fastened to a heavy drag, and similar in make to the one he had so narrowly escaped. Tita and he went down on all fours in the snow, and he struck a match. "There is blood—here and here," he said, pointing to little hollow black specks in the snow. Tita was now circling round and round like a hound, trying to pick up a lost trail.

"Look here," exclaimed Gilchrist, holding in hollowed hand half a dozen little brass shells. "Look! What does that mean? There's been gun play. And how did Lobo get away?"

"My father," said Tita simply.

"There are three trails instead of two. Lobo fired his revolver, and my father heard. Don't you see? He could hear where we couldn't."

Gilchrist nodded. "How was Lobo caught?"

"By the hand, I think. You see, we were rolling over and over in the snow —and then something went snap!" She clicked her even white teeth. "It was the trap."

"It was Providence," said Gilchrist gravely. "The Almighty was certainly looking out for you that time, little girl."

They approached the camp, the ground-floor windows of which were aglow, and when distant some dozen yards Gilchrist pointed out a small alder, one of the few trees in the clearing. "Wait for me here," he whispered. "Promise not to move."

"How long will you be gone?"

"I can't say, but not more than ten or fifteen minutes."

"I think you are doing a very foolish thing," she said colorlessly. "I don't understand—but I'll do as you say. It is your wish."

"It is my wish," he nodded. "You'll understand afterward, for I'll make everything clear. Now, don't worry, for there's nothing to worry about. I tell you I'm going in there to do Mr. Leblac a good turn. I'm not going to fight with him; what's done is done."

He nodded gayly, and then came back, slipping his Colt from the holster and pressing it into her hand. She hesitated and then accepted. "Just a precaution for both of us," he smiled. "A man never knows what he may do if there's a gun handy, and I'm not sure where Lobo is. If he should happen around——" He nodded, and, whistling under his breath the song concerning the King of Normandy, set out for the house.

It rather surprised Gilchrist to feel so entire master of himself, so debonair and totally unafraid. His blood was singing, and he actually looked forward to the coming meeting with Courcelles.

The girl stood in the shadow of the alder, waiting and watching.

CHAPTER XIII.

GIVING COURCELLES A CHANCE.

Gilchrist kicked off his webs, opened the door without knocking, and walked in. By the fire sat Pierre Courcelles —to give him his right name—alone. On the table was the whisky decanter and glasses; also a large bowl of water and some stained linen. There was a faint smell of carbolic in the air, and instantly it brought up to Gilchrist the memory of that night when he awoke to find Tita's arms about him. He saw again her anxious, sympathetic eyes.

Courcelles had heard Gilchrist's approach, but had not troubled to move; his eyes were on the door, and if he felt surprise at the intruder's identity he did not show it.

Courcelles owned the gift of being highly unpleasant in two different and distinct ways; he could be loud and foul-mouthed, brutal and vituperative, or polite, sneering, and ironic. He was master of either, and now the latter humor seemed to possess him, for he arose and bowed with flowery courtesy. "Welcome, Mr. Gilchrist," he greeted. "I see my hospitality has quite an irresistible attraction for you. I'm sorry my daughter has retired; but, if they will do instead, my poor services are at your disposal."

Gilchrist was thinking in flashes; his brain had never been more keen and alert; his analysis of words and actions, his interpretation of the look in a man's eyes never more accurate. And he knew that Courcelles was not dissembling; that he was ignorant of Tita's flight and her encounter with Lobo.

"I didn't come here to see Miss Tita," he said, "but to see you. I wanted to have a talk with you."

His coolness angered Courcelles, and a lump showed between his eyes; it was a characteristic lump, a white lump that slowly changed to purple-red, and it always came when his temper was aroused. He had not asked Gilchrist to sit down, and he himself was standing, the table between them. "I think there has been said between us all there need be said, Mr. Gilchrist," he replied

darkly, attempting to retain his pose, "and I thought I had made myself quite clear."

"You did, but I didn't," replied Gilchrist. "Have you had an accident?" he finished casually, eying the stained linen and the bowl of water.

"Lobo had. He hurt his hand," said Courcelles shortly. His eyes were inquisitive and furtive.

"It's a mistake to have bear traps lying around," said Gilchrist, with a shake of the head. "I nearly stepped into one the other day. They seem to grow around here."

Courcelles' eyes narrowed, and he was silent a moment. "I do as I please on my own property, Mr. Gilchrist," he said at length. "If people persist in trespassing, that's their lookout."

"But Little Lake isn't your property," replied Gilchrist, "and I object to your placing bear traps near my traps —I might spring one by mistake, and lose a leg or starve to death."

"Be careful what you're saying, young man! I don't know anything about a bear trap on Little Lake. I haven't said anything about traps. I didn't say Lobo had been caught in one. What do you know about it?"

"I know one was planted for my benefit," replied Gilchrist, "whether by you or Lobo. That trap came from here, for there isn't one in our outfit, and I know the day it was planted."

Courcelles shrugged. "Is that what you came here for? I don't know anything about it, and you needn't come here to air your dirty suspicions. But I tell you this, young man: I *have* planted bear traps on my property, and if you spring one you'll stay there and rot! I've warned you repeatedly away from here; I've told you I don't want you snooping around my daughter——"

"That's just the point, Mr. Courcelles," interrupted Gilchrist. "You don't recognize my right to call here as a friend and neighbor, and I don't recognize your right to call Miss Warrener your daughter."

The effect of the mere pronunciation of these two names was tremendous; Courcelles' jaw dropped, the lump stood out, and became purple-red, then slowly disappeared. Sweat pearled his brow, and he grew ashen. "W-what do you mean?" he demanded thickly, staring at the other.

"Just that," said Gilchrist. "I know the whole story that began fifteen years ago with your coming to Fort la Plonge up on the Churchill. I know Mrs. Warrener is not your wife, nor Tita Warrener your daughter. I know how Lobo happened to lose the power of speech——"

"It's a lie!" cried Courcelles, crashing a fist on the table. "It was fair fight, and I married the woman——"

"It wasn't fair fight, you cowardly wife stealer, and you didn't marry her!" cried Gilchrist, leaning over the table. "Don't you lie to me, or you won't get a chance for your miserable life!"

Courcelles tried in vain to meet the other's eyes; his own wavered and dropped. He gulped, and sank back into the chair. "It was fair fight," he muttered sullenly. "He'd have killed me if I hadn't killed him——"

"You didn't kill him," said Gilchrist, "and he has yet to kill you! Warrener is one of my partners, and he's only ten miles away!"

Courcelles grew livid. His other fright was as nothing to this. He sat bloodless, palsied. He was a poor sort of thing, and Gilchrist's anger changed to the quality of pity one bestows on a cornered rat. There was silence a moment.

"I'll pass over about your breeding and planning to take beaver," continued Gilchrist, "except to say you weren't so clever as you supposed. I knew days ago what Fanning and you were up to, and I was going to give you a chance to keep clear of breaking the law for the sake of what I supposed was your family.

"And I'll pass over the way you've treated Mrs. Warrener and her daughter, for there are some things that can't be discussed without violence. They say there's some good in the worst of us, and I suppose your goodness consists in not having deserted at the first opportunity the woman who sacrificed

everything, and wrecked her life for you."

Courcelles glanced up, clutching at this single favorable clause in the indictment. "Look here, Mr. Gilchrist," he said in a wheedling voice, "you're young, you haven't lived yet, and you don't know what temptations a man stacks up against. You don't know how hard it is to be good sometimes, and that chance and circumstance can make scoundrels of men. I'm making no excuses; I did wrong, and I know it. But I loved Mrs. Warrener, and she me, and for me there hasn't been any other woman. If we didn't marry it was because we couldn't without committing bigamy——"

"I don't want to discuss that with you," interrupted Gilchrist, "and I'm not setting myself up as any man's judge. But you've treated the daughter of the man you wronged like a dog, and the wife little better, I think. Nor is it your fault that you're not a murderer to boot. If Warrener were here now you'd know what to expect."

Courcelles' eyes dropped, and he shifted in his chair, the old fear showing in his face. "D-does he know?" he asked thickly.

"No, he doesn't," replied Gilchrist. "And this is what I have to say to you: I'm going to tell Warrener in the morning, and so you have one night to make whatever use of you like. I don't care what you do or where you go, but if you place any value on your life you won't be here in the morning. I needn't tell you that Warrener will kill you on sight, and that neither I nor any one could stop him; that's why I won't tell him until you're gone. I'm not doing this for your sake, but because I don't want Warrener to come at last to his daughter with blood on his hands. You're worth no man's life; you've ruined his, and now I don't propose to have you make a murderer out of him."

"But what chance have I," whined Courcelles, "if they know all this in Silver City? They'll lynch me if I try to get through; I know that crowd. And if they don't, Warrener will dog me like a bloodhound until he gets me. I know him; he never let up for thirteen years——"

"He won't," said Gilchrist curtly. "He won't know where you've gone, and he'll have his daughter. He won't bother about *you* once he gets her, realizes what it means, and has time to think things over. As for Silver City, it doesn't know anything about this; I'm the only person that knows, and the only one that knows until the morning."

A new light came to Courcelles' eyes; he sat up, and the look of fear vanished. "And what about Mrs. Warrener?" he asked, in a more assured voice.

"That's a question Warrener and she alone can settle," replied Gilchrist, "for it's beyond me. If Mrs. Warrener elects to go with you, all right; or if she prefers to remain here and meet her husband, all right. If she doesn't want to go with you, you won't want to take her; and if she won't remain here of her own free will, Warrener won't care about seeing her again. That's the way it seems to me. There will be no compulsion, you understand. To-night Miss Warrener will go with me to the Sacré Cœur in Silver City, and in the morning I'll bring her father over."

Courcelles nodded. "It's best that Mrs. Warrener should stay here," he said slowly. "To go with me would only double the chance of Warrener following me. We have loved, and we have paid for it; let it end here and now."

"I needn't impress on you the need of haste," said Gilchrist curtly. "It's only through accident that Warrener doesn't know your identity. He may take it into his head at any time to come here, for in the rôle of Leblac you've aroused his curiosity. He believes you have a wife and daughter; he has even seen Miss Warrener, and thought it a dream. His brain is cloudy at times, but it may occur to him to put two and two together, come over here, and look around. That's why I haven't lost any time in speaking to you. I don't know if I've done right," he finished slowly, "but it seemed to me the only thing to do."

Courcelles put out his hand, as if to

reach for the whisky decanter, but instead slipped it within the table drawer, which for some time past he had been opening stealthily by imperceptible degrees. And when the hand reappeared it held a double-barreled derringer of heavy caliber which he leveled at Gilchrist. The cringing attitude, the fear in his eyes, the whine in his voice had vanished. "Sit down, young cub!" he said with an oath. "Now I'll have a little talk with *you*."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE AVENGER.

Courcelles' small eyes were snapping, the purple-red lump showing between them, and Gilchrist's first emotion was startled fear. The blood left his face; then he pulled himself together, and with at least an admirable assumption of nonchalance he accepted the designated chair.

"I don't see what you hope to gain by all this," he said calmly enough.

"Perhaps not, but *you* may gain something," replied Courcelles, "though you seem slow at learning, young cub. This may teach you that this isn't New York; that the law isn't within call; that this is the law here," tapping the derringer, "and that you should come prepared to enforce it," eying the empty holster on Gilchrist's hip.

"You may also learn to mind your own business—and you will before I'm through with you; I promise you that!" He sat back and sneered, the hate showing in his eyes and in the vicious lines of his mouth. Gilchrist thought that more than ever he resembled an enraged weasel.

"You're a little tin god on wheels, aren't you?" sneered Courcelles. "*You* were going to do this, and *you* were going to do that, and just as *you* thought best. I was to do thus and so, and jump around while *you* cracked the whip. Why, you infernal little whelp ——" His eyes blazed up, and he looked as if about to hurl the derringer in Gilchrist's face; then he sat back and sneered again.

"You overplayed your hand, young cub, when you said nobody knew that story but you. And now nobody will know it—do you hear?"

"Perfectly, thank you!" said Gilchrist, the blood once more singing within him. "But don't be a fool; killing me won't get you anything, you know."

"Won't it? Then it will keep me everything I have! I tell you I'll kill you, and not think twice about it, rather than be driven out of here, give up everything I've worked for, and become a wandering beggar just because you chose to interfere in what's none of your business. I'd be a fool if I didn't. What did you take me for, young cub?"

"I never took you for a fool," replied Gilchrist. "Look here, you'd much better take the chance I offered you and clear out, for I tell you killing me won't get you anything but the rope. I've a couple of partners, and men don't disappear even up here without some inquiry being made. And I happen to have a father who can spend a fortune finding out what's become of me, for he's the president of Gilchrist & Co.—if you happen to have heard of that house."

Courcelles sneered again, but the casual statement was not lost on him.

"You simply can't stay here," added Gilchrist, "for Warrener and Spear know about your plans for taking beaver. I'm not bluffing; of course, you may shoot away, but I warn you it won't pay. Killing me won't stop Warrener coming here—in fact, it will only give him a reason for coming—and when he does come your jig will be up.

"And another thing—don't think nobody knows I'm here, for Miss Warrener does. I suppose you think she's in the house, but she isn't."

"What do you mean?" demanded Courcelles, startled out of himself, and unable to conceal his astonishment.

"I mean Miss Warrener got out the back way, and left here three hours ago," said Gilchrist. "I mean that Lobo attacked her—and was trapped for his pains. I mean she's waiting for me within call of my camp, where

Warrener and Spear are; that she knows I'm here, and if I don't show up within a reasonable time she's to bring my partners over and find out what's wrong. But if I do return, why, then we'll go to Silver City, and Warrener won't learn anything until the morning." Gilchrist lied in the most convincing manner, for he knew if the other suspected Tita was waiting under the alder he would find a way of surprising her.

The purple-red lump showed between Courcelles' eyes. "You're lying!" he exclaimed. "That bluff won't go!"

"All right," said Gilchrist, leaning back and folding his arms. "If I am, then Miss Warrener is in the house; if I'm not, then she isn't. You can easily find out. I'm only trying to appeal to your common sense. At least you'll have no one to blame but yourself."

Courcelles eyed him intently, and not without some grudging approval. "You've nerve, young cub; I'll say that for you," he growled.

He arose, derringer in hand. "You move," he said, "and it'll be the last you'll make."

He went to the foot of the stairs, an eye on Gilchrist, and called Tita's name. He repeated it again and again, his voice growing strident and angry, but there was no answer. Finally a door opened, steps sounded in the hall overhead, and Gilchrist heard Mrs. Warrener's timid, apologetic voice. "What's the matter, Pierre?"

"Nothing!" growled her gallant protector. "Don't come down! I don't want you. See if Tita's in her room, and be quick about it!"

Mrs. Warrener obeyed without question, at length returning to the top of the stairs. "No, she isn't," she said anxiously. "She isn't in her room; she isn't upstairs at all. I thought she had gone to bed hours ago. Is anything wrong, Pierre? Where has she gone——"

"There's nothing wrong, and I know where she is!" snapped Courcelles. "Don't ask any more questions. Go back to your room!"

"Yes, Pierre." And again the woman obeyed without question. Gilchrist felt the blood coming up under his collar, and his hands itched.

Courcelles waited by the foot of the stairs until he heard Mrs. Warrener close the room of her room. Then he came back to the table, and, pouring himself half a glass of whisky, drained it at a gulp. "Well, it looks as if you'd been telling the truth," he said, eying Gilchrist. "You're right so far, anyway."

"I don't ask you to take my word for it," said Gilchrist. "Bring Lobo in here, and make him tell the truth. Make him tell you that three hours ago he saw Miss Warrener leave the back way, that he dogged her across Silver Lake and back again, and that he attacked her. He'll lie, of course, but that's the truth. How could I know he'd been caught in a bear trap if I hadn't met Miss Warrener and she told me? And it's a lucky thing for Lobo you heard him shoot and packed him back here. It's lucky for him he wasn't in that trap when I came along."

"Still howling, young cub?" sneered Courcelles. "Lobo's quarters are out near the fox pens, and don't think I'm going to leave you here while I fetch him." He poured himself another drink, and the whisky was beginning to show in his eyes.

Off somewhere in the night a shot suddenly echoed; then two more crashed out in quick succession. Gilchrist instinctively leaped to his feet, his face paling. The glass dropped from Courcelles' nerveless hand, and shivered to fragments on the hardwood floor. His face had become gray.

Gilchrist saw his chance, and took it in the same instant, leaping upon Courcelles, and wrenching the derringer from his palsied hand before the other knew what had happened. The old fear had returned to Courcelles; he had made but a feeble, spasmodic attempt to retain the weapon, and now he stood with slack jaw and glazed eye. There came the sound of loud voices—a shout—and hurried steps.

"That's Warrener!" cried Courcelles hoarsely. "Give me a gun! Give me a fighting chance! For God's sake, give

me a chance——" His words trailed off.

Neither saw that Mrs. Warrener, white and shaking, stood halfway down the stairs. Things were coming too fast for observation. There was no time to think.

Gilchrist spied a closet to the right of the stairs, and, gripping Courcelles by the arm, literally hurled him in and slammed the door. Almost synchronous with this action the door giving on the small veranda was flung open, and Spear, amid a blast of keen night air, shot into the room as if flung from a catapult. His neck and shoulder was dyed red from where a bullet had seared its way across his right cheek. He stopped short, and Gilchrist and he faced each other for a moment in silence.

The woman on the stairs had retreated a step or two; she was pressing both hands over her heart.

Gilchrist and Spear shot out a question at each other. "Where's Tita?" from the former. "Where's Warrener?" from the latter.

Then Spear sent forth his words like bullets from an automatic pistol. "Tita's outside. She's been hit—not bad. Warrener broke away and headed here! He's plumb crazy. He's after Courcelles. It means murder. We've got to head him off——"

They wheeled at the crash. The door at their backs leading to the kitchen had been almost torn from its hinges, and on its rebound from the wall struck Warrener on the shoulder, yet did not budge him. He looked like some strange, gigantic animal, and Gilchrist felt a thrill of pure fear shoot through him as he met his eyes.

"Where is he?" bellowed Warrener, brandishing the heavy Colt he held, his mighty voice echoing and crashing through the house. Both Gilchrist and Spear sought to hold him, but he swept them aside with a single irresistible motion of his great arm.

"He's not here!" gasped Gilchrist. "He left an hour ago! I told——"

"It's a lie!" cried Warrener. He raised the revolver over his shoulder as Spear and Gilchrist sought to close in on him. "Stand back!" he commanded, a deadly purpose in his eyes and voice, "or, as sure as there's a God in heaven, I'll shoot! This is my work. I'm going to finish it! That blackguard's in this house, and I'll get him if I have to tear it down! Stand back!"

"Stop!" implored Gilchrist. "Think of your daughter. Think of Tita! Don't come to her with blood on your hands. No man's worth it!" In desperation he threw himself again upon Warrener, and again the other, meeting him halfway, flung him back as a stag shakes off the hound.

Then Warrener raised his mighty voice. "Courcelles!" he bellowed. "Courcelles, come out, to me and take your chance!"

And still none saw the crouching, fear-struck woman on the darkened stairs.

As Warrener's words echoed themselves away, and he stood waiting and watching with his back to the closet, its door opened, and Courcelles sprang into the room, his moccasined feet hardly making a sound. In that closet, unknown to Gilchrist, hung the other's knife, belt, and revolver, and the trapped weasel had come out to fight for his life—the life for which he knew he must fight. He knew from Warrener's voice where he was standing, but he did not know his enemy's back was to him. It was three to one, and a desperate chance, but preferable to being killed through the door, which must happen if Gilchrist said the word. He knew Warrener would do as he said—tear the house down if need be until he found him. And the other's taunt had aroused within him a latent spark of courage. He took his chance, counting on the sudden surprise.

Gilchrist had purposely refrained from looking at the closet, fearing his eyes would betray Courcelles' whereabouts, while Spear had no reason for suspecting what the closet contained; thus all three were taken off their guard. The breadth of the stairs alone separated Warrener from his enemy.

No one could have told in detail pre-

cisely what happened on the opening of that closet door, for it all happened like a moving-picture film run at bewildering speed. Spear saw the door open, Warrener heard it, and Gilchrist sensed it. And Gilchrist, to his dismay, saw that Courcelles was armed, saw the hatred and fear in his face as he trained the revolver on Warrener's back.

There was no time to act, no time to shout a warning, for before Warrener could turn Courcelles had fired point-blank. But an instant before this a small, crouching figure had launched itself from the stairs between the men, throwing up both arms as if to ward off the bullet, and when Warrener wheeled it was to catch his wife in his arms.

CHAPTER XV.

PEACE IN THE BIG WOODS.

Gilchrist was trying to tear loose the derringer which had caught in the lining of his pocket, and as he realized what had happened he fought his way through the biting smoke that was shot with flashes as Courcelles turned loose his weapon.

The next Gilchrist knew he was blundering and stumbling down the passage leading to the kitchen; pursuing the flying Weasel, a great rage in his heart and a sob in his throat as he thought of Mrs. Warrener and the look in her husband's eyes as they met at last on the brink of the grave.

Courcelles had had a good start, and he knew the way; the kitchen was dark, and Gilchrist stumbled around, tripping over table and chairs before finding the door Courcelles had slammed. His rage and haste only served to retard him, and when at length he tore open the door, and, unmindful of hidden danger, rushed out into the clearing, it was to find no sign of Courcelles. The foxes were barking in their pens, the moon shone down peacefully on the snow-covered trees, and the stars twinkled like tiny blue diamond chips. The silence and peace of the big woods closed about Gilchrist, and, emerging from the man-made inferno, the contrast struck like a blow. His head cleared, and his thoughts instantly returned to Tita. The tragedy, though long in the telling, had consumed but a few minutes, and he had been thinking of her subconsciously. He was now thankful she had been hurt, for better physical suffering than to be an eye-witness of what had occurred. That tragic picture would never be wiped clean in his mind, and how much more terrible would it have been for her.

He started for the distant alder tree, and came upon a dark object lying in the snow; it was a man, face down. Mechanically he turned him over and the moon beamed kindly on the dark, saturnine features of Lobo, the Dog Rib Indian. His mouth was set in a wide grin, and an outflung hand gripped a revolver He stirred a little, and whimpered like a puppy in its sleep, and Gilchrist, freeing the stiff fingers, thrust the weapon in his pocket. It's "feel" was familiar, and he knew it to be his own.

A figure came crawling painfully over the snow from the alder tree, and Gilchrist ran forward to meet Tita. She had been shot through the right leg, and Spear, having no choice but to follow and head off Warrener, had left her to minister to the wound as best she could.

"Are you hurt?" asked Gilchrist, dropping on the snow at her side.

She shook her head, pointing to the handkerchief she had tied about the leg. "I saw him come out. He went there," pointing to Silver Lake. And Gilchrist knew she was speaking of Courcelles.

"Tell me what happened," she said colorlessly. "Was it—was it my father—Mr. Warrener, I mean?"

"No," said Gilchrist huskily. "It's—it's your mother, Tita."

"Do you mean—she is dead?"

He bowed his head. "She gave her life for your father. Courcelles—Leblac—would have shot him. She threw herself between them."

Tita sat motionless, staring out into the night. Once she raised her hand to brush aside a tear.

"It was my fault," said Gilchrist

dully. "For your father's sake I tried to save Courcelles' life, and it cost your mother hers. He's away scot-free, while your mother—— It's always the woman who pays; you said so once, and it's true!"

"Yes, she paid," nodded Tita, still looking out into the night. "And she paid nobly. This is not your fault, Mr. Gilchrist; you must not blame yourself at all. I think I understand now what you tried to do. Did you know my father was coming here to-night?"

"No. I don't know why he came. I didn't want to tell even you until Courcelles had gone. I gave him the chance, but he wouldn't take it. It is not your father's fault, Tita; don't misjudge him. He wasn't responsible. Think of what he suffered. I know he would have even spared Courcelles if he had had time to think things over."

She nodded again. In a few short minutes she had become a woman. "I will go to him," she said quietly.

He lifted her in his arms.

"I can walk," she protested, "once I get on my feet." But he carried her to the house, and, passing the prone figure of Lobo, she shivered, and hid her face on his shoulder.

Spear limped out on the veranda, an ankle swathed in stained linen, and it occurred to Gilchrist that he had seen Spear drop as Courcelles began firing promiscuously. There was no need for questions.

"Your pa's upstairs, Miss Warrener," said Spear, unashamed of the tears that had smudged the powder stains on his haggard face. "You'll be the only one that can do anythin' with him. He wants you. There's only the two of you now, little girl."

He put out a rough, kindly hand, and touched her dark hair. "Your pa's been a good pard to me, an' he's all wheat," he finished.

They cleaned and dressed Tita's flesh wound, despite her protestations, and then the three of them went upstairs slowly and along the hall to Mrs. Warrener's room, where Spear softly opened the door.

By the bed sat Warrener, holding tightly between his own great palms the small, fragile hand of the woman he had lost, and, in death, found again. There was a smile of perfect peace and happiness on her lips, as if in that all-realizing, tragic moment all had been confessed and all forgiven. But for the small ragged hole over her heart which told its own story one might have thought her asleep.

Warrener sat motionless, with bowed head, as if hewn from granite; he had sat thus, unwinking, immovable, since Spear and he had first entered the room. He did not heed the opening door, and it was not until Tita had put her arms about him that he started and looked up, dazed and unseeing. Then something seemed to break within him, and as Tita flung herself on her knees he put his arms about her, and the two heads, the gray and the black, were bowed on the bed, and the girl's passionate tears merged with the man's harsh, labored sobbing.

Spear closed the door gently, and Gilchrist and he tiptoed downstairs, where the old trapper, without excuse, made straight for the whisky. Gilchrist pulled out his pipe, and filled it with unsteady fingers.

"It's hell," said Spear, tabling the glass, and producing his chewing tobacco, "but mebbe it's best. Mebbe it's best, after all. It's funny the damage one man can do in this world." He shook his head, and spat into the fire. "He got away, eh?"

Gilchrist nodded.

"An' I s'pose we got to let him go," said Spear. "He'll make Silver City before we get started. But there's a life on his hands now, an' mebbe he won't get far. Fannin' may help him without knowin' what's been pulled off. How did it come he got in that closet with a gun in his hands?"

Gilchrist related briefly what had happened since the coming of Tita to Little Lake camp. Then Spear told his side of the story, and the two halves completed the whole. This was what had happened:

Warrener—as Gilchrist had warned

Courcelles—became possessed with the idea of seeing "Leblac"; he had questioned Spear concerning his appearance, and then announced his intention of paying a visit to the Silver Lake camp. It seemed as if for the first time the significance of "Leblac" having a wife and daughter occurred to him; also the possibility that he might be Courcelles. This possibility had never struck Spear, for he entertained some doubts as to the other being the old factor of Fort la Plonge, and, at all events, he believed Courcelles had left the country long ago. He had tried to dissuade Warrener from making the trip, but in the other's humor this was useless, and the two set out together, Spear rather welcoming the opportunity of telling "Leblac" what he thought of him.

As they came into the clearing they heard a shot, and near the alder tree saw what they believed to be two men fighting; and, running over, they found Tita struggling with Lobo. The Indian had crept upon her unawares, and seized the revolver, before she had time to use it, which Gilchrist had left with her. In the struggle for the weapon Tita had been shot, and Lobo fired once at her rescuers, and before he could again pull trigger Warrener had dropped him. These were the three shots Gilchrist had heard.

Warrener then recognized Tita, and a few hurried questions sufficed to put the three of them in possession of the truth. The knowledge that Courcelles was close at hand seemed to drive Warrener mad, and, breaking from Spear's grasp, he had rushed toward the house.

"Until that moment, when Warrener stooped over the girl, an', lookin' down in her face, shouted out her name, I never thought 'Leblac' might be Courcelles," concluded Spear. "It fair took my wind. Then I knowed what was goin' to happen if Warrener ever got to Courcelles. I never knowed you was in the house, for there wasn't no time for Miss Warrener to say nothin'. It all happened as quick as winkin'. An' I never knowed when I was tellin' you that story about Warrener that you knowed what you did."

"At that time I didn't know it for a fact," said Gilchrist; "but Miss Warrener confirmed it. I wish I had told you then, Spear, what I suspected; two heads are better than one, and this might have been averted. My one idea was to get Courcelles away before Warrener happened over here and saw him. I tried to do what I thought was best, and I bungled it."

"It wasn't you, son," said Spear, with a shake of the head. "It was fate. You done all you could, but there's no use buckin' against fate. Why should Warrener take it into his head to come over here to-night?' Why to-night more than any other time? Why should he suddenly ask me what 'Leblac' looked like? An' so I tells you it was fate, an' bound to happen."

The sound of muffled sobbing had ceased upstairs. Gilchrist arose.

"I'd better bring Lobo in," he said wearily. "He isn't dead. I saw him stir, and he made a queer sort of noise. Then I'll go over to Silver City. I'm the only one fit to go. I suppose Mrs. Warrener will be buried in Detroit—she was always talking about it." He stepped outside with bowed head, while Spear swore again. The ankle was paining him.

Gilchrist made for the alder tree, but no familiar figure bulked black against the snow; Lobo had vanished. There was a heavy trail leading to Silver Lake, and Gilchrist followed it down to the ice. He stood a moment looking out across the lake, and then, shrugging, returned slowly to the house.

The foxes had stopped barking, the moon shone austere and cold, the stars twinkled like blue diamond chips, while all about was the utter silence and peace of the big woods.

They found neither hair nor hide of Pierre Courcelles and Lobo, the Dog Rib Indian. So far as personal endeavor is concerned, Warrener made no attempt to find them, nor did Gilchrist and Spear, and whether they lived or died together is known only to the Big Woods.

Fanning is no longer forest ranger, fishery guardian, and game warden, though no charges were preferred against him, and his true reason for resigning is known only to the three partners and a young girl. To them he admitted that Courcelles had come to him that night, and, saying only their plot had been discovered, demanded to be outfitted. And Fanning complied, fearing what the other knew, and thinking him well out of the neighborhood. That was the last he had seen of Courcelles, and he had never suspected the other's past.

There is a young girl in the Sault au Recollet, at Montreal, whose father holds a responsible position with Gilchrist & Co., the big fur house. She is unaccountably backward in some studies, but advanced in literature and modern languages—notably French—and her thirst for knowledge is unquenchable. She loves music passionately, and has no match in outdoor sports.

They say her father and she are quite devoted, and that there is some young man in New York—at least, so his letters are postmarked, and they think he is young—who seems rather interested in the progress she is making; they say she has the privilege of corresponding with him as if he were a brother or some member of the family.

And they say her mother is dead, and that once every year her father and she make a trip to Detroit, but for what particular reason no one seems to know, for she never talks about her private affairs. She is a strange girl in ways; for instance, one of her most cherished possessions is a heavy Colt's revolver that looks as if it had seen service, and which has the initial "G" carved in the butt; surely an absurd and savage ornament for a young girl's room.

You will be glad to know that BURTON E. STEVENSON'S new novel, "The Avenger," will appear complete in the next issue of the POPULAR, out November 7th.

MEN WHO BELONG

ACCORDING to his own words in the Congressional Directory, Representative Ezekiel Samuel Candler, junior, belongs to a lot of things. In his biography he says of himself:

Is a member of the Baptist Church, and was, from 1896 to 1905, the moderator of the Tishomingo Baptist Association; a Mason, Odd Fellow, Woodman, Beta Theta Pi, Knight of Honor, Elk, and Knight of Pythias, of which last-named order he was grand chancellor in the domain of Mississippi.

Herewith an illuminating extract from the biography of Representative Howard Sutherland, of West Virginia:

In March, 1893, moved to West Virginia in connection with the Davis-Elkins coal and railroad interests; continued in their employ for ten years; was married in 1889 to Miss Effie Harris, of Fulton, Missouri; ten children have been born to them, of whom six are living, five daughters and one son; the eldest daughter, Miss Natalie, is a student at Vassar College, and the son, Richard, a student at Yale College; is a Presbyterian, and a member of the Knights of Pythias, Independent Order of Odd Fellows, Ancient Order of United Workmen, and Royal Arcanum, and is a Knight Templar, thirty-second degree Mason, Mystic Shriner, and a member of Beta Theta Pi college fraternity; has always devoted a large part of his time to the public interests.

And herewith a few phrases from the biography of Senator Willard Saulsbury, of Delaware:

Several times president of New Castle Bar Association, and has long been chairman of board of censors of that bar; director of the Union National Bank, Equitable Guarantee & Trust Co., and sundry business corporations; president Delaware Society Alumni, University of Virginia; vice president Delaware Antituberculosis Society; member of Sons of American Revolution, Colonial Wars; president Wilmington Club, and vice president Wilmington Country Club.

The Taking of Kilkenny

By Peter B. Kyne

Author of "On Irish Hill," "A Reasonable Profit," Etc.

The blood of the Irish will tell. Something of the splendid spirit which dominates the Irish race is exhibited in this fine story of the Philippines, where two sons of Erin are on opposing sides in the war game

FIRST SERGEANT JOHN RYAN, top cutter of B troop, —th United States cavalry, rolled his cud reflectively, while pondering my query:

"What was the very finest fight in all me soger days, say you?" He lifted the fringe of his military mustache and spat carefully between his fingers. "I should say," he continued, "that the finest fight, bar none, was me little run-in wit' Shawn, the Bullock. Yet 'tis small pride I have in the mem'ry av it, for while I won, I was crool hurt in mind and body. To be sure 'twas a grand fight, and I enjoyed it, but——"

"I mean a battle, not a fist fight——" I began, but the sergeant interrupted me.

"This was both—the two rolled into wan. Divil such a fight did ye ever read av in histhry as the fight bechune meself and Shawn, the Bullock at the takin' av Kilkenny. And as 'tis a long story, I'll start in by tellin' ye who Shawn, the Bullock was."

To begin wit', then, Shawn, the Bullock was born Malachi Fitzgerald, in Kerry. As a slip av a bhoy his parents moved to Liverpool, where Malachi grew into a fine big dock rat, eventually 'listing as a marine in her majesty's navy. He was assigned to the *Shearwater*, on the Pacific station, and histhry tells us he deserted his ship at Honolulu at the beginning av the Spanish-American war and hid away on a United States transport passin' t'rough to Manila. Be that as it may, he turned up as a packer in the quarthermaster's corrals before the Filipino rebellion started; but who ever heard tell av a British marine developin' into a mule skinner or a packer? Me bowld Shawn was incompetent, and back av that he was impudent, so the pack masther give him the sack.

'Twas in the quarthermaster corral they nicknamed him Shawn, the Bullock for two reasons. In the first place he had a grand big mustache that he cultivated clear across the big lip av him down to the p'int av his jawbone, where it turned up at the inds for all the wurrld like the antlers av an auld bull caribao. And for all his brogue he had British mannerisms about him—howld-overs from the Liverpool docks and her majesty's service, and the other packers took to callin' him Johnny Bull, until 'twas discovered he was Kerry Irish, when some exile changed it to Shawn, the Bullock. Even the little Filipino boys called him *Juan el toro*.

Shawn, the Bullock was a fine, handsome figger av a man, and black bad Irish from heels to hair—the scum and offscourin's av a family av Fenians and moonlighters. But he had a philandherin' way wit' him; so when the pack masther fired him, he took up wit' a fine-lookin' mestizo girrl from the nort' country. Faith, he married her, and went to farmin' hemp on her plantation. 'Twas said she was a rich woman wit' two hundhred taos, and a fine hacienda that'd been built by her German father.

To make a long story short, she was

in child when the troops pressed up the Manila & Dagupan Railway, and met the insurrectos at Shawn, the Bullock's wife's plantation. 'Twas his own fault, but he never forgave us the wild shell from Dyer's batth'ry that dhropped into the hacienda, and left him a single man and childless. 'Twas his own fault, I say, for he could aisy have got her safe-conduct t'rough both lines. However, that's neither here nor there. Gawd knows she was dear to him, for all her bastard blood, and had she lived, she'd have bore him a child; so he swore, be the nine gods av war, as the mestizo girrl lay dyin' in his arrms, to cast his lot wit' her people. The light had gone out av the wurrld for Shawn, the Bullock, and he wanted to die; so he buried her, gathered his taos about him, equipped them as best he could, and took the field agin' us. Afther all, ye can hardly blame him, for wild he was at heart, and somethin' had bruk in his head. The native provisional governmint give him a colonel's commission, and sint him into the south to take over the flower av the insurrecto army—trained men who'd serrved under the Spaniards and deserted by regimints wit' their equipment in the rebellion av '96.

But all av this was news to me before I first met Shawn, the Bullock, and at that I didn't see him at all, at all, but held speech wit' him wan black night in the Pasay jungle. We'd been exchangin' complimints wit' our service pistols, each shootin' at the flashes from the other's gun. Then we got talkin', and faith I'm thinkin' 'twas the brogue that saved the both av us.

I was a djooty sergeant in the infanthry in them days, and we was howldin' down a line av enthrenchmints from the bay up t'rough the woods around Pasay to the open plain foreninst San Pedro Macarti, doin' outpost twice a week, and the rest av the time playin' poker in the trenches, atin' white bread and fresh meat, wit' the Manila *Times* delivered on the line every mornin'! That was sogerin' on active serrvice for ye. Lawton was busy to the nort', and all we had to do was to howld the sout' line from the bay to the Pasig, and wait for more throops to come down from the States, so's we could advance into Batangas.

For two mortial months 'twas a summer's holiday wit' us, and then all at wanst things comminced popping. There was five t'ousand amigos out in the bush foreninst us, wit' their base at Paranaque, and 'twas aisy to see some lad wit' brains had took them over. Though none av us was officially notified av his succession to command we were not long in findin' out we had a white man to deal wit'. He must have took charge av a Tuesday, for a Wednesday mornin', bright and early, he dhruv in our outposts as they was never dhruv in before. They come tearin' into the main guard wit' wild tales about a white man leadin' the gu-gus agin' us; said they could hear his voice above the shootin', cursin' his men and beggin' them in English to follow him and shoot from the shouldher, instead av the hip!

However, be the grave av the divil and the forethought av the commandin' officer, we'd cleared the jungle for two hundred yards in front av our lines, so we waited till they'd come to the edge av the clearin', when we let them have it. Faith, 'twas all that saved us, for they was five to our wan, and 'twas hard wurrk we had to keep them from crossin' that clearin' and mixin' it wit' us. Had we let the bush grow up to our front door 'twould have been a different story to tell.

I was the noncom in charrge av the comp'ny outpost detail that night, for when the fightin' was over late in the afthernoon, out we went ag'in. 'Twas comin' dark when we sneaked out, and I could see me lads were a bit jumpy at l'avin' the trenches for a dirty wet night in the bush beyant the main guard. There was dead scatthered around in the weeds at the edge av the clearin', and 'twas not pleasant, I'll admit, in the dark, although we knew the inimy had fallen back on Paranaque. However, wit' that white man in charge we had to look for the unexpected and be prepared for it, and I knew the sin-

thries'd be crackin' away at everything that moved that night, and a lot av things that couldn't move; so I spoke to the detail, remindin' them that the men av the main guard were tired and sleepy afther the day's wurrk, and to do no shootin' at the first pariah dog that went scoutin' by in the grass—for there bein' dead about I knew the dogs'd be out.

"If ye must shoot on outpost, men," says I, "let there be something to show for it. See to it," says I, "if ye shoot at all, that ye show me a chicken, a dog, a horse, a caribao, or a Filipino in the mornin'. Shoot if ye like, but be prepared to show me something for it or take the consekens av me wrath."

And wit' that I counted off the reliefs, and took two men out and placed them on a Cossack post in a clump av young bananas. I give them their ordhers, and was l'avin' them, when out in the bush, not forty feet away, I heard a man tear loose a fine healthy sneeze.

I turned, pullin' me six-shooter in case av close wurrk, and says I: "Who's there?"

There was no answer, so I challenged ag'in. I was in doubt whether 'twas a wounded man overlooked be the natives afther the fightin', or a bushwhacker layin' to snipe the outpost, and I made up me mind to find out. So I challenged ag'in in Spanish, and ag'in in Tagalog. I'd a German named Myers on post, and he challenged in German. Still there was no answer, so I cut loose wit' me Colt's in the direction av the sneeze; and when me gun was impty a fine big Kerry brogue answered me.

"Ye omadhaun," says the voice, "why didn't ye challinge me in the Gaelic? Do ye not come from Galway where 'tis still spoken? And be the same token ye are not practicin' what ye're preachin'. You've shot at me six times, and what have ye to show for it?"

"Glory be," says I, "but 'tis an Irishman I've been tryin' to kill, no less. Ye dhrunken gossoon, come out av that, for dhrunk ye must be to be prowlin' in the bush foreninst a nervous Cossack post, and tossin' yer lip to the sergeant av the guard."

Wit' that he sneezed ag'in. "Be the great gun av Athlone," says he, "I've caught a terrible cowld in the head."

"What in the name av common sinse ails ye, man?" says I. "Come outer that."

"I was creased on the top av me sinful head in the action this afthernoon, and I've laid here in this wet bush and caught cowld."

"Who are ye?" says I, for I knew he could not be of ours. I knew every man in the regimint.

"I'm Colonel Malachi Fitzgerald, av the army av the Filipino Republic," says he, as cool as ice.

"D'ye mane to tell me ye're not an American soger?" says I.

"I do that," says he. "I'm an Irish soger, bad luck to ye, and I owe allegiance to nothin' white. Confound ye, ye nipped the tip av me right ear wit' wan of your shots, and 'tis worrse nor a bee sting."

Sure I could not believe the man! "And are ye fightin' wit' the hombres, Malachi Fitzgerald?" says I.

"Why not?" says he. "Am I not a free agent? Fightin's me trade, and I owe the United States nothin' but a black hate for the sorrer they put upon me this day six weeks. What right have ye here, except to rob a lot av poor divils av a counthry that belongs to thim an' which they'd have took back from the Spaniards if yer hellion av a counthry had only kep' her hands off six weeks longer!"

"I'll not argue politics wit' ye, Fitzgerald," says I, "for I have nayther the time nor the inclination to banter worrds wit' the likes av ye. Come in outer that, now, like a sinsible man, and don't get yerself kilt mixin' in a fight that's none av yer business. Sure, don't ye know if they'd been wort' fightin' for they wouldn't have run off and left you, their colonel, behind them, to catch cowld?"

"Bad cess to them!" says he. "I must teach them to howld their heads. 'Twas that chicken-hearted ordherly av mine that left me here. He run off at the

first volley. Well, never mind. The weight av a cl'anin' rod across his black back I'll give him this night."

Well, sir, the thoughts av a white man, and an Irishman at that, leadin' a wild lot av Filipino sogers agin' his own race dhruv me into a dancin' rage.

"Ye dirrty renegid," says I, "ye're a disgrace to yer ancesthry. 'Tis more belike ye're a deserter from our service, and if ye are, may the Lord 'a' mercy on yer sowl, for that's treason and a firin' squad for you. Come out av that bush, ye Sassenach, or I'll pot ye where ye lie."

"I'm sorry," says he, chucklin' like a wild divil, "but I could not think av surrenderin' while I live, least av all to a Galway man. So, wit' yer permission, sergeant dear, I'll stay in the bush."

"Dear knows," says I, "I don't want to kill ye in cowld blood, but before I do, answer me this: Was it you that led that bunch agin' us this mornin'. There was talk from the outposts of a white man's voice givin' orders."

"I did," says he, "and bloody well they carried themselves, do ye not think so? Good little men they'll make, when I've had a chanst to drill them in open order, and break them av that vile habit av shootin' from the hip. When we dhruv the outposts in, I ordered a follow-up charge wit'out a stop. I did not get it, for there's jealously among me officers. If I'd had that charge as I planned it—if that dirrty little Major Alphonse Quibal hadn't disobeyed me orders be haltin' at the edge av the clearin' to lay down and fire by volleys, I'd 'a' had ye, sergeant. I'd have had me headquarthers in the Hotel d'Orient this night, and takin' me pick av the loot av Manila."

He was bad Irish—I knew that—but because he was me own kind av people I hesitated to open fire on him, for all that 'twas wicked av me to stand there talkin' to him. And while I was thinking what I'd do he sneezed ag'in.

"Begorry," says he, "I have a head like a slop bucket. The divil himself only knows how long I've been lyin' here. What time is it, ye Galway man?"

"How can I tell—in the dark?" says I.

"Strike a light and look," says he. "I'll not pot ye, and besides, I've a notion I'd like to have a look at ye."

I saw that, like the fox he was, he was puttin' me on soft ground. If I struck a light he could see me and kill me, while he himself lay snug in the black av the bush. And for all that I had a desire to try him out. 'Twas a foolish notion, and Gawd knows why I did it, but I struck a match and looked at me watch.

"Seven o'clock," says I, and flopped on me face wit' some seventh instinct, just as a bullet lifted me campaign hat off me head. The match wint out, and I rolled six feet away and lay as still as a mouse. He thought he had me, and I could hear him chucklin'.

"There's another paid on yer heavy debt, darlint," says he.

"Is it, avic?" says I. "Well, it isn't, ye unmannerly scrub."

He swore at that, and then he chuckled ag'in. "No matther," says he. "Betther luck next time. So 'tis seven o'clock, eh? I've been layin' out here a matther av three hours. Ye can thank this blood for yer life. It keeps tricklin' into me eyes, or I'd have got ye that time. And what might yer name be at reveille?"

"Me name is Jawn Ryan," says I civilly, for all me wild rage. "I've heard av your kind av Irish, but never have I met your like before. Yer black to the core av your black heart. I've ordered ye outer that bush. For the last time, now, will ye come?"

"I will not," says he. "Do you come and get me, ye Galway pup." And he blew his nose. Wan av me sintries blazed away at the sound.

"Cease firin'," says I, "for this is a personal matther. For the sake av me race I'll wash me own dirrty linen. Cease firin'."

"Be all means," says Malachi Fitzgerald. "I'm behind a rock and 'tis a waste av ammunition."

The man puzzled me. "Then what do ye intend doin', Fitzgerald?" says I.

"I'm goin' to sit here and talk wit' you for five minutes until me head clears a bit, and then I'll be off. Ye're a brave, cool man afther me own heart and I love ye for it, though I'd kill ye for the sake av the uniform ye wear. I'm weary associatin' wit' me social inferiors, and a divil a white man have I talked to in two months. Be the way, Sergeant Ryan, what's the news av the wide, wide wurrld? 'Tis a long time since I've seen a daily paper."

"Ye can get yer news av the wide wurrld from the provost marshal general when I turn you over to him," says I, and I reloaded me pistol, cocked it, and took a step forward, for I'd made up me mind to go in and bring him out, dead or alive.

"Ryan," says he, "you're an unmannerly skut, so ye are, and I'd give a hundred pesos to batter the face off ye wit' me two fists."

I kept coming on.

"Stand back," says he; "you're a brave man, and I cannot help likin' ye for it, but ye've your back to the clearin' and a bit av starlight and I can see ye faintly. All's fair in war, me pepperbox, and wit' wan shot I could kill ye where ye stand. But I'll not kill ye, Ryan. I'll make a bargain wit' ye."

"Ye'll make no bargain wit' me," says I, "for I'll kill ye if I can, ye mad dog."

"Ye fool," says he, "I'll have ye now, wit'out shootin', if ye will have it so."

I laughed at that, for well I knew his gun was impty or jammed to earn me his consideration. I come on. There was a little rustlin', so I knew he was on his feet and I fired.

"Take that, ye brave man," says he, and flipped a knife at me. It took me high in the muscles av the right shouldher, and hung there, as Malachi Fitzgerald took off through the bush in the direction av his army. I blazed away at him, but sure 'twas no matther av use at all, at all, for all that the sinthries fanned the air around him.

Soon the rustlin' and crashin' in the bushes ceased, and then that rich Kerry brogue come boomin' out av the dark two hundred yards away.

"Ryan," says he, "are ye hurrted?"

"I have your knife in me shoulder, thank ye kindly," says I, "but 'tis only a scratch. Still, if I live ye'll pay dear for this day's wurrk, Fitzgerald. I'll take ye yet, and I'll take ye alive, and when I do, Gawd help you. I'll wather cure you and spread-eagle you, and strip yer hide from your body wit' a cl'anin' rod. Hear me, Fitzgerald! I'll get you yet, and the day I do you'll currse the day your mother give you birth."

"Shawn, the Bullock," says he, "is always at home to his inimies. Ye're a spiteful man, and ye may go to Hades in a hand basket," and wit' that he was off for good and all, and I saw him no more for three long years. But when I did, I kept me wurrd. I took Shawn, the Bullock, and I took him alive!

I had, in the manewhile, learned all about Shawn, the Bullock, beside hearing from him more than wanst in a professional way. Wanst I got a personal message from him. Two privates av the Third Artillery was scooped in be Shawn's men, and taken before him. He welkimed them kindly, had them up to dinner wit' him at his headquarthers, drank wit' them, beat them at crib, and kept them by him for a month, at the ind av which time he towld them he'd tired av their company, and was about to turn them over to the tinder mercies av his friend, Major Alphonse Quibal.

"The major," says he, "has a takin' way wit' him."

"So I've heard," says wan av the 'tillery privates, "but you're no sport to pass the buck to the major. Why do ye not order out yer firin' squad, and have done wit' us? Ye low-down murderer, I could find it in me heart to be shot decently be even a white renegid, but you're not even a decent renegid."

"Bully for you," says Shawn, the Bullock. "I'll tell ye now what I'll do. I'll fight ye, man to man, to see will I let ye go or shoot ye like dacent men."

"Fair enough," says the 'tillery private, and they stripped to each other and went at it, and the 'tillery private

knocked out Shawn, the Bullock, in the eighth round.

When he come to, he escorted them to his outposts, shook hands wit' them, and turned them loose.

"And if ye would do me the small favor," says he, "look up an Irish sergeant in the Fourteenth," says he, "give him me complimints, and express me tindher consideration for the state av his right shouldher." And he sent them back under a guard and a flag av truce.

That was Shawn, the Bullock, for ye! Wicked as a mad dog he was, but kindly and wholesome when the humor gripped him, and he had a queer code av honor, all his own. If he liked ye he followed his code, and if he disliked ye he was worse nor a rattlesnake.

Sure I enjoyed the joke av the man, so I sint him back a letther be a young native bhoy, thankin' him kindly for his sympathy, and advisin' him I'd drop in on him wan av these fine days, and in the m'anwhile would he be so good as to sind me the countersign, so's I'd have no throuble gainin' access to his quarthers.

Begorry, what d'ye suppose he replied? Faith, he sint me back a note be the same messenger.

"Come, Ryan," says he, "and let the passwurrd be 'Faugh-a-ballagh'!"

D'ye know what that manes? Ye do not? "Faugh-a-ballagh" is the Gaelic for "Clear the road"—the wild cry av the Irish regimints goin' into action. Gawd help the throops told off to hear that cry and stop an Irish rush! 'Tis seldom done.

In the late shank av '99 I left the infanthry for the cavalry and was ordered from Luzon into the southern islands for service agin' the Moros, so I heard no more av Shawn, the Bullock. But in the fall av 1902 we come back to Luzon, and they sint us down into the south Camarines, where the last simblance av organized revolt was still busy raisin' the divil undher Shawn, the Bullock. He was a ladrone chief now, preyin' on friend and foe alike, and wit' his band av about five hundred he'd been cut off from escape into the nort' ag'in; so a regimint av United States volunteers and a squadron av mounted cavalry was delegated to break up, capture, or destroy his command.

We'd been bone idle for three months, and faith we were glad av the detail, for well we knew the fightin' would be good wit' Shawn, the Bullock. His men was the pick and survival av five years of guerrilla warfare—men who'd played the game so long it had got into the bones av them, and they couldn't give it up while they had a gun in their hands. It seemed like the dispensation av Providence that B throop was sint, and a happy man I was, for I had the top cutter's diamond on me be then; and if I could, be great good luck, capture Shawn, the Bullock, 'twas but a step into a commission in the Philippine Scouts or the Constabulary. And back av that I hated the man, for he'd brought disgrace on our blood. I felt the backslidin' av Shawn, the Bullock, like a personal affront, and I wanted to even it up. Besides, I had a scar in me right shouldher.

Faith we saw service in that little campaign, chasin' that brave, misguided bunch av wild divils, and the man that led them. Shawn, the Bullock, was as elusive as a flea—here to-day, and gone to-morrow, wearin' us out wit' runnin' fights and night attacks, till man and horrse we was as thin as skewers and sick av the job. If we routed him out of a barrio at daybreak, faith he'd have swung around in back of us be sunset, and the buglers'd be blowin' taps next mornin' over a couple av the finest.

It stands to reason Shawn, the Bullock, was touched in the head, or he'd have come in like a sinsible man and laid down his arms. The worst that could have happened to him would have been deportation. We plastered the Camarines wit' handbills, offerin' a reward av a thousand *pesos oro* for him, dead or alive, and he might have known that sooner or later wan av his own men would bolo him for the blood money; that wanst white men set out to get him, get him they would in the long run. But he was a wild, wild man, fearful of neither man nor devil, and

'twas plain he meant to fight to the finish and die, gun in hand.

The rainy season come on, with Shawn, the Bullock still at large, so we wint into camp on some high ground to wait for betther weather, for our auld man was not for killin' his men hikin' them through mud and wather to their buttocks, and the throop horses was thin and ga'nt and sufferin' from mud fever. So we threw out our outposts and rested up for a month, and at the ind av that time a deserter from Shawn, the Bullock's band come sneakin' in wit' the news that Shawn had gone into seclusion for a rest himself, and to gather a commissary for the dry season. And he named a town full thirrty miles to the south.

Afther listenin' to the deserter's story, the auld man turned him over to the guard for safe-keepin' and ordered Captain Johnny O'Flynn to take B throop and reconnoiter Shawn's position. We left in the pourin' rain, afther dark, guided be a Spaniard who knew every foot av that counthry, and be daylight we was tucked away in a wooded swale two miles from the barrio where the inimy was supposed to be restin' aisy wit' no thought av attack.

We rested there, afther our night's march, and in the late afthernoon I took three throopers and set out to get the exact lay av the counthry to the south and east, while Johnny O'Flynn wit' three more throopers scouted the west and nort'.

I was into Shawn, the Bullock's stronghold before I knew it. Out av the teak and mahogany forest I rode, into an open space foreninst a little barrio, stockaded, and perched high on the shouldher av a young mountain. Bechune the town and us run a broad, deep river, and the far bank, outside the stockade, was fortified wit' rice bags filled wit' sand. There was a bridge acrosst the river into the town, but 'twas a wooden bridge, and well I knew Shawn, the Bullock would drench it wit' ile and fire it if attacked from the front be infanthry. The approach to the bridge was guarded be a Nordenfeldt rapid-fire gun, chuckin' little half-pound shrapnel, although how Shawn, the Bullock got that gun is a mystery to this day.

Shawn had picked his position wit' the eye av a born soger, and well I knew that wit' at least three hundred good men behind that river trench—for three hundred the deserter informed us Shawn still had wit' him—'twould require more nor our flyin' column to take him.

Attack him as he would might, front, or rear, 'twould have been plain murder to send a t'ousand men agin' him wit'out a mountain battery to shell him out, and 'tillery we did not have and could not get until the dry season. Shawn, the Bullock had figured on this, and here he was, as bowld as a magpie, restin', and feedin', and recruitin', and drillin' for the next campaign. The only reasonable way to attack him was from the nort' and west, and that meant to storm the hills in back av the barrio, and the price to pay would be heavy.

Well, sir, I had just time to take this all in, when who should walk out on the bridge and stand leanin' agin' the rail, lookin' down into the river, but Shawn, the Bullock himself. 'Twas a fair shot at three hundred yards, and one av me troopers could not resist. He whanged away, and missed, and in two jumps Shawn was into the trenches at the head av the bridge.

I wheeled me horse. "Out av this," says I, "ye fool! Ye've stirred up a hornet's nest," and away we wint, the "punk-punk-punk" of the Nordenfelt followin' us, and the shrapnel screamin' over us to bust in the woods beyant. Faith we did not linger, for Shawn, the Bullock was twistin' the crank av that gun, and 'twas bad luck to let him get the range.

He quit shootin' when we was out av sight, and 'twas then that a wild notion come into me head to dare the divil in his den. I swung Jack Dempsey about and galloped back into the clearin'. Shawn, the Bullock was standin' on top av the trench beside the gun, and I give him the Irish war cry:

"Faugh-a-ballagh!"

I could ha' swore he was delighted to hear me.

"Welkim to Kilkenny," says he. "Welkim, Ryan," and he took off his big straw hat and bowed to me. I shook me fist at him, and wint, and j'ined me throopers, but I'd let him know who he had to deal wit', whether I led the attack on him or not. 'Twas a hard task, but I meant to schame out a plan to get him and endeavor to enthuse Captain Johnny O'Flynn wit' it.

I had the plan av the town in me head, and I itched to get in to it and haul Shawn, the Bullock out be the scruff av the neck. Let me but wanst get into this barrio he called Kilkenny, and wit' thirty men I'd wipe out his three hundred. To demoralize guerrilla throops ye must carry the fight home to thim, and I knew this.

I reported to Captain Johnny and found him lyin' in a litter made av two long bamboo saplin's and canvas horse covers, slung bechune two throop horrses. Poor bhoy! He'd run into wan av Shawn, the Bullock's outposts, and had a Mauser t'rough both hips.

He listened to me, and then, says he: "Ye will take over command av the throop, Sergeant Ryan, and we'll go home outer this," so the bugler sounded boots and saddles, and we jogged off, windin' down the trail to the nort' av Kilkenny, as Shawn, the Bullock called his barrio, and along the east bank av the same river that flowed in front av his trenches.

We was movin' along at a fast walk. 'Twas half an hour before sunset, and we were about to leave the river road and strike acrosst countbry, when wan av the advance guard pulled up, jerked his horse back from an open space on the river bank, and held up his hand. I halted the throop and rode forward.

"What is it ye see?" says I to the advance guard.

"A bull train comin' up the road a mile ahead and on the other bank av the river," says he.

"Are the carts loaded?" says I.

"Look for yerself, sarge," says he, and I looked.

Sure enough the advance guard was right. A mile away and just comin' into sight in a big bind in the river come a procession av caribao bulls hauling big boxed carts piled high wit' something, and what that something was I was at small loss to understand. In a twinkling av an eye I'd made up me mind 'twas rice, bound for Shawn, the Bullock's garrison, and in another twinkle av the same eye I'd me plan av action ready to put into execution.

I rode up to Captain Johnny's litther, and explained me schame to him, axin' his permission to go ahead wit' it. He give me wan look and held out his hand.

"Go where glory waits ye, Jawn," says he. Sure I was an auld soger, and he unbint to me sometimes. "If ye have luck ye'll get Shawn, the Bullock, and if ye have anything less he'll get you. Take what men ye want, go and Gawd bless ye," and he held out his hand. "'Tis the proud captain I am," says he, "to have a top cutter like you."

I called the second djooty sergeant to me—a rattlin' fine soger named Jim Hall.

"Jim," says I, "I'm goin' to take thirty-five men and cross the river. I'll send five av them back wit' the horses and mayhap a prisoner or two, and then do you take command av the rest av the throop, and like the sinsible man go straight to hospital wit' Captain Johnny. Ye might make a brief report to the colonel, tellin' him I'm off to tackle Shawn, the Bullock in the mornin', and that if we're not all kilt we'll be back directly it's over."

"Ye lunatic," says he, "what do ye mane?"

"If I towld you, Jim," says I, "ye'd know as much as yer top sergeant. Take what men I leave ye to guard Johnny O'Flynn," and wit' that I went along the line, pickin' out a man here and a man there—the flowers av the flock they was, and marksmen all. Then I lined them up to wan side, and when the bull train had disappeared from sight in the big bind av the river, but still comin' toward us, says I to Jim Hall:

"Wait here until I sind back the horses," and wit' that I ordhered me

detail into the river. Away we wint, up to the horses' bellies, and in a jiffy we were swimmin' for it, every man Jack out av the saddle, howldin' wit' one hand while they swam wit' the horses. We got acrosst wit'out a hitch, and was dismounted and waitin' for that bull train when it come into sight.

'Twas accompanied be an escort av twinty av Shawn, the Bullock's men, and praise be, we took them wit'out firin' a shot to arouse the neighborhood. As I suspicioned, the carts was loaded wit' rice, so I piled the rice out on the road, and into the fifteen big deep box carts I loaded thirrty av the finest troopers Gawd Almighty ever created. The guns and ammunition av the prisoners we threw into the river, and the prisoners themselves we made swim the river to Jim Hall wit' the horses, and when all were safe back on the east bank again, away I wint wit' me thirty dismounted throopers to call on Shawn, the Bullock!

I'd kept the Chino bullwhackers av each cart, and wit' the muzzle av a carbine convanient to his kidneys, divil a Chino was that foolish as to disobey orders.

Was I worried? Divil a hair. Somehow or other, findin' meself dismounted and depindin' on me two feet to take me out av the reach av Shawn, the Bullock's wrath in case I failed to surprise him, only made me the more confident, for I'd been raised in the infanthry, and say what ye will 'tis the infanthry that's the backbone av the service.

I explained me plan av campaign as we jolted along.

"Whin daylight comes, lads," says I, "ye will lay clost in the boxes av the carts until I give the wurrd, and be the same token 'twill be a wurrd ye never heard before. 'Twill be a Gaelic worrd: 'Faugh-a-ballagh,' m'anin' 'Clear the road!' See to it that ye take quick, clane sights and clear it wit' magazine fire. 'Twill be every man for himself and the divil take the hindmost! And ye will oblige me be l'avin' Shawn, the Bullock to me."

'Twas dark whin we started, and as ye know, every native goes to bed wit' the chickens. So when I was a mile from Kilkenny I halted, threw out a guard, tied me Chino bullwhackers and their wather buffaloes to the carts, and waited like a sinsible man for daylight. 'Twas me intintion to ride in the first cart, and I picked me out an intelligent coolie for a spokesman. He could speak Chinese, Spanish, and Tagalog wit' equal proficiency, and I learned that he had small love for Shawn, the Bullock, and his crowd, for they had commandeered his rice and three av his bull carts.

I *hablared* him well that night, schoolin' him in his answer to the challenge av Shawn, the Bullock's sinthry on the road leadin' into Kilkenny. When challenged he was to answer: "Friends wit' rice for the comandante Americano," for I figured they'd be expectin' the rice, and that it would be aisy to divert suspicion av the fact that instead av rice the carts was loaded wit' death and destruction for Shawn, the Bullock.

When the gray comminced to show in the east, I got under way, for the sun comes up like a shot in the tropics, and I had to time the arrival to win past the outposts, while yet it was fairly dark.

Sure enough we were challenged a half mile outside Kilkenny.

"*Parada! Quien vive!*" says a voice from the deep shade av a tree, and a blithe little cutthroat steps out into the middle of the road.

"*Amigos con arroz para soldados Fillipinas,*" or worrds to that effect says me trained Chino, and pulls up his caribao.

"*Bien,*" says the cutthroat, and stepping carelessly up to the cart he takes a look in to satisfy himself. But I'd had me eye on him t'rough a crack in the box, and the minute his little black mug appeared over the edge av the box, I druv me right to the p'int av his jaw and knocked him cowld. Wit' the help av a private and the Chino's sweat cloth we gagged him, and bound him hand and foot, and laid him in the cart, while I waited for Shawn, the Bullock to give me the signal to advance.

And presintly I heard it. 'Twas first call for reveille in Kilkenny, for Shawn, the Bullock was a military man, and did things accordin' to the regulations. Thinks I to meself: "We'll move along now, for be the time we enter the town the garrison will be lined up in the calle at reveille, and for quick shootin' and splindid results, give me brown men in comp'ny formation. So I nudged me Chino wit' the butt in the small av his naked back, and away we wint, wit' me praisin' the saints I was on the right side av the river, and spared the crool necessity av stormin' the hills in back or takin' the bridge in front under the nose av that wicked little Nordenfeldt gun. I'd instructed the two men in the last cart—I'd placed them there be reason av the fact that they'd both served wan enlistmint in the 'tillery—that when the ball opened, they was to take two Chinos and run for the head av the bridge, where they'd find the Nordenfeldt. Two more men was to cover them while they took it, and help them bring it into action in the main street. I had everything planned to the last detail, and me plan was to light into them like the wrath av Gawd and drive them up the street *away* from the gun, and then shell them as they went.

Assembly sounded as we entered the town at the outskirts, and lookin' ahead and down the street through the crack in the front av me box, I could see three comp'nies av ladrones linin' up for roll call, and be all the luck av fools and drunken sailors they was fallin' in wit'out arms!

'Twas good shootin' light be now, and down the gray street we come slowly. At the door av a big shack I could see Shawn, the Bullock standin' wit' two native officers. I knew him at wanst wit' his back turned toward me, although I'd never laid eyes on him at close range. He was wearin' Spanish infanthry boots and a Luger automatic pistol.

Straight past the massed gu-gu we drew wit'out suspicion, for 'twas plain we'd been passed be the outpost, and not a sowl questioned our frightened bullwhackers sittin' up on the front av the carts, while we lay in the boxes covered wit' rice mattin'.

We was abreast the middle comp'ny, and the buglers—four av them—was soundin' off:

Oh, I can't get 'em up, I can't get 'em up,
I can't get 'em up
In the mornin'.

"Musha, can ye not?" says I, and I rose up in me cart wit' the screech av a wild man.

"Faugh-a-ballagh," says I, "Faugh-a-ballagh!" And at the cry me throopers rose up and cut loose wit' magazine fire into the brown av Shawn, the Bullock's sogiery. Wit' wild cries they broke ranks, l'avin' a windrow av dead and wounded where they'd stood. Straight for their guns they wint.

"Afther them, lads," says I, "give them no time to form," and pullin' me six-shooter, I lepped down into the street. Wit' drawn pistols me thirty come leppin' afther me, like the great soger bhoys they was, and I looked back wanst and saw me ind men breakin' for the bridge and the rapid-fire gun.

'Twas a riot. Up the street we druv them like cattle—the scum! Some few got their Mausers, and these Shawn, the Bullock called upon to follow him. I saw him draw his Luger automatic and dodge around the fringe av the howlin' mob of divils we was slaughterin'.

"Faugh-a-ballagh," he yelled, and fired at me.

Then the heads av the mob got bechune us, and he stood for a minute pressin' onward toward me wit' the squealin' gu-gu, and I saw his upraised right hand claspin' the big automatic. Fair out of the scrimmage it stuck, and I remimbered I was a sharpshooter, and the distance was only fifty feet, so I took a fair sight and fired, tearin' through the ham av one thumb a little, and liftin' the gun clear out av his hand. 'Twas a pretty shot, though I do say it who shouldn't, and nine times out av ten 'twould have meant the loss of a hand. But barrin' a slight cut along the ham av his thumb, and bruises on his fingers where they clasped his

shattered gun, Shawn, the Bullock was scarcely hurted.

"Faugh-a-ballagh, ye black divil," says I, "I towld ye I'd take ye alive and I'll do it yet."

He heard me and smiled at that. The mob had swept by him now, wit' my lads afther them like sheep dogs. I looked back, and the rear guard was turnin' into the calle draggin' the Nordenfelt wit' them, and I give the order to cease firin'. The bugler blew the call, and the fire slackened away.

"To the side av the street," says I, "and give the lads room wit' the gun. To the side av the street wit' you, Shawn, the Bullock, or be kilt wit' yer own rapid-firer."

"Thank you," says he, and hopped aside, as the shrapnel commenced tearin' up the street, and the bhoys comminced poppin' away wit' their carbines ag'in, all av us fallin' back at the same time and rallyin' around the gun, Shawn, the Bullock wit' us and him unarmed.

"Go afther them, lads," says I. "Follow 'em up and wipe 'em out for good and all. I'll care for Shawn, the Bullock," and away they wint, leavin' us two facin' each other.

When the tide av the ruction had gone by, says he to me, circlin' around me:

"Ye'd take me alive, would ye?" says he, and his bloody hands opened and closed.

I took a fair look at him. He was my height and age, a bit broader ner me in the chest and longer in the arms, but too light be half in the legs. He was a fair match and he was unarmed, and while I took shame to meself to bate him wit' the butt, he was dangerous and I wanted him alive. So in I wint, butts to the front, lookin' to drive the breath out av him wit' a quick poke in the belly and thin stow him away, convanient for handlin', wit' a light blow on the temple. He saw me purpose, and well he knew be the way I whirled me carbine I'd serrved in the infanthry and would not be denied. He circled around me.

"Chuck away that gun, Ryan," says he. "Ye've got me—ye've wiped out me command—now give me the same chanst I gave yer friend in the Thirrd Artillery. I fought him for his life, so I did, and he licked me. You're not Irish, or ye'll do the same for me now. I will not surrender, so let us fight as Gawd made us, head to head and toe to toe. Ye must take me alive, for I swear I will not surrender to ye, and be the honor av me mother I'll not foul ye. Man, man, ye're a great soger and I love ye for it. I might ha' known this, I might ha' known. Who but you would have thought to come in the carts?"

I swung at him wit' the butt, for I did not trust him. I missed, and quick as a flash he'd stepped in and planted his right in me mustache. He was out ag'in before I could recover.

"Ye fool," says I, "why in blazes didn't ye clinch me and fight for the gun?"

But he only grinned at me through his caribao mustache, wit' the black eyes av him dancin' like a divil's. And at that exasperating grin I wint wild.

"I'm too light in the legs for a rough and tumble," says he. "Give me my chanst, Ryan. Let me fight ye fair, and if I whip ye, give me a half hour's start and hunt me down."

"So be it, Malachi Fitzgerald," says I, and I tossed me carbine behind me. Me belt wit' the ammunition and six-shooter followed, and Shawn, the Bullock put up his dukes and led.

'Twas over in five minutes. Gawd knows I fought that man the best I knew how, and he cut me to strings and ribbons. We was alone in the street together, wit' the dead and the wounded, and the B throop men was in the far ind av the barrio, howlin' and shootin' still at the natives who'd jumped into the river and was swimmin' away.

But av that I knew nothin' till later on. I was too busy wit' Shawn, the Bullock. We wint at it hammer and tongs, and I mind me I'd dropped him wanst.

"I have ye now," says I.

"Oh, have ye now?" says he, and in

a flash he was up and clinched. He hung to me till his head cleared; then, as we broke, he reached me wit' left and right, and the sun set in a hurry, for all that it hadn't risen as yet.

'Twas the punk-punk-punk av the Nordenfeldt shellin' the bush that I heard, as I come to, on me hands and knees, alone wit' the mess in the main street av Kilkenny, and when I got to me feet me carbine, pistol, and belt was gone, and so was Shawn, the Bullock.

Mind ye, the whole fight, from the time we'd entered the town until I come to, hadn't lasted seven minutes. I picked me way among the bodies, and reeled uptown in the direction av the firin', and arrivin' I found me thirty laddybucks alive, but scratched up a bit here and there. The half av Shawn, the Bullock's men lay in Kilkenny, and the guns and bolos was ours. We sprayed the bush wit' shrapnel while the ammunition held out, and then I wint down to the river and washed the signs av battle off me face, for I was a tired man and most unhappy.

The town was ours, and the guns was ours, and we'd broke the back av the rebellion in the Camarines, but sure what good was all that wit'out Shawn, the Bullock? We looked for him among the dead, but he was not there, and the tears come into me eyes at the thought av what I'd done—chucked away me commission in the scouts or the constabulary to take out me racial spite on a man wit' me fists. I was that unhappy and mad I broke down an' cried like a child, for I was filled wit' shame for me mornin's wurrk.

Wan av the lads come up and tapped me kindly on the back.

"Buck up, sarge," says he. "'Tis the fortunes av war. If he's gone he's gone and it can't be helped. What'll we do next?"

"Ye might have the kindness to blow out me brains," says I, "for not only is Shawn, the Bullock gone, but my carbine, and belt, and six-shooter has gone wit' him. 'Tis a disgrace I'll never get over."

"What did he look like, sarge?" says another lad, comin' up. "Was he wearin' tan Spanish infanthry boots?"

"He was," says I, "and now he's gone."

"He'll not go far, I'm thinkin'," says the lad. "I saw a native officer leadin' a horse out av a stable yard back there a bit, and I dropped him where he stood. Come along and let us have a look."

I took heart av hope at that, and says I to the corpril: "Do you take half a dozen men, go to the head av the town, and set it afire. There's always ammunition concealed in the thatch, and mayhap a ladrone or two in the houses. The rest av you come wit' me and we'll look for Shawn, the Bullock. Where was it ye saw this man ye tumbled?" says I to the private.

"Faith I was too busy to mark him down, sarge," says he, "but we can scatther and look for him."

"Look, thin," says I, and away we wint.

I was pokin' around be meself in the rear av a line av nipa shacks, whin I heard some wan shoutin'. So I ran down the street and up an alley, and found a dozen of me lads in a stable yarrd. Lyin' on his back in the yarrd was Shawn, the Bullock, and sure it needed but wan looked at him to tell me he'd had his billet, and was on his way. He was alive, but he'd been mortally hit and was goin' fast. Me equipmint lay on the ground close by, and he grinned as I come up and knelt beside him.

"Well, Ryan," says he, "ye've kept your wurrd. Ye've took me alive."

Now, 'tis a strange thing, but at the sight av poor Shawn, the Bullock lyin' there helpless and weak, I could not find it in me heart to feel plazed wit' meself, and as I took his limp hand in mine, I thanked Gawd *my* bullet hadn't done for him.

He lay there, lookin' up at me wit' his bowld black eyes, and smilin' at me.

"Arrah, but 'tis you are the fine soger bhoy, agra," says he, and pressed me hand. "'Tis an honor to have fought ye, and a greater honor not to have sur-

rendered to ye—for surrender I never will."

"Plaze yerself, Shawn," says I, and at that moment there come the cracklin' and poppin' av burnin' bamboo.

"Are ye burnin' Kilkenny?" says he.

"Aye," says I, and he closed his eyes, as if in pain. "'Twill not burn well," says he, brokenlike, "for the bamboo is green and the nipa is wet. Sure I built Kilkenny meself, and named it so for the sake av me blood—and self-respect, for I'm the last provisional president av the Filipino republic, self-elected—and I wanted a capital to remind me av home, if only be the name."

I saw that he was touched in the head and I felt sorry for him, for barrin' that crook in his brain he was quite a man. He opened his eyes presintly and looked up at me ag'in.

"I'm dyin,' Ryan," he whispers, "sind yer men away and l'ave us two alone. I'm Irish, and I want to die wit' me own people."

So I sint the lads away, and I took poor Shawn, the Bullock in me arms, for was he not a man and a brave soger afther his own fashion, and was he not wan av me own? I held him in me arms, and he thanked me, poor lad, and there he died, whisperin' to the sowl av his mestizo girrl and his unborn babe at the last. I—that was, his own blood—I closed his eyes, and for that I refused a commission in the Scouts. I could not be paid for closin' Shawn, the Bullock's eyes, for 'tis no credit to fight a man that's been touched in the head. They said I was a fool.

Maybe I was. But that's neither here nor there. And I planted Shawn, the Bullock, in Kilkenny, and we gave him taps and the three volleys—not wit' a corporal's squad, but wit' the full strength av me thirty troopers, as become his rank, he bein' the last av the Filipino provisional presidents! Also, bein' what he was, I

Laid him on the hillside wit' his face turned toward the west,
Toward that dear land which Irishmen, where'er they are love best!

And those of us of the faith—we knelt and prayed for the repose av the sowl av Shawn, the Bullock.

WITH THE HIGHEST RECOMMENDATION

NORBORNE ROBINSON was in Boston one day when he discovered that he had to get off a lot of letters in a hurry. He called up a typewriting bureau and asked for the manager. A woman's voice replied:

"I speak for the manager."

"I want a typewriter to come over to my hotel and take about thirty letters," explained Robinson. "I've had a machine sent up here, and I always dictate to the machine. Can you send me a girl who is a swift performer?"

"I certainly can," replied the woman.

"Does she know how to spell?"

"Why, certainly. She's the best speller we have in the shop."

"Well, has she horse sense? You know I don't want to have to stop and explain everything to her."

"She's unusually clever."

By this time Robinson was greatly elated.

"That's fine," he said. "Have her over here at eight o'clock to-night. By the way, who is this girl?"

"It's me," said the voice.

"Good night!" concluded Robinson, all his joy departing. "I hereby elect you as the honorary president of the Hate-myself Club."

Unraveling Mike

By H. G. Van Campen

What happened one winter in Alaska. A drama staged on the Island of Blaine in Prince William Sound. Of the characters, you will be interested most in Mike Rosmovitch, the smallest full-grown human on the island; and Mrs. Ross, the well-dressed, white-haired woman of mystery who undertook to do the camp's washing

FOR six days without a break a wolfish nor'easter had roared through Prince William Sound. A southbound ship had been unable to stay at the dock. Twice her headlines parted. I ordered the carpenters and pile-driver crew in from the new dock we were building, after three men were blown into the water. Freight and mails were late, our powder was "somewhere in the Sound," and the supply up on the hill was down to a few boxes. It would all reach us—if we had luck. But from Cordova to Fairbanks, "inside," they pay fifty cents per pound for freight, and a sky-high ocean rate tacked to that, so life on coast Alaska has compensations.

Evans, the superintendent, decided that outside mining should continue all winter on the Island of Blaine. We must keep ahead of the snow, in a country where the big flakes fell as fast as it could be shoveled.

"More men, John, and get your snow dumps ready while you can," said Evans. "Copper's 'way up, and I want the biggest production we can drag out of the mine. They say they'll get the ships here if we'll fill 'em."

I was short-handed at a bad time. Men working since the previous winter were dubious about putting in another where rain or snow was to be expected daily for the next eight months, and several got their time before each southbound boat was due. From the interior camps of the Iditarod many were coming, but they were chechahco prospectors who were broke, and would only work long enough to save fare "outside." Each boat brought a job lot, that had mushed back to Seward from camps they had gone to in the spring, hopeful then of tripping over a pile of nuggets on the way—the sort that are just about as useless in the city as on the trail. One day's work mucking in the open pit put their kind in the hospital, but I took whatever came to hand, and booted 'em forth when better material appeared.

No foreman likes to pay three dollars and a half a day of his company's money to soft-fleshed incompetents, however useful the exercise is to the latter. A course of sorting ore and mucking waste will never hurt any man, and I've seen it make good citizens out of many. But it's hard on a seasoned worker, when you give him a partner whose heart moves faster than his shovel Either the seasoned man does two-thirds, or gets sore, and for fear of doing too much "soldiers"—and the new man's to blame. Some of them harden up quickly, others are born soft and stay so, and they all delay production.

That's what I was thinking when the *General Shafter* made a landing on a morning in October. It was snowing so thickly that the tumultuous waters of bay and channel were white with it, and it has to be some snow before that happens. The skipper bellowed from the bridge, the mate bellowed back, and the sailor with the lead—it was low tide, and our Blaine reef is what pilots dream

of when they've had too much mince pie —couldn't heave it over the side for the harrying wind.

I tried to ask Eddie Wilson, the chief engineer, if he had a hundred extra barrels of oil he could let us have, for we burn oil in the power house, and our shipment was along with the coal and powder. He howled, and I semaphored. Kelly, the mate, and a wise mick he is, understood, and with his arms answered that he didn't think they could hold fast long enough to land it.

I could see heads peering out from the companionway of the steerage quarters, then a little fellow with a bed roll in a caribou robe jumped to the rail and looked down, and from behind me Radoje Ladslo, one of my men, sent him a string of Montenegrin. The little man had a sweeping black mustache which the wind whipped against his cheeks, and he held a flap of his fur cap away from an ear as he listened, grinning under spectacles.

"Does he want to go to work?" I asked.

"He say tell the mister boss please yes he like vary mooch," said Radoje, showing his white teeth. He was the artist who cut the camp's hair—more of a shave than a cut, but it beat doing it yourself. He was as gabby as a city barber, but he was the best miner I had.

"Where'd you know him?" We were blown upon each other when I shouted this.

He said in his own country, explaining: "Him no can spik same me—no spik Inglees."

"Well, if there's a bunk in number four he can be with you, and tell him if he leaves candles burning when he goes to sleep he'll wish he'd stayed on that boat."

"Him no make fire. Sure I tell," Radoje promised.

Mike Rosmovitch was the smallest full-grown human on the island. After supper on the second night he came into the store with Radoje and some of the day shift.

"My fran like for to put roll in safe," said Radoje. Mike bowed with confidence, surrending a wad of bills and a sack of gold to me.

"No keep pants, mabbe blow," said Radoje.

"John D., please write—take a slant at the size of it!" said the bookkeeper, immuring Mike's fortune in the safe. "He did some shoveling for this."

Mike was buying red burlap to screen his bunk with, and such a desire for privacy was unusual among his countrymen. He purchased also four pounds of candy, a dozen oranges, and a box of shredded coconut, Radoje vivaciously aiding him. They went away to gossip and gorge. We sold a lot of candy to the men. It's always so in a camp where the drinking is light. We allowed no saloon, and a man had to crave liquor strongly to mush four miles each way for the brands of poison they sold over the bar of the one isolated saloon on Blaine. Few of the Americans drank at all. I didn't keep the ones who traveled that trail often.

Next day I walked past number four bunk house, and grinned at a line of heavy brown woolen underwear, blue work shirts, and German socks. It looked like a boy's outfit, so I knew it belonged to Mike Rosmovitch. The things were very clean. Once a week the line of little shirts hung on the porch of number four. That was oftener than his mates displayed their washings.

"The dear little clean soul!" said Emmy, my wife, when I told her about Mike. "He gives me the most beautiful bows when we pass on the trail. Isn't he the one who wears the red necktie?"

Mike invariably wore a tie. I heard that a certain wit working near him had profanely referred to the tie's wearer as a "dude." Mike remonstrated, through Radoje. The insulter laughed delightedly, said more and worse, and Mike used his shovel on the enemy's head. I saw the latter's red trail on the snow, going toward the hospital, and marked him a half hour off shift on my time sheet. Mike was mucking calmly when my round took me by him. He bowed impressively.

"If there's any more of that, you'll get your time check!" I informed him.

He motioned apologies, with bows.

"No more—you savvy de burro?"

"Sure, sure!" he cried, bowing.

"Then get back to work, and leave Ivanovitch alone."

"Don't fire my little Mike!" begged Emmy at dinner. "What's he been doing, Johnny?"

"Oh, I'll keep him if he behaves himself, and speeds up a few. Two partners have quit him, he's so pesky slow."

"Perhaps they're slow," she suggested. "Anyway, he's too small to do as much as a big man."

"He's stronger than a lot of the big fellows. He just pokes."

"Couldn't he be a miner and drill holes? Papa says any fool can run a machine. Give him a machine."

"Well, you run this house, and I'll try to boss the mine, ma'am."

"Oh, you will?" said Emmy, making faces. "Then what'd you tell me about him for?"

She's a saucy one at times. But it's pretty nice having her around.

I had all kinds of trouble that month. Bins full of ore and no freight boat, the snow to fight outside, and the winds holding up construction. A man couldn't stick on an iron roof in such weather, and if he could his hands would stick to it. Snow smothered the creeks, reducing the water power so much that I had to use the auxiliary steam engine for the electric plant. Slush ice stopped up the water pipes, and wild appeals in Japanese dialect outside my bedroom window at four of a pitch-black morning meant get into my boots and clothes, grab a couple of aids from the weary night shift, just washing up for bed, and plod through the snow to the dam on the mountainside, to ascertain what had stopped the cook-house water supply.

Winter came early and all in a bunch, but we were ready for it, as much as is possible when you are enlarging all the time. Once more the island was all white, the high peaks losing their jagged points, becoming rounded under the drifts. We had it better than "inside," where the dry snow forms no crust. Thaw and rain generally followed snow, then it froze, and a thick crust resulted. And on those rare days, when there would have been sunshine if the sun looked over our mountains before two in the afternoon, when it was nearly ready to set, we could see the peaks of far-distant islands, looming white against azure sky and blue-green water—and the kickers who quarreled with our wet, lonesome land wouldn't leave it if you gave them free fare to the States that weather.

And suddenly, as our changes came, after a night of riotous storm, when the lumber on the docks and shore had to be lashed tight, and the one boat left in the water broke away from its two anchors, wrecking on the beach, and the gulls shrilled all night under the cook house, that was built over the water, the dim twilight at nine of the morning showed the channel quiet, the faintest rosy brightness on the peaks of the opposite island, and the carpenters, aloft on their neglected roof, were whistling as they hammered. I saw Emmy in a short skirt and fur parka speeding across the flat and over the hill, as I was blowing out my lantern. That meant the house was cleaned and shining, dinner three-quarters prepared, and the stove banked against her return.

Emmy's the daughter of a miner, and when she passed me on the trail, on my shift, she merely spoke, and hurried on about her own affairs. Rain and snow were all the same to her. She was out some part of every day, and pink cheeks and clear, gray eyes showed it.

It was a fine day, and the enormous black raven that croaked at me daily—he was the one that used to lay for me at No. 1 blacksmith shop, supper times, when I was night-shift boss—and hop about my lunch basket—croaked less mournfully as I threw chunks of snow at him. I felt good, except that the powder and the coal hadn't come, and we couldn't dump another car into the stuffed bins, and they'd be sure to send three freight boats in a row, and then none for five

weeks! Shippers will know my thoughts on that matter. No one else can.

I plodded up to Argyle West and Argyle East, a couple of prospects where we were "drifting" for a hundred feet or so, and down a "stope," and around underground, to have a look at the diamond drilling, and finally I crawled up a muddy "raise" to the pit. Terence McNamara was wheeling a barrow of ore to a "raise" as I emerged. He was scowling, while it was his custom to hum cheerfully in clear weather. Said he:

"I ask ye to gimme a new par'ner! Anny of the other byes but that lazy scut of a Rosmovitch, for while as a man an' a gintlemin he may be grrand, I hoven't the nature to stand him, sir! Slow? If he'd been widout meals a week, an' seen a grub cache thirty feet away, he'd starrve before ever he got there."

Mike Rosmovitch was over in his allotted corner, breaking, sorting, and filling waste car and ore barrow. I gave some orders about "bulldozing" some big rocks that a heavy blast had brought down. I had just started using a nonfreezing powder on those rocks, and I was reflecting on that as I reached Mike. Every mucker has to be taught to distinguish ore from waste. It doesn't take long for any one except a born dummy.

Mike broke a chunk with his hammer, and raised a piece, contemplating it through his spectacles. Thoughtfully he turned it over, threw it into the barrow, removed it for a second scrutiny, sighed, and replaced it. While lifting a second piece he reached for the first, which he again slowly revolved. I could see from where I was that it carried copper sulphide, but he looked and nodded with deep distrust as he dropped both into the barrow.

He certainly was slow. I sent Terence off, and left Mike without a partner, so that I could figure what he was worth. I didn't dare stay and observe him, for fear I'd hit him. I arranged to keep account of the number of his waste cars per day. Three hours later I was back in the pit. Deliberate, lingering, oblivious to everything but his task, he was staring fixedly at a useless chunk spattered with pyrite.

"Waste—throw him in car!" I called, experimenting.

Mike bowed, but completed his examination. I sighed, before I looked at his waste pile. It had grown at the normal rate. I watched him for two weeks before I convinced myself that he got out as much as any man there. He had his own methods, and while he worked for us I kept him by himself.

The whistle blew for one o'clock as I left my home that day.

"Johnny!" screamed Emmy, from the door. I turned. She was laughing, so I laughed.

"You won't take a bath to-night if the *Laredo* gets in?"

"No. I'd have to be up too late. Why?"

"'Cause there she is—I didn't want to waste coal heating the tank!"

The *Laredo's* bow and her smoke were in sight. Then she passed Clam Point and dropped her stern hook, to come alongside the dock with the tide, which is strong in the channel. The *Laredo* was a passenger boat, but she could pack one thousand tons of ore in her hatches, so I was happy. She wouldn't have the powder, as passenger vessels can't carry explosives, but her wireless would have heard from the freighter.

"How much freight?" I called to Joe Large, the purser, when he could hear me.

"Fifteen tons. And a passenger. Female," he answered. The last word was in a lowered tone.

Such of the bachelor staff as had run out for a minute to get a paper—we only had three boats a month that winter—perked up and directed their glances at the deck.

"Old!" said Joe, the ship being closer, and the boys stopped looking, and scowled.

In a camp of two hundred persons, all in one employ, you know everybody's business. No one had a mother or a mother-in-law due. There was no place for a woman to stop, and if

this one was a tourist, she must be gently told to keep on touring. If she was a cook there were no jobs, and in any case I'd have to inflict the cruelty. Evans always left it to me, and beat it if he saw any skirts. He said he was too sympathetic and disliked hurting their feelings. Emmy, in her "dock clothes," a civilized fur coat and cap and rubber boots, passed by me.

"I wonder who that nicely dressed woman with the lovely white hair is," she remarked.

"We'll never know. She can't stick around here," said I. "No place. What the dickens—look at that range."

"It's a hotel size. She must think there's enough people to start a restaurant for. Poor woman!" said Emmy. "See, she's looking at the camp, and she's disappointed. She thought there was more of it. She isn't frumpy nor sloppy, like the ones that wear a man's hat and a sealskin, and a pair of overalls. Don't be mean to her."

I grunted. They began to land freight from the forward hatch before the plank was thrown across for passengers. The purser and several men jumped ashore.

"She expects to start a laundry," said Large hastily. "Says she'll live in her tent until she gets fixed. She's an old sour dough, and expects to rough it. But there's not enough washing to pay, is there? Then it's plain rot for her to stop."

The white-haired woman coolly leaped four feet of space, and lit beside me.

"Are you the manager?" she demanded.

"I represent him."

She talked—I darted abruptly from her, to find out if the skipper had orders to take ore. He had, and I sent for my loading gang. She followed me—and talked. I rushed into the dock house, and telephoned to the power house that we'd load with the belt conveyor, as we used the cars only as an auxiliary if the belt broke down—and she was talking when I came out. She was a woman who had suffered many wrongs. Had a road house at Chitina with the best accommodations for men and dogs on the trail, and she had gone "outside" on a visit, and, returning, found the house burned, while her partner had disappeared with their joint funds. And her hand bag had dropped overboard as the ship was in Seymour Narrows—two magnificent diamond rings and eighty dollars in bills down among the codfish! Started a laundry in Cordova, but a steam outfit cut prices—no hand laundry could compete with steam.

I climbed up a ladder and into the bin we were going to load from, and found Evans, snickering, up there.

"Me chase her? No, she's all yours," said he, and fled back through the bins. I descended, sighing, and she asked what price our lumber was a thousand feet.

"Twenty-five."

"They told me seventeen, down in Cordova, for native. And I've had such fearful trouble—it was my husband got me to come north. I'd been with my own folks in Iowy to-day—and they said seventeen! That a party bought his for that, and towed it to Knight's Island to the saltery."

"Madam, rough lumber is twenty-five. We have no wish to sell you any. You can't build on company property anyhow——"

"But the beach limit?" she interrupted.

She was a sour dough, all right.

"Sure you don't want to sell booze in that laundry?"

"Sir! I'm a respectable woman. I've got my range and my wringer on that boat. All I ask is a chance. I've had so much trouble——"

She sniffled in a ladylike manner, touching her eyes with the whitest of handkerchiefs. Well—Emmy was doing our washing because the Siwash boiled the flannels and then hung them in the snow, and had hopefully bought corn meal when Emmy wrote on certain garments "to be starched." Mrs. Evans was toiling over a tub. There were our young staff engineers, and a few of the Americans in the bunk

houses who would rather pay than do their own. Mrs. Ross looked as though she'd be clean.

"I don't believe it will pay you, not when you have to buy lumber," I told her.

"I can manage! I'll build a floor and a base for my tent, if I can get near a creek."

"There's creeks enough. You can have a place beyond that last tent, down the beach, but let this be understood: We allow no spirituous liquors sold or handled on this company's property, and I'm afraid if any one began it, and wasn't quite on the line, they'd have to cut it out. Do you get me?"

She used the handkerchief again. And she was nearly my mother's age, I judged. So I told her about some secondhand one-inch stuff that she could get for about ten dollars a thousand, and some two-by-threes, an odd size we didn't use, that the sawmill might sell at a bargain.

"If there's a couple of men with nothing to do?" she said tentatively.

"We don't have any loafers here. But I'll put your freight under a tarpaulin, and you can buy a meal ticket from the storekeeper, and eat when the men are out. They don't take over twelve minutes. See the chap with the whiskers, just coming? He's not an employee, and he's got a dory. I think you can make a deal with him to pack your stuff."

"Sir, I thank you! I am honestly grateful, and I hope to have your washing. I starch shirts, and I press suits —in case any one is going outside," she said.

She was a handsome woman when she wasn't telling her woes. She went with dignity to interview Gaines, the squaw man. Later I saw the big range in his dory. In a week Blaine had a laundry. Bundles were left in the store and delivered there. She hired a one-eyed native for messenger service. The men did their own washing, for they had tubs and boiling water day and night. This was always true of the Slavonians, until Mike Rosmovitch brought a bulging pink calico bag and threw it in with a pile awaiting the native.

"She charge four bits one shirt, fifteen cent one pair socks, twenty cent one towel," warned the storekeeper.

Mike bowed.

Radoje said eagerly: "Misto Rosmovitch no care. Her nice lady. Not much got wass for do."

Vasili, the native, took the pink bag, and very shortly returned it, reporting that the lady said the clothes therein were not dirty. Radoje conferred with Mike, who stolidly presented the bag to the native.

"Misto Rosmovitch him say wass him clothes!" cried Radoje.

"No will do! Clean!" remonstrated Vasili.

Mike declaimed angrily in Montenegrin.

"Him say, yes, yes—her wass, no talk. Mush on!"

Radoje pushed the bag at Vasili, who, cowed by Radoje's brilliant eyes, sighingly received it. A bill for five dollars and forty cents was pinned to the pink bag when it next reached the counter. Mike paid without remark.

Our laundress' prices seemed high even to people used to camp prices.

"Forty cents a shirt is really awful. And ten cents a pair for thin stockings is seventy cents a week. I'm going to do it myself again," declared Emmy. "You can't stay sorry for people who are so grasping, if they have got two daughters."

"I won't have you washing if it takes my whole pay, for there's a couple of trades you shan't take up, missie," said I.

"You go and run your mine," retorted Emmy.

Next day she and Mrs. Evans began training Hannah, Vasili's wife, and I guess that poor Siwash wished she was dead, between 'em both. It cut the biggest bills from Mrs. Ross' weekly list, for Emmy and Florence Evans wore as flossy clothes in the house as they would have in the States. Emmy's scheme was to have supper seven-eighths ready, and then skin into a fancy frock. She'd hold the tail of it up while she

brought in the beans, and chuckle as much as I did. The minute we finished I helped her clean up, and then we sat down in our little house to a peaceful evening, unless a boat came—and that was the time they often routed me out.

"I feel as if we ought not to have taken the washing from Mrs. Ross, but it's her own fault," said Emmy one night. "She was up here to-day, and I told her so. She asked if I thought there was any chance to lease the cook house, as if there were over fifty men eating there she could make money."

"I'd hate to eat the chuck she'd put out. She's after the coin hard. But there will be no changes. The company wants its men to get enough to eat."

"Her laundry doesn't make enough to pay her store bill."

"What'd she come to a camp like Blaine for?"

"Her husband was a perfect scalawag. And she has two daughters, and doesn't want them to know she has to wash."

"That's nothing to hide. She's probably ashamed of her prices."

Emmy laughed. She read an hour before she observed:

"I saw the queerest thing from the front door to-day."

That tone, from Emmy, was a lure, and I immediately requested her to furnish details. Our house was built to the edge of a steep bank. Below it the waves broke and seethed, at high tide. When the tide was out, people walked the beach instead of wallowing through hip-deep snow above, and Emmy viewed the camp's promenade when she threw down ashes and cans for the tide to catch. We had fifty-one large and small pigs—fat, fuzzy-coated, and Northland bred—that roamed the beach in snow and rain, and Emmy knew every pig, she alleged. She threw rocks down at the Malemute pups when they chased the pigs, and commanded bad little boys not to shoot at gulls feeding on the cook-house refuse. The little boys liked her, and often came to call, a bashful party of Japanese, Aleut, Slavonian, and "white." The head Japanese cook and Emmy were fussing over the garden they intended to have in July, although radishes are all that will mature in a place lacking soil. Blaine was all spongy tundra. The beaches were rock, with no sand. Emmy was interested in everything about our island—so I waited to hear her newest discovery.

"Mike Rosmovitch stood in one of number four bunk house's windows, and dropped three white shirts down on the beach into the soot and oil from the power house. Then he went after them, and very soon he went away with his pink bag."

"His clothesline broke?" I suggested.

"No. He had no line. He's doing it to help that woman—the good little man. Now, isn't he?"

"Does he know her?"

"I'm sure he doesn't, because if he's working nights, and around camp in daytime, and he sees her, he runs into the bunk house. He's very shy, and he looks mournful. I wish I could do something for him."

"But Mike's fine! He's got money, and a job. If you must worry over the muckers, there's Giuseppe Carreno, whose wife locks him out if he's over ten minutes getting from the mine to home, when he goes off shift."

"He should whip her. She needs it!" said Emmy indignantly.

"She's drinking. And he can't figure out where she gets it. Most of the foreigners use snuff, and she's at that as well. Mixing the two habits is tough on Giuseppe. They say she doesn't go to the saloon for it. She couldn't make the trail with a pair of twin babies."

"Do you know, Vasili looked as if he'd liquor to-day, and it's a criminal offense to sell it to Indians, isn't it?"

"Yes; but three bidarkas full of Chenega natives who brought land-otter pelts to trade were over here. Probably gave him some hooch."

"I hope little Mike doesn't drink and waste his money."

"Lemon pop and ginger ale are his stand-bys. He's very steady."

Mike had worked for me two months. He displayed a positive talent for "steaming," after a trial, and I put him at that, thawing the ore in the bins before a freighter was due. That ore was frozen so tight that we could have torn the bins down and it would have stayed put. Some of it had to be blasted loose. Mike was alone on this job, in a snowshed darkened by banked drifts, and, walking through, you couldn't see Mike in the hot steam until you slipped on a hose and heard his yell:

"Or right!"

His English did not improve, but the Slavonian learns slowly; doesn't desire to know the language. They're all going home, anyway, when they get a sufficient stake saved. One day I found frost had shoved the tracks up, and as we might have to use the cars for loading, the ground underneath must be thawed until the rails were flat again. In the steamy snowshed a man's voice sang:

> "Rock of ages, cleft for me
> Let me hide myself in thee!
> Till the storms of life be——"

"Oh, Mike!" I called. There was silence, then, close to me, a hurried:

"Or right!"

"You sing English song?"

I could only dimly see his black mustache, and his black eyes behind misty spectacles.

"No un'stan'," he answered, blinking, but he pointed to the far entrance, indicating that some one had just gone through.

Clear days became only a memory. Snow, snow, and snow. We quit work in the "Fraction," a tunnel from which the ore was dropped to the main level underground, through a sixteen-inch pipe, laid at forty-five degrees—and an incline "raise." The men couldn't climb to the "Fraction" through the drifts of soft snow. Production was costly, with snow dumping continuous. We gave up hand sorting at night, for they couldn't see. We only ran out waste and snow. The men wore two slickers each, and couldn't keep dry. The big acetylene lamps of the pit were dulled by the blinding fall of snow. Naturally a job underground was a picnic to the outdoor conditions. Change day was every second Sunday in the month, the shifts alternating, day and night. Mike Rosmovitch changed with his shift, and when he worked nights I didn't see him. Wendall, our shifter, put him mucking underground.

"The wind that rages through the pit since we shot the big bank down is knocking out that little guy. He didn't say so, but he's been getting cough sirup from doc," explained Wendall.

"Where's he working?"

"Seven East."

I kept Mike in the same "crosscut" when he changed back to days, though he was so white and thin that he was a receptive subject for miners' consumption. During his first weeks I often heard him laughing with his friend Radoje, but latterly he was all gloom. They held constant discussions, Mike shaking his head, Radoje evidently handing him the Montenegrin for "buck up." I wondered if he'd sent for his family and they'd refused to come. That happened sometimes. He had asked me once through Radoje if he could rent a company house if he should need one.

"Mike's wife won't come over?" I asked Radoje.

"Misto Rosmovitch shall get him davorce," said he. "He like for know how much?"

"He better stick to her a while longer," I advised, depressing him visibly.

"She my woman, I cut one beeg stick," said Radoje, with a menacing air.

"That's the system. And he didn't?"

"Naw! Him cry, her laugh. You bet I don't go for marry nobod', boss."

"How old is Mike?"

"I dunno. Him got two girl, twanty-five. I theenk he catch next boat, go south."

I had all the men needed then, so that didn't interest me much. But I did feel sorry for the poor, little, sad-eyed cuss. He had stopped sending his washing to Mrs. Ross, and once a week the line

of boy-size garments dried on the porch of number four.

The storekeeper said Mrs. Ross wasn't settling promptly. We ran the store for a very small margin of profit, and employees' accounts were deducted from wages. She'd given Marley a hard-luck yarn, and he let her have credit on his own responsibility.

"The thing that gets me, is a dame that can't pay for her mush and bacon, sending out for ten gallons of perfume at a crack. She's had two lots come. She must be taking perfumed baths. The laundry never smells of it. But twenty gallons! Women are mighty wasteful," said Marley.

"Was it billed perfume?"

"Yes. I signed for it with our freight. She's one of these elderly birds that mean to keep young, and goes through all sorts of didos to do it. It came from Cincinnati."

An old prospector had rowed over from his island that morning. He was shaving a pipeful of plug by a window, listening, and smiling to himself.

"What's her game, Phil?" I queried.

"Hooch," said he.

"Make it out of the scent?"

"Tain't perfume. Those Cincinnati people put up a dope—one gallon makes ten. It's the undertaker's friend. They tell me the washlady peddles it to the dagos."

"Golly! The old rip," said Evans. "Look into that, John. Nice people you import for this place. I've noticed a slight hilarity in spots lately."

So had I, but there must be stronger proof of guilt than Phil Jones' word, for he was a gossip, and not too careful to glean facts.

A raft of creosoted piles broke loose under a high sea that afternoon, and before we got them tied up I traveled the horseshoe of beach facing the bay. I was working the end of a beached pile off with a peavey myself, when I looked up suddenly and glimpsed a couple of men from the night shift staring out of the window in the Ross tent house. They ducked as I looked. Of course, they might have been after washing, but I knew they were not. The woman certainly had the privilege of visitors at discreet hours, and she might have got them to chop wood for her. When the men in dories started the last pile for the raft, I walked to the tent, and knocked on the frame of the canvas door. Mrs. Ross opened it, and hot air, heavy with alcoholic fumes, struck my nostrils. That settled it.

"Mr. Howard!" she exclaimed, startled. But she wore a welcoming smile the next second. I was sore all through.

"I suppose you are aware that the furnishing of one drink to that one-eyed native can procure you Federal hospitality in restricted quarters? Not to mention the Slavonian trade?"

"But I haven't—I don't know why—it seems as if a woman can't make her living decent without being misjudged! And I ain't on company land, even!"

"Don't begin to sob. It won't get you a thing," I said harshly.

The red came into her face. She glared as I concluded:

"Never mind what land you're on. If you don't get rid of all the booze you've got inside, to-day, and not by sale nor gift, for it must go into the bay—out of this camp you'll go, and pronto! Good afternoon!"

She didn't say anything, but I inferred she was mentally active. On the way up the beach I struck about half of the pigs grunting and nosing at Vasili, the native, seated in a snowbank.

"Get up and go home!" I shouted, as I didn't want the tide to drown him. He was stupid, and odorous of whisky or the Cincinnati "hooch." I kicked him partly awake, the pigs escorting him as he staggered along.

"Whatever is it, Johnny, honey?" cried Emmy, when I walked into the kitchen before supper. She kissed and clung until she thought I was soothed, then bounced the chops so they wouldn't burn, and kissed me once more, repeating her question.

"I expect to bundle that old woman out on the next boat. And I don't like the prospect. But she'll go!"

"She's been here," said Emmy gently. "She was crying, and she's only got

seven dollars. She couldn't even get to Valdez on that."

"That's her funeral. She's been selling hooch to the men."

"Yes, she said you believed that, and she was just ready to die of shame! She said if she did she wouldn't sell a Slavonian any, as she hates them. Those two men were leaving washing. Her husband was a regular brute. He's the man who burned her house down and took the money. It wasn't a partner; they were married, it seems, and she's never heard of him since. I told her we couldn't have drinking in a clean camp like this—you know papa used to get after the folks in Nevada who sold liquor to the Utes, Johnny, and I wasn't any softy about giving her my opinion of such wretches. She just cried and cried. She said he never cared anything for her, and would sit and read his Bible for hours, or sing hymns over and over, through his nose, and she couldn't get a word out of him. And taking all her money!"

"What'd he burn the house for?"

"She doesn't know. It is hard to be that age, and have no money, and no one to help."

"Sentiment's all right in its place, Emmy. We'll give her a chance to cut it out, but she'll only have one. Neither the old man nor myself will let her get by with that sort of thing."

"Dear me—why can't people have sense and behave themselves?" scolded Emmy, culling chops from the pan. "I'll make brown gravy. You carry the biscuits and the tea. We're happy, and I'd like everybody to be the same. Don't forget to put the stand under the teapot."

She was excited over the Ross case, and next day she triumphantly brought the news that Mrs. Ross had rescued a native kid who fell into the deep part of our biggest creek, on his way from school. The rescuer had to swim before she clutched him. Northern water is not pleasant swimming in summer, and in winter, if a boat springs a leak, and it's far from land, the man who knows will grab the heaviest thing he sees, to sink quickly, and be through with it.

"I saw it," said Emmy, leaving a tear on my blue shirt front. "She was nearly carried out to sea. The tide was in, and it makes a whirlpool of the creek then. She's got a brave heart, and I went down and told her so, and she said she wished she had drowned, for everything was over for her. And she looked so old and pitiful, Johnny, and I thought of—of my own mamma. Don't drive her out—please, please don't!"

"I'm willing to help her at whatever she can do. Give her the washing back."

"No; she charges too much," whimpered Emmy. "Poor soul!"

The one-armed native was sober and alert after the day I found him among the pigs. There were no more fights in the bunk houses.

"She's reformed," I told Evans, who was much relieved.

"I had the house boy send her all the extra staff blankets and the curtains. That'll foot up to quite a nice bit of money," he observed. "Hear about her pulling the boy out? She was chopping firewood, in overalls and sou'wester, back of her place this morning. She's a real Alaskan."

Mrs. Ross treated me with cold formality when she passed. She was injured. I had heaped another trouble on a wronged woman. She paid her store bill unexpectedly, and there was gold left in her "poke," so she had augmented that case seven.

I'd say, if we met: "Nice weather—for Blaine—isn't it?"

Our washlady would haughtily incline her head. As long as she had obeyed orders, and was not suffering for her three meals a day, I had no time to fret over her. There's plenty of real worries around any mine. We got a clear moonlight night after three weeks of rain, and long before my alarm clock whanged its strident summons a voice cried at the open bedroom window:

"Pipe's freezee! Can't ketchum watah cook house!"

"Oh, golly!" I yawned, and told the Japs I'd be out in a few minutes. There was always the expectation of having to uncover a mile or two of pipe line. This time it was easy, as a few buckets of boiling water on an exposed length of pipe started the flow, and the Jap boys went gayly back to their kitchen. It was five o'clock. The full moon hung over Otter Island, the stars were all aglitter, and the beach was white with frost. A sleepless pig drank at the stream that flowed from the power house. At the far end of camp lights showed. One was in the Ross tent. The others went toward the water. As I looked, three two-hole bidarkas crossed the moon path, paddles glistening, occupants plain against the light. The old lady was still selling to the natives!

Well, there was a boat due within the next twenty hours. I didn't say anything to Emmy at breakfast. I wasn't going to argue with any one, Evans included. But for once the *General Shafter* arrived ahead of her schedule, because of a calm passage. It was hardly daylight when she tied up at ten that morning. She had our Christmas turkeys, the toys for the school kids' tree, and a great mess of Christmas freight. Everybody not on shift was out on the dock. A deputy marshal from Valdez got off.

"Who you hunting this trip, Al?" I asked, and he laughed.

Sometimes a man the government wants badly drops off a boat and gets a job. It's difficult to pick a suspect from a crowd of muddy-faced men at work in a shadowy place.

"I'm just smelling around. Guess I'll stay over till she comes back from Seward to-night," said the deputy marshal. Confidentially he added:

"Got a white-haired woman named Ross or Rose here? We've had a couple of letters. You had any run-ins with her?"

"I think she's going out on this boat," said I.

"I know she is, John," said Al. "She's been selling liquor to natives. I'll take her away after dark, so the women won't see her go. Who's that pretty girl?"

"That's my wife. I thought you'd met her. Emmy! Oh, Emmy!" I called, but Emmy was scudding up the dock. She went down a ladder that none of the women but herself dared tackle, and set off down the beach.

"You come over to the house for noon dinner. She isn't the kind that has to be told a week ahead," I bragged, and Al said he'd be there with bells on. I showed him our little, red-painted house with the snow packed around it, and we kidded a minute about when he was going to quit batching.

"I hate to go get that old lady," he said seriously, "but there's too much of it going on. She was married, and doing well running a road house on the Ruby Trail, and along came a know-it-all musher with a team of mangy dogs and about four bits between him and tidewater. He threw a talk into her, and she beat it to the States with him. Then the fellow found that she had brought only a small part of the family money, so he pulled out and left her. When she came north she couldn't find the husband. He'd burned their place flat, and no one knew where he went. I've got my witnesses to round up before I call on her. I'll see you soon."

The boat went on, and I hustled up to the mine. Mike Rosmovitch was running a waste car out of Seven East, a "crosscut," where I had ordered Radoje Ladslo to drill some holes, but not to shoot them until he saw me. It was wet in there, water pouring from the face of the walls, and the track awash to your knees.

I put my candle up to where Radoje was loading the last of the round we intended to shoot. He explained that he had found an old diamond-drill hole —we had been prospecting there with a drill during the previous summer— and had plugged it, using it for one of his cut holes, its position being right. There were fourteen holes in this round—three cut holes, three back holes, three lifters, four side holes, and one easer. The cut holes and the easer were loaded the heaviest.

The chuck tender, who had a lusty voice, howled:

"Fire! Fire!"

Mike Rosmovitch left his car, splashing along beside Radoje. I followed, with the men working near, leaving Radoje to spit his holes. We made three turns, halting in a "drift." Mike put his hands to his ears, his candle dripping upon his shoulder. A miner or mucker accustomed to underground work hardly notices the biggest blasts, and I wondered what had been Mike's line before he came to Blaine. He coughed dismally. Radoje said it was only three minutes.

"My fran theenk fi' minute long tam," said Radoje genially.

I took out my watch. Mike watching me. I nodded, and he held his ears tightly. The chuck tender relighted his pipe. There was the muffled thunder of the blasts, the holes exploding one on top of the other, then a wild cry, an explosion right in my ears, rocks flying—something struck my forehead, and I fell, recovered, held to the wall, was hit again, went face downward, into the muddy water, to the sound of groans, of curses that grew fainter—fainter——

I staggered up in the darkness, swallowing blood that was dripping from my head. I wasn't going to drown in there! The acrid smell of powder smoke was in my nose and mouth. My aimless hands hit something warm, and my fingers, feeling, crushed the fragile glass of a pair of spectacles. I began to pull Mike up.

"My leg's broke," said a voice. "I can't stand if you lift me up, sir. Leave me drop. I ain't got no wish to live."

"Mike," I said, still pulling; "Mike, is that you talking?"

"Yes, sir."

My head was pretty bad, but I held him. I didn't think it was queer he should be talking English when he didn't know it. A splashing began, and Arelino, the chuck tender, gave thanks to the Virgin in impassioned Piedmontese. I found Radoje coming to life almost under my feet. A rock had knocked him senseless, but the water on his head shocked him conscious again. I held Mike while I called names. One man did not answer.

"Where's Dominique?" I shouted. My voice sounded small to me. I was sick, and blinded by blood as I stammered.

"Put Mike on—a car. And gimme—gimme——" I couldn't think straight. What I wanted was to tell somebody to get my spare candle out of my back pocket. I'd stuck my iron candlestick in the rock, but it was gone when I felt for it.

"That di'mon'-dreel 'ole, she come through to here!" I heard Radoje repeating. "How I know that? Hah? I bet I dreel my own hole, nex' round. I keel my pal!"

He wept on Mike, who feebly besought him not to worry. That's the worst feature of the Slavonians. They go up in the air when there's no excuse for it. I tried to kick him, but I hadn't a kick left in me. The big chuck tender packed Mike on his back. Some one put an arm around me, preventing me from sitting down in the water. I must have walked to the main tunnel, for, as if half asleep, I heard the ore train coming, the voices of the trammers, the driver yodeling a ragtime song, which ceased, as he roared:

"Get on there, Maje!"

"I can walk now," I told whoever had hold of me.

The horse stopped. They were making a bed of slickers on top of a loaded car, and Mike was lifted up.

"The foreman's hurt bad on the nut," one of them said.

"I'm all right," I whispered. They didn't seem to hear.

A square of daylight showed far ahead, but was abruptly obscured.

"Doctor coming! Got 'em?" It was Jack Parsons, who had worked, timbering, with me at the Giroux, in Nevada.

I thought I answered in a tremendous voice, but Jack said next day he didn't know I was anywhere near. The man I had missed began to run when the first rock flew through from the

old diamond-drill hole in the crosscut. Being an excitable Albanian, he shrieked as he sped to the hospital that every man in the drift was blown apart.

"Confound you, hold his head tight, d'you hear? I'll shave the hair away before I sew it. Savvy?"

That was the next I heard after Parsons' yell. I didn't open my eyes.

"Why for you no feex Mike his leg —you want him die?"

That was Radoje. Scrape—scrape—it was my own head! What the dickens were they doing?

"I'm going to set Mike's leg in a few minutes. Your boss would bleed to death. Open that little black case—no, the other one! Here, you, Parsons, hold these edges of skin together while I sew it. How clean are your hands? Um—souse a little from that bottle on 'em first. Eh? It's a bad cut, but it won't lay him up long. Watch out, he's coming to!"

I opened my eyes and stared at Mrs. Ross. We were all in the tool house at the tunnel entrance. Doc's black emergency case was on a pile of steel drills.

"The doctor twisted his ankle when he was coming. They're helping him up here. But I took his stuff so as not to delay, because we thought there was a bad accident. I know just what to do, so please don't move till I say you can."

"Mike—Rosmovitch?" I breathed.

"I'm behind you, Mr. Howard."

I looked at her again as she sewed me together. She shook her head, and a warm tear dropped on my face.

But her hands were steady as a machine. She bandaged me.

"Sleds'll be right up here for 'em," said Parsons. "Now what, ma'am? Will I cut that pants leg and boot off Mike?"

"I'll do it," answered Mrs. Ross. She spoke to Mike in his own language. He moaned.

"My fault! I break my pal's leg," whined Radoje.

"Shut up that row!" said Parsons.

I dozed, and woke—because Mike groaned, perhaps. Parsons, kneeling on the tool-house floor, hid Mike from me. Mrs. Ross was saying:

"Yes; two or three months at least. He's thin and sick looking, and that'll hold him back. He's been mucking in this mine?"

"T'ree month," said Radoje. "For heem I buy all that hooch from you. We sink it in bay, but when he fin' out natives keep on come, he say, no use for try no more—davorce."

"I had to live," she muttered. "And those little shirts that came at first belonged to him?"

"Sure theeng."

"His leg is set," she announced.

I was feeling stronger every minute, except for a horrible throb in my head, and I said:

"A deputy marshal got off the boat."

"A marshal? For me? Oh, he can't —I won't go, I won't—the disgrace! I had to live, and I've had such trouble every——"

"We ain't a-goin' to let nobody take you out o' here," growled Parsons. "I'll scoot you over the mountain an' bring a launch to the other side, an' we better be mushin' now!"

"Oh, Mike, Mike—don't let 'em take me!"

She was pawing at Mike. It sure made me feel tough to see her.

"Leave her in the old shack beyond number three lake. He doesn't know where it is," said I.

But Mike was talking:

"You be good woman now, mamma? Think of them two girls outside, married to good, square boys. I come here because I didn't care what I did, an' made out I was just over. But I got three thousand bucks down in the safe. We'll beat that case somehow."

"You'll take me back, Michael?"

He nodded. She gave a gulping cry, and kissed his muddy hand.

"My ol' woman!" he whispered.

"Say, leesten, Mike!"

"Oh, leave 'em alone!" snarled Parsons.

But Radoje would speak.

"It's me write letter to that marshal, an' say she sell the hooch. I theenk

that's more better for my fran Misto Rosmovitch."

Mike swore in Montenegrin. The woman cowered, sobbing, beside the little man.

"Then you're his witness? And if he hasn't any witness, he's got no case! Get underground, and don't show up until I send for you!" I ordered, and Radoje scooted for the main tunnel.

"There's—there's a chance?" Mrs. Ross quavered.

"You bet!" said Parsons. "But here's the sleds to take the cripples down, and doc's a-comin', and your wife, John. He's all right, Mis' Howard! Don't git a-scared of the blood!"

Emmy stepped softly into the shed, her eyes full of fear, but she's a game girl, and she was ready for any sight. I grinned and nodded, and she weakened enough to press her mittened hands against her heart as she nodded back.

"All right, honey, it's only a cut. And she's Mike's wife, dear. Do you know where the marshal is?"

"He's sitting by my kitchen fire," answered Emmy. She touched Mrs. Ross' shoulder, saying:

"I tore your place to pieces looking for that—stuff—and I sunk it all in the creek. You'd just gone when I got there. There's not a bit of evidence. Are you hurt very much, Mike?"

"Say, you're a queen!" cried Parsons.

"Then help the queen get her husband home," said Emmy. "I have to cook that marshal's dinner."

THE GRANDEUR OF CHARLIE CARLIN

REPRESENTATIVE CHARLES C. CARLIN, in the national Congress, has a district in Virginia just across the Potomac River from Washington. Among his constituents are many colored people, and one day an old darky, having found his way to the door of the House of Representatives, wanted to walk in and talk to Carlin.

The doorkeeper explained to him that he would have to send in his name. While the old man was waiting for the congressman to appear, he looked up and down the vast corridor in which he stood, gazed at the ornamented ceiling, and glanced at the oil painting on the walls.

"'Fore de Lawd!" he finally exclaimed. "Is dis hyah Chollie Carlin's awfice?"

A CASE OF SECOND-SIGHT

THE bartender had reached that state where he was staggering visibly under the blows and jars of too much rum to the brain. He was seeing double.

The dignified gentleman who entered the bar every evening at a certain hour, with his hat on at a certain angle, and with his heels striking the floor with a certain velocity, walked up slowly and asked for his customary glass of beer. The bartender, with elaborate care, prepared two glasses, and set them down in front of the sober and unshaken customer.

"I ordered one glass of beer," said the patron, in a smooth manner. "Why, in the name of a suffering Heaven, give me two?"

"Well," said the bartender, lurching forward to emphasize his curiosity, "ain't your friend goin' to have one?"

A Man From the Hills

By William H. Hamby

Author of "Cold Potatoes and Ten Dollars," "Feeding Fat the Enemy," Etc.

There are few keener enjoyments in life than to have an idea and see it work. It is that creative thrill, instead of sordid greed, that gives zest to business. It was an original idea that came to this inquisitive hill billy. It ought to interest you. It has to do with the high cost of living

BIRKINS stood bullying a group of his clerks. It was only a few minutes until opening time of the Big Brick Store's Great Removal Sale, and there was a whole stack of goods not yet tagged. The Big Brick Store made a specialty of goods that could not be guaranteed; and had innumerable special sales that varied only in the color of the tags.

For the present sale a red tag was attached to every article in the store; the price marked up sixty per cent, a heavy line run through that figure, and then marked down sixty per cent.

It was seven o'clock. The last tag was attached. The doors were swung open, and Samuel T. Birkins slipped on his veneer of breezy palaver kept solely for customers. Toward his help, he was coarsely jocular, or nastily overbearing, according to his humor.

The first person to enter was a lank, elongated hill billy, with a tall, peaked head, tawny hair, and tanned face. His cheap, faded, two-year-old coat sagged as though he had carried rocks in his pockets. He stopped uncertainly just inside the door and looked slowly around as though embarrassed or scared.

Birkins slipped a wink to the three or four clerks who were near him as an invitation to watch how an expert handled a greenhorn.

"Good morning," he gave a patronizing wave to the stranger. "What can we do for you this morning, young man?"

The hill billy approached, very solemn and diffident.

"My name's Lafe Jason." His Adam's apple slid up and down. "I'm looking for work."

Birkins' smile changed in quality; the veneer was not gone, but an obscene sneer got through.

"Ever work in a store?" A side wink to his head clerk.

"No," very seriously.

"What do you *think* you can do?" Birkins began to feel good. He would give his clerks a little fun.

"Most anything, I reckon," answered the young hill billy—he was not more than twenty-three or four. His guileless, pale-blue eyes looked about reflectively. "Anyway I'm willing to tackle it."

"Know anything about dry goods?"

"No"—the lank youth hesitated—"nothing, except that they are generally shoddy."

"Well, I tell you what you do," Birkins remarked rather hastily, "you look around here, and if you see anything you can do to make us money, I'll give you a job."

Again Birkins winked at his clerks, and as the young fellow sauntered off among the stacks of sale goods, looking speculatively around—and up, they all had a good laugh.

"He might be a drawing card," said Birkins, "if we should put him on exhibition in the window, and mark him, 'Before Buying One Of Our New Suits.'"

The serious-faced applicant for a job paused at one counter whereon was a big stack of half-sheet bills advertising this wonderful sale. The young man picked up one of them and read it carefully. It began like most of Birkins' advertisements:

GREAT SACRIFICE! PRICES CUT IN TWO!

We have to move. The building we occupy has been sold. During the ten days of this removal sale—the greatest sale ever held in Wahoo City—we are going to sell $20,000 worth of goods at exactly half price. A loss to us of $10,000; a gain to you of $10,000.

Birkins was still talking with two or three of his clerks, and several customers were nibbling here and there along the counters in hearing distance, when the hill billy approached the proprietor with the bill in his hand.

"Well," said Birkins, "have you found something you can do for us?"

"Yes," answered the youth solemnly.

"What is it?"

"I can save you ninety-eight hundred dollars."

"How's that?" Both the clerks and the early customers paused, interested.

"I can move you for two hundred dollars."

The hill billy turned toward the door without waiting for a reply. The quickly suppressed laughter of the clerks and the unchecked merriment of the customers who had overheard did him more good than anything he could think of, except to get Birkins down behind the counter, and bore a hole through his face with his kneecap.

As he reached the door, Lafe stepped back, scared, to let a bunch of girls come through. He was afraid Nina Wingate was one of them. He had been quaking ever since he entered the store, lest he meet her; but the girl clerks did not come on duty until eight. He had not seen Nina since October when she had stood on a rock by the spring—he had stopped there as he walked in town the evening before, and could see exactly where the toe of her shoe had rested—and told him with exuberant delight that she was going to town—she had a job clerking in a store.

Of course Lafe had been to town since then, but he had avoided going to the Big Brick Store. Nina was now a town girl, and would wear fine clothes and be proud. And he did not want to make her feel bad by having to recognize him before the other clerks as an acquaintance. Lafe knew he was a hill billy, knew his clothes did not fit, knew he was a source of merriment to bystanders.

The door cleared of the influx of customers, and Lafe started out again. But Nina was approaching the same door. He stepped aside quickly, and waited half hidden until she passed inside. She was dainty in new clothes—and wonderfully pretty. But somehow Lafe felt that the enthusiasm for her new job had not lasted.

Just inside the door she turned with an unaffected little cry of delight:

"Why, Lafe Jason! When did you come to town?" The other girls stopped to stare and smile, but Nina unnoticing shook his hand in the warmest and friendliest grip; and her deep-gray eyes looked wistfully up into his. "My, but it is good to see you. Where have you been keeping yourself? Haven't seen you for ages. How are all the folks?"

As Lafe went out on the street, he forgot his desire to get his knees on the edge of Samuel T. Birkins' face.

There were only three important stores in Wahoo City. And the other two never minded Birkins' sales. For twenty years these three had dwelt together in unity and prosperity, making an average profit of sixty-eight per cent on old style, shoddy goods palmed off by the jobbers on the backwoods hill trade. And the three combined had managed to chloroform all competition in the colicky stage of its infancy.

Lafe went down the street toward Ben Hilman's general store.

The young hill billy had an amazing memory, both accurate and tenacious. Once, in three months he had memorized every historical date in the school history. And now as he side-stepped the broken spots in Wahoo City's rickety sidewalks, he could run back for ten years, and recall where each of his

meager purchases had been made, exactly what he had paid, and just how badly he had been cheated.

Hilman's was a big, barny sort of store, with a disorderly sort of stock of goods. Like the two other main stores it carried something of everything, but its specialty was the Undersole brand of shoes. One whole side of the storeroom was lined with them.

As Lafe entered he glanced instinctively to the left of the fourth section of the fifth shelf. It was from right there the clerk had taken his first pair of dress-up shoes. It was nine years ago. He had gone barefoot late in November, through four frosts, and one light snow, before he saved up enough rabbit money to buy him a real pair of shoes—ones that did not have club soles and coarse, cowhide vamps. Lafe remembered his boyish thrill as he took them home. And they had lasted like rotten paper. In two weeks, there were holes in them. The store had scorned his request to make them good—and he had gone barefoot through two more snows, before he got together enough money for the club-soled, cow-vamped protection to which he had been accustomed.

As Lafe walked down the aisle toward Hilman at the back of the store, his eyes followed the lines and lines of shoe boxes.

"I'll warrant," he said to himself, "there are shoes been sitting up there so long they have forgotten whether they are the grandson of a cow, or the stepson of a horse."

Hilman was not a merchant; he was a storekeeper—the sort who never gave away an empty box, and insisted on his clerks taking damaged and left-over goods on their wages.

Of course, he did not need a clerk; and he made it burningly clear that if he did he would not want an untutored, awkward, bungling, shabby hill billy.

Lafe crossed the street, and went up to the Buckeye Bridge Store. This was the store where he bought his first suit of clothes. He had worked out the money in the harvest field, and got the clothes to wear to a basket dinner. He started out that first Sunday morning wearing the suit with the secret anticipation that he would be the center of attraction the entire day. He was. For he sweated on the way—and the dye did the rest. It was over an hour before he discovered why everybody looked at him and laughed, nudged somebody else, who also looked and laughed. When he did discover the mottled and streaked condition of his face and neck where he had wiped the sweat, he fled in the bitterest humilation of his life.

Horatio Ames, proprietor of the Buckeye Bridge Store, received him with that quality of friendliness which permeates a man who secretly expects to run for county clerk two years hence. Ames wore glasses, had full pink cheeks, curly black hair, and overmoist lips. He made it a rule of his life to never let any young man get away without a word of good advice. Perhaps the time may come—as it should—when public venders of platitudinous advice will be compelled to take out patent-medicine license; but so far they have escaped the Pure Food and Drug Act.

"Have you had any experience clerking?" asked Horatio Ames, in a hopeful, almost eager tone—as though that would settle it.

"No," replied Lafe.

Ames looked out of the door reflectively, speculatively, and shook his head with regretful reluctance.

"I'm afraid I can't use you—just now. Possibly some other time I might find——"

"Were all the clerks in town born in stores?" asked Lafe, with some heat.

"Why, no——"

"I just wondered," said Lafe, "how they got their experience before they got a job. I reckon," he added, "what you fellows are after is somebody experienced in wearing clothes, rather than selling them. Well, I've not had such an all-fired lot of experience carrying dry goods around; but I'll bet ten coonskins I could sell them, if I got a chance."

"I don't doubt it, I don't doubt it,"

hastily added the suave merchant of shoddy goods. "But at present—now let me tell you what I would do—I am anxious to see you succeed; if I were you I would go back to the farm—and —and——"

Lafe did not wait for the rest—he started, but not for the farm.

"Not by a long shot," he said angrily, as he strode back to the hotel. That sort of advice made him sore as a side-saddle. He had heard all his life that "Lafey would have to be a farmer." To be sure, they all agreed, he would fail at that, but a man can fail on a farm and still not starve, and they did not believe he could do that well at anything else. But worse still, there was no farm to go to—just a one-room cabin and a hillside patch of rocks, and already it was overpopulated with worthless brothers.

No, he would not go back to the farm.

"I reckon," he said, as he sat down on the edge of the hotel porch—"I'll have to start something of my own."

But thirty-six dollars would not go far. He needed a lot more—say at least two hundred.

He still sat there figuring out a way to get that two hundred, when Nina came by on the way to dinner.

He did not intend to embarrass her by appearing to know her, for a number of people were on the porch waiting for the dinner bell. But Nina looked toward him, nodded and smiled, and paused a little shyly.

"Are you staying here, Lafe?"

Lafe got up eagerly, and walked with her up the street to her boarding house.

There was no doubt now that she had not found the job in town what it had seemed that October day. Her people were as poor as his; and her ambition as strong. A chance to work in a store had seemed like a door into the far, green fields. But the light had gone now—and there were signs of trouble in her face—it was a pretty face, very girlish, but with strength in it.

"Yes," he said, as they approached the boarding house, "I guess I'll stay."

"What are you going to do, Lafe?"

"I don't know yet—not for sure. You like it here, don't you?"

"Y-e-s—— In some ways."

He saw she had been crying, and wondered. Nina did not tell him that as she started to leave the store Birkins had flung at her a particularly raw jest about her "hill billy."

"Say," said Lafe, with sudden courage, "what time do you get through down there?"

"At six."

"Would you mind to take a little walk afterward—down by the bridge?" He asked it shyly.

"I would love to, Lafe." And her eyes affirmed it.

He went back to the hotel and ate a hearty dinner. And then waited for six o'clock.

The sun was not yet down, but among the tall trees through which the valley road ran, lay cool, soft shadows of coming twilight as Lafe and Nina sauntered toward the bridge.

Lafe said nothing at all of his day's experience. He was habitually reticent. With Nina his mind worked freely, but he talked mostly of the things he intended to do—what he thought one ought to make of himself. But with her the personal crept in, and along with the bright-tinted hopes of things she was going to attain, she could not help but let Lafe know that her job at the store had been disappointing. She got only five dollars a week, and four of that went for board and room—and she had to put up with many things.

"Sometimes," she said, as they leaned on the railing of the wooden bridge, "Mr. Birkins treats us very well. But" —there was a slight quiver at her lips —the trustful lips of a little girl, and she broke off suddenly—"but I guess nothing is ever what we expect."

"No," said Lafe, "I guess not. Sometimes it is worse, and again sometimes it's better."

"Do you think they are better as often as they are worse?" She looked up with the tremulous hopefulness of one who wants to believe.

"If we make them," he answered, and shut his jaws grimly.

She looked down the creek to where the water foamed over a shoal, and he looked down at her. She was not a bit like any of the other girls from the country he knew. She was light of foot, slender and girlish. Yet there was purpose and courage in every line of her body. For a fleeting second—by accident—his hand touched hers on the rail, and they both looked away and blushed.

It was silver-gray twilight as they returned, and they said little—none of it personal. As they neared her boarding house, she looked up, and smiled shyly.

"I'm glad you came, Lafe. It won't be so lonesome now. I wish you could stay."

"I'm going to stay." But as he went on alone to the hotel, he was trying to solve that eternal riddle of "how?"

The next morning Lafe went around to all the stores again, but avoided the proprietors. He picked the most accommodating-looking clerks, and asked to see a great many different articles. He studied them carefully, and not being pleased asked for something else. Before he left, he bought some small article, and promised to think over the question of a suit of clothes, or a pair of shoes.

He did think it over and went back again. Got a different clerk this time, and saw other goods which he examined very minutely.

Every day for two weeks, some days three or four times, he was in the stores. The clerks found him very amusing, and left him to his own devices most of the time. He wandered from counter to counter, picking up article after article; and occasionally asked to see a certain bolt of cloth, or pair of shoes, or hat.

It was Friday afternoon he went into Hines & Mervin's real-estate office.

"Somebody told me you had an old typewriter to sell," he said.

They had. They had bought a new one, and would sell the old Number Two for ten dollars.

"I reckon I as well take it." And he fished a bill from his trousers pocket.

He took the old typewriter under his arm, and carried it to his room at the hotel.

All that afternoon and into the night there came an incessant click, click, clickety-click from Lafe's room. The drummer on one side alternately snored and swore, and the hog buyer on the other side grunted in disgust every time he woke up and turned over. But still the click, click, click, click went on.

Three days later, a lean, sunburned hill billy appeared at the post-office window, and astonished the girl clerk by asking for ten dollars' worth of stamps.

In about an hour everybody along the street stopped to stare at the same young man carrying toward the post office an armful of letters. There were five hundred, so the postmaster told Hen Bartlett that evening, and all addressed to farmers.

It was two days before the hill billy again appeared at the post-office window. This time he asked if there was any mail for Lafe Jason.

There were four letters. The next day there were seven; and the next there were fourteen.

And after each batch of letters, Lafe would approach the other window of the post office with several two-dollar money orders; and then go across the street to the bank where he cashed some two-dollar checks.

These money orders and checks grew until on the following Friday he got fourteen in one mail.

By this time everybody in Wahoo City was wondering about the hill billy and his mysterious mail. Where was he getting all that money—rumor increased it to a hundred dollars a day—and for what?

They almost quit saying alleged funny things about him, and began to have a feeling of speculative interest.

Saturday was the big trading day in Wahoo City. Farmers and their families came to town that day, and Wahoo City's trade nearly all came from the

farmers. It was the main trading point for a territory of twenty miles.

Many traders came into the Big Brick Store, and looked, and priced, and looked again, and jewed, and jewed.

Birkins was everywhere, his veneer of palaver a double thickness, asking about crops, and babies, and broadly flattering whomsoever might buy. But he noticed somehow they were not buying—not much. He was puzzled, mystified. Moreover he noticed quite frequently a customer would surreptitiously take a paper out of his pocket, and glance at it hurriedly.

"Well, Mr. Schott," Birkins slapped an old German on the shoulder, "how's how with you? What can I sell you to-day? Fit you out with a new suit of clothes?"

The old German was willing to look at a suit of clothes.

"Now, Schott," said Birkins, "there is a fine, all-wool suit that cost me in Chicago nineteen dollars and forty-five cents, plus the freight. I've been asking thirty dollars for it; but I'll make you that suit for twenty-two fifty. Got to make a little, you know."

The old German agreed "dot was right." He examined the clothes critically, especially the name of the make and the number. Then he fumbled in his pocket, and brought out a soiled paper, and studied it laboriously.

"Meester Birkins," he said, "I'll give you fourdeen dollars for dot suidt."

Birkins hooted, and then raved—but sold it for fourteen dollars. Although a Gentile, Birkins was the sort of a merchant a bad Jew is supposed to be. And he could not miss that two-dollar profit on the old German's suit.

"Say, Schott," he said, as he wrapped up the clothes, "let me see that paper you had."

"Nein, dot cost me two dollars."

"I'll give you two dollars to let me see it two minutes—and then I'll give it back."

The thrifty German succumbed to the temptation.

Lafe Jason had returned from the post office after the last rural mail carrier was in; and sat on the hotel porch opening the twenty-one letters the mail had brought him. In fourteen of them he found checks or money orders for two dollars. There are few keener enjoyments in life than to have an idea and see it work. It is that creative thrill, instead of sordid greed, that gives zest to business. The real business man is imaginative, even fanciful, and like an inventor or an artist or a poet, the joy of living runs strong in his veins when he can create an original plan, or method, and work it out successfully.

Before he finished his letters, he looked up the street and saw Nina coming down the walk. He was surprised. It was the busiest time of the afternoon for the store. She walked in a sort of stumbling haste, her head bent forward. He wondered if she were ill. As she came nearer, he saw her lips held tightly between her teeth, her face was flushed, and her shoulders heaved slightly.

She was crying, and trying to hold it back until she got to the shelter of her room. She did not look up as she passed. He watched her in consternation, uncertain what to do. When she was by, he saw her shoulders rise in one convulsive sob, which she quickly suppressed like a hurt child trying to be brave.

Lafe, stuffing the letters in his pocket as he went, strode after her, and overtook her just as she reached the gate of her boarding house.

"What is the matter, Nina?"

At the sound of a friendly voice she broke into a gulping, broken little sob, and wiped her eyes.

"I—I—haven't got any job any more," she said, "and—he talked awful to me." The tears were starting again—tears of indignation.

"Birkins?"

She nodded dumbly.

He opened the gate, and led the way to an old bench under the tree in the yard.

"What did he say?" Lafe asked.

"I—I can't tell you. It was awful. I was selling some lace, and he had been talking to an old German. And

all at once he came up to me and—abused me awful. Said I was a traitor and as good as a thief—and—I don't know a thing in the world that I had done—I don't know what he meant—and it was before all the other clerks and people, too."

Lafe nodded slowly. He began to understand. He was perfectly cool and steady, but his lips shut in a line, and his eyes narrowed, as they did when sighting a rifle barrel.

"I think I know." He took a paper out of his inside pocket. "Look that over, and you will understand. I've got to go to the hotel a little bit—but I'll be back directly."

It was a typewritten letter, one of the form he had been sending out. Nina read it carefully:

DEAR SIR: Do you know how much you ought to pay for the things you buy? You cannot unless you know what the goods actually cost.

For instance, Star A Undersole Men's shoes which the stores in Wahoo City sell for $3.50 cost them delivered at their stores $2.14. You ought to buy them for $2.75. You can, if you won't give any more. Birkins, Hilman, and Ames all will cut prices when they have to or miss a sale. But you don't know when to insist on a cut, nor how much reduction to hold out for, unless you know the price they pay.

Again: Birkins' store will ask you $22.50 for an N. & J. all-wool, Homer cut, suit of clothes. It costs him $12.62. If you know that, you can buy it for $15.

See the point? If you know the cost, you can save from ten to one hundred dollars a year on your purchases.

Now I have discovered the cost, gone to the wholesale house at St. Louis, and verified it. Know I have it right. I have a list of 100 staple articles, clothing, shoes, hats, hardware, et cetera, with the cost price plainly marked.

I will send you this list for two dollars, if you will sign the inclosed promise not to make any copies of it, nor to show it to any one but your immediate family.

Send to-day. You'll save twice that the first time you come to town.

LAFE JASON, Wahoo City, Mo.

"And that was it," said Nina, her face burning hotly. "Birkins thought I had given him the cost mark." And at the thought of the insults Birkins had heaped upon her, her small hands clenched, and angry tears started again.

But a moment later the hot indignation changed to a smile. "Who would ever thought of Lafe doing that? It's clever, anyway, and I'll bet he's made some money on it."

She glanced down the street. Lafe had not stopped at the hotel, but was entering the Big Brick Store. A few minutes later, people were running toward the store.

Nina stood up, her heart pounding. Could anything have happened? Of course not. Lafe was the most peaceable man in the world. But the excitement seemed to be spreading, and more people were running.

Directly, though, Lafe was coming up the street, walking unconcernedly with a free, easy swing. It was all right. Nina's heart beat easier.

As Lafe came into the yard he wore the smile of a newly converted saint. There was a gleam in his eye, and a buoyant play of muscles. Nina looked at him with wondering admiration—she had never seen him like that; there was the light of a conqueror in his face.

"What was the matter, Lafe? What happened?"

"Oh, nothing much."

"Why did the crowd run to the store, and what are they carrying out?"

"Oh," he said, looking away, "old Birkins ain't feeling extra good, and they are taking him home." For a moment the corners of his mouth lifted in a dry smile. "The doctor says it's painful, but nothing serious."

Then turning swiftly to the girl, he said earnestly:

"Nina, I've got a new job for you—working for me. Want you to commence Monday—at eight dollars a week to begin with. Will you?"

The light came back to her eyes, the light of anticipation that she had almost lost. This was the real opening into life.

"Yes." She did not look up. "What is it, Lafe?"

"I'm going to start a store," he said. "Right next door to Birkins'."

The Girl and the Ground Wire

By Francis Lynde

Author of "The Taming of Red Butte Western," "The Fight for the G. V. & P.," Etc.

"A new kind of detective." The critics have used the phrase in their commendatory reviews of Francis Lynde's stories of "Scientific" Sprague, which appeared originally in the POPULAR and have recently been published in book form. Sprague is indeed unique, and when you learn that it is this ingenious investigator who solves the problem of the "Girl and the Ground Wire," there is no need to tell you that it is a bully story.

(*A Novelette*)

CHAPTER I.

THE Chicago Fast Mail, due at the capital of the Sagebrush State at seven-thirty in the evening, was half an hour late, and young Mrs. Blount, with dinner waiting at home, was charmingly impatient—charmingly because the stirring of suspense sent a glow to her cheeks and brightened her eyes, heightening the attractiveness of a face which was normally pretty enough to make the dullest time killer in the platform throng turn for a second look at it.

When she had telephoned the house and had told Jepson, the chauffeur, that the train was late, there was nothing more to be done; and after fidgeting for a time in the stuffy waiting room she went out to join the pacing throng on the platform. It was at the second turn that she came face to face with a giant of a man frock-coated like a Southerner, and wearing the soft hat which American tradition associates with the long-tailed coat worn in public places.

"Mr. Sprague!" she bubbled gratefully, letting her small hand disappear in the grasp of the mighty one. And then: "I'm so glad! I came down to meet Annette, and the train is late, and the dinner is getting cold, and I hadn't seen anybody that I knew well enough to nod to. When did you get back?"

The big man drew Mrs. Patricia's arm within his own, and the pacing sentry go was resumed.

"Back from the Honorable David's ranch in Quaretaro County, you mean? I've been back and forth half a dozen times in the past few weeks."

"And you haven't been near us in all that time," reproachfully. "What has Evan been doing to make you stay away?"

"Nothing, my dear lady—less than nothing, I assure you. Your good husband is the soul of hospitality, and I couldn't tell you how many times you have barely escaped having me thrust in upon you as an unexpected dinner guest—I couldn't really."

"It is written down against you," said the little lady accusingly. "You know, or you ought to know, that I've been simply dying to hear the story—the real story—of that dreadful affair in the oil fields in which Mr. Fairbairn

came so near being hanged or sent to the penitentiary.* Of course, I read the newspaper accounts, but any one could see that they were plainly designed to keep people from finding out the real truth."

"You say you are down here to meet some one?" Mr. Calvin Sprague threw the query in as one throws a switch in front of a train which needs to be shunted to safety.

"Yes; Annette Barbour, my cousin. She was visiting me here a few weeks ago, and she went on to Seattle to the wedding of an old school friend. Now she is coming back to finish her visit."

"Annette Barbour?" said the big man half inquiringly. "Not by any chance the daughter of Mr. Jason Barbour, the New York banker?"

"Why, yes, she is. Do you know her?"

"I know her father," admitted the frock-coated athlete.

His companion nodded. "Everybody knows Uncle Jason."

Calvin Sprague's smile, which was too far removed from the level of Mrs. Patricia's eyes to be visible to her, was grim. He was remembering that a good many chartless adventurers upon the Wall Street sea of finance knew Mr. Jason Barbour—to their cost.

"Yes," he returned gravely; "Mr. Barbour is quite widely known. You say Miss Annette is coming to visit you. Will she stop long?"

"I hope so," was the hospitable response. "We are going to keep her as long as we can."

The delayed train was not yet within sight or hearing, and they made another turn in comradely silence before the big man spoke again.

"Mrs. Blount, I'm going to ask a favor of you," he began abruptly, after the little interval of silence. "From what you said a few minutes ago, I infer that you haven't met young Mr. Stamford Fairbairn."

"I haven't; but I have met his brother-in-law, Mr. Starbuck."

"Starbuck is all right. But this young brother-in-law of his—— Oh, dear me, Mrs. Blount, I'm finding it desperately hard to pose as a gossip."

Mrs. Patricia was of New England lineage, and her fetish, so far as she permitted herself to indulge in one, was respectability. After a pause which was surcharged with all sorts of possibilities, she said: "Are you trying to tell me that I shouldn't invite Mr. Fairbairn to the house while Annette is with us, Mr. Sprague?"

"See there, now!" said the amateur gossip, with a mellow laugh. "See how straight a woman's intuition can go to the mark, when a blundering man wouldn't even be certain that there was a mark. Let's talk of something else—of this delayed train, for example. I should think you would be curious to know if I am leaving town, Mrs. Blount."

The little lady laughed joyously at the not overskillful attempt at topic changing, but she was sufficiently self-contained to fall in lightly with his mood.

"Possibly you are meeting some one—as I am," she offered.

"I am. I have a ten-minute appointment, while the train is changing locomotives, with a Great Personage. I suppose I ought to be dreadfully nervous and gaspy."

"Yes, I can imagine your being nervous over anything!" she scoffed. "Who is the Great Personage?"

"If you'll promise not to be entirely overcome, I'll tell you. It's Mr. Hardwick McVickar, vice president of this puissant and all-powerful railroad."

"Oh, pshaw!" in disparagement either real or perfectly simulated. "I've met Mr. McVickar, and he is just a nice, grumpy old gentleman, and perfectly harmless. I thought you meant a member of the president's cabinet, or a United States senator, at the very least."

Sprague grinned at the feminine summing up of Mr. McVickar, the despotic tyrant of ten thousand miles of

*See Mr. Lynde's novelette, "Very Crude Oil," published in the May month-end POPULAR, which can be obtained from any news dealer.

railroad, as a "nice, grumpy old gentleman," but what he said was: "Oh, the politically great; it is quite natural that you should think in terms of politics just now, with the special session of the legislature about to convene, and the town overflowing with greasewood Solons, as Starbuck disrespectfully calls them. Do you keep open house for the members of your party?"

"No; I'd like to, but Evan won't let me. Mrs. Governor Gordon is going to give a series of receptions, and I thought we might give one or two at least. But Evan won't hear of it. He says it's an open secret that the session has been called because he insisted upon it, and he doesn't want to be charged with trying to influence legislation."

Sprague presumed upon the privilege of an old friend when he said: "There are times, Mrs. Blount, when your good husband stands up so straight that he has a tendency to lean backward. There is a crooked law on the statute books, passed either through inadvertence or chicanery, and Governor Gordon has called the legislature together for the express purpose of repealing it. You may tell Evan from me that he won't be justified in overlooking any promising bets."

"You mean that Mr. Hathaway and his people will resort to—er—more chicanery?"

"I mean that the very existence of Mr. Hathaway's monopolistic company is at stake. Under its present charter, the Hathaway company has the exclusive right to build a pipe line from Twin Buttes to the oil field, thus controlling the field by controlling its only possible transportation line. If this right can be maintained it means that the Hathaway people will eventually own every oil well in the district, and Mr. Starbuck's brother-in-law and his associates will be everlastingly smashed. Sometimes I am a little afraid that Evan doesn't fully realize the magnitude of the thing."

The delayed Fast Mail was whistling for the station, and the wife of the attorney general looked up with a quick little laugh.

"It appears that you're not overlooking any bets, either, Mr. Sprague," she retorted mockingly. And then: "Annette will probably be in the coast sleeper. Can you get me through the gates so that I can meet her on the platform?"

The big man said he could, and he did. When the long train pulled in, he hurried his companion down the platform. At the step of the rear Pullman a bright-eyed young woman, with a face so eagerly and winsomely alert that it narrowly missed being acutely beautiful, was descending. Sprague halted long enough to see the double hug and to hear the chorused "You *dear!*" Then he went on to the vestibule of the private-car trailer, where a white-jacketed porter was waiting to admit him.

"Yas, sah, Misteh McVickar is in de settin' room. He say for you-all to come right in." And Sprague edged his way through the corridor vestibule to the central compartment of the private car. At a flat-topped desk sat a man well past middle age, with the deeply lined face and massive jaw of authority. A long, black cigar was clamped between his strong teeth, and he shifted it to dismiss the stenographer at his elbow, and to say: "Come in, Sprague; you can have all the time there is."

The man who looked like an Alabama statesman, and was not, took the chair at the desk end, and planted himself solidly in it.

"It's curiosity this time, Mr. McVickar," he began, with a gentle smile. "The legislature of this State convenes to-morrow in extraordinary session. A fair third of its members was elected a year ago on a ticket which was popularly called the railroad ticket."

"Bosh!" growled the square-jawed man at the desk impatiently.

"That may be," returned the visitor evenly; "but in the regular session last winter it was made pretty evident that one man in three could be depended upon to vote for any railroad measure that happened to be up. I'm curious to know what this third man is going

to do in regard to the repeal of the pipe-line enabling act."

The vice president shot a quick look at his visitor. "What are you doing out here this time, Sprague?" he demanded.

"Call it a vacation," said Sprague, with another of the gentle smiles. "My wife has gone to Germany with her aunt, and Senator Blount asked the department of agriculture to send me out as a soil expert on his irrigation project in Quaretaro County."

"What's your interest in this pipe-line squabble?"

"It might easily be personal. Young Fairbairn is Mr. Richard Maxwell's brother-in-law, and he stands to lose a good bit of money."

"Father Hiram can advance the price on lumber a dollar a thousand, and never miss the money he has given his son," cut in the vice president, with a grim laugh.

"Just the same, I'm making it a personal matter, Mr. McVickar. I don't want to see the boy lose out."

The railroad man was marking tiny circles on his desk blotter with the sharp point of the paper knife. "I'm sorry, but I can't help you out this time, Sprague," he demurred at the end of an inappreciable pause.

Sprague glanced at his watch. Eight of the ten minutes were gone. He leaned across the desk end.

"Mr. McVickar, you want this oil business for your railroad, don't you?"

"Of course; and we're going to get it at Twin Buttes."

"Supposing I should tell you that you won't get it at Twin Buttes, or anywhere else, if this pipe-line graft can be made to hold?"

"What's that?" demanded the vice president.

"It's like this: Young Mr. Fairbairn and his friends own or control two-thirds of the producing wells in the district. Before they will submit to the extortionate proposals of the pipe-line company they will cap their wells and go out of business, hoping that, in the course of time, the Northern Central will build into the district by way of Lewiston and Arequipa."

"Are you authorized to tell me that?" snapped the man at the desk.

"Oh, no; there is no authority about it. I am merely giving you a friendly hint. You don't want the Northern Central to build into your territory."

"Young Fairbairn won't hold out, and those pikers who are in with him can't hold out," declared the railroad tyrant.

"That remains to be seen. Maxwell is worth a couple of millions, and another brother-in-law, Starbuck, could probably scrap up a million or so more. They will both stand by Stamford to the last ditch."

For once in his history as a railroad dictator—and it was perhaps the only time—Mr. Hardwick McVickar hesitated. Then he said: "I must consult with Gantry and our people here. And I can't take time to do it now."

Sprague looked at his watch again, and got up to go.

"You have a very excellent wire equipment on your railroad, Mr. McVickar," he suggested. "It may accelerate matters a little if I say that Stillman Rogers, general counsel for the Northern Central, is at present a guest at the Intermountain Hotel."

The vice president made a final attempt to deny his responsibility. "We don't control a single vote in the legislature, Sprague. I've had my lesson in this State. It would be tantamount to setting off a dynamite explosion for us to try to get any sort of a measure passed, or held up, in the extraordinary session. The entire State would blow up with a loud noise."

"Of course," said Sprague gently, moving toward the vestibule; "we all understand that. But every man has his friends, Mr. McVickar—even a railroad vice president."

"One moment," interposed the man in authority. "Will you tell me flat-footed, Sprague, that the government isn't behind you in this oil-field deal?"

The frock-coated visitor laughed easily. "In what way could the government be behind me, Mr. McVickar?" he

asked mildly. "As we all know, this oil-field business and the fight which has grown out of it are strictly local. One might almost suspect that extra pains have been taken to keep it so, to keep well within the State's jurisdiction and well beyond the possibility of any interference from Washington. This pipe-line company now—every dollar's worth of stock in it is said to be held by citizens of this State."

The vice president's big head wagged slowly from side to side. "You're not denying it," he grumbled, half to himself. "But the fact that you are bracing me is a pretty decent denial in itself. If you had the goods on you—the government goods—you wouldn't be here fooling with me. Go on back to this young plunger in whom you have such a warm personal interest, and tell him he still has a fighting chance. But don't tell him too much, Sprague—for the Lord's sake, don't tell him too much! I'll do what I can, but it will only be in a general way, and purely advisory."

"That is all I am asking," said Sprague; and he went out, with a cheerful: "Good night, and a pleasant journey to you, Mr. McVickar."

CHAPTER II.

Half an hour after the departure of the delayed Fast Mail, the big man, who defined himself an expert analyst of soils temporarily engaged in making tests for Senator Blount, foregathered in a private room in the Intermountain Hotel with two others—a lean-faced, hard-muscled plainsman, who answered to the name of Billy Starbuck, and a handsome young fellow with blue eyes and curly hair, who figured for the moment as the chief oil operator in the Lost Hills district.

"Shoot it out, Mr. Sprague," said the younger man, when Sprague had stripped off the enveloping frock coat and had taken his seat in the biggest chair the room afforded. "Did you see Mr. McVickar?"

"I did; and he is your friend—to a limited extent."

"Then we can swing the railroad vote?"

"That remains to be seen. I've been counting noses—with the good help of Editor Blenkinsop, of the *Daily Capital*. Even with McVickar's help, you are going to lack about ten votes of a majority in the House, and possibly six in the Senate. Besides which, there is always a possibility that somebody will cut in on the circuit with a ground wire."

"We're not going to lack anything," declared the young oil plunger truculently. "When it comes to paying for dead horses, we've got just as much money as the other fellow has."

Sprague looked inquiringly at Starbuck, and the plainsman nodded, saying: "It had to be done, Calvin. This is a case where money talks, and everything else barely whispers. Maxwell came across with a check to help out, and I matched it."

Sprague shook his head in sober deprecation.

"That won't do; it won't do at all—and I'm saying it to both of you. This is one time when you can't afford to fight the devil with fire."

"Why can't we?" snapped Fairbairn.

"Simply because your strength in the fight lies with the decent contingent. Leaving ethics and common honesty entirely out of it, you can't hope to bribe the thing through and keep it dark. And the moment somebody squeals I can assure you in all soberness that the decent contingent will rise up and smash you; and Evan Blount and his father will head the riot."

"Pshaw!" said the younger man. "If all the stories they tell about the Honorable Senator Sagebrush are true, he used to do it himself."

The big man reached forward, and laid a finger on Fairbairn's knee.

"Stamford, my boy, don't make the mistake of thinking that because a man has once been the machine boss of his State he can't turn square around and face the other way. The senator has done it, and if you want to have him behind you you've got to fight fair."

Fairbairn got up, and filled a short pipe of the college variety.

"I haven't any other guess coming," he said half morosely. "After the way in which you cut the hangman's rope for me at Arequipa, I can't even use common sense any more unless you tell me to. If you've got anything up your sleeve, give it to Billy. I'm due to go down to the lobby and meet a man."

When Fairbairn's footfalls had died away in the corridor the big expert opened upon Starbuck fraternally.

"Stammy is going to give us a heap of trouble, Billy," he predicted. "You won't take it as a family affront if I say that he has inherited a good bit of his father's indifference to the means by which any greatly desired end is to be attained. Then there's another matter—a complication which has dropped down out of a clear sky, and one which will tangle Stammy hopelessly if we can't steer him clear of it."

"Skirts?" said Starbuck laconically.

The able-bodied one smiled broadly. "How did you know?" he queried.

"I don't know; I'm just guessing. Stammy has dropped a word or two now and then about a hopeless case he had left behind him in New York. His father says 'No,' and cusses in English, which is the only language he knows; and the girl's father says 'No,' and cusses in French and German, which he learned while he was financial agent for the Astorbilts in the old country. It's a business feud of some sort between the fond parents, I reckon."

"It is," said Sprague calmly; "and a very bitter one. Stammy's father and the girl's father have been feeling for each other's throats any time these last ten years."

Starbuck was silent for the time it took him to make and light a cigarette. Then he said: "You don't mean to tell me that the girl has blown out here?"

"It is even so. Worse still, she is the guest in a house whose door stands hospitably open for Stammy Fairbairn. Billy, you've got to keep him from putting his foot over the threshold of that door—at least until after this political scrap has been fought to a finish."

"Name the door, and I'm with you," said the plainsman mine owner nonchalantly.

"The young woman in question happens to be Mrs. Evan Blount's cousin," returned the government man; whereupon Starbuck threw up his hands in despair.

"Stammy's got his invitation. What's going to break loose if he accepts it?"

"The invitation is going to be withdrawn. I attended to that little matter as soon as I learned of the threatened presence of the young woman."

"Threatened, you say? Then it isn't a fact yet?"

"It wasn't at the moment when I took the liberty of blackening Stammy's reputation."

Starbuck looked dubious. "This town is mighty small when it comes to keeping two fond hearts apart," he suggested. "What's going to happen if these two get together?"

"Two or three things, and all bad. In the first place, Stammy will lose interest in the oil fight—he'll be too busy putting up the sentimental fences. In the next place, the romantic reunion will be advertised, not necessarily in the newspapers, but by those who will find it profitable to spread the story of it. In that manner it will shortly find its way to Mr. Jason Barbour, in New York, and to Mr. Hiram Fairbairn, cruising in the Mediterranean. Then the fireworks will begin."

"Which of the two fond parents will apply the match?"

"Both of them simultaneously, I fancy. I'm not breaking any confidence when I say that Mr. Barbour has already selected his daughter's future husband—a young man after his own heart."

"How about the girl?" asked Starbuck.

"She isn't very enthusiastic over her father's selection; in fact, I have a vague suspicion that this Western trip of hers is in some sort an attempt to escape."

"Worse, and more of it," grumbled Starbuck morosely.

"Much worse, and much more,"

Sprague agreed. "Stammy can't afford to antagonize his father. The time may come a little farther along when this oil business of his will ask for more money than either you or Maxwell can afford to put up. For that reason, if for no other, Stammy must stay on asking terms with his father."

"I thought you shook your head a minute or two ago when we mentioned money?"

"So I did. It isn't bribe money that's going to be needed. But that's neither here nor there at present; the pressing need of the moment is to keep these two young people apart."

"It's a frost, and that's a cinch," was Starbuck's verdict. "Blount was trying to take Stammy home to dinner with him no longer ago than yesterday."

"Mr. Blount will extend no more invitations to your brother-in-law," said Sprague definitely. "Are you going?"

"Down to the lobby—yes. To tell the truth, I don't like to turn Stammy loose too long at a time. I'll drop in later—if you haven't gone to bed."

CHAPTER III.

It was nine o'clock when Starbuck left Sprague's room. Reaching the lobby, he found it filled with caucusing legislators; but young Fairbairn was nowhere in sight. The great lobby was a domed interior court, surrounded on three sides by shops and offices fronting outward on the three streets. Near the main entrance Starbuck paused with his back to the door of the city ticket office of the railroad company. Opportunity, bald behind, but with the inviting forelock dangling easily within grasp, brushed past the plainsman mine owner—nay, brushed him aside when he gave place to two men, one of whom thrust a key in the lock of the glass-paneled door and turned it while the other waited.

Later, when the two had gone in and the lights went on in the closed office, the opportunity was still Starbuck's. As it presently appeared, the two seekers of privacy had seated themselves near one of the door-buttressing lobby windows. The shade was drawn, but the window was open a few inches. Starbuck heard the voices of the pair, and he might have heard the words had he been listening.

They were strikingly ill-assorted, the two who sat upon opposite sides of a flat desk behind the shaded window. One was a hard-featured man with a hawklike profile, the eye deep set, and the mouth thin and hard, vanishing to a mere line in the side view. His hair was graying a little at the temples, but his hands, the surer age index, were the hands of a man well past middle age.

The other was clean shaven and well groomed—a rather handsome young fellow, whose besetting weakness was plainly limned in the full lower lip, too loosely held, and in the eyes, which, like the lower lip, were a trifle too full. Lisher was this young man's name, and he was the city passenger agent for the railroad company.

"Well," barked the older man, when the latch had been snapped on the door, "what did you find out?"

"Mr. McVickar didn't see anybody except the government man—Sprague—while he was here. I couldn't follow Sprague into the car, of course, but from what I could see through the window it was merely a social call. They talked for the few minutes the train stopped, and then Sprague got off and came back here to the hotel."

"You are sure there was nobody else?"

"I didn't see any one; but I saw Ackerton, who has been regularly retained as Fairbairn's lawyer, going back through one of the Pullmans as the train pulled out."

The hawk-faced man brought his clenched hand down upon the desk with an ugly word to emphasize the blow.

"That explains it!" he gritted. "Let me see that telegram again."

The young man drew a folded paper from his pocket. It was a cipher telegram, dated within the hour, from a station a few miles east of the capital. It was signed "McV.," and was addressed to Gantry, the assistant general

passenger agent, and Lisher's superior officer.

"I am putting my life in your hands, Mr. Hathaway," said the young man, as he passed the message across the desk.

The president of the pipe-line company took the telegram, and his hard jaw came up with a snap.

"You did that three years ago, Lisher, when I caught you making false entries in the lumber company's books to cover up your stealings. I didn't send you over the road, as I might have done; instead, I got you this place here under Gantry."

"I know," said the younger man half doggedly. "Sometimes I wish you had jugged me; sometimes I think I'd rather wear the stripes than be your tool."

The hawk-faced man made a noise like a rusty hinge.

"It's never too late to mend," he said, with harsh sarcasm. "Any time you're tired of drawing your salary from the railroad company I can have an expert go over the lumber company's books."

"I know," repeated the passenger agent gloomily. "I'm in the hole, and I can't get out."

"Let that go, and tell me what this wire from McVickar means."

The young man looked up inquiringly. "I thought you knew Mr. Gantry's cipher," he said. Then he wrote rapidly upon a pad, stripped the sheet, and pushed it across the desk. One glance was all the bird-of-prey eyes needed to give it.

"So that's it, is it? McVickar's giving us the double cross, eh? The word is to be passed at the capitol that the railroad is not interested. Well, we'll show 'em that it *is* interested, and you're going to be the bright young man who will do the showing, Lisher."

The young man put up his hands as if to ward off a blow.

"Don't ask me to forge another telegram, Mr. Hathaway! Don't! I'm in deep enough as it is."

"You haven't much originality," said the other contemptuously. Then he made a circle around a single word in the translation, and pushed the paper back to the passenger agent with a curt command: "Read it now."

Lisher obeyed almost mechanically: "'Tell our friends quietly that we are (not) interested in obstructing repeal.'" With the one word "not" removed, the sense of the message was completely reversed.

The passenger agent shook his head. "It won't do, Mr. Hathaway. Mr. Gantry will have to see the original message when he comes back from the West. I shan't dare to hold it out on him."

"Show me this word 'not' in the cipher," snapped Hathaway.

Lisher pointed it out. Luckily—or unluckily—it came at the end of a line. "That's your dodge hole," said the pipe-line president. "You know how to take that word out; you learned the trick making erasures on the lumber company's books. Fix it, and leave the original for Gantry to find when he gets home. Then make me an exact copy; do it here and now. I want to use it."

The young man with the loose lower lip groaned, dug into a drawer of his desk, and removed the cover from the typewriter at his elbow. Fifteen minutes later the president of the pipe-line company was circulating affably among the caucusing groups in the hotel lobby. With some he merely argued smoothly. To others, with a carefully elaborated air of secrecy, he showed a telegram signed "McV."—a cipher telegram with a word-for-word translation penciled between the typewritten lines.

It was between half past ten and eleven when Starbuck, passing through the upper corridor, saw a light in Sprague's room and thrust his face in at the door.

"Just a word by way of good night," he said. "Stammy and I have been hard at work rounding up the doubtfuls. We're safe. Taking the railroad members for granted, we've got a clear majority in both houses."

The big man looked up from the table where he was writing.

"That will do to sleep on, Billy," he replied gravely. "Just the same, I

wouldn't count the chickens before they're hatched if I were you. Or, to change the figure, I'd keep a sharp eye out for the ground wire. Good night."

CHAPTER IV.

The opening day of the extraordinary session of the legislature, called together to break the monopoly which a hastily passed enabling act of a former session had conferred upon the Hathaway Pipe Line Company, dawned bright and fair, as most summer days do in the Sagebrush State. Starbuck was a little disappointed when, upon going down to breakfast, he found that Sprague had already left the hotel and the city to drive out to the Honorable David Blount's home ranch of Wartrace, thirty miles to the northward.

As the day progressed, however, the plainsman mine owner, acting as field manager for Fairbairn and the associated oil-well owners, saw no reason to regret the temporary absence of the big-bodied expert who had been acting unofficially as his mentor and counselor.

At a late hour in the forenoon the two houses of the legislature met in joint session, and listened to a brief message from Governor Gordon, stating the object of his call. Acting upon the message, the lower House promptly took up the business in hand. Blount, the attorney general, had carefully prepared the repealing act, and it was presented by the member from Carnadine. On motion, it was referred to the committee on corporations, and the legislature adjourned after the shortest session on record, the reconvening hour being set for the following morning.

Having an open afternoon to be nullified, Starbuck persuaded his brother-in-law to take him on a country drive in the new car which was young Fairbairn's latest and most luxurious acquisition. The drive was to the westward, and by skillful maneuvering on Starbuck's part it was made to consume the entire afternoon. At the evening meal in the Intermountain Café, Sprague joined the two at their corner table, much to Starbuck's satisfaction. Through two-thirds of the meal the jovial soil expert descanted eloquently upon the honorable senator's irrigation project, and it was not until the small coffees were served that he said:

"Well, how did the great fight go to-day?"

Starbuck told the story of the day's doings in a single sentence, and Sprague nodded.

"So far, so good," he commented. And then: "What have you two on for this evening?"

It was young Fairbairn who answered: "I don't know what Billy's going to do, but I'm going to run out to Mr. Evan Blount's for an hour or so. I've simply got to have a little confidential round-up with him before this bill comes to a vote."

Sprague looked up with a good-natured grin.

"I'm afraid you'll have to make it a business call to-morrow morning, Stammy," he said blandly. "I met young Blount and his wife in their auto heading northward as I drove in. I've a notion they were aiming to spend the evening at Wartrace Hall with the senator and Mrs. Honoria."

Starbuck winked one eye so slowly that the motion of the lid could hardly be detected. He, too, had seen the attorney general's auto. It had been headed townward, and it held not only Blount and his wife, but a very attractive young woman as well.

Young Fairbairn looked at his watch. "Foiled again!" he laughed. "I guess it's the theater for us. I bought a box on the chance that I might be able to persuade Blount and his wife to go. Trot upstairs and get into your glad rags, you two. I want to tell you this charming little city puts on a heap of dog when it takes a box at the theater. It's a burning shame, though, that we three good-looking people have to go as a stag crowd."

The theater sufficiently accounted for the evening, and Starbuck was glad that the legislative contingent and its following packed the house so that his

brother-in-law did not happen to discover the three seats in the dress circle which were occupied by Mr. Evan Blount, his wife, and Miss Annette Barbour.

In like manner, the theater accounted for a late rising on the morning of the legislature's second day in action. After breakfast, Fairbairn hurried out to make his business call upon the attorney general, and Starbuck took counsel with Sprague.

"To-day's the day," he said laconically. "From what I could learn yesterday, it's a foregone conclusion that the committee will report the repeal bill back to the House this morning. Unless all the guesses are wrong, there won't be much discussion."

"Have you seen Blount?" queried the expert.

"Only for a minute or two yesterday after the adjournment. He was all kinds of confident when I told him I had inside information that the railroad members are for us. It so happens that a majority of the committee on corporations were elected on a railroad ticket."

Sprague, who had been dallying with his coffee spoon, looked up quickly. "Don't bank too much upon that, Billy. I broke in on Mr. McVickar because you asked me to, but I told you at the time that it might work or it might not. These railroad magnates are kittle cattle."

"We're all right," said Starbuck easily. "I'm predicting that the repeal act will go through both Houses with a whoop, and do it this morning." Then he added: "You'll find the answer on the city billboards."

"You mean the aviation meet at the fair grounds this afternoon?"

"Exactly. Not one of the country Solons is going to miss that."

"Probably not," was the comment. And then: "You don't suppose there's any possible chance that Mrs. Blount and her charming guest will be hanging around Evan's office at the capitol this morning, do you?"

It was precisely at the moment of this asking that Mrs. Blount's charming guest was preceding her hostess into the tonneau of the Blount house car in front of the capitol.

"Patricia, why didn't you tell me that Stammy Fairbairn was *the* Fairbairn of this oil muddle?" the guest was demanding. "After all I've confessed to you——"

"How was I to know you didn't know, dear?" was the soothing question.

"I never was so completely astounded in all my life as I was when Stammy walked in on us a few minutes ago in Mr. Blount's office," the guest went on, speaking as one with a grievance. "To think that Stammy and I have been here in the same town for days and days, with neither of us knowing that the other was in existence! When are you going to ask him out to dinner, Patty?"

What the hard-pushed young hostess replied need not be here set down in cold type. We remember that she was New England born, and was blessed—or banned—with the New England conscience. Let it suffice us to know that the crisis was tided over temporarily, though only to recur again an hour or two later. But of that more in its place.

The recurrence was at the opening session of the House, convening at eleven o'clock to hear the report of the committee on corporations on the repeal bill. Stamford Fairbairn and his bear warden—the lean, sober-faced plainsman, whom Annette persisted in calling a desperado in disguise—were in the public gallery; and, try as she might, Mrs. Patricia could not prevent a second meeting.

Luckily there was little time for confidences even if the bear warden had not been standing by to forestall them. As soon as the speaker had gaveled for order the chairman of the committee—a red-faced, portly lawyer from the Mormon end of the State—was upon his feet reporting the repeal bill back to the House.

There was a gasping murmur to run through the crowded galleries when it became evident that the majority re-

port was adverse to the passage of the bill. Smoothly, and without a hitch, the red-faced chairman was reciting the reasons. In good faith, and with the law of the State as its warrant, the Pipe Line Company had taken its franchise, and had invested its capital. In the opinion of a majority of the committee members, it was too late for the people of the State to intervene.

After a minority report, which was but a feeble rebuttal of the chairman's argument, the debate began, and it quickly developed that the repeal bill lacked neither enthusiastic supporters nor equally silver-tongued opponents. Back and forth the arguments were hurled across the House, seeding the air thickly with words until the great bell in the tower of the near-by fire station boomed out the hour of noon.

As if this had been the signal for which he was waiting, the red-faced member at large from the Mormon counties got upon his feet, and offered an amendment—a skillfully worded clause, which, if inserted in the repeal bill, would effectively kill it. In an uproar of protest, the amendment secured a second, and in spite of vigorous filibustering on the part of the opposers the amendment was put to a vote.

It was not until the speaker was announcing the vote which showed the strength of the two factions that the real explosion came. Young Fairbairn, oblivious to the clamor on the floor of the House, was bending over the chair in front of him, with his lips within whispering distance of a pink ear, when Starbuck shook him roughly.

"Do you hear that, you blasted idiot?" hissed the plainsman. "The amendment has carried—*carried*—two to one, you pig-headed young ass! Where's your majority now?"

The young man sat back in his seat, and a beatific smile spread itself over his face.

"There's my majority, Billy—right there," he burbled fatuously, pointing to the girl in front. "What the blooming, bleeding blazes do I care about a lot of greasy oil wells when I've found her?"

Fortunately there was no time for the recriminations which might justly have followed this sapient retort. A tall, funereal-looking member from the Lewiston mining district was upon his feet and moving that the amended bill be referred back to the committee. There was a second, a viva-voce vote in which the storm of ayes rattled the cut-glass pendants on the great dome-centering chandelier, and the House stood adjourned.

CHAPTER V.

Grimly determined, Starbuck rose with the crowd in the gallery, and tried to part Fairbairn and the pretty temptress. The effort was a distinct failure. The crowd—or, rather, some of the women in it—got between the effort and its accomplishment, and Starbuck was so far from keeping hold of his charge that he eventually lost sight of him altogether.

Worse than that, Fairbairn did not turn up in time for luncheon at the hotel; and Starbuck, sitting down with Sprague to discuss the debacle, was sweating gloom from every pore.

"He's gone out to Blount's house—there's no doubt about that. He has simply shoved himself upon Mrs. Blount so that she couldn't refuse to ask him. I'll bet you a bronk with legs a mile long that those two turtledoves will be at the aviation meet this afternoon as big as life."

"Isn't it awful, Billy?" laughed the big man, in mild sarcasm. "You and I were never young."

"My gosh!" groaned the plainsman. "Maybe I was young once, but I never saw the day when I didn't have a little sense left in my hand to draw to. Why, look at it! We're dumped—knocked down in the middle of the road and run over. With all our fine-haired work, Hathaway has showed us that we're not knee-high to a hoptoad. He had this majority tucked away in his vest pocket all along, and he knew it. That's why he hasn't made any more stir about it."

Sprague had finished his frugal

luncheon, and was lighting one of the colossal cigars. After a time he said: "Since Stammy seems pretty safely out of it for the present, it's up to you to save the half million, Billy. What have you done—anything?"

"Not yet. I haven't had time to do anything."

"There's no time like the present. Suppose you begin here and now. Last night you thought you had a safe majority; to-day you're sure you haven't. Where is the loose screw?"

"I don't know. In fact, I don't know *anything* right now."

"All right; I'll see if I can't give you a starter. Do you know the personnel of the committee on corporations?"

Starbuck rattled off the names as if he were reading them out of a book.

"Of course you have the record of each of these men?"

"Yes; and it's all our way. Four of the members were elected on the railroad ticket, and——" Starbuck's jaw dropped suddenly as at a sudden opening of vistas. "Suffering Scott!" he ejaculated. "It's the railroad bunch that's gone back on us!"

"It looks that way," said the expert calmly. And then: "This is interesting. I wish I had time to go into it with you, Billy, but I haven't."

"You've done your part," said Starbuck. "It's Mr. Hardwick McVickar who has given us the double cross."

"Somehow, Billy, I am not quite ready to believe that. I'm not saying that McVickar wouldn't do it under pressure; but, as I happen to know, the pressure was applied the other way. I'm quite certain of that because I applied it myself."

Starbuck pushed his chair back from the table. "You did? Then it's a trick!" he snapped. "Be a good fellow, Calvin, and tell me what to do."

Sprague smoked thoughtfully for a full minute before he said: "You have the afternoon before you, and you'll possibly miss the aviation meet at the fair grounds. I can give you one small pointer, and you'll have to build your entire structure upon that, like a pyramid upside down. It's a ground wire—cut in on your carefully insulated circuit. Have you happened to meet a young fellow here by the name of Lisher? He's Gantry's city passenger agent, and he has an office over on the Main Street side of the hotel."

"I know him by sight—yes."

"Nice young fellow," said Sprague, with apparent pointlessness. "Drinks a little, and gambles a little, but doesn't do enough of either to make Gantry lose confidence in him. If he had always been as careful as he is now, he might not have lost his job three years ago with the Twin Buttes Lumber Company. Are you beginning to see the hole in the millstone, Billy?"

"Not enough to hurt."

"Well, then, I suppose I'll have to make it bigger, much as I dislike to kick a man who has been down and is apparently up again and firmly on his feet. I've told you I was out here once before. It chanced to be at the time when Mr. Lisher was leaving the Twin Buttes Lumber Company's service to take his present job with the railroad. Odd as it may seem, Hathaway was the man who fired him from one job and got him the other."

"Give it a name," said Starbuck briefly.

"Plain embezzlement, I think. Just why Hathaway condoned it I don't know. It was hushed up promptly—or, rather, you might say it never got out. I don't suppose I should ever have thought of it again if I hadn't happened to see Hathaway hobnobbing with young Lisher in the railroad office this morning." Thus far the big-bodied one had been sitting back in his chair, speaking between leisurely puffs at the black cigar; but now he sat up suddenly. "There's your pointer, Billy. Go to it like a little man."

"Let me see first if I've got it straight," said the Timanyoni mine owner. "You think Hathaway has put up a job with this young fellow to turn the railroad members against us. How could it be done? How the dickens could it be done, Calvin?"

The big man smiled in lenient toler-

ance of his tablemate's lack of originality. "If you weren't so badly rattled over what Stammy's doing, or isn't doing, I am sure you would rise to the occasion. Why, man alive"—with sudden vehemence—"I've just put a weapon in your hands that would make a wooden Indian cigar sign climb down from his box and tell you all he knows."

"Sure!" grunted Starbuck disgustedly, rising from his chair. "I'll do it, and do it now. I'm batty, just as you say. Anything else?"

"Yes; after you've had your little séance with young Lisher you must go after Stammy and get him by the throat. It's up to him, as the chief of the oil-well owners, to round up his lobby and get busy quick. You get the idea? Let them raise the roar of protest while you are digging out the evidence of the crooked deal. To-night, when the caucusing begins here in the hotel lobby, you and Stammy can put two and two together, and if you've both been decently diligent the game will be coming your way again."

Starbuck reached half absently for the hat the waiter was trying to hand him, and said: "You're not going away anywhere this afternoon, are you?"

Sprague laughed good-naturedly. "Not if it will do you any good to know that I am in town. I'm going around to my laboratory shop."

Having reasonably clear instructions, Starbuck lost no time in carrying them out. A visit to the railroad office developed the fact that Lisher, in his capacity of city passenger agent, had been busy most of the forenoon with the aviators and their following. The clerk behind the counter could not say positively, but he supposed Lisher would be at the fair grounds during the afternoon.

Missing the immediate chance at Lisher, Starbuck caught a passing taxicab, and had himself driven to the attorney general's house in the northern suburb. Here he learned from the doorman that Mrs. Blount and Miss Barbour had taken the small car shortly after noon to drive out to the senator's ranch in Quaretaro County. The man explained that Mrs. Blount had received a telephoned invitation to luncheon at the ranch, and the two ladies had left immediately, with Mrs. Blount driving the car. Pressed a little farther, the doorman said that a young gentleman driving a new car had called shortly after the ladies had gone, and had driven away in a hurry when he had been told how to find the Quaretaro road.

At this the anxious field manager, who had been given a point upon which to build a pyramid upside down, was sorely distracted. There was no doubt about the identity of the young man described by the Blount footman. If he should go in pursuit of Fairbairn he might lose his chance of putting the thumbscrews upon Lisher. If he should go to the fair grounds in search of the passenger agent the lobby of protest would be losing just so much time in which to formulate a plan of action; and, moreover, it would be lacking the leadership which only Stammy could supply.

Starbuck saw anxiously that there were a thousand things to be done, and only one afternoon for the doing of them. Public opinion in the city should be roused; the two afternoon papers must be enlisted, and induced to give of their space; Blount should be seen and conferred with. Above all, however, the interview with Lisher took precedence; and again Starbuck tumbled into the taxicab, giving the order this time to the fair grounds.

It was a rather long drive, and the machine was desperately slow, since the driver had to run, or did run, all the way on the low gear. Clearing the houses of the western suburb, the mine owner could see the thick parking of automobiles around the fair-ground inclosure. Three planes were in the air, circling and diving to the cheers of the spectators; and as Starbuck bought a ticket and forced his way through the crowd at the entrance a fourth machine —a Wright biplane, carrying a passenger—was just rising in a long, graceful swoop from the half-mile stretch of the race track. Unlike his associates, the

birdman with the double load did no fancy stunts for the amusement of the vast throng. Instead, he rose in a widening spiral to a safe cruising height, headed his machine to the northward, and was presently a vanishing speck in the sky.

Wedging his way into the packed mass of spectators, Starbuck lost a full hour in a futile search for the passenger agent. A dozen men to whom he put the question had seen Lisher, but nobody seemed to know where he had gone. Wearied and baffled, the field manager finally made his way to the gates, cursing the indecision which had made him go in search of Lisher instead of trying to overtake Fairbairn. Half of the precious afternoon was wasted, and the first efficient move in the game of retrieval had yet to be made.

CHAPTER VI.

When Stamford Fairbairn was told that the two ladies were driving to Wartrace Hall for luncheon, he cranked his car, and five minutes later he was hitting the northern road at a racing pace.

For ten miles the road was like a parked speedway; then came the ascent to the second mesa up a long series of curving grades; and again the young man took it out of his car relentlessly. It was because he was driving with the muffler cut out, and with eyes only for the hazards of the road ahead, that he failed to hear or see a huge, birdlike object passing high overhead, and, like himself, pointing northward.

Five miles along on the second mesa, however, he saw in the forward distance a strange obstruction blocking the road. Half a minute later he made out the obstruction, and was wondering vaguely how it had got there. It was a grounded aëroplane, and when he came up he found two men tinkering on the motor. When he threw out the clutch and stopped his car one of the men—a young fellow with rather prominent eyes and a loose lower lip—dropped his wrench and came forward quickly.

"This is Mr. Fairbairn, isn't it?" he asked anxiously. And then: "By Jove, I'm glad I was in time even if we did have a breakdown! I was trying to overtake you, you know, and Jeckyll here was good enough to give me a lift in the plane. My name's Lisher, of the Transcontinental office, in the Intermountain. I don't suppose you remember me."

"I don't," said Fairbairn; this though the young man's face was vaguely familiar.

"It doesn't make any particular difference," was the hurried rejoinder. "I am one of the small stockholders in two of your Petrolia companies—I guess you have hundreds of 'em that you don't know personally. There's big trouble at the wells. Daggart's been trying to reach you by wire, and couldn't find you. Here's his wire to me."

Fairbairn took the typewritten telegram, which was proffered with shaking hands. It was addressed to J. W. Lisher, at the capital, and it read:

> Wells Three, Five, and Nine spouting warm salt water instead of oil. Can't reach Fairbairn by wire. Find him and get him here quick. Panic threatening.
>
> DAGGART, Superintendent.

Fairbairn read the message twice. Then he said shortly: "It's a fake of some sort, Mr. Lisher. Who ever heard of such a thing as this happening in an oil field?"

"Oh, but it *has* happened!" insisted the passenger agent excitedly. "Down in the Texas field they lost three of the biggest pools that way. Any oil man will tell you that."

The young plunger leaned against the fender of his car, frowning reflectively. An hour earlier a heart-to-heart talk with Annette Barbour had figured as the one great necessity in life, but he was still sane enough to realize that the talk might be postponed.

"It'll take the better part of two hours to drive to Petrolia from here," he objected, adding: "And I don't know what I could do if I should go."

"You're the only man who can do anything, Mr. Fairbairn," protested the

passenger agent, with pathetic urgency. "If this story gets out there'll be a panic, just as Mr. Daggart says. Everybody will lie down, and the Hathaway crowd can do anything it pleases in the legislature. You say it would take two hours to drive, and I guess it would; it's all of fifty-five miles by way of Lost Horse Cañon. But it's less than thirty miles in a direct line across the range." The passenger agent wheeled suddenly upon the aviator, who was still tinkering with his motor. "Jeckyll, how long would it take you to go thirty miles across that low range to the eastward?"

The heavy-faced man in the hooded cap shaded his eyes for the eastward look, and then held up a wetted finger to the gentle breeze. "Forty-five minutes, maybe, in this air," he estimated.

"Can you carry two passengers? We should want you to take us over and bring us back, and we can afford to pay the price. I know the country, and I can pilot you."

The aviator nodded. "I've carried two," he admitted, "but only for short distances."

Lisher turned short upon the young promoter of oil fields.

"Are you game for it, Mr. Fairbairn? If you've never done the bird act, I'm ahead of you only by the trip out here this afternoon."

The young New Yorker laughed hardily. "Everything goes," he said. "Wait until I run my car out of the road where it won't be quite so handy for somebody to steal, and I'm with you."

There was plenty of time for the car ditching. After the auto had been run aside on the mesa the two passengers stood around for fifteen or twenty minutes while the birdman was making ready. During the wait Lisher was the impatient one, and when Fairbairn laughed at him he retorted hotly:

"You can afford to take it easy, Mr. Fairbairn. If you should lose the whole shooting match at Petrolia it wouldn't break you. It's a whole lot different with a fellow who has to earn his money by the day."

"He's ready for us at last," said the plunger; and they took their places as directed on either side of the driving seat, while the aviator was giving them a few precautionary instructions.

As was to be expected, the machine rose slowly with its triple load. Fairbairn had an unlighted cigar between his teeth, and he kept his eyes fixed on the distant hills. When he looked down the mesa had become a fallow, dun blanket beneath them, and his ditched automobile was a mere disappearing dot on the edge of a pinkish strip figuring as the road.

CHAPTER VII.

Having failed to find Lisher in the aviation crowd at the fair grounds, Starbuck had himself driven back to town to make inquiries at the railroad headquarters—with no better result. Fairly outdone, he dismissed the taxicab, and a minute later was breaking in upon Sprague in the expert's temporary laboratory on the top floor of the Shoshone Building.

When Starbuck entered the big man was pottering with a complicated chemical apparatus at a long, benchlike table, but he stopped, and sat down to listen to the story of failure.

"I'll have to admit that it looks a little bad for Stammy and his half-million investment in the oil business," was his comment when the story had been told. "This mysterious disappearance of the passenger agent is suspicious. When I last saw him he was in his office at the hotel, having a heart-to-heart talk across his desk with Mr. Simon Peter Hathaway. Have you telephoned Wartrace Hall to ask if Stammy is there?"

Starbuck nodded. "He isn't there—hasn't been there."

There was a half-burned cigar lying on the edge of the laboratory table, and the able-bodied one picked it up and relighted it. After a thoughtful whiff or two, he said: "The Wartrace Hall road and the road to Petrolia are one and the same—for part of the way at least. I was just wondering if something might not have occurred between

Stammy's starting and the arrival which you say he hasn't made to turn him aside?"

"To Petrolia, you mean?"

"Yes; he wouldn't be likely to go anywhere else in that direction."

Starbuck glanced at his watch.

"He's had plenty of time to reach the oil camp," he said. "I'll call up Daggart on the long distance." And he went to do it.

The wire talk with the superintendent of the Fairbairn companies at Petrolia was short and to the point. Young Fairbairn had not been seen in the camp, and there had been no word from him.

When the mine owner faced about to repeat Daggart's answer, the big-bodied expert was struggling into his coat.

"There's no rest for the wicked," he grumbled, in good-natured impatience. "I suppose I've got to break off right in the middle of things and go and help you find this lost babe in the woods. Confound you, Billy! Don't you know that a chemist would rather take a licking than be obliged to leave an experiment half finished?"

"I'm too much scared up to waste any sympathy on you, Calvin. If this crooked legislature gets together again before we can find Stammy or Lisher, or both of them——"

"I know," was the reply; "but you must remember that you are consuming my valuable time, and obey orders accordingly. Is your credit good for the hire of a comfortable car at one of the garages?"

"My check book is," returned the one who was to be helped; and together they went in search of the means to the end.

Behind the wheel of a hired roadster, with Sprague in the mechanician's seat beside him, Starbuck took his orders without question.

"We'll go the way we have every reason to believe that Stammy went, and trust a little to our luck," said the expert; and Starbuck sent the hired car spinning out through the northern suburb.

Reaching the mesa road, from which there was a clear view to the westward, they could see that the aviation meet was still going on at the fair grounds. Two or three aëroplanes were circling over the inclosure, and when they had driven a little farther they saw one coming from the north. Sprague shaded his eyes, and took a long look at the homing biplane with its dot of a man sitting at the levers.

"There's where we made our mistake, Starbuck," he commented jocularly. "We ought to have hired an aëroplane. That fellow's probably been where he could see all the things that we'll have to nose out on the dusty ground like a couple of blind worms."

With a good road, the ten-mile run to the level of the second mesa was quickly covered. At the fork where the Petrolia road branched off Starbuck stopped the car.

"I've got an iron dollar in my pocket," he said. "Shall we flip it to see which way we go?"

The expert wagged his big head in dissent. "The hypothesis of chance always involves a lot of useless labor, Billy. Let's use a little pure reason. We know what was in Stammy's mind when he left town; he was making a get-away to this girl. Let's go the way we are still pretty sure he went."

Starbuck pulled the car into the left-hand road, and shoved the speed lever into the high-gear notch. A few minutes later, when he was bending forward to shift the spark back and forth between the batteries and the magneto to make a missing cylinder pick up, Sprague laid a restraining hand on his arm.

"Slow down, Billy; there's a car ahead."

A minute later they had pulled up opposite Fairbairn's derelict, which was standing at the side of the road just as it had been left. Without a word, they went across to examine it. Nothing had been disturbed, and there seemed to be nothing wrong with the car. Starbuck lifted the hood, and laid a hand on the motor.

"It's still warm," he said. Then he

set the spark and throttle, jiggled the carburetor wire, and cranked the motor. At the first turn the six cylinders leaped smoothly into action. The mine owner snapped the switch, and made a slow investigative circuit of the ditched machine. Then he started the motor again, slid in behind the steering wheel, and tried the clutch. The high-powered car moved off readily, racing around a wide circle on the level mesa under the mine owner's guiding hand.

"There's nothing the matter with the machine," he declared, when he had pulled up beside Sprague.

During the circling spin Sprague had been carefully scrutinizing the dusty surface of the road. "What's your guess, Billy?" he asked.

"Lawzee! You might as well ask me how I know I'm going to heaven when I die! Stammy's plumb fool enough to try to walk from here to the senator's ranch, but he isn't the kind of a fool who walks when he's got a car that doesn't need anything but a man to drive it."

Sprague took his companion by the arm, and led him out upon the road. "Use your eyes a little, Billy, and tell me what you see," he said, pointing to the ground.

There were footprints in the dust—quite a number of them—but no signs of a struggle. Having served a hard apprenticeship on a cattle ranch in his youth, Starbuck was no mean trailer, and when he had sufficiently studied the footprints he straightened up and began to roll a cigarette.

"There were three of them here, and Stammy was one of the three. For a guess, I should say that they stood here talking together, and there wasn't any scrap."

"You'll have to go a little farther," insisted the big man, smiling wisely.

"All right; I can do it. Stammy stopped his car here in the road first, and got out. Then he went back, and ran the car out of the way. After that he came over here again. How do I know it went that way? Because the overlapping tracks tell the story as plain as print if you know how to read them."

"You're a wonder, Billy," commented the government expert, with the genial smile still wrinkling at the corners of his eyes. "If you could take the one necessary step farther you'd be a marvel."

"Show me," said Starbuck curtly.

Sprague led the way to the side of the road, and pointed to a light wheel track in the dust. At some distance to the right he pointed out another.

"What made those tracks, Billy?" he asked quietly.

The mine owner measured the distance between the two dust grooves with a calculating eye; then he went down on his hands and knees to examine them closely.

"Bicycle wheels," he decided briefly.

"Two bicycles running exactly parallel?" queried the big man.

"Say—no, that won't do!" was the puzzled exclamation; and then: "You've got me going, Calvin."

"All right; I'll make you go a little farther. Let's follow these tracks up the road apiece, and as we go I'll predict that we'll lose them gradually before we've gone a hundred yards."

The prediction came true almost as accurately as if Sprague had used a measuring tape. A little within the three-hundred-yard limit the parallel tracks faded away gradually, and finally disappeared.

Starbuck stopped and nodded slowly.

"Well, I reckon I'm on after so long a time. It was an aëroplane making a run for a rise."

"Exactly," said the soil tester. "More specifically, it was doubtless the machine we saw flying back to town as we came out a few minutes ago. Now, speed your guessing machinery up right hard, and tell me the name of the man who made the third set of shoe tracks down here in the dust. One of the three was the aviator; you'd guess that by the prints of rubber soles; the one who was wearing the modish Oxfords was Stammy; who was the third?"

"Lisher," said Starbuck instantly. "But, if that's so, how did he get here?"

"You're rattled, Billy—so badly rattled that you can't put a very obvious two and two together and call it four. You traced Lisher to the fair grounds, and there you lost him. We have the proof before our eyes that an aëroplane alighted here—came down, and then took flight again. Also, we see this same plane—or another one just like it—going back to town."

"How do you know it was the same one?"

"I don't know it; I said the same or another just like it. These tracks were made by a Wright biplane; you'd know that if you'd ever taken the trouble to notice the arrangement of wheels under the various makes. And that was a Wright which flew over us a little while ago. What time have you?"

"Quarter of four."

"Putting together the bits of information you picked up in town, about what time do you think it was when Stammy came along here in his car?"

Starbuck made the necessary deduction, and answered promptly: "Between one and two o'clock. A little after one probably."

"Very good. The biplane overtook him here, or he overtook it; it is immaterial which. That was nearly two hours ago. The biplane carried two men; there is no other way of accounting for the third set of footprints."

At that instant Starbuck had a vision. In it he saw himself struggling with a dense throng at the gates of an inclosure—a throng that filled a many-seated amphitheater and crowded upon the ropes fencing off a speedway track. High in the air over the inclosure a number of aëroplanes were wheeling and diving like a flock of great birds, and on the farther side of the speedway another machine was rising with a passenger seated beside its pilot.

"You're dead right, Calvin," he said, when the flitting vision had come and gone. "I saw the machine go up with two men in it. It took flight just after I reached the fair grounds and while I was looking for Lisher."

Sprague led the pacing walk back toward the automobiles. "Two hours," he said reflectively. "What we want to know now is what has happened to these three men during that interval. Luckily we know where we can find one of the three—the one who is now back at the fair grounds—and it is racing around in the back part of my head, Billy, that we shouldn't waste any time in getting hold of him."

"But how about Stammy's car? It doesn't seem as if we ought to leave it here."

"Stammy left it here, and since we are in a hurry we'll follow his good example," said Sprague, with a grim little smile. "Get that hired wagon of yours turned around, and we'll see if we can't break a record getting back to town."

The record was broken without doubt, and in the outskirts of the capital Starbuck made as if he would turn aside and head for the fair grounds.

"No," said his companion, with quick decision. "Take me to the Intermountain first; then you can go and hunt your birdman."

Starbuck made record speed again through the suburbs and into the city. Dropping Sprague at the hotel, he turned the car westward and so disappeared.

CHAPTER VIII.

It was an hour after the return to the capital when the Timanyoni mine owner won back to the hotel, and found Sprague smoking the inevitable big black cigar in the lobby.

"Well?" said the government man inquiringly.

"It's a plumb hoodoo," was the discouraged reply. "The airmen have a date for Carnadine to-morrow. The show was all over, and the crowd was pouring out when I got there. Two of the birdmen were pointed out to me, and I talked with them. I didn't get anything but the name of the man we are looking for. It is Jeckyll, and he did take up a passenger. I have put in the better part of an hour hunting for Jeckyll, and can't find him. He's in town somewhere. The other fel-

lows told me that he had turned his machine over to the mechanicians and had taken an auto to the city. I've been to every hotel big enough to have a register, and he doesn't show up."

Sprague drew a folded letter sheet from his pocket, and passed it to his companion.

"I've had better luck than you have," he said half jokingly. "Tell me what you make of that."

Starbuck unfolded the sheet. At first he thought it was blank, but when he looked closely he saw that there were four printed lines upon it. The letters seemed to have been traced by the point of a fairy pen, and they were barely visible.

"Try it with this," Sprague suggested, handing his companion a pocket magnifier.

Starbuck put the glass to his eye, and spelled out the words:

> Wells Three, Five, and Nine spouting warm salt water instead of oil. Can't reach Fairbairn by wire. Find him and get him here quick. Panic threatening.
>
> DAGGART, Superintendent.

"Now you know what made Stammy leave his car and take passage in the Wright biplane," said the expert confidently.

"I will know when you tell me what this is."

"It is a typewriter backing sheet. Two days ago I happened to be loafing in the railroad office, and I noticed Lisher at his machine—noticed that he always put in two sheets at a time, as most careful typewritists do, to keep the type from punching through into the rubber roller. Naturally this second sheet gets the same impression as the first, only much fainter and without the ink."

"I know," said Starbuck.

"Well, while you were gone I began to add up a few more of the loose two and twos that were lying around. We know that Lisher has somehow persuaded Stammy to drop out. There are a good many ways of persuading a man, but the most convincing one is the documentary way. That's easy, isn't it?"

"Easy enough for you. What next?"

"When I got that far along I dropped into the ticket office, chatted a few minutes with the clerk, who knows me a little, and got permission to sit down at Lisher's desk and write a letter. Of course, I didn't know exactly what I was looking for, but I gathered up a few of these half-used backing sheets, and a little later took them around to the laboratory shop, and put them under a microscope."

Starbuck nodded. "I see. And when you found the right one you went over it with a sharp-pointed pen. Calvin, you make me say it again: I'm blamed glad *I* haven't been doing anything crooked. Can you go ahead and call off the rest of it?"

"What happened out yonder on the mesa road is pretty fairly evident now, isn't it? Stammy had this telegram shoved into his face. Put yourself in his place for a minute, with a half million or more at stake, and with the knowledge that by to-morrow morning every stockholder on the job would be running around in circles and uttering loud cries. You'd want to make a break for Petrolia and try to bottle it up some way, wouldn't you—at least until you could find out definitely how completely you were obliterated?"

"Surest thing in the world."

"That's probably the way it struck Stammy; and Lisher could easily persuade him that with the legislature hanging in the wind, and everything ready to go to pieces at a touch, his automobile would be too slow. I've driven over a good bit of the mesa country in the past few weeks. It isn't more than thirty miles as the crow flies from the place where we found Stammy's car to Petrolia. The biplane in which Lisher had overtaken the auto would answer well enough for the crow."

"Go on and prophesy some more."

"I wish I could, Billy, but there's a limit. The biplane evidently carried three men when it made that long road run to get its rise. We know that Stammy hasn't reached Wartrace Hall or Petrolia; and we know that the bi-

plane has come back with only one man in it. Also, we know that something like two hours elapsed between the abandonment of the auto and the return of the aëroplane. In that interval the birdman could have dropped his two passengers anywhere within a radius of sixty miles—say anywhere within a half-circle area of five thousand square miles. What did you say about hunting for a needle in a haystack?"

"Suffering jehu!" ejaculated the mine owner, starting half out of his chair. "And we can't count on even one more day! If Stammy and his oil crowd are not on hand to make the fight of their lives to-morrow morning —— Calvin, let's get busy—we've *got* to get busy!"

"The busy part of it is already in motion, Billy," said the big man quietly. "I had a hunch that you wouldn't be able to find this birdman, so I took the liberty of setting a few other wheels in motion. It's just as you say—Stammy is the one necessary factor in the problem. Hathaway knew this, and that is why he has taken such pains to eliminate him. We ought to be getting reports pretty soon, and——"

While he was speaking, a little man with a soft hat pulled over his eyes drifted into the lobby, shot a quick look around, and then came straight across to the two in the alcove. His speech ignored Starbuck as though the mine owner's chair had been empty.

"The fellow's name is Martin Jeckyll, and he has ducked—faded. But his machine's been shipped, and it don't go West with the others."

"Where does it go?" Sprague demanded.

"To Twin Buttes—on th' midnight freight."

The government man nodded complete intelligence. "You're doing well, Gibson. Mr. Starbuck and I will leave for Twin Buttes on the eastbound train at seven-thirty. Keep up the search, and report to me at the station just before the train leaves. That's all.

"One of the senator's former political henchmen," Sprague explained, when the little man, pulling the hat still lower over his eyes, slid away as if there had been invisible and noiseless rollers in his shoe soles. "I had occasion to borrow him a week ago on another little matter."

Starbuck dragged out his watch. "This waiting business is fierce, Calvin."

"I know. But there's nothing else to be done. Jeckyll is the only man outside of the five thousand square miles who knows where Stammy is. He's shipping his machine to Twin Buttes so that he can go back after his two passengers later on. The later on won't be until he gets word from some of the Hathaway people that the crooked game has been played to a finish."

Again Starbuck started out of his chair.

"Say, Calvin, we've got to find that man and make him talk—and do it to-night!"

"That is what I am hoping to do," was the sober reply. "Jeckyll will follow his machine to Twin Buttes. There's a chance—just a bare chance—that he'll do it on the train we're going to take."

To the Timanyoni mine owner, acid eaten with impatience, the waiting interval dragged, leaden-footed. After the café dinner, which was made to kill time as it might, he went to his room, and made his single preparation for the journey by buckling a serviceable forty-five under his coat. There was trouble in store for the missing aviator if, when he should be found, he were unwilling to talk.

At the station the Fast Mail, eastbound, was ready to leave before the little man in the soft hat came to report. "Nothin' doin'," was the word he passed to Sprague; and thereupon the two would-be rescuers settled themselves in the day coach for the fifty-mile run to the station in the Lost Hills.

At Twin Buttes a small disappointment reached out of the darkness to slap them in the face. They were the only passengers debarking from the Fast Mail; in the small hotel across the tracks they found no one answering the

description of the birdman, Jeckyll; and after that there was another interminable wait before they recrossed the tracks to meet the midnight express.

"He'll surely be on this train," said Starbuck, when the headlight came in sight. But presently the discouraging fact gave the prediction the lie. The express had no passengers for Twin Buttes, and there was nothing to do but to wait for the arrival of the biplane-bearing freight. This came in at half past one, and the two watchers were standing aside in the shadows when the big, fragile machine was unloaded from its box car. There were no station freight handlers to help, and the train crew swore morosely at the delay and the trouble. At the critical moment somebody's foot slipped, and the aëroplane came down with a crash.

"To thunder with it, annyhow!" growled the big Irish conductor, who was helping with the unloading. "L'ave her as she is, and let's git a move out av this."

When the train pulled out, the two watchers examined the machine as well as they could by the light of Sprague's pocket flash lamp. It was broken, but seemingly not beyond repair. Since there were no more trains from the west until morning, there was nothing more to be done, and in the silence of disheartenment they sought the hotel, and went to bed.

Nine o'clock on the morning of the day of climaxings found them once more at the railroad station, awaiting the arrival of the eastbound accommodation. There were a dozen passengers to get off at Twin Buttes, but no man of the dozen was the man for whom they were waiting. By this time Starbuck was ready to explode. "Think of it, Calvin!" he gritted. "Nine o'clock on the last day, and nothing in sight yet! Why the devil doesn't your spotter man at the capital wire us something?"

There was a wire presently, but it was not from the little man in the soft hat. It was from Evan Blount, the attorney general, and it was addressed to Starbuck:

Just found out through Gibson where you are. What has become of Fairbairn? Legislature convenes at ten. We need every man on our side. Answer quick.

Prompted by Sprague, Starbuck sent his reply:

Make every effort to gain time. Strong probability that Fairbairn has been kidnaped. See Gantry, and make him show you telegram two days ago from Vice President McVickar. Satisfy yourself that it is genuine, and wire me here.

An hour elapsed before the answer came from the capital:

House convened and waiting for committee report on amendment. Every indication that we lose out. Gantry still out of town, and won't return until one o'clock. Clerks can find no wire from McVickar in files. For Heaven's sake do something.

Again taking his cue from the able-bodied government man, Starbuck wired the attorney general:

Nothing possible here until after arrival of noon train from capital. Kill time and catch Gantry quick on his arrival. Must find wire from McVickar. Try again in Gantry's office, with search warrant, if necessary. Answer.

At half past eleven the reply came from Blount:

Committee has reported favorably on amendment and discussion is on. Our friends talking against time to delay vote. Oil people badly disorganized. Story out that Fairbairn has deserted them after selling his stock on New York market. Gantry's chief clerk admits message from McVickar, but thinks it was given to Lisher, city passenger agent. Can't find Lisher.

"There's your ground wire!" exclaimed Sprague triumphantly, when he had read the final sentence of Blount's message. "It comes around to Lisher every time."

"Lisher!" grated Starbuck, and swore. "When we get time to settle with him he's going to jail."

"Oh, I don't know, Billy; we mustn't be too hard on the little people. Behind this young railroad man, whose loose lip and shifty eyes are a standing invitation to the bullies and the master plotters, there is a tall, thin, leather-faced gentleman by the name of Simon Peter Hathaway. We mustn't forget that."

Since there was now less than a half

hour more of the suspense, the two wore it out pacing up and down the station platform. When the noon train —the last one upon which the aviator could arrive in time to make his coming worth waiting for—slowed into the station a man dropped from the vestibule of the rear Pullman, and made straight for the shed-roofed freight platform, where the aëroplane had been left by the crew of the night freight.

He was standing over the partly wrecked machine, cursing the heavy-handed freight crew patiently and painstakingly, when Starbuck touched him upon the shoulder.

"We've been waiting for you, Mr. Martin Jeckyll," said the plainsman, with a cold light in his gray eyes, hinting at battle, murder, and sudden death. "Tell us what you did with the two men you picked up yesterday on the Quaretaro road, and tell it quick if you care anything about staying on earth."

The aviator flung a frightened glance over his shoulder. Apart from the big, frock-coated man standing at the questioner's elbow, there was no one near enough to be a ready help in time of need.

"I—I didn't do anything I didn't have to," he stammered. "They wanted me to take 'em to an oil town up here in the mountains. It was too much for the machine; she gave out, and I had to set 'em down."

Starbuck's weapon was out, and he let the birdman have a glimpse of it.

"Tell it straight!" he gritted. "Your life isn't worth five minutes of the time you are wasting. Don't make me shoot the truth out of you a word at a time."

At this Jeckyll, who was a villain only in the pliable sense of the term, broke down, and told his story:

"It was the fat-faced one that put up the job, and, honest, gentlemen, I don't know any more than the monkeys what it was for. I was to get 'em over on this side of the hills, and then put up a bleat that the plane wouldn't carry 'em any farther. Then I was to make a get-away by myself, and fix things so I could go back after 'em late this afternoon." The man's heavy face suddenly turned ashen, and he gasped out: "Say, mister, f'r Gawd's sake, take that gun away from my stomach! I just et my dinner, and you're fixin' to make me lose it."

"In a minute," rasped Starbuck grimly. "Where did you drop these two men, and how were you to find them again?"

"It was in the hills somewheres about ten miles north of here, two or three miles to the left of a big road. They could 'a' walked out easy, but I guess the fat-faced one meant to put some sort of a kibosh on that. They was to make a smoke so I could find 'em again."

Starbuck glanced at Sprague, and the big man nodded.

"You're out of it," said the mine owner curtly to the sweating culprit. "If we find those two men alive and well——"

"You'll find 'em all right, just as I'm tellin' you. The plane's busted, and I can't help out, but I'll go along with you in an auto if you want me to."

"We don't want you," said Sprague, speaking for the first time. Then he took Starbuck by the arm, and rushed him up to the railroad agent's office.

It took five minutes and one hundred and fifty dollars peeled from Starbuck's pocket roll to extort the promise that a special train would be rushed from the capital in record time; and then they went in search of an auto.

Fortunately there was one to be had —one of the machines used in the stage-line traffic between Twin Buttes and the oil field. Starbuck practically bought it outright, and ten minutes beyond the interview with the railroad agent the dust-covered, rattling four-cylinder was burning the wind on the northward road. Ten minutes beyond this Sprague, who was keeping the outlook, touched Starbuck's arm.

"Easy, Billy. I see the smoke. Try this next gulch to the left."

There was no road in the gulch, but that made little difference to a man whose home reputation ran to the effect that he would drive an auto over any

trail where a broncho could pick its way. At the head of the gulch there was a pitching drift into an inner valley dotted with rounded hills; and at the foot of one of the hills they found the two young men they were looking for, both hungry, and one of them—the fat-faced one—with a badly sprained ankle.

Oddly enough, there were few explanations asked or offered. Young Fairbairn, sobered by an experience which was not altogether without its tragic side, merely said that it hadn't seemed worth while to try to find his way out afoot and alone, and stood a little apart while his brother-in-law and Sprague were lifting Lisher into the tonneau of the dusty car. Later, after the record-smashing run had been made back to Twin Buttes, and they were losing a few more minutes of the priceless time waiting for the arrival of the special train, the young plunger took Starbuck aside, and eased the nausea of his soul:

"If I lose out, Billy, it'll be because I blooming well deserve to. It was a frame-up from beginning to end, and if I hadn't been crazy about the way Mrs. Blount ran off with Annette I might have caught on. Lisher gave it all away last night after he fell over a cliff and hurt his leg."

Starbuck was instantly alert. "How much of it did he give away, Stammy?"

"All of it, I guess. The telegram he showed me—a wire signed 'Daggart,' and telling about how some of the big wells were flowing hot salt water instead of oil—was a fake."

"He didn't mention any other telegram, did he?"

"No."

"That'll come in later," said Starbuck, without going any deeper into the matter of the second telegram. And then: "You'll prosecute this fellow, Stammy?"

"I don't know, Billy; he's a poor, miserable lame duck, and the other man has some sort of a pinch on him that brings blood every time the screw is turned. He wouldn't tell me who the other man is, and in his wretched way he's trying to shoulder the entire responsibility for the frame-up."

Five other minutes passed without the welcome sound of a locomotive whistle, and Starbuck gave the younger man a brief outline of the situation at the capital. "You've got it all now," he said, in conclusion. "If the vote has not already been taken, you can figure Blount in the last ditch fighting like a man with a broken heart. We'll be too late to do any good. By the time we can get the oil men rallied and the galleries filled the funeral will be over."

It was at this conjuncture that Sprague came down the platform with a telegram in his hand. "Read that," he said, handing it to Starbuck; and Fairbairn looked on over his brother-in-law's shoulder. The message was from Blount, and it said:

> Gantry just in. McV. message found. It is dead against us.

Starbuck handed the telegram back. "I suppose that settles it," he said quietly. "With the railroad third of the legislature on their side, the Hathaway people can do everything they're aiming to."

"Maybe—only maybe, Billy," was Sprague's rejoinder, tempered with a mellow laugh that was like the booming of a deep-toned bell. Then he fished a penciled slip of paper from his pocket, and handed it to the discouraged one. "That's the answer I sent to Blount, and I hope you'll forgive me for signing your name to it."

Starbuck read the copy, again with Fairbairn looking over his shoulder. The reply to the attorney general's despairing cry was curiously cryptogrammatic:

> Never say die till you're plumb dead. Put best friend on House floor with instructions to talk till he drops. Buy one-ounce bottle copper sulphate in solution, and meet me in Gantry's office arrival special train.

"You say you signed my name to that?" demanded Starbuck; but he said no more, because at that moment the special train dashed in from the west, was quickly turned on the "Y," and the race to the capital was begun, with Lisher stretched upon an improvised

bunk of seat cushions in the body of the single car, and the three for whom the train had been sent burning incense in the stuffy smoking compartment.

It was half past two when the one-car train thundered into the station at the capital. One minute later a clerk in the outer office of the general passenger agent, on the second floor of the building, opened the door for Starbuck and his two companions.

"Mr. Gantry's in his private office with Mr. Blount. Whichever one of you is Mr. Starbuck is to go in," said the clerk, falling over his English.

"For the present purpose, we are all of us Mr. Starbuck," said the biggest man of the three jovially; and it was he who pushed open the door to the private office.

Blount was sitting back in a chair near the window, thin-lipped and pale, and the general passenger agent was tilting easily in his desk chair.

Sprague wasted no time on preliminaries..

"Mr. Gantry," he began briskly, "two days ago—or, to be more exact, some time during the evening of last Monday—Mr. McVickar sent you a telegram regarding the attitude to be taken by the railroad company in the matter of the repeal of a certain law on the State statute books. We are all willing to believe that you never saw that telegram until to-day. Will you let me see it now?"

The general passenger agent picked up a square of paper from his desk, and handed it to Sprague, saying: "It's a cipher, as you see. If Mr. Blount requires it, I'll give you a translation; but I need hardly say, Mr. Sprague, that I shall do it under protest. The matter is expressly private."

Sprague's mellow laugh was an easing of strains for everybody. "You won't mind, Mr. Gantry, when I tell you that this message was sent by Mr. McVickar after he had frankly discussed the Hathaway company matter with me—that it was sent, in fact, as a result of the discussion. But I don't want the translation; I want the original message. Blount"—turning short upon the attorney general—"give me that bottle of copper sulphate."

Everybody was looking on when the big-bodied chemist stepped to the window, screwed a jeweler's magnifying glass into his eye, and went over the cipher message word by word. After a scrutiny which seemed to last only for a fleeting second, he put the eyeglass aside, and with the end of a match applied a tiny drop of the solution to a certain blank spot at the end of a line. Instantly the word "box" appeared as if floating in the tiny drop of the reagent.

"Mr. Gantry, what does the word 'box' stand for in your code?" asked the experimenter quickly.

"'Not,'" was the prompt reply.

Sprague laid the restored telegram on the desk, where all could see it.

"Mr. Gantry, some man on your force received this message in your absence, changed it to reverse the sense, and made use of it in its changed form to influence legislation. Doesn't it occur to you that your duty in the premises is pretty plain?"

The railroad official threw up his hands and gasped. "Good Lord!" he ejaculated. "What are we in for this time? Tell us what to do, Mr. Sprague, and we'll do it."

It was Blount who did the telling.

"It is a plain case of retrieval—if retrieval be possible, Gantry," he said gravely. "Give Mr. Fairbairn here a certified translation of that telegram as it was originally written. You can't do less than that—and I may add that you can't do it too quickly. It may even now be too late."

The copy was furnished instantly, and given to Fairbairn. "It's up to you now, Stammy," said Starbuck; and at the word he rushed the plunger downstairs and into a taxi; and, with Blount following in his machine, the race to the capitol was made.

Old campaigners in the Sagebrush State who were in the lobby or on the floor of the House in the afternoon of that fateful day tell the story of how skillfully the miracle was wrought.

Judkins, a big, bearded ranchman from the Clearwater Hills, had the floor, and he was declaiming desperately against time, with his voice well-nigh gone, and the opposition trying by every means, fair or foul, to make him quit. In the midst of the turmoil a page ran up the aisle and stopped at the desk of one of the anti-Hathaway members. A moment later a slip of paper was passed from desk to desk among the members; and then Judkins was made aware that a friendly voice from behind was urgently prompting him.

In a flash the big ranchman took his cue: "As I was saying, Mr. Speaker, we shall never believe that it is the intention of the people of this State to permit a grasping monopoly to reach out and appropriate for its own private gain these God-bestowed riches which have been discovered in the Lost Hills. So confident am I that our cause is just, and that my fellow legislators here assembled will sustain it, that I call unhesitatingly for a vote on the amendment, confident, Mr. Speaker, that it will be overwhelmingly defeated."

There was a burst of applause and triumphant clamorings from the Hathaway people, who thought that they had finally won the hard-fought battle. But a little later, when the vote was announced, and it was found that the amendment was lost by an overwhelming majority, the cries of triumph changed to shouts of rage and disappointment, and the House adjourned in a pandemonium of noisy but harmlessly ineffectual protest.

It was the after-dinner hour at the Intermountain Hotel, and three men—the attorney general, the big-bodied government chemist, and the young-old mine owner from the Timanyoni—sat in a corner of the mezzanine lounge, quietly smoking. Sprague broke the comradely silence to ask what had become of young Fairbairn.

"I met him at the door of my house just as I was coming out, and I had to take him in and square him with Mrs. Blount," said the attorney general. "It seems that some one had been telling her that he wasn't—er—exactly the kind of a young man to invite."

"That's odd," remarked Sprague soberly; and then: "About these legislature people, Evan—you think you've got them so they'll pass your repeal bill in to-morrow's session, do you?"

"It is as safe as a house—thanks to you, Mr. Sprague. The vote on the amendment this afternoon settled it. The Hathaway pipe line will never go through to Petrolia on an exclusive right of way while the world stands."

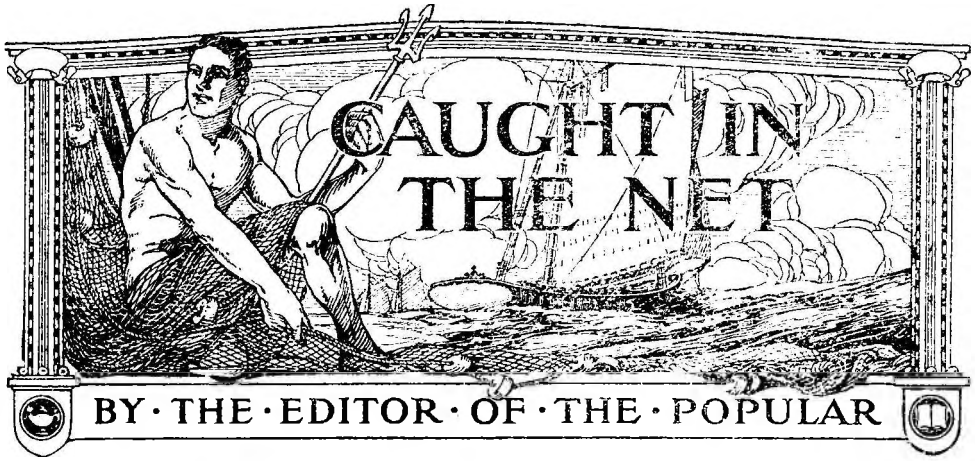
"Do you know what I'd do if I were in Mr. Hathaway's place, Evan?"

"No."

"Then I'll tell you. Halfway between Twin Buttes and Petrolia there is a narrow valley through which the wagon road and the old right of way for the railroad pass. On either side of this valley there are a number of abandoned mining claims, and the valley itself affords the only practicable route through the hills for either a railroad or a pipe line. There is nothing to prevent the Hathaway company from reorganizing as an independent corporation even if you do take their special charter away from them. Do you see the point?"

"I guess I do," was Blount's reply. "If you were at the head of the Hathaway crowd you'd buy up those mining claims, and thus slam the door in the face of any and all competitors. Much obliged for the hint; we'll stop that game, Mr. Sprague, before the cards are dealt."

"'Slam the door in the face of any and all competitors'—save and except the railroad company, which already owns its right of way in fee simple through the valley," Sprague amended, rising and stretching his arms over his head. "Your idea is a bully good one, Evan—if Mr. Simon Peter Hathaway hasn't beaten you to it. From something I heard the other day, though, I'm a little afraid—but I won't spoil your little hour of triumph. Good night, you two; I'm going to bed. I'm so infernally sleepy that I don't know what I'm going to have for breakfast to-morrow morning. 'Pon my word, gentlemen, I don't!"



American Influence

USUALLY nations view each other with suspicion, for their acts not infrequently are prompted by greed, envy, or malice. Once in a while a nation does a thing that is unselfishly noble, and that raises the moral tone and fires the imagination of the world. Such was the act of the United States in freeing Cuba and asking nothing in return but that Cubans prove themselves worthy of the boon of independence.

There was something America did a little after the Cuba matter that is forgotten, but is worthy of remembering, and out of which has grown a spirit of which Americans should be proud. In the Boxer Rebellion in China, America joined with the other great nations in the protection of foreigners and foreigners' property. There was some fighting, but neither in that trouble nor in any other outbreak in China did American soldiers fire a shot except for the protection of their own people. When the allies forced their way into the capital, it was through the policy of John Hay, secretary of state of the United States, that the powers pledged themselves to respect the integrity of the empire. Much damage was done in that Boxer Rebellion, and the claims for indemnity were staggering in their size. China paid the bill; China had become accustomed to paying such bills. She could not do otherwise. She was helpless. After the score had been settled China was amazed to have the money apportioned to America returned. The great republic of the West did not want to increase the burdens of the great, unwieldy, unfortunate empire of the East. China was stunned for a little while. She could not understand it. No wonder. She was so used to being taken advantage of that it was hard to believe it was not some new trick of the white devils. Slowly, however, she came to a realization that it was an act of national courtesy and kindness beyond precedent.

The Chinese are a staid, philosophical people. They thought the matter over, and then they determined on a fitting way to employ that money. Each year China sends to the United States a group of its most promising young men. Each of these young men has his expenses paid out of this indemnity fund. It is the duty of these young Chinamen to study the character of Americans and American institutions. When they finish their studies they are expected to return to their native land. They are under no obligation to pay back the money spent on their education and travels, but may do so if they desire, and most of them do.

To-day, according to the testimony of Doctor W. A. P. Martin, the veteran American missionary and educator, the United States is the most trusted of the foreign nations by China. The pages of the native press teem with

eulogies of the Western republic. Is it surprising? Is it unlikely that the spirit of republicanism imbibed by those young Chinese who came to America on the money supplied out of the indemnity fund has had much to do with making China a republic? And is it unlikely that out of the gracious act of America the trade and commerce of America with the huge Asiatic republic have profited greatly, and will profit more?

Forty-Love!

ONE of the greatest games in the world—lawn tennis—suffers under a handicap because the silly use of a beautiful word is made in its scoring. Somehow "love" came into employment to signify "blank" or "nothing." A person who sees lawn tennis for the first time is surprised when he hears the players call "fifteen-love," "thirty-love," or "forty-love." This surprise is all the greater if young men and young women are the players. If the newest spectator is a boy he gets a prejudice then and there. The average boy has a horror of sentimentality. To him "fifteen-love" is sissified, mawkish, suggestive of effeminacy. He wants to be manly and avoid everything that is not truly masculine in its application. He gets scornful about tennis. It's too ladylike, he thinks.

Did he but know it, no game known to man combines so many elements for the development of the lungs, the muscles, and the whole physical structure. It trains the eye, makes speed and accuracy, teaches self-control, and is conducive to grace. Few sports are cheaper, and no other is so well fitted for men and women between sixteen and sixty.

It is time this magnificent play should be relieved of its incubus. There is no more sense in a tennis player using the term "love" in announcing the score, than for a ball player to employ such a designation in his game. "Fifteen-nothing," "thirty-nothing," or "forty-nothing" mean more than "fifteen-love," "thirty-love," and "forty-love," and are not offensive. Free tennis of "love," and tens of thousands of youngsters will be won to the game. If for nothing else, it should be done as a health measure. The more young people play tennis, the better will be the health of the nation.

If any one thinks lawn tennis is not a man's game, let him ask some of the leading trainers of America. They used to think about it as does the average youngster to-day. They know better now. It has become one of the mainstays in developing college athletes. Many baseball managers, on their spring-training trips, put their men through a rigid course of tennis to get them on edge, and there are few great boxers in the United States to-day who are not skilled at tennis.

Playing the Game

THE typical amusements of the American people are moving pictures, vaudeville, and baseball. These abound in swift changes, in vivid focus, in a series of climaxes. The success of each is dependent on tension. When the inner life of a people is fed on excitement, and the itch for novelty, and when its life of amusement is passive, as Charles Weller has pointed out, when it sits back as a spectator, and thrills and grows dejected over a spectacle unrolled in front of its eyes, instead of personally participating in an activity, the attitude of mind will be carried over into the arena of politics. Here, too, the performance becomes a spectacle instead of a community activity.

There is an added reason for the passivity. There has come to the individual an increasing sense that he is outvoted. He has come to believe that his vote does not count. He believes, according to his station and temperament, that elections are won by big business, operating through spoilsmen politicians, or by ignorant masses, swayed and manipulated by demagogues. There has developed a cynicism about the ballot, democracy, free government. The individual is sure that his own clear, honest thinking

is outweighed by self-seeking or by ignorance, handled professionally by deft politicians.

With his national characteristic of admiration for success, he admires the expertness of the politicians, the almost perfect adaptation of means to ends. He would think he was making a little of a fool of himself, if he attempted to oppose that politician. He would as soon think of playing a game of baseball in opposition to the leader of the professional leagues. He loves to be a spectator, where skill, not his own, is being shown. He is not roused to action by being badly beaten. He is converted into a nonparticipant. The vast prestige of the boss, his unimpeded career till old age subdues him, is largely accounted for by the American habit of not personally interfering in a matter where one is not an adept.

"Oh, well, he knows the game"—so he says of the boss, and lets him continue to play that game unopposed.

It was in this spirit that the clash between Mr. Murphy and Mr. Bryan at Baltimore in the 1912 convention was watched. At last Mr. Murphy, the corrupt but successful boss of New York City, had met his match in the person of a national politician of personal honesty, but of equal skill in the mastery of men. No ordinary citizen, however much he might have resented Mr. Murphy's domination, would have thought of opposing it. But when a skilled opponent entered the field, the combat and the victory were applauded.

Surplus Luggage

EVERY once in a while high society's enterprising press agent announces in the dailies that Miss Accumulator or Jack Highboy has just arrived at a summer resort with twenty-seven trunks. Such an item should arouse commiseration.

One of the main objects of travel is to get away from things. Too much luggage, whether it be fat or clothes, game sticks or fishing tackle, is an aggravation of the spirit. Travel that counts for anything must cut us loose and set us free. It must slip the pulleys that make the wheels of the daily grind go round; leave behind the multiplicity of things that has become a weariness of the flesh and an oppression to the spirit. It must leave us free for new scenes and adventures, for new growth and revitalized living. How can it do that if we carry around with us twenty-seven trunks of our past? The Long Hunter of the pioneer days had a better idea of what a traveler needs. In the fall, when the west wind called, he slung a powder horn across his shoulder, took his rifle under his arm, and was ready for the long, blazed trail that led to the great woods. He kissed the family good-by and told them if he had good luck he would be back in the spring.

A Slump in Skyscrapers

THE era of the monstrously high skyscraper is ended. The tenant, and not the engineer, the architect, or the builder, has called a halt. Any very tall structures built hereafter will be put up for advertising purposes, and not for profit.

There has been a remarkable change of sentiment within the last few years on the part of tenants. There was a time when there was a rush to get into the newest and loftiest of piles. Not now.

It is said on high authority that there hardly is a building of more than twenty-two stories in New York that pays a dividend. One, of more than thirty stories, that paid fourteen per cent for the first few years after its completion, does not pay expenses to-day.

Tenants do not want to go too high from the ground. They are expressing this feeling in the most forceful way possible—by refusing to rent space above a certain level. Whatever the cause—the long elevator journey, the comparative isolation, or just a shade of dread or doubt—the fact remains that office room 'way high up is not desired.

The ideal skyscraper is of eighteen or twenty stories. In such buildings the space above the ninth floor is considered

choice. Below the ninth floor the light and air are not so good.

Architects say the skyscraper craze has resulted in the overbuilding of the office district of nearly every city of considerable size in America. As a consequence there has come a demoralization in rents. In New York this is particularly noticeable. A few years ago space in first-class downtown structures commanded from one dollar and seventy-five cents to two dollars and twenty-five cents per square foot per year. Now space is being offered at one dollar per square foot. Any person who desires to purchase a job lot of these skyscrapers at reduced prices has the opportunity. Their owners are tired of them. In some of these buildings from twenty-five per cent to fifty per cent of the space is vacant.

The world at large has looked upon the tip of Manhattan Island as one of the most valuable pieces of real estate on earth, but the fact is that rentals are much higher in the district between Twenty-third and Forty-second Streets, Fourth and Sixth Avenues, than in Wall Street or lower Broadway. The rentals paid to-day in the moderate-size skyscrapers in Fifth Avenue, between Thirty-fourth and Forty-second Streets, are one hundred per cent more than Wall Street properties command. There is a reason for this aside from the overbuilding of the lower end of the city. Wall Street is in the doldrums. The stockbroker is wearing sackcloth. Business is so bad that three thousand employees have been dropped by brokers since January first. But even when Wall Street revives there is not likely to be a recrudescence of the skyscraper madness.

Irreverence

AMERICA is usually accused of being irreverent. We are guilty. Sometimes to our shame, but not always. Much of our seeming irreverence is but a childlike frankness and directness of speech; an inclination to ridicule the verbal shadows of virtue and sentiment, while we hug the substance in genuine adoration to our hearts. It is true we do not show much respect for institutions and reputations. This is to be regretted, for it does not encourage the careful building of reputations. We are entirely too prone in our disapproval of a man's course to-day to forget all the things he has done yesterday and the day before. But even this irreverence it is not so bad as it sounds. We have a good-natured way of fighting, and often in the stress of conflict will call our best friends the hardest sort of names, and then invite them out to dinner. Then, too, a large part of our irreverence is not ridicule at all of sacred things, but relentless jabs at inflated shams. An American crowd has almost an uncanny penetration of a public man's motives. Often they know them better than he does himself. And when he begins to talk floridly about sacred rights, and ancient, honorable institutions, the hoot of derision that goes up is not for the rights nor institutions, but for the man's pretended concern about them. No doubt our irreverence often touches in the wrong spot, and we have too much of it. And yet in the roughest crowd let virtue, genuine religion, unshakable honesty be accidentally uncovered, and hats are lifted and tongues are still.

Insecurity

WE carry the sense of something untoward about to happen, as if life had been withholding one of its choice surprises, and was soon to discharge it. Some mischance is on the road to our dwelling, and we hold ourselves ready to give it a welcome. That trepidation plays through the quietest journey, the peaceful day. It is the guest in hard-won leisure and friendly meetings, the tireless companion in driving work and crowded hours. It came to pass while youth was still contending with its setbacks. It is the projection of experience.

Black Gold

By Frederick R. Bechdolt

Author of "The Old Man of Eagle Pass," "Free Rein," Etc.

SYNOPSIS OF OPENING CHAPTERS

Seeing nothing ahead but legal rut and a bare pittance, Frank Hart, a young attorney, decides to go into a wildcat oil-well scheme that is projected by his friend Lawson, a man who has had wide experience in the oil fields of California. Several other men become interested also, notably Olds, a civil engineer, Porter, a train dispatcher, and Ryan, an expert driller. Pooling their funds they aggregate four thousand dollars, a "shoe-string" capital, but it enables them to buy a secondhand equipment, stake their claim, and begin work sinking the well. Hart acts as promoter of the scheme, and when a seemingly disastrous stage is reached, he succeeds in borrowing money from Jacoby, the banker of his home town, Kernfield. Still there is a hard task before them, for the octopus oil trust, the United, aims to control the crude oil of the State, and its chief opponent, Savage, president of the Petroleum Association, is weakening in his stand. If Savage capitulates, the future seems hopeless for Hart, Lawson and company. But the drilling of the "wildcat" continues unabatedly amid hopes and fears. Especially the latter for Hart, as not only is his every cent at stake, together with borrowed money, but his fiancée, Jean, has misunderstood his motives, and is angered at his apparent lack of confidence in her.

CHAPTER IX.

BELOW THE TRAPDOOR.

THE repairing of the derrick went to completion. The fishing job began. Lawson hardly slept, and Hart found himself often in the tower at midnight, until ten days later they pulled back the tools. After that the drilling went on for a month, with only minor mishaps. The hole was down twenty-five hundred feet, when Spreckles, the tool dresser, took a memorable day off and met adventure.

He dallied in the cook house one evening, after Ryan had gone back to the derrick. He jerked his head mysteriously to Hart, and when the latter had followed him outside beyond earshot of the other men:

"Say, Mr. Hart"—he looked earnestly into Hart's eyes—"I've just got to take a day off and see how Kernfield's gettin' on."

Hart laughed. For some time now, ever since he had gone back on afternoon "tower," Kernfield had been an ever-present topic with Spreckles.

"How much money do you need?" He asked the question, smiling, but his smile concealed worry, for in wages Spreckles had three hundred dollars to his account.

The tool dresser returned the smile. "Twenty dollars will do me fine." He went on swiftly: "I'm aiming to take two hundred and fifty of what's comin' to me in stock. But I just got to slam a gold piece on one o' them bars! And hear some ragtime, too."

So it came that Spreckles journeyed to Kernfield the next day; and Hart took his place during one tower. For Hart was becoming accustomed to all manner of emergencies; and was learning many things about this business from the bottom, where all learning begins.

Of his visit to the town Spreckles never gave more than a chaotic account, wherein certain details were recited by him in Elizabethan terms. It was on his trip home that adventure came.

From Sunset he walked that morning northward on the dusty wagon road. It was hot, and Spreckles had not tasted sleep the night before. He endured the heat, and the dust, and the thoughts of

This story began in the first November POPULAR, still on sale at the news stands.

twelve hours' work ahead of him; and he cursed all pleasure with a fluent, though drying, tongue. For him there was one solace—he did not have to travel the entire distance on foot. Brown was due to haul hay from the Buena Vista Rancho, and Spreckles had made an appointment with the teamster, for a spot near the villagelike cluster of buildings which was the center of that stock-raising enterprise. So, when he had gone five miles from Sunset, Spreckles took a side road to the right, and he trudged through the soft alkali dust until he reached the low range of hills which separated the lake from the flat plain.

He rested there, under a clump of bushes beside a wide irrigating ditch. He removed his shoes and socks, and bathed his feet in the cool water. He began to feel better now. The memory of his pleasures came back to him, clothed in brighter hues. He whistled; then he began to sing; and while he sang the ragtime song, he swashed his bare feet to and fro in the ditch. He patted his hands to keep the measure's beat.

From classic standpoint there was not much virtue to the music; but the rhythm appealed to every muscle in Spreckles' lank body. He swayed his shoulders, and he splashed his feet to shuffling time; and his voice grew louder. The sixth stanza had welled forth, embellished where Spreckles had forgotten the lines, with little adornments of his own; the tool dresser was whooping the refrain:

> "O-o-open the door an' let me in,
> I'm almost free-ee-eezin'
> Wet to the skin."

He heard something behind him, and he stopped to look around. His face stiffened; song froze on his lips; he sat there, mute, motionless, abashed.

Two young women on horseback were regarding him, their faces two pictures of mingled amusement and perplexity. That they were beautiful, and that they were gazing down, through a sort of swimming, dazed mist, toward where his bared legs met the cool water, was all that Spreckles knew. Then, vaguely, into his embarrassment, words penetrated. Afterward he recalled these words, sorted them out, and put them together. The one who uttered them had a mass of golden hair. As to the other, Spreckles saw, in that bewildered and terrible moment during which he was striving to plunge his nether limbs out of sight beneath the bank, that she was darkly beautiful; and that her face was grave.

"Why, that's one of their new men now." These were the words spoken by the vision with the golden hair.

Eventually Spreckles found will processes by which to move his paralyzed tongue. "Excuse me, lady," he muttered, "I didn't know anybody was around."

"You *are* working on the oil well, aren't you?" the girl demanded. Spreckles remembered her now; he had seen her once in Sunset; she lived over there at the big rancho; her father was Henry, the cattleman.

"Yes, ma'am," he said, and strove to right himself. "I was waitin' for the mule team. I been to town."

The horses were becoming restive; they were moving to and fro. The dark-haired vision reined in hers, and now she spoke.

"Are they working there to-day?" She seemed to hesitate, then added: "All of them?"

"Yes, ma'am," Spreckles answered promptly. "That is, two on tower at a time. Was there any one you wanted to see?"

She flushed deeply and shook her head. And while he was still wondering why they persisted in looking down at him when he could not hide his bare shins, they started away. The light-haired one was laughing; and when the horses had taken a few prancing steps, she reined in. She called over her shoulder:

"Is Mr. Hart there, the president of the company?"

"Oh, yes, ma'am," said Spreckles. "He's there all the time now."

They galloped away in a cloud of dust. He watched them until they had

vanished around the nose of a low hill. He was still blushing when Brown came into sight with the four-mule team.

That afternoon he strove to recount his adventure to Ryan and to Hart, who was sitting on the lazy bench. Ryan and Spreckles were coupling on a length of casing. By this time the encounter had altered certain of its proportions in the mind of Spreckles. His own lack of ease, his diffidence in carrying on conversation, had vanished from his buoyant mind before belated ideas of what he might have said. Those fancies became to him real. It was a passage of wits that he recalled now, bits of light retort; an arrayal of the sexes against each other, in which he, the male, had come out, as a matter of course, with flying colors. He burned to tell it. But Ryan, frowning absorbedly over some odor in the water which the baler had brought up, refused to pay any heed to him, save to give terse commands. And Hart was, as he had often been during the past few weeks, abstracted.

Oddly enough, just at present Spreckles had forgotten the mention of Hart's name; he was interested in what he himself might have said to those two fair visions, too busy trying to make himself believe that he had said it.

The length of eight-inch pipe which they were coupling on loomed high above their heads, clutched at its summit by the elevators. About that casing they had looped thick rope; into the loop each man had thrust a clublike stick. Each was leaning against his horizontal lever. Thus leaning, they walked around and around in a circle, twisting the threads at the bottom of the new length of casing into the collar at the top of the last one. As they walked, Spreckles reverted to his travels once more.

"I told you about them two girls down by the ranch," he said, panting. No one answered, and he went on: "Pippins both of 'em. You ort to of seen 'em. I was sayin' to one——"

"Easy there!" Ryan ordered. "You're walkin' too fast, Spreckles. Town made you strong."

"I says to her," Spreckles continued desperately, "she'd better come out here and make a call on us. We'd be glad to show her around. And——"

"Get the tongs!" Ryan said crisply.

Spreckles suspended narrative to bring the enormous pipe wrench. It was as tall as himself; so heavy that it hung on a wire, and was lightened by a counterbalance far overhead. He swung it to place, and Ryan adjusted it to the casing. Spreckles ran to the engine's crank outside and coupled to that a long wire which was fastened to the handle of the tongs. The engine now took up the work of tightening the casing joints. Now Spreckles had an inspiration.

"I just thought," he cried eagerly; "one of them says something about you, Mr. Hart."

Hart looked at him curiously; he knew no women around here.

"Something about you." Spreckles scratched his head. "I was tellin' her about the work, and then she says——"

Ryan had stopped the engine, and he stooped to unfasten the tongs. He nodded to Spreckles. "Loosen that spider, now!" he ordered. The tool dresser gave him a despairing look, but seized a sixteen-pound sledge and opened the trapdoor which led into the cellar.

In this ten-foot cave under the derrick floor lay a thick, inclosing ring, fitted with several wedges. The contrivance supported the casing from dropping free in the hole. Spreckles departed gloomily to loosen these wedges with his sledge, and then remove them; so that Ryan could lower the whole string of casing down for the new length. The tool dresser vanished through the trapdoor. Ryan stood with his hand on the telegraph which controlled the engine, waiting for a signal, before he started the machinery.

Under the derrick floor there sounded a queer, muffled exclamation. Then a soft thump. Then silence.

Ryan waited for a moment. His large, grave face became puzzled. Abruptly, he started toward the trapdoor, muttering.

Sitting on the lazy bench, Hart heard the big driller say: "Something wrong!"

Ryan vanished through the trapdoor.

Hart had been thinking of Jean. During this month she had written him only three letters, and these letters were all cool. He had written to her twice every week; telling her each little detail of the work, every hope, and every fear; and telling her his love. He had said no word of their breach. He had waited for the day when she would relent, when constraint would vanish, and the old warmth of love return. It had been punishment, and his mind had gone to her at all hours. During Spreckles' talk he had hardly listened. Now, vaguely, it came to him that something was going wrong. The details of what had just happened—Spreckles going into the cellar; the curious exclamation; the soft thump; then Ryan's disappearance—these things crept into his mind. He came back to the present with a jerk.

Ryan had gone. Below there was a noise as of a heavy body scraping over the earth; then a hoarse, smothered shout.

Hart sprang from the lazy bench. As he was running to the trap, he caught a glimpse through the derrick-house door of two figures on horseback galloping toward him, a quarter of a mile away. He paid no heed to that sight. He reached the trap and peered down.

"What deadly thing was lurking there?" He had just time for the thought. Instinctively he held his breath as he descended by the ladder.

Spreckles had taken a lighted lantern down with him. But now the place was dark. Hart reached the earth. His foot touched something soft. He was beginning to take the breath which fear had made him withhold. He stooped to touch the thing on which he had stumbled. It was the prostrate body of a man.

Hart's head was swimming. He felt a strange, hard beating at his temples. He clutched the body and began to drag it toward the ladder. He remembered to hold his breath again. He struggled, holding the body in his arms, half lifting it, half dragging it. He felt the pounding growing harder at his temples. Blackness came. He knew that he was falling, falling as through vast distances. Then a terrible blow smote him, and he knew no more.

CHAPTER X.

WITH A WOMAN TO AID.

Jean had been riding in silence for some time; and for some time she had been deaf to the constant good-natured chatter of the golden-haired girl who rode beside her. She had seen the oil derrick from afar; lonely in the flat, saffron land. With her eyes fixed on that tower she had seen the ending of a long struggle. Now, at the turning point of that battle with herself, she urged her horse into a gallop. For a half mile the two animals clattered on. The derrick loomed taller; its timbers showed separately. Jean could see the great, thick walking beam. Her heart leaped.

It had been a dreary period with Jean. At the beginning, facing Hart that morning weeks ago, she had understood. Knowing, she was dumb before the revelation of the truth, the disillusionment, the breaking of her dream. The fact that he had allowed her to cherish false hopes had made her flinch before the future. And he had hurt her pride.

They had been companions in their love; had shared everything. She meant they should be companions through life, sharing everything in that same way. She felt that in giving him this companionship, she was bestowing on him a gift which few women had for men. She was eager to bear with him whatever burdens came.

The idea of two worlds: A man's world and a woman's world, the latter a sheltered, shut-in, gossiping little compartment by itself, had always revolted her; had kept her with few friends of her own sex; had made her rather cynical of men, until he had come. Then their sharing of every plan, building of mutual hopes, enduring of mutual dis-

appointments, had given her more happiness than she had ever known.

It had ended with his mistake; his clumsy attempts to shield her by what she recognized as deceit.

And so at first had Jean feared to face the future. After all, she told herself, it was the way of a man, the habit of his sex, engendered through long generations. He was like the rest of them. She knew that she could never be that sort of wife. She could bear poverty, or face even sordidness, but she must be on even terms with him.

Then his letters came one after the other, and she began to see—more plainly every day—how he felt his own mistake. She began to feel a great loneliness for him, to wish again with all her heart that she might talk with him. Then she wrote. But she remained unable to tell of her love, unable to breathe out her hopes. A dumbness had come over her; an aching in her soul, which she could not relieve by crying out to him.

She endured alone. She endured the better because she knew that it was the big struggle between them; the big battle for adjustment of their two selves; that it must finally settle their relations; and she must always share with him afterward.

It hurt; it wore; she became a little wan; lost color. His letters continued to arrive, telling of the work, of every little detail.

The longing to see him grew. A longing came to see that work, to watch it, to understand what was going on, what there was to fear, what there was for hope. She endured a keen, almost maternal desire to share his burdens in actuality. That yearning grew within her. But she did not tell him.

Chance helped her in this extremity. Virginia Henry wrote to Jean, as she had written every few months. The annual invitation for a visit was included in this letter; an invitation which Jean had never thought of accepting. But this time, Jean remembered in a vague way that the Henry rancho was somewhere in the vicinity of the wildcat well. She determined to come thus and satisfy that yearning. Jean answered the letter on the day of its arrival, saying that she would come that same week. During three years down there by the bay of San Francisco the girls had been close friends.

Jean arrived at the Buena Vista Rancho in the afternoon. The next morning Virginia Henry knew some of the hopes which were centered in that wildcat well. Then the two encountered Spreckles by the irrigating ditch. Now they were galloping their horses toward the derrick.

When they drew rein beside the tall, gaunt structure, the place was silent, apparently deserted. A queer, disagreeable odor caused the two girls to sniff; a heavy, sulphurous smell. They sat for a moment in their saddles, staring up at the summit of the tower.

It seemed strange, this silence. As if this deadness had come suddenly; as if there must have been—but a moment before—both motion and sound.

As Jean noticed that odor and sensed these things, she felt a sudden clutch of fear. She frowned in a half-frightened, half-puzzled manner. "Do you think anything has happened? It's so still. And——" She sniffed again. "I wonder what that *is?*"

"There's a house over there," Virginia gestured with her quirt. "Let's go ask."

Jean shook her head. "I'm going to see." She dismounted.

Virginia followed her with a nervous laugh. Something about the place had dampened her gayety. The two girls went hesitatingly to the derrick house. The place was still; the length of casing hung in its center, inert, black. On all sides were evidences of recent occupancy, or work suddenly stopped. The great tongs still swayed gently to and fro on the suspending wire. A mud-stained glove which Ryan had left behind him lay on the floor.

Jean saw Hart's hat on the lazy bench. She remembered that hat; he had worn it when he had come to see her, weeks before. Now it was all splashed with bits of mud, and stained with lubricating oil. She took a step

toward it; her face was pale; she glanced about. The sulphurous odor was all over the place. It made her feel dizzy when she breathed that air.

Then she saw the open trapdoor; and something, she did not know what, made her walk over to it. She peered down. Blackness lay below her. The odor was stronger now. As her eyes became more accustomed to the blackness, she could distinguish vague outlines; the sides and rounds of a ladder descending into that gloom; the length of casing in the middle of the cellar, losing itself in the dark. And, down there, where the ladder melted into blackness —something else.

The strange, sulphurous odor made her head reel. She saw that shadowed form more plainly below her, asprawl in the gloom.

"Virginia," she cried, "run to that house. Go call somebody. Get help."

Virginia stood near the door of the derrick house, hesitating. She stared at Jean, white-faced. "Run!" Jean stamped her foot. The girl vanished.

"It's some kind of gas," Jean called; and, calling, realized that she was now alone. She peered down into the cellar again. But looking toward the light had blinded her to this darkness.

She thought of Hart's hat there on the lazy bench. She leaned far down, and called through the trapdoor: "Frank, are you there? Frank!" Her voice echoed in the cellar. She felt a sense of suffocation, as if a hand were on her throat.

She drew away from the trapdoor and got a breath of cleaner air. It revived her. She gulped in that clean air again. Then, holding her breath, she stepped down with one foot; she found the first round of the ladder, and began descending. She had an awful realization of awkwardness; she was moving slowly; that would never do. She strove to hurry, and half slipped, half fell, bruising her knees against the rungs of the ladder. She landed at the bottom, trembling, terrified. She felt a wild impulse to flee from this black hole. She remembered Hart's hat. She groped, searching for him. She could hold her breath no longer; she gasped the heavy air. The gas had become less, but it was still potent poison. Groping, she bent low. Her head was reeling again. Her hand touched Hart's prone body. She seized him with all her strength.

A sort of blind fury came over her now, and she forgot everything; forgot her swimming senses, the pounding in her head, the horror of this black place, her own weakness, and the imminence of death. She had him in her arms; and she must drag him up to the air.

She lifted him, and she tugged, and for that moment she was possessed of the strength of the mad. She felt the shock of a sharp collision; her back struck the ladder; she heaved with every muscle in her body to lift him up.

Feet were pounding on the derrick floor above her head.

Jean saw a shadow coming to that patch of light at the top of the ladder. A man hurled himself on the ground beside her. It was Lawson; he seized her, supporting her, lifting her. She cried out to him to leave her, to take her precious burden, which was already slipping from her arms. As she called, Frye dropped into the cellar, disdaining the ladder's aid. The old cook tore Hart away from her. And then, half swooning, she felt herself lifted up and on up into the light and the sweet air.

She struggled to keep her feet. Lawson left her sinking to the floor, and rushed back to the trap. Then she saw Frye, his grizzled hair all rumpled, his eyes dilated, his chest heaving to his labor, emerging through the hole, with Lawson tugging at his shoulders. And over Frye's shoulders, bent like a half-empty sack, the limp body of the man she loved.

The two men carried Hart toward the derrick-house door. Johnson, the tool dresser, almost collided with them there. They dropped their burden. "Sulphur gas," Lawson shouted. "Come on, Frye." They did not wait to get the breath which their lungs craved, but stamped back. They vanished in the cellar again.

Johnson had already seized Hart, and was dragging him outside. Virginia Henry came running down the hill, white-faced, wide-eyed. Jean saw the girl as one sees things in a dream; and dropped on her knees upon the earth beside Hart's outstretched form. Johnson was loosening the collar of the flannel shirt. Suddenly he began moving the arms back and forth in the wide, vigorous sweep to induce respiration.

With a savageness, Jean shook off Virginia, who was chafing at her hands. She seized one of Hart's arms and strove to help the tool dresser.

As she was toiling thus, staring down into Hart's face, waxen as if death had already set its seal upon the features, Lawson and Frye reeled forth from the derrick house. They bore Ryan and Spreckles; they dropped them on the earth, and sank down beside them.

Suddenly Virginia Henry seemed to awaken to this emergency. She knelt swiftly between the two senseless forms; she began moving the huge arms of Ryan as she had seen Johnson move those of Hart. Lawson, recovering from his exhaustion and from the fumes of the gas, helped her in the task.

Jean labored doggedly over Hart. She saw no signs of breathing; his face was like the face of the dead. Still she struggled; and she sobbed with a sort of futile rage. He must live! The tears ran down her face as she swept his arms, now from his body, now back again.

Lawson left his labor of resuscitation and came beside her. Leaning down, he looked intently at Hart. He bent lower; he seemed to be listening. Then, turning his eyes on Jean, said quietly:

"He is beginning to breathe."

It was as if she herself had come from death to life again.

An hour later they had removed the three victims to the bunk house. And shortly after that Hart opened his eyes. He saw Jean bending over him. He struggled, as if he were trying to rise; then he fell back, uttering her name in a wondering whisper. She placed a gentle hand upon him, restraining him, and he sank again into his swoon. Later, when he awakened, once more, she bent closer to him. "Dear heart," she said, in a low voice, "I came. I couldn't stay away any longer, Frank."

Slowly his strength returned, and all his faculties; and he talked with her, oblivious of those about him, unmindful at first of the black tragedy which had hovered so closely to them all. She told him how she had come; and how she and Virginia had ridden up, to find the derrick silent, deserted. And then she shuddered. "I went down there," she said simply, "and I found you, dear. But I couldn't carry you any farther. I tried so hard; and I was fainting when they came and got us."

He stretched forth his arms and drew her head down to his. "Jean!" he cried. "You! And you might have died!"

What time passed they did not know; but there was no need of explanations now between them; no need for promises on his part; for reproaches on hers. They knew. The past was done with. As they were beginning to talk of the future again, Virginia Henry came into the room.

"They're going to live!" she cried. "Both of them!"

She told them how Spreckles had already recovered his consciousness; and Ryan was beginning to breathe more deeply every minute. And then, as if she realized for the first time her own weariness, she sank down exhausted on a rude chair.

Lawson entered from the other end of the building, where he had been helping minister to the senseless men. He seemed to be strangely exultant in this moment; as if some good news had suddenly come to him. He walked over beside Hart, and stood looking down on him.

"Well," he said, and his eyes were all alight, "I can tell you now."

Hart stared drily at him.

"That sulphur gas"—Lawson's smile grew broad—"it nearly killed you three. But it's all right, that gas—it lies just above the oil sand. Inside of a week we ought to know."

Late that night, when Virginia Henry

and Jean had ridden back to the Buena Vista Rancho, convoyed by Lawson, Ryan did his first talking in the bunk house. For some time the big driller had struggled to regain all of his faculties. They had come slowly. Speech was the last of them. And before speech, there had been sight and hearing. Ryan had watched Jean and Hart when the two had come into the room where he was lying. Then he had lain silent for a long time. Now he spoke to Spreckles, who lay near him, propped up by a roll of blankets.

"Spreckles," Ryan said, in a hoarse half whisper, "you are a great man with the ladies, you are! A-prowlin' round that ranch, and then lettin' on that you have made a hit with Mr. Hart's girl."

And Spreckles made no reply. For in that moment he realized how there lay ahead of him much silent endurance. Whenever Ryan might choose to revert to that painful subject he must listen helpless. Fervently now he wished that he had never thought of going to Kernfield, and it almost seemed to him that they had done him an ill turn in resuscitating him at all.

CHAPTER XI.

STRIKING OIL.

They landed the eight-inch casing in the next hard formation; drove down that pipe, instead of letting it drop free with space about it; drove it down for forty feet. Then they baled the water from the hole, and they let it stand for a night and a day, and then another night. At the end of that time they lowered the baler again. The long iron bucket came up empty. They had shut off the water. They were ready to go on; to drill again until they encountered the oil sand—or drew the string of tools from a dry hole.

First they lowered, inside of the eight-inch casing, the six-inch pipe which Hart had bought from the ex-steward of the Sacramento River boats. All four men worked together at this, during daylight. Lawson, Johnson, the red-haired tool dresser, Ryan, and Spreckles. Length by length they dragged the smaller casing to the waiting elevators, coupled each length, then lifted it on the cable into the derrick above the hole. As the length of casing rose thus aloft, Spreckles stood, one foot in the big, clamplike elevators, ascending with the pipe. Always he sang and jested as he rose through the wide aperture in the derrick-house roof, a lean, lithe figure topping that six-inch pillar of black iron. Stepping lightly off upon the roof he steadied the swaying pipe while the others below adjusted its lower threads into the collar of the length which was resting in the hole. When this had been done, they screwed the two lengths together; then released the spider in the cellar, and lowered the whole line for its added distance.

Length by length, one after another, hour after hour. Thus for three days the pipe went down, and down, and down. The black hole swallowed it, and still demanded more; and ever the sweating men toiled; and the engine panted; and the heavy wooden calf wheel creaked and rumbled to the straining steel cable. Until at last the hole was satiated; filled to the bottom, twenty-five hundred feet below.

Brown hauled water again from Buena Vista Lake. They poured whole barrels into the hole. And then the mighty wooden bull wheel roared and smoked once more, lowering the ton's weight of steel tools into the earth. Lawson clamped the temper screw about the cable, started the engine, and the walking beam went up and down.

Down and on down, foot by foot, yard by yard, into the mudded bottom, the bitt chewed its way. And Lawson, eyes intent on the rim of the hole, head inclined to one side as if he were listening to messages from the bosom of the earth, felt through his finger ends the news of every thudding stroke. At noontime he left off his work, and Ryan took it up again.

Morning and afternoon Hart watched the drilling, sitting on the lazy bench. Morning and afternoon, Jean sat beside him there, intent, silent like himself. At intervals they looked into

each other's faces, smiling hope, promising themselves success.

Jean rode up from the Buena Vista Rancho every day. Often Virginia Henry rode beside her; and sometimes sat with her in the derrick house. But in the afternoons, when Lawson was not working, Virginia fell into the habit of riding over the saffron plain with him.

Jean and Hart spent their time watching that steel cable where it vanished in the earth, watching it, trying to read its news, waiting for the great moment to come.

Sometimes they looked together out upon the saffron world which stretched about them, league after league. And looking, they strove to read there some sign. But the wide, yellow plain had nothing to show them. The sun shone hot upon the pale, short grass; the breeze stirred it to little ripples; as both sun and breeze had done the day before, and the days before that. The plain kept its secret.

Down and on down, foot by foot, yard by yard, the huge bitt chewed its way. Until five days and nights had passed, and then the sixth day was half gone. And there was no sign of oil.

That afternoon, when Ryan had taken the work, Jean spoke in a low voice to Hart of what neither had dared thus far to speak.

"What do you think, dear?" She looked into his troubled eyes.

The trouble cleared away; he smiled at her. "Maybe a dry hole." He was not flinching; he had learned to face things far bigger than man and man's affairs. This earth battering to tear the earth's black gold from its depths, had brought new strength out of his soul.

"If a dry hole, what then?" she asked.

He did not need to add figures before he answered: "I'm four thousand dollars in debt. I've got to make that good first. But I can dress tools now. And I can work up to drilling. Some day we'll drill here again. There is oil."

She nodded, and said nothing for a while; but after some minutes she leaned closer to him, and patted his arm. They were looking into each other's eyes, forgetful for the moment of the clanking cable and the jarring screw, when Ryan stopped the engine.

They saw him move away the stool; he was silent; his large face was grave. He unclamped the screw, leaving the cable free. Spreckles sprang to the bull wheel and slung its rope belt over one disk. Ryan started the engine; the great spool revolved, winding the steel cable, yard by yard. Jean and Hart sat, with their eyes on the round rim which marked the top of the hole. The cable slid up and up; swiftly, shining dully in the light of day. Up and up; and then a new glint showed, small drops whirled from it, spattering over the floor. Ryan's eyes lighted as he saw those drops. They were black; they did not whirl briskly, as water sprayed away, but they clung to the cable with tenacity, and sputtered lazily down close by. The tools came suddenly into sight; a thin, brown-black film clouded half the length of the steel stem. Ryan said no word; but stopped the engine.

The tools hung above the hole, swaying gently to and fro. Ryan stepped over them; he bent to the bitt; he detached a small handful of sticky earth as black as coal, and dripping swart drops. He smiled.

Then, mutely, he held that earth forth in his palm and nodded.

Hart was beside Ryan in a single leap. He reached forth his hand. But Ryan held the earth away from Hart. He waited until Jean had come within reach.

"For you, lady," Ryan said simply, and let the earth drop into her white palm. The black, crude oil stained her fingers. She bent her head to it, and she almost touched it with her lips; then, straightening—and her eyes were moist now with a sudden rising of tears—she pressed the oily sand into Hart's hands.

Spreckles had run noisily over from his place by the bull wheel. He stopped now abruptly. He stood silent. Then, catching Ryan's frown, he looked away.

Jean and Hart were clasping each other's hands. The oil from that sand oozed slowly over their united palms. She raised her lips to his. Ryan gruffly ordered Spreckles back to the bull-wheel brake.

The strong, primitive odor of the oil was in the air.

When some moments had passed, speech came back to every one. Incoherent words of relief and of joy, of thankfulness for hopes fulfilled.

Ryan stepped to the door of the derrick house. He raised his voice in a mighty shout. "Lawson!" he cried; then: "Lawson! Oil!"

He came back to his place by the string of tools; and he scanned the bitt once more, taking another fragment of earth from it. Lawson strode into the derrick house. Virginia Henry was by his side. Her eyes were bright, her cheeks flushed. But she was silent. Ryan spoke with quiet solemnity:

"Ed, it looks like light oil; twenty-two gravity."

As if the earth had spoken, answering his words, a sullen, thick mutter exuded from the round iron summit of the well; it died away at once; then came again, prolonged.

"And gas with it!" Lawson looked about him sharply. "Water! Get the barrels quick. We got to hold it down."

Into his command there penetrated a terrible interruption. Out of the remote depths, where the bitt had unlocked it from its prison house, the oil was speaking. A deep growl was growing nearer, louder. By the time they had sprung to the barrels, a rushing roar drove the blood from the women's faces.

"Run!" shouted Lawson.

Jean and Virginia fled from the derrick house. And, as they fled, the air trembled to the growing roar. A moment later the men dived like rabbits from the structure. A flood of water leaped from the well's rim; it descended, wetting everything. And then a thick, black column sprang thundering upward toward the crown block.

CHAPTER XII.

THE GUSHER.

The black-oil column arose, a jet pillar, climbing straight upward, in the center of the timbered framework. About its circumference whirled a cloak of misting drops. The roar of driving gases made it seem alive, a monster unleashed from blind subterranean caves, seeking the blue dome of the sky. That roar was so deep, pitched so far below any scale known to man, that it seemed a rushing vibration of air and earth. It became at once a presence over everything. Its enormity of volume was terrible. It surpassed the hissing thunder of breakers when they crash upon the rocks; it shook all things about. It was the sound of strength, the strength of the black-oil pools, hidden during long, slow ages, finding the light again. Power, engendered through unreckoned thousands of years, buried under the débris of whole mountain ranges, and in this moment given vent; it did its immutable will. And, doing, it sang beyond the ear of little Man. It struck a note deeper than even Nature on the surface knew—the bass of earth's early days.

Pygmies, they stood, the four men and the two women, appalled before that song. They stared at the black column; and they saw the column rise on upward, yard by yard; until, sixty feet in the derrick's framework, it stopped, spraying at its summit in a thick, jet cloud. The derrick timbers ran oil; the earth about took on a black film.

Abruptly the thunder ceased. It ended in a sigh. Into the silence, insignificant voices sounded. Lawson and Ryan were shouting as they ran back to the derrick house. Hart and Spreckles followed them. They fought in a frenzy of haste and striving, slipping on the oil-soaked planks, as they dragged the lighter things to safe places. Into their hot toil came the deep rumble of the oil once more. They fled, drenched by the first outpourings; and they stood a few brief moments, watching the column climb. It rose more

swiftly this time, capped by a whirling fan of wind-driven spray; until, with a sharp rattle of stones, it reached the crown block.

And now the derrick's upper timbers were hidden in the cloud of black petroleum, cascading downward. The roaring deepened and grew more loud. The oil column, broken by the crown block, still spouted on upward for twenty feet; then thirty, then forty feet; until its wind-spread pall flattened out nearly one hundred and thirty feet above the earth.

Over to the leeward the plain was already black for half a mile. The whole derrick ran with films of oil. Ryan, Lawson, Spreckles, and Hart were soaked with the fluid from head to foot. They ran about, signing to each other with their hands, strange, black beings. Under their feet little brooks of petroleum ran sullenly, like squirming snakes.

From the bunk house had come Frye, the grizzled cook; and Brown, the teamster, left his mules at the corral to help. The engine's fires were out; the fires in the cookstove three hundred feet away had been extinguished. What things might be dragged from the derrick house had been taken by the men during that one brief respite.

During preceding days, at odd times, Brown had used his four mules and a scraper at building a sump. Thus he had excavated, near the derrick's base, a rude basin, banked high with earth. It extended fifty feet square; it averaged more than ten feet in depth.

As though disdaining this sump, the gusher was spraying off to one side of it with the wind. It was bestowing on the excavation only a portion of its oil. But already this had begun to cover the bottom of the huge hole.

Once again the thunder died into a sigh. Once again the men made a concerted rush to the derrick house. Before they had fairly gained the place they heard the mutter of the oil. And they fled as a new column sprang upward. The gusher's stream went on climbing to its previous height, thundering forth its elemental song

Now came coherent toil. Lawson and Ryan conferred at a distance, shouting into each other's ears. They stood on a blackened flat, two oil-sodden figures, gesticulating with dripping arms.

Awed by what they had attained, they had already wasted too much time. There lay before them large things which they must do. First, they must catch this falling flood and dam it before it spread over the whole land. And then, if the gusher allowed them interval, they must harness its strength, divert the jet column into a lead pipe, that it might pour where they willed.

Brown and Johnson set to work with the mules and a scraper, gouging out a new sump. Black oil descended on them like water in a cloudburst, painting men and animals. Ryan and Spreckles took shovels and began diverting two of the larger streams into a little arroyo which was near.

And Frye, the cook, hitched the mules to the buckboard, driving at reckless speed to Buena Vista Rancho, to get more teams and grading implements. To Hart fell the task of riding down to Sunset on a similar errand; and to notify the other stockholders by wire. He took the saddle horse which Lawson had been using that afternoon; he mounted it, drenched as he was with oil. And as he started, Jean rode beside him.

During the brief half hour since Ryan had held out that handful of dripping sand to Jean in the derrick house, they had all been oblivious of personalities. Under the deep thunder of that gusher, they had stood, or run, or striven, according to the gusher's demands.

Now as he saw Jean ride beside him, Hart looked into her dark eyes. Her face was unusually grave; as if she and he were suddenly caught in the stress of some cataclysm, whose power had for the time dominated even their love.

He tried to shout to her. The thunder of the oil column swept his words away before they had fairly left his lips. She smiled steadily in his eyes. And, gazing at her, as she rode beside him, her riding habit all specked with

the oil, he remained mute, biding the attainment of distance.

When they had trotted the horses more than a quarter of a mile, he told her his errand.

"I'll go as far as the rancho," she said.

At this time there seemed something between them so mighty that it walled off familiar talk. He merely nodded and asked her where Virginia Henry had gone. And she answered that Virginia would come soon.

But when they had gone half a mile, and had turned their horses to look briefly at the enormous fountain whose thunder still welled down upon them; and, after gazing at its enormity, had started on again, he leaned over in his saddle and kissed her upon the lips.

"Dear heart," he said, "do you realize?"

She reached out and took his hand in hers. "We waited so long—and now——"

"We can marry now." He said it with the solemnity of sudden great happiness. "Now, Jean!"

And as they rode with the gusher's roar slowly lessening behind them, they planned that golden future, for which they had hardly dared of late to hope. They had attained it at last. They need wait no longer. She listened to his eager project.

The emergencies of this flood of oil would not allow him leisure, but they could marry in Kernfield. Better that, than to bide their time and go to her home. He was determined on that. In this moment of fortune, he was going to take all that the world had to give him.

And she knew it would bring pain, were she to leave him ever so briefly now.

So they parted at the forks of the road. Hart went on to Sunset. He rode as one in a dream. But in the little town he awakened to the swift present. He procured men and teams; he sent telegrams to Olds and Porter. He bought hardware, supplies for the men, lumber, and pumps.

He found a new demeanor on the part of those with whom he dealt. With the news of this flood of oil came credit. He need not ask for it. It importuned him. He recalled George Long's words that hot afternoon weeks before in Kernfield: "To him that hath shall be given." He smiled to himself.

And in his own bearing there had come a change. There was something in it which made men defer. The sureness born of property shone in his face; it exacted its due from others. He had attained.

Yet even in this large moment of his life he looked ahead with grim lips and a frown. He had property. But, with the coming of that black flood of wealth, there had arrived a stern necessity, which had not been present before. Having, he must hold. And holding, he must be ready to fight whoever sought to take it away.

And, from this time, Frank Hart walked among men, more coolly alert, more guarded, than he had been during the days when he was poor.

CHAPTER XIII.

WHEN COMES SUCCESS.

"Twenty thousand barrels a day!" Lawson shouted into Hart's ear.

They stood, side by side, watching the black column thunder upward to its flattened pall one hundred and twenty feet above the earth. Deep-noted came that elemental song, the heavy bass of the world's crude youth. Unabated the flood shot forth, gushed heavenward, and fell in thick, ebon sheets.

Encircled about the gusher, nearly one hundred men were toiling; and scores of mules dragged scrapers, tearing out the sumps, heaping embankments to dam the accumulating pools. Rimming these working ones, a scattering throng. Ranchmen and sheepherders from the countryside; oilmen and drillers from Sunset; and already a sprinkling from the Baker River field. These stood staring from a distance. Their saddle horses and vehicles dotted the plain, all darkened with the wind-blown petroleum. In and out among

the crowd, a half dozen keen-eyed men kept constant patrol, lest some careless smoker light a match and set the whole air aflame.

Over in the corral Brown was harnessing the little mules to the buckboard; and Hart, awaiting the team, was clad in his business suit; a neat contrast to Lawson, who was red-eyed from weariness, soaked from head to feet with the dark oil.

"Twenty thousand barrels a day," Lawson repeated, straining his hoarse voice to penetrate the diapason. "She's keeping it up. Lord knows when we will be able to put a gate on her."

Hart leaned closer to his friend. "Work enough now to catch the oil," he cried.

Lawson nodded. "We're getting most of it already," he called; "as good as seven thousand dollars a day for us."

Thousands of dollars a day soaking into the saffron plain and blowing away in the desert wind! And still seven thousand dollars a day being stored! Hart stared at the booming riches which they had unleashed.

Black gold! It was inundating the whole place. For miles about, the air was laden with its strong, primitive odor. Thousands of barrels lying there before them in glistening ebon pools. Thousands more barrels thundering upward every day.

Lawson gestured widely; Hart looked where he pointed. A mile away a new derrick frame was rising from the ground; a half mile away another timbered framework showed. Ryan was supervising that work; assessment derricks, by which to hold new quarter sections for another year. Down the gray, dusty road two long mule teams were dragging lumber-laden wagons toward them. Other men were coming to stake claims, to buy land, or to lease, seeking the wealth which these men had shown.

Lawson smiled; from his weary eyes shone the light of joy which only the prospector knows when his dreams have been proven true. Suddenly, as if he had just realized it, pointing to the gusher, and waving his hand to the new claims—"Frank," he cried, "we're rich men!"

For a moment Hart did not reply. He glanced over the toiling men and mules. They had come freely, gladly, sure of their pay. He had found himself more than once wondering at that. For he had no more money in his pocket now than he had ever had; less, in fact. And the company had less than it had the week before. Yet the men had come eagerly, and they worked hard. Teams had hauled provisions to the place; and Kernfield business houses had sent supplies by freight, while other business men were begging orders by mail.

Hart looked at the gusher pouring forth its inundation of black gold. There lay the reason. That was tangible; the oil which they had released from the earth's remote depths. Then he nodded, thinking briefly before he shouted back his answer:

"I want to know about pipe lines, before I'm satisfied."

Lawson looked at him steadily. "That's your end," he replied, "and you'll handle it, I know."

Brown was coming up with the little mules. Hart reached out and shook Lawson by the hand. "Good-by, Ed," he called. "See if you can't steal a bit of sleep."

"When Ryan comes back." Lawson smiled grimly. "I can't till then. And now, good luck. Lord!" His face became suddenly grave. "I envy you. It makes me feel lonely, your going and marrying now."

Lawson's eyes went far away. He was thinking of those afternoons when he had ridden forth with Virginia Henry.

Virginia Henry had gone on ahead with Jean to Kernfield the day before. That afternoon Hart met the two girls, and he was able to put by a hundred vexing little problems born of the oil, problems of property.

The marriage was so quiet, so brief, so matter-of-fact in its very brevity, that when he held Jean in his arms and looked down into her dark eyes, kissing

her upon the lips, it came to him as a sort of shock that now they were together; that he had her for his own at last.

Yet, by its lack of guests and its lack of many words, and because there was no crowd of friends to take them from each other at this moment when they were starting into life side by side, Hart found the wedding hallowed.

Virginia left them immediately after the ceremony. She said that she had friends to see; that she must leave for home the next morning; and there were many errands, which her shopping with Jean had prevented her from doing.

"You'll have to bring her back to me, you see," she told Hart, "for a little while, until you get your house built out there." She was unusually grave; her lightness had gone this afternoon.

Jean and Hart went to the Southern Hotel. When they were in their rooms, she looked up into his face. Her eyes, with all of her deep joy, had within their depths a shadow.

"Frank," she said. "I know you've much to do. You go now, dear. Don't worry about me." She smiled as if there was an effort in her brightness. "You go, and, dear heart, come back as soon as you can. But not until you can."

He bent his head and kissed her. "Jean," he said softly, "you know. You understand. There's the financing; Jacoby's coming back to the bank to see me. And all that oil—we've got to find out what chance there is for a pipe line now."

"I know." She was smiling more brightly. "When you come back, you tell me all about it, dear. I've a dozen things to do, myself. I won't be lonely."

But when he had closed the door behind him, she sat very still, with a lonely feeling gripping her heart, and her steady eyes fixed as she tried to see him again before her. She knew there would be many hours like this; hours when he would be away; when she would be alone—waiting. And so she endured, knowing that endurance was a part of it all. Then she took a sheet of paper and a pencil. She began drawing a plan for their home. Tomorrow they would order lumber for the house.

Down in the lobby, among the crowd of men of many breeds, Hart found that he was notable. One importuned him for news of the new field; another waved his hand from across the large room; a noisy group stopped talking as he walked by, gazing after him. He heard a bell boy saying to a sleek, white-waistcoated promoter: "Yes, sir; that's him, Mr. Hart." The clerk left three clamoring tourists to ask if there were anything that he might want.

In the street it was the same. He knew many in Kernfield, but now the very boys smiled up at him; and gray-haired, successful men bowed from the other sidewalk, across the stream of heavy traffic. In every face was a sort of gladness for him. He knew it had not always been there; that it was not there because of himself; that it was but a salutation to something outside of him—his success. And yet, for all its suddenness, it came freely, good-naturedly; not fawningly, but from the heart; an instinctive joy in success, just as there had been before an instinctive aversion when men felt that he was on thin ice. Even as he appraised it for its true worth, Hart could not help liking that manner of the other men.

He found Jacoby waiting for him in the bank. Jacoby, alone, of all of the town, shook hands just as he had always shaken hands. His dark eyes were warm as he congratulated Hart on the marriage; they were warm when he asked about the gusher and the new field. And when the two started talking business, Jacoby's eyes and voice were again cold.

"We've got it corralled," Hart said, when he had told of the black flood. "We can store a million barrels by damming the arroyo farther down. Lawson thinks it ought to drop off soon, though. If she sands up, we'll clean her out, and then we can bring her in on the beam, pumping several hundred barrels a day. Or she may flow gently for some time."

Jacoby nodded. "How about the other claims?" he asked. "You said the company was taking two."

"The assessment derricks will hold them for a year," Hart answered, "and we'll let them lie until we get this oil to market. The association ought to extend its pipe line from Sunset. This is twenty-two gravity oil. They're hungry for it."

Jacoby spoke coldly. "Fifty cents a barrel now. They're eager to pay that —to-day." He paused.

Hart looked at him keenly. "To-day! How about to-morrow?"

Jacoby shook his head. "This news," he said, "has just come. Savage has sold out the association to the railroad. General Pacific is in control."

Hart sank back in his chair.

Again he saw those two giants, avid, looking down on him. He saw them hovering closer now, about to move.

"The railroad!" He spoke thickly. "That means the United, too. They've got us." His voice sank to a whisper. "And I married to-day."

It passed almost as quickly as it had come. He had seen disaster crash about him, and he had seen disaster, when he stood his ground, become harmless against him. He was learning to look it in the face. He stiffened, and he sat there, frowning.

"What are you going to do?" Jacoby looked at him keenly.

"Fight." Hart's voice was gentle, as if he were facing something which pleased him. "If I can do it."

"The other producers——" Jacoby said evenly.

"Don't they know it yet?" Hart interrupted.

"By now they will." Jacoby replied. "The papers are here from the city by this time.

Hart was silent again. He pondered for a few moments. The banker watched him. Jacob seemed to be waiting, with, perhaps, a shade of anxiety, for some decision.

"Well." Hart looked up. "They'll fight, these fellows. They aren't cowards. They've fought before. We've got to organize. I've got to see if there isn't some one who'll pull them together before the panic gets hold of them." He scowled and clenched his fist. "Do you realize there are a hundred men in California ruined to-day—already?"

Jacoby remained silent.

"Organize," Hart repeated sharply. "Jacoby, this means that the railroad and the United are holding the whip hand. As soon as contracts with the producers run out, they'll hammer down prices. Right away. Oil goes down to twenty cents!"

Jacoby nodded. Still he watched Hart silently.

"Remember?" Hart asked abruptly. "What you said about oil? I've thought of it often. Supply increasing; demand increasing. If that is true——" He looked up, his face all alight with a grim, fighting joy. "The way the market is, I'll bet neither the association nor the United has much oil on hand. By Jove! They can't have!"

"Frank," Jacoby said quietly, "you've sized up the situation in a nutshell." And now into Jacoby's face there had come a quiet satisfaction.

"If I have," Hart said firmly, "I'll make those pirates pay a decent price for my oil. They can't bulldoze me. Not if I have to go to work for wages. They can't! I've got to get down there to the hotel and see what chances there are to make others look at it the same way."

"They'll stick, if you handle them right," Jacoby said quietly.

"You're right," Hart agreed. "They'll stick, if they're handled right. But now"—he remembered his own immediate problems—"how about this oil of ours? Jacoby, I've got to store that oil." He looked anxiously at the banker.

"Will you lend me money on it? I've got to pay a lot of bills now. I've got to pay back wages."

Jacoby nodded. And then, calmly: "I'll lend you money." His face was emotionless. "Oil is as good as money in the bank."

"Jacoby!" Hart exclaimed. "You're brave to go into this!"

"I know conditions. And oil, as I said, is as good as money in the bank." Jacoby smiled.

Hart was doing mental arithmetic. He added figures swiftly. "We may have half a million barrels to take care of."

Jacoby bowed. "I can advance you enough for present needs, myself. This is not the bank. It is personal. I have talked it over—the likelihood of this situation—with other men. Some day later on I can tell you more. Just now I cannot; it would be violation of a confidence. Now"—he started to rise—"better go and see what there is to do."

Hart rose; but he was striving to understand several things at the same time. Events had come swiftly. It was some moments before he spoke.

"You mean," he said slowly, "there are other interests who have been expecting this smash?"

Jacoby merely inclined his head.

"Do they want to see the producers put a crimp into that combination—that bunch of thieves?"

"I've said as much as I can." Jacoby closed his lips tightly; his face was cold again.

"That money——" Hart hesitated.

"That money," Jacoby replied evenly, "is my own; it is advanced on your oil as security. You mortgage it. The security is good. I have faith in oil. And—you go to work now. I'll see you later, Frank."

He walked away from the bank slowly. Upon his shoulders he felt the weight of large responsibility. For the present the company had money. But what the future would bring depended on—himself. He thought of that oil pool gathering beside that roaring gusher, a black patch on the yellow plain. He had that oil to battle for. He had a queer feeling, as if he had grown older, and more grave.

When he entered the room in the Southern Hotel he found Jean sitting where he had left her. She rose and came toward him, her arms outstretched.

"What is it, Frank?" She scanned his face.

He told her, almost word for word, what Jacoby had told him.

"Jean, dear heart," he cried, "if I'd known this! You see what I've done to you!"

She held her hands on his shoulders and smiled proudly into his troubled face. "Frank," she said, "I'm so glad we're married now! I can be with you. Why, don't you see? It's the big fight of your life. And maybe I can help you."

"Help me!" he cried. "Of course you can, Jean. You've always helped me. But I wanted now—for you——" He saw the sheet of paper on the table, with the plan which she had drawn. He made a gesture toward it.

"I know," she said softly, "but we can have the home later. And now I'm happier than I ever was, Frank. I'm beside you." She paused abruptly. "They were to know to-day?" she asked.

"Down in the lobby," he said, "two or three of them called out to me to tell me as I came."

"You go, then," she bade him firmly. "Go and talk with them. Go now, Frank."

"Such a honeymoon——" he began.

But she shook her head. "Go, and when you come back, you can tell me all about it. You can't lose time now."

Part III.—"To Him That Hath"

CHAPTER I.

THE CLAWS OF THE ASSOCIATION.

When Hart left the elevator, the lobby of the Southern Hotel was filled with the same throng that had been there during the afternoon. The men in oil-stained khakis, the men in broadcloth, the men in business suits, the men who had sprung from the soil, and the men who had behind them the learning which the universities give. Californians all; and the great bulk of them came from the San Joaquin Valley,

where the earth, since the first vaqueros rode over its level plains, was always generous; where, since the early pastoral wars for range, men had often fought over division of those earth-given riches.

Individualists these men were, accustomed to battling for their own. The fathers of many had warred with the railroad over lands. Many had dared the desert's arid wastes seeking yellow gold. Many had marched over Alaskan passes with the army of argonauts who sought the nuggets under the deep drifts. Some had made three fortunes, losing each again; others had struggled thus far without reward. And nearly all loved that great gold struggle for itself.

This afternoon they had been talking peacefully of oil. But now, over the entire room, from pairs, and groups, and out of the center of a large milling crowd, there came another note, a sullen, deep-throated growl; the growl of strong men, aroused to rage. There was in the large room, in all the air, that savage note of primitive male rage; the hoarse note, which has meant fighting since the days when men wore hair on their backs, and killed one another defending half-picked bones.

By the entrance to the elevator Hart paused and looked over the lobby. As he saw the set, strong faces there, the glinting eyes, the fists doubled in upraised gestures; as he heard the deep, ugly bass from tightened chests, and caught the growl of oaths, he felt a sudden thrill of exultation. His head flew back.

"Fight!" he thought. "Of course they'll fight!" And somehow, in that thought, unconsciously he viewed them with pride, as if they were his own.

Out of the crowd in the middle of the floor two men came swiftly toward him. He recognized Olds, the association's engineer, and Porter, the train dispatcher, who held stock in the well. Porter's face, with its many worried lines, held a bewildered look, as if the man had encountered a sudden shock. Olds was scowling deeply, muttering.

"It's out!" he cried. "And I've known it for ten days!" He seized Hart by the hand. "Ten days!" he repeated more quietly, but with a thickness of anger in his tone. "I had to keep my mouth shut. It wasn't my secret to give. Curse them! I resigned to-day."

Hart nodded, making no reply; he was smiling. He did not feel disturbed; only a little sorry for this other's emotions.

"You see?" Olds looked at him appealingly. "You understand? I'm only—I *was* only a hired man. Thank God! I've quit. I'll never work for that thief, Savage, again." He grew calmer, smiling as with a pleasant memory. "I told him what I thought of him to-day, before he left town; when I quit. You bet, I told him."

Porter had Hart by the hand; his voice was commiserating. "Hard luck! I can stand it, of course. Lord! Yesterday I was a happy man! But it was only five hundred with me. They say you've four thousand in; borrowed money——" He checked himself.

Hart nodded. "Yes," he said, "four thousand." He laid a hand on Olds' shoulder as he went on: "And I'm not worried."

"Surely you've heard?" Porter looked at him curiously.

"If I'd only been able to tip it off! I ought to have, anyhow," Olds cried hoarsely.

Hart smiled down on him. "Now you're foot-lose?"

"Without a job," Olds scowled, "and not likely to get one. This is a smash!"

"We've got fifty thousand gallons in the sumps by now," Hart said evenly.

"A month ago," said Porter, with a pathetic endeavor at a smile, "we'd have been rich. And now——"

"Well," Hart spoke crisply, "we're not down and out, yet."

Olds gripped him by the arm. "They'll begin to knock the price down right away. Don't you see? The association's contracts with its stockholders expire this week. Oh,. you bet! They waited before they let any one know this. Twenty thousand barrels a day from our gusher—and oil will go

down to twenty cents inside of eight days!" He smore bitterly.

"Easy!" Hart lowered his voice. "Let them see if they can hold it down. You know something about the storage tanks?" Olds gave him a swift look of inquiry. Hart smiled. "We'll talk it over later," he repeated. "Now, let's see what there is to see."

The crowd in the middle of the lobby consisted for the most part of producers from the Baker River field, stockholders in the Petroleum Association. Their solvency depended on the price which Savage had made for crude oil. Several of them had helped in the organization of the association. Now those same men were cursing it. From time to time the name of William Savage sprang from lips all twisted with rage. Every one was speaking at once. Some raised their fists and shouted, striving to make their voices carry above the din; proposing wild plans, violence, lynching, tar and feathers. Others stamped upon the floor, holding before them copies of the latest San Francisco papers, on whose front pages the news was emblazoned—the railroad's purchase of the majority of the association's stock. The sight of those black headings maddened some; they shouted inarticulately. And here and there among the crowd men looked vacantly about them, muttering as if dazed by the catastrophe.

Along the sides of the room other producers were talking more quietly; telling one another such details as they had learned. Here and there men hurried, spreading wild rumors, tales of greater disaster about to come. .

Through all of the turmoil came a constantly repeated cry: "They'll squeeze us now. Prices gone! Gone to the bottom!"

Hart walked around the lobby, with Olds on one side of him and Porter on the other. The former was still muttering angry reminiscences of the past ten days, when duty to his corporation and the strong habit of confidential employment had kept him silent. Porter, half wondering, half pitying, kept repeating at times, "Four thousand!" But both of them were now subdued, watching Hart, as if they hoped for something at his hands.

Thus they circled the roaring crowd in the middle of the room, and passed among the little, earnest groups who lined the sides. Now and then, from one of these groups or from the fringes of the milling crowd, one seeing Hart would stop talking to nod or utter a greeting. More than once a speaker paused in the midst of a tirade to nudge companions and to point toward him. At such times there arose expressions of sympathy. "Bad enough for us. Look at *him*." Or, "There he goes, Hart. Backed that wildcat on borrowed money; and it's come in a gusher." And again, "Twenty thousand barrels a day. Nice smash for him!"

When Hart and his two companions were near the wide street doors, an incident occurred which drew all eyes in the room toward him.

George Long entered the place. He was walking swiftly; and, as he came, there arose from all sides a sort of snarl. Long's name was emblazoned in the newspaper accounts, as the man who had consummated the association's purchase. Many glared at him with anger-dilated eyes. He came on as if oblivious, holding back his great head with its iron-gray mane. Dignity was upon him, the dignity of a strong man who believes in himself and what he has done. Epithets of hatred and looks loaded with threats seemed to rebound from that mantle of sure dignity. He had gone a few paces when he saw Hart. He stopped.

"Hello, Frank." He held out his hand in the old matter-of-fact manner.

Hart took the hand, and he remembered then how he had seen Long and Savage ride away together in that automobile, the day when he forsook the law for oil. For some reason which he did not take the trouble to analyze, he smiled as he returned the greeting. He had always liked Long; he liked Long now. But his voice had lost a little of its old deference. The tribute to a larger, older man was no longer so evi-

dent in his tone. It was more like the salute of equals.

"Well"—Long spoke with some sympathy—"sorry to hear you were caught."

Hart's smile became less pleasant, and more like a grin of friendly defiance. "How caught?" He was dimly conscious of the fact that voices were silenced about them, as if many were listening. He went on surely: "Oil is still fifty cents. We've got lots of it."

Long's face broadened. He smiled appreciatively. "Sure," said he. "I haven't heard of a drop—only all of your fellows seem afraid just now."

"We're excited a little." Hart shook his head. "The news came this afternoon, you see." Then, unconsciously making his words a trifle louder, as if for the benefit of those about: "Remember, we've got the oil. And 'to him that hath'—you know. If the General Pacific wants my oil, it's got to pay."

Long caught the rising of Hart's voice; and recognized the meaning of that silence about them. His mantle of dignity became thicker. But his manner remained warm, as he changed the subject. "I heard of your marriage, today, Frank. I want to congratulate you; and please give Mrs. Hart my best wishes." He spoke the last words in a low tone, bowed, and went on to the clerk's desk. About him eddied a wave of visible hatred and distrust. He showed no sign of knowledge that there were others in the room.

After Long had left, going out into the street once more, men looked frequently at Hart; and there passed about the room repetitions of his defiance delivered to the railroad's lawyer with a smile.

"Shows fight, doesn't he? Well, fight! That's the thing. Yes, he can talk. But talk's easy. It don't raise prices, though."

A large, frock-coated man, wearing the wide, black felt hat and the narrow, black string tie of the old-fashioned Californian, a man with a big, smooth-shaven face and a square jaw, came elbowing his way through the edges of the crowd toward Hart and his two companions.

"That's Doherty," said Olds. "He started in the Los Angeles city field. He helped Savage organize the association, you know."

Doherty was smiling as he came on. He reached out his hand. "I heard of your well," said he. "Good oil, too. And some one just told me what you handed back to George Long. I'm glad to know you." He reached out the other hand to Olds. "Help!" he cried. "They tell me you quit your job to-day. Good work! They'll be tearin' up the earth in Coalinga this afternoon!" He glanced at Porter quizzically.

Olds introduced them. "Porter," he said sardonically, "got bitten for his bank account with the rest of us. He's in on our well."

"So." Doherty shook his head. "Maybe not yet. We ain't down and out yet, are we?"

Hart touched his arm. "Will you come upstairs and talk it over?" he asked abruptly. "I don't figure on laying down myself. Not if the rest will fight."

"Nor I," Doherty cried. "I'm with you."

The four crowded into the elevator; and Hart named his floor. "My wife," he told them in the corridor, "is waiting for me. I'll go ahead and tell her."

Jean met him at the door; her arms went out to him. He stopped to kiss her before he explained, and then, as the others came on up, "Do you mind?" he asked. She flashed one look of mingled inquiry and acquiescence, and left them in the room, withdrawing to the inner apartment. But when she had gained that other room, she sat near to the door, listening, in spite of herself, listening with mingled pride and eagerness.

"Now"—Doherty took a chair and puffed at his cigar—"there's not much time. You say fight? I know them. I helped get them together, before old Bill Savage turned thief. There's a hundred men down there that have to fight—or go to the wall."

"What I want to know"—Hart spoke

swiftly—"is this: Is the association loaded up with oil?"

Olds shook his head. "The association—in spite of all that Savage unloaded from his own wells in the last month—is sailing mighty close to its selling contracts. What with the new steamship lines coming in——"

"And other new ones to come in," Doherty interrupted.

"And others going to come in," Olds nodded. "What with these, and with the shut-downs, the association hasn't much in storage."

Hart was standing facing them, his hand uplifted. "That's as good as we can expect," he said. "They've got big contracts now to meet. Next week, when the producers' contracts with the association expire, they'll both combine to force down the price. But"—he spoke slowly, surely—"they—need—the—oil." Then he snapped the words out. "They've got to have it. If we organize and hold our oil—hold it, mind you—then we've got them on the hip."

He had been talking loudly in his excitement. He paused now, still holding one hand upraised.

Olds was smiling, rubbing his hands. Porter's lined face relaxed.

Doherty spoke quietly. "There are several have been saying the same thing to me. But you're the first has thought they were short of oil. We'll be sendin' a call to meet within the week. But, man"—he laid his hand on Hart's shoulder—"come downstairs now, and make that talk you just made here. There's many need a bit of bracin' up."

They left the room as abruptly as they had come. They sought the frightened crowd once more.

The word went round the lobby. Organization became the universal topic. Out of chaos and wild anger, out of panic and widespread fear, came suddenly the spirit of battle.

But there were some who shook their heads. Whispers of distrust passed about the fringes of the crowd and arose in some of the groups.

"Was it possible?" many asked.

Hart saw shaking heads; he heard the mutterings. But he remained unperturbed. He had this thing to do—the guarding of his property. And he was not afraid.

In the upstairs room Jean sat alone. She sniffed the heavy odor of cigar smoke; it clung here behind the four men. To her it brought the memory of Hart's voice, stern with the spirit of fight. She was exultant in her pride.

But with that pride there was an aching in her heart. The pain of loneliness was upon her. She wanted him. And he could not come to her. He had to go on this, the day of their marriage. She saw the sheet of paper on the table, with its incompleted plan. She picked it up and folded it; then she went to her grip and, kneeling down, took out a litle box wherein she kept Hart's letters. She opened the box and placed the half-finished plan with those other keepsakes.

CHAPTER II.

PREPARING TO FIGHT.

On the morning following their marriage, Hart and Jean rode out from Sunset to the north.

Brown, the teamster, was driving the buckboard. He sat before them, silent. His back, arched there in front of them, was eloquent with his discouragement, eloquent with the message of the discouragement of the other men who had toiled, and now expected nothing for that toil. Yet Brown had asked no questions regarding that situation; and he had tried to smile, offering his rough congratulations at the depot.

On the rear seat, Hart looked at that bent back, and Jean, seeing him look, pressed his hand. For she, too, understood. Then these two drew closer together. And neither spoke.

The little, mouse-colored mules jogged on steadily, with a sort of dogged cheerfulness, expressed by forward-pointing ears. They were sleek. This morning they had gotten as much barley as usual. They knew no problems. They hauled the buckboard and

its load of human beings, putting the miles behind them whole-heartedly.

The wide, saffron plain unrolled before, reaching out to the bare hills.

Hart felt Jean's cheek pressing against his coat. She smiled up at him bravely. They had thought to drive back this morning and see the work begin on their home. Yesterday there had been happy shopping. Then had come the countermanded orders. Plans had changed.

Hart felt a rage which gave him pain by its intensity. But he smiled back at her.

She had reached down and was pressing his fingers in her small, gloved hand again. And in a low voice:

"It will be all right, dear."

It was her assurance that she could stand up against her disappointment; her promise that she would wait, unmurmuring. He answered with a stern, quiet sureness:

"Yes, it will be all right soon, Jean."

For some time they were again silent. They were dismissing their former hopes. Jean's heart ached a little, with the memories of what was to have been. The aching ended before a feeling of pride in him, and a firm faith; a feeling which made her press her cheek more closely against his rough coat. Briefly Hart endured a bitterness. It went before a resurging of that rage. The primitive spirit of fighting to defend one's own swept over him again.

Then they thought no more of that honeymoon for which they had fondly planned, nor of the home. They began speaking of the thing which they had discussed late the night before, and again during all the morning's ride on the rattling train. With hands clasped, and looking before them into the north, they talked of that material thing—a matter of a certain number of cents. This question of the price of crude oil exalted them now to greater bravery and deeper love.

The price of crude oil! Seventy-five cents a barrel had become Hart's new faith. Now, on her honeymoon, Jean accepted that creed as a part of her own life. She eagerly asked questions. She plunged into technicalities of which she had never heard until the day before: The demand for factories and ships; the storage capacity of the tanks which the United owned; the capacity of the association's tanks. Her lips were tight; her dark eyes were slightly narrowed.

The price of crude oil! It meant their home. It meant Hart's success in life. It meant salvation of the entire industry. It represented fair dealing, the right. They made the subject sacred, an ideal.

At last they saw, far ahead of them, rising from the saffron plain, a straight, black column, which flattened at its summit in a smokelike cloud. As they drew near they beheld, like dense smoke wreaths upon the wind, a fog of floating spray. And, faint with distance, reverberating, deep, the gusher's thunder reached them.

They leaned forward, gazing at the remote spectacle. Down the breeze there came the strong odor of the oil, warm from the earth's depths. Their nostrils widened. Their eyes became alight; their cheeks flushed. They felt exultation in ownership.

As the mules jogged steadily, drawing them closer, and they saw the column, taller, thicker; saw the dense pall that capped it, and the dripping sheets of oil; as they heard the distant humming grow to a moan, then increase into an elemental bass roar, there came to Hart and to Jean a deep, impersonal anger; a feeling beyond any sense of their own wrong; beyond the knowledge of outrage done to others; a knowledge that money-lusting men were thwarting that flood of earth-born power; thwarting it even as it sprang thundering out of the saffron plain; condemning it to spend itself here, to lie in silent black pools, inert, rotting slowly under the sun's rays into stinking gases and viscid bitumen—until these men could fix prices to suit themselves.

Then Hart and Jean realized the right which they had behind them, the fundamental right, beyond their own due and the due of other men; the right of the oil to find its way to seaboard,

where industry clamored importunately for motive power. And feeling this, they became more confident.

Now, as the gusher's roar became deafening, and through the falling sheets of oil they were able to catch glimpses of the derrick's blackened timbers, they began to see by the roadside many evidences of suspended activities. Here was a wagonload of lumber, as its owner had left it after unhitching the draft animals. Farther on a partly finished assessment derrick stood, deserted. They passed a half-done building of rough boards and tar paper, where some men had planned a store, anticipating a boom town.

Where the crowds had gathered two days ago, watching the gusher, the plain was empty. No wagons toiled along the road. Every one had departed, with the reception of yesterday's news, as suddenly as they had come on hearing of the oil.

But the gusher thundered unabated. In fact, its flow had increased by, perhaps, two thousand barrels; as if ignoring Little Man. All about the booming fountain, within a huge, scooped-out inclosure, lay a wide, smooth pond. Black as ink, viscid it lay, thousands and thousands of barrels of crude oil.

Down-sweeping from the heights, the oil cascaded in sheets. The black sheets struck the surface of the pond; they ruffled it. And little, squirming brooks wound lazily from the derrick foot into the pool. Black gold. Thousands of barrels. And far under the surface of the plain, the earth held more.

But Savage had sold out. The United and the railroad now controlled the pipe lines. Men had turned their backs upon this place, had fled as if they were in fear. The oil lay useless.

The little mules were jogging no longer; they were swinging along at a brisk trot; their ears were pointed toward the corral. Brown pulled them in and squeezed the brake tight with his booted foot. Hart caught sight of Lawson, emerging from the wide arroyo which wound lazily away in the direction of the lake.

Lawson waved his hand. They alighted from the buckboard, he hurried up to them. His khakis were black, dyed from head to foot, caked in spots with oil. Oil was streaked on his face. He held out his hands to both of them.

"Well," he smiled. His face showed weariness, but the smile was genuine. "Well," he repeated the monosyllable. "It's fine to see you. It seems a month since you went. Yes, sir. All of that. Well!"

He fell back on the word; there was a sort of pathos in the way in which he did it; as if he were unable to offer any formal congratulations; as if he could only express by voice and manner his friendship and good will. And as if he could only remain silent when it came to the future and happiness.

Hart knew and Jean knew. For a minute they stood before him, mute. Then Hart looked sharply about him; there was anxiety in his face. Lawson caught the look.

"The men," he said simply, "are down there in the gully. Trying to see if we can't dam it ourselves before the sump fills."

Hart nodded. Relief showed in his face. "Nobody quit you, then?"

Lawson smiled grimly. "Only the teamsters from Sunset. The news came last evening. They dug out with the general stampede. It was lively for a while. But our own crowd stuck, of course."

"The arroyo." Hart glanced at the pond slowly nearing the top of its inclosing dikes, then at the gully. "Can you dam it in time?"

Lawson shook his head. "Hardly think so. And, of course——"

"Of course," Hart interrupted, "they're afraid of their pay down in Sunset. I see. Now, Ed, you go and get the men up here. I'll tell them how we stand. After that I'll get back to Sunset, and I'll pay these teamsters. Then I'll have them back again."

Lawson's under jaw dropped a little; his eyes widened. Hart was frowning straight ahead of him, absently patting Jean's hand upon his arm. "I raised backing," he said calmly. "Enough to carry us through; to take care of every-

thing for the present. And, Ed, we're going to hold our oil, we're going to get a good price for it. We're going to buck the United and the association."

"Wait!" Lawson had already turned his back. "The boys will want to hear that, Frank."

Hart looked at Jean. His face had become somber. She said nothing for a minute; and then:

"Do you think, Frank, that you can get back to-night?"

When their hopes of beginning home building had gone, they had found solace in the fact that they would at least be together every evening when he would ride back to Buena Vista Rancho. And now——

He shook his head. "I don't know. If I can——"

She made no reply. But he saw her breast heave.

And again he felt the pain of rage tugging at him. His eyes became cold, and he was looking far away.

"I'll lick you," he muttered, "if I have to make the fight alone. I will!"

She saw his lips moving, but the roar of the gusher drowned his words. She watched him, with a troubled, questioning expression on her face. He caught that look, and bent to kiss her. "Jean, we'll do our best."

The men were coming out of the arroyo: Ryan, Spreckles, Frye, the grizzled cook, and Johnson. They followed Lawson; their movements showed weariness; their shoulders were sodden with oil. But on their faces there was now a strange, fierce eagerness. Hart saw that look; he thought he knew the cause.

He watched them walking heavily through the black-oil film which covered this portion of the plain. He saw the weariness which was upon them. He remembered the long weeks when they had drilled that well, all of them toiling for a common purpose, risking their time, jeopardizing their lives. And beholding that stern eagerness, he felt a satisfaction—a satisfaction in the idea that Lawson had told them they were going to get their wages.

So he was smiling when they came on. And when they stood before him, he saw Ryan remove his battered hat; then saw the others follow Ryan's example. He felt Jean's hand upon his arm. He lifted his head proudly.

"Boys," he said, "my wife."

They took her hand, one after the other. And each of them made his own diffident remark, behind whose awkward, stilted phrasing lay good wishes, too genuine for expression in words. Until it came to Spreckles, who struggled for a minute in silence, wrestling to say something light and neat; then gave it up and muttered, "Pleased to meet you." After which he backed away, blushing furiously, and terribly conscious of Ryan's scrutiny.

There followed a minute of silence. Hart saw them all looking at him. The eagerness was showing once more. He raised his voice, to make his words heard through the gusher's roar. Now he would satisfy that longing which he saw in their faces.

"Boys, you agreed to take pay in stock. When you made that agreement we didn't look for this smash. But I've raised money to pay our bills, I'm ready to give you your wages in cash."

He paused. He watched their faces. He was eager to see their satisfaction. He was proud of what he had done; proud that Jean had seen it.

They looked back at him steadily. They said nothing. The eagerness had gone from them. They looked like men who had failed to get what they had expected. Lawson was frowning slightly.

Hart looked at Jean. She, too, was frowning, as if she were a little puzzled. Then Ryan spoke.

"Lawson said something about the company holding its oil—about a fight against the United and the railroad."

The big driller's voice was laden with inquiry. The others looked at Hart questioningly.

"Sure." Hart felt impatience as he spoke. He was disappointed in the flatness with which his announcement had fallen on their ears. Did they think raising money was easy now? "Sure, we're going to make a fight. All the

producers. We're going to buck the new combine. But it's our funeral. I'm not asking you men to go into that."

"If you'd just as soon tell us," Ryan broke in on him with a stubborn dignity, "we'd like to know about the company. We're stockholders yet. I want to hear about that fight."

There was something close to a rebuke in the request; a rebuke all the more stern because it was not meant for such. And suddenly Hart realized. These men had risked, as he had risked. They had done it in the same cause. That thundering black column represented to them—as it did to him—something far greater than a mere flood of oil. As Ryan had said, they were still stockholders. Now Ryan was speaking again.

"The idea is," he went on steadily, "it don't mean so much—our stock don't—as yours does. But we started in with the company. And there's other things. If the price goes down, work shuts off. And Lawson said there was a show for a good fight."

"You're right," Hart answered. He knew the meaning of that fierce eagerness now. They were not wage earners; they had the common cause; they were part owners of this company. "You see," he said, "the United and the railroad will try to hammer down the price. We intend to get the producers to hold their oil; because the combine hasn't enough to meet the demand. It may last a long time. But in the end we're going to beat them. We're going to get a good figure before we sell a drop—seventy-five-cent oil!"

"Hurray!" Spreckles shouted.

And this time Spreckles had a following. The others joined in the cheer.

Then Ryan nodded slowly. "I'll hang onto my stock," he said. "I'm going to stick for seventy-five-cent oil."

Old Frye summed up the situation. "Every little helps," he cried shrilly; "and seventy-five-cent oil means a boom. It's a boom or a shut-down in every field in Californy. We'll fight."

"Yes, we'll fight," Spreckles shouted exultantly.

Hart was silent. These were the men whom he had thought to make happy by paying them their wages. Probably none of them had a dollar in his pocket now. With the effort he had made, the worry of raising the money, he had assumed toward them a sort of paternal feeling. And they had rejected that attitude. He looked at Lawson; and Lawson smiled proudly.

"All right, boys." Lawson jerked his head. "Let's get back to the arroyo."

When they had gone Hart turned to Jean.

"Aren't they fine!" she cried. "And, Frank, you thought they wanted their wages!"

He flushed. "I never thought," he acknowledged, "I never thought they'd want to stick."

His face became grave. Brown was bringing back the buckboard. "I'll drive you to the ranch, Jean. Then——" He sighed.

"Never you mind, dear heart," she said bravely. "I can do my part, too. We're going to win."

He pressed her to him. "Jean!" he cried. "You're braver than all the rest of them."

CHAPTER III.

THE DROP IN OIL.

Five days remained before the expiration of the contracts between the producers and the Petroleum Association. They waited for the announcement of new prices for oil. They waited for that word from the United. They knew the mighty pipe-line trust, freed now from competition, would set the figure.

The days went by. The United did not speak.

Every morning Hart left his wife at the Buena Vista Rancho, and rode to the gusher. All day he worked along with the graders, while they gouged out the arroyo into an amphitheater, and dammed its lower end, to store the falling flood of oil. At dusk he came back to Jean, all covered with dust and oil, bone-weary from labor.

In the cool of the evening he rested,

He sat beside her on the wide veranda, under the deepening gloom of the locust trees. She watched his face in the half light. In her eyes was anxiety. Often she leaned toward him, stroking his hair, with a soothing caress.

For upon Hart had descended a strange restlessness. Even in this cool hour he could not find peace. He sat frowning, absorbed. Or, if he talked, there was irritation in his voice.

Sometimes she spoke of their own plans; told him of little details which she had mapped out during the day, for their home. If he answered her, it was at random, absent-mindedly. Often he did not seem to hear her at all.

And every night she heard him muttering in his dreams. Then she would forget her own longings and perplexities, while she bent over him, kissing him gently, smoothing his forehead, all knotted with sudden little lines.

At work among the graders, Hart retained that absent-minded manner. Men, addressing him, often had to repeat their words before he seemed to see them. Lawson heard some of the teamsters commenting on this, shaking their heads with rough sympathy. He worried over it.

In this manner, during three days and nights, Hart carried the burden of a problem. He wrestled grimly with that incubus. The struggle wore him; his face grew thinner; stern lines appeared and became deep upon his brow.

On the evening of the fourth day he came back to the rancho. The graders had finished their work. The arroyo was now a huge basin, whose bottom sloped toward the dam. Into that basin a lead pipe was already emptying a smooth, black cascade, the outpouring from the oil pool about the derrick's foot. The men from Sunset had left, driving their teams amid dust clouds.

Hart was sitting on the wide veranda of the ranch house. Jean had drawn her wicker lounging chair close to him. He had been silent for some time. She began speaking softly.

That day she had taken a list of lumber prices. She had puzzled over it; making specifications for a natural-wood finish in their living room. She was telling him of this. She was in the midst of a sentence, when he straightened abruptly.

"I've got it now!" he cried. There was a stern exultation in his tone.

She sat back, silent. She forgot her plans for the living room. She was watching his face.

He rose and began pacing to and fro. Then he stood before her, facing her.

"Jean," he said solemnly, "if they use this plan, they get seventy-five-cent oil. If they don't, they'll smash. It is the only way."

She saw how his face had suddenly cleared; how a score of painful, twisted lines had left it. She saw a new light in his eyes. There was something about him, clothing him like a mantle; something of absolute sureness—a presence which gave him an impressiveness.

She heard his voice with that new ring. She asked no questions, but reached out with all her faculties, to know him now as he had thus grown; that she might include and own all with her love.

The next morning the United spoke.

It was the utterance of a huge mechanism. Words from merciless, insensate lips. Out of a heart two thousand miles away—a heart of card indexes and tabulated reports—those words leaped along the wires that spanned a continent. They emanated from tapping sounders. On sheets of yellow tissue paper they reached the eyes of men.

Crude oil nineteen cents.

During the same hour, like an echo, the Petroleum Association sent out bulletins.

Crude oil nineteen cents.

Then the laden wires flashed messages to the farthest oilfields of the State.

At noontime Hart was standing with Lawson, watching the outflow from the lead pipe which carried the oil into the amphitheater. The gusher thundered skyward to its flattened pall. The wide sheets descended, ruffling the surface of

the surrounding pool. The black oil flowed steadily into the huge earth basin, as if there would never be an end to its flood.

Hart pointed to the stream. He raised his voice to carry through the gusher's roar. "We can store nearly a million barrels," he cried.

Suddenly Lawson peered down the wagon road. "Your wife." He touched Hart's elbow.

"She will drive me to Sunset. The meeting is to-night." Hart turned to look.

"She's driving fast!" Lawson shouted.

They watched her coming on. And when she reached the place, she held out a yellow envelope.

"They brought it to the ranch. It's for you, Frank." She pressed it into his hands as he kissed her.

He tore it open; he withdrew the telegram and read the words.

Crude oil nineteen cents. United made price to-day.

Olds had sent the message. As Hart held it before them, so that both of them could read, he smiled. His face was calm, even happy, as if he had heard a call for which he had been waiting.

"Nineteen cents!" Lawson muttered, as if he had received a blow; as if a dreaded hand had descended at last.

Jean said nothing. She was looking at her husband. She saw him without anger, without fear, smiling now serenely.

Lawson looked up; and before the dominating sureness of that smile his own fear disappeared. Like a soldier waiting for orders, he asked:

"What had we better do?"

"Get every drop of this oil we can. And start a new well as soon as possible." Hart reached out his hand. "I'm off now. Good-by."

When he had climbed into the buggy and taken the reins, he slipped his arm about his wife. In silence they drove away together. And she watched him; he was untroubled; there was eagerness in his eyes.

She waited for him to speak. And when he did, it was gently; he was talking of their love. She laid one hand on the lapel of his coat, looking up into his face.

But when they had reached Sunset, and she stood beside him on the little station platform, she said softly:

"It's going to be a big fight?"

There was a troubled question in her tone. He answered with a ring of gladness:

"Yes. A good, big fight."

Then she knew him as he had become; as he had grown with what had been always in his soul. For a minute she was silent; then:

"You like it, Frank; this fighting."

The words came to him like a realization. There was no resentment in them; she had accepted this. There was in her tone a deeper love, a greater admiration. He drew himself up. "It's all fighting, dear heart," he said slowly.

And when he had kissed her for the last time, and was in the car, he looked back. She stood alone on the station platform. She waved her hand to him. A brave gesture, full of encouragement; as if she were striving to give him all the strength which she possessed: adding it to his own.

He threw open the window; and he watched her as the train roared away; until she was a speck upon the little platform.

Then he shook his shoulders and gave himself up to his plan, which owned him now.

TO BE CONTINUED.

The next installment of "Black Gold" will appear in the first December POPULAR, on sale two weeks hence, November 7th.

The Weight of the Last Straw

By Charles E. Van Loan

Author of "Local Color," "The Chivalry of Carbon County," Etc.

Some men, even in Massachusetts, are born with their faces turned to the West and the itch of distant trails upon their tender feet. Amos Dowling was one of these. His is a unique story. For instance, you never heard of a man being drenched by a rain of spades, did you? That happened to Amos.

A GREAT deal depends on knowing how far a joke may be carried with safety to the joker. There is, in all rough comedy, a boundary line which separates harmless pleasantry from harmful violence. Inability to locate it has hurried many a bright young humorist howling to the hospital. Every weather-beaten graveyard west of the Missouri River owes no small portion of its silent vote to this fatal failing. They were the men who did not know when to stop being funny.

Take, for instance, the case of Amos Everett Dowling, proprietor of the Spotted Calf Restaurant in Little Butte, who found a copy of the ten of spades jammed into a coffee cup on his lunch counter. As peaceable a man as ever scrambled an egg, he removed his apron, and, going out, squandered twenty-nine hard, iron dollars on a large, venomous, double-action forty-five caliber revolver, the same being warranted to hurl six leaden slugs about the size of a man's thumb.

When a tenderfoot from Massachusetts spends that much money on a deadly weapon which can be of no earthly use to him, save at extreme close range—say, across a lunch counter—the indications are that some one is loafing dangerously near the line dividing jest and earnest.

There were hardy and persistent jokers in Little Butte in those days, but some of them were inclined to overplay their hands.

One man who benefited by the general error was old "Elkhorn" Jenkins, the proprietor of Little Butte's general store, where one might buy anything from handkerchiefs to hardware, or canvas, or candy. He sold Amos the revolver, steadying himself meanwhile by clinging to the show case with both hands. In the back room there was a little game and a big demijohn, the latter beginning to show symptoms of protracted siege, and, under the existing conditions, it did not strike Elkhorn as remarkable that the meek owner of the Spotted Calf Restaurant should be investing in artillery. Elkhorn was many deep drinks ahead of amazement of any sort.

"You say you—you wan' *big* gun?" hiccuped the old man. "*Now* you're tootin', kid! You sure said a mouthful then! You—you got ri' idea! Wha's a measly thirty-eight good for, hey? What's it good for? You tell it to me!"

Old Elkhorn glared hard at Amos, breathing deeply, but Amos, not knowing what a measly thirty-eight might be, held his peace.

"Huh!" snorted Elkhorn, in loud disgust. "Thirty-eight cal—cal'ber's noth-

in' but a popgun! 'F you're out to *shoot*, you gotta do somethin' more'n make a man *mad!* You gotta *stop* him! Tha's why I say, 'f you wan' git a gun, *git* one! Git reg'lar ole he-cannon! Why? 'Cause you wan't gun that'll knock fell'r down no matter *where* you hit him. Shoot 'm with pearl-handle watch charm, an' he keeps ri' on comin'. *An'* shootin'. I got very thing you need. Look here!"

Elkhorn Jenkins reached behind him and produced a fly-specked pasteboard box a foot long, out of which he fumbled the largest, and also the most expensive, engine of destruction in the establishment. He patted it lovingly.

"Here's ole Sure Death!" he crowed. "Look'm over! Heft him! Ain't he a *bird?* Talk about gener'l ree-sults! He busts 'm same as if they been hit with a ax! An' I'm jus' *givin'* him away for twenty-nine dollars! It's like throwin' him into the street!"

Elkhorn was beginning to show signs of maudlin tears, so Amos hastened to close the bargain, after which he bought a box of fifty "cattridges," blinking a little at the price.

"I guess I'm fixed now," said Amos. "You needn't wrap up the pistol. I'll just carry it loose."

He thrust the weapon into the waistband of his trousers as he had seen others do, and started for the door. Elkhorn had intended to carry the news to his cronies in the back room, but the remark about wrapping up a gun gave him pause, chuckles fighting with the hiccups in his throat. Then, of course, he had to take time to laugh, and by the time he had finished, he had forgotten the cause of his mirth. In sober moments Elkhorn's memory was bad enough; the contents of the demijohn had not bettered it. He reached his friends just in time to take one big drink with the winner of a big pot, and a bigger one with the loser. Long before the price of the gun had traveled across the table, the incident was wiped from Elkhorn's memory, and Amos, sitting alone in the Spotted Calf, wiping the coat of grease from his purchase, was in sole possession of the facts in the case.

"Now, darn it!" said he to himself, as he explored the fascinating mechanism of the cylinder. "I guess this monkey business will stop or——" Amos thrust out his right arm at full length—this being the Massachusetts idea of handling small arms—and six vicious clicks completed the sentence.

There was an ugly look about the young man's mouth, and a gleam in his eyes, which argued that in his calm New England blood might flow a swift strain of violence.

And why all this? Well, if you remember, there had been a playing card in a coffee cup—to be exact, the ten of spades.

One drop of water, falling at regular intervals, will wear away stone—New England granite, for instance. At least, this is what they say, though there is no record that any reputable witness ever waited around long enough to be able to make affidavit to that effect. Let it go at that, however.

In order to explain the peculiar effect of the card in the coffe cup, we must begin at the beginning, leaving Amos Everett Dowling thumbing his revolver gingerly, and scowling across the empty restaurant.

In the first place, Amos did not fit snugly into a Western landscape. He could not ride a horse, he would not play poker, or buy drinks, and he was guilty of other mild crimes against the place, the period, and the populace. He should have remained in the Massachusetts village where he was born. There he would have fitted into the scenery as smoothly as a horsehair sofa. He would have worn a full set of whiskers, an air of sanctity and eating tobacco, and, in winter, a woolen tippet. It is not at all unlikely that he would have been a pillar of the church, and a member of the school board.

But some men, even in Massachusetts, are born with their faces turned to the west, and the itch of distant trails upon their tender feet. Amos, by the accident of heredity, happened to be one of these innocent Argonauts,

much to the pious wrath and chagrin of his parents, who did not know anything whatever about heredity, but were well posted on the doctrine of original sin.

They told Amos the bitter truth as they saw it, but a man follows his star as a woman follows her heart, and this is the only excuse for Amos, whose itching feet carried him thousands of miles out of focus to make him a wavering blur upon an alien landscape. The pitiful thing about some tender feet is that they harden slowly, and with great pain.

In the days of his Western pilgrimage, there were still cowmen in the land—gentlemen of the saddle who lived hard on canned goods, fresh-killed beef, hand-rolled cigarettes, and squirrel whisky, and when they died, they died suddenly without making the least fuss about it, whenever and wherever the notion seemed to strike them.

They have gone, those wonderful men of the seventies and eighties, and to-day we have nothing but their uncertain shadows flitting across the pages of fiction written by gentlemen residing in Connecticut and moving-picture films manufactured in New Jersey. For our sins we have also the annual wild West shows, which are almost as savage and uncivilized as some portions of Prospect Park, hard by Flatbush, in Brooklyn.

But Amos saw the real thing—was immersed in it to his quivering ears. He was a bit late for the Indian and the buffalo—a bitter disappointment—but he was just in time for the cowman in all his glory, and therefore found the West as full of life, color, and excitement as was good for his general health.

Amos arrived in Little Butte with the money which his grandmother bequeathed him tied up in a woolen sock and suspended between his shoulder blades. That very day he was induced to buy the Spotted Calf Restaurant. Amos did not wish to buy a restaurant, but the owner wanted to sell him one, and there seemed no other way out of it, short of bloodshed. The owner was a profane man, with bushy eyebrows and two guns, and had Amos but known it, the most notorious coward north of the Platte.

It might have been worse, for Amos knew something of kitchen art. His mother, having no daughter, early drafted him for household duties, and in time he became quite proficient in the preparation of New England staples—baked beans, biscuits, crullers, and pies—the very things, in fact, for which Little Butte was hungry.

Having invested his money, Amos, with true New England thrift, set about to make his dollars bring a return. Under the régime of the man with bushy eyebrows, trade had somewhat fallen off, but Amos rolled up his sleeves, and went into the tiny kitchen of the Spotted Calf, where he removed several layers of grease and dirt, and announced himself open for business.

For a time he was waiter, chef, and dishwasher. He slept in the rear room of the narrow shack, and when it became known that he would rise at two in the morning to prepare food for belated customers, Little Butte began to regard him with a certain degree of favor.

He did not escape the usual education of the tenderfoot. Many a rough-and-ancient trick was resurrected for his especial benefit, but Amos bore everything with his pale, scared smile, making no complaints, and showing neither anger nor resentment. It was very much like teasing a sage rabbit. At last "Lop-ear" Haggerty appeared for the defense, with a powerful argument.

"Listen, you blame' ornery billy goats," said Lop-ear, "a little fun is all right, an' roughin' a stranger is part of the game, but I'm here to say you got to let this Boston-beans boy alone. First thing you know, he'll up and out o' here like a scart coyote, and then where can you git any decent grub in this town? He ain't got the sense of a prairie dawg about most things, but he's sure got gifts when it comes to jugglin' a skillet! Remember the junk we had to eat before he lit in these parts? Ever see any *pie* in this town before he come

along? Now me, I'm tender in my digestion, I am, and strong for spoon vittles, and the next son of a sheep-herder that goes shootin' around that restaurant nights, claimin' he's a Sioux Injun on the warpath, is liable for to step his foot in some hot lead. I'm delicate in my innards, I am, an' I ain't a-goin' to allow no rough joker to get gay with that cook, you hear me say it!"

Lop-ear Haggerty's reputation for snapshooting was as good as his reputation for bloodletting was bad, and the tenderness of his alimentary canal saved Amos from further molestation. Business picked up at the Spotted Calf, and Amos was forced to hire a waiter—an Easterner with religion, and a cough which sounded like a thump on an empty barrel. The combination is not a rare one in certain portions of the West.

Amos began to order fancy canned goods from as far away as Denver; eggs, and even oysters appeared upon the bill of fare, and his reputation as a restaurateur spread over several counties.

At the end of his first year in Little Butte, Amos again felt the impulse to travel. It was time for him to see new things and new people; heredity was tickling the soles of his feet once more. As the Spotted Calf was a golden calf in a small way, Amos decided that the trip must be in the nature of a vacation. A man from Massachusetts never abandons substance for shadow.

Boggs, the sickly Easterner, being too close to the pearly gates to risk dishonesty, was placed in charge of the establishment as waiter-cashier, and a cook was imported from Buffalo Mound. These matters being arranged, Amos prudently buried most of his money where nothing but an earthquake could find it, retaining the balance for traveling expenses. On a Monday morning he departed from Little Butte, sincerely mourned by the eating public.

"You Boston beans!" warned Lop-ear Haggerty. "Don't you be too long gone, boy. That new cook may mean well, but he sure did play hell with my aigs this mornin'. Where you going to? Denver?"

"Oh, I don't know," said Amos, settling himself upon the seat beside the driver of the stage. "I'm just taking a little trip to see the country. I'll be back after a while."

The shortness of that trip was a thing which Amos did not anticipate. The stage set him down at the railroad, and, having nothing to do, and several hours to do it in, Amos wandered about the main street of the small town, drifting in and out of the saloons and gambling houses.

It was in a back room where he had gone to read the papers that Amos encountered a fat, wheezing stranger, with puffy white hands, and a friendly smile. No one could have been blamed for pitying an individual so hopelessly at variance with his surroundings. From his stiff derby hat to his cloth-topped patent leathers, everything he wore proclaimed the tenderfoot.

"Pardon me," panted the fat man, "I fear that I have been sitting on the latest Denver paper. Here it is."

Amos thanked him politely. No man born in New England can deny it except in writing. There is that kink in his tongue which betrays him.

"They told me in Boston," said the fat man, wheezing slightly between phrases, "that this is a good country for asthma. It ought to be. It isn't good for anything else. Never suffered so much in my life. Can't eat the food; can't sleep in the wretched beds. Think I'll go back to some place where I can suffer comfortably."

"So you're from Boston!" said Amos, his heart warming to the strayed sheep at once. "I'm from Massachusetts myself. This country seemed a little raw to me at first, but it's all right when you get used to it."

"Well!" said the fat man, dimpling like a cherub. "To think of meeting some one from the old State away out here! I'll declare! Feel better already. If you don't mind I'd like to talk to you a bit. You can tell me a lot about the country and maybe give me some advice. I've been a little shy of these

strangers, and it's a lonely place when you don't know a soul."

Amos was flattered and pleased. He undertook to enlighten this helpless tourist, and together they walked about the town, the fat man wheezing with amazement at some of the stories which were told him. It was Amos' first chance to play the seasoned Westerner on a tenderfoot, and he made the most of it, drawing the long bow until it cracked.

Toward evening they drifted into the back room where they had met. They were calling each other "Amos" and "Ed." It was Ed's idea.

A thin, hawk-nosed little man sat at a table about which several men were standing. As the hawk-nosed man talked, he shuffled a deck of cards and spread them, faces downward, across the table, so that half an inch or more of each card was exposed.

"There you are, men," he announced. "As fair a game as any honest man would wish to see. You bet me that I can't pick out the ten of spades; I bet that I can. You've got fifty-one chances to win, against one to lose. What better would you want?"

"Might not be a full deck," hazarded a tall, awkward blond youth in boots and a spreading gray sombrero.

"Count 'em yourself!" said the hawk-nosed man. "Keep tally on him, men. I ain't afraid to have the cards counted."

"Let's move over and watch this," whispered Ed. "This is a new one on me. Did you ever see it before?"

"Never did," said Amos, "but it's as crooked as a dog's hind leg. That card must be marked somehow. These tinhorns don't throw their money away on a gamble."

"Sure it's marked!" said Ed. "And it'll have to be marked on the *edge*. I'm going to see if I can spot it."

"Don't let him rope you in," warned Amos. "These sharpers are mighty slick."

"Think I was born yesterday?" inquired the fat man with asperity.

As they moved toward the table, the blond youth was finishing a slow and deliberate count, each card dropping face up.

"Huh!" snorted the dealer. "You handle a deck of cards like a Chinaman! Satisfied now, eh?"

The boy under the sombrero was plainly abashed. He looked about him, grinning foolishly.

"They's fifty-two cards there, all right," he said, "and only one ten of spades so far's I could see."

A murmur of assent came from the men about the table.

"Uh huh," they said, nodding their heads wisely. "We was watching that, too."

"Now, then!" said Hawk Nose. "Any man in the house can shuffle 'em and spread 'em on the table. I won't touch hide nor hair of 'em, and I'll bet that I can get the ten of spades first grab. Anybody game?"

"I'll have to go you just once, old-timer," said the blond youth, placing a silver dollar upon the table.

"Fly at it!" said the dealer, leaning back in his chair, and surveying his audience. "All set? You're bettin' I can't pick out the ten of spades; I'm bettin' I can. Watch me closely; no mustache to deceive you; *here she is!*"

But it was the trey of diamonds which he turned over, and the blond youth cackled uproariously.

"Haw! Y' ain't so smart's you think you are! Haw!"

Hawk Nose tossed a dollar across the table with a scornful air.

"I don't do it *every* time, men, because then it wouldn't be a game of chance, and they could put me in the calaboose, but I do it often enough to make a living. That's all *I* ask. Some other sport like to try his luck?"

Once more the dealer missed, and this time the blond boy came near strangling. Hawk Nose shuffled the cards viciously, and spread them across the entire table.

"That's twice you beat me," he said. "Come on, bet 'em up, men! Take a chance, neighbor?" He addressed the fat man wheedlingly.

"No-o," said Ed. "I guess I'll just look on."

"Ain't there no sporting blood in this town?" whined Hawk Nose. "Ain't there no——"

A terrific crash interrupted him, followed immediately by a bloodcurdling yell. It came from behind the table, and like a flash Hawk Nose was on his feet, facing the other way, his right hand thrown back to his hip. Amos was conscious of a nudge in the ribs, and a sudden, swift movement at his side. The fat man's puffy hand shot out over the table, and was back in a twinkling with a card between the fingers. It was the ten of spades. Amos saw that much before it was thrust into his side coat pocket.

"Hang onto it!" hissed Ed. "Run your fingers along the edges, and you'll see they're *nicked*. That's how he tells it from the others! See if I'm not right."

"False alarm!" said Hawk Nose, resuming his chair. "Only a drunk falling off a pool table! Must be fine liquor they sell in this town. I thought it was a gun play starting. When there's any shooting in this country, I want to know it as soon as the next man." He took his hand from his hip, and his voice rose to its professional pitch. "Well, well! This ain't doing any business, men! I'm still bettin' I can pick out the ten of spades!"

Ed drew Amos aside.

"We've got him!" he said. "He doesn't know it's gone! Here's a chance to make some money!"

"Come on! Ain't I going to get a bet?" urged Hawk Nose.

"How much money will you take?" The fat man spoke eagerly, and his voice trembled as with suppressed emotion.

Hawk Nose looked up in evident surprise.

"How much will I—say, what's the matter with you?" He glared at Ed savagely. "Why, you big lard bladder, I'll take every cent you've got, you needn't to worry about that! What are you trying to do—run a blazer around here? You're *called*, so dig up your stuff, and let's see how strong you are!"

The fat man smiled a nasty smile, as he went to his pocket.

"We'll see how much you'll take," he sneered. "You talk a lot, but wind is the cheapest thing in this country."

Amos, the ten of spades safe in his fingers, felt the serrated edges of the card. The notches were so small as to be almost invisible to the eye, but they were there—two on each side, and one on each end.

Ed brought forth an alarming wad of paper money, and ostentatiously counted it upon the table, while the citizens gaped.

"Eight hundred and fifty dollars, *I* make it," he announced, with a calm air of triumph. "I'm a lard bladder, am I? Well, the price of lard is just eight hundred and fifty. What are you going to do about it?" He ended in an asthmatic wheeze, and the crowd, awed by the proximity of so much wealth, murmured, shifted nervously, and watched Hawk Nose.

It was now the dealer's turn to take the center of the stage.

"Eight hundred and fifty dollars!" he drawled. "Well, well! I thought from your talk that there was something pasted onto your fat wishbone beside small change! Eight hundred—oh, well, I expect that's a lot of money where *you* come from!"

The fickle crowd which had chuckled at the fat man's remarks, tittered at the dealer's biting sarcasm. With exasperating deliberation, Hawk Nose drew forth a bulging wallet, and pausing now and then to murmur "Eight hundred and fifty dollars! Well, well!" counted out several one-hundred-dollar bills, after which he paused with thumb and finger still submerged in hidden treasure.

"You sure you ain't got any more?" he taunted.

The fat man hesitated a second, and then turned to Amos.

"You might as well get in on it!" he whispered hoarsely. "You'll never have a chance like this again; you can double your money!"

"But I—I don't gamble!" stammered Amos, reddening to the ears.

"Gee whiz, neither do I!" said Ed. "*This* isn't gambling; it's a sure thing!"

Amos fought against temptation for at least a full second, but the sight of so much money had warped his moral nature and twisted his judgment. A sure thing! He slipped his hand into his pocket, and surreptitiously fondled the notched edges of the ten of spades; yes, it was there; no mistake about *that!* Poor Hawk Nose was hard and fast upon the horns of a physical impossibility, for how could he take from the table a card which had already been removed by some one else? It seemed very much like stealing the money, but the man was a bad man and deserved a lesson. Slowly Amos produced his bank roll—the salve for the itching feet, the passport along distant trails, five hundred honest dollars hardly earned over a hot stove in the kitchen of the Spotted Calf. But for the honest man with a conscience, who believes in spoiling the Egyptians, and asks no more than something for nothing, life would be hard indeed for the unregenerate rascal!

Amos had but one question to ask; it was a credit to his New England thrift and prudence. He asked it of Hawk Nose, who was leaning back in his chair with his thumbs in the armholes of his vest.

"You say the ten of spades is *there* —in the deck?" Amos pointed a shaking finger at the table.

"You're whistling I do!" said Hawk Nose. "And I'm betting that I can pick it out!"

"Well," and Amos gulped as he took the plunge, "I'll bet you five hundred that you can't!"

The fat man took the money from his limp fingers, and counted it hurriedly, and thereafter the transaction proceeded with great celerity. Hawk Nose made another raid upon his wallet, and Amos, in a trance, saw the entire sum placed in the hands of the stakeholder —the blond youth, who used his deep-crowned hat as a depository.

"Gosh all zickety!" he cackled. "Talk about your national banks! Don't nobody get gay and kick this hat, men!"

Amos put his hand back into his pocket, and his fingers closed tightly over his hope—the nicked ten of spades. Yes, everything was all right; it was still there. A lump came up in his throat, and his knees turned to water; nervous chills were tobogganing down his spine; Amos was experiencing for the first time the thrill of a gambler—he who believed that this was not gambling, but a sure thing! The men crowded close to the table, intent and breathless. As from a great distance Amos heard Hawk Nose talking.

"All set? Mr. Stakeholder, you understand the terms of the bet. These gentlemen say I can't pick out the ten of spades; I say I can. Nothing in my hands, nothing up my sleeves, watch me closely"—one hand hovered lightly above the cards for an instant, and as it darted downward, the dealer's voice rose in cheerful accents—"all open and aboveboard, men, and *here she is!*

The card which he turned over was the ten of spades.

The ride back to Little Butte was long enough for reflection. The return trip of the Prodigal Son—and he traveled afoot—held no more of bitterness, humiliation, and vain regret than that five-hour ride through the sweet-smelling sage.

After the impossible has happened, and the incredible been achieved, there are always those who feel it their duty to rend the veil, and expose the bare and unhandsome truth. Amos met many of these kindly ones before he sought refuge in the Little Butte stage on Tuesday afternoon.

He learned, among other things, that the fat man who wished to be called Ed, the blond youth who counted the cards so clumsily, and the supposed victim of alcohol who furnished the timely distraction, were partners with Hawk Nose in a conspiracy against his five hundred dollars.

As to the miracle of the second ten of spades, it was pityingly pointed out to Amos that Hawk Nose himself had shuffled the cards for the fatal play, and lastly, and many times over, he

was informed that the trick was old and moth-eaten, effective only against a tenderfoot or a born fool; that one of his kind was born every minute, and, finally, that he should have had better sense.

Amos had but one hope remaining, which was that the story would not reach Little Butte. The stage driver, Bill Clovis, was the licensed gossip of the region. This worthy man could not have been an eyewitness to the transaction, as he was on his way back to Little Butte when the affair happened. Fearing that some one might have told him upon his arrival Tuesday noon, Amos decided to make a clean breast of it, and throw himself on the mercy of the court.

Accordingly he climbed upon the box at the first stop, and framed his misery in words. Bill Clovis, sympathetic creature that he was, listened with as much interest as if he had not heard the story five times already, clucking to himself, and shaking his head dolefully over the depravity of mankind in general and tinhorn gamblers in particular.

"And I thought," concluded Amos lamely, "that I'd better tell you about it so—so you'd know."

"M-m, yes," said Bill Clovis. "I see."

"If they heard about it at Little Butte," faltered Amos, "they'd never let up on me. I'd rather they didn't find it out. *You* wouldn't mention it to them, would you?"

"Who, me?" demanded Bill, virtuously indignant at the bare suggestion. "I sh'd say not! Young feller, if my ole daddy didn't learn me nothin' else, he beat it into me never to meddle with nobody's business but my own! That's the kind of a hairpin *I* am!"

"Thank you," said Amos. "I'll appreciate it."

The denizens of Little Butte were astounded when Amos came tumbling from the stage on Tuesday night, having been absent exactly thirty-six hours. Naturally they were curious, but to all questions Amos replied simply and truthfully that he had changed his mind about traveling. By eight o'clock he was back over the stove in the Spotted Calf, explaining to an outraged cook from Buffalo Mound that an employer has a right to alter his plans if he sees fit.

Bill Clovis was an honorable man. He kept the secret for fully two hours. Then, to a large audience in the Gold Dollar Saloon, he did ample justice to the narrative, and Little Butte slapped its knees, stamped its high-heeled boots, and roared.

"Oh, this is *too* good!" said "Butch" Anderson. "We can't let this get away! This calls for something out of the ordinary! What'll we do to Boston now?"

With the deep and devilish cunning of their kind, the humorists of Little Butte took counsel together. Here was a grand opportunity—a thing too rich to be squandered on one wild upheaval of mirth; here was a joke which, with proper nursing, might be made into something worthy to be told as far away as the Rio Grande.

Lop-ear Haggerty was present, again appearing for the defendant.

"I won't say Amos ain't got it coming, because he has," said that worthy champion of "spoon vittles." "He went and left himself wide open, and threw away the key. Josh him all you like, boys, but whatever you do, don't get *rough*. If you run him out of town—and him the best pie producer in Wyoming—I'll have a few words to say to them as does it. My stomach is sickly and it's got to be humored; I'm sufferin' yet from what that new cook done to me, so mind you, don't chase this foolish Boston boy out of town. Kid him gentle, whatever you do."

With this warning in mind, the humorists went into executive session, and when their plan was finally presented, Lop-ear laughed louder than any one else, thus giving official sanction to the scheme.

Next Saturday morning Amos, who had been allowed three days in which to nurse a delusion, unlocked the front door of the Spotted Calf. A playing card was lying upon the sidewalk, face up. It was the ten of spades.

At first Amos was startled. He looked down the single street toward the Gold Dollar Saloon; not a soul was stirring, not a door was open. He picked up the card as he would have picked up a poisonous spider. It was wet with the dew, which was proof that it had been there all night. It was nothing unusual to find playing cards upon the sidewalk in Little Butte. Disgruntled gamblers sometimes hurled whole decks into the street after a losing hand, and in the morning the sidewalk would be gay with the bright-colored pasteboards. But this card was solitary and alone, at his very door.

Pondering deeply, Amos put the coffee on the fire, and, when the morning customers arrived, he watched them closely for signs of undue merriment or whispered asides. They devoured their liver and bacon, or ham and eggs, and their conversation and conduct was in no way out of the ordinary. In the course of a few hours Amos was able to persuade himself that the card on the sidewalk was nothing more than a strange coincidence.

After the noon rush was over, Amos decided to go for a walk, and when he took his hat from the nail, a card fluttered out of it and fell to the floor. It was the ten of spades. Amos tore it into a dozen pieces, and changed his mind about the walk, as well as the theory of coincidence. A ten of spades upon the sidewalk might be accident; a ten of spades in a hat pointed to design.

That night Amos watched his customers with acute interest, but was able to discover no sign of strangled mirth, no significant side glances, nothing on which he could pin a suspicion, but later, when the faithful Boggs was "ridding up" he found one ten of spades in the water pitcher, another buried in a sugar bowl, and a third under a plate on the counter. Boggs believed that gambling pasteboards were "the devil's picture cards," but still he was able to remark upon the significant fact that the three cards were of the same design.

"Kind of funny that they're all alike," he said, as he showed them to Amos. "Wisht they'd keep their property where it belongs! In the sugar bowl, too! Ain't no tellin' where these nasty things have been, or who's handled 'em!"

The proprietor of the Spotted Calf offered no comment, but went into the back room. Several hours later, when "Butch" Anderson, "Chalk" Thomas, and "Bat" Kirby hammered on the front door and demanded entrance, and fried oysters, they were tartly informed that regular meal hours did not extend beyond nine in the evening.

The next day seven more of the devil's picture cards were discovered in various places—thrust into the cash drawer, on the floor, behind the counter, and one came in the mail, addressed in a delicate feminine hand. The letter was postmarked "Little Butte."

By this time Amos was beginning to feel the strain of the thing. Open ridicule he might meet and have it over with, but this silent, mysterious persecution was breaking his heart, and the bland, innocent bearing of his customers pecked at his frayed nerves.

He studied them with the eye of a hawk; he analyzed their most commonplace remarks; nowhere could he find a clew. If anything, the citizens seemed unusually well disposed toward him—a bad sign. They had never been so friendly, or so free with their conversation. In vain Boggs was commissioned to keep close watch, and catch the card-dropping miscreants in the act. The rain of spades continued unabated.

One day, after Boggs had gathered the customary harvest, he spread five cards upon the kitchen table in front of Amos.

"Five more," he said, coughing. "I'm goin' to talk to the boys about this fool business. If it's a joke on me, it's a mighty poor one, because I never played cards in my life. I don't know one from the other. I'm going to talk to 'em about it."

"You shut your head!" snarled Amos. "And don't you say a word to *them*, either—not till we know who's

doing it, and then you come and tell me first. Understand?"

Poor Boggs went away, and coughed himself into a state of exhaustion. He was a good waiter, and he had the interests of his employer at heart. The problem was too deep and wide for him —the only soul in the town who had not been "let in" on the joke.

Slowly the funny men of Little Butte approached the thin dividing line between peace and war. Amos, first puzzled, grew ashamed, then angry, then sullen, and finally savage, and the finding of the ten of spades in the coffee cup marked his limit of endurance.

That is why he was sitting in the empty restaurant, thumbing a forty-five caliber revolver. Boggs was asleep in the back room; the hour was four in the afternoon, and trade was slack.

Light wheels rattled in the street, and Amos looked out apathetically. It was too early for the stage, and few wagons paid Little Butte a visit. Most of the transients came in the saddle. Amos was in time to see a buckboard pass rapidly in a swirl of dust; the figures of the passengers were hidden in the yellow cloud.

A little time elapsed, a double shadow darkened the window of the Spotted Calf, the door opened noisily, and two men came into the room. The light was at their backs, and they were not dressed as he had last seen, but Amos could have sworn to them anywhere. The small one was Hawk Nose, and the bulky one was the fat man who had asked, as a favor, to be called "Ed" because it sounded so much like home.

The rear of the narrow room was in the shadow, and instantly Amos was on his feet and gliding toward the kitchen, the revolver held close at his side.

"Hello, there!" called Hawk Nose. "Anybody at home?"

Amos showed a thin wedge of his face in the crack of the kitchen door.

"What'll you have?" he asked gruffly.

"The best you've got!" said Ed. "And plenty of it."

"Ham'n eggs would hit me about right," said Hawk Nose.

"Let that go for me, too," said Ed, "and see that the coffee is hot. Why haven't you got a stove in here? It's chilly."

There was a long silence, and then a muffled suggestion came from the kitchen.

"It's warmer down at this end." It was also darker, which was what Amos had in mind.

The men moved to the rear of the counter, which brought them well into the shadow, and within ten feet of the kitchen door. Soon a faint popping and sizzling was heard, and savory odors floated to the nostrils of the hungry men.

"Smells good," said Hawk Nose. "This air certainly does put an edge on your appetite!"

"You bet!" wheezed the fat man. "That's real coffee, too. Notice it?"

And so, warm and comfortable, and in pleasant anticipation of food to come, Hawk Nose and the fat man leaned their elbows on the counter and talked, all unconscious of a single eye blazing upon them through the crack in the kitchen door. The expression on the rest of the cook's face, could they have seen it, would have ruined their appetites, if nothing more.

Amos measured the distance between the door and the spot where his customers were sitting, took note of the failing light, and then, stepping back into a corner of the kitchen, picked up the revolver and cautiously inserted six fat cartridges. He also put a handful of them in his pocket. Then he drew the trigger to full cock, and laid the weapon gently upon the kitchen shelf, after which he disappeared into the rear room.

Boggs awoke from pleasant dreams with his employer shaking him savagely.

"Listen!" whispered Amos. "There's two men out there. After you serve 'em, wait in the kitchen until I call. Then you come in on the run, and go on the *outside* of the counter. Understand?"

"No," said the truthful Boggs, rub-

bing his eyes. "What do you want me to do that for?"

"Don't ask any questions," said Amos sternly. "Do as I tell you, and everything will be all right." Then he repeated his instructions, laying careful stress upon the point that Boggs was to pass on the outside of the counter on his reëntry.

"I guess I can do that all right," said the conscientious employee. Then he brightened somewhat. "Oh, I know!" he exclaimed. "It's about those playing cards!"

"You're a good guesser!" said Amos grimly. "Hurry up; the grub is ready."

Amos slipped the ham and eggs on the platters, and dished up sundry warmed-over vegetables. Boggs drew two large cups of steaming coffee, and shuffled out with his burden, coughing apprehensively.

Through the crack in the door, Amos saw the two men fall upon the food hungrily, and when Boggs returned to the kitchen, his employer passed him, treading softly, his right hand at his side.

"This goes right to the spot!" said Hawk Nose, as he raised his coffee cup.

"Ain't it the truth!" exclaimed Fat Ed, following suit.

"Hands up!"

The two words, constituting the most potent command in all the West, split the silence like a brace of pistol shots. Hawk Nose and his partner, caught with their gun hands on a level with their chins, looked helplessly over the rims of their coffee cups into the muzzle of what seemed to them at the time to be the largest pocket cannon in the world. Then, without hesitation of any sort, four hands shot into the air, two cups crashed to the floor, and through cascades of scalding coffee, the two rascals peered beyond the black orifice of eternity into the scowling face of their late victim, the innocent youth from Massachusetts. Even then they made no move. It is the fraction of the second which counts in such matters, and being seasoned to the country, they recognized the "drop" when they saw it.

"Holy cat!" murmured Hawk Nose, blinking the coffee from his eyes. "Might as well kill a man as scald him to death!"

"No talking!" said Amos sternly. "And don't forget that I'll blow the head off the first man that lowers his hands an inch." Then in a yell, which made the fat man gasp, and swallow a wheeze: *"Boggs!"*

Boggs had been watching through the kitchen door, but the habit of obedience was strong in him, and he came, trembling.

"Yes, sir, coming, sir!" It was the first time that he had ever addressed his employer as "Sir."

"Take their guns away from 'em, Boggs!" commanded Amos. "And get down on your knees while you're doing it, because, if they move, I'm going to shoot, and I don't want you in the way."

"Yes, sir," quavered Boggs, approaching timidly. "Which one first, sir?"

"The little fellow, with a face like a parrot," said Amos.

The fat man turned his head ever so slightly, and flashed a question out of the corner of his eye, but his hands remained as high above his head as he could comfortably reach. Hawk Nose, who had been taking note of several things—the caliber of the gun, the trigger at full cock, and particularly the whitened second joint of Amos' index finger—answered the query with an almost imperceptible shake of his head.

"No," he whispered, "he's just fool enough to *shoot!*"

Receiving helpful hints from time to time, Boggs uncovered certain pieces of ordnance which he dropped on the floor behind the counter. Hawk Nose proved a veritable walking arsenal. He had a weather-worn six shooter, man's size, in a holster at his hip, a two-shot derringer in each side coat pocket, and a long knife in his boot. Fat Ed had but two weapons—a light pocket revolver and a nail file. Evidently he was not the militant member of the firm.

"So far, so good," said Amos. "Now see if they've got any money."

"Sa-a-a-y, what is this? A holdup?" whined Hawk Nose.

"You shut your head!" growled Amos. "First thing you know, you'll provoke me, and I'll crack you once for luck!" As the authority which he held in his right hand had never wavered, nor the index finger relaxed its threatening tension upon the trigger, Hawk Nose subsided for the time being.

"Look in *his* pocket," suggested Amos, indicating Hawk Nose with a thrust of the revolver which caused that gentleman to blink. "The inside one—that's right. There ought to be a wallet there—yes, that's the one. Now, Boggs, count out a thousand dollars, and put it in your pocket."

Boggs paused with the wallet in his hand.

"A—thousand dollars?" he gasped.

"Do as you're told!" snarled Amos. "You needn't be afraid. It belongs to me by rights."

Thus reassured, Boggs counted out the money, though his hands shook so that he could scarcely hold it.

"There's a law, young fellow——" began Hawk Nose.

"Oh, no," said Amos coolly. "If there was, you'd have been in the jug long ago. I'm only taking what's coming to me. Your friend there sneaked the ten of spades off the table, and I had it in my pocket all the time, or else I wouldn't have bet a cent. If you put another one into the deck when I wasn't looking, it was cheating, and when you cheat and get caught at it, you lose. Got the thousand there all right, Boggs? Put it in your pocket."

Hawk Nose opened his mouth, and made queer noises, but speech was beyond him. Fat Ed gurgled and his shoulders shook.

"He's from Massachusetts, Steve," said he sympathetically. "Maybe that's the way they figure it over there."

"Another thing, Boggs," said Amos. "Take out two dollars more for ham and eggs."

"But we didn't *eat* the ham and eggs!" protested Fat Ed.

"Take it out, Boggs!" said Amos. "Now you can put the wallet back in his pocket."

"But, I tell you——" Fat Ed launched another protest.

"You *ordered* 'em, didn't you?" demanded the proprietor of the Spotted Calf. "You can eat 'em, too, if you want to," he added grimly, "only I'm going to begin to shoot at you just as soon as Boggs gets out of the way."

Hawk Nose was a student of character, as a tinhorn gambler must be.

"Yes, and he'll *do* it, too!" yelled Hawk Nose, as he sprinted for the door. Fat Ed followed, breaking into a lumbering gallop as soon as he found his feet.

"Bring those other guns, Boggs!" screamed Amos, as he leaped over the counter. "We'll chase 'em out of town!"

The cannonading which took place immediately thereafter, jarred Little Butte to its wooden foundations, and brought the entire population tumbling into the open air. The Gold Dollar Saloon emptied itself in three ticks of the watch, and its habitués were just in time to see two strangers sweep by, under heavy, if erratic, bombardment. And wonder of wonders, down the street in their dusty wake, vomiting flame and smoke, came the meek and lowly proprietor of the Spotted Calf, and every time he drew trigger, he uttered strange, warlike noises, such as had never before been heard in Wyoming.

"Hell's bells, men!" shouted Lop-ear Haggerty, going to cover like a rabbit. "Look who's shootin' up the town!"

On the whole, little can be said for Amos' target practice, except that there was a great deal of it, distributed over a wide expanse of territory. Ably supported by Boggs, with fresh weapons, he sped the parting guests until they were no more than black spots bobbing in the sagebrush.

Then, with the faithful servitor coughing heavily at heel, he returned in triumph, his guns empty, but his heart filled with large emotions. A committee went out to meet him.

"Great kingdom, son!" ejaculated Lop-ear Haggerty, who was examining a large, jagged hole in the peak of his

twelve-dollar hat, "do you know who that little feller was you was chasin' so bold and handsome? That was Steve McGrew, and he's a ba-a-d man to fool with. He eats people like you. How come it you tangled up with him, and got out alive?"

Amos drew a long breath, and an inspiration with it.

"Well, I'll tell you," he said confidentially. "Somebody's been littering up my place with playing cards for the last two weeks, and I got sick of it. That fat fellow put the ten of spades in my pocket, and I—I just went after both of 'em, that's all."

Boggs wagged his head affirmatively, and coughed with great importance.

"We're tired of that kind of fool doings," he said sternly. "You boys let it be a lesson to you to keep your gambling truck at home after this!"

Then, with the stride of a conquering hero, the proprietor of the Spotted Calf returned to his place of business to peel the potatoes for supper.

BALZAC IN WALL STREET

TWO stock traders, sitting in a customers' room in a brokerage house in Wall Street, were discussing the various authors.

"I think," said the first trader, "that Balzac was the most forceful writer. He is my favorite author."

The second trader started in to criticize some of the Balzac works and boost those of some of the other writers. A general argument was under way when a third party entered the door, a gentleman known for his shrewd investments.

"Ah, here comes Jones," said the first trader; "we'll leave the question to him." Then: "Hello, Jones. Say, I was just boosting Balzac, and our friend here has taken the other side. Now we're going to leave it to you. What's your opinion?"

Jones' face took on a puzzled expression, and, with his thumbs placed under his armpits, answered: "You've got the wrong party, boys. I never bought a share of mining stock in my life."

NO PLACE TO DISPLAY A BANK ROLL

C. W. BARRON, owner of the *Wall Street Journal* and Philadelphia and Boston News Bureaus, takes pride in "beating" his reporters on big news stories. He was at the Waldorf one evening and chanced to overhear a conversation which led him to believe that a big story was about to break from the Standard Oil offices. Next day he hurried down to 26 Broadway and asked to see William Rockefeller, whom he had known for a number of years.

To Barron's annoyance the colored office boy insisted that he—Barron—should hand in his business card. After much excited talk the card made its appearance, and was taken into Mr. Rockefeller's private office. The boy immediately returned with the information that Mr. Rockefeller was too busy to be disturbed. Barron started to leave. He was disgusted, raving with anger.

Turning to the boy, he demanded: "Where's that card I gave you!"

Frightened to the point of almost turning white, the negro again wended his way toward Mr. Rockefeller's office.

Beads of perspiration stood out on his forehead, his limbs were shaking as he returned to Barron and said: "Mr. Rockefeller, he done say, Mr. Barron, dat your card don't come back. Dat you oughta know dat what comes in dis here office don't ever go out."

First making sure that he still had his wallet, Barron hastened toward the elevator.

The Man Who Made 'Em Block

By Harold Titus

The man who "makes the eleven" has often been exploited in football stories. The poor scrub has been more or less neglected, the fellow who is willing to let himself be run over by the 'varsity for two months each fall; to strain against their rushes, to be battered and tramped down into the mud; to sweat and pant and fight on in the face of hurts! And all the time knowing that it isn't more than rehearsal! That it really doesn't matter! To understand fully that he is only a dummy, a make-believe! More than once we have felt that there was a big story to be written around the scrub. Titus has written it.

I PLAYED on the scrubs four years. I let myself be run over by the varsity in every scrimmage for two months each fall. I gave everything—my strength, my thought, my ambition toward making myself a good football player, and all for the sake of a letter I never got—a gaudy piece of felt, sewed on the chest of a bulky sweater. I'd wanted one of those letters ever since I was a kid in high school, and I kept on wanting it until my fourth season as a scrub had ended.

Oh, being a scrub is no dream! To have 'em drive down on you, and hurl their whole strength against you alone with all the vicious vindictiveness they would use in giving fight for a championship sounds fine, but it gets monotonous. To strain against their rushes, take their impact, and hear your spine crack right where neck runs into shoulders! To dig your cleats in, and feel the tendons of your upper calf *give* under the strain! To be battered and tramped down into the mud; to sweat, and pant, and scrap on in the face of hurts! And all the time knowing that it isn't more than rehearsal! That it doesn't really matter! To understand fully that you're only a dummy, a make-believe!

Why, the varsity men get to despise you! Oh, yes, I know, they slop a lot of sentiment when the season is all over, but you can't know anything about the true relationship until you've stood ready to meet a pair of eyes that hated you; waiting to grab those knees that wanted to catch you on the point of the chin and put you out! Too, they act nastily, and try to rub in the fact that they're above you, and the head coach tells 'em to break your ribs! Oh, there's a lot of bunk surrounding the scrub, but his life is a tough one—one long string of insults and injuries.

But then, this feeling only comes over me when I go back into the far past and sort of forget myself.

The first three years of it were bad enough, but they weren't in it with the last. Each fall I kept expecting to be shifted to the varsity. My sophomore year I dared hope for it; my junior year I'd have risked money on it, and when I went out for the fourth time I was sure of it. But it wasn't to be, and they chucked me back at left end on the scrubs in the first scrimmage.

The head coach called signals himself, and sent Waugh, big and bony, across from his left half-back position at me with wicked speed. The head coach

kept yelling: "Ding him in th' slats! Break th' redhead's ribs! Now! *Now!*" Of course, he didn't mean it. Those things just popped out when he was excited. In him, anyhow, I could forgive much. He had never spoken a word to me, never noticed me, except to hope his men would mash my lights out, but I looked on him as something a little more than human.

While his words and meaning didn't cut, they drove home the realization of just what another year would mean, if I failed to connect with the varsity squad. And that, with my experience, was something to think about. There was more work than ever before us that year, for by the time the schedule was half gone the coaches realized that the wind-up of the season would be the knottiest problem that they'd ever tackled. The team that was always out opposition in the last game was playing faultless football. They had a puncture-proof line, a backfield that gave the ideal a close rub, and a pair of ends that everybody conceded would be Camp's choice. Our varsity men were good enough themselves to have their names used as synonyms, but no eleven is even good enough to pigeonhole a game before the last whistle blows, and it seemed up to the team to extend itself every inch, and then stretch to as much as hope for an even break. That meant work for the scrubs, and lots of it.

I suppose all ordinary football coaches have just one big play under their skin, but with our head coach it was different. He wasn't the ordinary kind, and devised a half dozen plays that were as perfectly planned, as fine in detail as a Swiss watch. Genius bristled from them. They were conceived expressly for our big game, and, showing his colossal nerve, his stupendous faith in his own ideas, built to strike full on those ends—the best pair in the country!

I'll not forget how I felt when they finished trying that string on me the first time. I didn't know what was happening until it was past; then they repeated, and I had another dose of the stuff that made me dizzy. Those plays called for blocking! In every one a varsity back was singled out to get me so I'd be out for good! Zowie! How they did eat it up! I'd been blocked before by corking good blockers, but the head coach seemed to have shot a great gob of his own spirit into that backfield, and they went after us scrubs for blood. But I was the one who took the brunt of it all. Because I played at end and represented one of those crackajack players!

After they'd tried 'em on me twice I saw the head coach talking to the man who handled the scrubs.

"Hey, Red," he hollered. "Play on the other end."

It was the first time he'd ever spoken to me, and I sort of swelled up as I shifted over, never stopping to wonder at the change.

Then I saw 'em start those same plays for me on *that* end. Get the idea? I was the best end the scrubs had, so they pulled me across to make harder work for the varsity. You bet I was ready for quitting time that night! I went in lame and tired. I was so fagged my brain wouldn't work. The trainer met me at the gym door.

"Go over and get rubbed," he said.

Gee! I came all alive in a split second! Only varsity men got rubbed!

That stirred up a lot of foolish hope, and kept me awake most of the night, but I came out of it the next afternoon, and found myself in the old place with the reserves. I didn't have a whole lot of interest, but just before scrimmage time, the head coach came over and said:

"How do you feel?"

I don't know what I answered, but the question made me feel like working hard.

Again that afternoon they spent all their time smoothing out those new plays. A dozen times in succession they drove at me. When we got a rest I had a bump over one cheek bone that looked like a red Easter egg.

Lord! For months after that my knees would go weak, and a thrill run

down into my stomach when I thought those few minutes over! Because I realized, suddenly, what it meant when they shifted me over and sent the same stuff on me. I hadn't been able to comprehend the day before. But I knew then, knew the *why* of the trainer's attention, and the interest of the coach. Butchered to make a Roman holiday! They were training me up, rubbing me down, taking care of me so I'd last in the face of their attack until they made those varsity backs good enough blockers to spill all-American timber and spill it *every time!* I didn't count. It wasn't to *me* they were giving added attention. I was a scrub, a poor, soulless dub, whose body and soul they were grinding up to make chinking for the holes in their attack! They wanted me on my feet, fighting like a fool until they had those plays pat. Then nothing mattered!

After reasoning it out, my head seemed to be congested from neck to crown. I don't know how many times they sent their backs to batter and crush me so they could learn how to block off all conditions of men. I stood there with my feet apart between rushes, swaying a little, I guess, and aching for them to come on me! I yelled out loud when I charged in to meet them and swore like a pirate when they drew me off when I should have played close in. But I played better football than I'd ever played before. That was what they wanted.

"Kill off that redhead!" I'd hear the head coach holler. "Break his ribs! Block him! *Block* him!" and, somehow, I'd forgive him, rotten as it made me feel.

Then a big hunk of man would meet me somewhere. Most of the time it was head on, his shoulders crashing into mine, or into my side below the ribs, and I'd go down with my head trying to snap off. Now and then they'd fool me and get me in the stomach, and I'd suffer for breath when they quit me. Sometimes they'd upend me, and my face would smash into the sod, and in gasps I'd smell the fresh wet grass. At other times, though, my nose would jam into a stinking uniform, and I'd smell the accumulated sweats of seasons.

I slept that night, all right. I had no suspense to keep me awake. My dose was signed, sealed, and delivered, and I hated 'em all—except the head coach.

I'd never wanted to be with the varsity so much as I did that next day, and still, in all those hard, irritating years, I'd never hated them so. I wanted to spit in their faces when we lined up; and I'd have gone laughing through nine hells to be over that line of scrimmage, one of them!

The way they went after those new plays showed that the coaches had nailed their last hope to them. Oh, we scrubs made 'em learn their parts well! Those backs got to be better blockers even than the head coach had been in his day. I heard him say so himself, and that's going some! And I was the one who made 'em good! They had to get up, and go their best to stop me, because I got good, too! I thought out every trick I could that would get me past a sure blocker, but they caught on to every kink. They got better just as fast as I got wiser. They learned to throw 'emselves at me broadside, flying through the air horizontally, and there was no dodging them then! When I got to the place where I couldn't show anything new, they put a coach on me—me alone, mind you—and he taught me a lot more stuff. When I did spring any of those new ideas, and mussed a play or two before the backs learned to meet me, the head coach would go after those boys fit to break their hearts. It did me good to hear him!

Right up to the end—grind, grind, grind! I felt myself slumping. I was a mass of yellowish-green bruises and down so fine that whenever I grinned the skin stretched over my face as though it was dry, and ready to crackle. I was all in, strength gone, spirit gone, hope—oh, sort of stagnant. The whole cheese had gone into perfecting the regulars, and the men who were going to get the thing about which I had dreamed since a kid back in high school, for which I had worked four long years

with every ounce pulling, were the men who had used me up!

I'll never forget any of it, but above all, the labor of that last scrimmage will stick out in my memory like a sore toe. For over an hour they kept the attack coming on me. They tore me to pieces, beat me to the border of insensibility, and then expected me to get up and give fight again! Well, I did it. How, I don't know. All that afternoon I knew I had just one more play left in me, but somehow I lasted. When I think of shifting from one end to the other in that last practice I'll always see those other scrubs looking at me, while the varsity waited for me to reel over, and get in the way of their play. They all watched every step I took, those scrubs, and their faces were white under the muddy sweat and the eyes—even the blue ones—incredibly dark.

Ever since I first realized my place in the scheme of that team's development, I had been merely mad. But when, after standing a long, long time under the shower that night, I walked back and found the rubbers gone, and all their things put away, I got my first hurt. They'd forgotten all about me. I had been used for the last time!

In the hours I stayed awake I got used to the idea of never wearing a letter. I'd had my last chance, and my dream had busted. Guess it was about three in the morning when I broke training, lighted my pipe, looked into the mirror, and made myself grin.

So it wasn't so bad to squat on the side lines, and watch the varsity scatter over its end of the gridiron to receive the kick-off. I sat beside Denny Lawrence, the scrub quarter, and he said to me:

"Well, Red, we're watching our last game from the inside. We're only scrubs to-day, but we'll only be general public to-morrow."

You've seen varsity men, veterans, quick thinking, quicker acting, lose themselves in the first seconds of a big game's play? That's what happened to Horn, our full back. From between the goal posts he watched the ball come almost into his arms, misjudged by inches, fumbled, let it roll across the goal line, and—well, he never had a chance! They buried him alive—a touchback, two points against us, and less than twenty seconds of play!

Up behind us the rooters sort of moaned, but it didn't react badly on the varsity. The men were out and throwing every breath into making good the blunder. Oh, they played football! They played with the fear of failure in their hearts. The spirit spread. All around us, in the huddle of scrubs, you could hear boys grunt when a play struck a snag. We were pulling for them with the last ragged edge of our nerves.

After that first fluky flash, the game settled to a dead level. Women got bored, and lots of men up in the stands thought more of the cold than they did of the playing. But those who knew football couldn't pry their attention loose from that fight! The balance between the two teams was almost perfect. It was a case of gain a yard, then lose it; gain by putting in your last heartbeat, lose it in the face of a rush that refused to be stopped.

The *will* that was behind all that scrap bristled in its every detail. You could hear it in the thud of feet, in the surly grunt when a runner stopped unwillingly; could see it in heads, hung down low when men charged; in the stumbling bodies that blocked; in the quivering flanks of crouching forwards. It showed in the nasty grins men take on when their teeth show between lips, while their eyes look lust; it showed in the call of signals that came in short, dry barks out of the tangle of disturbance, and it showed in the hollow pung of the ball when kicking boots met it.

When the ball snapped back you could see those dog-gone lines shoot forward, meet, hang there for an eye's wink, then rise, slowly, creakinglike, while muscles scalded and stretched. Then the waver; then the slump, one way or the other, sometimes straight down. The play was close. Neither captain wanted to show his hand. Time after time they tried the lines, but neither would give for gains. End runs didn't make yards,

and the forward passes from ordinary formations entailed too much risk. Not in all that first half did either team make its first down twice running.

They came back from the gym with their hair plastered, and their lean faces clean from the trainer's sponge. You could see their knees give nervously, and their hands flutter, as they waited for that second kick-off. Then—snap! They were nickel steel again, every faculty focused on the one fine point!

We scrubs got white and pinched with the strain of it all. Our skins ran sweat, our lips stretched across our teeth, our bodies felt the racks just as did theirs out there. Only we couldn't relieve the tension by physical effort. I know a kid beside me snapped his fingers all through that last half, until I thought I'd go batty. I expected all the time to look down and see the flesh worn to his thumb bones. Somehow, though, I never found a second to bawl him out.

They rested the third and last time, and still the big figure two was the only thing on the scoreboard. Up behind us ten thousand frazzled throats begged the varsity to score, and across the way great billows of encouragement to hold broke and dashed out over the fine lines.

I pulled at my sweater neck to let a little air in on my chest. I knew what would come in that quarter. Everything our varsity had, had been used—except the series of plays that made the high card of their hand. The opposition was playing a frankly defensive game and the time had come. I started to my knees.

It was like a biff in the face—those memories. They settled about me like a clammy damp. I remembered how I had been used, what the product of that labor had been, how much it meant to them all at that moment, and for how little I counted. I forgot about the snapping fingers; forgot about the game, and just sat there, cold and a little lonesome. Half the playing time went by.

Then I found myself on my feet. It was a string of signals that put me there—signals that popped like hail on a barn roof, while wind rages through the cracks. The backfield shifted suddenly to the left, hard up against the forwards. The other line edged over a bit, as it should, for it looked like a rush straight through. It wasn't. It went out to the right, a short run, and a forward pass over their left end's head. I floundered and stepped on hands and legs trying to keep that end in sight. I couldn't, but I knew what was happening. I knew Waugh was at him! I knew just how! I knew how his eyebrows came together over his nose, and the way his mouth twisted to the right. I knew how close his knees came to his lowered chin, too. And I knew what that end out there all alone in the face of the play was thinking. He was going up toward Waugh, cautiously as he could, planning to slip past. That was his idea, and, as the squirming mass opened, I could *see* him try to do it. I laughed out loud! It was an old trick—an old, old one, and Waugh had learned it from me weeks before. He flopped through the air, the whole six feet of him straight out, and struck that end at the knees with his own middle; they went down as though welded!

Horn led at the same end with the next play, to block him out and make a big, wide gap there for the run, which cut in just off tackle. I knew how Horn swung his feet in arcs as he ran, and made you want to laugh; and I knew the funny dip he gave his head as he dove. The end tried to side-step and bend his back to make Horn miss the mark, but he hadn't reckoned on the awful speed the last drive of that cleated shoe gave the full back's body! He got a shoulder in the side, and rolled slowly on the ground, after Horn stood up and grinned like a giant imp!

Once more it was Waugh at the end, and the poor chap—the great end, the end who'd never really been blocked before—froggy, his mouth hanging open, caught the impact of our half's body in the thighs. And Waugh took him the fourth time—the time they carried him off. They'd driven him out,

and him Camp's choice! Holy smoke, but it took a blocker to get him!

In the minute's wait I grasped the more obvious situation. By those four plays the ball had been carried from our forty-yard line to within twenty-five yards of their goal! I never thought about gains while the plays were running. I was watching 'em get that end!

And while I counted the yards, the whistle cut in again, and I saw the fresh end get it. He was easy, and you could hear him grunt in the smother of silence that came with the play's beginning.

When they lined up again, I noticed that I was all in a tremble and hollering. Only I couldn't hear myself—not in that cyclone of sound. You could almost feel the air shiver under the crashing yells that came off the bleachers. They were going crazy! It was a march, a relentless, steady march to the end of the gridiron! And the gains were made on the ends, on those mighty ends who were going to be Camp's choice, those ends who were so hard to block—those parts I had *acted!*

Then I saw the attack switch to the other wing. Conroy stormed out ahead of a pass. Gad, but he looked nasty! I wondered if that other end noticed how Conroy held his fingers stiff while he ran, and how he breathed through his teeth. I guess he wasn't looking for those things, though. He was out for our scalp, that fellow. He spoiled the play! Somehow, I never figured it out, he got past Conroy, and I saw the big fellow sprawl. Then Horn went down before he'd the chance to pass.

"Less than a minute!" I heard somebody growl, and then noticed how the crowds had become like assemblies of violent maniacs. Too, I saw the timers confer.

But stop that next play? Not in a generation! Conroy had learned something. I knew they couldn't get past him twice—I'd made him too good an end! He went out in the lead of the next move like a cat, lithe and quick-stepping. I saw the end close in again. I saw Conroy tear up the sod in a couple of short, sharp strides. Then I clapped my hands and laughed, for I had known to a hand's breadth where Conroy's shoulders would get him. They went down with a jolt, and the play stampeded over them.

And as Waugh, the ball safe against his side, head low and legs working like drive rods, charged safely past the point where that end *might* have stopped him; as he cut loose with the last half dozen sturdy leaps that carried him across the goal line, I saw the timers run out, waving their handkerchiefs! Oh, it was in the last second of play all right, but it was inside the limit. The head coach had planned so; Conroy had carried out his plans.

I knew that Denny Lawrence was beating me on the back, and heard the final whistle cutting through the storm of shouting. They were coming down on the gridiron, those tens of thousands!

After the knowledge that we'd made it a win, came the let-down. I couldn't catch the spirit any more, and the bottom dropped out of things for me. Something made me look up. I saw a man running toward me. It was the head coach. In all my disappointment I felt that old admiration for him get warm inside me and, with it, a stunning regret that I'd never been able to get across that line which kept scrub from his own division. The players were chasing him, wanting, I knew, to hug him, and slap him, and act like women. But he kept running. He came straight toward me, and I stepped aside.

But he didn't want to get past! He grabbed me by the shoulders and squeezed. Then he shook me, a bit roughly. He pushed me away from the others, and I saw there were tears in his eyes. He sort of choked for a second, and then in a funny sort of voice, said——

Rats! I'm not going to tell what he said! Nobody else has ever known, and telling might spoil it even now!

Anyhow, what I'm trying to get at is this: A letter, after all, amounts to nothing. Even playing on the varsity isn't much, compared to real things.

Getting Away With It

By Arthur B. Gleason

A story to chuckle over. A clever bit of satire which you will want to retail to your friends after you've had your laugh. It's about an enterprising newspaper owner who decided to emulate the sample of a God-fearing weekly and add a contributing editor to his staff. He hit upon one that made even Theodore Roosevelt look tame.

GAST was owner of a chain of nineteen newspapers. He was always listened to, when out of his pallor and loneliness—a loneliness which no one at any time penetrated—he chose to speak. He was speaking now.

"We've simply got to have a new sensation," he said to his favorite editor. "Your editorials have gone stale. The big type is still there, and I suppose the ideas are in them if you squeezed hard enough. But the people don't thrill like they used to, when you pull out the stops and yell for revolution."

"Why don't you run again for something or other?" returned the editor.

"I had thought of that, too," said Gast, who was impervious to a subordinate's sarcasm. "Now that they've made the supreme court electoral, I'd considered running for chief justice, but I'm not a bulwark of law and order, and I'm not a friend of the people—so the chances are I'd slip."

"What's the matter with pulling off another war?" suggested the editor. "I've been thinking that some work in the Kongo could probably stir up the natives to a neat little revolt. Then when they were getting wiped out by the machine guns, work it so that President la Follette would have to intervene, and there you are with a brand-new battlefield. Those color photographs would be great—think of the chance on the black troops, and the bloody-red victims and the lush-green scenery."

"They're on to it," said Gast; "they're on to war. The people have got it in their heads that most all the scraps of the last thirty years were cooked up by the city editor."

"Well," said the editor impatiently, "they're on to anything, as far as that goes."

"I know, but the trick now is to do something they'll laugh at and like, even when they know it was the Three A-Hem Extra that did it. No, you're not striking it. You've gone stale. You've lost your feel for what the people really want. I tell you, man, they're sick of sensations, of things happening all over everywhere. What a paper needs today is internal sensation—a self-generated kind of bombshell. Roosevelt has proved it. Look at his career this last year on that God-fearing weekly. Do you suppose for one minute that they'd have sold half the copies if there had been a soul-saving convention somewhere in Oshkosh, and they'd sent their full staff of two reporters, or an earthquake in the toe of Italy, or a murder on a roof garden, or a war among the Quakers. No, no, all that's too jumpy. What they want now is the single mind hopping through space and time. Do you remember that series of his on the

'Lost Digamma' that every Greek scholar in the country jumped into, and then how he swung off into the 'Spitball'; or, 'What Every American Boy Should Know?' Then that thing—'Should Farmers' Wives Smoke,' with the findings of the commission, and the statistics of cigarette butts found under the washtubs. Oh, it's been great what he's done to journalism. He's invented the job of contributing editor, and then set the pace for all his understudies. It's a new idea—the big personality, that can rip off yards of sizzling copy. That's run out earthquakes and fires, for grabbing the people's attention. First you want a monarch, and second, he's got to have a rich past from which he can pull a wealth of illustration, anecdote, and inside information. The people want a picturesque, world-famous hero in a business suit to sit tight in an office and write about everything. That's the point—a star character for editor-man to turn out daily themes. Now, I've got the man."

"Where?"

"That's the trouble. We've got to pick him up and fetch him."

It was always Gast's way to pump his man, on the off chance of a novelty, and then produce his own wrought-out and hammered-down plan at the very end of a wearing session.

"We want new blood inside the office, fresh thrills at home right here—corner Sixty-sixth Street and Broadway——"

"Oh, you're going to fire me, are you? Why didn't you say so, first off, or were you maybe saving it up for a nightcap? When do I resign?"

"You make me tired," said Gast. "No. I'm not going to fire you. If you threaten me hard enough, I'll raise your salary. But I'll tell you one thing. You'd better put in a placid month with your hare-and-hounds horseback bunch and sweeten up a bit, for you certainly are unpleasant to talk to. It's a wonder to me you haven't offended an office boy or swatted a lady stenographer, the way you're living on your nerves. What is it? Writing cocktail editorials, or maybe you're trying to drive your own motor car, and flattened out Old Subscriber and Constant Reader."

"You've made your point," said the editor, in a tone of surrender. "Don't elaborate it so. You give me a headache with your Cooper Union irony."

"As I was saying," resumed Gast, "we've got the man. I know of a man for contributing editor that will make Roosevelt look tame—a man who can come up every week with a bright new budget of snappy items and soul talk."

"Spring it," said the editor.

"It's the sultan," said Gast.

"I don't catch it," said the editor.

"Certainly you catch it," said Gast, "s-u-l-t-a-n. We'll kidnap old Abdul, of Salonika, lift him right out of his prison inclosure there, hustle him aboard my yacht at Naples, and then give him a quiet voyage back to New York. We'll have the alcove next your den all ready for him, fitted up nice, you know, with gilt letters on the door, 'Abdul-Hamid, contributing editor.'"

"Say, you're right," remarked the editor.

"Right?" said Gast. "Why, man, it'll take like a breeze. I've got it all doped out in my mind. Listen. Twice a week we'll reserve the rear sheet—'The Sultan's Own Page.' There'd be a cheery word to his readers, a militant paragraph on some wrong that ought to be righted, a little hot talk to his enemies, and then perhaps he'd do a bit in the lyrical line—knock off a stanza, say, in the Friday editions. Then, at least once we will rip open the rear form *and* pictures with 'Is Capital Punishment Desirable?'—by The Assassin of the Assassins—his point being that it is too jarring to the victim. Then you might answer him once in a while. You know—'As our royal contributor has keenly said, the divorce evil must be regulated by government. There are too many divorces. Better more *wives* and *fewer* divorces.' Sundays, we could use him in two ways. We'd set him up in the column next the religious corner, with some standing head like this—'Glimpses at Truth, by The Shadow of Allah.' Then we could have a full page in colors for the children—'The Padi-

shah's Supplement for the Little People.'"

"I hope he's fertile with his brain throbs," said the editor.

"Oh, he must be," returned Gast; "look at his experience. He must have a fund of material to draw on. Not too often, you know, but once in a while, we could run a column or so: 'A Grave Chat With Fathers and Mothers, by One Who Knows.'"

"You'd have to go easy there," said the editor.

"Oh, moral I mean," said Gast, "perfectly all right and helpful. He could do a lot of good in a way, as you come to think of it."

"When do we start?"

"We've already started. The boys are over there now, Slade and Hopkins. They're about turning the trick now."

II.

That same evening, four thousand miles to the eastward, shadowy forms were darting in and out the ample gardens of the Villa Allatini. A score of these swift shadows closed in on the villa, as it lay among its pines bathed in the vitreous pour of the full moon.

"Now, Slade," a vibrant whisper said, as a dozen men converged at the portico. They pried open the swinging door, tiptoed down the hall, flashed their bull's-eye lantern into the third room on the left where, on a massive, carved-oak bedstead, lay their quarry, sniffling for mercy.

In deep chest tones, out of which terror itself could not extract the grace and music, he pleaded with his captors.

"This," said he, "is the third time in a year that my enemies have shifted me. Why not strike, and strike to kill? Life is not worth having with this miserable uncertainty."

They lifted him high and clear from the rich draperies of the couch, caught him at head and feet, like a corpse, and bore him to the harbor.

Behind them, and unheard of them, a laugh rang out in the Villa Allatini.

III.

Gast's inner and most private office was rocking with excitement.

"He's here, he's here," shouted the editor, pounding the Turkish consul on the back, and pointing to the famous stoop-shouldered figure of gloom in the corner.

"That thing?" said the consul. "That isn't Abdul. Abdul's in heaven among the houris, dead and turned to clay, gathered to his fathers."

"Is this a joke?" asked Gast angrily. "We swiped him out of the Villa Allatini."

The consul smiled.

"Didn't you know about the sultan?" said he. "I thought every one knew about the sultan—every one on the inside, I mean. Why, it's the same trick as the perennial Mrs. Eddy and the gamesome Mrs. Harris, and all those popular characters that keep an idea afloat long after it's water-logged. 'There ain't no such thing.' The sultan died away back there in 1901, long before even the Young Turks got busy. They had the tip all right, and never let on. Sure—they used to drive harmless old gents around, fellows with the sad fatalism in their eyes—bearded, you know, with a world-weary nose. What you call old-clothes men. This old fellow was always the best of the sultans. They had a set of understudies, one time and another, and used to work 'em in rotation. One fellow they called Salamlik Charley, because he always represented the empire on Friday at the mosque. But this old fellow gradually won his way to the top, and the rest of 'em faded. He's so sleepy and abnormallike—just what Europe was looking for. He liked it, too; said it reminded him of things he'd read. Some of the rest of them would kick—said there was nothing in it being sultan. They used to keep one fellow—a bright youngster he was, too, to think up stunts that the old reprobate ought to be doing, if he had been alive. He thought up that one where they had the hard-pressed sultan kill his eighteen-year-old Circassian girl—so young,

so beautiful, now cold in death. I remember their telling how the idea struck him while he was eating breakfast, and how he choked over his biscuit. Yes, the whole show's been just a dummy figure to represent tyranny and the moth-eaten régime, and all that rot."

"But what was the use of all that fool play acting?"

"Use enough, all right. You'd have had all the rest of Europe jumping in and annexing Turkey—wings, legs, breast bone, and rump—making Constantinople a neutral port—if they hadn't doped out this game. Nobody leaked. Why should they?"

"He shall still be the sultan!" shouted Gast, lifted out of himself in excitement.

"Let him remain Abdul, the Damned, let him be our man, no one will ever know that he is just the dummy for the dead old sinner. He shall have his Sunday page, and his Friday corner. Here, you old fake, you vaudeville pagan—will you be our contributing editor, and spin out copy for us?"

The little, blinking man in the corner, with hunched shoulders and drooping face, had not stirred while the consul talked. But he turned toward the group, as Gast's voice rose with the tides of his enthusiasm.

"I'd like to. I'd like to, mighty well. Your paper reaches a large audience. There's the chance to do a lot of good. But the fact is," said the sultan, lighting a Turkish cigarette, "I'm under contract to the *World*."

WHY HE INTERRUPTED BLAINE

WHEN James G. Blaine ran for President of the United States in 1884—ultimately losing to Grover Cleveland by a narrow margin—he conducted a whirlwind personal campaign. He visited many cities and towns. One afternoon he delivered an open-air speech in a Pittsburgh park.

Pittsburgh generally was friendly to him, but it was rumored that there was a hostile element in the immense crowd that had gathered, and that there might be attempts to interrupt him. The "Plumed Knight" smiled grimly at the prospect, as he said that he believed he could deal with any disturbers.

On account of the press of people, several of the reporters of Pittsburgh newspapers "covering" the affair were obliged to place their paper on the floor of the speakers' platform, standing on the grass to write.

Blaine began his speech, while the reporters raced along after him. Soon, mingled with the applause, there were mutterings, with disapproving comments in a louder tone here and there, the only effect of which was to make him more emphatic and aggressive. Under the spell of his oratory—for the now rather overworked expression, "silver tongue," was generally applied to Blaine in those days—the interruptions died down—all except for somebody at his very feet. This person not only shouted at him, but actually twitched the leg of his trousers persistently.

Blaine took no notice, for he was leading up to one of his most splendid flights, and he was not the man to permit his rounded periods to be disjointed or broken off for a trifle. At last, however, as he finished his sentence with a magnificent burst of eloquence, he looked down to see who was the impudent individual who not only dared to shout at him at such close quarters, but to lay profane hands on his legs.

"What do you mean, sir?" he began.

And then a much disturbed reporter looked up and said plaintively:

"Nothing, Mr. Blaine. But you were treading on my fingers, and your foot now is on my sleeve, so that I can't move or go on with my work."

The Spirit of Troublesome

By Charles Neville Buck

Author of "The Key to Yesterday," "The Call of the Cumberlands," Etc.

CHAPTER XIX.

THAT inflexible grip which the service takes upon its units and fractions of units had slowly and unconsciously altered the viewpoint of the Fifth Kentucky foot. Back there in the stagnant riffle of a life which for a century had not taken a forward step, their motto had been "Let us alone," and every man had been a law to himself—despot over his own affairs and the affairs of his family. Now, because they obeyed in a common cause and of their own volition, obedience no longer irked them, and they had come to think of themselves less as individuals than as bricks mortared together in a military arch.

The second day after the outbreak of insurrection passed with no greater excitement than occasional and desultory firing from the front. Night fell with utter quiet, as though both armies were exhausted and ready for sleep. The stars overhead were bright and close, and the men, sprawling on the earth, were thinking softened thoughts, or crouching around camp fires in rehearsal of recent events.

Near the spot where Newt Spooner lay stretched on his blanket, a bearded, gaunt man with a sprinkling of gray in his beard was writing a letter home. It was Uncle Jerry Belmear, whose forge and smithy stood at the forks of Squabble Creek. The yellow flare from a shaded lantern fell in sharp, high lights on his lean cheek bones and on the cramped hand, laboriously pushing its pencil. His lips moved automatically, spelling out the words of difficult composition. Newt was watching him with the reflection that there was nowhere any one to whom he himself could send a thrill of pleasure with a letter. Then, since strange influences were working in the boy's starved heart, he wondered if, after all, "Clem's gal" might not be glad to hear from him. Minerva was "eddicated," and in her head were cogitations which he could never hope to comprehend. She took medals for learning—he ground his teeth as he thought of the man from whom she had taken one. He was ignorant and "pizen mean." The contrast was obvious. Yet she had looked at him with a friendly glance, and had been grateful for his championship.

But these idle thoughts were violently interrupted by a sudden staccato outburst and the darting of Mauser tongues through the dark. Recumbent figures came to their feet. Uncle Jerry Belmear rose with the half-finished letter in his hand, and as he stood up he was struck. Had the same man been wounded in a charge or lying in his trench, he would have fallen silently, but that messenger out of the night, coming when his thoughts were all back in the silent Cumberlands, startled him into outcry. He wheeled, and from his lips broke a sound that started as an oath and ended in a weird shriek, heard along the whole battalion front.

As though they had wanted only that cue, the battalion, hitherto patient to await orders, sprang to the trenches and began pumping their Springfields frantically into the night. Buglers were madly blowing "Cease firing!" officers and sergeants were carrying profanity

This story began in the first October POPULAR. Back numbers at news stands.

and strong language the length of the line, but the panic spirit had to spend itself before they heard or obeyed—and realized with chagrin that stray bullets had upset them.

But that mild disgrace of showing nerves instead of nerve must be lived down, and it served to put the newly made veterans the more on their mettle.

Almost every day that followed brought its clash with the enemy, and once or twice the Shirt-tailers came into hand-to-hand struggles, where it was bayonet and butt and "fist and skull," and where their barbaric yell drowned the bugles. They grew accustomed to the thunderous roar with which the cruisers in the harbor shelled the insurgent positions in preparation for their advance, and so day by day and step by step the still parallel lines of the brown men gave back, and those of the American force hitched forward.

And in these by no means idle days, the word went abroad among them that they were only waiting here to be relieved by fresh troops from the States, and were to be a part of the force designated to push on to the insurgent capital.

But the rumor went ahead of the actuality. Sometimes there were days of quiet, and even brief, informal truces at certain sections of the front when the open rice fields became a common playground. Then the straw hats that had heretofore bobbed up only to fire and bob down again moved about in the open, and watched the Americanos playing baseball. Once a band came out from Manila, and, when the heat of the day was spent, gave a concert in the rice fields, and at its end, as the national air swelled out, and the troops from home stood at attention and uncovered, the straw hats across the open fields were also doffed. Though he did not quite understand why, that incident caused a strange and new emotion to pulse through the arteries of Private Newton Spooner; an emotion in no way kin to the "pizen meanness" for which he was justly notorious. But the courteous enemy never allowed these pleasant recesses to last long, and after a lesson or two in treachery they ended.

Finally came the forward movement, the rush into native towns across the defenses, the pursuit of fleeing insurgents, and the glare in the sky as the nipa houses went up in flame; and the lying down at night in bivouac under the stars. In due course followed the end of State-troop days and the organization of new regiments of United States Volunteers. Yet this was more a change in the technical than the real, for while the Fifth Kentucky ceased to exist, and the Shirt-tail Battalion was no more, most of the men who had comprised the command were again together in the Twenty-sixth Volunteers, and the men from the hills still followed Major Henry Falkins.

Young Manly Fulton had returned to Louisville with a degree from Harvard University, and an ambition to become a journalist. At the newspaper office where he was carried exceedingly near the bottom of the pay roll, he was classed as a cub whose value no one took seriously save himself. In the course of time it entered the mind of young Fulton that a visit to the schools and "colleges" of the Cumberlands would make a "feature story" of general interest. He heard of young people, and older people, too, who were struggling to shake off the bonds of a century-old illiteracy, so he confided to his Sunday editor that herein lay, ready to his hand, a subject with genuine "heart interest."

The Sunday editor laughed, and explained that this story had been often written, but if the reporter wished to ring one more change on an old theme he might go—at his own expense. So the young man went to Jackson, and from Jackson, with mule and saddlebags, to the "college" on Fist-fight Creek.

As the principal was showing him over the place a girl passed through the library, and the "furriner" was presented.

The girl looked unwaveringly into his eyes as the professor smilingly said:

"This is Miss Minerva Rawlins, one of our native born. We are rather proud of Miss Rawlins."

Manly Fulton looked back at her, and his clean-cut, young face for some reason flushed. He had heard much of the slatternly women of the hills, women who bore drudgery and children, and early became hags. Now he found himself being put at ease by a young creature who carried herself like a goddess, and whose eyes shielded, behind a naïve reserve, the truant impulse to twinkle into amusement at his evident confusion.

Later the head of the faculty suggested: "If you want to see and appreciate the full contrast between the school life and home life of these people, persuade Miss Rawlins to play guide for you along Troublesome. Tomorrow is Saturday, and she will be riding home. Why don't you ride with her?"

So, when "Clem's gal" started across the mountains the young man rode at her side, listening eagerly to the new point of view that her speech developed, and marveling at the life he saw about him; a life in which he seemed to have stepped back a century. It was all wonderful, for spring had come to the hills and kissed them, and they were smiling with a smile of blossom and young leaf, and whispering with soft breezes and the singing of crystal waters.

For a time her conversation was "Yes, sir," and "No, sir," for though at first it had been himself who was embarrassed, it was now she, and so until she discovered how boyish and frank he was, she eyed him with shy and sidelong glances. But at last she began to reveal a flowerlike personality which was altogether charming, strangely blended with a gravely mature point of view. Her language, partly the hard-conned "proper speaking" of the school, and partly idiom, amused him with its quaint outcropping of Elizabethan phrases, which fell in tripping unconsciousness from her lips.

When near sundown they came to her cabin, he felt the girl's embarrassed eyes on him as her father invited him "to light, an' stay all night." And at table, though his stomach revolted against the greasy and uninviting fare, he knew that, as she served him standing, her eyes were fixed upon him. He caught the high-chinned courage of her unapologetic loyalty, even to swinish blood, and gamely bolted his food with mock relish.

"Heaven!" thought the boy, as he vainly tried to sleep that night in the swelter of the overcrowded cabin. "What a life it must be for her! And yet," he added, "what escape is there?"

The next day she took him rambling along creek beds, where she had friends among the early flowers and ferns and budding things and the feathered and singing things. She was in an unusually light and gay mood, and chattered until he felt that he was in an enchanted forest, and, through her talk, which was all of birds and blossoms and woodland mysteries, he caught brief flashes of insight into herself.

"Do you know," he suddenly demanded, looking up from a mossy place where he was gathering violets, "that you are a rather wonderful sort of person?"

She stood over him, slender, and simply garbed in a blue calico dress and a blue calico sunbonnet. Into her belt she had thrust a cluster of violets, and her eyes, which were closely akin to their petals, grew suddenly serious. The corners of her lips drooped in wistfulness.

"Am I?" she questioned gravely. It was the nearest thing to a compliment that had come her way.

"Yes," he asserted, rising to his feet. "Anywhere else in the world people would be wild about you, and here whom do you see? You know the line: 'Full many a flower is born to blush unseen.' Don't be one of them."

"How am I going to help it?" she asked him simply. He did not respond because he was asking himself the same question. But when that only visitor from the outside world had ridden away the place seemed rather empty and desolate to the girl, and she sat

alone in the spring woods while some voice insistently queried: "How can you help yourself?" She would marry no man who was ashamed of her people, even if such a man should come to woo her, and no man whom she would care to marry could well escape being ashamed of her people. Only one man had she ever known who seemed to feel for her a sort of reverence, to look up to her as superior to himself. That man had been very rough and wolfish in his championship—and that man had been a felon!

If some man might come who felt that way, and yet who had a living and enlightened soul; if such a man should say: "I love you!"

"Clem's gal" bent forward and pressed her fingers against her temples. "If——" she whispered.

Long ago Malolas had been taken, and the armies of Emilio Aguinaldo were giving back. Soon was to come the second and longer phase of the insurrection—that of the guerrilla days. But as yet there were still occasions of battle. The enemy lay one day with his trench tops commanding a steep river bank, and a deep, swiftly flowing current of tawny water adding defense to his front. Halfway across this stream the broken abutments and twisted girders of a dynamited railroad bridge showed his preparations for attack. Yet both river and trenches must be crossed, and the Twenty-sixth Volunteers had come, among others, to do it. A small mortar was merrily tossing shells across the way, but they fell on roofs devised of the rails from the uptorn track—and fell for the most part harmless. One small section of the earthworks was unroofed—and from it the mortar had driven the insurgents. That troubled the enemy only because it was the one loopholed portion of the defenses, and consequently more healthful for riflemen.

A few strong swimmers might carry a rope across, thought Major Falkins, and attach its loose end to the bamboo stakes which went up at the very edge of the trench embankments, provided they could live long enough. Killing is quicker work than swimming in a strong current. But if three started and one arrived, his fellows could follow in the few leaky barges that were available. These barges could cross, if at all, only by rope ferry. The current set its veto on any use of oars. For such character of work a "suicide squad" is asked to nominate itself, and among those who responded was Corporal Newton Spooner, formerly Private Newton Spooner, of the Shirt-tailers, and before that No. 813 at Frankfort.

As the boy stripped off his khaki and stood naked behind a screening tangle of riverside growth, several machine guns and the musketry of the regiment were preparing to give him at least a noisy end.

Major Falkins stood by, coaching the three swimmers as a trainer coaches his jockey when the saddling bugle sounds in the paddock.

"Watch the rope," commanded the major briefly. "Swim in single file, and not too close together." He turned to Newt, who happened to be standing nearest him.

"It's going to be mean work, Spooner," he said in a low voice. "I hate to order it."

Corporal Spooner saluted, but his eyes narrowed, and glittered with a light venomously serpentlike.

"I reckon," he said in a guardedly low voice, which only the major heard, "you'd like to see me peg out, wouldn't you? But I ain't goin' to do it. I'm goin' to live long enough to finish a job I've got to attend to yet. I reckon you know what it is."

Then he slipped without a splash into the water, for he was to lead the little procession. The major raised his hand in signal, and the spattering roar became a solid thunder. Rapid-fire guns, mortar, and Krags played on the earthworks. Every Shirt-tailer was sighting as though for a sharpshooter's medal—carefully, deliberately. A scathe of lead raked the trench tops, under which every brown head went down and stayed cautiously invisible. With strong,

sure strokes the three naked men shot out into the stream and past its center —seemingly unobserved.

It began to look as though they would gain the other side unseen by the enemy. But suddenly from the loopholed section came spiteful little squirts of fire. Against that fire only the mortar could cope—and the mortar had turned its attention elsewhere. Tiny geysers kicked themselves up where the Mauser bullets struck and skipped on the water. The roar from the Shirttailers rose in louder indignation, and the crew serving the mortar was feverishly refinding the range. A few more strokes, and the three men fighting the current would be safe in the lee of the steep bank—but the little geysers were multiplying. The third man suddenly turned his face backward over his shoulder, and shook his head. He raised a hand as one who waves farewell at a railroad station, and went down.

Corporal Spooner and the other man were reaching out to grasp the projecting roots that fringed the opposite shore, but as the second man crawled up on the bank there appeared on his naked flesh a constantly spreading splotch of crimson. Corporal Spooner paused to drag him under cover, then proceeded to tie the rope and, safe, because of his very proximity—sat down, panting, to wait.

CHAPTER XX.

Two general officers were eyewitnesses to that river crossing; they chatted about it over the cable with the government at Washington. Major Falkins, too, who had conceived the plan, and crossed in the first barge, before the mortar got the exact range of the loopholed breastworks, was also mentioned in these dispatches. Later both the major and corporal were given the Medal of Honor, and Newt became Sergeant Spooner, whereat the Deacon, now battalion sergeant major, patted him approvingly on the back. But fate sometimes indulges in satiric contrasts. One afternoon, when the rush on a trench was over, and had been so mild an affair that the men felt like a fire company turning out to a false alarm, the last straggling volley from the routed enemy dropped both the major and the new sergeant in the stubble.

Newt's hurt was a shattered arm, but the superior officer had an ugly hole torn through one lung, over which the field surgeons shook their heads, and whispered things about grave complications. Both were jolted back in wagons to the railroad.

Sergeant Spooner knew that his trouble was simply a matter of hospital inactivity and waiting, but in Manila, as in the field, surgeons talked anxiously about the battalion chief. Every day an orderly from division headquarters clattered up to the hospital to inquire after his health, and the ladies who had followed their soldier husbands as far as Manila, sent flowers. It was finally decided that Major Falkins could only complete his recovery, if at all, in a more temperate climate, and so he was invalided back to the States. Newton did not know he was gone until the transport had sailed; and when a hospital orderly brought the news he said nothing, though his face set itself as he gazed at the whitewash of the ward wall, and sniffed the antiseptic odor of chloride of lime.

There were days of convalescence when, with his arm in a splint, the mountain boy wandered about the town which until now he had had so little opportunity to investigate. Each day he would stroll to the north bank of the Pasig River, where it cut the city in half, and wander among the strange, many-colored sights and pungent reeks of the Chinese bazaars in the Escolta. If these explorations brought him any sense of wonderment or interest it was denied expression in his brooding eyes. Sometimes he would cross the ancient stone bridge, and wander at random into the walled Plaza de Manila, which had been the town of three hundred years ago. Late afternoon usually found him on the *paseo* along the bay, and there, with the tepid water heaving drowsily at his front, he would lean

until darkness fell, thinking of two things. Somehow, the face of "Clem's gal" rose often and insistently into his reflections, and the set of his jaw slackened almost to a smile. Then the thought of his old grudge would come, and the jaw muscles would stiffen again, crowding out the softness.

The grip of the service was strong upon him, and he could salute his superior without a wince, and stand as respectfully at attention as any other of his comrades, but he knew that this was only because he had learned to dissociate the personal self and the military self. His hatred and the resolve born of it were undying. Generations of Spooners had made a virtue of hating until it coursed as an instinct with their blood. He knew now that simply to kill Henry Falkins would be no revenge at all. True punishment must involve the torture of dread, and for the major death would fail to attain that purpose. He must therefore devise something more exquisitely painful, and now, having leisure for reflection, he let his mind run on ways and means.

The islands are not a good place for one to brood upon a fixed idea. On every transport he saw men, backward-bound, whose faces wore the imprint of melancholia and morbid derangements; men who were climate mad.

Yet the sergeant had another idea at the back of his head, to which he never referred, and while he was waiting to be sent back to his regiment he might often have been seen sitting on one of the *paseo* benches, deep in the study of a spelling book, or arithmetic.

While these things were going on in Luzon, Henry Falkins was fast coming back to health. This was natural enough, for each morning the breeze stirred the chintz curtains of his window in the old mansion near Winchester, and the breeze was freighted with the heavy sweetness of honeysuckle. Each morning as he came down to breakfast he would meet, on the old colonial stairway, a girl whose eyes sometimes danced mischievously, and sometimes deepened into sweet serenity. Then, in the dining room, where Jouett portraits of men in blue and buff gazed down, this girl would pour his coffee from the old silver pot that these same ancestors had brought out of Virginia. And the colonel would fall pleasantly into reminiscences of days when he, too, wore a uniform, though it was gray, and rode with Morgan's men.

But there was a better medicine than that for Henry Falkins—the medicine of joy. Sundry preparations were going forward in the house. Dressmakers were working like beavers, because when the major had recovered sufficiently to return to the Philippines he was not going alone. There was to be a wedding in the meantime. The girl had been down to "Bloody Breathitt," and stood with him on a high place in the hills. She had breathed deep with appreciative delight as she gazed off beyond the crests of their wooded slopes, where the patriarchal pines and oaks stood sentinel over the valleys. And there she had ridden the trails tirelessly, and the rude mountain folk had treated her like a young queen come from another land, because, with her sesame of graciousness, she had won her way at once into the sealed reserve of their hearts.

Together the two had gathered the blossoms from the rhododendron, and down in shaded recesses where the waters whispered over mossy rocks, and the elder-fringed forests closed in until only slender threads of sunshine filtered through, they had gathered ferns and been children together.

At last came the day when they knelt down and rose together from cushions before an improvised altar in the wide hall, and the colonel led them all to the wainscoted dining room. There, in a vintage that had lain for a generation in the cobwebbed sleep of the cellar, both the old man from the mountains and the old man from the blue grass toasted them. "Even if," as the colonel chortled, "the youngster is a Yankee soldier."

When the journey across the continent ended they had lazy days at sea. As Henry Falkins gazed at his wife,

panama-hatted, white-clad, with the Pacific winds stirring the one curl that in persistent truancy escaped its confinement to trail across one eye, he wondered if she were really not too delectable a vision to be real. And his brother officers seemed to think so, too, so that she reigned on the quarter-deck.

But if the testimony of so astute an observer as General Sherman is to be accepted, war is not unbroken honeymoon, and in the islands in 1900 the general's monosyllabic descriptive was more applicable. At least that was true in certain provinces, where the orders of "El Presidente" were being carried into effect with ardor and pertinacity. Those orders were to disperse, live outwardly as Americanistas, and under the semblance of peace to harry, sting, and annoy the army of occupation. The seventy thousand troops now in the islands were no longer marching and bivouacking as armies, but, "split in a thousand detachments," were scattered into garrisons from the China Sea to the Pacific.

Over beyond the mountains and across the level plantation lands of Nueva Ecija lay a town from whose center radiated many meager barrios and villages. It was a town with a small stone church, from whose teetering cross one arm had been shot away.

That church had a line of graves inside its walls—with stones identically alike—and a history. Here for almost a solid year a garrison numbering at the outset fifty Spanish soldiers had held out with heroism against a swarming horde of insurgents equipped with artillery. The town bore many *recuerdos* of that long and dogged fight. The walls of the church showed them in disfiguring scars. The ruins of nipa houses showed them in fallen rooftrees and gaping breaches. The even ranks of gravestones within the walls bore eloquent testimony in successive dates of death.

In long, underscoring lines of brutally strong trenches and transverses, went still more of the record. How snugly and safely the besiegers had burrowed into the ground and swept and whipped the starving garrison inside was easy to read.

It was to this town, with its church, that Henry Falkins and his battalion were ordered to "wait in heavy harness, on fluttered folk and wild." The way thither lay over a hundred miles of plain and mountain, and in that hundred miles, under the extremely capable eyes of Lacuna and Pablo Tecson, the brown hornets were buzzing with extraordinary and tireless stinging power.

The battalion would make the march with a mule train and an escort of two extra companies, and when it was ensconced in the village which the war-scarred church dominated, the escort would say farewell, and return to Manila. The extra companies would be picked up for the homeward journey by a cruiser which would meantime have steamed with supplies around the north end of Luzon, through Batingtang Channel, and down the Pacific coast. After that from time to time other ships would come and bring old mail and look in to see that the garrison was still there and on the job. It was not a place to take a bride, even though the bride had crossed the Pacific to be with her husband, and held determined views on the subject of being left behind in her rooms at the Orient.

Possibly, Henry Falkins told her, she could follow later by sea.

For three days the command, with its train of fifty mules, pushed on through a level country, well watered, and seemingly uninhabited. On the fourth it struck the mountains, and from that point crawled, scrambled, and panted. Up slopes steep and slippery with untrodden grass, where hoofs and feet shot treacherously out, the column crept, until the mules balked, and their burdens had to be transferred to human shoulders.

Then, descending into a valley where the grass grew long and lush along the waterways, and lay brownly parched a little distance back, the column readjusted its impedimenta, and mended its pace. Sometimes the heat over the grass simmered in misty waves, and the

marching men clamped their unshaven jaws and set their eyes eastward. The eyes were growing blue-circled and weary, and the infantrymen picked up each foot with a sense of distinct and separate effort.

Sometimes from the long grass at the side broke an unwarned din of rifle fire, as the "point" ran into an ambuscade, and then the column closed up, and in the merry response of volleys for the moment forgot its weariness. Sometimes the parched grass, kindled by unseen and hostile hands, burst into scorching sheets of flame at the front, necessitating tedious detours.

In this fashion, at the end of ten days, they came to the town with the church, and found the cruiser awaiting them. The escort returned at once, and left the first battalion of the Twenty-sixth Regiment, United States Volunteers, to attend to its knitting, with the Pacific Ocean in front of it and the ragged mountains at its back.

There was much to be done, for not all of the command was to stay there. In near-by towns smaller detachments under company officers were to establish themselves, and put the fear of God and the Eagle into rebellious hearts. That these outlying fractions might not be cut off from headquarters nerves of telegraph wires must be strung across the hills and through the bijuca tangles of the bosque. These lines must, in places, follow bolo-cut tunnels through the jungle, where the air was hot and fetid; where one fought for breath, and was blinded by the streaming sweat, and where the stiffness of one's spine oozed out in flaccid weariness. Also it proved immensely diverting to the loyal amigos to creep out by night with a pair of wire nippers and undo in a moment what men had moiled through days to accomplish. When these wires sputtered and fell dead it was usually a fairly good indication that news of some fresh atrocity would finally percolate, and that a new "punitive expedition" must fare forth.

And yet in the town itself, and even in the smaller garrisons clustered about it, there was no overt act of rebellion—only ghastly news from the hills and hinterland.

In these days former Top Sergeant Peter Spooner, now battalion sergeant major with the Twenty-sixth Volunteers, became more than ever a force in himself. The smattering of Spanish which he had picked up in old Mexico had become a fluent stream. He was so valuable in a dozen ways that the semiclerical work of sergeant major often fell to other hands while Black Pete was out on special detail. His scouting expeditions were so effective that the name of the dark giant became with the people of the enemy as it had once been in the Kentucky mountains, a word to conjure with. In short, Black Pete Spooner was such a treasure of a "noncom" as gave his superiors food for mess-table boasting.

"Spooner," declared his captain, "could command a battalion if called on. He absorbs detail. He has even picked up the Morse code, and only yesterday I found him relieving the signal-corps man at the key. That's an example of his versatile efficiency."

In many scouting expeditions, Sergeant Newton Spooner likewise won for himself the bitter hatred of the guerrillas. These mountain men had, in common with the enemy, the ability to become invisible, and often when they were supposedly being stalked it was found that they were really stalking.

So the days passed, and at last a steamer brought fresh supplies, and also Mrs. Henry Falkins, who would no longer be denied.

CHAPTER XXI.

Months in the isolation of a tropic garrison bring to the minds of men strange vagaries. When the work is that of hunting down elusive little traitors who present faces of friendship by day and develop ingenious and atrocious deviltries at night, the effects are neither softening nor humanizing.

The presence of Mrs. Henry Falkins was to the men of the battalion like the

steady freshening of a clean and fragrant breeze into a miasma. Had they had their way they would have set her up, a living image, in the place of the patron saint above the bullet-scarred altar of the church. But even saints have defects, virtuous and noble defects, perhaps, such as erring on the side of too great faith in humanity, when humanity is treacherous.

One native woman whose face bore more strongly the characteristics of some far-off Castilian ancestor than of immediate forbears and mixed race, came to headquarters, and ingratiated herself with the commander's lady. When she brought in the week's washing, her smile was a dazzling flash of milky teeth and lips touched with Spanish carmine.

And it fell to pass that though he had always been immune to feminine blandishments, the tall sergeant major was seen frequently strolling between the nipa houses with the mestiza girl.

The Deacon, who had always been reserved, even melancholy in the thoughtfulness of his expression, was in these days more deeply somber than before.

Newt Spooner alone in the command recognized that there was some secret gnawing within his kinsman, and that it was not a pleasant secret.

Deaths in the battalion had claimed several lieutenants, and left vacancies which carried commissions. Sergeant Major Spooner felt the time ripe for him to cross the line from noncom to commissioned officer. He could, in the old militia days, have had captain's bars for the taking. Now it would need the mandate of Washington, but the fact that nothing was said about it secretly grieved him. His officers from major down had bragged endlessly of his efficiency, yet the thought which was constantly in his mind never seemed to occur to them, and he doggedly refused to suggest it. It should not be inferred that the noncommissioned giant went sulking about his work. On the contrary, whatever rancor he felt was inward and unworded, and for that reason the more dangerous.

Newt, too, was feeling the influences of narrow pinching days and jungle borrowing, and mountain climbing on chases that came to nothing. More and more prominently the haunting presence of his private grudge thrust itself to the front of his brain and grew sinister.

The boy held his peace, though he knew that Sergeant Major Spooner had received a letter from one of the insurgent "generals" offering him a captain's commission "in the service, and just cause of the republic." Black Pete himself believed that this proffer was in reality an effort to lure him into the power of the enemy for torture and death, and he mentioned the incident only to his major.

Then one morning the mestiza girl bade a smiling farewell, which was also tearful, and was kissed by the major's lady. She was going away, she explained, to relatives who dwelt in the mountains. She waved her hand vaguely toward the cordilleras: "*Mucho* distance away. No longer could she see the beautiful señora, or"—and here her dark lashes drooped, and her olive cheeks flushed, "or the tall, brave *soldado Americano*."

Sergeant Major Peter Spooner walked with her, carrying her calico-wrapped bundle as far as the outskirts of the town, and the two talked in low voices, in Spanish. So the Deacon was the last to bid her farewell, as befitted the man who had most impressed her heart.

If the sergeant major was cast down he only devoted himself more industriously to the service, and gave no sign.

And the service had need of him, for a few days later came word of a sizable force of the enemy camped in the mountains, and bent on mischief. In one of the few loyal villages the presidente had been murdered, and many Americanista houses put to the torch. Swiftly enough the battalion prepared for pursuit and punishment. Yet to go out in force would mean failure, so several scouting parties left in advance of the column. One went under the command of Lieutenant Sperry, and Ser-

geant Major Peter Spooner was included at his own request.

It was thought natural that the sergeant major should wish to be one of the avengers. The native girl had gone that way; might be in that region where amigos were being slaughtered, and it was perhaps known to the guerillas that she had loved an American soldier whom they blackly hated.

The detail embraced only twelve men, one of whom returned. But even that one did not return to the town by the church.

At a considerable native village some ten miles away, and lying at the edge of the mountains, was garrisoned a platoon of the battalion under the command of Lieutenant Barlow. The road between the town with the church and this subsidiary station was, for that country, good, and the garrisoned village itself was as safe as a fortress. It was beyond that the work lay.

When Mrs. Falkins learned that a company from headquarters would march at once to follow up what news the scouts brought in, she promptly announced that she would accompany the expedition as far as the village. The major raised no objection. It was a pleasant thought that he could defer his farewell with his wife until he left the edge of the safety zone, and meet her there on his return. Mrs. Falkins rode her native pony along that ten-mile march with a feeling of exhilaration and pride. These men who marched and fought behind her husband were to her all members of a great family, of which he was the head. They were no longer raw men, "unmade, unhandled, unmeet," but seasoned and tempered veterans, and her young heart thrilled with pride as she drank in the morning air, and gazed with fascination at the vivid colors of the forests and the weird picturesqueness of the thatched hamlets by the way.

For five days after their arrival in the village they awaited news from the hills. They had hoped for definite tidings before that time, but as yet the delay had caused no anxiety. The scouts might have found the reconnoissance a larger enterprise than they had anticipated. So those at the village invoked the philosophy of patience and waited.

It had been some time since Lieutenant Barlow had seen a woman from God's country. He was one of the men who had come to the regiment with its reorganization, and now he was glad that he had turned a native bungalow into a fairly comfortable place for the quartering of his superior and his superior's wife. There was a small, thatched porch shaded against the midday glare by a grass curtain. From this veranda when the moonlight flooded the village, one had a view not to be despised. Across a bare space of so-called plaza stood the house occupied as headquarters, and now on the fourth evening after their arrival its office stood open-doored and vacant save for the musician of the guard, who must remain on duty there until tattoo.

Everywhere about the village was the ordered quiet of a town well guarded. The girl sat in a deep wicker chair, while the two officers nursed their khaki-clad knees on the steps—and all talked of the States. The moonlight seemed to gush and flow over the face of the world, and to throw walls and roofs and palms into the fantastic picture shapes of a fairy tale. Off between the houses she could see the pacing figure of a sentry. Overhead from the nipa roof came the occasional stirring of a house snake, and in the long silences which the night stillness fostered they heard tiny sounds of delicate, scurrying footfalls as the lizards scampered across the walls.

One of them darted out into the yellow light of the open door, and halted near the lieutenant's knee. There, flashing like luminous jade and inflating his small crimson throat, he shrilled out his small, strident voice, and others answered.

It all seemed very unreal and far away and strangely beautiful. Then to their ears drifted a call from the sentry line for the corporal of the guard.

Athwart the front of the headquarters building lay an unbroken space

which the moonlight dyed with the deep blue-green radiance of a black opal. Shortly there appeared into this space two figures carrying something which seemed heavy. They moved slowly, as though their burden were a thing that required much care, and, as they came nearer and made their way slowly toward the open door of the headquarters office, it became obvious that what they bore between them was a very limp human being. At first it seemed unconscious, and hung sagging in their arms, but before they had disappeared through the doorway it came to life with a nerve-rasping jargon of delirious sounds, and lashed out inconsiderately with its arms and legs at the men who were giving it assistance.

Major Falkins and Lieutenant Barlow rose hastily and crossed the space of moonlight. The girl rose, too, but she went into the house with that sound of raving still in her ears, and sat down, suddenly unnerved.

In the office the major and lieutenant found the creature which had, several days ago, been a private soldier of the headquarters scouts lying on the floor in the lemon-colored lamplight. It was mumbling inarticulate things through parched and cracking lips, and gazing wildly out of a couple of red embers that had formerly been eyes. Its clothing hung on it in tatters, and the exposed flesh was bolo gashed and brier torn. This was the one man of the twelve who came back to report—and came back decorated from torture. The surgeon was already kneeling on the floor, doing what human skill could do—which was too little.

The raving man made a tortuous effort to speak, as though the eternal peace of his soul required it, but of those bending over him none could construe the hoarse gibberish of his swollen tongue and unbalanced brain.

Sergeant Newton Spooner had silently entered the office in response to the major's summons. Now he stood at attention just within the threshold, and his eyes were not pleasant eyes as he gazed on the thrashing, disfigured thing, and recognized in him a kinsman. But if his face was hard-set and lustful for vengeance it was hardly more so than that of the battalion commander, standing by as the surgeon forced brandy between the teeth of the wrecked face. The physician finally rose with a shake of his head.

"It's no use," he announced briefly. "He can't last two hours."

But to the object of erstwhile human shape came a momentary flash of revival. He tried to prop himself on one elbow, and waved his torn fingers toward the mountains. From his mouth came incoherent sounds, and in his eyes burned the desperation of a final effort to rid himself of some message. Then he reached his hand around to his back, and they saw that he bore pinned to his belt a package wrapped in the red calico of which *tao* breeches are fashioned.

They removed and opened the covering, to find inside a communication of the sort that scrapes the civilization from men as a coarse cloth scrapes the tender blush from a peach.

Thus ran the screed in neatly penned Spanish:

> This memento we return with compliments. The rest will be dealt with as befits foes of the republic. If you follow, you will find at Santa Rosa another memento.
> *Adios, con mucho felicidad,*
> GENERAL JOSE ROSARIO.

Major Falkins wheeled to Sergeant Newton Spooner. His face was very white and stony. "Have your company ready to hike—quick!" His words were snapped out like the cracks of a mule whip, but Sergeant Newton Spooner had saluted and disappeared before the final syllable was uttered.

Within the hour Mrs. Henry Falkins stood at the shell-paned window of the bungalow, and saw the company swinging toward the edge of town with a step that argued coming events. At their head, guiding them into the blind trails of the bosque, went a native from the village, but he went with a rope around his shoulders, which was held by a sturdy private of the advance guard. There was no intention that he should abruptly disappear into the jungle and

carry warning instead of giving service as guide.

At noon the next day the column had proof that thus far at least they were following the right trail. The overhead wheeling of buzzards would have guided them now even had the native failed of loyalty.

In the gulch of a stream that ran between tall and tangled banks the advance came upon the bodies of the two men who had comprised the "point," and who had first run into the ambuscade. What the other ten had done was plain enough. At that first outbreak they had scattered into a second slough running at right angles with the dipping trail. There they had lain down and taken cover among the scattered rocks, and there eight of them still lay. It was the only thing they could do, also it was what the enemy had planned they should do. Major, lieutenant, and sergeant went over the ground and read the signs. It was quite easy. They could tell the approximate order in which each had died, by counting the litter of empty cartridge hulls about the bodies.

Then they found one pile of these spent souvenirs in a place where there was no corpse, and it was perhaps the largest pile of all. That should be the spot where Sergeant Major Peter Spooner had come to lay for his last stand. Probably he had lost consciousness from bloodletting at the end. Otherwise he would hardly have been taken alive.

The bodies were hurriedly buried, and the graves marked; then the column pushed on a little grimmer, and a little more silent and a little faster, toward Santa Rosa.

At dawn the men of the Twenty-sixth Volunteers filed into empty streets, which echoed their marching tread. It was like a village of the dead, a place of empty houses and open doors. No one had waited to explain to the wrathful avengers. But they found, nailed conspicuously to the front of a nipa shack in the principal street, a large white sheet of paper, bearing another note of satiric directions.

On the trail which leads from this street, the bosque will, at the distance of one league, contain one more memento. *Adios, con mucho felicidad,* GENERAL JOSE ROSARIO.

There was no spoken word, as Falkins, turning from the message, nodded to the company commander, and the column swung forward. There was no sound as they marched through the deserted street except the rattle of cup and canteen on haversack and the purposeful thud of their own feet on the hard-beaten earth.

And beyond the edge of the town where a sullen-looking carabao bull, sole occupant, gazed after them, there was still grim silence as they plunged into the thick growth of the bosque, and bored their way into the country which at every mile was growing wilder and more impassable. The eight bodies they had buried, and the one which doubtless by this time had been buried back at the garrison, accounted for seventy-five per cent of the detachment which had gone ahead. The three others included Lieutenant Sperry, of Jackson, and Sergeant Major Peter Spooner, and those two had been taken alive. The column was so grim in its purpose now that it needed no more orders than bloodhounds would have required.

CHAPTER XXII.

At a place where they came upon the ashes of a dead fire, Henry Falkins halted the command, and, accompanied by a lieutenant and Sergeant Newton Spooner, undertook some investigations of his own. It was Sergeant Spooner, led by an inborn instinct which became a compass in the woods, who discovered the thing they sought. He returned in grim silence to the officers, and led them to a small clearing in the bijuca tangle. There, roped upright to a tree, was a body wearing the uniform of a first lieutenant of United States Infantry. Newt Spooner had found the "memento." The dead man bore no bolo gashes, and the wound which had disabled him had been only a bullet through one shoulder. Yet as the officers came near they realized that he had

not been dead when he was placed here. He had stood up, lashed against a slender palm bowl, and died on his feet.

Newton Spooner pointed to an amber smear about the lips and nostrils of the dead man.

"Honey, sir," he said briefly, in a voice that rasped like a file. "Wild honey. They put that stuff on his nose and mouth, sir. The ants did the rest."

The officers turned away, sickened, and after a moment Falkins ordered briefly: "Bring a burial detail, sergeant—and, sergeant," he added, as a vicious note crept into the timbre of his utterance, "when we come up with these fellows, we take no prisoners. You understand—no prisoners!"

For ten days after that a company of United States Volunteers drove their way through the mountains and bosques of eastern Luzon, with the hammer blows of forced marches. Their faces were the bristling, unshaven visages of half-wild men, and their eyes bore the inky cancellation marks of a fatigue which, in such climates, is courtship of death. They had been bearing a noonday, steamlike heat that parboiled them, and wasted them in floods of sweat. They had marched and slept in wet khaki when sudden rains drenched the land and the jungle simmered afterward. A demoniacal desire for a reckoning in full with one José Rosario sustained them.

The chase had resolved itself into a hellish adaptation of hare and hound, for always ahead of them lay clews and information, and evidences of recent departures. Always the wily guerrilla was just out of grasping and crushing distance. In lonely villages they found marks of his recent occupancy—with prisoners. In the hills they found the ashes of his fires, but himself they never found. And as he taunted them they followed "as dust-blown devils go"—followed with an artificial and superhuman endurance engendered of mountain hate and an unassuaged thirst for vengeance.

In many brains queer, nightmare shapes rose and had to be brushed aside with a conscious effort, and in many veins the blood ran hot and feverish. The pursuit had carried them in a long circle, like the flight of a fox, and brought them back to a point not so many miles from where they had entered the hills, but as far as ever from their quarry. The pursuing force was too large. The rest of the way they would rake bosque and hill in scattered segments, each acting for itself and seeking to fall upon the enemy while he watched the decoy of the largest detachment.

Major Falkins, with a dozen men, including First Sergeant Newton Spooner, were working their way through a jungle which seemed impervious to human progress. For days they had been so working. Step by step they moved lethargically, and in single file. No military order of formation can be kept unbroken where men are weaving their tired bodies in and out through a matted growth of rank bijuca and jungle tangles. Besides, they moved as men half asleep, and indifferent of consequences, dragging leaden feet. The course they had taken had yielded never a sign, never an indication that they had chosen wisely. It led them through an unpeopled country where the valleys were mosquito-infested and malaria-ridden, and where drenching rains brought chill to their aching bones. They forced themselves forward with their hair matted and their brains dull. Clouds of mosquitoes moved with them. They were steadfast and resolute men, but they were also half insane.

In this fashion they came to a small, ravinelike channel, which for a little way ran in the direction they wished to go. Through it they could walk upright without fighting vines and cane. Experience had taught the danger of easy ways, but weariness had overcome caution, and for a furlong they plodded silently.

Ahead of them the dry stream bed which was giving them momentary comfort as a roadway twisted at an angle. Even in their lethargy they observed one rule of military caution. They walked in file, with an interval of several yards between each two.

Eleven of them had passed out of sight around the turn. Major Falkins, who was number twelve, was just turning the point, and behind him trailed one other. It was Sergeant Spooner, who rarely lagged in the rear. Then the heavy stillness broke in the old, familiar thunder, and four men lurched forward and crumpled down on their faces as useless henceforth to the United States of America as bursted bubbles.

"Back here, boys!" yelled Falkins, leaping out of his lethargy into sudden life.

"Git behind this twist—git inter ther la'rel!" shrieked Sergeant Spooner, in echo, forgetting that the natural cover of the islands was not the laurel of the Cumberlands. Falkins, standing at the turn, became an instant target, and the sergeant saw his campaign hat fly off, spinning; saw the officer set his feet farther apart as one who braces himself, and heard the spiteful bark of his revolver. The sergeant himself was unseen, and it suddenly occurred to him that he might be more effective by remaining so. He saw the men who were still on their feet falling back on the protecting angle with its steep banks, firing doggedly as they came, and one by one he saw them drop short of their goal, except two who reached it only to lie down at the margin of shelter. He saw the major stand for a moment, shaking his head as the voices of the Krags died away, and only the Remingtons of the enemy broke the silence.

Then the major, who no longer had a command, stepped back around the angle and sat down on the ground. He laid his pistol on his knees, and wiped blood from his eyes, but, after a moment, as though that posture were not comfortable enough, he stretched quietly out with one elbow under his cheek, and drew up his knees as a child might lie in a crib when its mother has kissed it good night.

Spooner realized that he alone of that detail remained an efficient. There was no one to save except himself—and Falkins. To save himself was easy. He had not yet been seen.

Cautiously the sergeant crawled over and possessed himself of all the firearms that lay in reach without revealing himself; then again he crawled back, burrowing under the overhanging bank. He laid the four Krags in a row, with their muzzles roughly trained above the major's body, and waited. At his back rose a bank which would confuse and multiply with echoes any sound.

At length the cautious brown heads appeared, and brown bodies flitted among the dead, collecting their spoils. Then Newt cupped both hands at his lips, and let out the mountain yell, a yell which had grown famous in Luzon. At the same instant as fast as he could work the triggers lying grouped before him he made the rifles speak from their magazines, as it seemed in unison, and the four reports were magnified by the rocks into a seeming of volley fire. Instantly and in frenzied consternation, the brown men disappeared, and Newt Spooner worked his way forward, firing as fast as he could until he could peer into the channel. But the white men lying there would require no attention, and could benefit by none save the impossible courtesy of burial. As for the brown men, they were gone.

In one body, however, there was still life, and that happened to be the body of the battalion commander.

Newton Spooner strapped as many cartridge belts about himself as he could carry. Then he pressed his canteen to the lips of Major Falkins, and began a slow and tedious journey back toward a point ten miles to the east, where, if all went well, and every chance favored him, he might possibly strike the camp of the main detchment to-morrow afternoon. To-morrow afternoon! For once in his life Newton Spooner laughed.

That night Major Falkins did not die, but lay raving with a delirium of fever in the seclusion of the jungle, whither the "noncom" had borne him. And while he lay tossing a dark figure sat huddled near by, lethargically slapping at mosquitoes and bringing him-

self back with heartbreaking effort out of the heavy-lidded temptation of sleep. The man who so sat grinned from time to time, and there was the queer, distorted quality of madness in the grin.

When Henry Falkins at last opened his eyes he saw about him only the dense tangle of the forest, and heard only the bird voices in the trees. Slowly a recollection of yesterday came to his mind. He tried to rise on his elbow, and discovered his feet were tight bound. Evidently he had been captured, and was now being carried off by the ingenious Rosario to be filed away for future torture. Then he heard a sound like a strained chuckle, and turned his eyes to find himself gazing into a grinning, lunatic face, which was the face of Sergeant Newton Spooner.

"Where are we, sergeant?" he inquired, with forced composure. "Why am I tied up?"

The sergeant's reply was a hyenalike laugh, under which his gums were exposed beyond his teeth.

"I reckon," he suggested slowly, "ye mout es well drop the sergeant part of hit. Thar's jest the two of us left, and hit won't be long twell thar's jest one."

The wounded battalion commander settled back on the ground, and said nothing. The demoniacal face of the other was not a face that could be reasoned with. It was the face of a man whose unhinged reason was capable of anything but sanity.

"Ye penitentiaried me oncet," went on the sergeant, in dead-voiced reiteration of an old theme. "Ye sent me thar when ye didn't have nothin' erg'inst me. In the penitentiary," he talked on half coherently, half ramblingly, "a feller jest studies 'bout things and gits meaner—and hyar 'pears like he kin git meaner yit."

"You must have dragged me away from that ravine," interrupted Falkins, realizing that they were not where he had fallen, and reasoning rather with himself than with the other. "You saved me yesterday. Why did you do that?"

"Because," retorted the other quickly, with a fierce upleaping of passion to his eyes, "because I was savin' a superior officer in battle—even if it happened ter be *you*. Besides, ye b'longed ter me. I wasn't a-goin' ter suffer no nigger ter git ye. *Thet* would hev been a soldier's death. Now, thar's jest two of us. We ain't soldiers no more—jest men."

Falkins lay of necessity outstretched, awaiting the pleasure of his captor. About him swarmed mosquitoes, and he tossed his head in the vain effort to shake them off, and slapped viciously at them—for with his feet trussed there had been no necessity to tie his hands. Above him he could see patches of blue between the waving palm fronds, and to his fevered eyes the sky seemed to rock and ripple like a placid sea. Then he looked at the other soldier, standing at a distance, and the soldier, too, seemed to wave gently from head to foot, as though painted on a fluttering curtain, but he read in the glowering face that the man meant to kill him.

"You fool!" he muttered. "You poor, poor fool!"

He spoke in a voice of lassitude, as though his interest in the matter were academic. In his brain the tide of fever was rising afresh, and this time it stole on him with the warmth of a comfortable narcotic.

But Newt Spooner went on, more steadily now, though with no faltering of determination: "I've waited a long time. I told ye my chanst would come. I told ye, when ye tried ter play the hero there at Frisco, thet I'd git my chanst. Ef I'd kilt ye then ye'd hev hed all ther best of hit, but now hit's different. Now I kin make ye pray fer mercy—an' not git none."

"Kill me and good luck to you!" snapped the bound man, for a moment roused out of growing stupor into a peevish irritability. "I'm no more afraid of you now than I was then."

"I reckon," the boy spoke very deliberately and impressively, "I reckon I knows a way ter make ye skeered." It had been a long time now since Newton Spooner had talked in the uncouth vernacular of the hills, but the Newt Spooner of this morning was, it seemed,

a man relapsed; a man from whom had slipped all the changes that the months had wrought. He came slowly and unsteadily over, and squatted on his haunches over the prostrate figure. He drew one hand from behind him, and held it out.

"I found a wild-bee gum down thar," he went on in a dead, level tone. "This hyar's wild honey. Thet thar Filipino idee of givin' the ants a party hain't so bad, a'ter all, is it?"

The major rolled over and presented his back to his enemy. He laughed, and his tormentor did not know that it was the laughter of uncomprehending delirium. To Newt it seemed a misplaced sense of humor.

"Wake me up for breakfast," murmured the major. "I want to take a nap now."

Later Falkins awoke to a lucid interval, and saw nothing of his mad companion. But gradually his mind began to collect scattered fragments of memory, and the thing he had laughed at rose up to torture him. He remembered the threat now, and he remembered the dead face of the man they had found tied to a tree. He lay alone, shivering in weakness, and harrowed by a terror he would not have cared to confess. An ant crawled over one wrist, and he leaped up, choking off a wild scream. It seemed that he could feel them crawling and stinging in thousands through his nostrils and nibbling at his brain. His fever would return, but for the present he lay sane and clammy with chill.

When the cool of the evening came Newt reappeared. But his face, too, had lost its maniac glare. It was the face now of a man unutterably weary —as though all day he had been in some great travail.

"I reckon we mout as well be hikin'. Kin ye walk?" he inquired curtly.

"I'm not going to walk," retorted the officer belligerently. "This is as good a place to die as any other."

"I ain't goin' ter hurt you," said Newt Spooner, in a tired voice. "I reckon the time ain't come yet, after all."

"When will it come?" demanded the other, amazed beyond belief at this sudden change of front.

"Thet's my business. I hates you worse than pizen—but I can't hurt you while we're both wearin' this uniform. It beats hell how much a man gets to thinkin' about a pair of government breeches!" He stopped, as if in embarrassment, then he added: "Besides, I'm beholden to your wife. She gave me a lift once on the highroad."

Two days later, just as the platoon, flushed with a success which the others had missed, was preparing to break camp for the day's march, two men, both gibbering foolishly—both shambling on unsteady feet, tattered, thorn-torn, and scalded with fever, dragged themselves, in the locked embrace of drunken men, up into sight of the outposts, and collapsed. One wore a major's uniform, and one had on his sleeve what was left of a sergeant's chevrons.

CHAPTER XXIII.

The policy of splitting the command into bits and leaving one platoon to carry on the seeming of the full force had brought both disaster and success. The main body had taken a middle course upon which the smaller details might theoretically fall back, and on either side squads had scouted. While the men under Falkins were being misled and trapped, another detachment had slipped fortuitously upon a scouting party of the enemy, and, being less fatigued by reason of an easier course, they were stealing through the bosque with unabated course, and not one of that scouting party escaped alive except two who were captured. The detachment rejoined the platoon, and in view of the spirit in which the main command received these prisoners, they finally laid aside their show of sullen stubbornness and talked volubly.

Not only did they talk, under the effective persuasion of their captors, but they acted. They agreed to lead the Americanos to the camp of General Rosario, which they said was pitched in a particularly inaccessible part of the mountains only a day's march away.

Then the command which had for so long been following a fox fire rose up, invigorated by the prospect of final success, and all day they slipped forward through trails which they could not have found alone. They marched with the swiftness of the final spurt, and at nightfall lay under cover, feasting their eyes on a column of smoke which rose from a cañon where the enemy lay in fancied security. The captives had done their work well, once they had undertaken it, but the onslaught must be sudden. There must be no time given to slaughter the American prisoners whom Rosario was carrying north with him as a present for Aguinaldo.

They could not but admire the sagacity with which the enemy had selected his lair. They must attack through two high-walled gorges where machine guns waited to mow them down. But the Americanos meant to reach those guns before they were discovered, and after that the impregnable stronghold would become a trap without exits.

The column had therefore divided, each section taking a guide. The guides, with bayonets at their backs as reminders of their mission, had gone forward, and with passwords bespoken the sentries, whose voices had been choked off in the pitchy darkness before they could give outcry.

Then came the mountain yell, but it came only from the narrower gorge, and it was accompanied by musketry which the steep walls echoed and reechoed. The flood of flight surged into a wave of disorganized rout toward the other opening—where it fell back in broken spray from volley and bayonet. Useless now were the machine guns; worse than useless the impregnable walls of rock. The insurgent forces, remembering their red iniquities, asked no terms or quarter, but hurled themselves on the bayonets, and went down in the close chaos of bolo and clubbed musket. "And luckiest of those that fell were those of them that died."

It was a little keyhole picture of red-and-black inferno while it lasted, but it did not last long.

Yet of General Rosario and his white prisoners there was no trace. That wily leader had gone on with a small escort before nightfall, and no one was left to tell what direction he had taken.

So it happened that when the two survivors of the ambuscade came tottering into the camp which they had hoped to reach much sooner, they found the main detachment just leaving. Had it not been belated by the delay of the successful expedition into the hills it would have passed this point twenty-four hours ago, and the half-dead refugees would have been too late.

It had taken Henry Falkins and Newt Spooner two days instead of one to cover that ten miles of bosque. They had come staggering, sometimes gibbering, and rarely were both of them sane. Sometimes they raved in duet, but during the first day Newt kicked and pummeled his superior forward as long as he could walk. After that he carried, dragged, and rolled the limp figure, obsessed only by the fixed idea that he had a package to deliver somewhere "over yon."

Frequently he forgot that the package was a thing of life. Frequently, too, he madly beat it and swore at it, but always he worked it forward, falling time after time to rise again and stumble ahead. Then Newton Spooner became a thing without consciousness, and a faint spark of realization flickered back into the murk of the major's brain, and laid on his sick soul the same necessity. That day, or part of it, he dragged and carried and kicked. At last, with neither fully conscious, they linked arms about each other's shoulders, gazed at each other with wild, agonized eyes, mumbled at each other with swollen tongues, and shambled, crawled, and hitched along together.

Between two cots in the village at the mountain's edge the wife of Major Falkins vibrated like a pendulum for several days, and when the commanding officer's tongue became again a thing which he could lift and command, he told her of his rescue by the boy who had taken a blood oath against him, but he told nothing of the episode in which

the sergeant had debated the fulfillment of his vow.

Later, when the company had marched back to its headquarters in the town with the church, Mrs. Falkins drew a glowing picture of heroism in a letter which she wrote home to the States. The colonel, her father, in due time recited it, until it found its way into news column and editorial, and was duly read by many persons.

"Clem's gal," no longer at the mountain "college," but studying at State University in Lexington with the scholarship that she had won, was one of the many. She read it in the little dormitory room overlooking the quiet campus. She had come here to prepare herself for a return to the mountain school—as a teacher—and when next she went back to the Cumberlands the paper went with her, that the prophet might have honor at home.

It was October, and she had been summoned by the illness of her stepmother. Now, as the girl rode along the creek-bed roads, the hills were flaunting their watch fires of autumn, and the horizon wore its veil of Indian-summer softness. Clem had met her in Jackson with his nag, and she was riding, mountain fashion, on a pillion behind him. Her father was battered and disheveled, and about his clothes clung the smokehouse odor of the windowless cabin with its log fire, but there also clung about the vaulting slopes and ruggedly beautiful ravines the fragrance of the fall, and the girl could not find it in her heart to feel gloomy, even though she was exchanging the wholesome life of the university for the squalor of the cabin. Thanks to Newt, she had her room, where she could withdraw as into her own castle. She felt almost gay, and as she thought of the room which a rude, sullen-eyed boy had reared for her with his calloused hands her eyes grew soft like the horizons. That boy, too, had been away into the world, and had become a hero. Presumably he was mending his broken life.

The old horse plodded slowly, and sometimes the girl slipped down and walked alongside. Clem had little conversation after he had told how "porely" the stepmother was. "He reckoned hit all come about from gittin' 'dew-pizened.'" But as they made the trip the girl recited to him the news from the far-away islands.

The man listened stolidly, and at the end inquired: "Did I onderstand ye rightly, M'nervy? Was Henry Falkins ther feller he saved?"

When the information was confirmed, he ejaculated in wonderment: "Well, dog-gone my ornery skin! Hit seems like jest yestiddy thet Newty lit out acrost these hyar hills, hell bent on laywayin' Henry Falkins fer a-penitentiaryin' him."

Then Minerva remembered the lad's face when she had told of Henry Falkins awarding her medal, and for the first time she understood.

Back in the town with the church the months went by with routine of garrison duty and periods of fevered activity. The energetic Rosario had for a time lain dormant after the paralyzing blow which had obliterated so large a portion of his command, but as the natives began to evince a growing confidence in the protecting hand of the American government, the "general" bestirred himself, and once more tidings of his atrocities drifted into headquarters. During these months there passed between Sergeant Newton Spooner and his major no reference to the morning in the jungle, when the last echo of the old threat had found expression.

It was as though, on this subject, the lips of each were sealed by oath, but Sergeant Spooner went about his work with a smart and soldierly alacrity that kept the men of his company always on their toes. When there was trying work to do the comanding officer found himself instinctively turning to that company, and since the company responded to its top sergeant like a muscle to a nerve, that meant that he turned to Newton Spooner.

Then came an epidemic of outrage.

Villages with Americanista presidentes went up in smoke. Haciendas of

loyal Spaniards and Hacanos were raided, and their people put to the bolo. With the wild stories of Rosario's activity that drifted in, there came persistently the fame of a white man who stood at the Filipino's right hand, giving him counsel. The rumor added that this man was a deserter from the American army. The truth or falsity of that allegation did not particularly interest the Twenty-sixth Volunteer Infantry. The Twenty-sixth from its Shirt-tailed beginnings had been stainless of the reproach of desertion. If other commands had been less fortunate it was not their affair. But it was very much their affair that, when they ran down a band of guerrillas and closed with them, they encountered more numerous casualties, because some one had been teaching the brown men how to fight and shoot as they had never fought and shot before.

It very closely concerned the Twenty-sixth Volunteer foot that the game of war was being taught their foes by a renegade who had learned it under their own colors.

The telegraph operator at a near-by village was passing the time of day with the S. C. man at the headquarters key. Suddenly the instrument went dead with a splutter, and, while the headquarters operator tested and cursed, it remained stubbornly dumb. The line had been cut again.

Before a detachment could be dispatched to follow the wire to the break, the instrument set up a buzz, and the buzz became Morse code. As the astonished operator read the dots and dashes this message was clicked out to him: "General José Rosario, in passing, presents his compliments, and hopes to report other mementos in near future."

Obviously the wire had been grounded, and the message sent by the enemy himself at some point where he had tapped it with a field transmitter. That must be the work of the renegade —presumably a signal-code deserter, and yet, though the bosque was combed for days by peeved and eager soldiery, no sign of a hostile force was found. Newton Spooner and a squad of scouting men came upon a muddy spot in the bijuca tangle where a number of feet had trod, and though the top sergeant noted the print of a service boot he said nothing of the circumstance—at the time.

It happened that about the same time the mestiza girl whom Sergeant Major Peter Spooner had honored with his attentions, before he had fallen into the villainous hands of Rosario, came back to the town. She did not remain long, and her face was sad. She had come, she confided to Mrs. Falkins, hoping to see the great, brave soldier, and when she was told of how he had died her sobs tore her until the spectacle of her grief was insupportable.

Then Newton Spooner did an unprecedented thing. Unversed as he was in the ways of courtship, he dogged the steps of the mestiza girl, fetching and carrying for her with doglike devotion.

And since he was willing, instead of pressing his own suit, to sing the praises of the late sergeant major, she let him sit at the threshold of her nipa house, and gaze at her while she sewed. When she went away and Sergeant Spooner asked a brief leave of absence to accompany her on a part of her return journey, the men of the garrison shook their heads, and announced that they would be damned.

CHAPTER XXIV.

Newt Spooner was gone a week, though he had only announced it as his purpose to escort the girl as far as a near-by village.

In three days more, according to the articles of war, his name must be dropped from the company roll, and his status become that of death or desertion. Even if he came back at once he must face the lesser charge of absence beyond leave.

When the sergeant did return he bore the marks of jungle travel, and as he reported to his company commander his face indicated that his explanation would not be merely personal.

Yet Sergeant Spooner was secretive,

and asked permission to guide a small force into the hills. He said that he had come upon evidence which would not wait, and he had therefore taken the liberty of following it up independently. He believed he could lead a detachment to a place where a party of insurgents were in hiding, and—at this his captain sat up and took notice—although it was a small party, he had information which led him to believe the renegade might be among one of the number.

But for such an enterprise Newton Spooner's superiors required no urging. The sergeant said that no considerable force could hope to reach the place unheralded, so two picked squads stole out that same evening, and before dawn of the third day—for they marched only at night, and lay hidden while the sun shone—were creeping through the long grass upon a native farm where two nipa houses proclaimed the presence of humanity. They crept cautiously, for though the place had all the seeming of private and peaceful domiciles, they had learned to distrust appearances, and to trust Sergeant Newt Spooner's judgment. The spot was very wild and desolate, lying remote from any village. In the gray mists between night and morning it seemed a land of ghosts, with broken hills and jungle closing about it.

As daylight crept to the east, soldiers stood silent and patient at each door and window of each house. It was a strange disposition of troops about thatched houses that lay soundless and wrapped in profound slumber. The lieutenant who had come in command stood at the right of the front door of the larger house, and over against him, on the left, stood Newt Spooner. But each stood with back pressed to wall, so flattened against the uprights that, in that dim light, one coming out of the door would pass them by, unseeing. And at each of the other openings the watchers were likewise flattened as though they had been figures in bas-relief fantastically wrought by the builder.

They stood without sound or movement until, as the light strengthened a little, the door opened, and a mestiza girl in slippered feet and partial attire came out, carrying an earthen water vessel. As she crossed the threshold, looking neither to right nor left, Newt Spooner's tight-pressed palm shot out and silenced her carmine lips. The officer recognized the girl. He had himself recently turned away, unable to watch her sobs for her dead lover, and now he felt an impulse to resent this rough indignity at the hands of the sergeant. But something in the sergeant's face gave him pause, and at the same moment Newt Spooner sternly whispered to his prisoner in Spanish: "Call him! Call him, I tell you!"

For an instant the girl stood, trembling from head to foot, with dumb agony in her eyes. It was evident that she was facing the hardest crisis of her life, and that terror was dominant. As Newt bent forward with threatening hardness in his relentless face, she shrank back against the wall, bowing her head in forced assent, and with the soldier's strong hand still close enough to stifle any unwished-for outcry, she called in quavering, heartbroken Spanish: "Beloved, come to me! Come pronto!"

There followed, at once, a sound of bare feet from inside, and a gigantic, half-clad figure appeared anxiously at the door. It was the figure of a white man; and as the lieutenant caught its shoulder and threw his revolver muzzle to its broad chest, he found himself looking into the grave eyes of former Sergeant Major Peter Spooner, late of the Twenty-sixth Volunteers.

For an instant the officer stood, too dazed to credit the testimony of his eyes, but while the Deacon glanced down the barrel of Newt's leveled rifle, and shrugged his shoulders with a low oath, the officer realized that he had under his hand the mysterious renegade.

And then, as the deserter, still gazing into the flinty face of his kinsman, raised his hands in surrender, he coolly turned toward the house, and shouted back in excellent Spanish: "General, we are captives. Resistance is useless."

In answer to that message there

shortly appeared, framed in the door, the startled countenance of the notorious Rosario himself. Once too often he had trusted himself with those inconsiderable escorts which had enabled him to pass from place to place without attracting attention.

The detail made its march back to headquarters, taking its prisoners with it, in a semidazed condition. Against Rosario they felt little vindictiveness, now that he was captive to their arms. But this other, this sergeant major who had organized most of them into soldiery back there in the Appalachian hills, with him there was a ghastly difference. He had been a hero, mourned as lost. He had taken the pay of the service, and held its highest warrant—and he had been false to his salt for those tin bars which they roughly stripped from his shoulders.

But if the command was struck sick with astonishment, Black Pete himself treated them to no show of emotion. He had already weighed and considered what it meant to desert to the enemy in time of war, and he had been taken in attendance upon the enemy's district leader, wearing the enemy's livery. He was already, in effect, dead, and he meant to maintain the stolid silence of death.

And so the detachment marched into headquarters with the grim silence of a funeral cortège, though as yet the corpse walked upright and on its own feet.

No lips were tighter set, and no face more stonily expressionless, than that of Sergeant Newton Spooner. His was the capture, his the credit—and, in part, the shame. Between himself and the man who must hang existed the bond of one blood and one name. The smirch upon the regiment was likewise a smirch upon that blood and name.

The struggle in himself had begun from the moment when he found the print of a large boot in the mud, and the disgrace to the service and the regiment had come home to him—the one form of disgrace which he had ever understood. But the mental sweat was not yet over. It must have its ugly culmination at general court-martial, and when that time came he, Newt Spooner, must say the words upon which conviction would indubitably follow. He knew that in its hideous fullness, had known it from the start, and yet when the hour came and he took the stand to testify, no voice could have been steadier, or no gaze more unflinching, than that with which he held the eyes of the accused.

But the gaze with which the Deacon met his was in no wise weaker. As Black Pete listened to the proceedings in which his life sands were running out his eyes were thoughtful and perhaps a shade wistful, but undrooping and unwavering.

The defendant testified that when he was captured they offered him choice between death and a captain's commission. He had chosen the latter. They took him north, and he had talked with Aguinaldo in person. The "president" had received him as an officer and a dignitary. He had beguiled him with hopes of foreign recognition, and a filmy vision of ultimate success. The Deacon had held during his life one goal and one ideal. His dream was leadership. He had tired of the warrant of the "noncom." He wished to sit in council with men of higher rank. The experiment had failed. He made no plea.

The hearing before G. C. M. came after the regiment had left the town with the church. It was on a larger parade ground that the united battalions were drawn up at sunset, and the regimental adjutant stepped a pace forward to the colonel's side, and "published the order" which announced that Peter Spooner was "to be hanged by his neck till dead."

The lines stood silent as the adjutant's words were read. Black Pete, at "the front and center," to be seen of all men, presented a picture quite as uncompromising as he had ever presented before. His contemplative gray eyes bore straight to the front as he stood at attention, and in them slept a thoughtful expression as though they were looking off beyond horizons hid-

den to other men, and already piercing the opaque things of life and death.

And Newt Spooner gave his company front a motionless, sternly impersonal figure upon which to guide. In neither condemned nor informer was there a vestige of tremor as the officers came to the "front and center," and the formation ended.

In the wet mists of a rainy morning they escorted Black Pete to a scaffold around which ranged, in hollow square, the regiment he had betrayed—and there they hanged him high as Haman. Inscrutably brooding hills looked down, rain-shrouded, and to their crests at the last moment the condemned man raised his eyes.

There was silence, save for the pelting of rain on iron roofs until it was broken by the noise of the falling trap and the low, whiplike snap of the tautened rope. Then the burial detail went out and did its work. Sergeant Newton Spooner returned to his routine duties with a grim taciturnity which did not invite conversation.

It was at Manila many months later that Major Henry Falkins again called Sergeant Spooner to battalion headquarters, and spoke with a certain embarrassment.

"Spooner," he inquired slowly, "have you come to realize that one man may bear testimony against another for reasons other than spite?"

A slow flush, brick red and hot, spread over the bronzed face of the noncommissioned officer.

"I've come to understand a good many things, sir," he replied gravely, "and it cost something to learn them."

"We'll be mustered out before long," suggested Henry Falkins, "but I won't be long out of uniform, I hope. I'm going to stay in the service. Once I promised you a chance——"

Newt Spooner grinned. "I reckon the uniform's good enough for me, too, sir," he interrupted; then added, with a diffidence which all expression of deep feeling brings to the mountaineer: "I reckon, sir, as long as I can serve under you I'll go on reënlisting."

Falkins was a mountaineer, too. He hastily changed the subject. "Commissions from the ranks are going to men less capable than you—but examinations must be passed. If you'll study, Spooner, I'd like to get behind you and help."

"I've never spoken of that to any man, sir, but I've been thinking about it," announced the sergeant diffidently. "I've been studying for eighteen months."

Not far from the corner of Main and Limestone Streets, in Lexington, Kentucky, and almost in the shadow of the Phœnix Hotel, a poster on the sidewalk and a flag from an overhead window proclaimed that "Men are wanted for the United States army." Out of the door of the building so decorated one spring morning, when the trees were in delicate new leafage, came a sergeant attached to the recruiting station. He was selected, as many of these men are, for his soldierliness of appearance. Such men are the best advertisement the service can use, and it uses them.

The sergeant was not overly tall, and though spare he was by no means lean. His shoulders swung back squarely, and his chest, rounded and strong like a barrel, bore on its olive-drab blouse a sharpshooter's cross and the Medal of Honor, which must be bestowed by an act of Congress.

His face was clear-cut and bronzed by tropic sun and ocean winds. In fine, as the sergeant walked to the corner, casting his eyes up and down Limestone Street, he was an inspiriting figure of a man—and a soldier man. He had for the time nothing better to do than to stroll, and as he strolled a flicker of reminiscent amusement brought a pleasant grin to his firm lips. Sergeant Newt Spooner was thinking of the black-clad, lowering-faced boy who years ago hiked through this town bent on assassination.

As he went along the historic street, where every square held traditions of antebellum days, he began to encounter other strollers—college lads in sweaters and caps, and college girls with books. But his eyes finally focused their gaze

on a young woman who came out of a house, and also turned up the street, walking ahead of him. She was a slim girl in simple gingham, but in her cheeks was an apple-blossom glow and delicacy, and her movements were informed with the lithe grace of out of doors. Newt wanted to overtake and accost her. He wanted to see if she would recognize him, changed as he was, as quickly as he had recognized her, who was even more changed.

For this girl looked like some splendid young blossom that had come to flower in open woods, and the soldier saw with mingled pride and twinging jealousy that all the boys and men who passed took off their hats with frank ardor in their eyes. This was such a metamorphosed Minerva that he fell into shyness and delayed announcing himself until they had reached the stone gateposts of the rolling campus, where, under the maples, the macadam road wound up to the college buildings, and the old field gun of Civil War days looked out over the cadets' drill ground.

There he plucked up courage to call in a low voice "M'nervy!" And at the mountain pronunciation coming unexpectedly from behind, the girl wheeled, and stood for a moment confronting him in a pretty picture of delight and astonishment, while a warm color stole into her cheeks.

"Newty!" she cried, as she held out both hands in greeting. "Where in the world did you spring from?"

They stood there under the maples for a while, and the boy made her talk of herself, and while they talked a man wearing the uniform of a lieutenant of infantry came down the walk. He was a likable-looking fellow, well set up and soldierly, but very young. From his campaign hat to his polished puttees he was new, new like the lately minted coin that has not long circulated. Lieutenant March was not long from the "Point," and he was at present stationed here as commandant at the university. The sergeant, with his back turned that way, was deep in conversation with the girl, so that as he heard a pleasant voice saying, "How are you, Miss Rawlins?" he turned just in time to see the officer's lifted hat, and to catch the smile on his lips. But his soldier instinct was now second nature, and in the same glance he saw the "U. S. A." of the collar ornaments.

At once Sergeant Newt Spooner stood at attention, his heels together, and his hand at his hat brim in salute. The officer, too, was taking in those things which military men observe. He saw the service stripes and the two medals on the breast, and his eyes brightened. As he returned the salute he cheerily inquired: "What command, sergeant?"

"Fifty-ninth Infantry, sir, late of the Twenty-sixth Volunteers."

"Here on leave?"

"Recruiting detail, sir."

The officer's eyes were dwelling on the decorated breast.

"Medal of Honor man," he said. "What service was that, sergeant?"

The girl, whose less trained eyes had not recognized the import of the little metal disk, flushed with pleasure. Newt flushed, too. It irked him to talk about himself, but the military ethics were ingrained, and he still stood upright, and answered respectfully, but briefly as possible: "The islands, sir. Province of Nueva Ecija." When the lieutenant had gone the sergeant looked down in an embarrassed fashion at the white road.

"Minerva," he said, "I don't know whether it interests you, but I'm studying pretty hard myself. That's why I asked for this detail. That and one other reason. I'm only a noncommissioned officer, and you're almost a school-teacher. I'm on the wrong side of the line, but I've applied for an examination, and when this term of enlistment is up I've got a good chance of a commission."

He saw her looking at his medal, and heard her saying: "I should think you would have, Newty."

"Oh," he hastened to tell her, "I mean that I've got an influential friend, who's going to help me."

"Who is that, Newty?" she demanded, and as he answered the young

soldier flushed: "The best soldier in the service—Colonel Henry Falkins."

The girl looked down at the pavement, and then up at the tender green of the maples. Her only reply was a low "Oh!" but her voice said more, and presently she added a question.

"You said, Newty," her eyes now held a challenging twinkle as she spoke. "that there was one other reason why you asked for this—what do you call it?—oh, yes, I know, this detail. What was that reason?"

The sergeant raised his face, and held her eyes with a steady gaze, until her own eyes fell and her cheeks grew more rosy.

"That reason," he announced boldly, "is that I want plenty of chance to tell you what the reason is."

THE END.

FRANCIS WHITLOCK begins another "Tale of the Lost Legion" in the first December POPULAR. It is called "The Ambassador to Albania"—a three-part serial.

WHY MR. BENNETT RAISED HIS SALARY

JAMES GORDON BENNETT, proprietor of the New York *Herald*, lives in Paris, and has done so for many years. He is constantly in touch with his New York office, however, and at uncertain intervals runs over to this side, to see for himself how things are going on in Herald Square. His decidedly aggressive personality is always felt there, and many an editor, reporter, and office boy has been summarily "fired" by cable when he least expected it.

One day, a few years ago, the word passed around that the "Chief" was in New York. He had slipped across the Atlantic on a fast liner, and might be in the office at any moment. Instantly every one "dressed to the right" for inspection. In every department of the big newspaper building—business office, editorial rooms, composing room, and pressroom—there was apple-pie order and vigilant industry. Not a man meant to be caught napping if he could help it.

Mr. Bennett came in briskly, shook hands with the leading members of his staff, and, as is his custom, visited every part of the *Herald* edifice. In due course he reached the pressroom in the basement. There everybody was in spotless white overalls, with one exception, so that the general effect—with the shining steel and brasswork of the great presses as a background—was that of the gun deck of a battleship at morning parade.

The exception was a pressman who, under the strain of the occasion, had allowed himself to get gloriously drunk, and, moreover, had contrived to fall into a barrel of printer's ink just before Mr. Bennett arrived. The pressman's comrades had cleaned him off as well as they could with paper and cotton waste, and they kept him in the back row as the "Chief" passed along.

But James Gordon Bennett has a searching eye, and he caught sight of the ink-smeared unfortunate—in such sad contrast to his immaculate fellow workmen—at once.

"Who is that man?" he demanded of the foreman in sharp tones.

"Why, er—Mr. Bennett," was the hesitating response, "he's a pressman, and his name is——"

"Never mind his name," interrupted Mr. Bennett. "He looks to me like the only man down here who has been doing any work. Raise his salary five dollars a week."

And Mr. Bennett passed on.

The Boxer With the Bracelet

By George Randolph Chester

Author of "Sledge's Way," "Get-Rich-Quick Wallingford," Etc.

With the aid of a statue, known as the Boxer with the Bracelet, dug up after being buried under the mud for two thousand years, "Shine" Ricks and his pals attempt a new "con" game amid the ruins of ancient Pompeii.

OF course you don't get it, you dough-head!" agreed Shine Ricks. "This burg's been buried under the mud for two thousand years."

Blister Bill Blockenball, jamming his fists in his pockets, and hunching his broad shoulders, indulged in another scornful survey of Pompeii.

"I don't see why they ever dug it up," he observed.

"What can they do with it?" puzzled Ten Thumb Joe Turner, his wide face squeezed into painful thought.

"Charge to get in," Shine replied, quite satisfied with the explanation. "They strung us, didn't they?"

"That ain't why we came," Bill reminded him. "You said that all the boob Americans with money in their clothes had to chase out here before they durst leave Naples; but you didn't show us yet."

"It ain't a good place to work, anyhow," decided dumpy little Ten Thumb Joe, glancing about the deserted streets, with their roofless buildings open to the sky. "There's no chance for a getaway."

Judging the town from this viewpoint, Blister Bill began to take a historic interest in it.

"I'll bet it used to be a good place for a stick-up," he speculated. "If these little narrow alleys was all dark, what chance had a pickled guy comin' home late in the morning?"

"Don't you guns ever think of anything but that rough stuff?" reproved Shine, who was much given to glistening attire, whose eyes were too small, and whose nose was too long, and whose lips were too thin. "I'm wasting my time trying to educate you."

"Aw, cut it!" growled Blister Bill. "We'd still be in that room over the stable, livin' on spaghetti, if we listened to you. This con idear's sweet, if you pull it; but I ain't strong for conversation. I can get more with a sand bag."

Shine, gazing idly down Labarynth Alley, suddenly stepped out of sight.

"Back up!" he husked. "Don't know me."

"What's eatin' you?" demanded Blister Bill, glowering at him.

"Here comes a live one!" replied Shine, and sauntered down Mercury Street, idly swinging his little cane.

Presently he retraced his steps, and, having timed himself with accuracy, stopped in front of the House of the Faun just as two men turned the corner. The larger man was heavy with the muscle of advanced middle age, and he wore a short-cropped, almost gray mustache, which fairly bristled with incisiveness. The other was dark and highly important. The heavier man cast one glance at the ratlike countenance of Shine, and, frowning, turned conscientiously to his guide.

"This, Meester Burley, sor, was the largest and most fashion-able house in Pompeii," began the guide, casting a look of viperous hatred at the cheerful Shine, who was listening without paying. "Do not stand there, Meester Burley, sor; stand here," and he gently pushed Mr. Burley, sir, into the exact

spot which would give him the view every guide is bound the visitor shall have.

Mr. Burley, a man who usually stood with his feet spread, flushed under his skin, and deliberately moved back to the spot from which he had been shoved.

"That's a new iron brace," he observed, indicating the modern improvement. "When was it put there?"

The guide turned on him with loathing. Information about that brace did not come in this part of his recitation.

"I will tell you about that," he said shortly. "As you enter the atrium, Meester Burley, sor," he began, and Shine exchanged half a glance of humorous sympathy with the victim. Mr. Burley did not exchange his half.

Shine, feeling momentarily slighted, strolled on to the next conspicuous point of interest, and waited, determined to be friendly with his fellow countryman. He stood blankly interested before a statue of a bulging-muscled boxer with a bracelet on his ankle, when the amateur archæologist and his guide came up; and again Shine exchanged half a mutual smile of good-fellowship.

"There's one I like," declared Mr. Burley, passing around Shine. "I have to have some antiques in my new house on the avenue, and I think I'll start with this one. I'll give ten thousand dollars, cash, to have this thing delivered to me at the Collecima Hotel."

The guide almost turned a handspring.

"Impossible!" he ejaculated. "The Italian government permits none of its ancient art to be taken out of the country."

Mr. Burley's admiration turned immediately to longing, not unmixed with a certain degree of daring speculation.

"I guess we'll have to steal it," he laughed.

"Impossible!" again stated the guide, and hastily changed the dangerous subject. "This statue, Meester Burley, sor," he began, in the set oratorical tones with which he dispensed information, "is known as the Boxer with the Bracelet. It——"

Burley suddenly felt Shine listening behind him, and he turned his cold, gray eyes steadily on that friendly young gentleman. Shine glanced up at the blue sky, and down the street, and across at a broken column, and moved away, swinging his little cane.

II.

"We found a good place to land on your hick," Blister Bill eagerly advised, when Shine rejoined them. "There's a little stone shack down here, all dark inside, where nobody ever goes, and if you'll lead him to it, why, Joe and me'll wait inside."

"Ain't you got any ambition?" Shine reproached them, entirely out of patience. "A wise sport like this don't carry more than two or three hundred in his clothes."

"That's enough for us," modestly returned Bill. "Where is he?"

"He's gone," reported Shine, and they looked at him with weary disapproval. "I got his number, though, and he's our meat—for big money, at that."

Blister Bill and Ten Thumb Joe smiled their laggard faith.

"I suppose you think you can load this dead-hep party with that bum gold nugget of yours," suggested Blister Bill, with as much sarcasm as he could express.

"Now, don't knock that nugget!" objected Shine, touched in his pride. "That's an Abrams & Tingley nugget, and they're the best gold-brick manufacturers in New York; but it ain't for this guy. He's laid himself open for the easiest frame ever joshed about on the corner of Forty-third Street. Let me hand you a laugh," and, quite jauntily, he led the way to the Boxer with the Bracelet, and pointed out that impressive object of art.

"We saw this guy before," was the comment of Blister Bill. "He's overdeveloped in the neck to make a quick duck."

"John L. would have walked around him like a cooper round a barrel, and

pounded all his hoops off," asserted Ten Thumb Joe. "Dago, wasn't he?"

"He looks good enough to me," asserted Shine. "You know who this guy is I'm stringing along? It's C. W. Burley, of the Burley Tobacco Company. He's mugged in all the papers every time he gets on a boat or gets off one."

Blister Bill took his hands out of his pockets, in order to lay a crooked forefinger emphatically in a hard palm.

"Then don't you try to string him," he earnestly advised. "The only way to handle a smart business crook like him is to get him up a dark alley."

"The stringing's already done," Shine declared, smiling complacently. "Anyhow, it's a straight business prop. Burley wants this statue. The government won't sell it, so Burley wants it swiped. He'll give——" Shine hesitated. The truth was seldom necessary. "He'll give three thousand bucks!"

"Who did he offer it to?" suspiciously inquired Blister Bill, looking first at the Boxer and then at Shine.

Shine did not even gulp.

"Me," he stated.

"We didn't see you chummy with him," Ten Thumb Joe put in, edging between them.

"Did we want to be seen framing anything?" impatiently returned Shine. "The only question is: Can you heavy workers get away with it."

"We can, if we can lift it," confidently declared Blister Bill, estimating the probable weight of the Boxer, which was a little over half life size, and he caught hold of it, to tilt it on its pedestal.

Seven guards were on the spot instantly; more came running, and they emitted shrill cries as they surrounded the vandals.

"I got you," observed Blister Bill, grinning cheerfully at them. "I know just what they're sayin'," he explained to Shine and Joe. "They're tellin' us to beat it, and I'm hep to the answer." He produced a handful of small coins, and gave them each the equivalent of a nickel. There was an instant change in the attitude of the embodied law. It was no longer fierce; it was merely regretful that it must perform its duty.

"It is not permit to 'andle," explained one softly flowing voice, which carefully separated each syllable as it spoke.

"I tumbled to that, bo, before you got here," replied Bill. "We didn't hurt him any. We just wanted to see if two of us could carry him. It's a bet."

"It is much danger," advised the soft voice, and a big-chested and big-throated Italian, who was born where Caruso was born, stepped forward. "In Italy, the prisons are not"—he hesitated for a word—"gay."

"I've wised myself up on that," frowned Blister Bill. "There's only three minutes' difference between a two years' stretch and a life sentence. You don't need to keep tabs on us any longer. A guy wanted us to steal this little stone heavyweight, but I guess we'll just tag it with a 'nix.'"

The one who was saving his money to go to America, and sing like Caruso, explained that delightful joke to the rest of them, and they all laughed, though not less than eleven out of the eleven looked at the statue in thoughtful speculation.

"You would need to be immediate," he told Bill. "To-morrow the statue is to be moved. The air eats it."

Blister Bill turned triumphantly to Shine.

"Get that, don't you?" he demanded. "You better coax this tobacco guy down an alley."

III.

Walking aimlessly up a by-street of Naples, Shine overly jaunty, Blister Bill slouching, and dumpy little Ten Thumb Joe spraddling his way, the three of them suddenly stopped in front of a littered old yard, full of weather-beaten antiques.

"The heavyweight!" exclaimed Bill.

"They couldn't have got him here this quick," figured Ten Thumb Joe.

Taking that fact into consideration, Shine came to a brilliant conclusion.

"It's a phony," he decided.

"Why don't your man buy this one?"

wondered Blister Bill, walking in to look at the antique. "It's just as good."

"A guy like that don't buy fakes," Shine reproved him.

"Not if he knows it," corrected Ten Thumb Joe. "A lot of these wise sports gets stung, though."

A yellow-mustached young Englishman came hurrying out of the shop, and addressed Shine with servility and contempt.

"Can I serve you, sir?" he inquired.

Shine, thrusting his pink shirt forward, looked distantly at the salesman, and jingled some change in his pocket.

"Well, I don't know," he replied, glancing disdainfully about the yard. "What's this thing worth?" and, with his little cane, he tapped the Boxer with the Bracelet on the weather-cracked knee.

"Fifteen pounds," condescended the English salesman, tilting back his head to look at Shine coldly through his nostrils. "Shall I send it?"

"Well, no," drawled Shine, and, with half-closed eyes, he insulted that Englishman from head to foot and back again; whereupon the salesman, without another word, turned haughtily on his heel, and went back to the shop.

For the first time in a week, Shine received the admiration of his comrades. Even Blister Bill relinquished a word of praise.

"You got a front on you, after all, Shine," he admitted.

"I guess the police department misses me at home," bragged Shine, expanding under the tribute.

"'Ello, Bill!" hailed a broadly grinning Italian "copper," as they passed out of the yard.

"Bono sarah, Frank," returned Blister Bill, and swaggered on, endeavoring to appear modest.

"How do you come to know that wop bull?" inquired Shine, in surprise. He himself had not yet made any influential acquaintances.

"Passed him a couple of months' wages," returned Blister Bill simply.

"One bone," supplemented Ten Thumb Joe. "We got a fine alley corner on his beat."

"They're all alike," Blister Bill explained. "Only these guineas don't want all you make. Say, Shine, chase your boob down past our corner, won't you?"

"No," emphatically refused Shine. "I wouldn't lower myself to mash a guy's bean. Let's go home. I want to think."

There were twenty cigarette stubs strewn about the room before Shine found his inspiration.

"I got it!" he exulted. "They're going to move that statue out of the wet. Well, I'll swipe it. Burley can go out there and see that it's gone. Then we'll hand him the phony."

Ten Thumb Joe paused in an endless game of solitaire, and looked at Blister Bill reproachfully.

"Didn't I always tell you Shine had a brain on him?" he demanded.

IV.

Shine Ricks was very particular about the card he sent up to C. W. Burley. He leafed through his collection until he found a perfectly clean one, foolishly given him by a young cigar salesman.

"Benjamin F. Carter," read Burley, perusing that card with knitted brows, and questioning the face of his room waiter. "What does he look like, Tony?"

Tony absolutely gave up that impossible problem.

"He is American," he explained, with a shrug of his shoulders, and he smiled genially, to take the curse off the shrug.

"All right, bring him along," directed Burley, who, killing time until his wife and daughter should join him, accepted any means of diversion. He recognized Shine the minute the door opened. "Oh, it's you," he said, with grim amusement. "What do you want?"

Shine, who had hoped to talk with Mr. Burley as one gentleman to another, found himself standing awkwardly, twirling his hat in his hand.

"I had the pleasure of meeting you at Pompeii yesterday afternoon," he began, remembering the words of his

opening, but forgetting the gay and debonair air with which he had meant to accompany those words.

"Well?" rudely rejoined Burley, with a keen scrutiny which passed straight on through Shine, and clinched at the other side.

Shine, with regret, saw that they were not to converse on the plain of mutual courtesy and good breeding. He would have to make this a sordid business transaction.

"Well," he echoed, with a trace of resentfulness in his tone, "I heard you say you wanted that Boxer statue."

Mr. Burley bent on Shine a bristling-browed frown, and then he laughed.

"What about it?"

"Was you on the level when you said you'd give ten thousand dollars for it?" and Shine glanced briefly at a chair, though he did not sit down.

"Do you think you can deliver it?" asked Burley, softening toward him. This was a good enough joke to be taken seriously.

"I got a gang here that'll deliver anything they can carry," boasted Shine, feeling encouraged. "If you want that Boxer, it'll be gone to-morrow morning. Now, if you're game, speak up."

Burley's eyes began to sparkle. He could see himself conveying his friends about his new Fifth Avenue home, and saying, as they came to the statue of the Boxer with the Bracelet: "Yes; great, isn't it?" Then he'd tell the rest of it in a mysterious, low tone: "I'd be in trouble with the Italian government if they knew where this thing is. It's the famous Boxer with the Bracelet. I had it stolen from the ruins of Pompeii." Then he and the guests would chuckle, and they'd have a drink. As for moral obloquy, there was none. It was too good a joke!

"I spotted you for a crook the second I saw you," he smilingly observed to Shine; "but, since you don't pretend to be anything else, it's all right," and, aside from merely forgiving Shine, he rather admired his visitor. After all, it was rather a strong, full-blooded American proposition to cart a conspicuously valuable treasure from rigidly guarded Pompeii. "Now, tell me about it."

Shine began to recover his "front."

"Ain't much to tell," he nonchalantly answered, taking a chair, putting his hat on his lap, and swinging his little cane. "I'll hand you that statue, right down here at your hotel, any time to-morrow you say."

"Wait just a minute," objected Burley, with a grin. "I admire your nerve, but, at the same time, you can't make me an accessory. Now, Mr. Carter, the only way I'll play is this: You show me that statue; and you may gamble on it that I'll chase out to Pompeii to see whether it's still there or not."

"That's what I want you to do," Shine proclaimed, with the dignity of an honest man. "Only, for the love of Mike, don't tip yourself!" and his nervous fear was genuine.

"Don't worry about that," laughed Burley, beginning to enjoy this as much as if he himself were to be the thief; for he had put into the tobacco business the blood of a viking. "After you show me the statue, I want to see it boxed up, and carted away to the docks. Then you bring me a bill of lading, showing that it is consigned to my address in New York, and I'll hand you the ten thousand dollars."

"Cash?" spoke Shine, trying to conceal his excitement.

"American, if you want it."

Shine rose, and set his hat rakishly on one side of his head.

"You go out there any time to-morrow, and look for it!" and he walked away, twirling his little cane.

V.

Promptly on the appointed hour, C. W. Burley, who had left all his money at the hotel, and put a "gun" in each pocket, stopped in front of number twenty-eight Via Immacolatella, glanced into the littered stable, hesitated a moment, plunged up the reeking stone stairway, and knocked on the door at the front. He was somewhat reassured when the door was opened by the resplendent Shine; but, nevertheless, he

kept his hands in his coat pockets, where Shine, with a smile, saw the bulging points of the two revolvers.

"It's here, Burley!" Shine whispered. "It took ten of us to get it, but it's here!"

It was characteristic of Burley that, in following Shine into the dingy room, he poked his foot in the crack of the door and made a thorough survey before he went any farther.

In the center of the floor was a long box, like a coffin, and against the rear wall, by the head of the bed, stood a big, broad-shouldered, smooth-faced Italian, with a slouch hat pulled low over his eyes and a red handkerchief knotted around his neck. Beside him was a dumpy little Italian, with a face much wider than it was high; and the little Italian was spluttering in his efforts to suppress a laugh.

"Walk over there with the others," Burley directed Shine, and then, there being no one behind him, he went to the long packing case and looked in. The Boxer with the Bracelet lay half imbedded in tightly wadded straw, his weather-cracked knee projecting pathetically.

Burley stooped down and examined the statue closely, but more with admiration and a sense of possession than with criticism.

"That's a great piece of work," he contentedly observed. "I don't know how you managed it, Carter, but I'll have to congratulate you on it. Won't that knee come too near the lid?"

"I don't think so," replied Shine, stooping down to "level" across the box with his eyes. "Here, Pippo, can't you settle this down a little?"

"Do they speak English?" inquired Burley, with a sharp glance at the advancing pair, and he stood up, puzzling why the dumpy little Italian should be spluttering again.

"The big one does," responded Shine carelessly, but with a warning glance at Ten Thumb Joe. "He sold bananas in Brooklyn."

"Da statue he packa all-a-da right," Blister Bill gruffly contended.

"I hope so," said Burley, much concerned, and he shook the box. "Who are these fellows, Carter?"

"A couple of huskies," whispered Shine, much elated; "but the little one ain't got sense enough to be scared. He thinks it's a joke on the government," and Shine cast on the almost hysterical Ten Thumb Joe a glance of deadly venom.

Burley, whose cold gray eyes had the sparkle of boyish mischief in them, that he was engaged in this exhilarating prank, smiled with both the Italians in a comradeship which he had denied to Shine.

"All right; pack up," he directed.

They plunged obediently into the work, under the active and overly voluble supervision of Shine; but they had not gone far when the impatient Burley stopped them.

"What do you think you're packing there?" he snapped. "Bananas? Take out all that straw, and lift the statue."

Things began to look like the packing department of a well-organized factory in about two minutes. There was something in the method of C. W. Burley's oratory which seemed to start things automatically on schedule. When the case was entirely empty, he studied the Boxer with the Bracelet calculatingly. It was no longer an object of art, but fragile commerce which needed careful shipping, and he gave minute directions. Exasperated presently, he took the straw into his own hands. He felt Blister Bill bending over him from behind, and jumped up.

"You fellows go over there by the bed," he ordered, full of instinct. "I'll finish this job myself." He dropped to his knees by the box, while Blister Bill and Ten Thumb Joe stood back and watched, with growing admiration, the work of his sinewy hands and his forceful arms and his strong shoulders.

"Holy Mike, what a stick-up guy he would have made!" whispered Blister Bill out of the corner of his mouth.

"They can drop that box from the top of a loading derrick, and old Short-arm Jab won't lose a chip," confidently declared Burley, when he had finished. "Now nail her up."

They nailed her up. Burley saw that the address was the one he had given Shine, and laughed like a boy. Shine laughed with him.

"Biggest stunt I ever pulled!" he bragged. "I've fixed everybody from Pompeii to the docks, and if the king raises any fuss I'll send him ten dollars." He paused to laugh again, a nervous laugh, in which there was no balance. "I hope you're satisfied, Mr. Burley."

Burley cast at him a quick look of dislike.

"Get your dray ready," he returned. "I'm going to follow this box down to the docks; then I'm going to take that blasted bone-shattering ride out to Pompeii. If I'm satisfied when I get back you may come to my hotel with your bill of lading and I'll hand you your ten thousand dollars."

Blister Bill and Ten Thumb Joe turned to each other significantly, and Shine glanced apprehensively at both of them. Of course, they would remember that he had said three thousand, but maybe he could bluff them out of it. Blister Bill gave a tug at his slouch hat. He drew the knot of his red handkerchief to the front. He swaggered forward.

"Gimme da mon," he requested of Burley.

Burley turned to Shine with a scowl, which Shine passed on to Blister Bill.

"I told you guys you'd get your money when the job was done!" he snapped, with a ferocity which was by no means assumed.

"Gimme da mon'," repeated Bill mechanically, but with a set determination.

"How much are these fellows to get?" demanded Burley.

"Two hundred dollars," replied Blister Bill. "We finish da work. We wanta da mon'."

"Pay them off," ordered Burley. "They know what this thing is, or they wouldn't be asking so much."

"I'll settle with them afterward," Shine stated, with a double meaning, at which Ten Thumb Joe grinned broadly. Shine was pale with fury.

"Gimme da mon'!" insisted Blister Bill, with a rising note of impatience in his tone, and he kept his eyes persistently on Burley. He had not once paid any attention to Shine.

"I won't be mixed up in this thing until that case is aboard the steamer," announced Burley. "I won't have it proved on me that I passed any money," and he came a step closer to Blister Bill. "You can't bluff me!"

"I ain't got that much on me, or I'd pay it!" declared the panic-stricken Shine. He kept his rapidly diminishing funds where his comrades and coworkers could not possibly find it. "I've put out a lot of money on this job, Mr. Burley, and it's near broke me."

"I suppose that's so," granted Burley, studying him keenly, but Shine was so sincerely worried and frightened that his appearance carried conviction. "I don't carry any money with me when I come to a dump like this, Carter, but I don't mind loaning you what change I have with me," and ramming his hand into his trousers pocket, he drew forth a jumble of silver and crumpled bills. "Two hundred and twenty-odd dollars," he counted, and thrust it into Shine's hands. "I've more than I thought. There's enough extra for their tips."

Shine glanced lingeringly at the assortment of currency.

"Gimme da mon'!" bellowed Bill, and Shine weakly passed it over.

VI.

C. W. Burley, pursuing his interesting diversion with the thoroughness by which he had built up his business, jumped in his car, and followed the dray to the docks. He saw the box pass a nonchalant inspection; he saw it taken on board the steamer; he saw Shine receive his bill of lading, and, with the stolid patience which, interspersed with his nervous energy, had marked his commercial career, he waited an hour and a half for the steamer to get under way.

"Pompeii," he remarked to the driver, refusing, for the third time,

Shine's eager offer to accompany him to that historic spot.

At the gate of the ruined suburb he jumped out, and made a careful selection among the guides who pressed around him. He chose a thin English youth who was studying art.

"Just show me the principal points," he said. "I only have an hour."

Patiently he trudged over the regular route, and patiently he listened to the guide's enthusiastic and imaginative accounts of the glories which were past, until they turned the corner in view of the sight of the Boxer with the Bracelet; then his blood leaped. The pedestal was vacant! He had no need to betray himself by questions, as he had figured when he selected his guide.

"This was considered the most beautiful statue in Pompeii," regretted the guide. "It was known as the Boxer with the Bracelet, and it had been the intention to leave it here permanently; but it began to show signs of disintegration, and yesterday they were compelled to move it to the National Museum in Naples. The statue represented——"

"That will do," interrupted Burley hastily, looking at his watch. "I'd like to see more of this stuff, but my time's up," and handing the guide a liberal fee, he took his bearings like a homing pigeon, and headed straight for the gate.

"National Museum," he observed to his chauffeur, and, after he had lit a cigar and puffed a while in moody silence, he began chuckling—at himself.

VII.

"What did you butt in with a piker play like that for?" demanded Shine.

Blister Bill and Ten Thumb Joe grinned at him.

"That guy ain't no boob," surmised Blister Bill. "If there's nothin' wrong there's nothin' wrong, but if there is we copped this much, anyhow," and he contentedly pointed to the pile of money in the drawer of a little table.

"Two hundred and twenty-two dollars and thirty cents," explained Ten Thumb Joe. "Bill didn't put up a two-minute talk for it. Soft money? Why, there wasn't a wallop passed!"

"You guns never will have any class to you," Shine complained.

"We're on the level, anyhow!" Blister Bill scowled. "You faked us on the price this boy was to pay. Is that honest?"

"I went to all the expense," Shine reminded him. "It was my headwork. I put up seventy-five dollars for that statue, and twenty-five more for expenses."

"Sure you did," agreed Blister Bill. "For that, Joe and me was to take half, and you was to take the other half. But you faked us! Now, just to show you that Joe and me ain't got no yellow streak in us like that, here's your split out of what we already collected." and he began separating the money.

"Aw, keep it, you cheap, petty-larceny grafter!" scorned Shine, rising in sorrowful dignity. "You would cut in and queer a big game that's went through as fine as silk, and here's where I lose you. You've had yours, and that's all you get!"

Blister Bill regarded him with an ugly snarl.

"If you collect this coin, Shine, and don't hand us ours, you want to lock up your weazand in a safety deposit, because we'll get it!" and, from his armpit, he pulled a knife a foot long. "We picked up a dago trick over here, Joe and me."

"At the same time, Shine," supplemented Ten Thumb Joe, also producing a knife and fingering it curiously, "when you pull the rest of the game, and come back with the coin, or if you don't pull the rest of the game and come back with the coin, we split this just the same."

"Yes, we're square," added Blister Bill. "It was your come-on we bunked for it."

"Gee, but I'm sorry I ever tied up with a couple of rums like you!" sighed Shine, keenly aware that he had lowered himself, and he went out to see if Burley had returned.

The familiar red car was standing at the door when Shine drove up the hill

to the Collecima Hotel; and Shine, rather grandly, approached the concierge.

"Mr. Burley," he said. "Just tell him it's Mr. Carter."

The boy returned very quickly, and he was grinning.

"The gentleman says you know his room number," he announced. "You are to walk right up, sir."

Warm with the glow of them who have performed triumphant deeds, Shine walked right up, and, with his precious bill of lading in his hand, knocked on the door.

"Come in," called the cheery voice of Mr. Burley. Even Burley's face was cheery as he approached Shine, and his laugh was cheery, as he caught Shine by the coat collar and shook that classy young art dealer until his teeth chattered. "You snipe!" Burley cheerily observed, and, opening the door, he quite accurately kicked Shine through it.

Shine, rubbing himself, looked back ruefully, as he stepped into his victoria.

"I guess he must be on," he finally decided, and rode down the hill, to collect his "bit" out of that two twenty-two thirty.

More of Chester's inimitable tales are scheduled for early numbers of the POPULAR.

THE PIETY OF "TAY PAY"

THE ready wit of T. P. O'Connor, Esq., M. P., editor, reformer, raconteur, and globe-trotter, is well known. They are telling now of how it prevented his being deprived of a favorite dish at a public dinner table not long ago.

It was on a P. & O. steamship, and as the craft glided smoothly along the Suez Canal, the passengers were in the saloon at dinner. It was Friday. Opposite "Tay Pay," at a small table, sat a stout, red-faced man, who hailed from County Kerry. The Kerry man displayed a well-developed appetite from the beginning of the meal, and was of the type of go-ahead tourist who "wants what he wants when he wants it." Even before the soup appeared, he made such havoc with the bread, olives, radishes, and similar matters, which had been placed on the table first, that Mr. O'Connor was obliged to reach out swiftly, or he might not have got any at all.

For the fish course the steward brought on a particularly enticing, but not very large, piece of boiled salmon. As the steward whipped off the silver cover, revealing the solid pink interior, and setting free the appetizing fragrance of this king of table fish, Mr. O'Connor remarked that the eyes of his table companion widened in anticipation, and then contracted as he noted that the portion was decidedly meager for the satisfaction of two healthy men, who also were hungry men.

"Nice piece of salmon!" observed the Kerry man.

"Looks so!" assented Mr. O'Connor.

"It is," said the Kerry man. "But it's cruelly small. And, bedad, my religion doesn't allow me to eat meat on Friday. So, faith, I'm obliged to get on the best way I can with fish."

And thus speaking, the Kerry man calmly lifted the whole piece of salmon from the dish and put it on his own plate.

For a moment "Tay Pay" was nonplused by the colossal selfishness and "nerve" of the Kerry person. Then an inspiration came to him. Leaning forward, with the large silver fish knife and fork in his hands, he transferred the salmon from the Kerry man's plate to his own, saying sternly:

"Confound you, sir! Do you think no one has a soul to be saved but yourself?"

A Wyoming "Accident"

By Frederick Niven

Author of "Lost Cabin Mine," "Hands Up," Etc.

His wages were forty dollars a month, and he thought as he worked, "If this is cow-punching, I'd rather be a sheep herder!"

THIS is a story of a row of poles stretching across a section of Wyoming's wilderness — and what they led to.

Firstly, they were erected because the cattlemen feared their ranges would be ruined if sheep browsed upon them, and, as Cyrus B. Long said at the Stock Association meeting of his district: "If these sheepmen come in here, the country is done for. It will go the same way as the New Mexico ranges—sheep to spoil the land for the cattle. They'll bring *goats* next to nibble, hogs to root —but we'll all be paupers long before that. And I prefer that this line between the cattle and sheep ranges don't remain an imaginary line, like the equator in the schoolbooks. My men know what to do when sheep come on the cattle range—but I propose that we stake that imaginary line. We can't fence it—for the cattle drifting"—he paused and smiled grimly—"but if we stake it, there it is—and if the law ever steps in to inquire into disputes, there is the staked boundary!"

Secondly, they were stuck up there from horizon to horizon, each one just far enough away from its predecessor, or near enough to it, for a sharp-eyed man, accustomed to these solitudes—like a gray-green and billowing ocean that has been magically solidified—to be able, arriving at one pole, to sight the next by a quick, puckering-eyed survey of the landscape before him.

Sunshine Joe, one of Cyrus B. Long's men, put them up on Cyrus' behalf. The job took about a week. A wagon had preceded Sunshine, a wagon laden with the posts—which had been cut in the woods along Parkman Creek —and every here and there the driver of the wagon threw one off. Sunshine's business was to erect them. On this mission he led a pack horse behind him, or drove it in front, varying the order of progress to vary the monotony.

The horses learned the object of the journey before they had gone far, and stopped of their own accord when, following on the wagon trail, they came to one of the recumbent posts. Sunshine then dismounted from his own horse, and took from the back of the pack horse—where it was thrust under the rope that held his blankets, frying pan, and grub—an instrument like a long-handled pair of scissors. At the end, below the hinge, two sharp-pointed concave spades confronted each other. Spraddling his legs, Sunshine raised the implement, opened the spades by extending his arms, drove them down into the earth, pressed his hands toward each other, drew them up, held his arms apart, and, in doing so, opened the spoons, or little sharp shovels, and dropped out the earth they held between them.

So on he went, plunging down, pressing, lifting, emptying, till he had a hole made of a depth that promised to sustain the pole securely. Then he took up the pole, dropped an end in the hole, stuck his tool back under the rope on the pack, put foot in the stirrup of his saddle horse, swung his leg over, and away the two horses and the man went upon the trail of the wagon, till the next recumbent stake was reached.

At noon he made a little fire of sagebrush, or sheep dung, partook of tea and a couple of flapjacks, while the horses browsed; at sunset—the same; and then, wrapped in his blankets, he stretched out and closed his eyes—saw, for a moment, an infinite number of little holes dance before his eyes, and poles get up and go plop into them—and then was asleep, to sleep till the dawn touched his shoulder, and he stirred, sat up, rubbed his eyes, saw dew on the sagebrush, a jack rabbit observing him from the edge of a coulee, or a coyote sitting on haunches, tail wrapped round it, licking lean lips; and in the east, above the gray-green rolls, a thin light spread, as of orange and red lamps being lit behind gray tissue paper. Behind him was the last upright pole; ahead of him a faint track on which, after two flapjacks, a slice of wild bacon, and a tin of wilder tea, he continued his job of making the dead line.

His wages were forty dollars a month, and he thought as he worked: "If this is cow-punching, I'd rather be a sheep-herder!"

II.

Tommie Tosspott, sheep-herder for Joe Marshall, was properly up against it. It was a son of a gun of a day. He sang gayly and bitterly to himself, sang what will give you an idea of the date of this story if you are conversant with popular song; he sang gayly and lugubriously, sentimentally, ironically, lovingly: "Break the news to mother ——" This because he was a sheep-herder, and because even the cow-punchers of to-day—who are generally called "riders," "ropers," "herders"—are ashamed to sing: "O, I'm a good old rebel, that's what *I* am;" or:

> O boys, we're going far to-night.
> Yeo-ho! Yeo-ho!
> We'll take the greasers now in hand
> And drive them into the Rio Grande
> Way down in Mexico.

Tommie Tosspott was up against it. All winter he had had for a home a tent with a stove in it; not even a shack. On several occasions he had been unable to muster his woolly charges into the pen before blizzards broke; and had to stay with them, huddling and miserable, before the storm—a thousand sheep, two dogs, a man, with the wind playing right into his backbone, as if it was hollow like a bit of narrow-bone stovepipe. The man that brought him his food had been delayed once on the way by snow. Soon would come the lambing season, and the wolves would keep Tommie busy every night, constantly tending a score of little lamps that had to be set round the flock to keep the wolves away, so that they might not devour the young lambs.

But all these things were nothing. They were the day's work, the night's work. He had shot a good many wolves, and would get bounty for them. But now was the time of mud and spring, bleak, cold; and Tommie was closed to that silent dead line, every pole giving its threat, or its ultimatum. He had just set his dogs off west to gather the sheep that were straying when, out of the gray-black, gray-green billows, he saw two men on horseback. To east something scared his flock worse than the dogs that were scaring them to west—perhaps a prowling coyote. They started off at a run. They rushed like a woolly river past one of the poles.

Tommie shouted to his dogs, but he could hardly hear his own voice. The thousand sheep were all crying; a ceaseless "Hurrah! Hurrah! Hurrah!" went up from them. It was that sound that made the two boundary riders of the Cyrus B. Long outfit shake a bridle, flail a quirt, and come so much on the jump, sliding and slithering into view.

"What a noise!" said Sunshine Joe. "Say, Pete, would you be a sheep-herder? Wouldn't you go crazy listening to that all your life?"

But Cyrus B. Long didn't hire men to pity his enemies. He hired them to ride the range. "I want none of your back East fellows out here seeing life," he would say to his foremen. "When I hire a man I don't want you to find out if he can rope, if he can break, if

he's lively in a branding corral—what's his specialty. I want men that are cow-punchers, and can do all there is to it."

So he had the men he wanted; and Sunshine Joe and Pete, after this brief expression of pity for the barren life of a sheep-herder, went into action. Sunshine dismounted, throwing the lines over his horse's head, and unslinging a magazine rifle. Pete, with fondling fingers, drew forth his Colt. What followed was, to look at, a most unconcerned exhibition. Sunshine even paused a moment to scratch his head. He stood with rifle low, taking the slight recoil between hip and forearm, holding the lovely weapon as if it was a fishing rod, and, in the phrase of Tommie Tosspot, just "pumped lead into them sheep as if he was a-shellin' peas"!

Tommie had had a religious upbringing in Camden, New Jersey. His mother had read him the parable of the ninety and nine. I don't know how far it influenced him now. But he set to work, riding wildly to and fro, while the sheep bleated and bleated like a thousand plaintive children calling "Hurrah!" half-heartedly to some visiting parson with a grand manner and a silk hat—not because they knew why, but because they had been told to.

He rode left and right. He shouted to his dogs. In the midst of the everlasting bleating the clip and rasp of the dinky magazine rifle went on, the biff and long-stabbing echo of the Colt. "There goes another!" he thought at each rasp and rasping echo that rushed through the rolling scene.

Tommie ran the risk of stopping a bullet meant for a sheep as he tried to turn the flock—and turn it he did, at last. As he followed in its wake, shepherding it east again, his two dogs in order, one to north, one to south, well spraddled out, barking, but not closing in on the sheep, he looked round. He guessed he had got the ninety and nine together all right—so to speak.

The shooting slackened at the post; the shooting stopped. Tommie, with his flock headed away from danger, looked round again. And when he did so he saw the little, piled-up knoll of sheep, a pyramid of wool beside the fatal post; and, riding away, in the attitude of half-ashamed big boys that have given an erring junior a swipe on the ear, laughing, feeling themselves right, yet unpleasant, were the two cow-punchers. As they rode they, too, looked round at the piled-up sheep, their left hands on ponies' haunches, their right holding up the bridles.

"Guess I'll remember them fellows," said Tommie Tosspott. "'O, break the news to——' Yes, I guess I'll remember you fellows."

III.

The little town of Parkman consisted of a score of houses, ten a side, as it were, with a broad strip of what was sometimes deep mud and sometimes deep dust between them. The street was so much like birdlime when muddy that a teamster had delighted the little knot on the Palace Hotel veranda by leaving a shoe in it when, putting one foot on the hub of his wheel, and gripping the edge of his high seat, he stepped up to his perch. Lovers of the picturesque preferred Parkman when there was dust, although that dust sometimes got into the dining room of the Palace, the Occidental, and Mrs. Gray's boarding house. They preferred dust to mud, because, when Cyrus B. Long's boys rode into town, there was such a splendid flutter at their horses' heels. They made the kind of picture that Charles Russell, the "cowboy artist of Montana," has put on canvas; dust, sun, and movement.

There was a bank in the middle of the north side of the street. When you went into it you found it was like an armored cruiser. The counter was of steel; no clerks were visible; but they looked at you through portholes the moment you entered. The teller was in the conning-tower contraption in the middle. If you had wandered in the laid-out lots back of the main street before visiting the bank, and had seen the pathetic little strips of ground with dots of green in them, bearing little boards at various angles, which silently implored, "Citizens! Protect your boule-

vards!" If, seeing these, you had thought, "It is quite true. This West is no longer wild," and then entered the bank, and saw the conning tower and the general battleship appearance of the place in which the clerks were at work, hidden from view till your flag—your bank book or letter of identification—was shown, you thought: "Oh, ho! It's like that, is it!" It was at least wise to be prepared for it being like that. But please remember, nevertheless, that Wyoming is safer than Chicago. Still—that's Parkman; and in Parkman comes Act Three.

The sheep-herders had come and gone. The cattle round-ups were over.

Tommie Tosspott rode into town, humming, "Break the news to mother." Perhaps the gramophone at the Occidental would give him a new song to take back with the new suit of underwear that he was figuring to invest in—before he visited the hotel, aware of how money goes when one comes into town. He rode in slowly and circumspectly, in the manner of a sheep-herder—grim, not broken, hard as nails, a bit lonesome looking; a man learns an awful lot of quiet in encounters with the elements, or in lonely thoughts, as well as on absurd battlefields.

He rode up to Ed Strange's store, casting but a fleeting glance at the projecting sign, "Pool and Pyramids," over the Occidental. He dismounted slowly, his journey over. He tied his horse to the telegraph pole with easy, slow movements. He stood a spell, looking left and right, and then strolled into the store.

A man with a goatee beard appeared at the back and said: "How do, Tom?"

"How do, Ed?" said Tommie Tosspott.

Ed, after his salutation, began turning over the pages of a monster catalogue, consulting the index, consulting letters that lay beside it; he looked at the book, the index, the letters. It seemed to be a long job. His beard thrust out. He paused to scratch under it. He frowned over, and pointed with a gnarled finger at, the picture of a bathtub in the catalogue. He consulted the letters again. Tommie moved round, reading the labels on the tinned goods. He moved round two walls. He came to where the writing pads lay, wiped his hand on his pants, and lifted them one at a time and read, without any criticism, the words, *"Feint Ruled*—Wyoming Bond—Sioux Linen—*Faint Ruled*—U. S. Tablet."

"I see there's two ways of spelling 'faint,'" he said.

Ed put his letters in the catalogue, closed it on them so that they stuck out a little way, marking the place of his researches, looked over his spectacles, pushed the catalogue to one side.

"Well, how's things?" he asked.

"All right. How are you stackin' up, Ed?"

"Pretty good. I'm just exercising my brains over a catalogue here. Guess I'm getting elderly. Brain begins to slip cogs. There's more call for bathtubs in Wyoming than there used to be when I first came in here."

"A bathtub don't surely need to be much of a puzzle," Tommie hazarded. "I guess a bathtub is a bathtub. They make some with frills and some gilt-edged, and so on, puzzling a man so much that he reckons eventually to do without one at all."

"I don't know about that," said Ed, having hearkened courteously and attentively; "you see, folks nowadays wants fancy bathtubs; and even one kind of towel, if you'll believe me, don't satisfy them no longer."

"So!" said Tommie, giving his head a little wag of interest. "Well, give me a plug of chewin' to make a start, Ed."

It was when Ed and Tommie had come the length of the underwear that a whooping broke out in the distance, and Tommie gave ear.

"You'll find them all right, I guess," said Ed, stroking the apparel.

"Well, I guess I'll have them." They had a nap on them, these clothes, that might be calculated to make an alligator itch.

The whooping drew nearer, and Tommie walked over to the door and looked out.

"Ed!" he said. "Come yere, Ed.'

Ed looked over his spectacles at Tommie in the doorway, and came slowly toward him as a man who always, when any one tries to rush him, puts on a brake, seeing the possibility of getting flurried before being well aware; or as a careful driver puts the brake on before coming to a hill. Down the street, riding in the careless, three-quarter-face manner beloved of cow-punchers when taking life easily, came two horsemen, brown as Indians, scarfed, large-hatted.

"Who's that fellow there?" asked Tommie, and pointed. He had none of the finer reticences of a refined society. He pointed naturally, raising his hand.

"That? Oh, they call him Sun——"

The cow-puncher saw, it would appear, the movement in the doorway of Ed's store, saw the hand go up, recognized the man who pointed, but did not see that he merely pointed, and very abruptly, with a quick look of alarm, made a rapid movement, down and up, and a white puff of smoke burst from his hand. His horse leaped like a cat, and he curbed it, as a bullet compressed the air between Ed and Tommie—and crash! went something in the back of the store; and a woman's scream followed.

Tommie's horse, at the telegraph pole, stood on its forelegs, stood on its hindlegs, squirmed this way, that way. Tommie rushed out to catch it—a stupid thing to do. That action alone showed that Wyoming was changing. In the old days men knew better than to do things like that when guns were popping. He clutched for the horse's head, and it swept round against him. The two cowboys were reining up now. Tommie plucked his Colt from the saddlebag. Sheep-herders don't ride into town with guns on their hips nowadays. Up went the Colt, forward and down—and he had the inestimable, cold, contained, demoniac satisfaction of seeing one of the men who had shot up his sheep some months ago fall out of the saddle like the snapshot of a diver.

Here, now, came Ed, who had run indoors at the first shot, his goatee beard sticking out of the store, he half bent, carrying a Winchester. The other cowboy spurred hard and went on down the street, his horse a mere tangle of legs in the heart of a rising dust storm, his hand coming up and down—quirting. But it was in the opposite direction that Ed suddenly looked. So did Tommie Tosspott, wrestling with his startled pony again, wrestling with it as a man does things by force of habit when there are other, and more important, new matters at his hand waiting to be done.

"Look up, you!" cried Ed.

Tommie heard shooting—and looked up, and there was the other fellow who had helped to make that hole in his flock, coming down the middle of the street on the jump, with three more men, who, though they had doffed their woolly chaps, being off duty, were clearly riders of the range, too. Pete saw Sunshine along there—beyond the telegraph pole, where the pony contorted and snorted—sprawled out in the street. He saw Tommie Tosspott. He recognized Tommie—as Tommie recognized him. What on earth old Ed Strange was doing mixed up in this the cowman couldn't fathom. But it was a moment for action, not for understanding anything except that his life was in jeopardy. His rein hand checked his horse, and he flicked a shot at Tommie. Pete's partners could not be out of this act, must needs rein up, and open fire also; so a fusillade of shots sounded, with shouts intermixed, and sounds of breaking glass.

Then the smoke rose, drifted away. There was an exceeding great silence for what it is permissible to call a very, very long little while; and then all the inhabitants came out on both sides of the street, all except the bank clerks and the teller. They were in their turrets, sitting tight, eyes on the door, guns in hand, dreaming of promotion and larger salaries in an ecstatic blending of funk and bravery.

What the inhabitants saw was Tommie sitting on the edge of the sidewalk, one leg over the other, holding a foot tightly, from which the blood ran. Ed stood on the sidewalk, his head up, his

goatee beard pointing to inhabitant after staring inhabitant as one by one they appeared. The beard seemed to be saying: "Well—what's it all about? What are you all rubbernecking for?"

In the middle of the street three men lay close together, and three horses fidgeted, pirouetted, ran away, changed their minds, stopped, and, putting down their noses, blew through them. Farther along Sunshine lay. His horse stood over him, with head down, as if Sunshine and he were posing for a picture for the English Royal Academy, a Christmas presentation plate, or a motion-picture poster.

Ed shouted to some one on the other side:

"Doc! Doc! Come over and attend to my old wife."

The people began to talk. The doctor ran across and disappeared with Ed into the store.

Tommie's horse had made such a wriggling and dancing that it broke the checkstrap on one side, and, with a final dance, slipped the headstall off altogether, and left the reins, with a foamy bit, hanging to the telegraph pole. The barber—he wore a large shade over his eyes, such as students use when their eyes grow sore under the study lamp; a sight to strike terror into the heart of any horse, one might have imagined—stepped out to intercept it in the beginning of its flight. It stopped. He spoke comfortingly to it, advanced on it slowly, but with decision, then quickly caught the saddle rope that hung from the horn and, while the horse quieted, slipped that round its neck for a halter and led it back to the pole. Others, spurred by his action, led the remaining horses over to the Occidental—two of them easy enough to catch because their reins trailed, and these horses don't run with trailing lines—and hitched them there. That done, these either helped to carry the four fallen men to the undertakers or joined the knot around Tommie. They heard him say:

"I guess he thought I was drawing a bead on him. Ed will tell you I only pointed him out, standing right there in the door. Guess he recognized me. He shot up a whole lot of my sheep. Say! This foot bleeds. 'O break the news to mo——'"

The "doc" came out of Ed's store and parted the crowd round Tommie Tosspott.

"Now, friend, let me overhaul you," he said.

Mrs. Strange followed the doctor, her head in a white cloth, as if she had been shampooing.

"Say!" she cried, in her shrill falsetto. "You carry him in here."

Which they did with alacrity. And, having helped him into the store, they were able, while the doctor stanched the bleeding, and put the great toe in splints, to see where the first bullet had crashed through the boards behind the counter and, velocity lessened, but still traveling, had ended its course against Mrs. Strange's temple, where she lay in the back parlor having a siesta. The bullet had struck, deflected, run over her forehead, and dropped on the floor. It is on Ed's watch chain now.

It was quite clear to everybody, even before the trial, that there could be no verdict possible except "Accidental death." At the trial Ed won the esteem of the jury.

"Accidental death!" And they planted Sunshine Joe, and Pete, and the others in the new graveyard.

If you should be fortunate enough, visiting Wyoming to-day, to get old Cyrus B. Long to tell you this story, he will add:

"The blamed irony of the thing is that I sold my last steer six years ago. I'm deep in this sheep business now—it pays better than steers. Yes, siree, it pays better than steers. At times I feel kind of sorry we weren't wise to that years ago, around this section; for there was an awful lot of good men passed in their checks one way and another along that line o' posts."

There are several more Western storiettes by Frederick Niven which you will get in later issues of the POPULAR.

On the Trap Line

By Raymond S. Spears

Author of "Meanness in the Mountains," Etc.

SYNOPSIS OF FIRST PART

An Indian maid, Mitchi Openeyes, is much taken with a white man who has come into her wild woods to study animal life, but she finds only ridicule for him when she learns that he has not come to trap. Necktie Man (that is his sobriquet among the Indians) is nettled at her scorn, particularly as he has fallen in love with the fascinating Mitchi. He concludes to set a trap line and proves himself a worthy competitor to her redskin lover, Avane. In the midst of his success as a trapper comes a thief bent on robbing him of his richest spoils. Necktie Man suspects Avane and determines to run him down.

(In Two Parts—Part Two)

CHAPTER IV—(*Continued*).

NECKTIE MAN returned tired and angry to his camp, and sat far in the night, puzzling on the problem of Johnny Sneakum, as he called the thief. Neither small bear traps nor tracking had proved of avail. One other thing he could do, and that was watch for the thief. Yet this might not prove efficient, unless he could discover how the thief timed his visits to the trail? The thief had preceded him only by a day on each occasion. That gave the thief the advantage of all the furs in the traps, and yet was far enough ahead for the safety of the raid.

"How can I get here at the same time the thief arrives?" Demsten asked himself in vain.

The following morning, when he was on his unmolested line loop, he found that at last he had caught a fox, a magnificent red timber animal, whose tracks he had seen several times, and now had caught by an old trick. He had taken a black raven feather and stuck it up in the snow by means of a long pole. Then he had placed a trap on a stump top, over which the snow had drifted. The fox, seeing the black feather, climbed up on the little mound to look at the feather, and put his paw into the trap. That was the doom of the fox, and quite the most satisfactory thing on the trap line.

But the coming of the wolves in January gave him a greater task of skill and cunning. Of all things, the timber wolf is the most difficult to trap, and Arthur Demsten matched his cunning with those terrible-fanged creatures of the bitter cold and the stinging snows. He found where a pack of them had torn down a moose, and eaten it alive, but not one ever put a paw into the traps he placed. He found where a pack of wolves sat around in a circle, looking at a lynx in one of his traps. The rattle of the chain made the wolves suspect some deep-laid plot to catch them.

Leaving the lynx alive in the trap, Necktie Man carefully set out four wolf traps in the snow where the wolves had gone up on slight elevations to inspect the lynx. Then he brushed snow over his own tracks with boughs, and went his way along the trap line. In the morning he returned to look at the set to see what luck he had had. There were three wolves in the traps, and thus he had succeeded in outwitting them.

It was a revelation to him to find that trapping as a matter of profit should

yield so much information about animals which mere observation failed to discover. He had never thought before that wolves had the same antipathy for the great cats like lynx or panthers that dogs had for ordinary house cats. The experience with the wolves and lynx compelled him to open his eyes to the prejudices of wilderness animals. He remembered that he had seen fisher tracks in the tracks of wolves, following them, then suddenly turned upon and driven into a tree by the wolves; that he had seen evidence of hard feeling between otter and beaver in a beaver pond; squirrels, he knew, were chattering enemies of bluejays and woodpeckers.

But he had yet to learn the bitterness of the Northern winter—he had yet to rub his nose with snow, as Avane had taunted him. January came with a harvest snow—a heavy, deep, damp snow that loaded down the trees, broke the dead branches, and twisted the green ones. Then the trappers had to put on their snowshoes, and this added a third or a half to the toil of each day along the line. Heretofore, Necktie Man had been wondering what Northmen meant when they talked of the hardship of the trap line. Now he underwent it.

On his snowshoes he forced his way over his line, every step sapping his strength by so much, and every day leaving its ache and its pain in his knees, in his back, in the top of his head. He mustered all his endurance, all his determination, and all his pride now—and he needed all that he had. He had caught much fur, and its value had made the winter as a mere financial proposition worth while. He reckoned his catch at a thousand dollars on January 1st, and when he tramped out to the railroad and telegraphed to the great fur companies and fur buyers that he was there at Port Huron with thirty marten, forty-one mink, seventeen fishers, seven foxes, and four wolves, he felt that he had vindicated science. He felt that his woodcraft was sealed by the stamp of approval, and in all the money that he had, the one thousand and thirty dollars which was paid him by the highest bidders among the fur buyers seemed his greatest pride. A little later, when he received the government warrant for sixty dollars for wolf bounties, his satisfaction was complete. Few trappers in the Canadian wilderness had more to show than he had for that first lap of the winter season.

On the other hand, Avane could jeer him. They were both trapping in a great fur pocket, which had long been neglected by other trappers. They had the advantage over other trappers of animals that never had seen a trap, for no trapper had been through that region in many years. Avane did not tell what his luck was, but Mitchi told Necktie Man when, after the "harvest storm," he came out of the woods to Pukaso.

"Avane is a very good trapper," she said. "By hard work he has taken twelve hundred and forty-four dollars' worth of furs. He caught many lynx —and you have not caught many lynx. They are the easiest of animals to catch."

The taunt was not without its effect. Necktie Man had no wish to be left behind in anything, and he set all his remaining traps, set snares and deadfalls. The few books that he had which told about lynx he read and reread, and in one of them he found a curious little footnote.

An old trapper, talking to the writer of the book, said that once in trapping rabbits for bait, he had accidentally left a piece of gill net he used as a game bag suspended on a stick over a rabbit runway. In the morning he found a rabbit had come along the trail and entangled itself in the gill net.

Demsten knew that about six hundred feet of five-inch-mesh gill net was hung in one of the log cabins, too old to be of much use in fishing. He cut off a hundred feet of this, and put it in his pack basket, without saying anything to any one, lest he be laughed at.

On a remote loop of his line, he knew of a lynx trail. This trail was along the foot of a perpendicular cliff of

rock, and the lynx that used it had somehow escaped snares, steel traps, and deadfalls. He hung three curtains of gill net over this runway in some brush, about a foot apart. The fine linen threads were lost to view in the mass of twigs. He set a dozen of these nets for lynx and rabbits. It was an experiment, and one that Necktie Man did not care to have any one know anything about.

He returned around his loop of trap lines, and set some traps for later baiting, and went home to Pukaso, as usual. Avane was in from his line when Necktie Man arrived. All the Indians greeted him with broad smiles.

"Hi!" Old Openeyes cried. "What for did you take the old gill net from the ice house?"

"He took it to fish for fishers, and maybe he catch um lynx!" old Tophad grinned.

"What did you take it for?" Mitchi asked, laughing with the rest. "You know that little brook trout are too small for those gill nets!"

The attack was so sudden, so unexpected, and so keenly illustrative of the Indians' habit of observation that Necktie was abashed, and retreated in confusion. He suspected that Avane was the one who made the discovery that he had taken part of the gill net, but he couldn't be sure. Avane never himself said what he had himself observed, not to Necktie Man, at any rate.

They made him so uncomfortable with their jeering that he did not rest long at Pukaso. Instead, he went to his line on the second day, and on his route, such was his anger, he killed all the rabbits and partridges that he could, and hung them up in trees. They were good trap bait, but he killed twice as many as he needed, sure sign that the Indians had pierced his skin with their barbed taunts.

When he swung down into the balsam swamp where he had hung up most of his gill nets, however, he was struck by the fact that there had been another visit by the trap raider. It had come wallowing through the snow, and had gone into one of those gill nets, and had backed out again, and gone around it, making many tracks of claws in the snow. Also, among the marks of struggling was one unmistakable print of a human hand in the shallow snow under the balsam brushy top beside which the net had been hung. The net was torn to pieces, and when he looked at the tiny linen threads through his microscope, he found that they had been cut, and not bitten in two.

Then the laugh was not on Necktie Man any longer, but on Avane, the half-breed, who had come within an ace of being triced up in a gill net! This would be a fine story to tell, back in Pukaso.

But when Necktie Man went on to the next gill net, he found that some animal had been taken from it—had been caught and stolen. There were some hairs left on the linen twine, and the twine had been cut by teeth—the bruised ends of the severed twine showed that. Under the microscope, the hairs showed that they were fine and silky, and black, with white tips. A silver fox had been stolen from that gill net—and a silver fox was worth from a hundred to a thousand dollars. This was not a laughing matter.

The thief had not found all the gill nets, however, and in one of them, at the foot of the rock cliff, Necktie Man found a lynx, tangled up and dead. His netting of wild animals in the deep snow was twice vindicated. He could not accuse Avane of being the thief; he could not prove anything. It was futile for him to think of being believed in his deductions—he must bide his time, and trap on, hoping that the thief would overreach himself. He decided to tell a white lie, when he went out. He would deny that he had used the gill nets in trapping, or for any other purpose. He would accuse Avane of using the nets, for he was tired of being laughed at by the Indians.

On his return to Pukaso, two weeks later, he found that Avane was not yet back from his line. Mitchi was there, however, and this was far and away better than having Avane around, even

if the laugh was going to be on Avane. He could hardly wait for a chance to turn the tables on him.

"Have you got the rabbit skins for making rabbit blankets?" Mitchi demanded the first thing, reminding him of a promise he had made.

"Why, certainly," he answered. "I have my pack more than half full of them—more rabbit skins than furs!"

"Of course—but it is good of you to remember!"

He gave her a great mass of rabbit skins, which were frozen, and then went over to her cabin and sat by the stove while she thawed them out, and cut them into long narrow ribbons. As fast as the ribbons were cut, they curled over, fur side out, and made strings. When she had cut all the skins into strings, she began to weave them into the unrivaled rabbit-skin blanket of the North—a blanket so warm that there is no cold in that region that dismays the possessors of rabbit blankets.

"I am making this one for you," Mitchi said. "And I am making it very beautifully, for along the edges I am going to weave in some muskrat-skin strings, which will give the blanket a very noble appearance. In the middle, I shall work in some black woodchuck skin, which will give it a very fine pattern."

"It is very kind of you to favor me so," he ventured.

"Not at all," she said. "You might freeze to death without it, and then I would be to blame for not making it. We must all of us take care of poor people who are unable to take care of themselves. How strange that you should have gone to setting gill nets to catch animals! I am very sorry for such weakness——"

"I didn't take that net to set for animals—it must have been Avane! It was certainly Avane! And he tried to make you laugh at me!"

"Oh, what a fib!" she laughed at him. "You ought to be ashamed of yourself for laying it off on him. Now, isn't this going to be a beautiful rabbit blanket? I think, after what you just said, you should have two rabbit blankets!"

"Well, I didn't set gill nets——"

"Sh-h!" she exclaimed, putting her fingers on his lips. "It is bad enough for you to set them, without lying about it! Don't fool an Indian!"

He sat, flushing and badly embarrassed. She was very positive in her assertions; evidently she knew what she was talking about.

"Well, what of it? It's none of your —of you folkses' business!" he blurted out, cornered. "It works, anyhow—I got a lynx in one——"

"There!" she said. "I knew I'd catch you—you act just like a sulky boy, getting angry because we laugh at you and your book-writing ways. I think what is the matter with you is a bad temper. One had one eye—one had one leg—yes; you have a very bad temper!"

"I beg your pardon!" he said contritely. "The lonely woods get on my nerves, and I have been very tired."

"Yes? Well, you would have been less tired if you had not stormed away angry on that last trip. You should have waited three or four days, for rest. Avane does, and he is an Indian. You must rest some days. Men who do not rest lose their hearts——"

"And some who do!"

"What?"

"Some men who rest lose their hearts—and then they work so hard they lose their hearts again, and are very glad of it!"

She looked at him narrowly, while he stared at the stove. She made no further comment, but proceeded to work muskrat-fur strings into the blanket—beautiful, long, black back fur.

"Is it not pretty?" she asked.

"It is beautiful!" he exclaimed. "So beautiful that I should never have the heart to use it in the woods!"

"Of course not," she laughed. "You lost your heart twice already—how do you expect to have any more hearts?"

"Your frankness is appalling!" he muttered, after a time, trying in vain to look past the mask of her countenance. "But I cannot complain—I put my foot

or head into every trap you set to catch me!"

"And at the same time I keep out of your traps!" she smiled.

"Anyhow, she's a good pal," Necktie Man muttered to himself, as he followed the path through the snow to the Tophad cabin.

CHAPTER V.

Mitchi Openeyes saw that Necktie Man was at times abstracted and worried, and she knew that it was not about her. She tried to learn from him what was the trouble; but, though she asked him point-blank, he would not tell. She asked Avane, but he denied any knowledge of any reason why Necktie Man should be morose.

When Necktie Man returned from his next round of the line, he was angry, surly, and so short-tempered that Mitchi went to him and demanded an explanation.

"Well, I'll tell you, Mitchi. Some Johnny Sneakum is going over my Pekan Ponds loop and stealing fur. I've lost a silver fox, some fisher, three or four lynx, and other furs. It isn't so much the money value as it is the feeling that I'm being robbed!"

"You are sure some man did it?"

"He wears bear-paw moccasins with claws on them—but it's a man. Of course it's a man! He left a print of his hand in the snow when he got tangled up in one of those gill nets."

"Is that so? It is too bad to have a thief in these woods. It is whisky that does it. In the old days, no one stole fur in this country, nor traps, but now they steal furs. It is too bad. The thief follows whisky through the woods! You do not blame us—any of us?"

He hesitated a moment; a dark flush came over her countenance as he did not speak.

"No," he answered at last, more to comfort her than anything else. "No—of course I do not suspect you! How could I do that, when you have been so kind to me?"

"Of course—you do not suspect me—but my own people—Avane?"

"Now, Mitchi," he exclaimed, "I do not know, and I have found absolutely nothing to show who did it. I followed his tracks to the Old Fur Trail once, and there lost it, on the hardpan. I set traps for him, but he stole them, too. I do not see how Avane could go so far into my country and cover his own line, too. You see, I suspect no one."

"Well, some one is stealing," she whispered sadly. "Oh, the meanness of it! I am so sorry, Mr. White Man—to think that perhaps an Indian is stealing from you, our friend!"

"It may not be an Indian at all!"

"Well, I know of no white man in these woods. Do not speak to any one about this—promise me? Thank you!"

She turned away, went to her cabin, and took her shotgun and snowshoes to go walking in the woods. Necktie Man would have enjoyed going with her, but she would not permit that. The following day he started over his line again.

A good deal of the zest of the sport of the trail and trap line was gone for him. He knew now that the thief was hurting Mitchi more than him. He wished that it was not Avane, but what else could he think? The miles seemed longer that day than ever before, and he could not exult over the captures that he made, not even over a great dark marten that he caught, quite the largest he had ever taken, and worth not less than forty dollars as fur, worth many times that to him in satisfaction had he been in his normal state of mind.

While he followed his line without pleasure, more tired than he realized from the tense life and the hard toil of the trap line, Mitchi Openeyes herself was on the long trail. She was determined to know the truth about that thief, whoever he might be, whatever regrets the discovery might cause her.

She knew that wild land, and needed neither map nor compass to get through it. She packed her basket, took her twenty-five-thirty-five carbine rifle with plenty of ammunition, and struck up Pukaso River, the dividing line between

Necktie Man's trapping country and that of Avane, the half-breed. Her woodcraft and her instinct drove her straight to the one solution of the problem of whether Avane was the thief.

The miles fell away behind her, and as she tramped she watched the snow. If it was Avane, he must have a trail through that snow leading from his trap line across somewhere into Necktie Man's country. Necktie Man should have thought of that himself, but he was not quite as good a woodsman as an Indian in the study of such a problem.

With fear in her heart, but determined, she hurried on, and as she climbed each hill, as she entered each balsam swamp, as she skirted around the foot of each mountain of rock, she felt her heart sink at the thought of what might be revealed in the loose snow ahead of her. There were moose tracks, caribou tracks, tracks of a thousand animals in the snow, but no track of Avane's snowshoes, or of any other man. There was not even the track of a man who wore bear claws on his moccasins.

She hardly stopped for dinner, and great was the sense of relief in her soul when night began to draw near, and she had discovered no sign of any crossing from Avane's territory into the land that was the white man's according to the unwritten law of the wilderness. At least, she could kneel on the bed of balsam boughs which she threw down under a brush wigwam, and, with the light of the fire flaring and flashing around her, pray that she would find no more the following day, be thankful that she had found nothing on this day accusing Avane, long her brother, now pleading to be her sweetheart.

In the morning she started on again at dawn, and that night she came down into the valley where ran the fur trail, and camped beside it.

There had been no one over this part of the trail in three weeks, and the trap line had been robbed within ten days. She had proved an alibi for Avane, her half-breed friend. Between him and Necktie Man there was no cause for the cry of unfair play. Had Avane been the thief, he must have followed that fur trail—but he was not the thief. It was some poor creature hiding back there in the wilderness, some one whom whisky had broken down and driven to theft.

Her first thought was to go back to Pukaso, and await the return of the two men, and to tell Necktie Man what she had discovered, but the lust of the wilderness was in her veins, and she wanted to keep going, free and happy, among those beautiful woods and hills. From her heart had been lifted a terrible burden of doubt and apprehension. She could sing, she fairly sang the song of her delight. There are many North songs for the expression of joy in the woods—free pleasure in the wilds. Her voice echoed in the timber, and there came back the low chatterings of squirrels, of chickadees, of other creatures; some songs were in Indian, some in French, some in English. One Indian song, as she thought it, ran:

Oh, Balsam Trees—oh, Balsam Trees!
So strong and bright,
In snow so light!
Shelter of the little birds,
Shelter of the giant moose,
Place where I shall go to sleep at night!

She swung along the Old Fur Trail toward the north along the eastern border of Necktie Man's trapping lands. The cold was so bitter that it rived the timber, and the rending echoed through the wilderness. She was in no hurry now. She was just taking a walk, free as the birds, and wishing that she could read the signs that foretold the future. She was in no hurry. When in the mid-afternoon she came to one of the Fur Trail log cabins, she stopped there for the night, and reveled in its comfort and coziness. She killed two rabbits, and broiled them over a fire in front of the camp, because she did not want to cook indoors on the efficient stove. She preferred to see the flames and watch the sparks dancing through the thin blue smoke.

Just at dusk she heard the lonesome call of the woods, a low, long-drawn murmuring through the ground and

through the treetops. A little later, when the stars were shining crisply in the sky, she heard the racing yell of a leader demon of that land—the call of a wolf to his pack of gray, shaggy hunters. At that terrific sound, she shivered involuntarily. She had not thought of the wolves before. Now she remembered that she had seen many of their tracks, but her mind had been so full of the trap-thief matter that she had not given them thought.

Of course, in February, the wolves were gaunt and hungry, starving, in all probability. These wolves that she heard now, as they gathered upon a trail, yelping and baying and howling, were on some doomed victim's track—they would never give it up. Moose or deer it must be. She listened as the pack came together, and then heard the galloping race, with all the howls of accompaniment, swing in and out among the hills, across levels, up hollows—now a loud, sky-filling medley—and again a muffled echoing—as the unfortunate creature in the lead ran its hopeless race.

Suddenly the pack topped a broad-backed mountain to the eastward, and came howling straight toward the cabin, running faster, and yelping louder and louder, and then she heard, only a few rods back in the gloom, the savage, gurgling bite of one wolf as he snapped down upon a tendon. There was a hoarse moose bellow, a crash as its heavy body stumbled among the close-growing balsams. Then the yelping and the howling of the wolves resolved itself into a gnashing of teeth, growling, gasping, choking, as the pack threw itself upon the game and tore it down.

She listened for a long time, and then dropped the heavy bars in place across the door, retreated to the bunk, crept into the rabbit-fur sleeping bag which she carried, and watched the sparkles of light from cracks in the stove dart across the ceiling and up or down the walls. Afraid—far from it! She was exultant that she was there in the frozen timber, listening to the savage beasts which are the delight of strong hearts of lovers of the wilderness.

In the morning, when the sun was up, she found where the wolves had trotted by the little cabin, leaping far over the suspicious Fur Trail, the pack having divided to pass both sides of the cabin, some rods distant from it, as if they would show their contempt of man by flaunting their success so close at hand.

Rifle in hand, she went to the place where the kill was made, and stood looking at the trampled snow where clean bones, with tiny shreds of meat, glistened frostily among the paw prints, where the gaunt skull was bare on some brush, with a little red squirrel perched saucily on the forehead, its eyes bright with the light, and its paws full of a chunk of meat which the night feasters had missed.

She went on along the trail from the camp, after some hesitation. She knew the jeopardy of wolves in that terrible land, but at the same time, now that she knew it was not Avane who stole the fur, she wanted to know who it was, and stop the raiding; or, at least, have a stop put to it. It would never do to have those beautiful woods made the rendezvous of thieves.

Two days later she came to a snowshoe track coming along the Fur Trail, and followed it out into the trapping land of Necktie Man. She did not recognize the snowshoes, but the tracks made her stick up her nose with contempt, nevertheless. The webbing had been patched repeatedly, and both the hoops had been wound with rawhide because they had been split. One of the hoops was spliced with another piece of wood. There was no mistaking the snowshoe prints; they were the tracks of some wilderness hobo. The tracks were a day old, and at the first camp, about five miles down in the woods, she saw that it was a white man's camp; a wigwam around which he had draped some kind of cloth, instead of using brush and boughs as an Indian would have done.

She was angry, very angry, to think that Avane had been suspected on his account, and, without stopping to think what might be the consequences of a meeting with the thief so far back there

in the timber, she strode along the tracks, and in mid-afternoon she found where they ended in a stopping place. Beyond the stopping place, there was the trail of a wolverine, hairy and all claws.

"The beast!" she exclaimed. "The beast! He is a Gargantua—a glutton, a wolverine! He has well picked his type!"

The track led five miles to a cave, and then it led away from the cave. She went into the opening under the great rocks, and some distance inside she found a pair of snowshoes—the patched and mended snowshoes—some firewood, a blanket, and some moose meat, cooking utensils, and a cloth bag of cartridges.

The cartridges were on the floor of the cavern, several feet from the camp kit, and she did not know what to make of them. They were old cartridges, forty-four-forties, stained with green—verdigris.

"He must have lost them!" she muttered. "He would not have left them that way, if he hadn't. If he doesn't know he's lost them till he has shot all his other cartridges, he'll be in a bad way, perhaps—those wolves would make it bad for him!"

It was already near night, and Mitchi Openeyes hardly knew what to do. That was the most comfortable place to stay anywhere around there, she guessed, but she most decidedly did not want to be there if the thief came back that night. However, if he should come, she told herself, he would take his things and go. Her carbine rifle was a guarantee of that. As night came down, there was another howl out in the wilderness, and another wolf pack gathered for the hunt.

She piled up some stones in the entrance to the cave, so that the way was barred, and, by the light of spruce-pitch sticks, she made herself comfortable for the night, a very small dry-wood fire warming up the air within the cave. She watched at the barrier till after dark, but all she could hear was the wolves, who seemed to be miles away, barking and yelping. For some reason they were not racing that night. She thought they might be hunting rabbits in a swamp, packs sometimes rounding the little jumpers under the balsams. She could make nothing of their howls and barks.

Of course, her sleep that night was fitful, and she was up before dawn, getting her breakfast. After breakfast, she left the cave without regret, and followed the tracks the thief had made away from the den. They led several miles down to Necktie Man's trap line, and at the first trap she saw that he had taken a marten. Two traps beyond he had taken a fisher. She kept on, and found that he had destroyed several traps in clumsy imitation of the wolverine, and then she saw that the thief was growing tired. Wallowing through the snow with only the paws on his feet was hard work, though the snow was only about two feet deep. He had grown careless, and in two places sat down to rest. Then cunningly, with his paws, he had rounded out the dent in the snow, to make it appear as if the wolverine had curled down to sleep there.

For ten miles he followed the trap line, and then turned off, and she turned off with him, and a mile from the line she found where a pack of wolves had struck into the tracks of the trap thief, galloping at full speed, their breasts heaving the snow ahead of them, they had raced with such eagerness.

"Why," she thought, "that couldn't have been last night. They were not racing last night."

As she hesitated in thought, she noticed that it was getting late in the day again, that the wolves would soon be coming out. She did not know where she could stop that night, and the trail led through a deep balsam swamp. She walked along the trail a few rods farther doubtfully, and then she came to where the wolf pack had split, and in all directions the wolf tracks circled and turned. She followed the man's false track, and soon came to where he had broken into a run. Then she found his rifle thrown against a tree. It was

an old, single-shot rifle, and it was empty. He had shot at something, and then fled, for he had no cartridges.

"It must have been the wolves!" she exclaimed, her anger giving way to pity, as she started on along the leaping footprints. She had only gone a hundred yards when in a tree in an opening in the swamp she saw a dark figure near the top, among the branches. She stopped and stared at it with awe.

It was a man. She went nearer, and she saw the snow on his cap, and on his clothes. When she got around to where she could see his face, she uttered a low cry of horror. The thief would steal no more traps, for he had frozen to death there in the tree, into which he had climbed to escape the wolves.

"Poor old Petron!" she exclaimed. "Poor old man! It *was* whisky! I knew it was whisky!"

As if in answer to her voice came a howl out in the hills at the border of the swamp—the howl of a wolf. They were coming out early that day. As she turned back on her trail with a gasp of apprehension for her own safety, she saw that one of the wolves had ventured up among the branches of the balsam tree till it could seize the bear-paw moccasin. That foot was bare. On the other foot, however, was the stuffed bear paw.

"Poor old Petron!" she exclaimed. "I must hurry away from here before the wolves come back!"

Soon she was clear of the race course of the wolves around the tree, and on the back track. She knew the trap-line cabin could not be far along the Necktie Man's line beyond the place where Petron had left it, for they had come so far on the trail. But before she was back on the trap line, dusk began to close down upon the woods. With the dusk came louder and nearer cries of wolves. Soon she caught a glimpse of a shaggy figure out in the timber, and a moment later, on the other side, she spied another. Then one of the wolves raised his ugly head above a balsam bush not twenty yards from her, and she fired at him.

As he reared up, and tumbled over backward with a gasp, from a dozen different directions came the growling anger of other wolves. She saw several rushing beyond the bush where she had knocked the one down. She heard them in their cannibal feast, as she raced with all her might toward the trap line. She had not gone far before she was compelled to turn and fire again as one of the gray monsters came up behind her. He turned back with a yell of pain, and she saw that he was gashed along the side by the bullet. He was no sooner out of sight among the trees than she heard his companions set upon and rend him to pieces.

She reached the trap line and leaped along it toward the camp, and, as she ran, she knew that the wolves were coming again, growing bolder with the increasing night gloom. She missed two shots, and then struck another one, as she knew by his yelp. As she ran, she filled the rifle magazine, and emptied it again—but it was so dark now that she knew she must get into a tree if she would save her life.

She came to a well-branched balsam, and, looking back to see that nothing was close enough to leap upon her, she loosed the strings of her snowshoes, fired twice into a shade that came too near, and then, with her snowshoes and rifle hanging from her pack, she swung up till she was clear of any wolf's jump. Then she made the pack fast on one side, the snowshoes on the other, and drew out a rabbit which she had broiled that noon, in case she should want a cold lunch that night. She approved her forethought very much as she ate it.

The wolves were suspicious of the tree at first, but they closed in slowly, as she could hear by their running through the snow just out of sight, circling around her as they had circled around that other one who had been treed in that part of the land. She shivered when she thought of him. She waited, after she had eaten, rifle in hand. At last the wolves were at the foot of the tree, and snapping at the bark and at the lower branches. A new moon was high in the sky, and by its faint light she aimed, and, with quick

shots, emptied the carbine into the fanged mass on the snow beneath.

There was a rush away, as yelping and baffled wolves retreated. On the snow other wolves tumbled and struggled. One started to crawl away. In the pity of her heart for his suffering, she shot to put him out of his misery. The echo of the shot was the gnashing of teeth and yelps and howls as wolves raged in the swamp. Now and then one or another hunger-smitten beast would make a rush to seize a dead wolf, but she drove each back or stopped the rush with a bullet.

Hard learned, the lesson was understood by the wolves, and they kept in the gloom beyond the circle of her vision. Then she felt the cold creeping over her, and realized that this was a more subtle, more dangerous enemy than the wolves. She fought against the chill, but her race had been long, her fatigue great, and she was damp with perspiration.

She thought that she would freeze to death, and was about to lash herself to the tree trunk, rather than risk falling into those fangs that waited for her. She was reaching into her pack for something of which to make a rope, when her hands came to the rabbit-fur bag. She uttered a little cry of satisfaction, and soon she had drawn it up over her feet, and drawn the puckering string fast around just under her arms. Over her shoulders she wrapped a sweater, and with two extra snowshoe strings she lashed herself fast, sitting on a solid bank of balsam limbs.

Then the chills of the night ceased troubling her, and with composure she found herself dozing into a comfortable sleep, awakened only by an occasional surly snap or growl out in the timber, where the wolves waited for her to fall down.

CHAPTER VI.

Arthur Demsten started on his trip around his trap line and over the loops. As he tramped along he considered what things he was doing there in those wilds; were they good things for a man of his education and his ability to be mixed up in? It was a hard question to answer.

Almost by accident he had been led into the winter study of wild animals on that bleak lake shore and inland through the wilderness. He had supposed the woods were beautiful and calm and restful, and in some measure he had been led into the study of wild life by the thought that here was a peaceful occupation, without wickedness, and remote from the disgrace and dishonor of other occupations.

Now he found himself troubled and his mind embittered by the wrong that a trap thief was doing him. Why should such ignorant people, such contemptible people as petty thieves trouble him, who loved peace and beauty, and who would have been glad to give ten times the price of a silver fox for peace and rest and comfort—ten times a thousand dollars if he could find a land where there was no thief, no unhappiness, no bitter rivalry, no wronging of one's fellow man?

In a far settlement, among Indians who were kind and peace loving, even if they did tease him some and bother him some, he had hoped to be able to pursue his calling—his peaceable calling of loving nature and observing it—he was now called upon by his restless conscience to protect himself from a thief. That he suspected one of the men in Pukaso, the haven of rest he had found, only made the problem the harder to understand.

"Why am I pestered so?" he muttered to himself, and then savagely: "I might as well be fighting crooked politicians back home as hunting a trap thief—a poor devil of a trap thief—up here in the woods!"

Instantly his alert mind caught the significance of that statement. What he had never admitted to himself, what no one had ever suggested to him before, he now saw stated in searing sentences across his mind.

"You ran away from home to escape your duties toward men there—and find that in dodging the political duties of

your ward you've taken up policemen's duty in the Canadian wilderness—so what is your gain by that?"

His success on the trap line was as great this time as on previous trips. There were martens and mink, several otters, three foxes, fishers, and in his fish nets, which he had set along all his lines now, there were five lynx and two beautiful black foxes.

There was little to exult him in these things, however. The hour when he struck into the part of this trap line where the thief had made his raids, all the hard feelings and anger returned in overwhelming force. It was easy to think of murder, back there in the woods, and Necktie Man caught himself thinking that if he did kill a man there, he could hide the body, and none would ever find it. The thought horrified his better self, and yet the innate savagery of his heart struggled to make it seem right to kill a man who stole traps.

"If I meet Avane in these woods, he will have to explain himself!" Necktie Man exclaimed. "I'll see if some red thief will rob me here in the woods!"

The wilderness was bringing out the long-hidden instincts of the Demsten family, and Arthur Demsten fought them with all the gentleness and all the reason and all the horror of violence that are the sweetest flowers of civilization. But it was all in vain. With his rifle ready for instant use, he hunted along his trap line, ready to shoot any man who should appear and fail to surrender. He was so eager to get over his lines that he passed one camp toward midday, and soon afterward found a snowshoe track striking into his trap-line trail.

"The thief!" he cried. "The thief! He has thrown off the mask of his wolverine paws, and now comes like a man! They're fresh tracks, too, made yesterday!"

He raced along, not stopping to put up the devastated trap cubbies, the disheveled fish nets. He had ceased to be a trapper for the time being, and now he was a man hunter, the brutal lust of the man hunt stirring his soul, and making his heart grow cold with sullen hate and stony anger.

He was blind to the reading of the trap-line trail. The only place where he stopped in doubt was where the snowshoe track turned off into the woods. There he found the track coming into the trap line again. He made sure that the snowshoes were the same going and coming. He hardly paused to wonder about the countless tracks of wolves crossing and recrossing the trap line and plunging in the snowshoe tracks.

He came to a tree under which were many dead wolves, some of which had been torn by the fangs of other wolves. From this tree the snowshoe tracks led fresh, and made that day.

"The poor devil of a thief was treed by the wolves! I'll come up with him now. Much obliged, Brother Wolves!" Demsten exclaimed, as he threw down his pack, drew his belt a notch tighter, and started on the run, the long snowshoe lope that is faster than a run.

He swept along the trail a mile, and came to one of the wigwams which he and Tophad had built. Smoke was coming from the chimney in the smoke hole, and he could smell frying rabbits in the little opening in the swamp. He flung himself across the open and through the paper-birch sides of the wigwam, with a shout:

"You thief—hands up!"

"What!" exclaimed Mitchi Openeyes, turning, startled by the crash. "Oh, it is you, is it? And you call *me* a thief!"

Necktie Man stopped, astounded, for Mitchi Openeyes looked him in the eyes, her face growing a richer color as, in her indignation, she faced him.

"Why, I—you——"

"You come with me," she said coldly, taking the frying pan off the stove and closing the dampers.

She stepped through the hole in the wigwam, which he had made in his anger, and put on her snowshoes, picked up her carbine, and led the way along his back track, where he had taken such tremendous strides in pursuit of her. Two or three times he tried to speak to

her, but she stopped him by a gesture or a sharp: "Keep still!"

She passed the tree in which she had been treed by the wolves, and he ventured to ask her:

"Did you stay there all night—treed by the wolves?"

"It does not matter—you suspected me of being a thief!"

She turned down at the trail where he had hesitated, to make sure which way the snowshoer had gone. Down the long, gentle grade, and a quarter of a mile back in the level swamp, she stopped and stepped aside, as she flipped her hand toward the tree ahead of her.

He glanced up, and there hung old Petron, poor devil of a wilderness hobo, victim of fur-trader whisky; from his back hung several furs, marten, mink, and fisher, which he had stolen, and which Necktie Man knew he had stolen along the trap line.

Necktie Man stared, and slowly, while he stared, took off his hat in the presence of the dead. Then he lowered his eyes to the eyes of Mitchi Openeyes, but instantly turned away under the scrutiny of that blazing indignation.

"I—I beg your pardon!" he whispered. "I—I—won't you forgive me? Oh, it was because I loved you that I stayed in these woods, in this wilderness!"

"It was because you loved yourself that you stayed here!" she corrected him. "Because you thought that I would help you love yourself!"

Hard as were her words, her voice was not pitched in anger, but fell to pity and sorrow.

"Don't say that!" he begged.

"Oh, but I must—I must tell you the truth—can't you see what you have done? What a beautiful dream you have awakened me from? Oh, I am so—so happy!"

She turned and led the way toward the wigwam. She did not remain there long, but picked up all her things, and started away through the woods. He pleaded, remonstrated, begged her not to go, but to let him go instead.

"No," she said; "I shall not be in any danger. I have plenty of time in which to reach the camp where I stopped night before last, before I found poor Petron. I am safe. I would not have you worry about me."

She slipped into the woods, and the balsam branches closed behind her, like a veil, like the beautiful curtain that they made. He watched her go, and then repaired the wigwam.

"Of course," he said to himself, "she couldn't stay here. She'll be all right when we get out to Pukaso."

He spent several days fixing up his trap line, and getting things to rights where the thief had been operating. He took the body down from the tree and buried it decently, under a huge leaning stone, and covered it with heavy logs. He told himself that he was giving Mitchi Openeyes time to forget that he had wronged her and Avane in his thoughts.

When he returned to the clearing at Pukaso, however, old Tophad had some news to tell him. Father Canoughly had come through to Pukaso to look after the members of his flock there. He had found them in a good spiritual state of mind. If he could have waited longer, a great event would have been deferred for sake of Necktie Man, but the father could not delay, as he was in a hurry.

Thus Necktie Man missed the wedding of Mitchi Openeyes with Avane Lokaman. Mitchi herself had expressed her sorrow, and had left a letter for him. Tophad gave the letter over, a very beautiful envelope of paper-birch bark, carefully sealed with melted spruce gum:

DEAR NECKTIE MAN: I know that I do well, and that it is for your sake and for Avane's sake that I marry him, as you see I have done. I am no longer angry, however, and I am very, very sad, thinking of how much I may mean to you, when I am not so to be regarded, except by Avane, who is my kind. And as I think of it, one had one eye, one one leg, and Milton was blind and Homer, too, and Swift was crazy, so I think it is best, for I have not what you lack to make up. So I say, as I leave with Avane to make this our first trip together, I wish you every happiness, and I am still your friend, as is Avane, who is good and

does not remember unpleasant things, nor know what you thought. So I say be good—be strong, and think first and speak second.

Very truly yours, MITCHI.

Necktie Man read the letter over and over again, and then he read other letters from the outside world which Father Canoughly had brought for him. From his own people came pleadings that he join them and stop his ridiculous fussing around in the wilderness when the world needed him for better work than setting traps and living in wigwams.

"So be it!" Arthur Demsten answered in his heart, with some dramatic emphasis. He packed up, and when Tophad's dog-team sled was loaded with his books and duffle, he sat down to write a letter on his typewriter, before lashing it fast for the early start in the morning.

MY DEAR MITCHI: What you say is true, and I thank you. What you said is true, too, but forgive me now. I am glad that you are to be very happy, as you are sure to be with Avane, and I hope that you will always grow happier and wiser. Now I am called out to the people of my own country, and to work among my own people, so I am going, and at once. I trust that you and Avane will accept my trap line, and all its traps, and all the cabins and wigwams, and all their contents, as a wedding gift to you, so fare you well, my good friends. As ever,

NECKTIE MAN, alias ARTHUR DEMSTEN.

Nor was this quite the end, for, after a time, there came to Arthur Demsten, now candidate for the assembly, a perfectly beautiful robe of otter furs, trimmed with ermine.

"I changed my mind about the rabbit-skin robe," she wrote. "Oh, but the camps and the trails that you made are beautiful, and Avane and I find them better than our own. And I thank you, Necktie Man, for what you did for poor Petron. We went to do that for him, and found by his tomb another evidence of how much larger you are than your Indian friends."

LEARNING THE GAME

BRINTON BUCKWALTER, nephew of George B. McClellan, ex-mayor of New York, upon leaving college thought he would like to try his hand at the political game. His uncle tried to talk him out of it, but was finally forced to consent to find him a berth. So McClellan took the matter up with Charlie Murphy, the Tammany chief, and told him to find the boy something that would make him sick of the game for all time. Buckwalter, wealthy in his own right, was then living in a bachelor apartment in an exclusive section of Madison Avenue, and employed a valet who had the distinction of having taught Colonel Roosevelt the gentle art of jujutsu.

"So you want to get into politics," said Murphy, who had sent for the young man. "Well, you'll find it a tough game, but I'll give you a chance." And he then ordered him to report to a leader of one of the toughest districts on the lower East Side, to live there and become one of the gang.

About two weeks later the lower East Side leader rushed into Murphy's sanctum.

"Mr. Murphy," he exclaimed. "I can stand the likes of them two fellers no longer."

"Who's that?" asked Murphy.

"Why, that young dude and his yeller Jap you sent me," answered the leader.

Murphy's big, oval face twitched with a semblance of a smile as he again inquired: "What's the matter, have your boys been teaching them the game?"

"My boys!" shouted the leader. "Why, between the dude and his Jap there won't be a voter left. The dude has knocked out most of me best men, and that yeller plague of his has twisted the others all out of shape."

Duty

By James Hay, Jr.

HIS name is Duty. No man denies him with impunity. All who follow his bidding enrich the world.

He puts into our hands the strong staff of Ambition,

Or charms our gaze with the glamour of Achievement,

Or scourges us through the weary years with the knout of Necessity.

He goes unmasked, so that none may say, "I knew him not," and, because of this, his prime ministers are Industry, and Pain, and Storm—and his greatest warriors are Dreams, and Beauty, and Laughter.

He drives the pale, bowed toiler to his deadly routine, and nerves the strong hand to clutch the throat of misery, and sends the brave soul to stamp out the fires of affliction.

He tears the veil from the ugliness of idle luxury,

And flays men from the lilac lanes of passion,

And rears the wall of self-denial, over which all must climb to reach the greater goals of life.

Strong, grim, irresistible, he stands forever at desk, at plow, at violin, and in the factory, and, through his absolute sovereignty, leads us to the places where we may give bread to those who hunger,

Or loveliness to eyes that have seen only sordid things,

Or laughter to faces that have been scalded by tears,

Or valor to hearts that have closed their doors to hope.

And always the children of Duty are beautiful children.

There are among them all the lovely stories ever written,

The portrait which makes pilgrims of millions that they may see the woman's smile,

The poetry of Romeo, and the shame of Shylock,

The men who have sacrificed themselves to patriotism,

The women who have broken their hearts on shattered ideals,

All those noble things which, performed in obscurity or achieved in the glare of public notice, have become golden threads in that marvelous weave we call Civilization.

Duty is king. He is more than king.

He is the foundation of religion, the father of courage, and the adornment of every useful man and woman.

Without Duty, there would be neither purity, nor bravery, nor law.

He has been the searchlight of all the centuries, and he has found and brought to the surface of humanity's sea its every good and perfect gift.

And all this explains why men follow him to the end.

The Black Diamond

By Bozeman Bulger

There are just two things on which the Cuban mind dotes. One is revolution and the other is baseball. There's a little of both in this story

NOW that bullfighting is but a sweet memory, and jai alai games have been denied the betting public, there are just two things on which the Cuban mind dotes. One is revolution; the other baseball. So, it should be plain that when these two sports break out simultaneously, nobody will be going around with a bored look making inquiries about what there is to see.

In a way of speaking, the successful revolutionist and the baseball star who can bat three hundred per cent go hand in hand. Either can walk down the Prado, with his chest expanded, and receive as many bravos to the square inch as ever swelled a matador's bosom. And, remember, the matador, for years, led the bravo league!

Take it from a camp follower of the big league, Cuba is the natural habitat of the hero. When heroing is good, Havana pays one hundred cents on the dollar. It follows that when revoluting is in flower, there is no use in a good show stopping over for a week's stand. Baseball holds its own because the revolution magnates can't get together like their diamond rivals and arrange a schedule that will eliminate the long jumps, and give the people at least three well-played battles a week. There would be no lack of support on the part of the public. For example, when the revolution which we are now about to consider broke out there were any number of American adventurers and their Cuban prototypes who went out with the scouting rurales for no other reason than to get a slight thrill of danger and a few pot shots at the outlawed blacks who had organized roving bands of guerrillas. Somehow this love of danger—and it is not so terribly dangerous, at that—is in the air. Even the children cry for it. The militant Cuban says we Americans take life and death too seriously, and maybe we do. Who can say?

So it is, we find Company A of the Fourth Regiment, encamped at the village of El Doro, about five kilometers from Ingenio Hatillo, the nearest railway station, in the State of Santiago de Cuba, the nesting ground of insurrection. It is the open season for revolution, and with Company A, business is picking up.

Officered by the most dashing captain in the whole army, and practically run by First Sergeant Rodriguez, this crack company had come all the way from Havana to crush out the rebellion started by the activities of the Partido Independiente de Color. This crushing process was to be done with the iron hand, bandaged in red tape. Already the rurales, an organization of the ranger type, had ruthlessly shot down three thousand black men who had ignored the military order to concentrate in the cities. These figures may be unofficial, but that has nothing to do with this story. The government wanted the rebellion suppressed in a more official way, and was going about it in a very businesslike way.

To tell the truth, this particular revolution was against the open-season rules recognized by all true lovers of the sport, and consequently lost much of its drawing qualities. Absolutely stripped of opéra-bouffe features, it was sadly

lacking in color effect. A red sash could not be seen in a whole day's ride. The Cuban army adopted the brown khaki of Uncle Sam two years before that.

It was a fight between the races, and the uprising blacks were a serious menace. Unless nipped in the bud this revolution might bring about intervention by the United States, a thing most undesirable to the powers that be—or were.

In three days, assisted by the rurales, the soldiers of Company A had made a fair catch of revolutionary prisoners. Most of the captives had been executed after perfunctory field trials. Others waited a hearing. The officers, working under carte-blanche orders, were wielding the aforementioned iron hand with a batting average of easily three hundred per cent.

It was early in November, but that does not necessarily make it any cooler. The camp sweltered in the tropical heat, and all hands tired of their sanguinary duties.

"Rodriguez!" It was a sharp command from the captain's officelike tent. "Bring me your list of prisoners."

"Si, señor, mi capitan!" The faithful old sergeant entered and stood at attention, stretching his five feet four inches, and his one hundred and thirty pounds, until he was as taut as the E string on a violin. "It is made out with completeness," he reported, and with a salute placed the official-looking sheet on the rickety table, resuming his taut pose.

With a pencil behind his ear Rodriguez, as he stood there, looked more the court clerk than the soldier. To Americanize the description, Red Tape was his middle name. For just that reason he had been assigned to Company A. This grizzled relic of a score of early revolutions, leather-faced and quite gray, looked the part. He pulled at his long mustachios that were his facial specialty, while from under overhanging bushy brows his black eyes followed the captain's finger, as it went down the list of names. These mustachios, by the way, gave one the impression of having been grown just long enough for their owner to get a good handhold on each side. A whole handful of mustache to stroke or pull, any Spanish expert will tell you, is much more impressive than the closer cropped one requiring a dainty twist with the tips of the fingers. In Cuba, this particular set was an institution loved and respected by all.

Sergeant Rodriguez also had a slight limp in his left leg, an inheritance from the war of 1898, and an infirmity of which he was quite proud. For several years he had been assigned to headquarters in Havana, and had things rather easy. Having been a hero in the affairs leading up to the foundation of the republic, Rodriguez was allowed liberties unusual to one of his rank. Partial freedom from the ordinary army discipline had given him a chance at the gayeties of the city. In a noncommissioned way, he was like his captain, a man about town. The old sergeant loved his opera, his suppers of Morro crabs at the Luz, his drives along the Malecon, his tilts against the dealer of vingt et un at a club in Calle Blanco, and his monthly perusal of the *lista de la Loteria Nacional.* It was his sorrow, that in all these years he had yet to catch a winning number.

Right down at heart, though, Rodriguez was a baseball fan of the dreadnaught type. He, or his captain, for that matter, could tell you offhand the batting average of any Spanish-speaking player you might name, but to ascertain the details regarding the movement of troops they would have to go to the books. Even in the midst of the rather gruesome work at El Doro, Sergeant Rodriguez saw to it that an orderly made daily trips to Ingenio Hatillo to get the sporting newspapers from Havana.

The Blue Sox were on their way from the United States to play the Cubans for the championship, and it was incumbent upon Rodriguez, along with his other duties, to keep a tab on the line-up of the Almendares, the Cuban stars. He felt most keenly his inability to be in Havana and confer with Man-

ager Carillo. He could have told Carillo just what players to use.

The absence of these manifold delights had made the old sergeant a little peevish as he stood there waiting for the captain to speak. The knowledge that for a week he would have no more excitement in life than the sentencing of a few black guerrillas to be shot, and the possibility that he might miss the first game of the series with the Blue Sox, irked him.

"One moment, please, sergeant." Rodriguez waited while the handsome captain strained a freshly made Daiquiri, that insidious Cuban rum cocktail, into a smaller glass. Military etiquette did not permit of an invitation to Rodriguez, but the captain was too humane to drink it in the old sergeant's presence.

"How many are ready for trial?" inquired the captain.

"Fourteen, *mi capitan.*"

"All guilty?"

Rodriguez smiled and saluted, as much as to say: "It is sufficient, señor, that they were caught."

"Have they anything to say in defense?" asked the captain, as he touched the edge of the cocktail glass with the tips of his fingers, to assure himself that it was still cold. At heart he did not relish the idea of having so many men shot, even if they were guilty of treason. Long life in the city had softened him.

"They expected to be shot, señor, when they were caught," replied the sergeant. "Mercy they ask not. They feel it an honor to die so, *mi capitan.* Many boast of the murders they have committed—their assassinations from ambush."

The captain reached for a pen and signed the order.

"You may proceed with the first squad, sergeant."

As Rodriguez folded the paper and turned away, there came to the captain a generous thought.

"Wait, sergeant," he called to Rodriguez. "Are there any prominent blacks among the prisoners?"

"Four that I have seen, *mi capitan,*" the sergeant answered. "You know, many of the educated black men from the city quit their professions to join the revolution. They are most loyal to their beliefs, señor. Of these four, two are doctors, one a journalist, and one is a musician. I have yet to inspect those that have come from Santos."

"Those in whose lives there has been something meritorious," the captain instructed, "may have the privilege of selecting their own burial boxes."

"Begging your pardon, *mi capitan,* but that is quite an honor for a prisoner guilty of treason, is it not?"

"I quite understand that, Rodriguez, but this morning I feel very human."

The captain also wanted to drink that Daiquiri before it had lost its punch. He dismissed the sergeant with a wave of the hand, and drained the cocktail to the last drop. Immediately he called for cracked ice, some limes and rum, and mixed another.

As was said before, the Daiquiri cocktail is insidious. It is a saying in the tropics that two make one joyous, but at four one must stop, otherwise it will stop one. American tipplers who have laughed at this dead line have found to their chagrin that in the fifth Daiquiri there is something synonomous with the kick-back in the crank of a high-powered motor car.

The captain was careful. After the second he leaned back, lighted a cigarro, and allowed his mind to drift to Havana. He saw the twinkling lights of the Plaza, the crowds around the bulletin boards of *El Mundo, La Lucha, La Prensa,* and other dailies that made a specialty of sports; he saw the betting commissioners gathered at the Cosmopolita. Then—the captain suddenly sat up. The Blue Sox were on their way!

A copy of *La Prensa* lay on the camp table; the officer turned to the sporting page. He had several small bets on the coming series, and must know that things were going right with the Almendares. Through two tables of batting averages the captain waded. Suddenly, the ends of his handsome

black mustache pricked up like the ears of a Boston bull terrier.

"No, it cannot be," he thought to himself. "It is the newspaper talk." Just the same, there was the little item telling of how Jacinto Mendoza, the Black Diamond, the hope of Cuba, had disappeared. A two-day search had failed to find him.

Try as he would, the captain could not dismiss it from his mind as a hoax. "Maybe," he thought, "the white players who didn't like the idea of having negro teammates drove him away. But, no, that could not be. The white players were depending upon Mendoza to lead them to a victory."

From the distance there came the sound of a volley of musketry. Several more members of the Partido Independiente de Color had gone the way of the three thousand. That was all. A slight shrug of the shoulders, and the captain was back among the box scores. The Mendoza article stared at him from the sporting page.

"Rodriguez might know." The thought came to his mind. So the captain buckled on his sword, and strode to the guardhouse, fifty feet away. There he found the old sergeant. A new squad of prisoners was being herded in.

Rodriguez looked up inquiringly, as the captain entered with *La Prensa* in his hand.

"Do you know anything about this, sergeant?" asked the captain, pointing to the item in the paper.

"*Caramba!*" exclaimed Rodriguez. "It cannot be, *mi capitan*. No, no. Do not tell me it is true. The Almendares would be ruined."

"There it is, sergeant. That is all I know about it. I thought perhaps you would know."

"Away from our dear Havana, señor, I know nothing," half moaned the old fellow.

Rodriguez took the paper and stepped to the entrance of the tent where he could see more plainly. He read and reread the item.

The captain, in the meantime, carelessly glanced at the black faces of the prisoners who awaited sentence. In the back row he espied a muscular, square-shouldered negro, with mud-bespattered face, his arms tightly bound with a hemp rope. Something about the figure struck the captain as being familiar; but, without his glasses, he could not make out the negro's features. The captain was nearsighted.

"I do not believe it, *mi capitan*," said Rodriguez as he returned the newspaper to the officer. "Manager Carillo will not permit it to be so."

The sergeant's air of finality seemed to give the captain considerable relief. Rodriguez proceeded with his work.

The prisoners were brought forward one by one, and one by one were sent away in charge of the guards. Finally it came the turn of the fellow in the rear, and the captain, an interested spectator by this time, adjusted his glasses on his nose to have a better look.

"That fellow seems to be uncomfortable," he said to Rodriguez. "Have him brought here to me."

Two soldiers obeyed the order with alacrity. The black prisoner answered all questions in mumbled monosyllables, and refused to lift his head.

"Who is he?" asked the captain, leaning over Rodriguez's shoulder. With a lone, gnarled finger the sergeant was running down the list trying to find the name. Many of the prisoners had refused to give their names, and had taken their punishment without being identified.

"What is your name?" Rodriguez demanded of the prisoner, but there was no answer. The stubborn black had not looked up.

"I cannot place him, *mi capitan*. It makes no——"

It may have been the sight of the sporting page in the captain's hand, but something caused the unfortunate black to lift suddenly his head and focus his beadlike eyes. Rodriguez stopped his sentence, and paled as if he had seen an apparition. This was lost on the captain, who had his back to the sergeant.

"You have read the order to him,

have you not?" the commanding officer inquired.

Four soldiers, familiar with the methods of procedure, stepped forward ready to lay hands on the prisoner. Right here the workings of the Daiquiri brought out another generous impulse.

"You may allow him to select his own burial box, if you choose," continued the captain.

Rodriguez, still staring at the prisoner, had said nothing up to this time, but when the soldiers took hold of the prisoner, the sergeant acted.

"Stand back there!" he ordered, forgetting the presence of a superior officer. "Wait! With apologies to you, *mi capitan*."

The old sergeant took the captain to one side, and whispered in his ear.

"What, him? The black——" exclaimed the officer. "That is not possible."

Rodriguez managed to keep his voice too low for the guards to hear, but talked most eloquently, gesturing with his two hands, his arms, his shoulders.

"Why, *señor, mi capitan*, we would be ruined. Havana would hate us."

The soldiers saw the commanding officer light another cigarro, and take from his pocket what looked like a railway schedule.

"Bring that man here in the light," he ordered. With his own hands the captain threw back the flaps of the tent so that he could get a better view. "Wash that mud from his face."

A moistened handkerchief did the trick, and the captain gazed at the prisoner's face through his strongest glasses.

"Loosen that cord on his left arm," he said to one of the soldiers. "It seems to be hurting him. We must have not cruelty here!" The surprised soldier started to obey the order, but was stopped by a warning sign from Rodriguez, who again whispered to his commanding officer:

"Not a southpaw, *mi capitan*. He is a right-hander."

The captain's brow grew dark, as he turned to the soldiers again. "Not the left arm, you fool!" he stormed. "Don't you know the difference between left and right?"

Without waiting, the officer walked over and, with a penknife, cut the cords from the prisoner's right arm. With another stroke he ripped open the shirt sleeve. On the sinewy black arm there were several welts. These must have caused great pain, but the prisoner did not wince.

"Cut those other cords!" ordered the commanding officer, handing a soldier his penknife.

In two minutes the prisoner's arms were free. The black man was still silent. Evidently he had made up his mind to suffer death for his share in the revolution, and, apparently, he was satisfied, especially since he had been granted the honor of selecting his own burial box. Not once had he appealed for mercy, but when the captain showed a spark of human kindness by having his arms relieved of the pain from the binding cords, the poor black's eyes took on an expression of grateful wonder.

"Corporal!" The captain called to the man in charge of the squad of four. "Take that man and rub his arms with hot water. See that he gets up a good circulation. Then use on him the arnica that you will find in my tent, and bring him back here in ten minutes.

"And, listen," he called to the retiring guard, "if that prisoner catches cold in his arm I'll hold you responsible. Go!"

The captain turned to his old sergeant and asked that he be seated.

"Rodriguez," he said. "For a minute we are man and man—not a commissioned and noncommissioned officer. Have a drink!"

An orderly was sent to the captain's tent with instructions to prepare two Daiquiris. While they waited Rodriguez and the captain spread out the copy of *La Prensa*, and began to figure. In five days' time they could finish the job on hand. The orderly came with the drinks.

"This is indeed an honor, *mi capitan*," observed Rodriguez, as he raised his glass.

"I'm the man who is honored," re-

sponded the captain with that exquisite tact for which Cuban officers are noted. "Ten days from now you will be the biggest man in Havana, sergeant."

Rodriguez thought of a stroll down the Prado, and smiled.

"If there is any credit for this expedition, *mi capitan,* you must have it."

"I'll have mine in good gold coin," smiled the officer.

Rodriguez looked at him wonderingly.

They were interrupted by a soldier standing at attention at the entrance of the tent.

"Your order has been obeyed, señor," he reported to the captain. "Shall I bring him in?" The captain nodded.

The prisoner was almost smiling as he worked his arms up and down, and felt the muscles play beneath the black skin.

"Any bad effects—any kinks?" inquired the captain.

"Very little, señor." It was the first sentence the big black had spoken. "I thank you for your kindness. After I am shot my spirit will bless——"

"You are not going to be shot," snapped the commanding officer.

"Jacinto Mendoza," and he looked the black man in the eye, "if I allowed you to be shot who, I ask you, would be able to pitch against the Blue Sox? Is there not some patriotism left in Cuba?"

Mendoza, for it was indeed he, fell in a heap. Tears welled up in his eyes. In another moment he was crying like a baby.

"Then I will not have to pick out that burial box?" he whimpered.

"The only box I want to see you in," said the captain, "is the pitcher's box. Get up from there!" Mendoza arose with what a ball player would call a lot of pep.

"Get out of here, and get to the train before the others see you," ordered the sergeant. "You've got but four days to get in shape. My compliments to Manager Carrillo, and tell——"

The officers, commissioned and noncommissioned, heard the flap of the tent slap. Otherwise, the only evidence they had of the departure of the Black Diamond was a little cloud of dust, "no larger than a man's hand," that moved down the road to Ingenio Hatillo.

Then it was that Sergeant Rodriguez and El Capitan Henriquez O'Donnell Marie del Valliente y Garcia looked over the betting odds and took another Daiquiri, even though they had passed the dead line of four.

It was the ninth inning, and two were out; the score—Almendares, three; Blue Sox, nothing.

That upheaval in the crowded stand —but there is no use going into that. Here was a Cuban team, on Cuban soil, whaling the life out of the best the Americanos could produce, and here were fourteen thousand Latin-blooded baseball lunatics with an unobstructed view!

Jacinto Mendoza, the crack pitcher of all Cuba, known to man, woman, and child as the Black Diamond, poised himself to shoot the last strike over on Johnny Baker. American players around the losing bench began to pick up their bats and poke them into a large leather case. The little mascot was gathering up the sweaters. To all extents and purposes, as we would say in the big league, the pastime was over. Baker didn't particularly care whether the next one was a strike or not. There was no Latin blood in Johnny. He knew a cinch when he saw it.

In the front box, the handsome El Capitan Henriquez O'Donnell Marie del Valliente y Garcia, one of the best sports in Havana, jumped to his feet and, with the moral support of a gray-haired, heavily mustached companion, implored Mendoza to put it over, or Spanish encouragement to that effect. In one hand the captain wildly waved a panama hat, utterly careless of its future.

The ball whizzed by and, swinging listlessly, Baker missed it. The umpire's cry: "You're out!"—they say it just that way in Spanish, too—was swallowed up and lost forever. Dragging his bat, Johnny dashed for the

Blue Sox bench to avoid the crowd that swarmed over the field. Mendoza, despite his color—and the color line was very tightly drawn at that time—was seized by his admirers, and carried about on their shoulders. Victory was complete.

El Capitan Henriquez O'Donnell Marie del Valliente y Garcia thereupon put on his panama hat so as to have both hands free. For ten minutes he stood there spraying the stand with Spanish congratulations and collecting pesos.

"That guy," remarked Johnny Baker to the other Americans, marveling at the growing size of the captain's roll, "must have had a blanket bet with the whole island."

THE DESPERATE STATESMAN

WHEN the Democrats were caucusing every day last April on the tariff schedules, they inconsiderately put on the free list a product which was extensively manufactured in a new congressman's district. The new man bounced out of the caucus, took his stand in the marble corridor outside, and mopped his fevered brow.

"That kills me," he lamented. "I told my district I'd keep the duty high on that product, and now there ain't any duty. I wish I could fool my constituents in some way. Abraham Lincoln said you could fool some of the people some of the time, and some of the people all the time, but not all the people all the time. When he said that, he overestimated my ability."

MELLEN AND HIS FRIENDS

RECENT newspaper criticism of Charles S. Mellen's administration of the New Haven Railroad would naturally lead one to believe that he hadn't a friend in the world. But no matter how few his friends may have been, he always went out of his way to do them a favor if it could possibly be done.

Some time ago one of Mellen's Boston friends, short, stout, and corpulent, a problem to all tailors, found himself in a predicament. He was in New York, and had received an invitation to attend an important dinner at the Waldorf, to be given in honor of one of Wall Street's big men that same evening. It was nearly two o'clock in the afternoon when he received the invitation, and the one dress suit that would possibly fit him was at his home in Boston. To go to the dinner in business attire was out of the question; and to endeavor to find a dress suit in New York that would fit him was also out of the question.

There was only one solution, he must get that suit over from Boston. He telephoned his secretary at Boston to get the suit and rush it to New York on the first train out.

When the secretary arrived at the Boston station of the New Haven, dress suit under his arm, he found that the New York express had just left, and that the next train would not arrive in New York until nearly ten o'clock. The secretary was in a state of prostration, for the dinner was to be held at eight.

Just then Mr. Mellen came out of the station and chanced to see his friend's secretary, and also that something was wrong. He walked over to the young man and asked the trouble. The secretary told him of the telephone message, and of him just missing the New York express.

"Why, that will be all right," said Mellen. "I guess we can fix you up."

Then he strolled back into the station and gave orders that the tracks should be cleared, and a "special" made up to take the secretary and his friend's dress suit to New York. And his friend was in his allotted seat when the dinner was called, wearing a fairly well-fitting dress suit.

A Chat With You

HERE are two letters out of a great many:

"*Editor* POPULAR.

"DEAR SIR: Have you ever had the pleasure of reading certain expressed ideas which were the embodiment of your own thought? You had probably carried the ideas in your mind for a long time, when, lo and behold! you read some article only to find that the other fellow had beaten you to it.

"The experience, I believe, is a common one. The ideas may embrace thoughts on life, the invention or improvement of machinery, the founding of an institution or some change in editorial policy. In short, these ideas may be concerned with any thought or deed within human range. An experience of this nature overtook me while turning the pages of THE POPULAR and finding your editorial section in a recent number. Five years of faithful reading of your magazine should identify me as an ardent admirer of its contents. I would rather miss an installment of your best serial than omit reading your 'chat.' This statement should speak for itself, for I will not and I could not presume to discuss the merits of your literary style and its charmingly personal appeal. Often has the thought occurred to me that two or three pages devoted to topics of general human interest and written in your own inimitable style would prove a boon to your readers and a boost to your magazine. No doubt you will receive hundreds of letters written in a similar strain, but I wish to be among the foremost in congratulating you upon the policy you have inaugurated. Very truly yours,

"NORMAN ROTH, M. D.

"2083 Clinton Avenue, New York."

We know, all of us know, the experience that Doctor Roth describes. It is all too rare. It brings its own indescribable thrill. Nothing could please us more than the thought that we had helped some one to feel it. Another letter:

"*Editor* POPULAR.

"DEAR SIR: Not knowing the name of the writer responsible for the article on 'Humanness,' in the June fifteen issue of your magazine, I cannot write him a personal letter which I would like to do. Kindly tell the man, or woman, who wrote the editorial that one of your constant readers considers it worthy of Robert Louis Stevenson. Aside from the beautiful thought the editorial expresses, it is also a splendid specimen of pure, simple, eloquent modern English prose. The writer thereof is certainly to be congratulated. Yours truly,

"GEORGE F. COOK.

"108 Selden Avenue, Detroit, Mich."

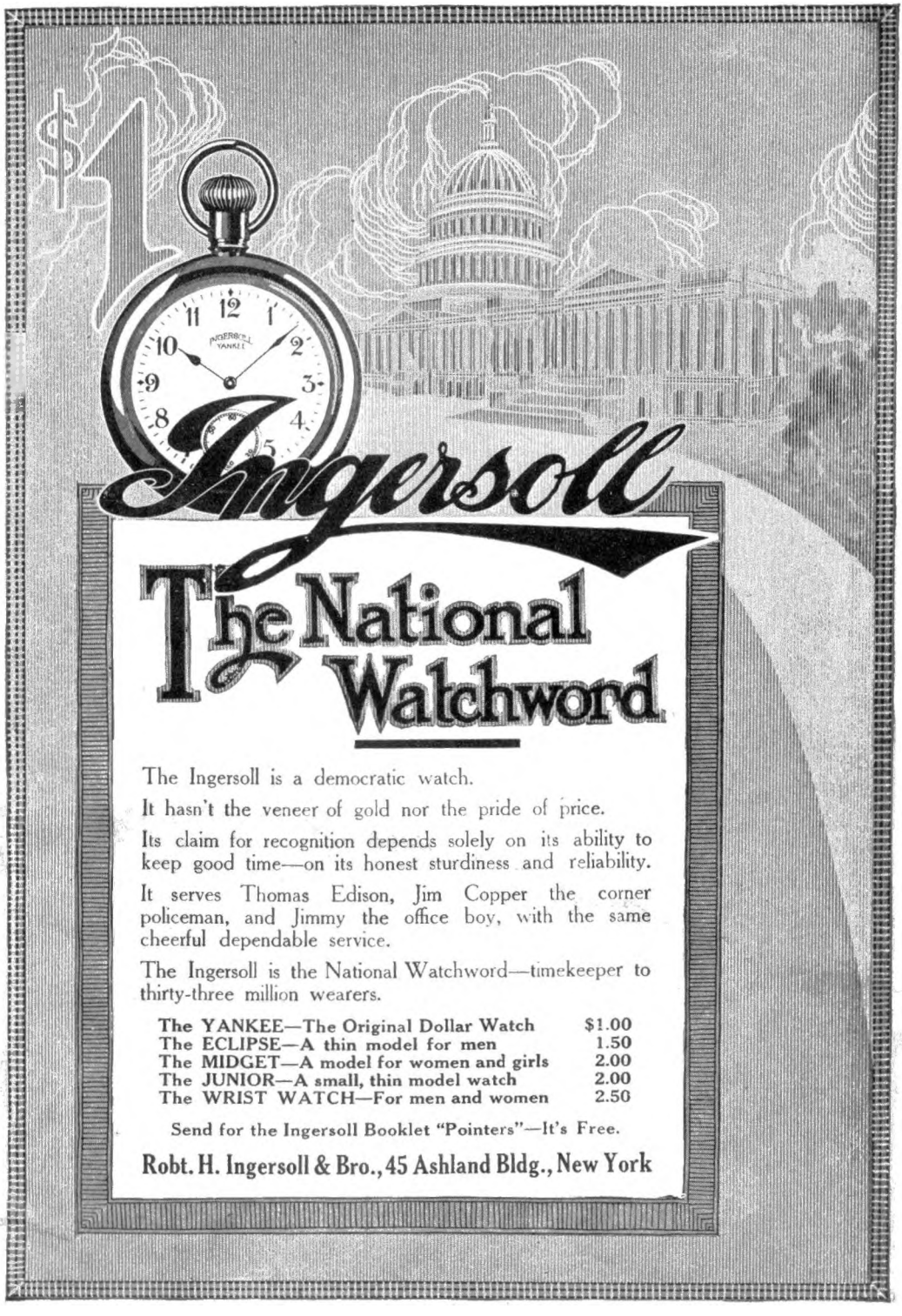
These are only two out of a great many straws, all showing how the wind blows. As space admits we will publish others. We are humbly and sincerely grateful for them all.

IN regard to the question of literary style which has been mentioned in the two letters given above, there are certain definite principles always worth remembering. More than once, you will remember, we have dwelt on the shining virtues of lucidity and simplicity. Force is the next in the order of merit, and it only comes when the man who is writing is sincere and feels strongly what he is saying. There are many ways of being insincere in print. Perhaps the commonest is an effort, on the part of the writer, to "show off" to make the reader suppose he is wiser, cleverer, or more learned than he actually is.

This sort of insincerity makes a man ridiculous. Another sort of insincerity afflicts another type of man. It is an undue reticence, a cautiousness, a bashfulness in speech or writing. Those who suffer from it are afraid of ridicule above all things. Their innermost thoughts seem too personal to go on paper for all to read. They want to express the joy, the pathos, the wonder of the life about them, but something holds them back and keeps them dumb, and when they do write they appear stilted, formal, and trite. The gift of self-expression is not given to all in equal measure. Conceit has spoiled many a writer, and bashfulness and reticence have gagged many another. There are "mute, inglorious Miltons" enough, lacking only the gifts of naturalness, of unself-consciousness.

SPEAKING of the vice of insincerity one might suppose that we, in these columns, are always under the temptation of saying too much in praise of some of the stories we expect to publish in coming numbers. This is not the case, however. We don't decide to publish anything unless we have some confidence and natural enthusiasm about it, and what we say here we really mean. We have read so many laudatory puffs of books which, on examination, turned out to be trash as to have acquired a strong prejudice against overpraise and false enthusiasm. No matter what Abraham Lincoln said, we don't want to fool even a part of the people part of the time. We don't believe it ever pays in the long run—and there are a good many people trying to do it who seem to enjoy the effort much more than we would. Our tastes lie in other directions. So when Doctor Roth, in his interesting letter, speaks of his interest in "the chat," and mentions its "literary style and charmingly personal appeal," we might feel puffed up in our own conceit and really get to thinking that we knew something about writing—but we don't. All the "charm," all the "literary style" we have comes from the fact that we try to tell only the truth in regard to something we are interested in. When we say a novel is a good novel it *is* a good novel. When we say that a story gives a vivid picture of life and conditions we mean it, and you are interested in what we say because *you believe it to be true*. That's our formula for writing an interesting "chat." Any one who wants to try it is welcome to it. You must remember, though, that in a magazine like THE POPULAR we have something especially interesting about which to write.

WE haven't left very much space to talk of the next issue, which is out in two weeks, but when we tell you that the complete novel which opens the magazine is by Burton E. Stevenson, and is a detective story, you will remember "The Destroyer" and "The Mind Master" and order your copy from the news dealer at once. The same issue contains also the first of a new series of "Competent" stories, by Roy Norton, the first installment of a great new serial, by Francis Whitlock, and some of the best short stories we have ever picked.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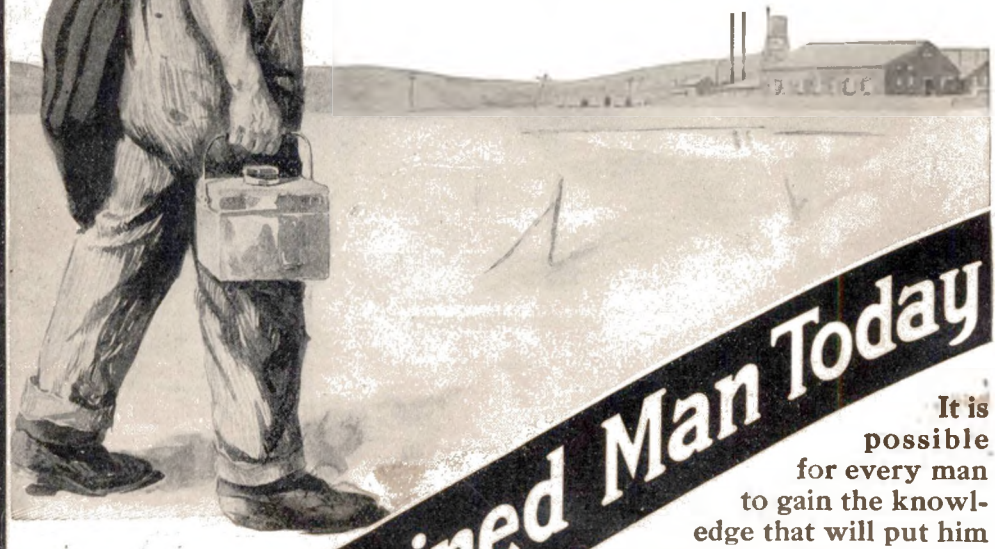

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OVERHEARD IN THE SMOKING CAR

WISE WILLIAM: Ah, that next number of THE POPULAR will be a winner. Jot down its date of issue: November 7th.

SIMPLE SIMON: What's so wonderful about it, Bill?

WISE WILLIAM (enthusiastically): A novel—all of it, too—by Burton E. Stevenson, is promised. Say, he's simply great in those mystery stories of his.

SIMPLE SIMON: Oh, yes; I read his "Boule Cabinet" in a newspaper—it took over a month of tantalizing scraps to get it all, but it was a fine story.

WISE WILLIAM: You could have read it in a few numbers of THE POPULAR.

SIMPLE SIMON: Is it possible!

WISE WILLIAM: That's the way with you boobs: you don't know a good thing until it's put under your nose. Why, THE POPULAR always has the best stories, either given complete in one number, or at most in three or four issues; and it comes out every two weeks.

SIMPLE SIMON: Is it possible!

WISE WILLIAM (irritably): There you go again! Switch those first two words—*it is* possible. Furthermore, in the next issue—which I will buy for you if you fail to get it—there will be the first big slice of Whitlock's new "Lost Legion" story. I never miss them.

SIMPLE SIMON (becoming interested): Sounds good. What else?

WISE WILLIAM: Roy Norton has one of his "Competents" yarns in it, too. Alaska's the scene. He has a bunch of guys up there, and they're the real thing. I imagine I know 'em. Then there is a prize-fight story by Van Loan. Say, that writer's a bird. Know him? And a railroad story by Packard is scheduled. Fine stuff!

SIMPLE SIMON: Does any of Bower's—B. M. Bower, you know—stories appear in THE POPULAR?

WISE WILLIAM: All of 'em. And in the next number there is one called, "The Rosary and Little John——"

SIMPLE SIMON: Golly, all that dope sounds like a pipe dream. Almost too good to be true. But you needn't bother about buying me the next number; I'll make a note of it now. What did you say the date was?

WISE WILLIAM: November 7th, and be sure you don't wait several days after that, or you're likely to miss the number. So long!

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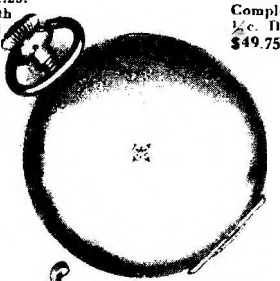

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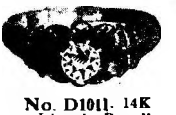

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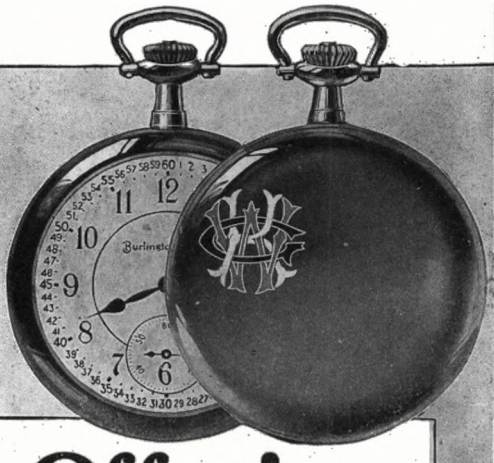

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