TWICE-A-MONTH 15 CENTS

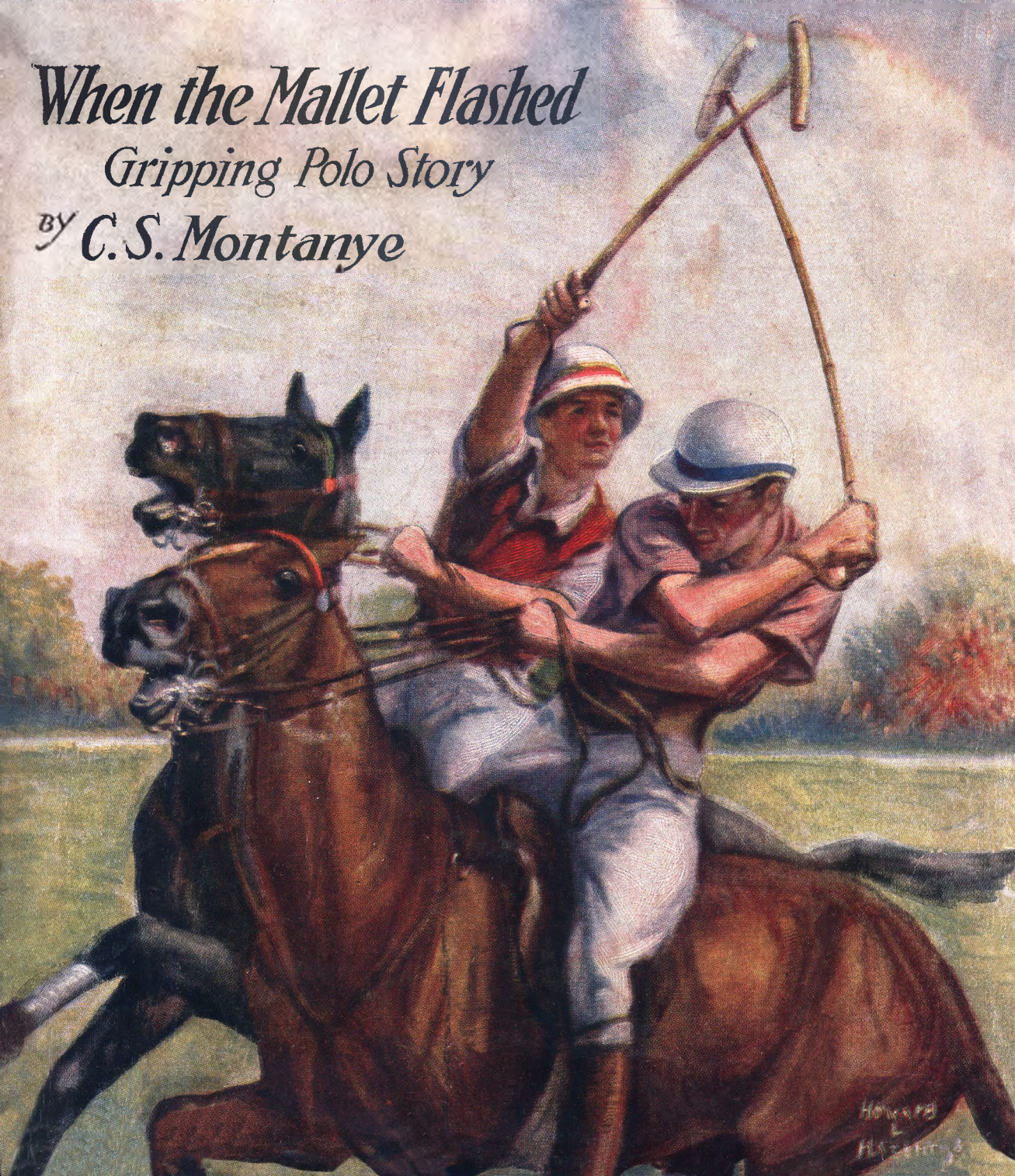
Top-Notch Magazine

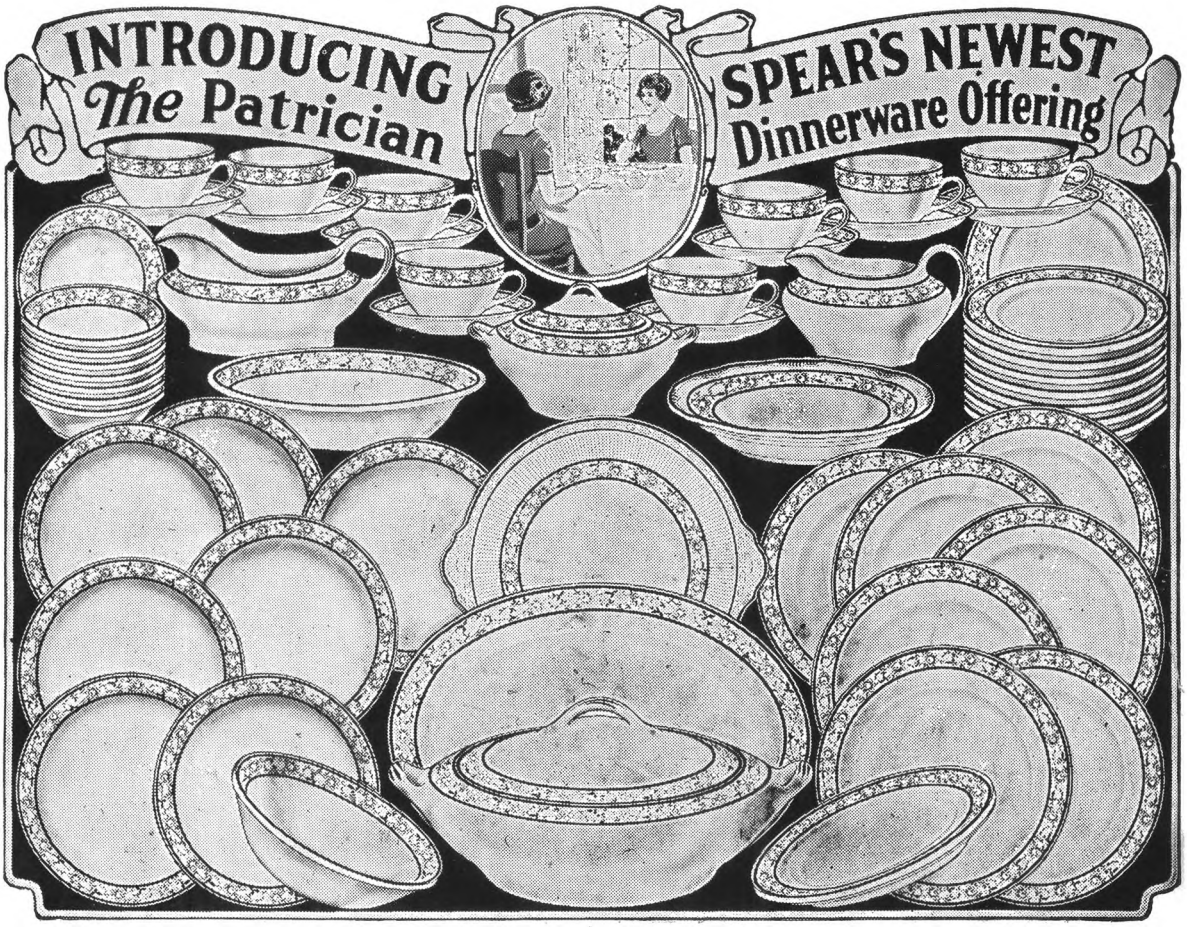
OCT. 1, 1925

When the Mallet Flashed

Gripping Polo Story

BY C. S. Montanye





$1 → 30 Days' FREE Trial

THE refined beauty that is ever-enduring—the dainty simplicity that is true art—the excellence of quality that brings pride in possession—these are the outstanding attractions of this, my newest dinnerware offering. Because of its graceful design and its refined coloring; because it is exactly right for every occasion, formal or informal, I have called this dinner service "The Patrician." Every one of these 58 pieces is made of good quality semi-porcelain. Every piece is beautiful, even-toned, lustrous white, decorated with a wide, artistically designed floral band in rich gold, and with gold stripes on all handles. Can you imagine a more desirable, a more attractive dinner service? This complete service for 8 people will be sent on 30 Days' Trial.

$1 WITH ORDER
Brings 58 Beautiful Useful Pieces A Complete Service for 8 People

$1 MONTHLY

If you are not Convinced that you Save $5.00 you may Return The Set

THE Shape of the Covered Vegetable Dish, the Cake Plate, the Butter Dish, the Cream Pitcher and the Sugar Bowl is Strikingly Graceful and Unusual. These are pieces of Outstanding Character and Beauty. No picture can do them justice. You must see the actual pieces. From the friendly cup of tea with a guest or two, to a big, important dinner, the Patrician Dinner Set is both appropriate and ample.

30 DAYS' FREE TRIAL: Send for the 58 Pieces Now, Today, at my risk. Use them as if they were your own, for 30 Days. If you are not convinced that you save $5, if you are not satisfied with quality, price, and terms, return the set. I will refund your first payment and all transportation costs. The trial will not cost you a penny.

These 58 Pieces, a Complete Service for 8 People

8—9 in. Dinner Plates; 8 Cups; 8 Saucers; 8—8 in. Soup Plates; 8—7 in. Pie or Lunch Plates; 8—5 in. Fruit or Dessert Dishes; 1 Covered Vegetable Dish (2 Pieces) 1—9 in. Open Vegetable Dish; 1 Cream Pitcher; 1 Sugar Bowl (2 Pieces); 1—13-½ in. Platter; 1—10 in. Fluted Cake Plate; 1 Gravy or Sauce Boat; 1—8 in. Fancy Butter Dish. **Order No. TA2997. Introductory Sale Price $14.95. Terms: $1 with order, $1 monthly.**

How to Realize Your DREAM HOME

You can have NOW the Home Beautiful that will be one of the finest in your neighborhood. All you have to do is to take advantage of my Remarkably Easy Terms. Send for my Big Free Book Today. It shows Thousands of Bargains in Furniture, Furnishings, and Everything for the home. Remember, you don't take a single chance when you deal with Spear. My prices are the Lowest, My Terms the Easiest; I give the Longest Time to Pay, ***and our business relations will be Strictly Confidential.*** Be sure to send for my FREE Catalog Now. *NATHANIEL SPEAR, Pres.*

→ Spear & Co. ← Dept. S-701 Pittsburgh, Pa.

Home Furnishers for the People of America

SPEAR & CO., Dept. S-701, Pittsburgh, Pa.

Send me at once the 58 Piece Dinner Set, as described above. Enclosed is $1.00 first payment. It is understood that if at the end of the 30 days' trial I am satisfied, I will send you $1.00 monthly. Order No. TA2997. Price $14.95. Title remains with you until paid in full. **Please print or write name and address plainly.**

Name..... Occupation.....

R. F. D., Box or Street and No.....

Post Office..... State.....

If your shipping point is different from your post office fill in line below

Send Shipment to.....

FREE CATALOG? **(If you want Free Catalog Only, Send No Money, put X here ☐ and write your name and address plainly on above lines.**

J. E. GREENSLADE

JACK WARD
Chicago

"I didn't want to work for small pay. Easily proved Mr. Greenslade was right—over $1,000 every month last year."

WARREN HARTLE
Chicago

"After 10 years in the railway mail service I decided to make a change. Earned more than $1,000 the first 30 days."

F. WYNN
Portland

"Last week my earnings amounted to $554.37; this week will go over $400. Thanks to the N. S. T. A.

CHARLES V. CHAMPION, Illinois

I'm now President, and my earnings for 1925 will easily exceed the five figure mark thanks to your training.

You're Fooling Yourself

-if You Think These Big Pay Records Are Due to LUCK!

But don't take my word for it! When I tell you that you can quickly increase your earning power; I'LL PROVE IT! FREE! I'll show you hundreds of men like yourself who have done it. And I'll show you how you can do it, too.

I'LL come directly to the point. First you'll say, "I could never do it: These men were lucky." But remember the men whose pictures are shown above are only four out of thousands and if you think it's luck that has suddenly raised thousands of men into the big pay class you're fooling yourself!

Easy to Increase Pay

But let's get down to your own case. You want more money. You want the good things in life, a comfortable home of your own where you can entertain, a snappy car, membership in a good club, good clothes, advantages for your loved ones, travel and a place of importance in your community. All this can be yours. And I'll prove it to you, Free.

First of all get this one thing right: such achievement is not luck—it's KNOWING HOW! And KNOWING HOW in a field in which your opportunities and rewards are ten times greater than in other work. In short, I'll prove that I can make you a Master Salesman—and you know the incomes good salesmen make.

Every one of the four men shown above was sure that he could never SELL! They thought Salesmen were "born" and not "made"!

When I said, "Enter the Selling Field where chances in your favor are ten to one," they said it couldn't be done. But I proved to them that this Association could take any man of average intelligence, regardless of his lack of selling experience—and in a short time make a MASTER SALESMAN of him—make him capable of earning anywhere from $5,000 to $10,000 a year. And that's what I'm willing to prove to you. FREE.

Simple as A. B. C.

You may think my promise remarkable. Yet there is nothing remarkable about it. Salesmanship is governed by rules and laws. There are certain ways of saying and doing things, certain ways of approaching a prospect to get his undivided attention, certain ways to overcome objections, batter down prejudice and outwit competition.

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

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

Remarkable Book, "Modern Salesmanship" Sent Free

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

It will show you how you can easily become a Master Salesman—a big money-maker—how the N. S. T. A. System of Salesmanship Training will give you years of selling experience in a few weeks; how our FREE Employment Service will help select and secure a good selling position when you are qualified and ready. And it will give you success stories of former routine workers who are now earning amazing salaries as salesmen. Mail the attached coupon at once and you will have made the first long stride toward success.

National Salesmen's Training Ass'n

Dept. R-4

N. S. T. A. Buildings, 1139 N. Dearborn, Chicago, Ill.

National Salesmen's Training Association, N. S. T. A. Buildings, Dept. R-4 1139 N. Dearborn, Chicago, Ill.

Send me free your book, "Modern Salesmanship," and Proof that I can become a MASTER SALESMAN.

Name .....

Address .....

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

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

VOL. LXIII — OCTOBER 1, 1925 — NUMBER 5

TOP-NOTCH

TWICE-A-MONTH MAGAZINE

CONTENTS

COMPLETE NOVEL

FORTUNE'S PAWN, ... **Ralph Boston** . . . 1
A strong young Westerner caught in a net of intrigue. Adventure and romance in the gold mining country.

NOVELETTE

FRAMING THE DUKE, ... **Frank E. Carson** . . . 68
The big junior thought football was too rough and a waste of time; then things began to happen; a gripping yarn of the gridiron.

SHORTER STORIES

BURSTING THE BARS, ... **Nell Martin** 37
Maisie, the sprightly stenographer, decides she needs a vacation and her boss, glad to be rid of her, joyfully acquiesces; her sudden decision to tour in her own car upsets more than her well-laid plans.

WHEN THE MALLET FLASHED, ... **C. S. Montanye** . . . 48
At the crucial moment in a big polo match. A player, a schemer, and a game pony.

SPOTS OF THE LEOPARD, ... **Hapsburg Liebe** . . . 58
Childhood playmates they had been, but now the girl regarded him as an enemy; a fascinating tale of the Florida keys.

TOO BIG TO HATE, ... **William Merriam Rouse** . 100
A man and his wife and his dog lived happily until there came a stranger and a phonograph to disturb them; powerful story of the North.

ROMEO'S ROUND-UP, ... **Nels Leroy Jorgensen** . 108
Daring conflict in the ranching country; further doings of "The Broadway Kid" returned to the Far West.

LUCKY STUFF, ... **D. J. Westheim** . . . 119
Things are not always what they seem; when a millionaire's son met a pretty waitress who had brains as well as looks.

AT CLOSE QUARTERS, ... **Harold de Polo** . . . 141
A canny old bull moose and the threatening wolf pack; strategy of the wild folk.

SERIAL NOVELS

THE PRISONER AND THE PLAY BOY, . **Francis Lynde** . . . 81
In Six Parts. Part V.
Tenderfoots though they were, they found a gold mine which proved a bonanza; a big story of pioneer days in Colorado.

CROSSED SIGNALS, ... **Burt L. Standish** . . . 122
In Six Parts—Part IV.
When a murder mystery seemed impossible to solve; compelling tale of baseball in the South.

TID-BITS—VERSE AND PROSE

NOT FOR GOLD, ... **Ross C. Miller** . . . 36
Hitting the trail.

RADIO RHYME, ... **James A. Sanaker** . . 47
Get the habit!

MEN OF THE SEA, ... **Edgar Daniel Kramer** . 57
Always heaving the restless deep.

RANCHING—AS IS, ... **S. Omar Barker** . . . 80
The boys who do the work.

WHERE THE SHAMROCKS GROW, . . **Pat B. Costello** . . . 118
In a land of charm.

TOP-NOTCH TALK, ... **Editor and Readers** . . 139
A Touchdown for Top-Notch.

Twice-a-month publication issued by Street & Smith Corporation, 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York City. Ormond G. Smith, President; George C. Smith, Vice President and Treasurer; George C. Smith, Jr., Vice President; Ormond V. Gould, Secretary. Publishers everywhere are cautioned against using any of the contents of this magazine either wholly or in part. Entered as Second-class Matter, January 8, 1915, at the Post Office, New York, N. Y., under Act of Congress of March 3, 1879. Canadian Subscription, $3.70. Foreign, $4.40.

WARNING—Do not subscribe through agents unknown to you. Complaints are daily made by persons who have been thus victimized.

IMPORTANT—Authors, agents, and publishers are requested to note that this corporation does not hold itself responsible for loss of unsolicited manuscripts while at this office or in transit; and that it cannot undertake to hold uncalled-for manuscripts for a longer period than six months. If the return of manuscript is expected, postage should be inclosed.

Address all communications to the Street & Smith Corporation

YEARLY SUBSCRIPTION, $3.00 **SINGLE COPIES, 15 CENTS**

Published on 1st and 15th. Next Number Out October 15th.

Those who stopped outside to listen did not know he was playing her accompaniment *without touching the keys!*

It happened at the Drake Hotel, Chicago, during the National Music Convention in June

And now anyone—without previous training—can play roll music with the same control of Keys—the same Personal Touch that a pianist has in playing by hand

THAT morning one of the visitors at the Music Trades Convention was playing roll music on the Gulbransen Registering Piano with all the expression of a brilliant pianist—yet this man could not tell one note from another on a piece of sheet music!

His audience sat and listened in amazement—among them composers, musicians and dealers in musical instruments.

It was a thrilling revelation—this instrument on which can be played roll music with all the Self-Expression—the Personal Touch—the variety of Tone Volume—that hand-playing has.

Yet there are actually thousands of people—people unable to read sheet music—who play the Gulbransen easily and inspiringly. And you can do the same at home.

Your Undiscovered Talent

You can play the introduction to a ballad or an operatic aria as a musician would play it—lively at first, then slowly as you near the words, then pausing for the singer, then subduing the melody to a whisper.

The vocalist carries the air. The piano plays only the accompaniment, regardless of the melody notes that are cut in the roll.

You can play a piano solo correctly, accenting the melody or the chords. You can play dance music in perfect time and rhythm.

Personal Touch — selective touch — self-expression —as in playing by hand—that is the missing art that A. G. Gulbransen contributed to roll-playing.

Hand-playing had it. Player pianos did not. So untrained persons could not play as musicians do.

Mr. Gulbransen had spent a life-time in making fine musical instruments and believed there must be a way. At last he discovered it, and gave it to the world in this creation—the Gulbransen Registering Piano.

Anyone can play it—you, or the unexpected guests who drop in of an evening.

FREE—*Color-Book de Luxe, "Your Unsuspected Talent—Its Discovery and Enjoyment"*

Your home will be known for its entertainment and charm if you own a Gulbransen—Grand or Upright.

Only mail us the coupon and we'll send free our de luxe color-book—"Your Unsuspected Talent—Its Discovery and Enjoyment"—and the address of a nearby Gulbransen show room where you can see and try all Gulbransen models.

GULBRANSEN
The *Registering* Piano

National Prices—Easy Terms

Gulbransen pianos are sold at the same cash price, freight prepaid, throughout the U. S. You can see this price stamped on the back. Gulbransen dealers are prepared to deliver any model, for a small cash payment—balance to suit the purchaser. A reasonable allowance for your present piano.

Four Upright Models—Community, $450, Suburban, $530, Country Seat, $615, White House, $700; Straight Grand, $785; Registering Grand, $1275.

SEND THIS COUPON

to Gulbransen Company, 3204 W. Chicago Ave., Chicago
for Color-Illustrated Book De Luxe
"Your Unsuspected Talent—Its Discovery and Enjoyment"

☐ Check here if you own a piano and we will send you form enabling us to estimate value.

Name_____

Address_____

City_____ State_____

The Nat'l Ass'n of Piano Tuners recommends that all pianos be tuned twice a year. Your Gulbransen deserves this care

GOOD READING

BY

CHARLES HOUSTON

In all the little towns of French Morocco, that war-torn country where Riffian tribesmen are making so valiant a battle against the power of the French, it is the custom of the natives to come together in great numbers and listen to professional story-tellers.

Before crowds of appreciative natives, the story-tellers weave their yarns of love, romance, and adventure and are well paid for their efforts. These story-tellers have a profound influence upon the communities and help mold public opinion.

In America the development of large-circulation fiction magazines has long made it possible for dwellers even in the most remote hamlets to satisfy the universal love for fiction that girdles the world. Everywhere men and women find escape from the harassments and worries of life by listening at the feet of story-tellers.

And now a great American publishing concern has taken another forward step in the providing of good fiction. Chelsea House at Seventh Avenue and Fifteenth Street, New York City, the "Story-teller's Headquarters," is providing for a constantly growing and ever-appreciative audience the best of modern fiction in attractively printed and bound books at a cost that fits every pocket.

These seventy-five-cent popular copyrights that bear the "CH" brand on their jackets make it possible for every one to get together a library of good books that will bear the test of time and bring joy into many a life.

Here are thumb-nail reviews of some of the latest "CH" offerings, but get the complete list for yourself to learn what a treasure-trove is at your command.

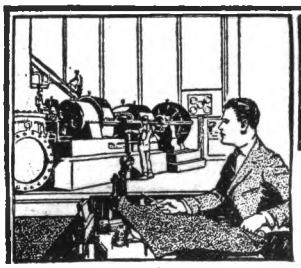
THE GOLDEN BOWL, by Harrison Conrard, published by Chelsea House, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City, Price 75c.

Into a land where mountain ranges flatten out into hummocks on the tawny sands, the great desert country of the West, go two men in search of the treasure of the Golden Bowl. Adventures await them on every hand. There is a fight ahead for the treasure, a beautiful girl, and for honor as well. Mr. Conrard makes you feel the terrible sufferings of the men as they stagger along in search of the Bowl, makes you share with them their disappointments and final triumphs. No lover of real Western stories can afford not to have this book in his library.

THE SPIDER'S DEN, by Johnston McCulley, published by Chelsea House, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City, Price 75c.

When good-looking John Warwick, popular young society man and athlete, saw the girl drop her gold mesh bag and beckon him to follow her, he hesitated to fall for so obvious a ruse. But something compelled him to accept that challenge, and soon he was in the midst of the most thrilling adventures of all his colorful career. How he got into

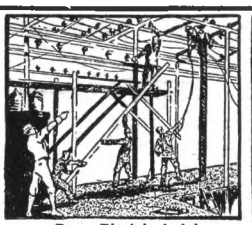
(Continued on 2nd page following.)



Be an Electrical Expert
EARN WHILE LEARNING

Early in your training I give you special instruction in house-wiring, Radio, and other practical work. I show you how to get spare-time work, and valuable experience. Many students make my training pay for itself in this way.

Go into Electrical Repair business of your own Profits $5,000 to $15,000 a year



Boss Electrical Jobs

Be an Electrical Contractor

Train at Home for a fine Electrical JOB and a big RAISE in Pay!

4 BIG Electrical Outfits Given

to you without one penny of extra charge. Not a "premium"—not something "FREE" to induce you to enroll. But costly, standard, full-size tools, materials, and equipment. The man-size motor of the same type as the big-fellows in a power plant. Not a toy, but a regular power-motor. Runs on Alternating or Direct Current, or 32-volt farm electric system. Comes to you knock-down. It's part of your job to wind the armature and assemble it. That's the way you learn Electricity by the Dunlap Job-Method.

GO INTO ELECTRICITY!

—the business of a million opportunities. Be an Electrical Expert. Go into the one great Industry where it's easy to get to the top, to make money, to make a real success. You don't need money in the bank or "pull" to get ahead in Electricity—all you need is Training, honest, complete training, such as I guarantee you.

If you are now earning less than $40 per week

if you want to be an ELECTRICAL EXPERT—if you want to step quickly into the class of men earning from $60 to $250 a week—*write me at once!* This million-dollar school offers ambitious fellows their big opportunity to learn every branch of Electricity at home in spare time by a wonderful, new, practical JOB-METHOD.

Learn Electricity Quick by My "JOB-METHOD"

My training is so simple a school-boy can grasp it instantly. Common Schooling all you need. No previous experience required. But my students make rapid progress because I train them on actual Electrical jobs with standard-size tools and materials which I supply without extra cost. The first half of my training is APPLIED ELECTRICITY—a complete course in itself. In the second half I give you Electrical Engineering subjects. I give you Electrical Drafting, Radio, Automotive Electricity, and many other valuable subjects, all for one small price, *and on easy terms.*

WRITE ME TODAY!

Yes, I can help you make a success in the great electrical business. Right now I am making an amazing offer. Don't enroll for any course until you get it. Coupon brings complete information. Mail it to me, personally, *today!*

Chief Engineer DUNLAP
Electrical Division
AMERICAN SCHOOL
Drexel Ave. & 58th St., Dept. E7192
CHICAGO

CHIEF ENGINEER
DUNLAP
and 22 Noted Engineers

This is no one-man, one-idea school. 22 noted engineers, educators, and executives of the following great corporations and universities have helped Chief Engineer Dunlap make this training complete and up-to-the-minute.

1. General Electric Co.
2. Commonwealth Edison Co.
3. Crocker-Wheeler Co.
4. Cutler-Hammer Mfg. Co.
5. American Telephone & Telegraph Co.
6. Westinghouse Electric & Mfg. Co.
7. Western Electric Co.
8. Underwriters Laboratories, Inc.
9. Columbia University
10. Dartmouth College
11. Massachusetts Institute of Technology
12. Lehigh University
13. University of Vermont
14. Armour Inst. of Technology
15. University of Kansas

AND MANY OTHERS

THE AMERICAN SCHOOL

is chartered by the State of Massachusetts since 1897 as an educational institution, not for profit. Over 200 educators, executives, and engineers have prepared the wonderful home-study courses we offer. You will be astonished at the many ways we help our students and graduates progress to success.

FREE JOB SERVICE
for Students and Graduates

We have supplied thousands of jobs **FREE**, not only to graduates, but to **STUDENTS** also. This **JOB-SERVICE** keeps in touch with great Electrical employers all over America. The day you enroll, this Job-Service Department registers you, finds out what kind of job you want, and where you want to work, etc.

REPORT PAY INCREASES OF 50% TO 500%

I have hundreds of letters which prove my training has doubled and trebled the pay of my students and graduates. My training includes Radio, Auto Electricity, Electrical Drafting, Business Training, and Electrical Engineering subjects, all for one small price and on terms within reach of all.

MAIL COUPON TO-DAY

Chief Engineer Dunlap
AMERICAN SCHOOL, Dept. E7192,
Drexel Ave. & 58th St., Chicago

I want to be an Electrical Expert. Please rush guarantee, job-service facts, complete information, money-saving offers.

Name .....

St. No. .....

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

the Spider's Den—and out—what befell him there, makes as baffling a detective story as we have read this year. See if you do not agree with us when you are more than a quarter way through the book.

HER DESERT LOVER, by Louisa Carter Lee, published by Chelsea House, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City, Price 75c.

She came stumbling through the storm into that quiet home of refinement. She could not gasp out her name. She was unknown, a woman of mystery. And what her coming did to change the life of that home! The fast-moving adventures that ensued are put down in wonderfully compelling style by the talented author of this love story. There's a glamour and romance about the book that hold your interest to the very end.

WHOSE MILLIONS? by Joseph Montague, published by Chelsea House, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City, Price 75c.

Millions gone begging! No heir to the Heathcote fortune of $20,000,000! With such an unusual situation, Mr. Montague opens his book with a rush and go that carries the reader on through the search for the missing heir, the struggle with a daring band of thieves, the final victory. You'll not forget this book in a hurry. It is an outstanding example of the story-teller's art.

OBJECT: ADVENTURE, by Ray Courtney, published by Chelsea House, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City, Price 75c.

Kent McGregor was frankly out for the thrills of Western life and his advertisement was headed with the title of this book. We are here to say that Kent's craving was more than satisfied and that he had adventures galore. He found that the O. B. Davis, his new employer on whose ranch he was to work, was a very good-looking young woman, and he found a number of other things in and about that ranch not quite so attractive, but all giving him his fill of adventure.

WHILE the books reviewed above are all popular, 75-cent copyright novels bearing the famous "CH" brand on their jackets. the lover of fiction must not forget that Chelsea House publishes attractive two-dollar books as well. For example—

FRONTIER OF THE DEEP, by Will Beale, published by Chelsea House, Price $2.

A veteran editor, who has the best of modern fiction at his competent finger tips told me that he had rarely read so fine a book as this, and his enthusiasm had genuine warmth in it. I understand, now that I have read the book, why he praised it so highly.

Mr. Beale has taken a land of epic grandeur for his background, the Great Canadian Northeast, and with the sound of surf thundering all through his pages he has painted an unforgetable picture of the lives of the simple fisher folk. These fine French-Canadians come alive in this book. We read with sympathy and understanding about their adventures and romances and wild loves. Mr. Beale has done a masterpiece, a book that is bound to live.

Classified Advertising

Agents and Help Wanted

WE START YOU WITHOUT A DOLLAR. Soaps, Extracts, Perfumes, Toilet Goods. Experience unnecessary. Carnation Co., Dept. 225, St. Louis, Mo.

LIGHTNING STRANGE BATTERY Compound. Charges discharged batteries instantly. Eliminates old method entirely. Gallon free to agents. Lightning Co., St. Paul, Minn.

$60-$200 A WEEK. Genuine Gold Letters for store windows. Easily applied. Free Samples. Liberal offer to general agents. Metallic Letter Co., 428 B North Clark, Chicago.

BIG MONEY AND FAST SALES. Every owner buys gold initials for his auto. You charge $1.50, make $1.35. Ten orders daily easy. Write for particulars and free samples. American Monogram Co., Dept. 170, East Orange, N. J.

EARN $10 DAILY silvering mirrors, plating, refinishing metalware, headlights, chandeliers, bedsteads. Outfits furnished. Decie Laboratories, 1135 Broadway, New York.

AGENTS, our new Household Cleaning Device washes and dries windows, sweeps, cleans walls, scrubs, mops. Costs less than brooms. Over half profit. Write Harper Brush Works, 201 3rd Street, Fairfield, Iowa.

AGENTS—90c. an hour to advertise and distribute samples to consumer. Write quick for territory and particulars. American Products Co., 4015 American Bldg., Cincinnati, Ohio.

$50.00 SUITS FOR ONLY $23.50! Make big money taking orders from friends and neighbors. $3.00 to $5.00 an hour in spare time. $75.00 to $125.00 a week for full time. We supply handsome Swatch Outfit, large size samples and all latest styles in elegant leather case. Positively finest outfit ever furnished salesmen. Write for yours at once and get started making the big money right away. Address Dept. 178, James Oliver, Inc., 848 West Adams Street, Chicago.

MEN AND WOMEN wanted as exclusive representatives, all localities, taking orders for beautiful low-priced house, porch, and street dresses. I deliver, collect, and pay you every Saturday. Carol Lee, 1082 Gateway Station, Kansas City, Mo.

AGENTS—WRITE FOR FREE Samples. Sell Madison "Better-Made" Shirts for large Manufacturer direct to wearer. No capital or experience required. Many earn $100 weekly and bonus. Madison Mfgrs., 503 Broadway, New York.

Agents and Help Wanted—*Continued*

NEW WONDERFUL SELLER. Cost 10c, profit $1.40, monograming autos. Experience unnecessary. Free samples. Worcester Monograms, B 149, Worcester, Mass.

BIG MONEY—fast sales; every one buys gold initials for their auto; sell $1.50, profit $1.44. Ten orders daily easy. Samples, information free. World Monogram, Dept. 12, Newark, N. J.

$15 DAILY (Sworn Proof) Introducing New Guaranteed Hosiery. Must wear or replaced free. No capital or experience required. You simply write orders. We deliver and collect. Your Pay Daily. Spare time satisfactory. Macochee Textile Company, Station 45010, Cincinnati, Ohio.

MEN, 18 UP. Be Railway Mail Clerks. $1,900 year. Particulars free. Write immediately. Franklin Institute, Dept. H2, Rochester, N. Y.

IF I SEND YOU A SUIT made in the latest style from the finest goods, will you keep it, wear it, and show it to your friends as a sample of my sensational $25.00 suits guaranteed regular $50.00 values? Could you use $3.00 an hour for a little spare time? If so, write me at once for my wonderful new proposition. Just write your name and address on a card and mail to Dept. 900, Knickerbocker Tailoring Co., 133 So. Peoria St., Chicago.

Help Wanted—Female

$6-$18 A DOZEN decorating pillow tops at home, experience unnecessary; particulars for stamp. Tapestry Paint Co., 110 LaGrange, Ind.

Help Wanted—Male

ALL Men, Women, Boys, Girls, 17 to 65 willing to accept Government Positions $117-$250, traveling or stationary, write Mr. Ozment, 308, St. Louis, Mo., immediately.

EARN $110 to $250 monthly, expenses paid as Railway Traffic Inspector. Position guaranteed after completion of 3 months' home study course or money refunded. Excellent opportunities. Write for Free Booklet. CM-28 Stand. Business Training Inst., Buffalo, N. Y.

SILVERING MIRRORS. French plate. Easily learned; immense profits. Plans free. Wear Mirror Works, Excelsior Springs, Mo.

ESTABLISH YOURSELF—AT HOME—As a Photographic Expert. Make $75 a week while learning. Write at once for Temporary Offer. International Studios, Dept. 140 C, 3601 Michigan Ave., Chicago.

$115-$400 MONTHLY paid—Ry. Station—Office positions. Free passes. Experience unnecessary. Write Baker, Supt., 49, St. Louis, Mo.

Salesmen Wanted

SALESMEN GIVEN PROTECTED territory to sell Doubleware Shoes direct from factory to wearer. Our new measure board insures perfect fitting. Write for particulars and list of open counties. Doublewear Shoe Co., Manufacturers, Minneapolis, Minn.

MAKE $100 WEEKLY IN SPARE TIME. Sell what the public wants—long distance radio receiving sets. Two sales weekly pays $100 profit. No big investment, no canvassing. Sharpe of Colorado made $955 in one month. Representatives wanted at once. This plan is sweeping the country—write today before your county is gone. Ozarka, Inc., 126 West Austin Ave., M, Chicago.

Business Opportunity

WHY WORK FOR SOME ONE? Start a business. $100 sufficient. Information Dept. 113, Paul Kaye, 149 Broadway, N. Y.

Farm Lands

HERE'S YOUR LAND! $10 down and $10 month buys 20 acres of my best land in Cent. Mich. for $400 or 10 acres for $250. Write at once for free 48-page picture book. G. W. Swigart, X1265 1st Natl. Bank Bldg., Chicago.

Patents and Lawyers

PATENTS. Send sketch or model for preliminary examination. Booklet free. Highest references. Best results. Promptness assured. Watson E. Coleman, Patent Lawyer, 644 G St., Washington, D. C.

INVENTIONS COMMERCIALIZED. Patented or unpatented. Write Adam Fisher Mfg. Co., 223, Enright, St. Louis, Mo.

PATENTS—Write for free Guide Books and "Record of Invention Blank" before disclosing inventions. Send model or sketch of invention for Inspection and Instructions Free. Terms reasonable. Victor J. Evans Co., 767 Ninth, Washington, D. C.

INVENTORS—Write for our guide book, "How to Get Your Patent" and evidence of invention blank. Send model or sketch for Inspection and Instructions Free. Terms reasonable. Randolph & Co., Dept. 412, Washington, D. C.

Detectives Wanted

MEN—Experience unnecessary; travel; make secret investigations; reports; salaries; expenses. Write American Foreign Detective Agency, 114, St. Louis, Mo.

DETECTIVES EARN BIG MONEY. Travel. Excellent opportunity. Experience unnecessary. Write, George Wagner, former Government Detective, 1968 Broadway, New York.

Does Happiness Cost Too Much?

THERE is no catalog number for "happiness," but we sell it just the same. You'll not find it illustrated, but it appears on every page. The frock for the young lady's first party; the boy's bicycle; dad's radio; mother's new coat. Don't they all mean happiness? And could all of them be had if Sears, Roebuck and Co. wasn't able to sell good merchandise at such low prices?

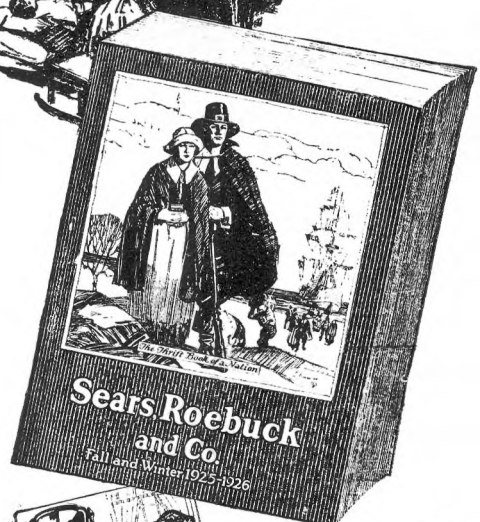
A customer recently wrote us: "I take great pleasure in showing my furniture to my neighbors. I shall always advertise you by your honesty and great bargains."

Things like that—and every day's mail contains a great many such letters—make us feel that we are a real factor in the lives of millions of American families. You could hardly blame us for feeling a bit proud in helping these folks to a little happiness they might not otherwise have been able to obtain.

Sears, Roebuck and Co. brings the trading centers of the Old World and the New World as well direct to the doors of our nine million customers; they see in our catalogs, at prices they can afford, the things they need, and the luxuries they have wanted.

One-fourth of all the families in the United States know that we guarantee them a saving on everything they buy; know we sell only quality merchandise, honestly illustrated and described. They know, too, that we ship all orders in less than 24 hours.

Our New Big Catalog for Fall and Winter is ready. It shows 35,000 bargains on everything needed for the family, the home and the farm. Send for it today.

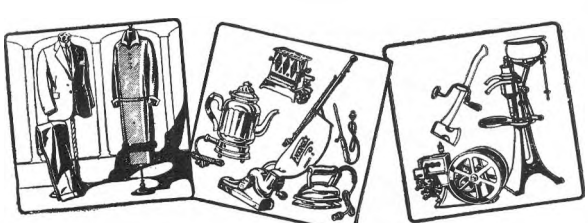


Send for Your FREE Copy

If you haven't a copy of our New Big General Catalog, send for it today. This convenient coupon will bring you our great Fall and Winter book, with its 35,000 bargains.

Sears, Roebuck and Co.

CHICAGO · PHILADELPHIA · KANSAS CITY
DALLAS · SEATTLE



WORLD'S LARGEST STORE

We own and operate Radio Station W L S. Tune in on 344.6 meters.

Mail the coupon TODAY to store nearest you

Sears, Roebuck and Co. 73A84

Chicago · Philadelphia · Kansas City · Dallas · Seattle

Send Latest General Catalog.

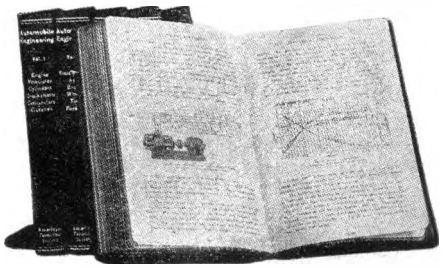
Name .....

Postoffice .....

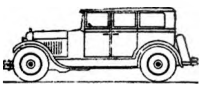
Rural Route ..... Box No. .....

State .....

Street and No. .....



Can You Fix It?



Repair any auto fault, learn how NOW. You can do it easily in this new simple way.

These FIVE Big Books are up to the minute on automobile engineering subjects; chock full of little known facts about construction, operation and repairs. Electric wiring treated in complete detail—illustrations and diagrams make everything clear and easily understood by anybody. The most interesting and most practical set of books ever written on modern automobile engineering.

Whether you want to fit yourself for garage owner, repair expert or merely wish to know more about your own car, you will realize the value of these splendidly bound volumes.

No Money Offer

An amazing new plan of distribution brings these books to you for examination without one cent of payment to us. We don't ask a penny of you, but ship the books to you FREE. Look them over—read them as much as you want to; note the splendid photographs and drawings and then if you decide you want them, send us $2.00, then only $3.00 a month until only $19.80 is paid. That is all; nothing more to pay us. If you send NOW we will include

Consulting Membership—FREE

Yes, we actually give you a certificate which entitles you to free consultation on any subject related to automobile repairing. 18 specialized experts are at your disposal—ready at any time to help you. With this library and this consultation membership you ought to be able to soon know all there is to be known about autos. Don't miss this special offer. Send now.

American Technical Society,
Automobile Division A747, Chicago, Ill.

You may send me your complete Automobile Engineering library, 5 big volumes bound in flexo covers, with the understanding that I am to have ten days to decide if I want to keep them. I will either return them then or send you $2.00 then and $3.00 per month until the special low price of only $19.80 is paid.

Name .....

Address .....

City .....State.....Employed by .....

TYPEWRITER PRICES CUT

World's best makes—Underwood, Remington, Oliver—prices smashed to almost half.

$2 and it's yours

All late models, completely rebuilt and refinished brand new. GUARANTEED for ten YEARS. Send no money—big FREE catalog shows actual machines in full colors. Get our direct-to-you easy payment plan and 10-day free trial offer. *Limited time, so write today.* **International Typewriter Ex., 186 W. Lake St.** Dept. 1039, **Chicago**

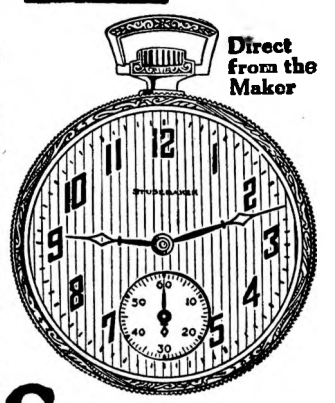
Free Trial

21 Jewel ~ Extra thin

STUDEBAKER

The *Insured* Watch

New Model Extra Thin



Direct from the Maker

SENT FOR $1.00 DOWN!

Only $1.00! The balance in easy monthly payments. You get the famous Studebaker 21 Jewel Watch—Insured for a lifetime; a choice of 60 new Art Beauty Cases; 8 adjustments, including heat, cold, isochronism and 5 positions—*direct from the maker* at lowest prices ever named on equal quality.

Write today for FREE BOOK of Advance Watch Styles.

Watch Chain FREE!

For a limited time we are offering a beautiful Watch Chain FREE. Write now while offer lasts.

Mail Coupon for FREE Book

Send at once and get a copy of this book—FREE! See the newest, beautiful, advance styles in Studebaker Art Beauty Cases and Dials. Read how you can buy a 21 Jewel Studebaker Insured Watch direct from the maker—save big money—and pay for it on easy monthly payments.

Write! for our free book. It will post you on watch styles and watch values. Send coupon at once. Get Free Chain offer today while it lasts.

STUDEBAKER WATCH CO.
Dept. W30 South Bend, Indiana
Canadian Address: Windsor, Ontario

STUDEBAKER WATCH CO.
Dept. W30 South Bend, Indiana

Please send me your Free Book of Advance Watch Styles and particulars of your $1.00 down offer.

Name .....

Address .....

City .....*State*.....

To a second fiddle

When the Really Important Male arrives, you, sir, the so-called head of the house, become a thing to be "hushed" at and shunted into ignominious corners. Feminine whisperings and the rustling of starched linen fill the electrified air.

Even that tiled temple of cleanliness where you have been wont to splash and carol of a morning is invaded by His New Lordship's ladies-in-waiting.

Garments of curious design dominate the towel rack—bottles of unfamiliar outline and content are everywhere.

But one old friend remains to greet your eye—for there in its accustomed place, in all its white purity, is your cake of Ivory Soap.

Take comfort in the sight, for Ivory is the bond that will draw you and your son together—the bridge across the vast crevasse of feminine interference.

Another Ivorian is in the making!

Let spotless walls be spangled with gobs of creamy Ivory lather. Let the floor be dotted with soapy pools.

For by these signs, you know that this son of yours is doing all the messy, woman-worrying, soul-satisfying things that normal men do when enjoying an Ivory bath.

PROCTER & GAMBLE

IVORY SOAP

99 44/100 % Pure · It Floats

Guest Ivory *is the younger generation of the man's size cake. A real chip off the old block for 5 cents.*

TOP-NOTCH MAGAZINE

VOL. LXIII Published October 1, 1925 No. 5

Fortune's Pawn

By Ralph Boston

(A COMPLETE NOVEL)

CHAPTER I.

A VISION OUT OF NOWHERE.

FIRST there was one shot; then, following an interval of perhaps thirty seconds, there came a whole volley of shots. Although faint and far away, they were very disturbing to Paul Gregory Burton.

When the preliminary explosion was wafted to his ears from the distance, he was so startled that he dropped the skillet of sliced bacon he was about to place on the fire jack. Jumping to his scattered equipment under one of the ragged cottonwoods, he caught up a belt with a swinging six-gun, snatched the gun from its holster, and stood motionless, his eyes fixed in the general direction of the mouth of the cañon.

After the volley had gently agitated the cañon echoes, silence fell once more; and it persisted for so long that Burton experienced a sense of relief.

"Beats the deuce," he muttered, "that I can't get away from things like that, even way out here in the heart of the desert! I had an idea that this cañon"—here he looked reproachfully around at the little cottonwood flat, hemmed in on two sides by precipitous, rocky walls—"I had an idea that this place was about the last word in peace, and comfort, and isolation. Then bingo! gun play; and once more the truth is demonstrated that there is no such thing in this world as peace, and comfort, and isolation. Well, anyhow," he added resignedly, "I've got to eat, I reckon."

He slipped the revolver back into the holster, buckled the belt around his waist, and picked up the frying pan. The boiling, smoke-blackened coffeepot he pushed to the edge of the fire jack to make room for the pan with the bacon. After that, he replenished the fire with bits of dead cottonwood branches, laid out his tinware, opened a can of tomatoes with a hatchet, and turned the sizzling bacon with the point of a dirk.

To have peace, comfort, and isolation

was all that Burton asked of the world just then. He was a young man with ideas as pronounced as they were peculiar. When he had trailed his burro, Andy, into that out-of-the-way cañon, he had fondly assured himself that he was a good thirty miles from his fellow men and all their works. And now look! Less than an hour in that abode of fancied security, and guns were cracking within earshot!

"Trouble is," philosophized Burton, "the world is getting so full of people that a man can't be a hermit any more. Hermitizing is a lost art. All that's possible for me is to make a stab at it and just do the best I can."

When a man of twenty-seven talks in that strain, there is certainly a mistake somewhere. About once in a hundred times the mistake is with the world; the ninety-nine other times it is with the man himself. Burton wanted the world to let him alone, and the world wouldn't do it.

He walked over to the foot of the nearest cottonwood, and from the blanket he had spread on the ground in lieu of a tablecloth he picked up his tin cup and plate. As he turned back to the fire to pour his coffee and dish up his bacon, he was given another jolt—and this one staggered him. Cup and plate rattled down on the sand, and his right hand moved uncertainly in the direction of the six-gun.

"Cut out the shooting, please," a soft, mellifluous voice requested; "I'm not the least bit dangerous. I'm awfully tired, though, and so hungry I can't begin to tell you. Isn't it wonderful!" the voice exclaimed a bit cooingly. "Just when I'm needing help in the worst way, presto! here it is, and right where I never dreamed of finding it. Cut up a little more bacon, will you? And get another cup? But that coffee smells good."

She called it wonderful, but to Burton it was little short of miraculous. Take a desert sixty miles wide and hundreds of miles long, and drop into the middle of it a man who wants to be alone; and then drop a woman into the same desert, and have her land on the same flat the man is temporarily occupying. Of course it was miraculous.

And this woman was young. She had yellow hair and blue eyes, and wore a straw "sailor" hat with a smashed rim and a broken crown. Some of the yellow hair was spilling out through the crown of that badly wrecked hat—tresses that shone like burnished gold. A gray middy blouse and a short tan skirt, both of which had plainly seen hard service, formed part of the costume worn by this —this apparition; and badly scuffed shoes, with spurs at their heels, did their best to fill out the ensemble. Not the least significant part of this vision was a belt overlaying the middy blouse, and supporting a small holster with an elfin-like weapon peeping over the top of it.

Burton removed his hand from the vicinity of his own six-gun and drew the back of it across his eyes. There was a bewildered look on his face. "W-wh-who —wh-wh-where——" Burton floundered, tongue-tied for the moment and almost incoherent.

"Who am I, and where have I come from?" said the girl. "That's what you're trying to say, isn't it? Now, listen. I can recognize a gentleman when I see one; so all it is necessary for me to tell you is that I am a lady in distress. I've lost my horse, and you'll discover by looking at my shoes that I've been doing a lot of footwork. I'm in danger, Mr. Man, and I'm appealing to you for help. Do I get it, or don't I?

"I'm betting a wad of dough against a last year's bird's nest that I do," she continued. "I'm a great little character reader, and luck was certainly with me when I was running for my life and this cañon came along with you and your camp in it. Give me all the bacon there is in that skillet, and fry some more for yourself. And a cup of coffee—please." She sank down at the foot of the cottonwood and leaned her back wearily against the trunk of it. "I'm fagged out and—and famished."

Burton, by then, had recovered his balance. Here was Beauty in distress, and in spite of his odd notions chivalry had not been driven out of his soul. Youth was calling to Youth, and Youth will always be served.

"All right, Lady in Distress," he said hospitably. "This is pretty extraordinary, but it can be explained later." He filled

the cup with coffee and the plate with bacon and placed both before her. "Go ahead and eat," he invited; "it's simple fare, but I've got plenty of it, such as it is. Help yourself to the condensed milk. There's sugar in that baking-powder can, and crackers in that paper sack. Eat hearty."

He began slicing more bacon for himself.

"What's your name, if I may ask?" inquired the girl, lifting the coffee cup.

"Paul," he told her.

She laughed—one of those rippling, joyous laughs that the right sort of girl always has on tap even in the greatest adversity. "Imagine!" she cried; "and my name's Virginia! You've heard of Paul and Virginia?"

Burton blushed under his tan. "Well," he answered, "I never heard of 'em out here in the middle of an Arizona desert—before. Is that bacon done enough to suit you, Virginia?"

"Paul," she told him ecstatically, "if they had anything like this at the Ritz-Carlton, the boss would eat it himself!"

CHAPTER II.

A FINE OUTFIT!

SINCE Burton did not care for company at that time and was trying to journey alone, his camping equipment, while amply sufficient for one, was unduly taxed in his effort to make it supply the needs of two. By using his frying pan for a plate, however, and by making his dirk serve for both knife and fork, he succeeded quite well with his meal.

When his amazement over that chance meeting in the cañon had subsided somewhat, he began to be afflicted with uneasiness and doubts. Who was this girl, Virginia, anyhow? What was her business in that inhospitable region? How had she happened to lose her horse? What was the danger that threatened her? These thoughts drifted through Burton's mind with growing insistence.

Giving her a meal was no more than desert hospitality, the humane bestowal of creature comforts by those who have upon those who have not. But what was to happen after the meal was finished? Burton pondered that problem as he munched his crackers and bacon, and a feeling akin to dismay welled up in him.

Could he turn this Lady in Distress, afoot as she was, and in danger, away from his camp? Thirty miles lay between the cañon and the nearest settlement, and all his manhood rebelled against casting her adrift on that thirty-mile stretch of blistering, empty desert. He knew he could not.

On the other hand, it seemed equally clear to him that he could not allow this strange young woman to share his camp on the flat indefinitely. If he had had a horse, he could have mounted her on the animal and have sent her off to the settlements alone—and his conscience would not have bothered him. However, all the live stock he had was Andy, his pack burro. And Andy was not a lady's burro; he was a man's burro and, at that, a decidedly hard one for any man to manage.

Any way Burton looked at the problem of helping this young woman who had appealed to him for aid, he could see nothing but impossible conditions which, in some manner, he was going to be called upon to meet.

Occasionally during the meal the girl would stop eating, assume a listening attitude, and her bright blue eyes would sharpen as they directed apprehensive glances toward the mouth of the cañon. These symptoms of alertness and worry gave Burton an idea.

"You are being pursued?" he inquired.

"You have nicked it, Paul," she told him; "I am being pursued by as rough a gang as you'll find north or south of the Mexican boundary."

"I heard shooting a while ago, and——"

"I was the central figure in that excitement," she cut in. "It was about two hours ago that 'One Eye,' coming from the west, and 'Mex' and Taranch, coming from the east, cornered me in a draw. The sides of that draw were too steep for any horse to climb, and the only way I could escape was by abandoning Fanita and using my hands and feet in scaling one of the walls. Of course, I couldn't sit pretty on the top of that bank and let those pirates climb after me. Taranch took charge of the horses, and Mex and One Eye took after me afoot.

"We circled, played hare and hounds for a while, and when that shooting happened they pretty nearly had me," the girl continued. "I lost them again, then dropped over the rim-rock up there"—here she directed her gaze at the top of the sheer wall edging the cañon on the west—"and worked my way down to this flat and"—here she smiled—"to your camp and *you*. Lucky, wasn't I?"

Her appetite satisfied, she heaved a sigh of contentment and leaned back against the trunk of the cottonwood.

"What do you think of doing next?" Burton asked.

"Well," she replied, "if I could get back my mare, Fanita, my next move would be an easy one to figure out. Possibly, with your help, I could recover the horse? If we can't do that, though, I guess you'll just have to take care of me, help me to Herkimer, and then see me aboard the train for Phoenix. That's about all."

"It looks as though it might be plenty," was his dry rejoinder.

She gave him a swift, appraising look. "Have I misread your character?" she asked. "You don't mean to say you're going to let me keep right on fighting that rough gang alone?"

That jarred him. "I'm going to stand by you," he answered; "but in order to work to the best advantage, I think I ought to know what it's all about."

She shook her head. "Not yet, Paul," she returned. "You've got to take my bare word, for now, that right is on my side—and let it go at that. Is it going to be too much of a strain?"

"I'll take your word," he said.

"All right," she continued, "let's see if you will."

She removed her battered straw "sailor" and shook out the long, bright, beautiful tresses of her hair. Burton caught his breath, for he had never seen such a golden cascade of rippling loveliness. From a small hand bag that swung beside the little revolver holster at her belt she took a pair of shears.

"Uncle Dan wouldn't ever let me do what all the other girls were doing," she said, "and bob my hair. It's got to be done now, though. Take these shears, Paul, and shingle it close."

He drew back from the shears. "No," he declared; "your Uncle Dan was right. I couldn't do a thing like that."

"Then you're not taking my word that it's necessary?" she asked, mocking him. "You're failing me right at the start."

With her left hand she caught one of the yellow strands and, with the shears in her right, she snipped it close to her head.

"Say, stop that!" ordered Burton.

"I tell you it's got to be done," she said sharply, "and I guess I know better than you do. If you won't take over the job, then I'll have to do the best I can at it myself."

Snip, snip went the shears, and the golden locks fell away in ragged handfuls.

"Oh, well, here!" growled Burton, reaching out his hand. "If you're bound to have it that way, I'll help. But it's a crime, Miss Virginia."

He did a good job, and, as the strands fell, she piled them on the spread blanket. Just as he finished a clatter of hoofs reached their ears from the mouth of the defile. The girl threw one end of the blanket over the glistening heap of yellow hair and sprang to her feet.

"They're coming, Paul!" she whispered. "And don't you tell them a thing about me, not a thing."

The next instant she had bounded away into a dense thicket of mesquite, disappearing in the same chaparral from which she had so magically appeared.

"Here's something else again!" muttered Burton, and pushed the telltale straw "sailor" under the blanket with the shorn tresses. "One Eye, Mex, and Taranch! They must be a fine outfit if their names are any indication!"

CHAPTER III.

BIRDS OF ILL OMEN.

THREE mounted men came galloping in single file around the bend of the cañon, the last man in the string leading a riderless horse. Burton stood at the edge of the flat and watched them sharply as they approached. Never, to his notion, had he seen a more disreputable assortment of desert "rats."

The rider in the lead was a slouching

giant of a man, his black, ropy hair brushing his shoulders, and a matted black beard almost covering his face. As he drew close, Burton could see that his right eye was gone—the socket disfigured. He wore an old Mexican sombrero, a greasy flannel shirt open at the throat and exposing an expanse of hairy chest, worn corduroy trousers, and moccasins. A belt at his waist sagged under its weight of guns, and across his saddle he carried a long rifle.

The two at his heels were hall-marked with the same worthlessness—one red haired and short, and the other swarthy and slender and catlike. A heterogeneous assortment of old clothes covered their bodies, and all were overloaded with guns and ammunition. Just from what the girl had said and without any further introduction Burton identified each of them off-hand as One Eye, Taranch, and Mex.

They were types of that vicious brotherhood of freebooters that roams the deserts and preys upon the unwary. But there were some differences to be noted between this trio and the rest of their kind.

In most cases these piratical Arabs travel afoot, too low in pocket to afford a horse and camp equipment. Occasionally one of them may pick up a flea-bitten burro and assemble a modest outfit of supplies; but if he goes much beyond this in the way of progress, he automatically alienates himself from the needy and pilfering brotherhood and is in the way of becoming a capitalist.

Burton was well informed regarding these human scavengers of the waste places, and he knew that One Eye, Mex, and Taranch, fairly well mounted and excellently armed, were a bit out of character. They had prospered, but it was plain they were not capitalists; they were desert riffraff on horseback, bribed by some lurking scoundrel with money to pull his chestnuts out of the fire. "Cat's-paws, all three of them," was Burton's mental tabulation, "financed for some enterprise in deviltry leveled at this girl Virginia."

Hulking One Eye bestrode a buckskin horse that was absurdly small for the rider's weight, and so clean limbed, well nourished, and trimly accoutered that it did not harmonize at all with the rest of the ragged and bony saddle stock. The big fellow's moccasined feet swung well below the saddle stirrups and nearly brushed the ground. That buckskin, as Burton figured it, was Virginia's mare, Fanita, the led horse at the end of the line having been deserted by the captain of the gang for something better in the shape of horseflesh.

"Buenos!" called One Eye perfunctorily, halting the buckskin at the foot of the slight bank edging the flat.

Burton answered with a curt nod and watched with interest while the leader comprehended the flat with a swift, searching glance. Mex and Taranch drew rein and waited, in evident readiness either to fight or to fare onward just as One Eye might elect.

"You been hyer long, compadre?" asked One Eye.

"Since just before noon," was the answer.

"Ain't seen nothin' of a stray moharrie, have y'u?"

"Moharrie!" exclaimed Burton. "You don't mean to say there's a woman strayin' around these deserts?"

"That's what I'm aimin' to tell y'u. She's been strayin' a lot, too, an' doin' it on the hoof—since we grabbed off her caballo. Reg'lar two-gun moharrie, she is, and an all-around killer. Wild cat, only wuss. Put out the light fer 'Hank' Sprague, over to Shoshone, and the sher'ff outfitted me an' Mex an' Taranch and set us to combin' these deserts. She's right around hyer, some'rs; it ain't been an hour since she give us the slip, over west o' this cañon."

Information of this sort, coming from a more respectable source, would have given Burton a bad turn, all circumstances considered. The effect was disagreeable, even as matters stood. Nevertheless, as between the girl and her pursuers, Burton was still favoring the girl.

"Well," he remarked, "if I see this wild cat I'll remember what you say. Where is she from?"

"The Tres Alamos hills is whar we picked up her trail." One Eye turned in his saddle. "Taranch," he ordered, "you nose around the chaparral up there on the flat. I wouldn't put it past her none

to be layin' low in that bresh, waitin' fer a chance to pick off this hyer hombre with a bullet an' take over his hull camp. That ud be her style."

Burton began to feel worried. If Taranch searched the chaparral he might find the girl; and, if he found her, there would be a fight—Burton and the girl against the three desert men. Burton had one revolver, and the girl had another; two weapons against all that array of hardware in the belts and across the saddles of this mounted contingent of desperate fighters. On the other hand, if Burton objected to Taranch making a search of the chaparral, suspicion would be aroused and a clash would result on the instant.

"All right, make your search," said Burton; "but if there was a woman here on this flat I guess I'd know about it."

Taranch spurred his horse up the slope and rode leisurely into the thickets. Burton watched and waited, hoping against hope that the girl might save the day by foiling the sharp eyes of Taranch. One Eye crooked a leg around the saddle horn, crammed tobacco into the bowl of a villainous pipe, and began to smoke.

"I been forty year in these hyer deserts, man an' boy," he remarked to Burton, "and this is the fust time I ever sot eyes on you. Easterner?"

"Once," Burton told him; "but that was some years back. I've been around Herkimer for six months."

"Prospectin'?"

"Yes."

"Wal, save yore time. Thar ain't no gold in these parts."

Oue Eye appraised Burton's camp with a greedy stare, and would not have been above taking over all the plunder if the moment had been ripe. Taranch rode back, shaking his head.

"That moharrie ain't around the flat, Pecos," he reported.

"Then," returned One Eye, "she's furder up the cañon, an' we'll ride. See y'u ag'in, compadre," he called to Burton as he and his companions rode away and lost themselves around another bend.

A low, silvery laugh broke from the chaparral. The next moment a figure emerged from the mesquite—and again Burton was staggered.

"Say," he asked sharply, "what does this mean?"

"Playing safe, that's all," was the answer; "that's the reason I wanted that shingled-bob. How do I stack up, Paul?"

CHAPTER IV.

DEEPENING MYSTERY.

BEYOND doubt Virginia had effected a startling transformation in her personal appearance since she had vanished into the chaparral. Disappearing in skirts and middy blouse, she had reappeared in boy's clothes of crumpled khaki, and had a bell-crowned Mexican sombrero pulled down to her ears. She still wore her scuffed and broken shoes, but had removed the spurs from the heels.

One Eye and his two companions were looking for a "stray moharrie." Here was a lad whose bright hair, freshly shingled, was completely hidden by the big floppy hat. For all that, however, one glance at the pretty face under the wide hat brim would have been enough for One Eye. Burton looked his disapproval, and the girl flashed him a defiant smile.

"You think I'm locoed, don't you, Paul?" she tossed at him. "Well, you've got another guess coming. I'm little Miss Wisenheimer every minute. I asked you," she broke off sharply, "to tell me how I stack up?"

"If you could have changed your face with your clothes," Burton told her, "you might be able to put this over. As it is, I don't see a chance. One Eye wouldn't have to guess very hard after a look into that face of yours."

"Wait till I get on my make-up," she said.

She was carrying a bundle roughly wrapped in old brown paper. Throwing this down in Burton's scattered plunder, she walked to the ashes of the camp fire, rubbed a hand over the smoke-begrimed coffeepot, and transferred the grime to her face.

"Thunder!" Burton exclaimed disgustedly, and turned away and rolled himself a cigarette.

He had taken no more than half a dozen whiffs when the girl stepped in front of him and thrust her face close to his.

"Size me up," she ordered. "I reckon that face won't give me away now, will it?"

She had a bright skin that no amount of Arizona sun could tan; and now all that soft whiteness had been corroded with gray soot. It was undeniable that she had cloaked her identity, but the effect was extremely gruesome.

"Oh, well," growled Burton, "if you keep the hat on I guess you'll pass. Where did those clothes come from?"

"From Jerry Flanders' place, over in the Tres Alamos hills. I had 'em with me in a bundle when I left Flanders' and started for Herkimer. Maybe you wouldn't think it, Paul, but I've got a lot of savvy—enough, anyhow, so that when I left Fanita and took to the cliffs I toted the bundle along. Dropped it over there at the foot of the cañon wall when I blew in on you. Went back after it when One Eye and his crowd came galloping up. You understand now, don't you, why I wanted that hair cut?"

Burton nodded. "That's one of the few things about you that I'm beginning to understand. Where were you when Taranch was searching the flat?"

"Up a cottonwood, looking down at him. He never had a notion I was so close." She laughed softly; then she sniffed and tossed her head. "'Wild cat,' eh? 'Reg'lar two-gun moharrie,' says One Eye. I heard all that while I was up in the tree, Paul. Honest, I never had more than one gun to my name." She pushed back the front of her khaki coat to show the belt girdling her slender waist—the belt supporting the small gun in its holster and the little hand bag.

"Out of sight, out of mind," she went on, and dropped the front of the coat. "Seventy-five thousand dollars in that hand reticule, Paul, and that's the secret of all these activities on the part of One Eye, Mex, and Taranch. Shackleby is egging them on. But listen: I never 'put out the light' for Hank Sprague, over in Shoshone. Oue Eye made that up out of whole cloth."

Burton turned to cast an anxious glance up the cañon. "That tough outfit is likely to come riding back any minute," he said, "and I don't think you ought to stay here."

She leaned against the trunk of a cottonwood, folded her arms, and regarded him speculatively. "Where do you reckon I ought to stay, if not here?" she inquired. "Think I'd be safer, hoofing it across the desert in this hot sun? No, Paul; you're up against it. Fate has double crossed you. You are burdened with a poor, helpless female; and you haven't the heart to turn her adrift, although you know mighty well she's going to be a tribulation and a care. I've done my little best to make this as easy for you as possible, and I'll keep on doing my little best to take all the strain off you that I can; but you are hooked and you may as well get that straight. You have got to see me through."

Thus bluntly and logically this mysterious young woman bared the heart of that most unusual situation. Burton was annoyed, and showed it; but he was bowing to the inevitable, and he showed that, too.

"Through?" he echoed blankly. "To Herkimer, you mean?"

"No; to Phoenix," she went on; "by way of Uncle Dan's and Herkimer. If I clear these deserts safely with my seventy-five thousand I shall be free of One Eye and the two other coyotes; but Shackleby won't have played out his hand—no such good luck as that—and he'll have some other mercenaries try to make good on the job if these desert hobos fall down on it. I'm depending on you a lot, Paul!"

He frowned. "Maybe I'm a weaker reed than you think, Virginia," he answered.

"What!" she exclaimed. "And you a six-footer and built like a gladiator? You can't tell me!"

"I've got some ideas of my own," he went on, "and I'm pretty well set in my ways."

"I wouldn't give a tinker's whoop for a man that didn't have some ideas and wasn't set in his way. I'm built like that myself. I've got two Christian names, Paul. One of them is Virginia, just as I told you, and the other is Jessica. Jessica Virginia. Named after a rich aunt in the hope that when she passed on she'd leave me a fortune. She didn't, though, and it was an awful blow to my folks.

Now that I'm liable to be your pal for some time, you needn't call me Virginia any more; make it 'Jess.'"

Burton continued to give the upper reaches of the cañon his attention, expecting at any moment to see the three riders show themselves on their return past the flat.

"Don't be worried," the girl told him. "We'll start for Uncle Dan's just as soon as the sun gets pretty well down. I reckon that's your burro I saw, over by the cañon wall? We'll have to walk to Uncle Dan's, trailing the burro, and I've got to rest before we start. Suppose we sit down, Paul, watch the upper part of the cañon, and spot those coyotes the instant they begin turning the bend? That will give me time to get back into the chaparral and hide out until they pass."

She dropped down at the foot of the cottonwood and rested her back droopingly against the trunk. There was a touch of weariness in her blue eyes, and a set of fatigue in the tense lines of her begrimed face. There was also, however, a Spartan angle to her character, and it was plain to Burton that she was drawing upon it now. Burton was touched, and sympathy filled his heart.

"Now that I've told you all about myself, Paul," the girl said, "suppose you return the compliment with a little of your own personal history? What about those ideas of yours? I'll bet they're interesting."

CHAPTER V.

THE CARDS ON THE TABLE.

IT was nearing two o'clock in the afternoon, and the overhead sun poured its blazing rays directly into the cañon. The cañon, however, had a coolness all its own and tempered the sun's heat. The flat was spotted with golden glints and purple shadows that intertwined and danced back and forth under the gently waving cottonwoods.

The silence was profound, and never had nature produced a more splendid setting for peace, and comfort, and isolation. Yet there was no peace, comfort, or isolation for Paul Gregory Burton. This mysterious girl with her troubles had disappointed his hopes, and she was even pulling on his sympathies in order that the wreck of his plans might be all the more complete.

He watched the lights and shadows play about the oversized Mexican hat and weave their odd tracery across and around the ill-fitting boy's clothes. With her head thrown back against the tree trunk, the soft, tender curve of the girl's throat was revealed to him with what was almost a poignant reminder of her helplessness. In that place, and hunted by enemies as she was, she needed a champion with a strong heart and a daring hand. He felt that his heart was strong enough, and his hand daring enough, and yet for all that he might be a weak reed.

Why not tell her about that psychic monstrosity that sat upon his shoulders like an Old Man of the Sea? Why not explain his reason for seeking the loneliness and the isolation of those deserts? She was demanding much of him, and it was only fair that she should be fully informed as to his limitations.

He dropped his eyes to the upper bend of the cañon, and while he talked he watched alertly for the first sign of One Eye, Mex, and Taranch returning toward the flat.

"You have said, Jess, that I am a six-footer and built like a gladiator," he remarked, "and I suppose that is correct. But," he added, his brown face hardening, "I'm not so dependable as I look."

"You haven't killed a man, or robbed a bank, or done anything else that makes it necessary for you to hide out in a place like this—have you?" she inquired, with a half laugh. "That's not one of the ideas that have given a set to your ways, is it?"

He shook his head. "No," he told her; "it's worse than that."

"My stars," she exclaimed, still jestingly, "this is pretty dreadful! What, for goodness' sake, can be worse than robbery or murder?"

"Looking a part," he answered in all seriousness, "and feeling yourself a hypocrite and not able to live up to it."

She lowered her chin with a jerk to give him a hard bright stare. "Come again with that, please," she requested, knitting her brows; "I don't believe I just get you."

"Most people don't 'get' me," he said

gravely, "and that's the hard part of it. All the reward I get for taking any one into my confidence and explaining about myself is to be called a 'nut' and 'locoed.' I'm taking you at your word, though, and I have hopes that you'll do the same with me."

"Look here, Mr. Man," the girl remarked, "I'm getting plumb interested in you. At first you were just a lone gold hunter to me, with a camp that happened to be available in my time of need. But the plot is beginning to thicken, and already you're as big a mystery as I am. Go ahead and tell me some more—I'll take your word, and I won't call you a nut, either, or say you're locoed. What appears to be the trouble?"

"Don't be flippant about it, Jess," he requested, "for this is pretty serious. I'll try to explain this trouble of mine so that you will grasp it. I've made up my mind that it's a species of megalomania, and——"

He was interrupted with a soft, low whistle. "I don't wonder people misunderstand you," answered the girl in supplementing the whistle, "if you spring a jaw-breaker like that on them. Me-gal-o-mania!" she repeated slowly. "What sort of a mania is it?"

He was patient, and went on with his explaining: "The accent is on the "meg,' and it means that a person has high-falutin' ideas of his ability,' grandiose delusions regarding himself. I'm built to play a big part in the affairs of the world, and I've tried to do that; but every time I make the effort I come a cropper. I have a facility for doing the wrong thing in a crisis.

"When I played football at college, for instance," he went on, "I would always take the most desperate chances instead of the easy ones in trying to break through the oposing line, and as a consequence I often just missed a touchdown. That is the idea I'm trying to make clear to you, Jess. I'm forever grabbing the hardest jobs and forever losing out on them. My weakness is to lay hold of more trouble than I can take care of."

"That's not a weakness," said the girl —"that's a gift. Most men take the little things they know they can measure up to, instead of going after the big things that will put them to the trouble of reaching." She broke off with a laugh. "Say, but this is funny!" she remarked indefinitely. "And right out here in the middle of nowhere, too! Can you beat it?"

"Maybe you won't call me a nut," observed Burton, "but you are certainly getting a lot of amusement out of something that I am trying to treat in a serious way. I went on from bad to worse with this megalomania proposition," he continued, "and then when I tried to clean up a million with fifty thousand, and lost the fifty thousand, I vowed that I'd get away by myself somewhere and see if I couldn't correct my troubles.

"I want to make myself over," he went on; "I want to adjust my undertakings to my abilities, so that I may win out now and then instead of continually losing out. Peace, comfort, and isolation are necessary to this work of readjustment. In college they began calling me 'Blunderbus,' because of my capacity for making blunders just when they were most costly. And now for several years I've been the same old Blunderbus, shooting at big targets and missing them altogether. I'm going to get out from under that nickname of Blunderbus, or else crawl into some cranny of these desolate hills and let my futility put an end to me.

"And that," he added, "is what I meant by being a weak reed. You are an enterprising young person, Jess, and you've had some sort of a setback. Fate brought you to my camp, and if I don't help you against this outfit of desert freebooters you seem to think it's going to be all day with you. It hasn't been pleasant for me to air my weakness as I have just done, but I considered it a duty. You had to be warned. If I do help you, Jess, it's liable to be all day with you. My cards are all on the table—look them over."

The girl got up very slowly from the foot of the cottonwood, pulled her hat a little farther down on her ears, marched over to Burton, and slapped him on the shoulder.

"Piffle!" she said. "One meets a lot of crazy notions in going through life, and right here I pin a leather medal on

this one of yours. I can't believe that you are stringing me with the idea of dodging the responsibilities I have unloaded upon you, and, anyhow, I promised you I would take your word. You've been isolated from your kind for so long in these deserts, Paul, that you are all mixed up in your dates.

"It's lucky for you that I blew in just when I did," she continued, "and gave you some real trouble on which to sharpen the teeth of this megalomania complex of yours. Now listen to me while I give you some inside facts regarding Jessica Virginia Larrimore, her aims, her activities, and her hard luck. I've picked out a big thing, too; but I'm not running away from it—I'm going to put it over, and you're going to help."

CHAPTER VI.

THE LARRIMORE SIDE OF IT.

IT seemed that Jessica Virginia Larrimore must have been of two minds regarding Burton, and whether she considered his remarkable statement as made in jest or earnest did not appear. It was plain that Burton had piqued her interest and aroused her curiosity; and if he had done that merely to draw her out regarding her own mysterious schemes and activities, then his subtlety was completely successful.

The girl went back to her place at the foot of the tree and, while Burton continued to watch alertly the upper reaches of the cañon, she began to talk about her aims, her activities, and her hard luck.

"Shorthand and typewriting is my line of endeavor," she said; "or it was until a month ago when I quit my job and decided to get rich. It's mighty hard for a girl to scramble along on twenty-five dollars a week these parlous times. So when Uncle Dan put that tip of his on paper and dropped it in the mails at Herkimer, I drew my time from Hanchett, Feeley & Ramson, Lawyers, in Phoenix, and launched my get-rich-quick enterprise.

"My dad—and he was one of the best dads that ever lived—died six years ago. I was sixteen then, and just finishing high school. I boarded in Phoenix with friends, and dad was a prospector. Somehow he never seemed to strike anything big; but he made enough to keep me and himself going, and now and then he would find the means to grubstake other prospectors. When he died, I had to give up thinking of college. I took a business course, and became a pothook artist and a typing expert. That's how I made my way—until I got that tip from Uncle Dan.

"What Uncle Dan told me in his letter was this in so many words: James Bolingbroke Shackleby, otherwise known as 'Spike' Shackleby, went out a few years back and discovered the Fanita Mine. He was a prospector, and as he developed the Fanita it began to look like a regular mine. Pretty soon an Eastern syndicate came along and offered Shackleby a hundred and fifty thousand dollars for the Fanita. That deal is going through just as soon as the agent for this syndicate satisfies himself regarding the title. Shackleby says he owns the mine himself; but he doesn't, for half of it belongs to me. You want to know why? Well, Uncle Dan told me that part of it.

"It seems that my dad grubstaked Shackleby for the prospecting trip that ended at the Fanita," the girl went on, "but, about the time Shackleby built his monuments and filed on the claim, my dad died at Jerry Flanders' place over in the Tres Alamos hills. Spike Shackleby thought he could beat dad's heirs and assigns—and that means me—out of the half interest in the Fanita that he owed dad on account of the grubstaking. He might have done it, too, if Uncle Dan hadn't known about that agreement.

"The only point my prospects hinged upon was this: Was that grubstake agreement written, or was it merely a verbal understanding? If it was down in black and white, and I could get hold of it, I had Shackleby for half of the hundred and fifty thousand he's to receive for the mine. If there wasn't a written agreement, Shackleby could lie himself out of it. He had filed on the Fanita in his own name—and that was his first move toward stealing my half interest. Uncle Dan advised me to go to the Tres Alamos hills and have a talk with Flanders.

"When I quit my job, I assembled my finances, bought the buckskin horse and,

just for a good omen, called her Fanita. Then I started for the Tres Alamos hills and, on the way, dropped in on Shackleby at the Fanita Mine. Maybe you think, Paul, that your megalomania complex has caused you to overreach yourself occasionally, but nothing you've ever done could match that mistake of mine in calling on Spike Shackleby.

"I tipped my whole hand to him—just about. I told him I knew dad had grubstaked him, and that I owned a half interest in the mine, and I wanted to know if he was going to be square and give me my rights. He denied everything, said dad never gave him a nickel, and then he defied me to prove that I had any right whatever in the mining property.

"'All right, Mr. Spike,' I told him, 'that's just what I'm going to do—prove it.'

"I made my way to Flanders' place, and after about a week we discovered among some papers dad had left—papers that had never been turned over to me—a grubstake agreement between dad and Shackleby, all executed in due form. My next move was to trail across the desert and drop in on Uncle Dan, on my way back to Herkimer and Phoenix.

"But Shackleby had been busy. He knew about that agreement, and he wasn't going to let me produce it if he could help it. So he hired this One Eye person to watch me and, if I found the agreement, to take it away from me and turn it over to him—Shackleby. So that's the little scheme, and it was responsible for the trouble I was in when I climbed down the face of that cliff back of this flat and found you and your camp."

Jess pushed back the coat and laid a hand on the bag swinging from her belt.

"That grubstake agreement is worth seventy-five thousand dollars to me," she went on, "and I've got it right here. My problem is to get from this cañon to Uncle Dan's, from Uncle Dan's to Herkimer, and from Herkimer to Phoenix without letting this piratical crowd get away with me or my evidence. That's our job, Paul—yours and mine. And if I win out, I'm going to make it worth your while."

"It's a brazen piece of deviltry!" asserted Burton.

"If you've been long in these deserts," the girl returned, "then you must know they're easy places for that sort of maneuvering. If I lose the evidence, I lose my half interest in the Fanita Mine. No matter if I escaped myself and told about the grubstake agreement being stolen, that wouldn't count. I've got to produce that paper, signed by dad and Shackleby, in order to make out my case."

"Where does your Uncle Dan live?" Burton inquired.

More intently than ever he was now watching the upper bend of the cañon for the return of One Eye, Mex, and Taranch. In every way in his power he was determined that this girl should keep her grubstake agreement and recover her rights. It might prove a big job for him, and he was hoping against hope that he would not come one of his customary "croppers."

"Uncle Dan Jesperson has the well and the little general store at the oasis known as Inglesito Wells," said Jess; "and that, I figure, is about fifteen miles from this cañon, almost on the direct road to Herkimer. We——"

Right here Burton discovered his first blunder. So sure was he that trouble was to come around the upper bend of the cañon that he had given no attention whatever to the flat. Now a crackling of mesquite called his attention to the right, and he shifted his startled gaze to discover the red-haired Taranch emerging from the chaparral with a leveled six-gun in each hand.

"One Eye reckoned y'u might be playin' off!" cried Taranch with a curse. "He had me sneak back afoot from around the turn, so'st to keep an eye on this hyer camp while him and Mex combed the cañon above. Ye're a purty slick moharrie," he went on, shifting his murderous eyes from Burton to the girl, "but right about hyer is whar y'u git the double cross. I'll take that bag y'u got at yore belt. Pronto, now! Hang fire, an' I'll let got with both guns. That'll mean two in this cañon that won't have a word to say about the Fanita Mine from now till the crack o' doom. That bag, I tell y'u! Fork over!" He emphasized the order with another oath.

CHAPTER VII.

LEAP FIRST, LOOK AFTERWARD.

WHAT Burton did in that crisis was fairly illustrative of his methods. He hurled himself at Taranch with a suddenness that was a greater tribute to his courage than to his discretion.

Taranch was no more than a dozen feet away, and while his left hand held a gun leveled at the girl, a weapon in his hight hand was reserved exclusively for Burton. The chances were about ninety-nine out of a hundred that the desert desperado would flex his right forefinger at the identical instant Burton launched himself into the air; the chances were about ninety-nine out of a hundred, too, that Burton would stop Taranch's bullet while in midflight, die where he dropped, and be of no further aid to the young lady with the much-wanted grubstake agreement.

An impartial observer would have gathered that Burton's main trouble was an inability to consider, or a distaste for considering, consequences prior to initiating action. In other words, he leaped before he looked.

That he escaped a fatality was due solely to one of those trifling circumstances which flash lightninglike out of the black cloud of chance for the purpose of making or marring human destinies. As Taranch pulled the trigger, he instinctively pushed himself forward; he was in the midst of Burton's scattered equipment, and his advancing foot struck the largest of Burton's canteens. It was not much; but it was enough to deflect Taranch's aim by the hairbreadth that sent the bullet through Burton's shirt at the shoulder and not through his heart.

The two men came together with a force that threw them, and they rolled about in the sandy soil. Burton worried at Taranch's throat with his clawing fingers, while Taranch struggled to draw a knife and make use of it while his breath served.

The girl, cool and businesslike, stepped to the side of the two prostrate men and leaned down to grasp Taranch's right hand and, with the expenditure of more strength than Burton dreamed she possessed, forced the hand and the knife to the ground and beat the hilt out of the clutching fingers. Then, quickly, the girl picked up a rope. "Face down with him, Paul!" she murmured.

Taranch's face was blue and his strength so diminished that Burton had no difficulty in rolling him over. With the rope, his hands were bound at his back and his feet at the ankles. Last of all, Jess untied a soiled bandanna handkerchief from his throat, twisted it, placed it between his jaws, and knotted it at the back of his neck. Then she stepped back and looked at Burton, who was breathing hard and collecting the artillery Taranch still had in his belt or had dropped.

"I'm beginning to understand why you fall down in your big enterprises, Paul," she remarked; "too much enthusiasm and not enough judgment. What they call touch and go. By all the laws of probabilities, you should this minute be lying dead there on the flat, leaving me to the tender mercies of this desert wolf. It's no glory to you that you missed the fate you invited upon yourself. From now on, while looking after my interests, I want you to be more careful."

"It's what really happened, not what might have happened, that concerns us," snapped Burton. "The echoes of that shot have carried a long way up the cañon, and we've got to prepare for eventualities. One Eye and Mex will be coming this way at a run."

"That's not what we're going to do at all," she corrected him; "we're simply going to be ready for eventualities while packing your plunder on the burro and seeing how quick we can beat it. If One Eye and Mex were so far away they did not hear that shot, there's a chance that we can get clear of the cañon and well on the road to Herkimer before they get back here."

"Herkimer!" exclaimed Burton. "I thought your next port of call was your Uncle Dan's?"

"Taranch heard all about our plans to stop at Uncle Dan's, so when those two other wolves of the pack get back here, this man will tell them which way we're heading—then all three of them would overhaul us. Pack up, while I move up to the bend and watch for trouble from that part of the cañon."

She started away briskly, while Burton ran to fetch his burro, Andy, rig the pack saddle, and hurriedly load the equipment. Long practice had made him adept at packing; and, although haste was the order of the moment, he took a bit of time to gather up the long golden locks of hair and stow them away in an empty ore sack. They were in the pack when he threw a quick "diamond" over the outer canvas and made all taut and snug. His last move, after tossing his hands in a signal to Jess that all was set, was to step into the chaparral and gather up the rifle Taranch had left there.

"No sign of the two others around the turn," reported the girl as they set out along the edge of the dry bed of the creek toward the mouth of the cañon. "Isn't this a whole lot better, compadre, than waiting on the flat and staging a fight with One Eye and Mex?"

"I suppose so," agreed Burton; "but we've got a long hard jaunt ahead of us, and under a broiling sun. Thirty miles! And if we don't go by Inglesito Wells, there's no water the whole distance."

She looked up to smile at him. "Changed my plans again, Paul," she said; "and we're going to Uncle Dan's after all. What I said about Herkimer was a ruse. I saw that Taranch was listening, and when he gets word to One Eye and Mex I want that whole outfit to go chasing us along the road to Herkimer. Get the idea?"

"Maybe it will work," commented Burton skeptically.

"Sure it will! Then there's something else we will do. Along the edge of the hills to the east of the cañon there are a number of little draws. I'll leave it to you to blind our trail so we can hide away in one of those draws and wait until the day gets a bit cooler."

Beyond the mouth of the cañon there was a stretch of stony ground. Turning there, and keeping to the hard, unyielding soil, they prodded the burro eastward along the foot of the uplifts that bordered the level desert. Possibly half a mile from the cañon, they took refuge in a draw that seamed the bare brown slope and began their wait for the going down of the sun. On the crest of the bank of the draw, Burton sprawled flat behind a clump of cholla cactus and peered westward, hoping to discover something of the plans and purposes of the three coyotes trailing Miss Larrimore.

"I'm running true to form," he mused, as he lay and watched. "I came near killing all that girl's chances by my work at the flat. I wonder, though, what she'd have done if I hadn't made that jump at Taranch and, by good luck, got the best of him? Her criticism wasn't what you would call constructive, even though she was in the right."

Perhaps it was an hour later that he saw three riders and a led horse moving like so many animated dots over the gleam of the distant sand.

"By George," he chuckled, "they're really making for Herkimer! That stratagem of the girl's has got them off on the wrong trail!"

To make sure that One Eye, Mex, and Taranch did not discover and correct their error, change their course, and so catch him and Jess napping in the draw, Burton remained on the lookout.

CHAPTER VIII.

UP AGAINST IT.

THE old saying that "it never rains but it pours" was exemplified for Burton when he came down from the bank of the draw. It was five in the afternoon; the heat of the sun had appreciably lessened and a start for Inglesito Wells and Dan Jesperson's could be made without further delay.

Something most unaccountable, however, had happened at the little dry camp in the draw. Jess was lying on the blanket Burton had spread for her in the shade cast by a shoulder of rock. She had discarded the Mexican hat and removed her arm from one sleeve of the coat. Her left shoulder was bare, and Burton was startled to see that the shoulder was bound with a red-stained bandage.

"How did you get hurt?" he asked.

The girl opened her eyes and made a helpless little gesture with her hands. "That's old stuff, Paul," she answered in a quivering voice; "I thought I could keep it to myself, but it's getting too much for me. Back there in the cañon

you heard some shooting. One of the bullets got me in the shoulder. I didn't think it amounted to much; so I just tore up a piece of cotton and fastened it around my shoulder and under the arm. Reckon I sort of wrenched it when I tried to help you with Taranch."

Burton knelt down at her side and began working at the bandage. "I've got to have a look at it," he said. "You climbed down that cañon wall with your shoulder in this condition?" he went on, when he had laid bare the wound.

"It didn't bother me—much," she returned in an effort to treat the matter lightly.

"And all the while you were in my camp on the flat," he growled, "you never said a word."

"I made trouble enough for you as it was."

The bullet had passed through the fleshy part of the shoulder and, because the injury had not received proper attention, infection seemed to be setting in. The whole shoulder was swollen and had a red and angry look.

"This may be serious," said Burton, "and I ought to give you a piece of my mind for keeping quiet about it. Wait a second."

He went to his pack and brought out his first-aid kit. After cleansing the wound carefully with water from one of the canteens, he painted it with iodine and then wrapped the shoulder with sterilized gauze and fastened the bandage in place with adhesive tape.

"That's the best I can do, Jess," he remarked solicitously. "I wish I were a doctor."

"Uncle Dan's a doctor," she told him as he carefully buttoned the coat over the shoulder, leaving the arm free of the sleeve.

"It's fifteen miles to Uncle Dan," went on Burton, "and you're not able to walk. If I'm any judge, Jess, you've got a fever this minute."

A quivering sigh of disappointment escaped her lips. "Tough luck, isn't it?" she asked. "But I can walk; I *will* walk. I'm going to get to Uncle Dan's if it kills me."

"Rest easy about that," said Burton; "I'm making it my business to get you to your Uncle Dan's—and without killing yourself, either. Shackleby's men have gone off toward Herkimer and we ought to have clear sailing between here and Inglesito Wells. The main thing is to make the trip an easy one for you."

The girl had no suggestion to offer; and that was eloquent proof of her weakness and suffering, for, in anything like a normal condition, she had ideas and methods for every emergency.

Burton cached his equipment and supplies there in the draw, cushioned Andy's back as softly as possible with a blanket, and knotted a lead rope around his furry neck and rove a hackamore into it.

"Now you behave yourself, Andy," he warned, "and don't try any of your Indian tricks! The little girl we've got along with us is up against it—in fact, we're all up against it—and you've got to do your share in getting us out of this hole."

When he started to help Jess to the burro's back, Burton was astounded to note how weak and helpless she had become during the few short hours they had been in the draw. Although she tried bravely she could do little for herself, and he had to take her in his arms and lift her bodily.

She brushed his cheek softly with her hand. "You're a good compadre, Paul," she whispered, "and I'm mighty sorry to be making you all this trouble."

The sympathy he had felt for her before, in the draw, welled up in him again—but stronger, this time. "Don't say a word about trouble," he answered, hiding his feeling with a touch of gruffness. "You hang to Andy's back and try to be comfortable."

He looped the strap of a canteen over his shoulder, strung one of Taranch's six-guns on his belt with his own, and fastened Taranch's rifle across Andy's back in front of the girl.

"Now for Uncle Dan's," he cried cheerily, and set out, leading the burro.

The ten years' wandering of Ulysses in returning to Ithaca after the siege of Troy have thrilled the world ever since Homer's time; and Burton thought of Ulysses during the long night of anxiety and struggle which was taken up with his own little Odyssey.

For perhaps an hour he led the burro; but when the sun went down in a flame behind the ragged western peaks, he found it necessary to walk at Andy's side and support the half-unconscious girl to keep her from sliding from her seat on the folded blanket.

The condition of Jess was rapidly growing worse. She needed immediately the ministrations of her uncle, the doctor; but Inglesito Wells was still distant and the traveling toward it discouragingly slow.

At a snail's pace they crept along under the moon and stars, shuffling through the sand. Jess leaned heavily against Burton's shoulder, and he clung to her with one hand while he used the other to prod Andy into action.

It was about midnight, as Burton judged by the stars, when the fever obscured the girl's reason completely. She thought Burton was Uncle Dan, and she patted his face and pressed her hot, dry lips to his brow.

"When I get my rights from Shackleby, Uncle Dan, life will be a whole lot easier for us, won't it?" she whispered.

"Yes, mujercita," Burton answered aloud; and he said in his heart: "If there is anything on earth I can do to help make life easier for you, Jess, count on me to do it."

The kindly night was their protection from the three wolves released on the girl's trail by Shackleby. By now they must have discovered that they were on the wrong scent, and very likely they would turn their pursuit in the direction of Inglesito Wells; but fate did not add a fight with the trailing desperadoes to Burton's tribulations of the night. Steadily, hour after hour, the girl, the man, and the burro plodded on and on toward Uncle Dan's.

CHAPTER IX.

TERRIBLY INDEPENDENT.

BY failing health Dan Jesperson had been driven into the deserts in his middle years. He found that he could live in the dry, bracing air of those waste places, but that a change to the pleasanter and more populous haunts of men would be equivalent to writing his death warrant. So he bought Inglesito Wells, and kept the pioneer store there, selling groceries, water, baled hay, and other supplies to the few travelers who strayed into those inhospitable regions.

Phil Larrimore, Jesperson's brother-in-law, did most of his gold hunting in the comparatively near vicinity of Inglesito Wells. Once a month it was his habit to drop in on Jesperson for supplies, to spend a few days at the little desert ranch, to tell of his hopes for making a "strike" and of his worries regarding Jessica Virginia, the little girl he had left with friends in Phoenix while she acquired her schooling.

Time and again he had said to Jesperson: "If anything happens to me, Dan, I want you to be a father to Jess." And time and again Jesperson had solemnly promised that he would look after Jess exactly as he would look after a daughter of his own, if that need ever arose.

When Larrimore dropped his gold hunting to set his feet in the "One-way Trail," Jesperson remembered his promise and proved faithful to it. But Inglesito Wells was not a promising place for a girl like Jess, so Jesperson kept track of her by letter and by an occasional visit back and forth, and made the girl's future his particular care.

Larrimore had left no money when he died, and Jesperson's estate would be small. Jesperson was anxious to have Jess provided for, and he schemed to get her away from the grind of the lawyers' office in Phoenix. She was a good girl and entitled to the best there was in life, and it was a trial for Jesperson to contemplate the impoverished future which lay ahead of her. It was these worries over the future of Jess Larrimore that eventually inspired Jesperson with what he conceived to be a bright idea. That idea had to do with his young friend, Zack Ducane.

Ducane was thirty. He called himself a mining engineer, gave his hailing place as Prescott, and whenever he found himself in the vicinity of Herkimer he would always spend a few days with Jesperson at Inglesito Wells. He seemed to the simple old man at the Wells to be a youngster of the finest character and prosperous in his business.

Jesperson's plan was simplicity itself:

He would marry Jess to Zack Ducane, and her happy future would be assured. Some six months before Jesperson learned that Shackleby was negotiating with an Eastern syndicate for the sale of his mining property at a big figure, Jesperson had sent Ducane to Jess with a letter of introduction. Privately to Jess he had written:

I want you to like Ducane, Jess, because he is one of the finest fellows that ever lived.

But, for some reason, Jess did not seem to fancy Ducane. She never spoke to her uncle, or wrote to him, to that effect; but the course of events spoke plainly for the state of her feelings. If Jesperson asked about Ducane, Jess made an answer that was beautifully indefinite although nicely calculated to avoid injuring her uncle's feelings.

Later, when he learned that Shackleby was on the point of selling the Fanita Mine for a handsome sum to the Easterners, Jesperson's plans for his niece's future turned to the grubstaking agreement between his brother-in-law and Shackleby. Jesperson instituted a private investigation which assured him that the Fanita property had been discovered while Shackleby was prospecting with the supplies and equipment supplied by Larrimore.

As a result of that evidence, Jesperson sent his "tip" to Jess and advised her to get busy with it, and to ask Ducane, who was a successful mining engineer, to help her. Jess, being an independent sort of person, wrote back that she didn't need Ducane's help, and that she would follow up the lead alone.

Jesperson, nevertheless, was determined that Ducane should help her; and he had written Ducane at Prescott, acquainted him with all the circumstances regarding his niece's hold on the Fanita, and had requested him to do what he could to help Jess, but to do it secretly.

So the matter stood, Jesperson hoping for great things for Jess, through the ability of Ducane to help her. And if Ducane served her well—at least, so ran Jesperson's thoughts—it might be that Jess would see Ducane in a more favorable light and Jesperson's fond hopes of a matrimonial alliance be realized.

On this day when Jess, driven to bay in the hills by Shackleby's hirelings, was being befriended by the stranger, Burton, Ducane dropped in at Inglesito Wells.

He was a striking chap, this Ducane, and easily calculated to fill any young woman's eye. There was a dashing quality about him that was romantic, too, and he proved himself a gentleman by talking and behaving like one.

In the evening of the day that found Burton struggling toward Uncle Dan's, with the helpless Jess in his charge, Jesperson and Ducane sat in comfortable chairs in front of the little adobe store and dwelling at the Wells.

"And you don't know just what Miss Larrimore is doing, at the present moment, Dan?" Ducane asked.

"She's a terribly independent piece, Zack," the old man answered, "and she has always insisted on fighting her own battles. But this Shackleby is a tough proposition, and I'm afraid the girl will run into trouble. I haven't heard a word since she left Phoenix and started horseback on the long ride to Jerry Flanders' place in the Tres Alamos hills. She has promised to come here and talk with me, after her conference with Flanders, and I'm expecting her at any moment."

"It's too bad!" deplored Ducane. "There's a lot of money at stake, and Shackleby is the sort of shark that will beat her out of it. If he can't do it in one way, then he will in another. If Miss Larrimore had allowed me to handle her end of the proposition, I'm pretty sure I could have called the turn on Shackleby."

"So am I, Zack," returned the worried Jesperson. "Young people nowadays have their own ideas, however, and don't seem willing to take counsel with older heads. Spike Shackleby was little more than a desert rat when my brother-in-law grubstaked him, and he's hand and glove with all the desert riffraff. If he should call on that crowd to help him, in his effort to beat Jess out of her rights, I—I don't know what will happen to the girl." The old man held his pipe in his trembling fingers and bowed his head in gloomy thought.

Ducane leaned over to drop a reassur-

ing hand on his knee. "I'm here to do what I can, Dan," he said; "and if you think your niece will call here at the Wells after talking with Flanders, I guess I'd better stick around to see if there's anything I can do to lend a hand."

"That would be right kind of you, Zack," Jesperson told him gratefully, "and I'd appreciate it."

And at the very moment, miles away but doggedly creeping onward toward Inglesito Wells, was Burton with the helpless Jess under his care and protection. Only a few hours more, and the event that Jesperson and Ducane were hoping for, would come to pass.

CHAPTER X.

IN THE GRAY DAWN.

SUNRISE in the desert is one of nature's most beautiful performances. Before the gray dawn the ghostly stars scatter westward; the east glows with a sudden, rich color, and almost before one can guess what is happening, the big red ball is "up" and shooting its rays across mountain and mesa.

It was through the gray dawn that Burton, haggard of face and with his jaws resolutely set, covered that last weary mile to Dan Jesperson's oasis. He saw the green of the cottonwoods from a long distance away—shadowy, almost ghostlike, against the lightening skies; then, little by little as he forged ahead, lurching along beside the burro and holding the unconscious girl to the burro's back, the tasseled tops of the sweet corn in Uncle Dan's garden patch took shape and form.

The adobe opened out in clearer perspective, and the corral with Uncle Dan's pack and riding stock, the wall-less, shed-roofed shelter for the stack of baled hay, the horse-power pump and watering trough and the shake shack stored with grain and other supplies emerged distinctly out of the fading haze. Andy sniffed the water, lifted his big ears, and increased his pace.

"Thank God!" fell fervently from the lips of Burton. "We're almost there, girl, and I didn't have to make a fight of it."

What he meant by that was that there had been no fight with One Eye, Mex, and Taranch; but, in another way, that long night had been one continual fight for him, and he was nearer fagged than at any time he could remember since coming into those deserts. His left arm with which, hour after hour, he had supported the girl on the burro, was numb and lifeless from shoulder to elbow.

A riffle of white smoke was rising from the stovepipe chimney at the rear of the adobe. Uncle Dan was astir, it appeared, and getting his breakfast ready. Burton halted Andy at the kitchen door, took the girl in both arms, and staggered with her into the kitchen. The sun, at this moment, jumped clear of the sky line. Andy moved on to the watering trough; and Burton, the limp form of the girl in his arms, stood full in the sun's rays just within the open kitchen door.

Uncle Dan was pottering around the stove. He looked up. Burton he did not know, and Jess he failed to recognize for the moment in her boy's clothes.

"Buenos, amigo," said Jesperson, after the fashion of the country. "Got a sick boy there and want me to doctor him? All right. Take him into the other room and lay him on the cot by the wall. I'll be with you pronto."

"It's a girl I've got," returned Burton. "and if you're Dan Jesperson the girl's your niece, Miss Larrimore."

Jesperson let out a cry, and staggered a step. "What—what's happened to her?" he demanded hoarsely. "She isn't —you don't mean to say she's——"

"She was shot and wounded by some of Shackleby's desert jackals, and half the night she's been out of her head with fever. If you're a doctor, you'll have to look after her without loss of time."

He carried Jess into the front room. It was the store part of the establishment, with pine shelves and a pine counter on one side, and two cots standing against the opposite wall. A youngish man was sitting on the edge of one of the cots, putting on his shoes. The other cot was empty, and there Burton gently deposited the girl.

"The devil!" gasped the man on the edge of the other cot. "Can that be Miss Larrimore?"

Jesperson had pulled himself together, by that time. Drawing up a chair beside

the cot, he sat down and bent over his niece. "Who are you?" he asked sternly of Burton while he sat timing the girl's pulse.

Burton gave his name. "I was camped over in Castle Cañon," he went on, "when Miss Larrimore ran into my camp to get away from some of Shackleby's men. We gave that rough crowd the slip, and I brought her here. All I had was my burro. It took us all night to make our trip from the cañon."

"You may be one of Shackleby's men yourself," remarked Ducane, rising and coming closer.

Burton gave him a black look. "If I had been," he answered, "I'd have left her in the desert. In that hand bag at her belt, Jesperson," he went on, turning curtly away from Ducane, "you'll find the grubstake agreement between her father and Spike Shackleby. Take care of it, for it has caused Miss Larrimore all this trouble."

He started to leave the adobe. "Just a minute!" snapped Ducane. "Where are you going?"

Burton halted and pulled himself erect. "I'm going to look after my burro," he said, "and after that I'm going to stretch out on the hay bales and get a little sleep."

"Before I let him go, Dan," called Ducane, "make sure that grubstake agreement is where he says it is. We don't know anything about this man, and his coming here like this is pretty suspicious."

Burton growled a protest, shouldered Ducane roughly out of his way, and left the adobe by the kitchen door. Andy was pushing his nose up and down in the watering trough, playing with the water luxuriously in his brute fashion. Burton led him to the corral, removed the blanket from his back, and the lead rope from his neck, and turned him out. Then he tossed a forkful of hay over the ocatilla fence, went to the hay shed, and threw himself down on the bales, dog-tired.

Jesperson he could understand, but that other man with his suspicions was beyond him.

"Jess didn't mention anybody else but Uncle Dan," thought Burton vaguely. "Oh, well, that fellow doesn't matter! The girl and the grubstake agreement have been delivered to the man who ought to take care of both of them—and if that lets me out, well and good." Worn though he was, a flood of sympathy for the girl surged through his heart. "I'm hoping, mujercita," he murmured, "that you come out of this all right. I'm hoping——"

But his reflections failed him. His heavy eyelids closed and he drifted away into sound slumber. Five hours passed; but they were as five seconds to Burton. He felt a hand on his shoulder and started up, blinking.

"Come into the house," said a voice. "You must be hungry, and I have a meal ready for you. Then there are some things we want to know, and only you can tell us." It was Jesperson.

"How is Miss Larrimore?" Burton wanted to know.

"Delirious; but I don't think anything serious will come of it. The wound isn't a particularly bad one, and if it could have been taken in time and properly attended to it would have caused Jess comparatively little trouble. Will you come in—and eat and talk with us?"

"I'll be with you in a brace of shakes."

Burton moved over to the watering trough and dipped his head in the cool water. When he rose erect, his face and hair dripping, he saw Jesperson beside him with a huck towel.

"Thanks," said Burton. He wasn't as amiable as he might have been, for he thought he saw in Dan Jesperson a trace of the same suspicion that other man had expressed.

CHAPTER XI.

PLATES FOR THREE.

NOT only did Dan Jesperson look after the store; he cultivated his garden patch, took care of his live stock, and attended to his housework himself. His establishment was a one-man institution, but, even so, his duties did not keep him overbusy. If the store averaged a customer a day, the month around, it was doing well.

He had dinner ready and waiting. The table was spread in the kitchen, and there were plates for three.

"Mr. Burton," said Jesperson, as Bur-

ton came into the kitchen, "this is my friend, Mr. Ducane. Mr. Ducane just happened to be here this morning, and I call that very fortunate—considering what has happened."

The two men nodded, and there was no move on the part of either that suggested a handshake. Burton seated himself opposite Ducane. From the open door leading into the other room there came an incoherent mumbling in the voice of Jess; nothing understandable, but just a low monotone of sound.

Burton listened for a moment and shook his head glumly. "Will she be like that very long, Mr. Jesperson?" he asked.

"I think not," said the old man, "but it is evident that the poor little moharrie has had a terribly hard time. We should like to have you tell us all that happened since she wandered into your camp in Castle Cañon. Take your time; we can talk leisurely as we eat."

Burton went over everything methodically, step by step. Occasionally Jesperson or Ducane dropped in a question or a comment; as this from Ducane:

"Masquerading in boy's clothes—that was the limit. Was that your idea, Burton? It hardly seems possible it could have been Jessica's."

"Well, it was Jessica's, as it happened," said Burton; "she brought the boy's clothes with her from Jerry Flanders' place in the Tres Alamos hills."

"And cutting off her hair," muttered Jesperson; "that would be like her, if she thought the masquerading necessary. But, go on, Mr. Burton."

Burton finished his recital, sketching very briefly the long hard night journey to the Wells.

"Are we to understand, Mr. Burton," Ducane asked when the recital was finished, "that you are willing to help Miss Larrimore still further in her fight to recover her rights from Shackleby?"

"Whatever I can do for Miss Larrimore," was Burton's answer, "I shall be glad to do."

"This man One Eye, and the two with him, are evidently pretty desperate scoundrels. The wonder is that Miss Larrimore escaped from them alive."

"She has Burton to thank for that, Zack," put in Jesperson. Any suspicions of Burton which he might have felt had been wiped out by Burton's story of his work for the girl. Jesperson was grateful, and showed it. "I am under a great obligation to you," he finished.

"You need not be," Burton told him; "given the same circumstances, any right-feeling man would have done the same as I did."

"Pecos, otherwise One Eye," continued Jesperson, "is about the worst of the desert scum. I haven't any doubt that he, and the two others with him, are in Shackleby's pay."

"Not a doubt of it," agreed Ducane with a nod. "And we're not clear of them yet, Dan. Burton, if Jesperson outfitted you with a good horse, would you be willing to take that grubstake agreement from here to Herkimer, from Herkimer to Phoenix by train, and deliver it into the hands of Miss Larrimore's attorneys, Hanchett, Feeley & Ransom?"

"I should be glad to do that for Miss Larrimore," said Burton. He was rather surprised at the idea, and even more surprised that it should come from Ducane.

"Would you, if necessary, be willing to make the entire trip from here to Phoenix by horseback? You could do it in two days, stopping the first night at Shoshone and then landing in Phoenix on the evening of the second day. Dan would supply you with a good horse."

"Either way you want me to go; it's immaterial, so far as I am concerned. But why cover the whole route on horseback?"

"Simply to throw One Eye and Mex and Taranch off the track, avoid trouble with them and the possible loss of the grubstake agreement. That crowd saw you with Miss Larrimore, and they'll suspect what you're up to if they see you making for Herkimer."

"I don't know about that; but, give me a good horse, and I'll get that agreement into the hands of the Phoenix lawyers in spite of Shackleby's men, whether I take the train from Herkimer or do all my traveling in the saddle."

"Good!" exclaimed Ducane approvingly. "Now, if you will kindly allow me to have a few words in private with Dan, here, we'll fix the thing up so you can start as soon as you are ready."

Burton had finished his dinner and he arose from the table at once. "I'll start in fifteen minutes, if you want it that way," he said.

When he had left the room Jesperson turned inquiringly toward Ducane.

"You forget, Zack," said Jesperson, "that he's a complete stranger to us. Of course, he has rendered Jess a great service, but ought we to trust him with that grubstake agreement?"

Ducane chuckled. "Not for a minute, Dan," he answered. "I'm figuring on making him a pawn in this game. The idea is to get Shackleby's crowd off the track. Burton will take a sealed envelope; but it won't contain the grubstake agreement. If the Shackleby crowd get that envelope away from him it won't be any loss to Jessica. While Burton is riding to Phoenix with the dummy envelope, we can make other arrangements for safeguarding the original document."

The face of the old man dropped. "You mean, Zack," he said protestingly, "to make a sort of cat's-paw out of Burton? To deceive him, after he has done so much to——"

"I'll admit," cut in Ducane, "that part of it is not pleasant; but I'm positive, after the whole thing is over and Burton is told just what we did and why we did it, that he will say it was the best thing and the only thing for us to have done in the circumstances. We're working for Jessica, Dan. Everything else must give way to her and her interests. While the Shackleby outfit is concentrating upon Burton, we'll be free to work for Jessica and cinch for her that half interest in the Fanita."

"But if anything should happen to Burton——"

"Let him take his chance," cut in Ducane; "it's Jessica and her fortunes that concern us."

Jesperson bowed his head and pondered the matter. "All right, Zack," he decided at last, "if you think that is best. I'll give him my sorrel, Pronto, the best desert horse I've got, and I'll arm him well. He ought to be able to show his heels to anything on hoofs in this part of the country. We'll get the envelope ready."

There was a noticeable reluctance in Jesperson's manner; but his friend Ducane, as usual, carried the day.

CHAPTER XII.

THE PAWN IN THE GAME.

ON a bench in the shade of the storehouse wall, Burton lounged while he smoked a cigarette and considered the proposition before him. There was something mysterious about that fellow Ducane. One minute he was suspecting Burton of being one of the Shackleby gang, and the next minute he was trusting him with the agreement which Shackleby and his gang were working so desperately to get their hands on; no doubt about it, this Ducane didn't ring true.

Dan Jesperson, however, was the clear quill. If he vouched for Ducane, then, no matter what Burton's private impressions were, Ducane must be all right.

"We'll let it go at that, anyhow," Burton decided.

The deep sympathy for Jess Larrimore, which Burton had experienced first in the cañon, had deepened and widened with the trying hours of the night through which they had passed. In taking up that fight alone against Spike Shackleby the girl had proved that she had a dauntless heart; and all the while she had been in Burton's camp on the flat, never a word about that wounded shoulder had passed her lips. Spartan fortitude seemed the principal quality of her dauntless courage, and in that lay the strongest appeal to Burton's sympathies.

"I'd feel better about this trip to Phoenix," thought Burton, "if Jess could only know about it. If she could recover her senses long enough to be told about the plan, and to give it her approval, I'd begin that long ride with an easier mind. Now that she is out of the deal temporarily, though, somebody has got to manage things for her. That 'somebody,' of course, has to be her Uncle Dan. And I'm looking to Jesperson for orders, and not to Ducane."

In hiding his supplies and equipment in the draw, Burton had held out something else besides the water canteen, the rifle, and the two six-guns. This object, which he had stuffed into the front of his coat, he now removed and held

thoughtfully in his hands. It was the ore sack in which he had placed the glossy yellow locks sacrificed by Jess to what she had considered to be the exigencies of her work.

Burton untied the sack and peered into it; then, very carefully, he selected a long yellow strand, drew it from the bag, and smoothed it out between his fingers. A strange sensation, so unlike anything he had ever known that it baffled analysis, ran through him at the mere touch of that soft, glistening lock of hair. He coiled it around his fingers, then placed the coil in the envelope of an old letter he had in his pocket.

"Maybe that will help me to a little 'savvy' if I'm tempted to come a cropper," he apologized rather sheepishly to himself. "If I blunder this job that's ahead of me, it is liable to cost Jess pretty dear. Too much 'touch and go,' she said, and not enough judgment. Here is a chance for me to find out whether I'm getting the upper hand of my failings, or not."

Barely had he returned the envelope to his pocket and retied the ore sack when he caught sight of Jesperson and Ducane emerging from the adobe. They came straight to him at the storehouse.

"Here, Mr. Burton," said Jesperson, handing him a long manila envelope, "is the—the important document in the case. The envelope is addressed to Hanchett, Feeley & Ransom, Attorneys, Phoenix. You are to deliver it to one of the members of the firm and explain that it is from Miss Larrimore."

"Correct," answered Burton, taking the envelope and slipping it carefully into an inside pocket.

"I dislike very much to start you off on your long ride during the heat of the day," Jesperson went on; "but Zack and I think it will be well for you to leave at once and spend to-night at your first water. That will be Castle Cañon, at your old camp on the flat. Shackleby's men would hardly look for you there, and the big idea is to fool them and shake them off your trail.

"Leaving the cañon early to-morrow morning and not pushing your horse too hard, you can easily cover the thirty-five miles to your next water, at Shoshone; and on the day after to-morrow you can leave Shoshone and do the forty miles into Phoenix."

"I'd log it differently," said Burton, "if you were leaving it to me; but if you want it that way, Jesperson, that's the way we'll have it."

"We also expect to be rather busy," Jesperson continued, "keeping track of Shackleby's ruffians and, if possible, steering them from your trail. We want you, for that reason, to cling closely to the itinerary we have prepared for you, so that we may know exactly where you are, all the way to Phoenix."

Burton nodded. "The cañon to-night, Shoshone to-morrow night, and Phoenix the day after," he repeated; "you may count on me to carry out the program."

"And there is something else we must insist upon," Ducane dropped in. "You will be well mounted and well armed, and if you are caught in a tight place you are to make a run of it, if that is feasible, or make a man's fight of it, if you have to. Saving that document is the big thing, and you must not let it get away from you. If it *should* get away from you, then get it back at any cost; for if you don't, Miss Larrimore loses a small fortune."

"I'll do my best," said Burton.

"I'm giving you my best horse, Pronto," Jesperson resumed; "he's fast, and he's hard as nails. He's desert bred, and will carry you all day under the blazing sun if you'll water him at the start and the finish of your day's ride. I have some weapons for you, too, if you——"

"I've got all the weapons I want," Burton cut in, slapping the holsters at his hips.

"Good! Here's a bag with a supply of rations for your night at the cañon and for your food en route. I see that you have a canteen. You might be filling that at the well while I put Pronto under saddle."

Jesperson went into the storehouse for riding gear, and, when Burton joined him and Ducane at the small corral, a wiry, clean-limbed sorrel had been put under saddle. Burton knew horseflesh, and after one critical glance he was highly pleased with Pronto The only other

horse in the corral that approached Pronto in looks and mettle was a black.

"That's the animal Zack rode out from Herkimer," explained Jesperson, "but he's not in the same class with Pronto."

Burton hung his canteen from the saddle horn and swung into the saddle. "Here is something of Miss Larrimore's, Jesperson," he said, and handed the old man the ore sack. "You are sure she will come out of this all right?"

"Out of her illness, yes," answered Jesperson.

"But how she comes out of this affair with Shackleby," spoke up Ducane, "depends almost entirely upon you."

Burton detected something spurious about everything Ducane said and did; even that last remark seemed to strike a false note. Burton had nothing to say to it. "Adios!" he called to Jesperson, and started off along the back trail to the cañon.

CHAPTER XIII.

PLAYING HIS HUNCHES.

IN action Pronto proved all that Jesperson had claimed for him, and Burton was well pleased. The fifteen hot and dusty miles to Castle Cañon were covered easily but in a leisurely manner designed to work as little hardship to Pronto as possible.

It was six in the afternoon when Burton rode into the cañon and along the dry creek bed toward the flat. But he did not stop at the flat and the scene of his old camp; instead, he traveled on around the upper bend and came to a halt in a sort of draw formed by a break in the cañon's western wall.

Close to the draw was a water hole, where Castle Creek, running under ground, was forced into its dry bed by an upthrust of bedrock. Burton removed the riding gear, rubbed Pronto down with a handful of brush tops, gave him a drink at the pool, and then picketed him in the draw at a spot where a desert-bred horse could find fair browsing. He and the horse were both screened from the cañon by a chaparral of mesquite and paloverde. The horse cared for, Burton took a frugal supper out of the bag of food given him by Jesperson, and then fell into reflection over a cigarette.

He was trying to use judgment; trying, as best he could, to carry out his important work for Jess in the way Jess would have liked him to do. For that reason he had not made his night camp on the more-comfortable flat among the cottonwoods. He had had a hunch, and he was playing it.

He distrusted Ducane. Possibly he was wrong in that, and he was willing to admit that possibility. He had been instructed, by both Jesperson and Ducane, to log his journey according to their ideas. Well, he would do that; but he was not disobeying orders by passing the night in the draw rather than on the flat, for he was in the cañon just as he was expected to be, and handy to the first water out from Inglesito Wells. Really he was in the cañon, but apparently he was not —and that might mean something or nothing in the little enterprise for Jess that was engaging him.

Jesperson had remarked that One Eye, Mex, and Taranch would not expect him to return to the cañon. Burton had mentally disagreed with that. He had also disagreed with the inference that Shackleby's desperadoes would expect him to make for Phoenix with Miss Larrimore's grubstake agreement. Why should One Eye and the two with him make any such guess? What means had they of gathering information as to what had taken place at Jesperson's ranch?

If Shackleby's men knew that Burton was on the way to Phoenix with the grubstake agreement, Burton continued to reason, then they must have had some mysterious means of acquiring that knowledge; and if, in a mysterious way, they learned that Burton had started for Phoenix that afternoon, it was easy to imagine that they would count on his stopping for the night at the first water —that is, in the cañon.

"It's time I learned how to be safe rather than sorry," mused Burton, "and here's a chance to show that I'm not too old to profit by experience. No bonehead plays on this trip, if I can help it."

If he had to, Burton knew that he could leave the cañon by the steep slope of the draw, come back into the flat lands of the desert through the hills, and so avoid the mouth of the cañon altogether.

It was the one place where he could show his heels, if he found it necessary, with every chance of complete success. Besieged in the cañon, he would have been caught in a cul-de-sac—but for that broken wall and the draw.

Night closed down quickly in the depths of the cañon; overhead, between the ragged, rocky walls, day still lingered while the draw was as black as a pocket. Peace, comfort, and isolation never seemed closer to Burton than they did there in the draw; nevertheless, when he stretched out with his saddle for a pillow, he slept with one ear open.

It was well that he did; for, some time along in the middle of the night, he sat up suddenly with an unwonted sound in his ears. He listened intently, peering fruitlessly through the thick gloom.

Again he heard it—a noise that might have been a horse's hoof striking a stone. Softly he rose to hands and knees, crept specterlike through the chaparral, and emerged wearily into the cañon. He heard nothing more, and he could see nothing. Quietly he got to his feet and, hugging the cañon's western wall, moved along down toward the bend.

Suddenly he halted. Not twenty feet away from him there flickered a dot of light. It was cupped in a pair of rough hands and tossed a reflection against a jungle of beard and a disfigured eye socket. There was One Eye, at the bend, lighting his villainous pipe. Then Burton heard a voice, Taranch's:

"Like enough he didn't stop hyer at all, but hustled on to Shoshone."

"Nary he wouldn't," answered One Eye, fading out in blackness as he tossed away the match; "that's nigh onto fifty mile from Inglesito, and with a late start he wouldn't try ter make it. He'll come, and he'll hunk down on the flat; then he's our meat."

Burton crept back into the draw, chuckling but deeply perplexed. The Shackleby crowd was after him. They knew he had left Inglesito Wells in the afternoon, and apparently they knew that he had about him the important document that they wanted. How had they discovered all that? Had they been hiding out at the Wells, and spying on what took place there? This was the easiest explanation that came to Burton's mind; but it was far from being wholly satisfactory. In the absence of any other theory, however, he accepted it.

He was pleased to think that in playing his hunch he had saved himself a fight with the gang; saved his life, it might be, and saved the fortune for Jess.

"It pays to be cautious," he soliloquized; "it certainly pays to have a little savvy when you're running out a trail so full of contingencies as this one."

He pulled in on the picket rope, tied Pronto close to a paloverde, and muffled the sorrel's nose in the crown of his hat to prevent an ill-timed whinny reaching the trio at the cañon bend.

At the approach of dawn, and long before pitch darkness fled from the depths of the cañon and the draw, he emptied the canteen into the crown of his hat and gave Pronto a drink by installments. Three times he crept to the water hole and filled the canteen before the sorrel was satisfied; and the last filling he left in the canteen for his own use during the ride to Shoshone.

Carefully as possible he on-saddled; then, even more carefully, he began leading Pronto up the steep slope of the draw, away from the cañon and into the hills.

"Judgment, that's the word!" he told himself exultantly. "I used it when I pitched camp last night, and now look what an easy get-away I am having because of it."

The banners of day were shaking themselves out in the east when he reached the top of the draw, climbed into the saddle, and set out through the seams of the valleys that cut through the hills. The sun was up when he galloped clear of the hills to the dead level of the desert, and turned Pronto's head in the direction of distant Shoshone.

"Even if they knew I was on my way," muttered Burton jubilantly, "they could never overhaul me between here and Shoshone. After Shoshone we'll have something else again, but I seem to be getting the hang of taking a look before I make a jump—and that means Phoenix by to-morrow night, with Shackleby beaten and Jessica's fortune saved. Pronto, we're a pair of winners!"

CHAPTER XIV.

OUT OF A CLEAR SKY.

FROM Castle Cañon to Shoshone, Burton had an easy time of it, and loafed along the trail. About noon he crossed some rough country, and gave Pronto a rest of several hours in the shade of a rock overhang. Although he watched the back trail constantly and carefully he saw nothing of One Eye, Mex, and Taranch; and by five o'clock he jogged comfortably into the little settlement known as Shoshone.

Ten or a dozen permanent residents were all Shoshone could boast; and the only business places consisted of a general store, a hotel, and an assay office. Jud McWattles was owner and overlord of that outpost in the wilderness. The general store, and the wing he had added to the building to serve as a hotel, belonged to him, and, while his name was not over the door of the assay office, it was no secret that he was the financial backer and silent partner of the man who ran the business. The hamlet was called McWattles, quite as often as it was referred to as Shoshone.

The place derived its revenues from a number of producing mines for which it formed the nearest base of supplies.

Dismounting at the veranda of the hotel, which was just around the corner of the building and flanking the front of the general store, Burton was greeted by McWattles. They were known to each other, and not unfavorably, and McWattles got out of his chair and offered his hand.

"I reckoned," McWattles said with a grin, "that it was about time you was gittin' tired of the desert and would come blowin' back this way. Needin' more supplies, Paul?"

Burton shook his head. "No, Jud," he answered; "I'm on my way to Phoenix and reckoned I'd stop with you for the night."

"Good! Doc Jesperson's sorrel, ain't it?" he asked, glancing at the horse.

"Jesperson let me take the animal for the trip."

"Well, turn him out, then come back and we'll loaf on the porch till supper time."

McWattles had prospered at Shoshone; and, as his wealth increased, he had relegated to clerks the work which he had been accustomed to doing himself. Hired men looked after the store, and McWattles confined his energies to the hotel. Guests were so few and far between that the job amounted to a sinecure.

"Mac" had always the leisure and the inclination for a bit of gossip, or for a session of several hours at his favorite pastime—checkers. He was a champion checker player, and the only man who gave him a hard tussle and usually managed to divide the honors evenly with him was Burton. So McWattles was always glad to see Burton.

"I hear Hank Sprague has hit the long trail since I was here last, Jud," remarked Burton, coming in from the corral back of the hotel and taking a chair on the porch. "How did that happen?"

"Considerable of a mystery about that, Paul," said McWattles. "Sprague, as you know, was an old-timer around here; he come in out of the hills for supplies, and he was all set to pull out again on a prospectin' trip when he was found with a bullet in him out by the hotel corral. You know, Hank wouldn't never sleep under a roof; he allowed it sort o' smothered him, and he insisted on bunkin' down in the open. He had spread his blankets out by the corral—and he was still wrapped in his blanket when he was found. Must have been done for while he slept—and never had an idee what happened to him."

"Any enemies?"

"Not that any one knows of. He used to run with Shackleby a good deal, and it's been rumored that he knew some things that Shackleby was afeared he'd tell. Then again, it's been said that Sprague was a friend of Phil Larrimore's, and knew too much for Larrimore's good. But that wouldn't hold water, 'cause Larrimore is dead, and has been dead for more'n six years. Anyhow, Hank was done for, and nobody's been able to figger out how, or why. Whether Shackleby's buckaroos, or some of Larrimore's friends, or persons unknown done it, is anybody's guess."

Burton's request for information was merely casual, and drawn by the state-

ment Pecos, or One Eye, had made on the occasion of his call at the cañon. Burton had learned nothing, but the fact was of little importance.

Following supper, the proprietor and his guest spent a couple of hours matching wits over the checker board; and then, about nine o'clock, Burton went to bed.

Sleeping quarters at the McWattles House were rather primitive. Half a dozen cots in one good-sized room were the only lodgings for guests, and Burton, as it appeared, was the only guest. When he retired, he put the long envelope addressed to the Phoenix lawyers under his pillow, thrust a six-shooter in beside it, and went to sleep.

He was awakened, some hours later, by a pounding on the front door of the hotel. He merely turned over and fell into another doze. He was aroused again by low voices, and the opening of a door. A man with a candle came into the room, sat down on a cot some distance from Burton's, and began to prepare himself for sleep. This was all in the order of business and Burton paid little attention. He shut his eyes to keep out the flicker of candlelight, and was presently sound asleep once more.

He had dreams, extraordinarily vivid dreams, of his own incompetence in handling large affairs. They made such a deep impression upon his slumbering senses that his slumber was restless, and he turned and twisted a good deal on his canvas cot. He was aroused again, just as the gray of early morning looked in at the hotel windows, by the click of a closing door. It was a muffled and stealthy click, as though some one was trying to close the door without disturbing the sleepers in the room.

Burton sat up on the cot and peered about him in the semigloom. With his nerves somewhat shaken by his unpleasant dreams, he got off the cot, went to the door, opened it, and looked out into the dim office of the hotel. He could see no one, and closed the door and started back to his cot. On his way, he saw that the guest who had arrived late had departed early, for there was no one in the tumbled blankets.

The windows at one side of the sleeping quarters commanded a view of the corral. Hearing sounds outside the hotel, coming from the direction of the corral, Burton looked out into the dim gray of the early morning, and was surprised to see a man mounting a black horse. Another moment and he had recognized the man as Ducane.

This was astounding. Had Ducane been the man who had arrived late and was now departing so early? If so, what business had called him to Shoshone? Burton sat down on the cot and wrinkled his brows. Inspired, perhaps, by his distrust of Ducane, he lifted the pillow at the head of the cot. Instantly he was on his feet in alarm; for, while the six-shooter was there just where he had placed it, the important envelope was missing!

To an accompaniment of galloping hoofs, receding in the distance, Burton scrambled into his clothes and rushed out of the room, buckling his revolver belt around his waist as he ran. Dashing from the hotel to a shed by the corral, he snatched his riding equipment from the pegs where it was hanging, raced into the corral, and proceeded with a swift saddling of Pronto. He worked with lightninglike rapidity, and Ducane could not have been more than a mile or two on his way when Burton began his pursuit.

"Delivering that grubstake agreement is my job," growled Burton, "and I'll not let even Ducane take it away from me!"

CHAPTER XV.

HOPING AGAINST HOPE.

THE situation was peculiar and had a dozen angles of mystery. Ducane at Shoshone, when he was supposed to be working to help Jessica Larrimore elsewhere! Ducane arriving late, departing early and by stealth, and taking the grubstake agreement with him! If he had wanted to deliver the agreement himself, why hadn't he done so in the first place instead of passing the job along to Burton?

"He sneaked over to my cot and slipped it out from under my pillow!" Burton theorized; "and now he's trying to leave me up in the air. What's his

idea about that? I was told not to let any one get that envelope away from me, and if some one *did* get it, I was to get it back! Well, here goes; I'll get it back, even from Ducane. I'll not let him play horse with me like that!"

Burton was riding north, in the direction of Phoenix. There was a chance, of course, that Ducane might be riding south, for Burton did not know whether those galloping hoofs he had heard had been receding along the north trail or the south trail. But the way to Phoenix was also the way to Shackleby's Fanita Mine, and Burton might want to call on Shackleby in case he did not succeed in overhauling Ducane.

No more illuminating example of what Jess Larrimore had referred to as Burton's "touch and go" could have been offered by Burton than this hasty pursuit of Ducane. All the judgment Burton had used was "snap" judgment. He had a hunch, that was all; and he was playing it hit or miss, and hoping against hope.

For the first time since Burton had left Inglesito Wells Pronto was really showing his speed. Never had Burton traveled faster in a saddle, and all he had to do was to shake out the lines and urge the sorrel by voice alone.

Luck was with Burton, too. As the miles flew rearward under the sorrel's drumming hoofs, Burton's eyes, straining ahead into the distance, picked up the black horse and its rider. A joyous yell escaped Burton's lips.

"Now then, Mr. Ducane," he cried, "I'm going to show you something! You can't crowd me out of my job and get away with it!"

As Burton slowly gained on the man ahead, the latter caught the sound of pursuit and turned for a rearward look. Then, strangely enough, he pulled his horse to a halt and waited for Burton to come alongside.

"What's the idea, Burton?" Ducane challenged; "what in blazes are you chasing me for?"

"Hand over that grubstake agreement!" snapped Burton, his dark eyes aflame. "You can't put over anything like this."

"Why, you crazy fool," Ducane yelled, "you've got that grubstake agreement!"

"Don't lie to me! You've got something up your sleeve, and I won't stand for it. Give up!"

Ducane was holding the reins with his left hand, and his right hand was hanging at his side. Suddenly that right hand was lifted, and a sharp report rang out.

Burton owed his life to Pronto just as, on another occasion, he owed it to the canteen against which Taranch had stumbled. Ducane's quick movement in throwing up his hand caused the restive sorrel to shy; and, as a consequence, the bullet from Ducane's revolver whistled harmlessly into space.

Burton flung himself from the saddle before another shot could be fired, and his arms closed about Ducane's head and shoulders. Fighting and scrambling, Ducane was dragged from the back of his horse, and Burton pinned him to the earth with two knees on his chest.

While the fingers of his left hand twined about Ducane's throat, Burton's right hand searched his pockets. In the breast pocket of the coat Burton found what he wanted, and he snatched it clear of the coat and leaped up and away from the man on the ground. Then Burton quickly picked up the other's revolver which had been knocked out of Ducane's hand.

"I'm doing what you told me to do!" cried Burton breathlessly. "I'm responsible to Miss Larrimore for this grubstake agreement, and when it's delivered to the lawyers in Phoenix I'll do the delivering."

Ducane seemed to have been dazed by his fall. He sat up, peering around for the weapon, an odd, perplexed look coming into his face. He had not seen Burton snatch up the revolver.

Burton ran to the sorrel. The reins were hanging from the bits and the horse was standing as though hitched just where Burton had pitched from the saddle. He sprang to the animal's back, and faced around for the return to Shoshone.

"Wait!" yelled Ducane, suddenly recovering his voice. "Hold up, Burton! You've got this all wrong!"

"If I'm wrong, Ducane, then we're both wrong," Burton answered; "meet me at the lawyer's office in Phoenix and we'll let them set us right. And I'm going to keep your gun, with which you're alto-

gether too quick; I'm not trusting you for a minute."

Then, as he started for Shoshone, he slipped the long manila envelope into his inside pocket and heaved a lengthy sigh of relief.

Ducane did not follow him on that return ride. Burton kept close watch of the trail as he rode and saw nothing more of the black horse and his rider.

Arrived back at McWattles' corral he stripped the gear from Pronto and slapped the horse affectionately on the withers. "Sport," he cried exultantly, "we did that with ground to spare!"

He gave the horse a ration of oats and hay and went into the hotel. McWattles was just coming into the office—recently out of bed if one might judge from the way he yawned.

"Where you been so early, Paul?" the proprietor inquired.

"Attending to a little business, that's all," said Burton. "Did you know Ducane had left?"

"Why, I reckoned he'd be gone," answered McWattles; "he got in late, paid for his lodgin' before he went to bed, and allowed he'd be leavin' before breakfast. Did he disturb you any? He said he'd try not to."

Burton laughed. "Oh, well, not a whole lot," he answered.

He went on to the big cot-filled room to wash his face and hands and make himself ready for breakfast. As he took off his coat and his revolver belt and flung them down onto the cot on which he had slept he saw something on the floor that caused his eyes to pop. With a muttered exclamation he stooped down and picked up the object. Could he believe his eyes, or was he dreaming?

The envelope with the grubstake agreement, the envelope given to him by Jesperson, was the very one he was holding in his hand! It had not been stolen by Ducane, but had fallen out from under the pillow and had been lying on the floor; and it had been there all the time he had been having his mix-up with Ducane.

Burton sank down on the edge of the cot, held a long envelope in each hand, and stared from one to the other as though hypnotized.

"Blunderbus!" he muttered. "I am certainly running true to form!"

CHAPTER XVI.

TREACHEROUS MANEUVERS.

SCARCELY had Burton's dust vanished from the sky line out of Inglesito Wells when Ducane caught up his black horse, cinched on the riding gear, and climbed into the saddle. Jesperson handed him a long manila envelope, addressed to Jess Larrimore's lawyers in Phoenix, and identical in every way with the dummy envelope given to Burton.

"There is the grubstake agreement, Zack," said Jesperson with a worried look, "and I'm hoping that out of all this scheming of ours you can get it safely to Phoenix and make it certain that Jess will win her rights from Shackleby. The only thing on earth that will turn the trick for Jess is that agreement!"

"I know, Dan," returned Ducane, hanging a canteen from his saddle horn, "and you can bank on me every foot of the way. Shackleby's wolves will be giving all their attention to Burton, and that will leave the trail clear for me."

"Where will you be stopping to-night? You can't very well camp in the cañon, for Burton will be there, and it's too long a jump for you from here to Shoshone."

"I know of some dry washers who have pitched a camp in the desert, and they'll put me up for the night. It won't be very pleasant, or comfortable, but that won't count—if I can do something worth while for you and Jessica."

The old man was visibly affected by this generous attitude of Ducane, and he reached out and gripped his hand fervently. "The girl is helpless in there," said Jesperson, nodding toward the house, "and I'd be about as helpless as she is if you weren't here to help see us through. We've got to force that crooked Spike Shackleby to recognize the girl's rights, and if you get through safely to Phoenix with the grubstake agreement the whole thing will end in a triumph for Jess. She will appreciate your work, Zack."

"Maybe she will," muttered Ducane, looking away, "but she has been anything but friendly so far."

A pained expression swept Jesperson's face. "Do Jess a favor, put her under obligation to you, and she never forgets it. She has a heart of gold, Zack, and she's true blue. Win this fight for her, and ever afterward she'll consider you her best friend."

"How will she consider this Burton?" queried Ducane. "He has helped her a lot, and more than once in her unconscious chattering we have distinctly heard her mention the name of 'Paul.' That's about the only word we've been able to understand; and it's Burton's first name."

"Oh, well, he's a stranger; and Jess never saw him before yesterday. Burton has given her a lot of help; but you are the one who will be saving her half interest in the mine."

"We'll see." Ducane reached out to shake Jesperson's hand again, rattled his spurs, and galloped away in the same direction Burton had taken. "Adios, Dan!" he yelled.

Two hours after Ducane left, Pedro Salinas, the wood hauler, arrived at the Wells. He brought with him the señora and all the niños, for Salinas was changing his camp. The arrival of the wood hauler and his family could not have been more timely, for they were loyal friends of Jesperson and the señora had several times nursed patients for the desert doctor.

Salinas pitched his tent by the storehouse, ready and willing to remain at the Wells as long as the Señor Jesperson should have need of the señora's services. The señora went at once into the adobe and began ministering to Jess.

Everything, Jesperson was convinced, was falling out wonderfully well for him and his niece. Ducane had started for Phoenix with the grubstake agreement, fairly sure of a safe journey—thanks to the strategy exercised in the matter of Burton; and now the señora was at the Wells to look after Jess—which meant that she would receive careful nursing and soon be herself again.

"You're a lucky girl, Jess, in spite of the backsets you have had," the old man soliloquized as he sat on his front porch and smoked his pipe in comfort. "The way we handled Burton is the only thing that worries me; but I reckon we can make that all right with him after we've forced Shackleby to do the right thing."

It was nearly sundown when Ducane rode into the camp of the men who were dry washing the desert sands for gold. It was a forlorn and ragged camp, pitched in the heart of the arid plain. A dirty and dusty canvas shelter was pitched beside an old wagon loaded with brimming water barrels. The ungainly machine that separated the gold from the sand was not in operation when Ducane arrived; the camp, in fact, seemed deserted, although there were a couple of horses hitched to the wagon wheels and standing dispiritedly, with drooping heads.

Ducane whistled shrilly; and, at the sound, a Mexican uncurled himself from somewhere under the canvas shelter and came forward.

"Buenos, señor," he said, evidently recognizing Ducane.

"Where's Pecos?" Ducane demanded.

"Nobody here but me," the other answered; "bymby Pecos he come, señor, and Mex and Taranch."

It was an hour later that Shackleby's raiders came trooping into camp—three men with four horses, One Eye still riding the buckskin, Fanita. The three desert prowlers instantly recognized Ducane, but in friendly wise and not with the least show of hostility.

"You've made a fine bobble of things," growled Ducane; "shooting the girl wasn't down on your program—all you were to do was to get that paper Shackleby wants. You missed out on it, and have got everything deucedly mixed."

One Eye began to swear; and when he had finished swearing, he launched into a swirl of explanations. They had shot at the girl—she was as slippery as an eel, and all they wanted was to scare her. He didn't think they had touched her with their bullets.

"Well, you did," went on Ducane, "but we'll let that pass, for now. I don't know what Spike will say when he hears about this; but there is something else you can do to square yourselves. Now, listen. After you rest up a little, and have your supper, you three will go back to Castle Cañon. Burton, the man who helped the girl get away from you, will be staying to-night in the cañon, at his

old camp. Go there and lay for him; stick around that cañon till you 'get' him. I'm moving on in the morning toward Phoenix, and will spend to-morrow night at McWattles' place in Shoshone. What you're to do—and you're not to fail in it—is to clean up on Burton."

So treachery was showing its ugly head, even at the moment Jesperson, on his front porch at Inglesito Wells, was congratulating himself that Jessica's fight against Shackleby was as good as won. That fight, at the moment, was all but lost, and solely because of Jesperson's misplaced confidence in Ducane.

In the early evening, miles away from Inglesito Wells, three riders galloped away from the dreary camp of the dry washers and laid a course toward Castle Cañon. They had not returned by morning, when Ducane left the camp and pointed his black in the direction of Shoshone. He did not discover that Burton was also a guest at the McWattles' House until early in the morning; and immediately upon making that surprising and unpleasant discovery, he had left the hotel quietly, and in haste.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE THUNDERBOLT.

WHILE Jesperson sat on his front porch, smoking his pipe and congratulating himself on the trend of events, the señora appeared in the open door.

"Señor," she said, "the señorita she ees com' back. You say I should let you know."

Highly pleased and greatly encouraged, Jesperson went immediately to the bedside of his niece. Her eyes were wide, and now the light of reason was glowing in them, and she lifted an unsteady hand.

"Uncle Dan!" she murmured. "So I'm here, and Paul brought me through all right. Where is he?"

"Burton is all right, Jess," answered Jesperson reassuringly; "but you're not to talk now. All you're to do is to drink a little gruel the señora has ready for you, and in the morning you'll be strong enough for a little conversation."

"But the grubstake agreement! That's all right?"

"Everything is all right, mujercita!" declared Jesperson cheerily. "I'll tell you all about it to-morrow. Rest easy; and above all, don't try to talk, or to exert yourself. You've had a hard time of it; but that's all past and gone. You ought to be a happy girl, for splendid things are on the way to you."

Jess had to be content with that. She drank her gruel, and, presently, sank into a natural and refreshing sleep. By morning she was well enough to eat a good breakfast, and after that she had the promised talk with her uncle.

"Where's the agreement?" inquired Jess. "The señora brought me that hand bag, and the paper isn't in it."

Jesperson laughed and patted her hand. "The agreement," he told her, "has been sent on to the lawyers, in Phoenix, by a trusted messenger. You see, Jess, it wasn't well to wait. Shackleby may turn over the mine to this Eastern syndicate at any time, get the money, and skip out with it. That would make endless complications."

"Who was the trusted messenger?" asked Jess.

Jesperson hesitated. The girl did not know Ducane as well as he knew him, and had not his confidence in him. He thought it best to hold back the exact information for a while.

"Well," he quibbled, "we started this man Burton for Phoenix, yesterday, with a long envelope addressed to your lawyers——"

"Paul!" exclaimed Jess happily. "That's fine, Uncle Dan! He's a real man, and I can't begin to tell you all that he has done for me."

"He told us something of that himself," went on Jesperson, plagued with the thought that he was deceiving the girl.

"Everything will be all right," continued Jess contentedly, "with Paul to get that agreement through for me. But you said 'we'—'we started Burton for Phoenix.' Who else was here, and knows this?"

"Zack happened to be at the Wells, mujercita, when Burton brought you here."

Jess wrinkled her brows. "Where's Zack Ducane now?" she asked.

"He went away yesterday," said Jesperson indefinitely.

"You didn't tell him anything about the grubstake agreement did you?" Jess was excited, and breathless. "He didn't know—or did he know—what Paul was to do with that grubstake agreement?"

"Calm yourself, Jess," begged Jesperson; "you mustn't get excited."

"But this is important," Jess insisted. "I've got to tell you something about Ducane, Uncle Dan. He's not a mining engineer at all, but a crooked gambler!"

"Nonsense!" protested Jesperson. "He's straight and square, and I've known him for a long time."

"He's been fooling you. Mr. Hanchett of the firm knows him well, and he doesn't know any good of him. Zack Ducane is a gambler; more than that, he's a friend of Spike Shackleby! That's why I couldn't call on him to help me establish my right to a half interest in the Fanita, Uncle Dan, as you wanted me to do."

Jesperson's jaw dropped, and his eyes went blank. "What are you saying, girl?" he asked huskily. "How do you know all that?"

"Mr. Hanchett told me, first," said Jess, "and then Jerry Flanders gave me some more information. I saw Hank Sprague, the prospector, when I first got to Flanders' place. Sprague was an old friend of dad's, and he warned me to look out for Ducane; said he was going to start for Phoenix, that very day, and tell my lawyers all he knew about Ducane. Hank Sprague was doing that for me, Uncle Dan; but—before I left the Tres Alamos hills, the report came that Sprague had been mysteriously murdered at Shoshone. Can't you guess why that happened? Shackleby was watching, Shackleby knew what Sprague was planning to do—and Shackleby must have had him put out of the way. Poor old Hank Sprague! Father's friend, Uncle Dan, and he lost his life through this Fanita deal!"

Jesperson was terribly shaken and he started to his feet. With an effort, he got the whip hand of his feelings.

"All the same, mujercita," said he, with assumed cheerfulness, "you're not to worry about Ducane. Burton will be more than a match for him, if I'm any prophet."

The girl's face cleared. "Yes," she said, with a sigh of relief; "Paul said he would see me through, and he will."

"I'm leaving the Wells for a day or two on important business, Jess," continued Jesperson presently, "and the señora will take care of you, and Salinas will look after the stock and the store."

"Why must you go now, Uncle Dan?" protested Jess. "You're too old to be pounding around the deserts."

He laughed. "Well, I may be old," he returned, "but I'm not Methuselah by a long shot. You're coming splendidly, Jess, and I'll leave medicine for you and the señora will give you the very best care."

Jesperson turned away. Once out of the adobe, his old face went gray with anxiety; but a light of determination blazed in his eyes. He prepared himself for a journey by stuffing a pair of saddlebags with rations and filling a water canteen. Then he strapped a revolver belt with two guns about his waist.

"If what Jess says is true," he muttered between his teeth, "I'll get Ducane! I'll go after him, right in the camp of Spike Shackleby. And if fate decrees that I shall go the way of Hank Sprague, I'll take one or both of those scheming tinhorns with me!"

This, then, was Jesperson's "important business." If he had been deceived in Ducane, and had been fooled into helping Ducane and Shackleby wreck the future of Jess Larrimore, he would make a heroic attempt to undo the result of his folly and to punish those who had laid a snare for him.

Jesperson had lived long enough in those deserts to become familiar with the Mosaic law of "eye for eye, and tooth for tooth." But never, until that moment, had he approved of it.

CHAPTER XVIII.

FORTY MILES AWAY.

THAT he had made a blunder Burton realized; but the more he thought about it the less he took it to heart. He had been traveling to Phoenix with an envelope supposed to contain a grubstake

agreement signed by Philip Larrimore and Spike Shackleby. Now, through an error, he had taken from Ducane an envelope identical in every way with the one intrusted to him—Burton—by Jesperson and Ducane. The only difference between the two envelopes, that Burton could see, was that Ducane's envelope had an ink blot on one corner.

Burton had not been told that Ducane was also going to Phoenix. If everything was open and aboveboard, why was it necessary for Ducane to go? If Burton was being trusted to deliver the grubstake agreement, why should he not also have been trusted to deliver any other communication Jesperson and Ducane wanted to send to Miss Larrimore's lawyers?

"Jesperson and Ducane have been putting something over on me," Burton at last decided, "and my cue is to deliver both these envelopes to Hanchett, Feeley & Ransom." His eyes narrowed and his jaws tightened. "If Jess could have known what was going on when I left the Wells," he muttered, "I'll bet there wouldn't have been any double crossing about this. She's as square a little moharrie as ever breathed, and I'm still helping her fight out this Fanita Mine business with Shackleby. But I wish to thunder I knew what was up."

He had breakfast, half an hour later, with McWattles; then, as soon as he had finished the meal, he paid his bill and was ready to make his start for Phoenix, forty miles away. Before he could leave the hotel office for the corral, however, a dusty automobile dashed up to the front of the hotel and halted. Two men tumbled out and dashed for the hotel door. Burton fell back a few steps and waited, tense and alert. Something was going to happen, he knew, for one of the two men was Ducane; and Ducane, if his looks were any indication, was in an ugly temper.

The man with Ducane was a stranger to Burton. He was middle-aged, lithe, sinewy, and quick as a cat in his movements. His face was as stormy as Ducane's.

"There he is, Spike!" Ducane yelled, as he and his companion ran through the open door.

Swift as a lightning flash a suspicion crossed Burton's mind, a suspicion aroused by that one word, "Spike." Why was Ducane traveling with Spike Shackleby? Why, unless he was another of Shackleby's hirelings? With Ducane listed as one of Shackleby's confederates, a number of things that had been mysterious and hard for Burton to understand suddenly became crystal clear.

Shackleby walked over to Burton and planted himself in front of him. Burton divided his attention between Shackleby's eyes and hands. The eyes always indicate, a split second in advance, what a man intends to do with his hands; and Burton, just then, considered this of extreme importance.

"You're the hombre that held Ducane up in the trail and stole some papers from him?" demanded Shackleby, through his teeth.

"I'm the hombre," answered Burton easily. "What is it to you?"

"Ducane's my friend and——"

"You are Spike Shackleby?" cut in Burton.

"That's my label."

"Then," said Burton, "if Ducane's your friend, he's no friend of Dan Jesperson's and Jess Larrimore's."

Burton and Shackleby stood eye to eye. The issues of life and death were tossed back and forth, but Shackleby knew that he had a man to deal with who could be as quick on the draw as he was himself. There followed a pause, as tense as it might be tragic.

Ducane, no doubt armed again, began a movement calculated to bring him around to the side of Burton and thus get him between two fires. McWattles came strolling to that part of the room, just then, and in his right hand he carried a solid-frame, forty-four-caliber Colt's revolver.

"You and me, Ducane," McWattles remarked, "are goin' out on the porch. Spike seems to have some business with Paul, here, and we're goin' to leave 'em together."

"But Burton's a thief!" cried Ducane. "And his business is with *me*, and not with Spike!"

"Burton's no thief," said the hotel man patiently; "any cimiroon that can play

as good a game o' checkers as him is a square-shooter and there ain't no thievin' in him. "Spike," added McWattles, "you an' me will go out on the porch."

"Nobody's goin' out on the porch!" snarled Shackleby. "When Ducane rode to the Fanita and told me how he'd been held up, we jumped into my car and I brought him here to see that he had fair play. You're for fair play, ain't you, Mac?"

"Mostly," McWattles answered, chewing reflectively on a cud of tobacco.

"Then if Burton took somethin' from Ducane at the point of a gun, as he has jest admitted, it's no more'n right that he should give Ducane back what he took from him, is it?"

"That depends on what Burton took," said McWattles calmly, "and whether he or Ducane had the best right to what was took."

"So that's the way you stack up, hey?" shouted Shackleby. "It's plain to me, McWattles, that you're in on this with Burton. Now, hear what I got to say: If Burton don't hand over what he took from Ducane within two minutes, I'll drop him in his tracks and take it off him with my own hands. Get that, and get it right!"

"Two minutes, eh, Spike?" returned McWattles. "Then keep yer eyes on the clock. Somebody's due to drop, in two minutes, but I kinder suspect it ain't goin' to be Burton."

The old clock on the wall ticked lugubriously. Sixty seconds passed, with the four men in the office facing each other like so many statues. Then, as the next sixty seconds began to tick themselves into eternity, another automobile was heard arriving at the front of the hotel.

" 'Pears like I'm gittin' more'n my share o' them buzz wagons this mornin'," remarked McWattles casually. "Don't anybody look to see who it is, 'cause the man that turns away his eyes is li'ble to be bored. This ain't no time for mind wanderin', is it?"

Steps were heard on the porch, steps that indicated that more than one man was entering the office.

"You're all covered!" announced a businesslike voice. "Jim, collect all the guns. This difference of opinion, gents, isn't going to end in any gun play. Try and be peaceable for a spell and tell us what it's all about."

A man with a deputy sheriff's star pinned to his shirt moved around collecting the firearms.

"If it ain't Garlock!" exclaimed McWattles, relieved, and eagerly giving up his gun. "Garlock, the sher'ff, and Jim Prentiss, the deputy; and——No! Well, I declare! Mr. Sim Hanchett, of Phoenix. Sim, I reckon it's two years since I seen you at Shoshone. Remember that game o' checkers we had, two years ago this spring?"

"Hanchett!" exclaimed Burton, weaponless and comfortable for the first time in quite a few minutes; "not Hanchett of Hanchett, Feeley & Ransom, Attorneys?"

"The same," said Mr. Hanchett.

"Then I've got something for you—something from Miss Jessica Virginia Larrimore. Here it is." Thereupon he handed over the two envelopes.

CHAPTER XIX.

STEEL BRACELETS.

WITH the passing of these two envelopes from Burton to Hanchett, the show-down for Spike Shackleby had been made pretty complete. Mr. Hanchett was an old-fashioned gentleman with sideburns, and he had arrived at Shoshone under convoy of a very able sheriff and an enterprising deputy sheriff. The well-known strong-arm methods of Spike Shackleby, under such conditions, were entirely out of order.

"I reckon, Ducane," Shackleby remarked, "that we'll be on our way."

"Don't hurry," Garlock, the sheriff, requested. He gave the deputy a signal, and that gentleman, his arms full of guns, planted himself like a rock in the open door. "Just what was the trouble when we got here? It looked like everybody was getting ready to draw and open the fireworks."

Shackleby's moody eyes were on Mr. Hanchett, who had seated himself at a table and was opening the envelopes. He was ready to say something, but was beguiled from his purpose.

"Snakes alive," chirped McWattles,

"another automobile! That makes three this morning. If this keeps up, I'll have to add a garage to my fillin' station. Jim," he added to the deputy, "I know you don't want to let anybody out, but how about lettin' somebody in? There's a party back of you."

Jim Prentiss side-stepped, clearing the door so that a haggard old man with a gun in each fist stepped into the room. Burton was astounded.

"Why, Jesperson!" he exclaimed. "How does this happen? I thought——"

"Ducane," said the old man, "you've been pulling the wool over my eyes for months. Pretending to be my friend, you've been crawling around like a snake in the grass seeing how much damage you could do me. You got away from Inglesito Wells with that grubstake agreement, after persuading me to do a contemptible thing and send Burton to Phoenix with a fake agreement. Coyotes like you and Shackleby have no right to live; the law will take care of Shackleby, but I've made a quick trip from the Wells to take care of you. Now——"

Prentiss dropped the guns he was holding and grabbed the two weapons out of Jesperson's hands before he could use either of them.

"Say, Doc, you're forgetting yourself," Garlock remarked. "I'll admit that the law is sometimes slow in these deserts, but all you've got to do is to give it a little time and it will arrive. It's here at Shoshone right this minute in all its"—he coughed—"majesty and power. Sit down and compose yourself, Doc. While you're doing that, you can tell us more at length about this trip of yours from the Wells."

Jesperson tottered into a chair. Although pretty well worn with his recent experiences, he began forthwith to make out his case. He began with an account of his niece's persecution at the hands of One Eye, Mex, and Taranch; all of them mercenaries, he declared, of the worst wolf in that part of Arizona—Spike Shackleby. He told of Ducane's coming to the Wells in the guise of a friend, of the arrival of Jess, unconscious and delirious; of the strategy with the grubstake agreement, devised by Ducane, in which Burton was to be sent off with a dummy envelope ostensibly to clear the deserts of enemies so Ducane, with the agreement, could reach Phoenix unharmed.

"But you never meant to go to Phoenix!" cried Jesperson, enraged. "Your idea, Ducane, was to go to the Fanita Mine and hand that agreement over to Shackleby—and then get your pay for it. Garlock," he appealed to the sheriff, "take that agreement away from him!"

"Jesperson," spoke up Burton, "through an error it appears that I have saved Garlock the trouble."

"Error?"

Burton, in a happy frame of mind, described the manner in which, thinking he had lost the envelope intrusted to him, he had pursued Ducane, taken a similar envelope from him, and then, on returning to the McWattles House, had found the envelope he supposed he had lost lying on the floor by his cot.

Ducane looked his disgust; and Shackleby laughed, not pleasantly but with a certain amount of venom. Jesperson beamed.

"Then this thing was adjusting itself without any help from me!" he exclaimed. "This is most extraordinary! An error providentially designed in the interest of justice! Did any one ever hear the like before?"

"I have here," said Mr. Hanchett, "a couple of blank sheets of paper, folded, as Exhibit A, and a grubstake agreement several years old between Philip Larrimore and Shackleby as Exhibit B in the case of Larrimore versus Shackleby." He placed the grubstake agreement carefully in his pocket, and went on: "Miss Larrimore, once a very efficient typist in my office and now my client, set out alone, many days ago, to run down this written agreement. She did not return as promptly as I thought she should, and I was afraid that something untoward had happened to her.

"My fears were intensified by certain information that had reached Garlock to the effect that Spike Shackleby was on the warpath and taking the law into his own hands out in this part of the desert," Mr. Hanchett went on. "The sheriff

and his deputy were making a trip to Shoshone, and I received permission to ride with them in their official car. My object was to secure first-hand information about Miss Larrimore. I have been far more successful than I imagined I should be. Shackleby," he added, "do you want to settle this matter out of court?"

"I know when I'm beat," said Shackleby; "sure we can settle this out of court."

Garlock signaled again to the deputy. The latter drew two pairs of handcuffs from his pocket and approached Shackleby.

"Hey, what you tryin' to put over?" cried Shackleby.

"Well, Spike," explained the sheriff, "a posse from the next county went out yesterday and brought in your three assistants, One Eye, Mex, and Taranch. The other sheriff telephoned me late last night that Pecos, otherwise One Eye, had 'come clean,' not only letting you in for all this lawlessness in the matter of the Fanita Mine, but making both you and Ducane accessories before the fact in the killing of Hank Sprague, here at Shoshone. I reckon, Spike, that we've finally got you."

Snap! One pair of bracelets settled about Shackleby's wrists. Snap! The other pair encircled the wrists of Ducane.

"This is better, far and away, than I had hoped for!" declared Jesperson. "I rode horseback from the Wells, but I went in to Herkimer and hired a motor car to take me out on my trail of vengeance. It was a hard, hard trip—and wholly unnecessary. Fate had been taking care of the interests of my niece—fate, aided and abetted by Mr. Burton." He got up from his chair and stepped toward Burton. "Can you overlook, amigo," he asked, "the way I double crossed you? Ducane had me locoed with his talk, and that's my only excuse."

"You're Jessica's uncle," said Burton heartily as he grasped the extended hand, "and that's enough for me."

"Jess will know how to thank you, Burton, better than I can," Jesperson went on; "she never forgets a kindness, and you have put her under a great obligation to you."

There was a far-off look in Burton's eyes. His hand wandered to the breast of his coat and rested there, just over an old envelope in which was coiled a glossy, golden lock. The favor of Jessica Virginia Larrimore, he had come to realize, meant more to him than anything else on earth.

CHAPTER XX.

BY LIMITED.

THREE months have passed, and certainly they have been very wonderful months for Jess Larrimore and Paul Burton.

The Eastern syndicate purchased the Fanita Mine, for the title to the property was clear with that grubstake matter settled, and Jess came in for her little fortune in hard cash. With all that money, she wondered what she was going to do. Burton made a suggestion, and the suggestion was accepted promptly; result, a gathering of friends at Inglesito Wells, a preacher officiating, and that well-known wedding march echoing out across the oasis from a portable phonograph.

Mr. and Mrs. Burton caught a limited train from Herkimer for the Pacific coast, and out on the observation platform, during what was undoubtedly the most beautiful evening of their lives, they sat side by side and talked. They had the "umbrella porch" to themselves; there was a bright moon and wonderful stars in the blue-black sky, and the two lines of glimmering steel faded into the dusk like a silver road to fairyland.

"You are to take my seventy-five thousand dollars, Paul, and set yourself up in business," Jess was saying.

"Bless your generous little heart!" murmured Burton. "All my life I have hated my incompetence in handling the big affairs that came my way; but there has been one thing which, I knew, I should hate even more."

"What was that?"

"Why, marrying a girl with money and then having to ask her to stake me every time I wanted a dollar."

"Look here, old 'Touch and Go,'" said Jess with a dash of her old time spirit, "either what I've got is yours, or this

litle trip ends at Reno. Please get that on straight."

Burton laughed softly. "Jess," he said, "I went into the deserts to seek peace and comfort and isolation. I felt that I was incompetent to manage the big things that attracted me so powerfully, and on which I was falling down continually. I had tried to make a million with fifty thousand, and had lost the fifty thousand—or, I thought I had. But I was mistaken about that. While I have been in the deserts, trying to get a grip on my abilities and learning how to measure up to the really big moments in life, my fifty thousand was still working for me. Before I asked you to marry me, I had received word from the East that the million was mine, after all.

"I didn't tell you about this," Burton continued, "for I knew that the matter of money had nothing to do with your love for me, or with my love for you. But, now that you're trying to use your seventy-five thousand to set me up in business, the facts concerning that million have got to come out."

"Another of your snap judgments, wasn't it, *novio?*" inquired Jess. "You just jumped at the conclusion that your fifty thousand was gone, and beat it for the big open spaces, where men are now and then as tough as they make 'em. Was that it?"

"That was it," admitted Burton cheerfully. "At Shoshone, that early morning when I jumped at another conclusion, might be reckoned as a similar case. I thought I had lost your grubstake agreement; time was scarce, and I didn't lose any in taking a look at the floor. I just made after Zack Ducane, took the real agreement from him, and galloped back to the McWattles House to receive the surprise of my life.

"As I consider it now, that was my big eye opener. There's a bright little cherub that 'sits up aloft' and guides our destinies according to our motives, rough hew those destinies how we will. Ducane tried to make me a pawn in the game, and he helped to make me a pawn of good fortune. I had no more than settled the idea about the cherub in my mind, than along came the letter from the East telling me that the cherub had been busy overseeing my fifty-thousand-dollar investment.

"That finished my schooling," he went on. "All I needed in order to step out and continue to be successful in measuring up to big undertakings was——" He paused.

"This analysis of human endeavor is right interesting," remarked Jess. "But why are you hanging fire at this critical point, Paul?"

"Well," Burton told her, "that point involved the very biggest enterprise I could undertake. I had known you for two months and a half; and you had had me tied to your chariot wheels from the night, that *noche triste*, when we traveled the deserts from the draw in the hills to Inglesito Wells. That was as plain as Gospel to me, mujercita; but it was your feeling in the matter that worried me. Would you think me an impoverished fortune hunter, or would you not? I could tell you about the million, but I decided I wouldn't. I went straight and asked you to marry me, and——"

"And I grabbed you so quick it must have made your head swim!" chuckled Jess. "That ought to have taught you something else, Paul."

"What else could it teach me except that I was being rewarded with more happiness than I deserved?" Burton asked her.

"As for that," commented Jess judicially, "you might say there are two ways of looking at it. You see, I wasn't thinking so much of your happiness as I was of my own. But let's get back to the lesson for you that culminated in the proposal and the quick acceptance. The biggest undertakings are never quite so difficult as we think they are, and measuring up to them is never quite so hard as we imagine it is going to be. Honest, if you hadn't asked *me* to marry *you* pretty soon, I'd have been asking *you* to marry *me*."

Burton's arms went round his wife and drew her close to him. With such a girl at his side he knew he could climb any height, reach any goal.

And so they sat in their canvas chairs on the umbrella porch, the moon and stars above, and the dim miles receding

into fairyland while the limited rushed on toward the golden shores of their hopes and their aspirations.

Back at Inglesito Wells, Uncle Dan was standing in his living room under a floral bell which had been imported from Herkimer as the main decoration for the recent wedding. In fancy, he saw Jess standing under the bell with Burton at her side and the minister facing them with his open book. The look in the girl's blue eyes as she gazed at Burton, Uncle Dan could never forget.

"Phil," the old man murmured huskily, "I did my best for Jess, but my best would have been pretty poor if it hadn't been for Burton. I know a real man when I see one, and the happiness of your girl is as assured as anything in this world can be."

He put out his light and went to bed. For him, at least, there was peace and comfort even in that isolation.

How did you like this story? Will you write us a short letter giving us your opinion of it? At the same time we should be glad to have any criticisms that you care to offer on any other story in this number, or on the magazine as a whole. Any letter that you may send will be appreciated by the editors.

NOT FOR GOLD

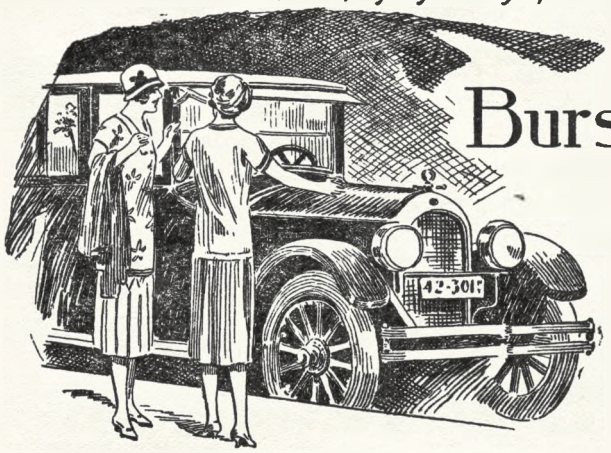
By Ross C. Miller

I LIKE the job, and I like the folks
That I meet here day by day.
I like the town and the country about,
But somehow I can't stay.
There's something gnawing at my bones;
There's an itching in my feet;
I've got to go where the yearning calls,
Though the parting is not sweet.

There's a big outdoors awaiting me—
It pulls like a full-grown ox;
It yanks me away from the friends I know
To the hills and trees and rocks;
To desert wastes that know no thirst,
Though the sun beats ever down,
And turns the earth to a sickly white
Where it should be green and brown.

It's not for gold that I wander so,
Or a hope of gathering wealth;
But it's His own wish that I hit the road,
And He pays me back in health.
So I'll roll my blanket on my back,
And I'll make my parting nod;
Then I'll hit the trail that leads off there
Where I'll be alone—with God.

Mazie, the Sprightly Stenographer, Takes a Vacation



Bursting the Bars

By Nell Martin

(COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE)

CHAPTER I.

IN NEED OF A VACATION.

ON his way to his office, young George Dorsey, Attorney at Law—he who now wore so proudly the title "Judge" Dorsey—was reflecting that there had to be some outlet for his feelings, some sort of a change. It wasn't that Maisie—Maisie Sinclair—whose tight-rope-walker father's name had been "St. Clair," but who had changed it for office purposes to Sinclair—had been doing anything at all startling or anything to get her into George's bad graces. Not of late!

Maisie was the goddess in charge of the machine of George's office, and future. In fact, since she had become a permanent fixture—and there was no doubt at all that she had—things had been almost too peaceful. She attended strictly to business and in a businesslike manner. But it was the constant drip-drip-drip of her outlandish personality upon the stone of George's consciousness that upset him.

Garbed like a demure plate from "What Every Business Woman Will Wear," perfect in every detail from the well-brushed, satiny waves of her bobbed coif to the soles of the very neatest and most correct of footwear upon—it must be owned—the very neatest and most correct of feet, Maisie was certainly easy upon the vision, but the fact remained that she took courage to face.

It was not at all that George was wondering whether Maisie might be removed from his office. Even in the days when George was wont to fire her every few weeks, something always saved her job for her; luck was her mantle, and her sandals were shod with protection. George had long since given up that idea. It was just that George felt that he must have a rest from her exuberance, temporary, as a matter of course.

Now he had hit upon what he thought was a plan—a vacation. He needed one, and, what was more to the point, affairs at the office were now arranged so that he might take it. There were no trials on the calendar for a few weeks, and office routine could go on. Mr. Wing, the elderly, semiretired tenant of one of the suboffices, would look after things for him, and Maisie was more than amply capable, as she had so often demonstrated.

George thought fondly of a certain resort toward which his yearning had often strayed and planned a happy and carefree month of rest and relaxation from the strenuous Maisie. His mouth was all ready to say the fatal words upon reaching the office. So the shock was great when her morning greeting was:

"Hello and good-by, Mis——Judge Dorsey! I'm going to break it to you easy, as some funny chap so touchingly

says. I'm gone, long gone! I been chained an' anchored to the floor for so blooming long that I think I'm growin' barnacles, so I went and hired me a Queen o' the May to dance around this here maypole, an' I'm hittin' the trail. Is it all right?"

"Why—— Miss Snclair——" gasped George, running true to form, and also slurring her name as was his custom. One always gasped when under direct fire from Maisie's guns.

"O' course, if you ain't satisfied I should blow, I'll cancel the bookin'. But it ain't in the cards for a St. Clair to follow one tent show year in and year out, an' intimidation breeds contempt o' court, as the smartest lawyers say. Father always changed his shows every spring, an' when it gets kinda green and springy I smell the sawdust, an' I gotta git out and go. I done pretty well to work through last year without no rest except such as I got dodgin' steam at the cafeteria tables, an' I got a classy trip all planned. I got a demmysella hired to answer telephones an' do all the fightin' off for you, an' Miss Kellogg'll take your dictation. Course she don't understand your clients like I do, but she'll struggle along while I'm gone. I hope you're contented with the idear."

Contented with the idea was mild. George was charmed with it. Even though it meant the postponement of his own little vacation, it had its compensations; for when Maisie had returned from her outing, then he could go forth on his pilgrimage, thus making two plausible separations possible.

What a rest for him! An atmosphere entirely free from Maisie for more than the contemplated month! And while he blushed inwardly to think of the deservedness of the sly little dig she had got in about no vacation last summer, he agreed perfectly that she had one coming now. It was quite true that last year he had forgotten to give her a vacation; for the reason that he had been so busy trying to get rid of her permanently that he had never thought about a temporary relief.

Welcome indeed would be the flawless services of Miss Kellogg, the more-than-efficient maiden dedicated to the service of the subtenants of the luxurious suite of offices, wherein his was one; George had always envied the five other lawyers, but Miss Kellogg had been hired only for the tenants, not for the boss.

"Well, Miss Snclair," he said, trying to keep his enthusiasm from his voice, "this is a coincidence! All the way down this morning I've been thinking that vacation time is upon us, and I was going to ask when you wished to take yours—on salary of course."

"Well, now, that's right handsome of you!" The dumb wonder of the world smiled. "I been plannin' for this here Catalina trip for quite some moons. That there Catalina is some place, so I see by the press agent. I always wanted to see one o' them glass-bottom boats, an' now I'm goin' to. It's to be hoped that there ain't nobody aboard wears hobnail boots! Well, then, I'll be plannin' to leave as soon as I get this new spare part hooked up an' runnin'."

Which was soon! After a day of instruction Maisie felt that the substitute was not sufficiently dangerous, that while she might fill the bill satisfactorily there was little likelihood that she would supplant the regular incumbent, and departed blithely, after a few pungent words upon the subject to Mr. Wing, the elderly attorney who sublet the office next to George in the suite.

"She doesn't seem to be too easy to instruct," he said casually, referring to the stodgy Miss Davis who filled Maisie's chair. There was no hidden meaning in his words, but Maisie's answer left him gasping—the usual effect produced by her speeches.

"You never expected no answer to that Mr. Wing, but you're a understanding chap—you know, Mr. Wing. I may be dumb, but I ain't absoblamelutely blank. Use your noodle! I've raised this job pretty darn careful from a pup, an' I ain't runnin' no chance o' its goin' sour on me. I may not be the cream o' the stenog'fy business, but there is folks as gets used to skim milk in their coffee. An' when they've got used to it, it ain't good sense for the skim-milk bottle to push the cream pitcher out for folks to sample, now, is it? Or the skim milk might get threw out—or canned!" She

howled cheerfully at her own pun, and prepared to leave.

"Well, hope you make it to Catalina for the week-end, Mr. Wing It's the chance of a lifetime to see me playin' the part o' the grand duchess; got a line o' wardrobe that has been collected from all points south o' Siberia; an' what high life I don't see this next two weeks'll have to wiggle along without me for another year."

Cheered by the prospect of two Maisieless weeks, George was downright cordial when she left. "I hope you have an enjoyable trip Miss Snclair," he said politely. "I sincerely believe you will benefit by the change." By that he meant *any* change. "I understand you're going to Catalina."

"Going to Catalina—I'm going to do that island thorough. Take it from me, I'm going to give the place a treat. It'll have to tighten up the bolts and pull the guy ropes into place after I'm gone, I'll remark in print the size of a three-sheet. They'll think a strong wind has blew in when I do my grand sashay into view. I gotta bathing suit which is built after lines that the human eye wouldn't believe possible——"

"I have no doubt of it," broke in George hurriedly, hoping to stave off any further explanation. "Well, good-by. And of course if you have to get bailed out over there, why—er—you know who to call on." This was both ungrammatical and unexpected; also quite a surprise to George himself, coming from his own lips Well, they were enforcing bathing-suit laws; that might have been timely.

CHAPTER II.

OFF FOR ADVENTURE.

EARLY next morning, it being Sunday, Maisie, after breakfast at the soda fountain, consisting—the breakfast that is—of caramel sundae and ginger snaps, sent a few post cards from the drug store, all of them views from Catalina, with "Some vacation!" varied now and then by "Swell place! Wish you were here!" and straight from that decisive deed walked into a coma brought on by the sight of a shining, newly painted, blue-curtained coupé of the common, or bakery variety—the kind that is turned out by the baker's dozen—and similarly priced.

Practically rolling in wealth—that is for a St. Clair—with an income accruing from the subletting of the suite in which she had established George's offices during his absence, likewise a healthy salary —one not based on ability, as George often thought—with money coming in from stock which had been a dower portion from the Greek strong men—friends of Maisie's from the days when she slept in a trunk top under canvas while her father walked a tight rope and her mother played the calliope—who had now quit the strong-men business and opened a restaurant, assisted by Maisie, hence the stock.

She owned also a half interest in a beauty parlor which had started with one chair and now threatened to become a healthily paying business, but one requiring more supervision than Maisie had time, or inclination, to give it. So, as has been said, almost rolling in wealth, Maisie had been thinking all this long time that one of these agile fender fighters was vastly suitable to her needs and position, and now, on this Sunday morning, just as she was about to embark upon a high-class vacation, with wardrobe to match, came opportunity.

"Hi, Jimmy!" said a heavily marceled and powdered girl of 1924 model, sliding onto one of the high stools alongside Maisie, at the soda-fountain counter. "Don't know anybody wants to buy a coop, do you? Gotta swell buy for somebody."

"Oh, I dunno," said the sheikish soda-jerk. "What's wrong with it?"

"Not a blame thing," replied the girl. "It's me that's jimmed, not the leapin' cockroach. I gotta tough line handed out to me by the new lady judge we got in this here democratic village yesterday mornin'. She says I better not be caught drivin' again for a year or so, on accountta that little misunderstandin' I had with that nurse and baby carriage at the corner of Seventh and Alvarado last week. How was I to know that the woman was going to get glued to the pavement to wipe the infant's chin just as I rounded the corner? I didn't hurt the infant none at that, just the nurse, and

serves her right. But however, since I ain't got no use for the car for a while I might as well sell it as pay storage, and then get me another one later; so——"

"I hope you'll pawdon me," Maisie broke in with dignity, "but I overheard your conversation." Coming from the next stool this was not without its touch of surprise. "Was it the car sitting out in front you was wishing to dispose with?"

"That's the baby," answered the girl. "Buy of a lifetime for somebody."

"I might look at it," said Maisie promptly. She had never lost anything yet by seizing an opportunity, she recalled, as witness her profit on the mortgaged apartment house, her one-chair-beauty-parlor partnership—and that gave her another idea.

"You wasn't by any chance in the beauty business, was you?" she asked, as the two girls walked toward the little car.

"You said it!" responded the other. "How'd you guess it?"

"I guess it was because you're in such perfeck shape yourself," replied Maisie, not mentioning the fact that the papers had faithfully reported the case of a nurse and baby carriage having been struck by a small coupé driven by a lady who said she was a manicurist in a barber shop.

If that didn't bring the price down, it at least kept it from being raised when the prospective seller saw the eagerness of the prospective purchaser. And it wasn't more than ten minutes later when Maisie Sinclair stood possessed of one motor car, with the curtains at its tiny windows; perhaps the blue curtains might have turned the trick: or the flowers in the vase.

After a thirty-minute lesson in driving, when the girl pronounced her an expert, Maisie slid into position by the curb in front of her modest hotel and blithely went inside. True to form she broadcast to all who might be listening that she had just acquired the little boat for the ridiculous price on the check the lady wanted O.K'd by the hotel management. A somewhat flustered clerk, however, assured the lady that no doubt her check was good, but that of course he couldn't personally indorse it.

"I tell you," said Maisie suddenly, as if just seized with the idea she had been nursing for lo, these many minutes. "You said you was in the beauty business. You gotta place of your own?"

"No such luck!" said the beauty expert, as to fingers. "I been in this barber shop I'm in for three years now and no nearer a place o' my own than the day I started."

"All right!" said Maisie with decision. "I'll trade you half a beauty parlor for the car an' we'll tear up the check."

"What kind of a beauty parlor?" The other hesitated.

"A regular, honest-to-William joint," Maisie answered. "Was one chair until it took on weight, an' now it's got three, and about to present its parents with a fourth. Regular marceling, two apprentices workin' on half pay, mud packs, an' everything. I staked a damsel which wished to go on her own, an' the thing plumb pesters me with profits outsida the fack that I gotta do the bookkeepin' nights when I might be learnin' law, like I should. I made my money back and some extra already, an' the partition's been knocked out and set over twicet. Wanta see it? We'll call up my pardner and see if it's jake with her."

Thus it happened that the interval between breakfast and lunch was spent in exchanging that half interest in a beauty parlor for a "coop" with blue curtains, with, however, a little to boot from the incoming beauty parlor owner; a little matter of a paper stating that one Maisie Sinclair had a credit of healthy proportions against the said beauty parlor, to be taken out in trade. Free marcels for a year, crowed Maisie, and an automobile to ride in!

Then she remembered. She should have taken the eight forty electric for the harbor, bound for Catalina. But she couldn't drive that coop to Catalina, and what proud possesser of a new car could resist such a lure? Farewell, Catalina! You'll never know what you missed. Her mind instantly decided that the smart thing to do this season was to tour, and tour she would, in her own car.

Back to her hotel for her already

packed and waiting bag, and Maisie was off for Yosemite, adventure, and wide roads that beckon.

CHAPTER III.

RUNNING INTO TROUBLE.

COMING out of the hotel with the bag, Maisie tripped straight toward where she had left Arthur—for such the previous owner had informed her was the name and title of the sprightly perambulator—when consternation brought despair in its wake; for where was Arthur? In fact, Arthur was not! Not at all! Anywhere! Maisie had known that Arthur was intelligent, but she had sensed that Arthur was rather pleased than otherwise at his change of ownership, that he had taken to her; why, then, should he desert her now?

Arthur however, had departed, leaving only an empty curbstone where once he had champed his bit.

"My bus' been stole!" shouted Maisie, running back into the hotel lobby. "What'll I do now?"

"Notify the police quick. There's a million o' those bugs clogging crossings all over town," advised the sympathetic clerk. Which she did.

"This is Miss St. Clair," said Maisie, "at the Rexton Hotel, and my automobile has just been stole."

"What kind of car is it," came the query, with enthusiasm which seemed to die when she explained its family name.

However, they took the license numbers, which Maisie, luckily, had on the slip of paper which Arthur's former mamma had given her to show ownership. The girl had, by the way, explained to Maisie that she could get the State to make a note of said change of ownership by showing this paper, but it would be all right for Maisie to do that after she came back from her trip, since she wanted to start to-day, and to-day was Sunday. "Or if you should go through Sacramento you could stop off and get it fixed while you're gone," she had said, which seemed like a healthy idea.

Having reported the theft, there seemed nothing to do except await Arthur's return, which she never doubted, for the traffic policemen always were so polite, that is, the one over by the Mackinaw Building was, and once Maisie had spotted the cop at that corner even nab a stolen car right by his traffic button. Arthur would come back. She might go up to the police station and sit a while and wait for some one to bring him in.

So, walking to the corner to wait for a trolley, she idly scanned the cars parked at the curb. And, oh, the wonder of it, right there, half a block from the hotel, sat Arthur as meek as ever, his blue curtains intact, his license number in plain sight and everything! *And* there was a ticket tied to Arthur's steering wheel.

Maisie climbed in, took off the tag, and stepped on the starter. Arthur leaped to the fray. The ticket said "Illegal parking," but that meant nothing in Maisie's young life. Arthur was back, and when she came back from her trip she could ask somebody what it meant. So away she went to the open road, north, toward the big trees!

Having been a mere foot passenger of the arteries of the city until now, Maisie felt some apprehension as to roads, but after a while she saw a stage with "Bakersfield-Sacramento" across its wind shield, and as Sacramento was one of her objectives, she decided to follow it, and did, to the occasional astonishment of motorists who had thought those things couldn't do more than twenty per.

Through traffic like a worm, clinging to the tail light of the stage, using that vehicle as a buffer, Maisie incredibly crossed the city and fared forth upon a boulevard which led out into rolling hills and pretty little subdivisions, where pennants informed the world that this was the one and only place in California to settle—in and for. Magically she missed disaster, exulting in the fact that she controlled this monster—Maisiecally speaking—of power and speed. Then hunger came, and with it disaster.

Maisie came out of the Home of the Green Apple Pie, in Palmdale, a ninety by ninety-two village, to find the veritable constable of fiction comparing the license plates on her near-car with a slip of paper he carried. His very chin whiskers wiggled with delight; he peered at the paper, then at the plates, in a very ecstasy of anticipation.

"Well, ossifer, it's real!" Maisie told him exultantly. "Hand-painted curtains an' everything! Ain't he a lulu? Ain't he all to the hossradish? I ain't blamin' you for takin' an extry squint at 'im. It ain't every day you gets a eyeful like him."

"Don't get flip, young lady!" said the constable severely.

"Flip's just what I got most of just at the present." Maisie grinned impudently. "For the first time in nigh onto two heartbreakin' years I got a chair under me which ain't tied to a floor sittin' still. I'm towering, brother, towering!"

"Not no more you ain't, heh, heh!" cackled the constable, quivering with importance and his own joke. "Not unless you'd call it towerin' when the reg'lar depittys comes for you."

"What're you yellin' about?" demanded Maisie belligerently. "Have I parked on the wrong side o' your four-foot bully-vard, or is it the curtains you object to?"

"Don't try any o' your fast city talk on me," he said with a further wiggle of the whiskers, "fer it don't get you nothing. They's been sev'ral tried it before. But I ain't got no time to waste on crim-'nals, 'cept to lock 'em up. They can do their talkin' through the bars after I've gone on about my other business."

"Whadda you mean, criminals?" demanded Maisie. "Say, I'm a darn good criminal lawyer myself, if information is what you're after."

"Well, try an' get yourself outta jail then," he snorted. "Guess I better take that bag out, too. Prob'ly stole it as well."

"Stole——"

"You needn't try to let on you're innercent," the constable blustered. "This here car's stole, and you stole it. Why, they broadcasted the numbers on them licenses not more'n a hour ago. It ain't such a large world as it used to be. This here radio's jest the ticker for catchin' bandits."

"I never stole no car, I own it! I bought it——oomph!" Maisie had just remembered the trifling incident of Arthur's disappearance some three or four hours before. She had plumb forgotten to speak about finding him. But that would be easy.

"Oh, that," she said breezily. "I nearly forgot. That was me he was stolen from. He wasn't stolen at all, just moved away from where I left him, an' when I found him I forgot to call back and——"

"Well nex' time you can remember," persisted the ancient officer. "What might your name be?"

"M. St. Clair," replied Maisie easily.

"I reckon that's why the name on the owner's tag up inside is Clarice Schmidt."

Now Maisie had not peered up under the dashboard, had not seen the little printed square, and now it came to her that Miss Schmidt had said that until she got her registration changed at Sacramento she could just say that was her name.

"Oh, I was going to say that M. St. Clair sold me this car this morning, and my name's Schmidt," she added, smiling one of her best.

"Well, be that as it may," said the constable in a dark tone, "you'll rest just as quiet Schmidt as St. Clair. Funny that the tag is dated a couple months back——"

"Oh, I can explain that——"

"Well, do yer explainin' to the jestice," the constable broke in.

Then with a firm grasp on her arm, he guided her across the road and around the side of the eating house which she had just quitted. "Jail's right here handy," he said jocularly. "Right back o' the lunch counter. Makes it handier about carryin' in meals and all."

"You're not putting me in jail! gasped Maisie. "Why, honest, you old nitwit, you're layin' yourself out an' orderin' flowers. You ain't got no idea who I am. Why ev'ry judge in Los Angeles knows me."

"I ain't got a doubt of it." Her tormentor grinned.

With that he unlocked a padlock on a small shack built of corrugated iron and led her inside; slid a rasping corrugated slide back in its rusted groove revealing the one opening, a barred window.

"Here's your hotel. Tower to your heart's content," he taunted her, and with a quick movement he stepped out, slammed the door, and the padlock clicked.

"Nitwit?" he said severely, coming around to the barred window to talk. "Young lady, when you do any more shoplifting, you stay in the city limits with your loot. They mebbe don't catch much there, bein' too busy shinin' up their stars, but out here we got a respeck for law that's another thing again." He walked away, carrying Maisie's bag

"Hey, you!" she called spitefully. "You're doin' a little shopliftin' yourself. Where you goin' with that bag? It's mine."

"With them initials?" he grinned, pointing. It was unfortunate, Maisie reflected, that she had bought that bag at a secondhand auction.

"I'll have you arrested," she said. "I can prove that's mine."

"Who you going to get to do it?" The constable wiggled the spinach. "And which does that 'GGW' stand for—St. Clair or Schmidt?" Then he was gone, around the corner of the restaurant.

"Well, if this ain't rich!" howled Maisie. She was not daunted at all; only mad. "Me in the clink for stealin' my own automobile which I ain't stole. An' can't prove it. If I only hadn't got hot and hadda explained ladylike that I was savin' trouble by goin' to Sacramento to get that thing changed—but no, bein' the daughter o' my father, I hadda lie. Now whadda I do? Course he'll come back——"

And he did. But it was Monday when he came. Part of the night Maisie had been a model prisoner, sleeping the sleep of the innocent, on the hard, narrow, iron cot; the rest of the time she had alternately walked the floor, rehearsing the biting speeches with which she would burn up that old ten-twenty-thirty makeup when she got out, and standing at the wee window praying for company. A stray cat or two had been the only answers to her prayers.

CHAPTER IV.

FIGHTING TO GET OUT.

MONDAY came, and with it breakfast, but delivered through the barred window, for the bars were generously wide apart. Maisie had even wondered if she might not be able to slide between them, sideways, the trouble being that there was no one to lift and start the sliding.

"Say, you!" she greeted her jailer, as he appeared with coffee and what looked something like an egg sandwich. "How long you goin' to keep on with this foolishness?"

"You'll get jestice soon enough," he answered softly. "Don't be anxious. An' anyway, the next bars you're behind may be closer together."

"Don't you kid yourself!" she commented caustically. "You notified the authorities yet?"

"Not yet," he replied. "Yesterday was Sunday. I'll tell 'em this mornin' by telephone."

"Oh, you got telephones out here?"

"We got more than that. We got brains enough to catch criminals," answered the constable, stalking away.

With lunch he told her that he had notified the police that he had caught the thief and the car. "And they said that car was stole from that St. Clair you said sold it to you," he added grimly. "You had nerve to tell me who the real owner was."

"You're due for a surprise," Maisie informed him, more gayly now.

"So're you," he returned. "You forged that registration card, I guess, Miss Schmidt. Forgery's pretty nigh as bad as stealin'."

"That ain't worryin' me!" Maisie grinned.

"Maybe this will," he replied, with dignity. "I understand that last Sat'day you had your drivin' license took away from you—for a year! That's why you ain't got it with you!"

Maisie bit her tongue. There was where she had tripped. Traded her perfectly good beauty parlor for something that was out of commission! Not meaning the car! She swallowed rapidly.

"Oh, well, I don't care," she thought. "I ain't Schmidt." And dared to say it aloud.

"Ain't Schmidt!" The constable stood awed. "Well, I heard tell o' them al-i-as-es, but not so many in a flock. Go ahead and think up a funny one. I c'n hold you for drivin' without a license no matter what you call yourself. An' if

you're Schmidt, I got you for that; an' if you ain't, I got you, anyway."

It was about dusk when Maisie saw the car—Arthur—come around the corner and slow down by the restaurant. Hope sprang to life, and then Arthur moved on, down the road toward the great open spaces. It was near midnight, or after, when Arthur came limping back and turned in at the garage down the road.

And the next day was Tuesday.

The meals were regular, at least. After the first breakfast they were delivered and handed through the bars by the one waiter from the restaurant, but Tuesday's breakfast came by the important route of personal delivery again.

Even as Arthur came around the corner that morning, Maisie lifted her coffee cup. It riled her to see Arthur, free and untrammeled, strike out for the open spaces again, while she remained in durance vile.

"Say, you!" she demanded hotly of the constable, who stood meditating outside—just out of reach. "What's my car doing running all around the country?"

"Your car?" he responded gingerly. "I guess not! An' it ain't doin' no worse than it was when you brought it this far."

"You're rentin' it!" Maisie accused him, suddenly wise.

"Got to make the township board money o' the prisoners," he returned with dignity.

"You graftin' old skate!" she flared. "When you goin' make some kinda a move? You can't keep anybody in jail like this?"

"I'm a doin' it," he responded placidly, making off.

"When the officers coming from Los to get me?" she howled.

"Don't be in no hurry. They won't treat you any nicer'n I'm doin'. You will be taken over to the jus-tice this mornin' most likely. He'll tend to you as soon as he gets his mornin' trade out. He runs the feed yard."

It was a long list of crimes that Maisie heard read out when that important event took place, near noon. Theft, highway robbery, driving without a license, resisting an officer—these were only a beginning.

"You got any bail on you?" demanded the feed-merchant justice of the peace.

"Plenty!" replied Maisie nonchalantly. "Cast a glim on that, an' see if it don't give you a thrill. Bet ten dollars cash would look like a million to you. An' there's more where that come from. Cash is one thing that sings a alto to any tune you can start, an' is harmonious to the itchin' palm."

"That ain't too much," the justice said, nevertheless giving a visible start at the bank roll that Maisie unearthed from her customary hiding place, her stocking. "Let's see; here's Jane Doe-St. Clair-Schmidt; drivin' with a suspended license you ain't got; stealin' a car; forgin' a car certificate; resistin' an officer; violatin' a city ordinance on parkin'—well, I guess we better make it a couple of thousand——"

"Thousand!" gasped Maisie. "Why, you—you——" For a moment her audacity deserted her.

"You ain't got that much with you?" The justice grinned.

"Well, I know where that much is," Maisie asserted. "My grief, boy, what a wow you'd be playin' a saxophone in a jazz band! Every note you open up on is blue!"

"Will you deposit this on your bail?" he asked, reaching for the money.

"Not by a jugful!" hooted Maisie, reaching faster. "You get George Dorsey, Judge Dorsey, that is, attorney at law, on the phone right away, and he'll settle your current accounts." Then she settled herself to wait.

CHAPTER V.

SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT.

AFTER a moment's parley the justice and constable agreed to do it, and time passed quickly. In fact, it didn't seem any longer than Christmas when central reported that she had the eminent attorney on the wire. How Maisie thrilled at the sound coming from the telephone! George! What a lawyer he was! Her troubles were over. She grinned impudently as the constable explained that a criminal wanted his attention. "Schmidt——" he was saying when Maisie interrupted.

"Schmidt, your uncle's grandmother!" she howled. "St. Clair! M. St. Clair. I work for him."

The constable turned upon her a six day's-dead fish eye.

"So! You ain't thought up any new ones, but you're St. Clair now!"

"Never you mind who I am. You just tell him—here let me talk."

"No; you don't," he said with dignity. "I'll do the talkin'. These here codes don't go in this court."

"Court!" snickered Maisie. "Feed store! You tell him M. St. Clair—I mean Sinclair—is——"

"Oh, it's Sinclair, now!" It was maddening, his stupidity and cupidity.

"There's a gal here who has stole a car, an' she says she's M. St. Clair, and the car was stole from her, and she's Schmidt, an' St. Clair sold it to her, and it's a stolen car, and she's lost her license——"

Maisie could hear George's crisp tones through the telephone.

"Why, this is the constable out at Palmdale—seventy miles north of the city," he explained. "She's in jail out here——" He turned from the telephone with a triumphant air.

"He said it ain't you," he told her decisively. "That Miss Sinclair isn't out here; that she's in Catalina for two weeks on a vacation, an' he had a post card from her this morning."

Those fatal post cards, sent from the drug store just before she acquired Arthur!

"An' he sayd Miss Sinclair don't own a car and never did!"

The voice was going on again over the telephone.

"I thought so," said the constable at last. "He says you couldn't be her, anyway, 'cause the jail ain't built that could hold her two days."

"Is that so!" replied Maisie airily. So that was what George thought. She would have to live up to that.

"You get the Ponsay Dayley Own Beauty Parlor on the phone and ask for Miss Schmidt—the number——"

"What for?" he resisted.

"Cause I spent enough time out here now. I know if I stay any longer I'll grow a bonehead, too, an' I don't dare. My business is too tecknickle. You get 'em."

Something in her manner made the constable think that from Mr. Dorsey's description this might be Miss Sinclair after all. He got the number she gave him.

"Now you ask her the license number on her car which she owned until Sunday."

He did and, looking somewhat crestfallen, turned to Maisie.

"Now you ask her why she sold her car."

He did. The further information seemed to stun him.

"Now you ask who to?"

"Look here, young lad——"

"Don't answer me back!" Maisie broke in with her jaw at a stiff angle. "I spend most o' my time gettin' folks outta trouble, folks that are as dumb as you, to start. You gotta learn."

He asked "Who to?" "What else?" he added, with wonder dawning in his gimlet eyes.

"Now you call the Rexton Hotel and ask to speak with Mr. Nevers—an' while you're at it, you ask the hotel who Mr. Nevers is. An' you ask him does Miss St. Clair live there——"

"Here—you been sayin' Sinclair——"

"Never mind that! My boss can't say T," returned Maisie haughtily. "An' you ask him does she own any car an' when she got it and what kind—and was it stole and when—an' what kinda clothes she had on when she left——"

"I won't do it," said the constable.

"Oh, yes; you will!" said Maisie with finality. "My head's just beginnin' to work. You been rentin' Arthur for two days, an' that's confoundin' a fel'ny. You could be sent up yourself for usin' a auto which you was under the intention was a stolen vehickle. An' be quick about it, too, 'cause I was talkin' with a bus driver last night through the bars, an' he was goin' into the police station first thing this mornin' and report that I found my car an' you're holdin' me out here unlegal—an' he's gonna report at the same time how much he's paid you an' this justice in fines in the last year and have 'em check up an' see if you've turned 'em all in to the county, an'——"

"I'll ring up that hotel just to prove

you're lyin'," said the constable with dignity, which melted as he asked the questions she gave him.

"An' now we'll just sit here and wait for the officers to come out to release me, as that bus driver said he'd send 'em," she said placidly. For once out from behind those bars Maisie's naturally alert mind had started to work and her inventive capacity was unlimited. "They oughtta get here as soon as the ones you sent for to get me. That is," she added, a sudden thought striking her, "if you really reported that you'd found Arthur—and got me—which I bet you never."

Arthur chose that exact instant to park before the door of the feed yard.

"Here, Hi!" called a townsman, jumping out. "Here's your car. Got a right likely mess o' quail this morni——"

"I'll see you later," broke in the constable, crimsoning. "Over't the garage."

"Oho!" exclaimed Maisie alertly. "Quail? I hadn't noticed that it's quail season."

"See here," said the constable, fingering the spinach. "I guess I made a mistake. I guess you're Miss Sinclair all right. An' I guess the car's yours, too. An' if I let you go with a reprimand for drivin' without a license, will you promise to get yourself one when you get to Sacramento?"

"You ain't lettin' me go with nothin', uncle," returned Maisie joyously. "I'm goin', an' you just try to stop me. An' dig up my hand bag before I have this here justice make out a habeas corpus for it."

"It's right here." He produced the bag from behind the justice's desk. "But I really could fine you for drivin' without a——"

"For shootin' quail outta season, you mean," she silenced him. "Whyn't you try to pin that onto me, seein' as it was done in my car?"

"If I was you," suggested the constable, "I'd get started, for if those officers come up here they might not believe you, an' you'd have to go to all the trouble to prove to them you're who you say you are."

"If they was to come!" jeered Maisie. "They're as likely to show as the ones I said I sent for." She had climbed in and settled herself ready for a start, her bag beside her. "Which ain't likely," she added, her foot on the starter, "as I never sent for 'em. No more than you did. You never intended to tell 'em you found that stolen car; you was too busy rentin' it. An' that reminds me, I want the rent you been gettin' for Arthur these last two days. I get ten dollars a day for Arthur when I rent him. Fork over twenty bones."

The justice retired behind his desk to grin, and the constable started to back away. Maisie reached out and caught him by the most convenient handle—the spinach!

"Twenty!" she howled.

And he dug down, one hand trying to shield his precious whiskers, the other bringing up some currency. With her free hand Maisie reached down and appropriated two bills with X's in the corners, then let loose of the chin whiskers.

"Pay my fine with the rest!" she cried cheerfully. "And save some to pay your own, as I'm likely to hunt up a game warden before the sun goes down on my wrath." And leaving a purpling limb of the law shaking a wild arm and yelling something which was lost in Arthur's noise, she sped away, no doubt breaking more city ordinances.

"Well," gasped George, late that afternoon. "Miss Snclair! You back? I thought you were in Catalina."

"Oh, did you?" said Maisie acidly. "Well, I ain't."

"Didn't you like it?"

"Love it!" she said cryptically. "That's why I'm goin' there—next summer. This summer—well, you gotta be a experienced vacationist to be educated up to the tourist class. An' a vacation by yourself ain't nothin' to leave home for. It's like doublin' in brass—one thing to talk about and another to try an' do it. An' absence makes the heart grow fonder—that ain't no lie. I guess I'm better off in the bosom o' my family. I'll wait till you take your vacation, and then maybe I'll go to the same place for a coupla days. That'd be sorta chummy——"

"Oomp!" said George. And then to change the subject, he added: "By the way, Miss Snclair, there was a strange telephone call this morning. Some one

in some small town up the valley says she is you, and she is in jail for highway robbery and forgery, I think they said. They wanted me to come up and get her out."

"Did you go?" she asked sweetly.

"I knew it wasn't you," he explained.

"Oh, no; of course not! Somebody tryin' to put something over on you; good thing I came back. Murder is about the only crime I c'n think of that I'd be likely to commit. Oh, o' course it couldn't be me! There isn't a jail built that'd hold me," she said innocently. "Long," she added after a pause. "Laugh that off."

Which innocent remark gave George something to think about.

Another Maisie story will appear in an early issue of TOP-NOTCH.

RADIO RHYME

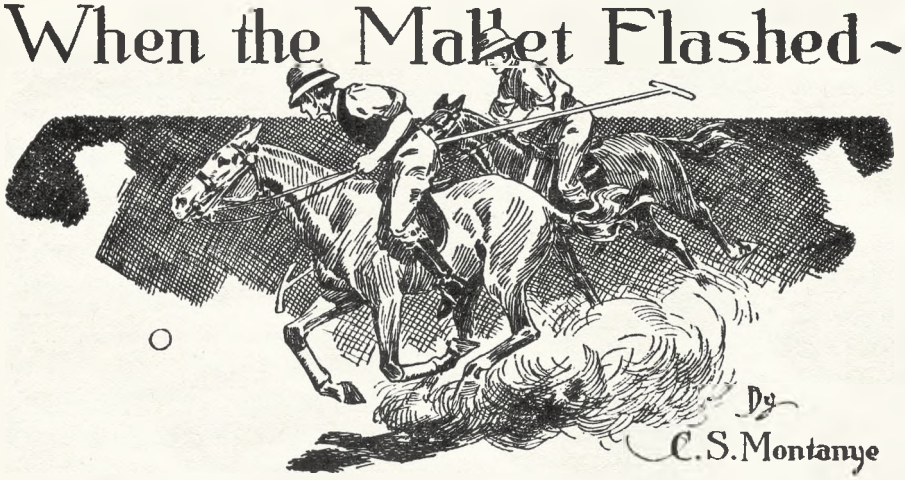
By James A. Sanaker

TUNE out trouble, tune in joy,
Broadcast smiles each day, my boy.
Get the habit!
Don't announce that bad old news
Makes you think that you might lose;
Just sign off from sad old blues;
Turn the knob to Sunny Views.
Get the habit!

If your program's kind of weak,
Your batteries of hope go seek.
Get the habit!
Make the weeping numbers few;
Add a stirring march or two;
Encore with a lilting song;
Tell the pessimist he's wrong.
Get the habit!

Life is like a radio set,
What you tune in for you will get.
Get the habit!
Get the good news while it's hot;
Control is worth a mighty lot;
Let stations singing blah go by,
But broadcast hope until you die.
Get the habit!

When the Mallet Flashed~



(COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE)

CHAPTER I.

BETWEEN THE GOAL POSTS.

FRONTING the clubhouse that faced the Shallowbrook polo field, Tommy Andrus flipped away his cigarette and registered approval. Out in the center of the field where the practice game was in progress between the club's crack team and a sub-four, Carey Winston, a forward, had taken the white ball out of a brief but exciting scrimmage.

With smooth, expert skill, Winston, riding hard, shot the ball to his No. 3, cleverly circled away from opposition, charged to the left, and, after the flash of another grapple, pounced upon the ball again and shot it accurately between the goal posts.

There was a rattle of applause from those who had motored out to watch the practice play. Andrus turned the heel of his varnished riding boot over the smoldering stub of his cigarette and smiled at the portly figure of old Judge Halsted beside him.

"That's polo for you, judge. This chap Winston is a crackerjack. He plays one of the coolest, most logical games I have ever seen."

The judge, a polo enthusiast and one of the founders of Shallowbrook, touched the tips of his gray mustache—a habit that was his when he was either perplexed or meditative. "I don't like mysteries in fiction or life," he observed dryly. "And Winston is rather a mysterious individual, you'll admit, Tommy. There's something about him that has impressed itself upon me. Perhaps my years on the bench have made me a trifle—ah—suspicious."

Andrus, watching the fours take fresh positions, chuckled. "Nonsense, judge—if you don't mind plain speaking. Winston's a close-mouthed, taciturn person, and the way he dodges notoriety and publicity is a bit strange, but a mystery man—well, hardly."

"How much do you happen to know about him?" Judge Halsted asked keenly.

Andrus winced as he shifted his weight from one leg to the other. "How much? Not a great deal. I only know that he seems well supplied with money and that the minute I glimpsed him down in Pinehurst this spring I knew he was destined to be Shallowbrook's No. 1. I'm not particularly interested in his affairs. If he can help us defeat Greenmead next Saturday, send us over to England, and give us a chance to compete for the Wendover Cup, I'll ask nothing further."

Judge Halsted clipped the end from a cigar and struck a match. Out in the field the game went on with Winston sitting his saddle loosely and riding like a demon.

"He has a cavalryman's seat," the judge murmured after a pause. "I don't

like mysteries," he repeated, half aloud. "Never did and never will. They—they annoy me."

The game continued through the two last chukkers. Andrus intently studied each move on the part of his team, this team into which he had put all the hopes and expectations of a semi-invalid who could never ride again. He understood thoroughly just what hung on the impending match with the formidable Greenmead horsemen.

It was the tail end of the Long Island polo season, and an invitation had come from England through a Captain Herbert, offering an opportunity to either Greenmead or Shallowbrook to cross the wide Atlantic and compete for the famous Wendover Cup at Hurley Field.

Andrus drew a little breath. He realized the honor that lay in Captain Herbert's invitation, what it meant to Judge Halsted, and to the players. The team that went to England would be a real team. It would be a glorious adventure; the contest would be replete with fine sportsmanship whether or not the British trophy was won or lost. Defeating Greenmead, however, would be no light or inconsiderable task. The opposing team had behind it a long, unbroken string of easy victories. With a Rodman Courtney, the enemy No. 1, an experienced and brilliant polo player, the game promised an ample quantity of thrills.

Andrus could not help recalling Rodman Courtney's pet ambitions. The Greenmead captain was an egotistical, vainglorious individual who needed only the assurance of a chance to win the Wendover Cup to throw fuel on the bright fires of his swaggering conceit. And it went without saying that Courtney would leave no stone unturned to defeat Shallowbrook when they clashed.

The shrill sound of the referee's whistle aroused Andrus. The practice game had concluded and both teams were walking their mounts back to the stables. With a word to the judge, Andrus limped down the field. Though the day was warm and bright his leg ached dully. He wondered, as he went on, what had ever prompted him to ride the steeplechase at the United Hunts meet that had brought about disaster.

Under the sheds where riders dismounted and ponies were being blanketed prior to a cooling out, the sharp aroma of sweaty leather and horse blended. Rutledge, the first team's No. 2, saluted with his mallet when Andrus approached.

"Fair playing, Tommy?"

"Fair enough." Andrus smiled.

Seward, the Shallowbrook back, pulled off his helmet and with a word started for the clubhouse. It was then that Andrus, passing Cole, his other player, came face to face with Carey Winston. Winston, tall, slim, and darkly sunbrowned, completed giving instructions to his groom concerning Jimminy, his Western pony. Andrus noticed that the other's youthful face was expressionless, blasslike, almost grim. He thought, as he had so often thought, that it was the face of one who had lived and—suffered.

"Neat work, Carey."

Winston nodded. "I think we played a better practice game to-day. A tighter, altogether better game."

"Good enough to vanquish Greenmead?"

Winston nodded again. "I hope so. I believe so." He slowed his pace as they moved back toward the clubhouse.

Andrus looked at the watch strapped to his left wrist. "The judge," he declared, "wants the team to dine with him to-night at Crossroads. Doing anything special?"

"I'm sorry," Winston replied colorlessly; "but I have a date—in town. Thank the judge for me if I don't see him, Tommy."

They parted at the clubhouse, Winston going on to the locker room to remove his polo uniform and don a suit of gray tweed. Some one, Seward or Rutledge, had offered him a lift back to town with his chauffeur; but his mood was not one for company and he had refused.

Absently listening to the drone of conversation about him, the wet splash of the showers across from the locker rooms, Winston consulted a time-table and saw that the best he could manage was a local that left the little station near the clubhouse at five minutes after six. Meditatively he knotted his foulard cravat, buttoned his waistcoat, and said good night to the others.

Then, walking a road dappled with the sullen red of the flaming sunset, he started toward the station. Birds called plaintively in the thickly foliaged trees that lined the highway, and from dense thickets the perfume of flowers mingled with the sweet aroma of the countryside. Winston shook himself impatiently. Each step that carried him closer to the station made him remember more sharply the letter he had stored away that morning in the secretaire in his rooms. What was the meaning of it? What sinister, veiled threat lay beneath its neatly typed lines? Was it possible that some one had accidentally stumbled upon a clew—had learned?

Of a sudden Winston felt something that was not unlike the chill of an impending disaster.

CHAPTER II.

SHADOW OF THE PAST.

THE train reached the Pennsylvania station some fifty minutes later. Winston used an escalator and emerged upon the humming activity of Thirty-fourth Street. Then he walked east toward Seventh Avenue.

A huge hotel lifted its bulk to the cloud-ridden sky. At its feet crawled a restless tide of traffic, humanity. A vibrant undertone that was like an ominous growl held in its muffled roar the strident voice of the great city. A few blocks north the nightly conflagration of Broadway kindled where the dusk deepened and died.

Winston went on to a rank of taxicabs near by. He selected a vehicle the chauffeur of which made haste to turn down the flag on the clock and step on the gas.

"Where to, boss?"

"The Aberdeen Chambers on Madison Avenue," Winston directed, mentioning a certain street in the middle Fifties. "No hurry."

He settled back against worn leather upholstery; the taxi moved off into the river of northbound traffic; Times Square and the theater world; Bryant Park, with the loom of the Public Library; Fifth Avenue, comparatively deserted after its daylong stress. The cab turned east and after a space stopped on Madison Avenue before the front entrance of the Aberdeen Chambers, a place of exclusive bachelor apartments.

The lower floor of the building was occupied by an expensive florist. Close to its plate-glass window, apparently intent upon the horticultural display, a thickset man who wore a brown suit idled, a cigar tucked away in one corner of his thin-lipped mouth. He turned leisurely as Carey Winston paid and dismissed the chauffeur; but the polo player scarcely noticed him. The loiterer gave an imperceptible nod of satisfaction when the other entered the building.

The elevator was somewhere in the regions above; so Winston used the stairs. He went up a single flight. A latchkey admitted him to the cool darkness of his three-room-and-bath suite. In the gloom he stood hesitant for a minute, straining his ears—listening. At last he snapped on the electricity in the living room, threw open a window to the inquisitive night, and dropped into the padded depths of an armchair.

The room was well furnished. On the mantel of a stone fireplace was the enlarged photograph of the Pinehurst polo team on which he had played half back that spring. Crossed above it were two worn mallets; in front of it stood a willow-root polo ball the faded white paint of which bore several black autographs. From either end of the mantel shelf a cork helmet dangled. Beyond doubt this was the room of a person who was neatly particular, of one who liked luxury, a place that was a part of the city and yet remote from it.

After a brief space Winston got up and approached the sprawling bulk of a mahogany secretaire that stood between two windows. With a key he unlocked the top drawer, and then drew out the letter which had been delivered that morning. The envelope was of good quality and bore only a typed superscription, stamp, and postmark. Winston turned it slowly over in his hand before he shook out the inclosure. This proved to be a single sheet of note paper on which, without salutation or signature, was typewritten:

One who desires to see you on a matter of extreme importance requests that you kindly

call to-night after nine o'clock at the Hotel Metropolis and come directly to Room 806. This is for your own benefit as well as his.

For a long time Winston stared at the few words that so inoffensively stared back at him. Unanswerable questions knocked on the door of his mind. Should he destroy the note and forget about it? Did its unknown author hint of things that had occurred back in the months of yesterday? Did the shadow of the past again lie at his feet and stretch craftily over the wilderness of the restless city to the quiet of the Long Island countryside—the green turf of the polo field at Shallowbrook?

"They know!" he thought fantastically.

CHAPTER III.

THRILL OF THE GAME.

AN hour later Winston left the Aberdeen Chambers and dined in a little restaurant around the corner from the building. Then, on foot, he struck off in a westerly direction. Had he turned and glanced back he might have noticed that the man in the brown suit who had lingered before the florist's window had detached himself from the spot opposite the restaurant and, a half block behind him, sauntered in the same direction.

As Winston remembered, the Hotel Metropolis, one of the most recent Manhattan hostelries, was on the other side of the Rialto, close to its beating heart—a tessellated brick affair haunted by cloak-and-suit merchants, butter-and-egg men, buyers, theatrical celebrities, and those wide-eyed transients who come annually to the Big Town for a vacation visit.

With an effort Winston shook off the gloomy thoughts that pursued him. He began to think of polo. So long as he could remember, fleet ponies, the sharp clash of conflict, the duel of wits, and the thrill of the game had been the things he had cared for most. He had played polo a good deal before the war. Then, for two years, he had touched neither mallet nor stirrup. Pinehurst had been the scene of his return to the game, and he was grateful to Tommy Andrus for making him a member of the Shallowbrook club and team.

It would be something, Winston realized, to defeat the powerful Greenmead four. It would be something to help gratify Andrus' dearest ambition and to please old Judge Halsted whose interests were all with the team. It would be something to know the broad track of the churning Atlantic, the hospitality of foreign shores, the game on which the fate of the Wendover Cup depended. He asked himself if the miracle was possible—if every dream might still come true.

Across the light-smitten Boulevard of Gayety, the Hotel Metropolis stood to receive and greet him. Winston went into an ornate, well-filled lobby and started for the elevators. Midway there he halted and, struck by a sudden idea, retraced his steps to the black onyx desk presided over by a bespectacled night clerk. The thickset man in a brown suit had come in from the street and was shaping a course toward the desk himself, but he obligingly stepped aside when Winston reached it.

"Will you kindly tell me," the polo player asked, "who is registered in room 806?"

The clerk obligingly consulted a register. "A Mr. Martin Black, sir, from Philadelphia."

When Winston thanked the clerk and went on, the man in the brown suit stepped up, smiling a trifle, to the desk. "There's a funny thing," he said to the clerk. "Our young friend mentions room 806 and I'm wondering if room 805 is vacant. I've got a business interview on, and that's always been a lucky room for me. I just want to hire it for a couple of hours. What do you say?"

The night clerk fingered a card index, dipped a pen into an inkwell, and swung the register around. "Your luck is still holding if you don't mind my saying so, Mr. Brown," he declared with a glance at the signature the other scribbled. "805 was vacated only an hour ago. Glad to let you have it. Front, boy."

Winston alighted on the eighth floor and went down a deeply carpeted corridor that seemed lined with a million doors. Each had a brass numeral and room 806 he found was on the south side of the building, around a bend in the passage. Winston noticed a glimmer of

light on its transom, tightened his lips, and knocked.

Steps sounded, the door opened, and he found himself considering the man who looked out at him. Winston was conscious of two small, sword-sharp eyes that drank him in eagerly, of a round, bland face that somehow was vaguely familiar, yet which he could not identify on the spur of the moment. He was ushered into the smoke-filled confines of the room itself with a word.

"Glad you decided to call in on us, Mr.—ah—Winston. Have a chair."

The door shut softly and for the first time Winston realized the chamber contained a second occupant. This was a bulky, darkly handsome youth with a petulant, dissatisfied expression and a gaze that was heavy with suppressed eagerness. While the one who had opened the door was irritatingly familiar and yet [illegible] to be accurately placed in memory, no such problem connected itself with the second tenant.

Winston, with a flutter of his alert nerves, knew there could be no mistake. The other was Rodman Courtney, captain and No. 1 on the Greenmead polo team.

"I see you recognize me," Courtney said languidly. "Sit down, Winston. As Martin said a minute ago, I'm glad you decided to act upon my little note."

Without any change of expression Winston seated himself. The man with the sword-sharp eyes and the bland face had not removed his gaze. Courtney looked over significantly and, from the corner of his eyes, Winston saw the stout man nod slightly.

"Look here, Winston," the Greenmead player began, "there's no use beating about the bush. I know that when Tom Andrus brought you up to Shallowbrook he supplied the team with the best player it ever had. That isn't flattery—it's a fact."

Martin Black uncapped a humidor and made a show of selecting a cigar.

"Go on," Winston said quietly. "Come to the point. I presume," he added, "there is a point."

Rodman Courtney let a smile shadow his lips. "Exactly. Even with you playing next Saturday I feel reasonably confident that Greenmead will defeat Shallowbrook. Still, there is always that thousandth, unknown chance. I might say that in all my life I have never wanted anything as I want victory next Saturday afternoon. I want the honor of taking the Greenmead four to England; I want to be a member of the first American team to win the Wendover Cup. Because of this overwhelming desire of mine I intend to make doubly certain there will be no slips Saturday, no thousandth, unknown chance to crop up and spoil it. Get me?"

"Go on," Winston repeated.

The other leaned a little forward. The excitement in his gaze was open and undisguised. "With your help I can turn in to-night knowing that the game Saturday has already been played and won—here in this room! A polo player of your ability and class, Winston, can be as much of a handicap as a help to his team. An ordinary performer with the mallet trying to be a drag on a four would be easily detected, but you—you can ride as brilliantly, to all appearances play as formidably, and yet aid us and help defeat Shallowbrook. Do that and I'll give you my personal check for a thousand dollars after the game."

There was a tense, dramatic silence. During it the stout man with the bland face shifted his cigar from one corner of his mouth to the other. Rodman Courtney strained forward, his face dark with color.

Winston drew a breath. "By every right," he said slowly, "I ought to take you in these two hands of mine and choke an apology out of you, Courtney!"

The other laughed quietly. "Undoubtedly, but you—won't."

Martin Black chuckled. "You bet your life he won't!"

With difficulty Winston checked the mad, dizzy impulse that bade him fling himself upon the youth who, so sure of his ground, smiled casually.

"But you won't," Courtney repeated thoughtfully. "I'll tell you why. Winston, by a stroke of sheer luck I've got the goods on you. I've discovered who you really are—what you were. You've been clever but not quite clever enough. I know what happened out West and all about a certain two years.

In view of this I don't think you'd relish having me stop in at Crossroads tomorrow night and tell Judge Halsted the story. Neither do I imagine you'd enjoy having me spread it around Long Island, among the people whose guest you've been, at the houses where you've weekended. Get the point?"

On his feet, Winston stood as stiff and immovable as a bronze statue. A muscle twitched spasmodically in one of his lean cheeks and perspiration broke out in tiny beads on his forehead. For a long while he stood motionless, fighting the fury that was a lash to his hot blood, trying desperately to combat the hollow, sinking despair that pervaded him.

In a cycle of seconds he had all the chaotic impressions of a swimmer sinking in the middle of a dark, awesome sea. He seemed to glimpse Tommy Andrus—the Andrus who had put the best of him in Shallowbrook. He seemed to see old Judge Halsted broken in bitter disappointment. He seemed to hear the crash of his own dream castles tumbling down about his ears. And then he thought of the information that Courtney would spread—among those who were his friends—those who trusted and respected him.

"Come, come!" Rodman Courtney exclaimed impatiently. "What's the answer? A thousand dollars to help Greenmead win—the broadcasting of a certain story if you refuse. Which?"

After another minute Winston opened his shut, wet hands. "Let—let me think," he replied. Though his tone was even, a dull note of tragedy lurked within it.

CHAPTER IV.

MALLETS AT SALUTE.

THE morning of the game between Greenmead and Shallowbrook dawned dubiously; but toward noon the haze that drifted across Long Island's center was blown out to sea and by noon the sun was warm and smiling.

Two hours later the Shallowbrook polo field grew bright with the pastel shades of feminine gowns, the polished nickel and plate glass of ranks of parked motors. A throng of polo fans wending a way from Gotham, from Jericho, Oyster Bay, Old Westbury, Wheatly Hills, and other places, filled the clubhouse veranda and the uncovered stand where a brass band played. With the field lightning fast it was a day intended for polo in the most favorable circumstances.

Out in the warm sunshine the black-jacketed four from Greenmead warmed up blithely. Tommy Andrus, leaving Judge Halsted with the party being entertained at the clubhouse, made his way down the field. The clean-limbed, wiry string of Shallowbrook ponies were tethered in a long line awaiting the moment of conflict and need. Saddles were being cinched, and when Andrus came up he found his team already mounted.

He saw that Carey Winston had elected to ride a gray pony that wore boots all around. Somehow it seemed to Andrus as if his No. 1 was even grimmer and more brasslike than usual. Andrus stroked the curved neck of the nearest pony and looked up at his players.

"I guess you fellows know what it means to win to-day," Andrus said. "Hard hitting and hard riding will defeat Greenmead. Give the best of everything you've got from the first minute of play. And don't forget that European excursion and the Wendover Cup. All right, everybody! Best luck!"

With mallets at salute the Shallowbrook four cantered out, their light yellow jackets glimmering like stolen sunshine. Applause, rising above the brazen echoes of the band, drifted across the field. The players warmed up in a businesslike manner, then spread out in cavalry formation when the gong clanged, joined the visiting team, and paraded past the clubhouse.

From the saddle of the gray pony, Winston saw Judge Halsted on the veranda. The man appeared to be looking directly at him. He moved his own gaze slightly and let it focus meditatively on Tommy Andrus, who limped forward to speak a last word with the timekeeper.

There was a short delay; then the teams took position, each two forwards on the right and left respectively, their half back behind them and their back in the rear of that player. The game, divided by agreement into six periods or chukkers, of seven and one half minutes each,

impended; the suspense was impressive. Winston told himself that each hope and despair must be fired in the crucible of conflict, hammered thin on the anvil of battle.

The shrill blast of the referee's whistle roused him. There came the white flash of the wooden ball as it was tossed in and the game was on.

Immediately Courtney, swinging his pony around and leaning from the saddle, used a forehand stroke and shot the ball well down the field. Greenmead, riding hard, presented an attacking front that started a brisk offensive and gave every indication of success, until Seward, sending his pony into the thick of it, broke up the first of the enemy's stratagems and spoiled a certain goal.

Shallowbrook tried for a safety a minute later but drove out of bounds. Rutledge shot in from the foul distance, Cole was ridden off, and with dazzling accuracy the visiting No. 3 galloped the ball down the field and shot it the thirty-five yards necessary to score the first goal.

Greenmead registered again when, purely by accident, Courtney's buckskin pony kicked the ball through the goal posts, but Seward, playing the game of his life, gave the home team its first tally after a scrimmage and earned a goal with a difficult shot under his mount's neck.

The gong clanged ending the first period and the teams rode in.

"We'll have to do better than that," Rutledge muttered. "I don't like the way we've started off. Greenmead has a little too much stuff on the ball for a first chukker."

Cole laughed shortly. "They're out to roll up a score and swamp us before we get started."

Andrus appeared, his gray eyes eloquent. "Harder riding, men! What's the matter with you to-day, Carey? Hold them, fellows!"

The second chukker was a repetition of the first so far as the Greenmead offensive was concerned. With smooth support the visiting horsemen rode in and out of the mêlées and generally mixed plays, scoring twice more before the session concluded.

"They simply can't keep this pace up," Seward said to Winston when the third period began. "The polo of a complete game has been crowded into these last few minutes."

Winston, his expression inscrutable, nodded briefly. The whistle shrilled and the green turf echoed to the hoofbeats of the racing ponies, the sharp crack of the white ball that darted across it.

There was no scoring on either side when the half and period ended. Once play was resumed, Winston on Jimminy began to put more of his wrist into his stroke and unleashed some of the reserve he had apparently held in check.

Courtney, a flying demon on horseback with a swishing mallet, started a scrimmage near the side lines and a charge down the field. Cole, who had done nothing formidable, earned a second goal for Shallowbrook. Then Rutledge, finding a hole, got through it with the ball and scored amid a thunder of applause. This left Greenmead with only a one-point advantage.

"Two and a half minutes to play!" Seward snapped. "Let's tie the score! They're weakening. Their defense is breaking up!"

In a desperate mix-up Cole took the ball out of the next scrimmage and sent it hurtling into the air. The team tore down the field in pursuit. The enemy back raced out of the flying throng and tried to stand off the attack. Shallowbrook, though, was not to be denied. Rutledge rode around, took the ball from Cole, and tied the score an instant before the period ended.

"Keep it up!" Andrus cried when the four took their remounts after a breathing respite. "One more point to win! Come on, Carey. We're relying on you. Show us something!"

In a keenly fought rally the Shallowbrook players tried desperately for points; but it was in vain. Seward lofted the ball only to foul, and the hardest kind of riding failed when the Greenmead forward broke up a play and made Courtney a present of the ball. Driving hard the Greenmead captain sent it well down the field. Eight ponies, white streaked with lather, thundered after the ball. Riding in the van Winston saw Courtney's mallet swing up and fly down.

There followed the gusty rattle of applause, cheers.

"Goal!" Seward groaned. "Five-four, They're one ahead of us now!"

While he stood beside Jimminy, awaiting the last chukker, Winston's eyes narrowed. He could feel the gaze of Tommy Andrus shifting to him and he knew there was disappointment in it. Still the player's expression was unchangeable when he swung into the saddle and adjusted the leather strap of the mallet over his wrist. He cantered out after the others, realizing they were face to face with the game's crucial minutes. They needed one point to even the score—two points to achieve victory. Could they make it despite all obstacles?

"Our last chance!" Winston heard Seward saying. "All together now, men!"

The ball flashed in for the last period. The game Jimminy, using his own equine intelligence and training, wheeled to prevent Courtney from making a shot. Then with careless recklessness, Winston rode clear, lofted, and found the goal posts, tying the count.

With the thin echo of cheering in his ears he continued his fast, hard riding, his brilliant playing. By degrees he grew conscious of the fact the visiting team's early offensive had wearied them. Twice he caught glimpses of Rodman Courtney staring at him and saw the expression in the other's eye. The game went on tensely.

"There can't be much time left!" Winston told himself after an invasion of the enemy's territory that resulted in a off-side play and some hitting that was far from accurate.

When the ball was thrown in again Winston saw that Seward had taken it and was putting into practice a maneuver they had used in the past with some success. Passing the ball to Cole, the Shallowbrook No. 4 reined his pony in and contented himself with defensive work. Meanwhile No. 3 shot to Rutledge who, awaiting the stroke, pulled his pony around and drove diagonally across the field.

There the alert Seward, at a gallop again, drove in the nick of time, and in the next heartbeat Winston saw the ball coming to him and knew that it was Shallowbrook's last chance to win within the number of periods agreed upon. Of course, in the case of a tie, an extra chukker would be played.

"Now, Jimminy!" Winston called.

The thin, nervous ears of the pony went flat against the gleaming arch of its neck. Winston pressed his knees tighter, swayed out of the saddle, and smashed the ball down the field. Riding without rein he dashed after it. A half dozen yards behind him he heard the galloping hoofbeats of the enemy—then the voice of Rodman Courtney, thick, strained—like the voice of a chagrined Nemesis.

"My ball!" Courtney shouted.

The hoofbeats drew closer and Courtney, his face dark with rage, reached Winston's side. Saddle to saddle they charged on, a flying team. Winston, his mind working in split seconds, thought only of the game ticking away relentlessly, the last chukker that must end. Was there time sufficient even yet for one last, mad effort? He leaned for a shot, but Courtney drove into him, striving to get Jimminy's head around, hemming him in before he reached the ball, so that his mallet arm was useless.

"You bounder!"

In Winston's ears Courtney's epithet seemed to come from a far distance. Dimly, through a swirling haze, his polo intuition told him that the only thing left to do was to make a last charge, to depend on his pony's speed, to smash the ball toward the goal post.

"On, Jimminy!"

The gallant little pony with a magnificent spurt of speed plunged Winston clear of opposition. The ball lay just ahead, glimmering like a white stone in a sea of green. Winston heard Courtney's voice again, but in his ears was only a curious ticking like that of a great clock. He asked himself what anything meant —what anything mattered. In the last chukker—the last minutes of play—fate could arrange the balance.

Hanging so far out of the saddle that the sun blazed in under the brim of his helmet, Winston lifted his mallet and swung it down in a flashing arc. The crack of the ball sounded.

For one breathless, dizzy, and uncertain breath-take Winston imagined that

he had failed. Then, through the same whirling haze, he saw Tommy Andrus far across the field waving his hat and heard Seward's panting tones behind him, vibrant with happiness and the flush of victory.

"Goal, Carey! We win—our game!" Seward cried.

CHAPTER V.

WITHOUT LEAVE.

A HALF hour later Carey Winston entered the governors' room in the clubhouse, closed the door behind him, and waited for the man who sat across the room to look up.

"I understand," Judge Halsted said at last, "that you wanted to see me about something."

The perspiration was cold on Winston's grim face. He pushed a hand across it before he answered. "In a few minutes," he said unsteadily, "Rodman Courtney intends to come here and tell you something, judge. What he tells you is the result of what happened in the last chukker. I purposely pretended to fall in with some plans of Courtney and held myself in reserve through the first periods to-day so that I could throw him off his guard and have enough left to try to win for Shallowbrook."

The judge, seated in the shadow of the oil painting of himself that was on one paneled wall, raised a hand. "Rodman Courtney," he said slowly, "cannot tell me what I already know."

Winston lifted his heavy gaze. "What—you already know?"

The other stood up and then took a step forward. "Winston, I'm rather a judge of men. You get to be a judge of them after you've spent years on a bench in a courtroom. You almost are able to read their minds—to understand, anyway, when they have something on their conscience. When you first came to Shallowbrook I knew you were carrying a secret weight around with you. Every action of yours bespoke a troubled conscience. And so, because I dislike mystery, I had you investigated."

Silent, Winston tightened his lips.

"With the resources at my command," Judge Halsted went on quietly, "it was not difficult for me to learn much about your past. Several things at Pinehurst put me on the right track. I unearthed your record, I delved into it, and I continued to keep you under surveillance.

"For example," the judge went on, "one of the operatives who was assigned to watch you at the Aberdeen Chambers trailed you to the Hotel Metropolis a few nights ago. He took the room next to the one in which you had the interview with Courtney and that same night I was informed that you seemed agreeable, by inference, to helping Greenmead defeat us to-day for the reward of a thousand dollars and—Courtney's silence."

"And yet you allowed me to play?"

The judge raised a hand. "I told you before that I was a judge of men. Winston, bare records are not always eloquent. They told me that you were a military deserter from the Fifteenth Cavalry of the United States army, but I had to go elsewhere to learn that while you were technically guilty you were morally innocent when you left Prairie Post, out West, to go without leave to aid a comrade in distress."

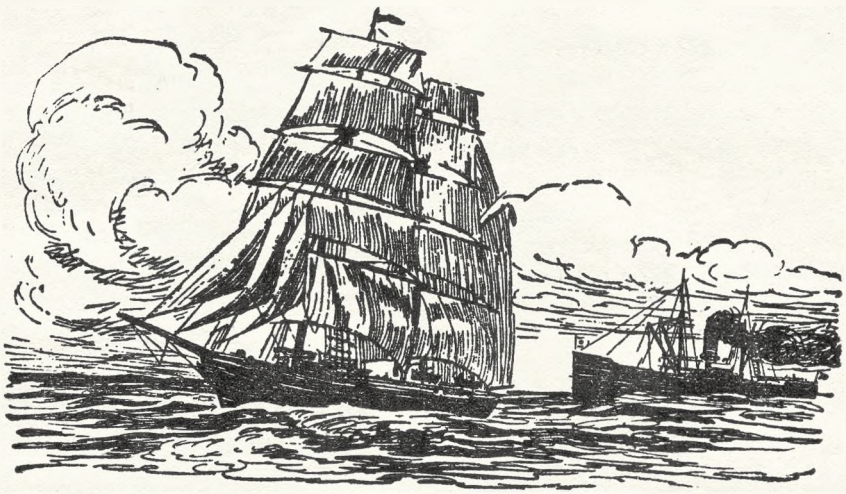
There was a short silence.

"Desertion is desertion regardless of circumstances," Winston said bitterly. "I served two years in Fort Leavenworth for it. I thought," he went on dully, "that when I changed my name and put the past behind me I could forget, bury the stigma and disgrace. But there was a man—a Martin Black. This Black happened to be a spectator at my trial. He saw me down here at Shallowbrook and being an adventurer he imagined he could make some money and sold his information to Courtney. I made them tell me that after I pretended to have fallen in with their plans."

Winston squared his shoulders and drew a breath. "After all, what difference does it make? Shallowbrook won to-day and the team goes to England. I'll disappear, and——"

The door opened and Tommy Andrus limped in. "So here's where the conquering hero is hiding! The crowd wants you outside, Carey. Oh, yes; our friend Courtney is down the hall and wants to see you when you have a chance, judge. He says he has something to tell you."

Judge Halsted slipped an arm around Winston's shoulders and smiled. "Send him in, Tommy. I've got something to tell Courtney, too—something concerning bribery and corruption and what will happen to him if he ever decides to open that foul young mouth of his." He smiled up at Winston whose grim face was lighted by the sun of a dawning comprehension. "You're remaining, my boy. I want you to stay and hear what I have to say to Courtney before I turn you over to your admirers—the same admirers who will be waiting to hear that you've helped Shallowbrook defeat Wendover next month across the sea."



MEN OF THE SEA

By Edgar Daniel Kramer

MEN, who have followed the winds of the sea
Are never the same as their fellow men;
They evermore walk with strange mystery.
Though they tramp the fields or the misty glen.

Sober or gay, though they laugh or weep,
Their eyes are brooding, they see afar;
And they are hearing the restless deep
In the mystic singing of moon and star.

The salt tang clings to their bearded lips,
Though they walk in gardens the high hills know;
And the ropes are thrilling their finger tips,
The while they labor with pick and hoe.

The gray gulls scream through the night and day;
They are aliens lost in a ghostly land;
But they dream and dream of the time when they
Will go back to the waters that understand.

Tale of the Florida Keys

Spots of the Leopard

By Hapsburg Liebe

(COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE)

CHAPTER I.

A FEUD STILL ON.

THE man was about twenty-four, stalwart, lean, sunburned, and hard, with a pair of blue eyes that not many women had looked into without a spirit of envy. He wore one of the finest Western hats that Stetson could make; his high-heeled Spanish boots were the costliest that ever left Denver; looms have not woven finer blue serge than that in his coat and trousers. He carried from the sea-going Key West train two large suit cases and an alligator-skin bag. The suit cases were stuffed with clothing, two silver-mounted "six-guns," two cartridge belts fitted out with holsters, and many boxes of cartridges. The bag contained, along with a few other things, roll upon roll of bank notes of divers denominations—enough such rolls to choke, literally, half a dozen horses.

The boy was ten years old and so full of life that he never could be still for longer than a minute at a time. His clothing was all new, and he was inordinately proud of it. In his arms he carried a small rifle, a bundle of fishing tackle, and a profusely illustrated Robinson Crusoe. He had thought Crusoe a singer, until the book enlightened him.

Ordinarily, the man was as sparing with words as though they cost him a dollar apiece. The boy could hardly have talked more had he been paid a dollar each for his words.

"What's the name o' this island, Bill? How far is it back to Miami? I got tired o' that old train; didn't you, Bill? Where are we goin' from here? Are we goin' in a boat? How long will it take us to go, Bill? Can we fish for a shawark on the way there? Say, Bill!"

Lazily, good-naturedly, Bill smiled down upon this fatherless and motherless street Arab whom he had picked out of a juvenile battle on Miami's water front, only the day before. Already he had given the lad affectionately not one nickname but two, "Sputter" and "Wildcat's Kitten," the former because of his everlasting talkativeness and the latter because of his startling fighting proclivities. The boy's name was Mullane.

In the combined soft and musical drawl of South and West, Bill answered the questions in the order in which they had been asked, and with characteristic brevity: "Long Key. About a hundred miles to Miami. I got tired, too. Wardwell's Key is our destination. In a boat, yes; prob'ly a cabin-cruiser launch. Three hours, with good luck. Can't fish any on the way, for shark or anything else. Be careful," he added, "that rifle ain't loaded, Sputter."

At the wharf he found that all the launches of the cabin-cruiser type were

out with fishing parties: it was in midwinter, and the Long Key fishing grounds are a mecca for sportsmen tourists at this time of year. However, there was a small schooner, sun-warped and weather-beaten, with sails almost as drab in color as her deck and sides; she bore the somewhat ponderous name, *Cumberland,* and it was a word that touched a tender chord back in the memory of the man.

He walked, the wide-eyed boy beside him, to a point near the vessel amidships. A parrot in a cage on a corner of the cabin eyed them soberly and cried: "Hurry up!"

A huge man, with tremendous shoulders and hamlike hands, appeared suddenly on the deck. "Well, what for you?" he glowered.

"I want to charter this windjammer. You the skipper?"

"Not so's you'd notice it, I ain't the skipper!" the giant rumbled. "I'm the schooner's donkey engine. I load and unload cargo, mostly phosphate in bags, from the mines near Tampa; they're developin' and plantin' Long Key, you know. Civilization ruins everything, sooner or later, don't it? When the Keys is gone, what'll be left to a man who likes it wild, I ask you! Me, I'm Griffin Urmey. You've heard o' me, mebbe; most people has, seems like. But they ain't never got anything on Griffin Urmey; not so's you'd notice it, they ain't! When old Man-o'-War Jim was alive—you've heard o' 'Man-o'-War' Jim Henderson, the fightin'est skipper on the Gulf, o' course?"

The newcomer didn't say that he had, or that he had not, heard of "Man-o'-War" Jim Henderson.

Ignoring his silence, Griffin Urmey put another question: "Where did you want to go with the *Cumberland?*"

"Hurry up!" the parrot squawked. It was a young bird, and it knew no words but these.

"Wardwell's Key," was the prompt response.

Urmey gave a great shrug. "Wardwell's Key! Why, there ain't anything there any more. Used to be some coral-rock houses, groves o' lime and avocado, and banana and pineapple plantations, also sugar cane, but they've all growed under now. Even the houses is thicketed over. Nobody ain't lived there for years. It was this way:

"Two sets o' Tennessee hillfolks settled the key, the Wardwells and the Hendersons. They got along fine with their groves and plantations until a reg'lar old mountaineer-style feud sprung up between them. The Wardwells started it; they swore they'd drive the Hendersons into the sea, and they dang nigh done it. But the Hendersons thinned out the Wardwells, too, and all that wasn't killed o' the Wardwells has either died a natchel death or went some'eres else to live.

"Of the Hendersons," Urmey continued, "there was left only old Man-o'-War Jim, his wife, and their daughter. These three took to the sea like ducks. The girl growed up on the schooner and could sail it as well as her daddy; so when Man-o'-War died and was buried in the Gulf, the girl takes charge o' the vessel, and she still makes a livin' for herself and her mother a-runnin' it."

Urmey paused to catch his breath, and went on: "The Gulf now knows this here girl as 'Man-o'-War Mary Ann' Henderson, which title she inherited from her daddy. This here is her schooner, named for the mountains them people lived in 'riginally, up in Tennessee. I'll call her, and you can talk charter to her —and not to me, the donkey engine."

He turned toward the sun-scalded cabin, walking as softly as a cat for all his great heft, and the two on the near-by wharf stared after him with hanging jaws. Another moment, and he was back on the heels of a young woman whom one could easily have imagined a composite creation of the best of Hebe and the best of Venus—a delicately sunburned, bareheaded, and barefooted goddess in faded khaki, with eyes as blue as those of the man on the wharf.

It was, of course, "Man-o'-War Mary Ann." She had grown a protective hard shell about her rare, ultrafeminine self in order that she might survive in the scheme of things. To her, all men were rather unnecessary; those she had known —even her father—had been bold, more or less bad, hard-bitten, and her tendency was to judge all mankind by the men she had known.

Therefore, she looked upon the newcomer very much as though he had been sand beneath her feet.

"So you want to hire the schooner for a run to Wardwell's Key, do you?" she asked a little sharply.

"I wanted it for about three months," replied the man under the wide-rimmed Stetson hat. "I own at least half o' that key, and I'm goin' to build it up and make it into a paradise. I didn't know you was a Henderson until just now, or maybe I'd have went at it different. Still, I hope you'll take me up. You see, I left home before the feud started, when I was only a boy; I went out to see the world, and I've seen it, and I ain't plum absolutely crazy to see it any more. I remember you, Mary, though it's been a long time. Maybe you'll remember me a little. I'm Bill Wardwell."

Neither line nor tint of the girl's face changed in any noticeable degree. As dispassionately as though she were discussing some other year's fishing, she said: "Yes; I remember you—now. You and me used to play together every day, under the coconut palms and sea-grape trees. We made play houses, with sea shells for dishes. I had a china doll, and you had a wooden gun. It would take a lot o' money to bring the key back, Bill."

"I've got it," Bill Wardwell replied. He opened the alligator-skin bag and showed her. Urmey saw it, too.

Then Wardwell went on: "I had beginner's luck with an oil well, and I also had hoss sense enough to quit right then. I reckon that you own about half o' the key, Mary. Want me to fix up your half too?"

"I own a third of it," the girl returned, a little stiffly. "If the Hendersons had owned half of it, it'd been called Henderson's Key. I dare you to even set your foot on my third of it!"

CHAPTER II.

A GENTLEMAN'S AGREEMENT.

TO Bill Wardwell this was a hard blow, coming as a sort of climax to the news that his people were no more—nobody knew how hard a blow it was. But life had been full of rough places for him, and he had met them all as he met this—figuratively, with boots on.

Sputter Mullane, Wildcat's Kitten, had been silent for as long as it was possible for him to be silent. "Wow!" he exclaimed.

"Mary," Bill Wardwell drawled softly, "Mary, do you think it's fair to blame me with the feud?"

"Oh, I don't blame you for anything," replied the girl quickly, and her voice was astonishingly even and smooth. "You can't help it—can't help being a Wardwell. A stingaree can't help being a stingaree, nor a dogfish a dogfish, you know. It's the spots o' the leopard, which wouldn't be a leopard if it didn't have the spots! No; you can't charter the schooner. You can go whenever you want to, Bill Wardwell."

"Wow!" Sputter Mullane exclaimed again; but, as before, nobody gave it notice.

The girl seemed about to turn her back upon Wardwell, but—she didn't, not just then. The light of pagan idolatry, or worse, was strong in the gaze of Griffin Urmey, just behind her. Bill Wardwell smiled faintly. He quite forgot the presence of Urmey and the boy when he said:

"Mary, you've been in my mind a lot—a little girl in pigtails. I never saw anybody out there in the world that was quite like you. The real, main, big reason I had for comin' back to the Keys was to marry you. I planned to build a fine mansion on the old home key and make the place a paradise—just for you. And you can kick all you want to kick, and buck all you want to buck, but I'm goin' to marry you, Mary Ann, just the same!"

At last the girl's countenance underwent a decided change. Her blue eyes became round. She turned a trifle pale beneath the rich, golden tints of her sunburn. And then she laughed uproariously.

"Well, that's rich!" she cried. "Oh, boy—that's rich! So you're goin' to marry me, anyway, are you? I'll see if you really are game. Bill Wardwell. On a gentleman's agreement—gentleman's agreement, mind you—I'll bet you my schooner and my third o' the key, against your two-thirds o' the key, that you do

not marry me, and you can set the time limit yourself."

Wardwell almost laughed. The odds were all against him. But had Bill Wardwell been without a great measure of venturesome blood, he never would have bartered the hard-won wages of five years as a cowboy for one long chance on an oil well.

"Fine!" he said. "Presumin' that you'll be nice enough not to run when you see me comin' to court you. Suppose we make the time limit ninety days?"

Man-o'-War Mary Ann took a step backward in her amazement. She had expected that he would make it a year, at the very least.

"All right!" she muttered. Then she went toward the cabin, to help with her mother's new, black-alpaca dress.

The voice of Griffin Urmey came harshly, when the girl had disappeared: "I say, you two had pe'mission to leave; now clear out!"

"Hurry up!" squawked the parrot.

They eyed each other hard, Wardwell and Urmey. It was in that moment that war to the last ditch, figuratively, was declared between them. Urmey had his plans, of course. Not that Mary Ann Henderson had ever encouraged him in the least; never had she even smiled at him out of the line of sheer duty, or even permitted him so much as to touch her hand.

"I'm goin' because I'm ready to go," said Wardwell measuredly. "If I didn't want to go, you couldn't move me; not to save your mis'able life, you couldn't."

"Yah, yah, yah!" taunted the Mullane boy. "Put that in your pipe, you big hunk o' cheese; put that in your pipe, and smoke it!"

Urmey glared hotly. Just then Mary Ann Henderson appeared at a corner of the cabin; she had overlooked something.

"A minute, Bill," she began. "You said you meant to put a lot o' money into your part o' Wardwell's Key—buildin' a fine house, and all. You won't do that now, not until you've seen how the bet goes, of course; will you? Because, you see, you'd lose it, if you did. It'd be foolish."

Wardwell smiled oddly. He was not the man to do anything by halves. "I'm goin' right ahead with it," he returned, "as soon as I can charter a vessel to take material out and hire a big crew o' men. I reckon it does look foolish, Mary, but —maybe it's one o' them spots you was talkin' about, the spots o' the leopard."

"You'll lose it," the girl declared spiritedly; "I sure will collect the bet if I win, and I'm sure goin' to win!"

Again Bill Wardwell smiled. "All right! I'll hope to be a good loser. Come on, little Wildcat's Kitten; let's go and hang up for the present in that hotel near the railroad station; humph?"

As the two were about to turn from the wharf, another small and weather-beaten schooner came swinging around the key's nearest point.

Wardwell faced back to Mary Ann. "What's that?" he asked, indicating the strange vessel.

She gave him an odd look as she answered: "That's Griff Urmey's brother's schooner, the *Loon*. You can charter her, if you want her, but she'd likely come high."

The *Loon* would likely come high because Henry Urmey, one of the worst men on the Gulf, chose usually to run rum and Chinese rather than lawful cargoes, there being more money in the former.

A few minutes, and the *Loon* eased in at the other end of the wharf and tied up there. Wardwell and the boy went toward her. Henry Urmey, like his brother, was huge, brass-brown from sunburn, bareheaded and barefooted. His crew of three men also were brass-brown and without hats or shoes; they were wiry, rat-eyed, of the lowest beachcomber type.

Bill Wardwell remembered the girl's odd look now. "That outfit," he whispered to little Sputter Mullane, "would slit our throats for a lead nickel. Let's go, son!"

CHAPTER III.

SOMETHING THE MATTER.

THE Mullane boy's everlasting fight for existence had given him a power of reasoning far beyond his years. When they were well on the way toward the

Long Key hotel, he shot half a dozen questions in a row at his god:

"That was a fool bet you made with the skirt, wasn't it, Bill? Anyway it goes, she's got it all, ain't she? What'll you do if you lose, Bill? Would you stay here? Or would you go back West? Will you take me with you if you go? Say, Bill!"

For once, Bill Wardwell had no answers for the boy. He was too deeply wrapped in his own thoughts to talk. He admitted to himself that it had been "a fool bet." But after his quixotic declaration that he was going to marry Man-o'-War Mary Ann, anyway, what could he have done but accept the wager she proposed? Out West they had called him a go-getter, and perhaps he had taken it too seriously; either that, or his sudden coming into wealth, he told himself, had addled him.

The hotel was a very pretty frame building, though it lay considerably sprawled in its setting of gorgeous flowers and coconut palms. One room on the second floor was vacant, and this Wardwell at once engaged for himself and his youthful companion. Little Mullane put down his rifle and the bundle of fishing tackle and was soon deep in his Robinson Crusoe, though he had to spell out the words laboriously. Wardwell dropped into a chair beside the open window and began to review mentally his plans for the reclamation of Wardwell's Key.

When the supper gong sounded, he went to his feet and kicked the alligator-skin bag toward the boy.

"It ain't hardly etiquette," he said with a smile, "to take baggage to the dinin' room. You load the rifle, son, and lock the door behind me, and watch the money. I'll bring you a fine supper when I come back, and I won't be gone long. All right?

"Sure!" Sputter Mullane nodded, accepting the responsibility gladly enough. "If anybody tries to take that bag, I'll shoot 'em right square in the eye."

Wardwell's neighbors at the supper table were two old men and a dozen or so of women whose husbands were out fishing for barracuda and sailfish along the edge of the Gulf Stream; the moon was full and high, and the fishing cruisers would probably not come in for several hours yet.

All this talk of fish and fishing was of exceedingly great interest to Bill Wardwell, and he was in the dining room much longer than he had meant to be there. As a matter of fact, it was the shrieking of the Miami-bound Key West train, an hour after nightfall, that brought him back to himself.

When he rapped at the door of his room, there was no response. Again he rapped, and still there was no response. Quickly he put down on the hallway floor the tray of food he had brought for the boy and crashed the door inward with his shoulder.

Sputter Mullane, Wildcat's Kitten, was gone; and gone, also, was the alligator-skin bag and its rolls upon rolls of bank notes of divers denominations!

For the first time, Wardwell swore at himself for not having put the bulk of that money in a bank.

There were times when this happy-go-lucky young man did things on the impulse of the moment and wildly, and times when he didn't. This was one of the times when he didn't. Calmly he went over the room, his eyes taking in everything. The rifle and the Robinson Crusoe lay on the bed quite as though they had been placed there with some care. There was no sign whatever of a struggle.

Then he went to the window and peered out. He saw that which he had not noted before; it was a crooked, leaning coconut palm that grew within a foot of the window ledge at one end.

"So that's the answer!" said Bill Wardwell to himself.

At that instant there was a voice from the doorway: "We heard a noise. Is something the matter, sir?"

It was the hotel clerk, with a negro bell boy behind him.

"Yes," growled Wardwell. "I'll say there *is* somethin' the matter. I picked a boy off the streets, half starved and in rags that didn't half hide him; I fed him and dressed him up and made him my boy—and now he's robbed me! That palm at the window couldn't be climbed by any white man; but anybody could slip down it—see?"

With that, he seized his broad-rimmed hat and tore from the room.

CHAPTER IV.

FOR THE BOY'S SAKE.

THE train had gone on toward Miami when Wardwell reached the little station. Idlers whom he questioned had seen no boy get aboard. Wardwell turned back toward the hotel. Perhaps he had been wrong in thinking that Sputter Mullane had repaid his kindliness in so insufferable a fashion.

As he was about to set foot on the lower step of the veranda of the hotel, the moon's bright light showed him a schooner that was leaving Long Key under a wing-and-wing spread of canvas. It was, he knew within reason, either the *Cumberland* or the *Loon*. Then Bill Wardwell jumped at a conclusion gratefully, happily—the boy was not guilty; the money was aboard that flying schooner, and it was Henry Urmey's vessel; Griffin Urmey had seen the money, and he had told his cutthroat brother.

Like a buck deer, Wardwell ran toward the wharf. The Old Henderson schooner lay where she had lain before, rocking gently against her cables, the moon sharing her feeble lights. The slender figure of Mary Ann stood on her forward deck; she was watching the *Loon* as that vessel became smaller and smaller to her vision, more and more indistinct against the dim northwestern horizon.

"Hello!" cried Wardwell.

Before he could say another word, the girl was speaking: "There's darn crooked work somewhere. Griff Urmey has left me, without a good-by or anything, to go on Henry's old tub——"

"With that twenty thousand dollars that I showed you," Bill Wardwell cut in. "Also, they must ha' took my boy, to keep him from raisin' a rumpus; and soon they'll find it simpler to kill him than to keep him and keep his mouth shut. Mary, if I let 'em even get out o' sight, I'll never see that boy any more. This is the only boat here; I'll pay you your own price, if you'll only forget that I'm a Wardwell, and be a sport——"

Mary Ann interrupted: "Come aboard, quick! For the sake o' that boy, I'll help you—I'll have to leave mother behind——"

Breathlessly Wardwell leaped over the railing. The girl sprang into action. Within the minute, almost, silent little old Mrs. Henderson was ashore and hurrying toward the home of a net fisherman whom the Hendersons knew. Almost within another minute, the fisherman himself, a lean and weatherworn man, had become a member of the *Cumberland's* crew of three. Shortly afterward, the schooner gave to the pull of her bellying wing-and-wing sails and began to slither like a ghost toward the open Gulf.

"Wait!" suddenly cried Bill Wardwell. "I forgot my six-guns!"

"Too late now!" Mary Ann laughed without mirth. "You boob, if we lose fifteen seconds more, the Urmey tub will be clean out o' sight. Anyhow, I got dad's rifle aboard. Bill, that darn outfit o' grave robbers is headin' straight for Wardwell's Key, if that's any interest to you, and they cain't turn either way aside without losin' the dead fair wind."

"'Boob' is right," admitted Wardwell, with engaging frankness. "I got my weak spots, I know. But gi' me that gun you mentioned, and I'll try to show you one o' my strong spots when we overtake the Urmeys."

The girl promptly turned over to him the rifle that had been the pet property of old Man-o'-War Jim Henderson, together with a belt of fifty cartridges. On and on they sailed over the shimmering waters, under the dead-fair night wind, and Wardwell noted, after the passing of another hour, that they were slowly but surely gaining on the *Loon*.

Still another hour went by.

Wardwell went to the girl, who was at the wheel now. "There'll be bullets passin' soon, Mary," said he. "You'll have to give George Pippin the steerin' and go into the cabin, stayin' below deck level, so as not to risk bein' pinked."

At that very instant, a bullet tore through the rigging; it was followed a few seconds later, by the distant keen crack of a high-power rifle. Mary Ann Henderson laughed a little, as though it amused her.

"This is my ship, Bill Wardwell," she said. "I'm runnin' things to suit myself, you boob, and not you. Are you goin' to try to board the *Loon* all on your own? It wouldn't be fair to get George Pippin killed; he's got a family. What's your plans, anyway, now that we're goin' to overhaul the Urmey tub?"

"Run me close up to her rail," Wardwell told the girl, "and I'll show you what my plans is."

"You'd have a chance in a million, with them five!" cried Mary Ann scornfully. "If you'll pay for the *Cumberland* if it sinks her, too, I'll ram the *Loon,* and split her wide open. I'm towin' a small boat we can get off in. What about it?"

"Too much danger for you and the boy," objected Wardwell.

"Scared, eh? One o' the leopard's spots! You can save the boy, and George and me'll look out for ourselves. Well, will you pay for my schooner if she goes down?"

Before Wardwell could speak again, two more bullets came ripping through the old vessel's mainsail, following two spurts of flame from the stern of the *Loon,* and then came two keen reports. Wardwell called to the net fisherman, who came immediately.

"Take the wheel, George!" he ordered crisply, dropping the rifle.

He swept the girl into his arms, tearing her hands from the spokes, and bore her, struggling desperately but wholly in vain, toward the cabin. Soon she was a prisoner, with the door lashed shut upon her from the outside. Pippin understood, and agreed that it had been the only thing to do in the circumstances.

Bill Wardwell caught up the Henderson rifle and hastened forward. He kept hidden and watched ahead, the while threshing his brain for a plan not so extremely hazardous as that of boarding the Urmey schooner alone and in the face of at least two rifles in murderous hands.

Then the *Loon* veered sharply to port and went slipping smoothly off southwestward under pressure of the now beam wind, and Wardwell wondered just what that odd move could mean. George Pippin quickly turned the Henderson schooner to port also, no doubt thinking to cut off some distance in the race. Suddenly the *Cumberland* struck, stopped, and then swung herself across her path, listing at a crazy angle. The mainsail boom whipped crashingly to the other side; the canvas above slatted thunderously.

Then came a volley of raucous, tantalizing laughter from over the moonlit waters. Man-o'-War Mary Ann's schooner had fallen neatly into a trap.

Pippin was grumbling and hauling down the mainsail when Wardwell reached him.

"Stuck on a sand bar," growled the fisherman. "I might ha' guessed somethin' like this was up. That Henry Urmey, he knows every bar and reef in the Gulf, even at night, by the looks o' the water above 'em. Well, thank goodness, tide's low, and high tide'll float us off afore daybreak. Trouble is, where'll the *Loon* be by then?"

Wardwell said nothing to that. He hastened to the cabin, and let the girl out.

"Sand bar—your great, pet aunt!" exclaimed Mary Ann Henderson. "It's Crooked Reef, or I'm a toadfish! We can thank Mr. Wardwell for this. She's stuck amidships, and water's comin' into her hull now. Maybe her bottom's clean stove in. Take a light, George, and go down and see what the damage is, will you?"

Pippin obeyed. Soon he was back with the report: "Her botom's broke bad, but the leak ain't so bad yet. Maybe she'll hang together until we can get to shore somewhere; anyhow, we're towin' a dinghy, should she sink."

An hour before dawn, with the tide almost high, they wormed the vessel off the rocks. The girl took the wheel and sailed, under an unusually stiff, early-morning breeze, straight northeastward. There was a rather hard glint in Mary Ann's eyes now.

"The *Loon* went the other way, didn't she?" George Pippin observed, his voice apologetic.

"They started the other way, yes," the girl admitted. "But that ain't any sure sign they went the other way, is it? I know the Urmeys, George, better'n you

know 'em. Henry hangs out a lot around Wardwell's Key, and I'm bettin' they've gone there now. If you're any prayin' man, George, pray that the *Cumberland's* bottom don't bust in for one good hour, and that the wind holds strong for that same length o' time. Darn Bill Wardwell, I want to save that boy! I'm afraid Hen Urmey'll throw him overboard."

Wardwell, standing near by, overheard it all. Mary Ann Henderson had paid not the slightest attention to him. Then he went forward, rifle in hand, and stood there with his eyes glued to the moonlit sea ahead.

CHAPTER V.

TIME FOR BRAINWORK.

THE moon sank behind the Gulf's outer rim just before the first streaks of dawn began to paint the lower edge of the far eastern sky. The old schooner's skipper smiled grimly as she held the doomed, now somewhat waterlogged, vessel to her course through frequent glances at the star signposts; she believed she would be in time. A few minutes later, Bill Wardwell's keen eyes picked the bare masts of the *Loon* out of the darkness; Henry Urmey's schooner lay at anchor within half a mile of a low, green shore that was Wardwell's Key.

The Urmeys and two of the rat-eyed, beach-comber crew were fast asleep. The watch sat on a hatch cover, nodding. There was a deafening crash, sounds of tearing and of splintering—the weather-beaten prow of the *Cumberland* had bitten deep into the vitals of the *Loon,* letting the sea in with a rush and a roar. The sleepy watch staggered to his feet with a wild cry of fear.

"Wow!" cried the irrepressible boy, who lay hidden in a coil of old cable on the forward deck. He had a vague idea that the end of the world had come.

Bill Wardwell, rifle ready, was aboard the stricken schooner and calling the lad's name anxiously. Sputter Mullane appeared before him much like a jack-in-a-box, was caught up and carried aboard the *Cumberland* almost in the time of a breath, just as the two vessels began to settle apart.

The Henderson schooner, also, was sinking rapidly. The voice of Mary Ann came ringing like a bell:

"The dinghy, Bill—aft, quick, you boob!"

With a little time to spare, they dropped over the now low rail and into the gently bobbing small boat. George Pippin took up the oars and pulled rapidly but silently away in the darkness.

"What happened, boy?" Mary Ann Henderson asked.

It was a simple story. Griff Urmey had done it. A blanket over the boy's head from behind; there was little else to tell. As for the alligator-skin bag, Sputter Mullane hadn't seen it any more. Wardwell couldn't understand how any white man could climb a coconut palm, but evidently a white man had climbed one.

"After they got me on the boat," little Mullane finished proudly, "I bit 'em, and scratched 'em."

"Wildcat's Kitten!" cooed Wardwell, delightedly. "I'm tickled a heap to have you again, son."

"You ain't out o' the jungle yet," said the girl quietly, who held the parrot in its cage on her lap. "You ain't got your money back, for one thing. For another thing, there'll be five men on Wardwell's Key to make life interestin' for you. Don't you ever believe they drowned!"

"They didn't have time to la'nch a boat, and they wasn't trailin' one, like we was," George Pippin put in. "O' course, they'll all swim ashore. I doubts that they'll try to take any shootin' irons, them aswimmin', but you can bet them Urmeys has got the satchel bag with 'em!"

"Me havin' the rifle yet will sort o' make me cock o' the walk, if none o' them ain't armed, won't it?" asked Wardwell. "If we don't get the money back at all, Mary, I got some more comin'—enough to buy us another schooner, anyway."

"*'Us!'*" cried Mary Ann, with deep emphasis, half angrily.

"Sure!" Bill Wardwell nodded. "Us—you and me, and the boy; us three."

"Hurry up!" squeaked the parrot sleepily.

George Pippin got his bearings and headed the dinghy toward the dark shore

of palm and pine, sea grape and grotesque mangrove.

When they were within a hundred yards or so of the shore, Wardwell spoke again, and in very low tones: "Listen! It's time for brainwork now; day's breakin' fast. I'll slip overboard and sneak for the mangroves. You row clean around the key, George, and keep the lookout's attention to cover me; they've got a lookout, all right. I'll leave the rifle with you, Mary; you might need it."

He dropped over the rail of the dinghy. His feet found bottom with his head out, except when a little wave submerged him.

"Better take the rifle," Mary Ann advised, half whispering.

Wardwell, however, was already yards away. Pippin changed the course of the dinghy and rowed briskly.

When Bill Wardwell crept from the water at the edge of the rim of tangled mangrove and sea grape, it was fairly light. However, he was confident that any member or members of the Urmey gang that might be watching would be interested solely in the movements of the boat, and he stole toward the interior of the key without any great fear of his having been detected.

The interior, he saw, was all young jungle now. The banana plantations had become banana jungles; the avocado groves had become jungles of avocado trees, untrimmed and woefully ragged. The old coral-rock house that had been his childhood's home was very nearly hidden under a mass of buginvillæa, bell flower, cacti, palms, and vines, but he noted that a path still led to the steps of the front porch. Henry Urmey, doubtless, had been using the house as a retreat and hiding place when the long arm of the law made a move as though to single him out.

Wardwell crept up to one of the living-room windows and peered cautiously through. Both the Urmeys, their clothing still dripping wet were sitting at a table that he remembered well, and two of the beach combers, who also were dripping wet, stood in attitudes of watchfulness a little distance away. On the table between the Urmeys lay Wardwell's money, the sodden rolls having been about equally divided into a pair of small pyramids.

"Some haul!" Henry Urmey grinned. "Griff, you're some brother, sure!"

The morning light was now sufficient for Wardwell to see everything clearly. He noted that the two beach combers exchanged meaningful glances; they were not included in the division of the spoils. The man at the window smiled. The thing half promised to work itself out for him. Then he saw the pair on foot separate like a pair of shadows, one of them reaching slyly for an iron bar that stood against the wall just behind him, the other reaching slyly for a knife.

The next instant, the knife flashed aloft, and simultaneously the bar described a vicious arc in the air. Without waiting to see the result, Wardwell tore around to the front door and into the room. Henry Urmey lay unconscious on the floor, and Griffin and his particular assailant were locked in each other's arms; the knife had clattered to the floor at their feet.

The man with the iron bar drew it back to strike at Wardwell; but Wardwell ducked the bar, and drove the beach comber down by means of a terrific blow to the jaw; the beach comber scrambled to his feet, dropped his weapon, and fled from the scene.

Then the newcomer tore Griffin Urmey's antagonist from him, fairly threw the wiry body out to the porch, slammed the door shut and bolted it, and proceeded to engage Griffin Urmey. The two went at each other like a pair of enraged lions, though silently. It lasted for half an hour, with no interruption from any source.

One man staggered from the house then and began to make his way slowly along the path that led toward the sea. His face bled, and his clothing was badly torn. It was Griffin Urmey.

The dinghy finished its little voyage around the shores of the key. The oars ceased their everlasting dipping at an almost curt order from Mary Ann Henderson.

"Reckon they've killed him?" asked the wide-eyed boy fearsomely. "Why didn't you make him take the gun? Didn't you know they was five o' them

and only one o' him? I cain't see how you could have the n-n-nerve to turn down a man l-l-like him——" Sputter Mullane's voice had petered out.

Mary Ann rose, the rifle in her hands, her gaze shoreward. "Run in," she said to George Pippin. "I'm goin' to look up Bill, and you two can wait for me on the beach."

CHAPTER VI.

THE PARROT'S ADVICE.

ODDLY or not, Mary Ann Henderson and Bill Wardwell met at a great coconut palm, under which not even grass was growing. Here and there in the white sand lay old conch shells, clam shells, white rock shells, lumps of honeycomb coral, the bare and bleaching bones of a youthful romance. Also there was the now paintless head of a china doll, and the broken stock of a wooden gun, now rotted almost back to earth.

Suddenly Wardwell's head began to swim again, and worse than ever. He put a bruised and battered hand to his temple, on which there was the red mark of an iron bar. The world was becoming dark to him; all he could see of it was a girl's death-white face.

"Spots——" he mumbled, like a man in delirium——"spots——spots o' the leopard——"

With that, he crumpled to the white sand, near the paintless head of a china doll, near the broken stock of a wooden gun.

A cabin cruiser from Key West arrived, and aboard it were two of the Monroe County sheriff's deputies and Mary Ann Henderson's mother, besides the cruiser's owner. George Pippin rowed out to meet them, and then rowed them ashore in the ill-fated old *Cumberland's* dinghy. The officers found and ironed the Urmeys in short order and then began a search for the beach comber trio.

George Pippin led Mrs. Henderson and the boy on a search for Mary Ann and Wardwell. At a point not far from the great coconut palm, the fisherman halted, put a finger significantly across his lips and pointed ahead.

The two were now sitting beside each other on the white sand, among the blessed bones of their childhood romance, and there was no more hate in the world. Wardwell, whose temples were bandaged in a generous strip of white cloth edged with lace, was taking sodden roll upon sodden roll of bank notes of divers denominations from the inside of his torn shirt and placing them in the girl's lap. The girl was smiling sweetly. Her blue eyes were very bright.

Pippin wisely backed his followers out of sight and hearing just before Mary Ann Henderson said:

"Ninety days—nothin'! You needed only three! This money'll easy buy us another schooner and build a house for us—you and me, and the boy; won't it, Bill?"

"Easy!" Wardwell agreed. "We'll go to Key West and be married whenever you say, Mary. When'll it be?"

Then from the beached dinghy not far distant came the metallic voice of a gaudily plumaged bird: "Hurry up! Hurry up!"

"I think the parrot's givin' us good advice, Bill Wardwell," blushingly said she whom the Gulf had called, with the greatest of respect, Man-o'-War Mary Ann. "S'pose we go straight to Key West on that cruiser?"

Did you like this story, or did you not? If you liked it, please let us know why in a letter, briefly worded. If you did not like it, let us know that and why. And while you are about it, comment on any other story in this number, or give us your opinion of the number as a whole. The editors will appreciate any letter you may send.

Naughty Child

GRANNIE: "You know, it was very wrong of you to tell auntie that lie. Your conscience must be troubling you."

Molly: "Oh, no; it isn't grannie. She believed it."

From Necessity

"THAT fellow Barnett must live in a very small flat!"

"What makes you think that?"

"Don't you notice how his dog wags its tail up and down instead of sideways."

Framing the Duke-

By Frank E. Carson-

(A NOVELETTE)

CHAPTER I.

THE KNIGHTS AT PLAY.

HIGH up in the east stands of Alumni Field — apart from other chatting groups of students who had come out for the first open practice of the season—James Van Sant Rutherford sprawled back against the tier above and surveyed the busy scene with placid indifference. His companion, a lithe, clear-skinned girl in becoming sport costume, kept up a running fire of eager comment. "Look, Jim!" She clutched his arm, pointing with a gloved hand. "That's Mellinger—just catching a ball under the south goal. Funny I couldn't pick him out before. There's Captain Pasquay; and oh, there's Billy Keane! See? He's talking with the coach. Oh, Jim, it's wonderful—being back!" She drew in a deep breath of the crisp air and turned upon her escort, cheeks aglow, eyes sparkling.

He gave a careless nod and fitted a fresh cigarette into a long, amber holder.

"There's Tommy Newman! I do hope he won't have such bad luck this year." The girl babbled on; her glance again shifting to the field below. "Remember? He only played one full game all season. First it was his knee, then he sprained his wrist, then—— Oh-h-h, look, Jim! Did you see that punt? Nobody but Herb Miller could make a ball act like that."

Rutherford grunted noncommittally. "Miller swings a mean foot," he agreed. He flicked a speck of ash from his gray overcoat and faced the girl, a lazy smile illuminating his dark, good-looking face. "You sure get a kick out of all this, don't you, 'Mibs?' "

"Don't *you?*" she countered, displaying twin rows of perfect teeth in an answering smile; a smile which vanished almost instantly. "Isn't it possible for you to get excited over anything, Jim Rutherford?" she asked spiritedly. "Can't you forget your dignity long enough to be human, to be young—to—to stand up on your hind legs and yell once in a while out of pure joy of being alive?"

"More, more." He applauded, grinning. "You're positively beautiful when you're this way."

"Oh, you—you——" Elizabeth Waring choked for words; her brown eyes flashed fire as she glared at him. "There! There's where you ought to be"—she gestured toward the gridiron—"a great big husky like you. You could play football, Jim, if you would. You could do anything, if you would. Why can't you come down off of your little golden pedestal and do something? What are you getting out of college, anyway?"

Jim Rutherford stared at her, mild amazement stamped on his face. "What

am I getting out of college?" he echoed sharply. "What am I in college for?"

"Jim"—her hand was on his arm—"you don't understand. What kind of a college would this be—or any college be—if every one in it did like you? Suppose nobody played football, or baseball; suppose nobody took any interest in debating or theatricals or the dozen and one other things which combine to make college life interesting? It would be a pretty dull sort of a place, wouldn't it?"

He gave a shrug. "Let the Pasquays and the Mellingers do it," he said. "I'm here to put in four years—to learn something—and then get out and help the governor make better automobiles. This isn't my kind of a college, anyway. I wanted to go East—or over to Oxford. But just because he graduated from here twenty-five years ago the gov thinks it's the garden spot of the world. Personally I don't like the crowd here, and you know it. They're not my sort."

It was Elizabeth Waring's turn to stare. "Jim Rutherford," she declared gravely, "I am thoroughly ashamed of you."

He shrugged again. "I suppose," he retorted cuttingly, "if I yodeled a squeaky tenor in the glee club, or wrote bum jokes for the *Owl*, or got out there"—with a wave of the arm toward the football field—"I would be quite a figure in your eyes. You'd be proud of me, eh?"

"I would. I'd be proud of you, Jim, if you would just do anything for the college—anything to make you forget that your father is a millionaire. If you would just unbend and rub elbows with the—the herd, as you call them, you'd enjoy it, and you would get a great deal more out of life—I know you would. Jim"—the girl's voice held a pleading note—"why don't you go out for football?"

Rutherford smiled at her earnestness.

"You could play football," she hurried on; "you played at prep. You like golf and tennis, and you've practically been living in the water all summer. Surely you are in excellent condition."

"Golf and tennis," he drawled in reply, "are gentlemen's games. They require some individuality. To play them it isn't necessary to associate with every Tom, Dick, and Harry; nor to be continually cursed and bullied by some big bruiser of a coach." He paused and eyed her shrewdly. "Why are you so confounded anxious, all of a sudden, for me to become a football hero?"

Elizabeth Waring's hands fluttered in a gesture. "Because," she declared, "it is a real, red-blooded man's game. Mollycoddles can't play it."

"You don't mean to infer that I'm a mollycoddle, or, what is it they call them, a cake-eater, Mibs?" His eyebrows arched good-naturedly.

"No, of course not." Her tone was patient. "But you've never tried yourself, Jim. You've always had things your own way. You don't know what it means to get out and work—actually work and hustle for something. Like—like Howard Mellinger does for instance." She spoke the name of the varsity's star half back.

"Blah!" He flipped the cigarette away carelessly. "Stoking furnaces, hustling baggage, waiting on tables. I suppose that makes *him* regular? Honest young man; works his way through college; becomes the campus idol; marries the banker's daughter; and all that stuff." Rutherford gave a shrug, drew his coat collar about his neck, and smiled sardonically down upon the gridiron.

The girl's face clouded. "At least," she said firmly, "Howard Mellinger wants an education bad enough to work for it, and he is willing to do anything to get it."

"Yes, and ten years from now he and most of our other noble college heroes will be humped over a musty set of books or chauffeuring a truck for a living."

"You're hopeless." Elizabeth Waring dismissed the subject with a toss of the head and gave her whole attention to the field below.

CHAPTER II.

WHEN DARKNESS CLOSED IN.

BORN with the proverbial silver spoon in his mouth, reared by a fond and doting maternal parent who had never wholly recovered from the fact that her ancestors came over on the *Mayflower*, Jim Rutherford had fallen heir to many snobbish traits which prevented him from being a popular member of the undergraduate body at State University.

His father's wealth and position as a prominent alumnus had helped to give the younger Rutherford entrée to a fraternity in his freshman year; but, while he attended the society's dances and appeared occasionally at the frat house, he preferred living in a luxurious suite of rooms in another part of town.

He made few friends — none who might be termed intimate. This aloofness, with his inherent air of superiority, made him the object of considerable ridicule among his classmates. He was familiarly known by such derisive titles as "The Duke," "His Majesty," and "King James the First."

Elizabeth Waring had more than once chided him for this "upitty attitude," as she jokingly termed it. With the freedom of childhood playmates they often had quarreled over the subject, and dozens of others, and promptly made up and forgotten it. Her words at the field, though, had left a sting.

Jim Rutherford caught himself frowning and pondering over them as he ate his evening meal. She had seemed so intense and so confoundedly sincere. Down deep in his heart Rutherford cared a great deal for Elizabeth Waring's opinion of him—more perhaps than that of any other person in the world.

Still it was irritating, being bluntly told that he was snobbish and woefully lacking in the things which she apparently admired in a man.

It was Wednesday and that night was "date night" at State. At eight o'clock he got out his car—a low, rakish sport roadster built on the famous "Rutherford Eight" chassis—and drove slowly over to Elizabeth Waring's sorority.

"What will it be—ride or picture show?" he asked gaily, when she joined him.

"Oh, let's ride. The air is so wonderful." She sank into the deep cushions with a smile.

"Ride it is," he said, engaging the clutch and meshing the gears with an expertness born of long practice. The big car shot away and threaded the evening traffic on the avenue.

The lights of the town were twinkling at their backs before Elizabeth Waring spoke. "Jim," she asked abruptly, "why won't you go out for football? Are you afraid?"

He shot a glance at her profile in the darkness. "Afraid? Of what?"

"Oh, just afraid."

"Don't make me laugh." He bit out the words. "Say"—he slackened the car's speed and faced her—"are you going to start that argument all over again? Can't you sit through your first glimpse of the football squad without wanting me to join it? What in the world has come over you, Mibs? You act like a hero-worshipping high-school kid."

She sat silent while they glided smoothly through the cool night air. "Jim," she said, after a bit, "would you go out for football if I asked you to?"

Rutherford released the clutch, swerved to the side of the road, and brought the car to a halt. "Now listen, Mibs." He flung an arm over the wheel and turned squarely in the seat facing her. "Just what in thunderation is on your mind. Why are you harping so persistently on this football stuff?

"I'm a junior this year," he went on. "If I had been going in for football, two years ago would have been the time to start—not now. Why, I haven't had a ball in my hands since I was a sophomore at prep. I don't like football. I hate it—except as a game to watch.

"And, good Lord, Mibs, what chance have I, anyway, of making the team against seasoned huskies like Miller, and 'Big Red' Sillman, and—and your friend Mellinger?" The reference to the last named was spoken sarcastically.

Elizabeth Waring glared straight ahead for a moment. Then she said softly: "It isn't so much making the team. It's just being out there, doing something for the college—and for yourself."

"For myself, ha!" He gave a dry laugh. "A fat lot of good I'd do myself chasing out every afternoon and being battered around by that gang of coal heavers and plow jockeys. Nothing doing, Mibs. I'll pay my way in, and sit in the stands."

"That's just what you have been doing all your life, Jim Rutherford," the girl cried hotly—"paying your way in and letting the other fellow do it. That's probably what will happen all the rest

of your life. You'll sit in a nice, velvet-carpeted office and let the other fellow do it."

"Well, why shouldn't I?" His voice was harsh. "I'll have money enough to hire 'em, won't I? But don't let that worry you. Dad will keep my nose on the grindstone. He's that way."

"Wouldn't you be better fitted to work with your father—to fill his shoes some day—if you knew a little more about your fellow men," she insisted, "and if you took more of an interest in what's going on around you, and weren't so—so self-centered and so snobbish?"

Rutherford fumbled in his pocket for a cigarette, lighted it, and scowled into the glare of an approaching car. The girl had dropped her eyes and was plucking at a bit of fur about her coat sleeve. Both were silent as darkness again closed about them.

"Jim"—Elizabeth Waring's voice was low, hesitant—"I guess we had better call it quits. I—I don't think I'll ever be the sort of a wife you are going to want. I don't think that you—— Oh, Jim, when I marry I want a husband who will do something, not be content to let the other fellow do it!"

He gave a gulp, flung the cigarette away, and grasped both her hands roughly. "Mibs," he exclaimed, "what are you talking about!"

"I mean just what I said." She struggled to control her voice. "You can find plenty of girls, Jim, who will like your sort of a life. You can——"

"I don't want any other girl!" He broke in fiercely. "I don't want any one but you. You know that, Mibs. Why, it's been settled for years."

She withdrew her hands with a firmness which surprised him. "No, Jim," she said gravely; "it hasn't been settled."

Rutherford's jaw dropped; his face flushed and grew hot at this rebuff. He tried to laugh, but the sound died in his throat. "That's final, is it?" he asked hoarsely.

The girl turned her head to hide the tears which filmed her eyes.

Angry and hurt beyond words, Rutherford sat irresolute, then suddenly gave the starter a vicious kick and swung the car about in the road. Neither spoke during the short ride home. At the curb, in front of her sorority, Elizabeth Waring held out her hand with a wan smile.

"We can at least be friends still, can't we, Jim?" she asked.

Pretending not to see the hand, the irate junior touched his cap and drove blindly away.

CHAPTER III.

KING JAMES ON THE GRIDIRON.

IN his tiny office in the gymnasium Head Coach Carl Whiting tilted his chair back from the desk and subjected his visitor to a quizzical scrutiny. "You want to come out for football?" He spoke slowly, as if uncertain that he had correctly understood the student before him.

Jim Rutherford nodded. His dark face bore a grim look; his chin projected aggressively. His manner was one of determined, bristling belligerence.

The coach couldn't help smiling. He knew men—particularly young men—and unless he was badly mistaken here was one who had been goaded into a step which was obviously distasteful. His keen glance swept his scowling caller from head to foot. "How much do you weigh, Rutherford?" he asked abruptly.

"One hundred and seventy-five."

"Ever play football?"

"A little at prep."

"H'm. You're a junior this year, aren't you? Why haven't you reported before?"

Rutherford colored and focused his eyes upon a glass paper weight on the dask. He shifted his feet aimlessly.

The older man spoke again before Rutherford's lips could frame a reply. "We're always glad to get football material," the coach said. "You come of good stock. Your father and I played three years together here at State. I'm afraid, though, that you are beginning a little late to emulate his example."

Jim Rutherford gave a short nod. "I am harboring no illusions about ever being All-American caliber, Mr. Whiting," he said crisply. "But I know football, I'm in good condition, and all I want is a chance."

"Every man at State gets a chance,

Rutherford." The other's tone was equally crisp. "I'll have a suit for you this afternoon. Report at the locker room with the squad at three o'clock." The coach turned to his work at the desk.

A lighted bomb would not have created any more excitement in the dressing quarters of the varsity football candidates than the appearance of James Van Sant Rutherford did that afternoon. With a curt nod to the few men among the group whom he knew, the dark-faced junior accepted a battered outfit from the trainer and retired to a corner of the big room.

"Ye gods," Billy Keane, varsity quarter back, exclaimed in an awed aside to a grinning fellow warrior. "King James has abdicated the throne!"

"Quite sporting of the old deah, eh, what?" the other pigskin knight drawled with an elaborate wink.

"Maybe he'll do his playing in one of papa's cars," another ventured to comment.

"Don't any of you little boys be naughty now, and splash any mud on him!" Red Sillman admonished severely.

Les Pasquay, captain and star end, was the only one to vouchsafe a word of welcome to the scowling newcomer. "Glad to see you out for the team, Rutherford," Pasquay said as genially as he could, accompanying the sentence with a perfunctory slap on the back.

None among the forty staring men in the room knew of the battle Jim Rutherford had waged with himself during the last two days. None knew that he had sat at the wheel of his big, yellow roadster all Wednesday night, driving aimlessly, furiously, on and on through the darkness, to return and climb out from beneath it, tired and worn, barely in time for Thursday morning's classes.

Thursday had been a nightmare. Over and over Jim Rutherford had told himself that he didn't care what Elizabeth Waring thought about him, that he would never, never speak to her again. Over and over he vowed bitterly that he wouldn't play football, that he wouldn't deviate an inch from his present comfortable mode of living for Elizabeth Waring, or any one else.

Yet here he was, on Friday, climbing into coarse, stiff football togs, and cursing himself for a spineless fool.

Nothing particularly exciting occurred during the two-hour gridiron session. The squad had barely been out a week and no scrimmage formations were tried.

Jim Rutherford performed quite well. He was thoroughly familiar, of course, with the fundamentals of the game, and in as good condition, physically, as the average candidate; true, every muscle in his body ached and he was dog-tired by the time he completed the final jog around the cinder track, but he had expected that. And a shower and brisk rubdown worked wonders.

He reported again Saturday and by the end of the following week the amazed buzz which had swept over the campus at his appearance in uniform had given way to amused speculation as to just how long The Duke would last. On the field he attended strictly to business; off the field he continued to maintain his air of haughty aloofness.

Elizabeth Waring he avoided studiously; he kept reminding himself constantly that he never intended speaking to her again, but that he intended to, and would, show her that he could play a real, he-man's game.

"That bird Rutherford gets me," Tom Macy, line coach, remarked to his superior on the eve of the varsity's first contest. "He's a surly, morose young pup; won't warm up to anybody; seems positively to hate football; yet he comes out every day and works harder and longer than any man on the squad."

"Yes," Whitten, backfield coach, put in; "and the scowling son of the upper crust is improving all the time. I never saw a man who could follow instructions well. You only have to tell him a thing once and he either has it, or he'll practice it until he gets it. His dad was quite a footballer in his day, wasn't he, chief?"

The head coach nodded. "Charley Rutherford was the fightingest half back this little old knowledge factory ever turned out," he said, a reminiscent gleam in his keen, gray eyes. "Only weighed a hundred and forty, too; and those were the days when beef counted."

"H'm," Whitten muttered slowly. "Too

bad the kid didn't come out in his freshman year. He is wonderfully built for an end, or the backfield. His mental viewpoint is all wrong, though."

Whiting nodded again. "He looks promising in spite of that," he said. "Keep after him. I've purposely kept him out of scrimmages until he gets toughened. I'm going to give him Hail Columbia next week. If he has any of the old man's grit in him we may be able to use him later in the season. From what I hear he has always had things pretty soft. Maybe he's yellow. If he is——" The coach gave a shrug and left the sentence unfinished.

CHAPTER IV.

HEADS UP!

WITH great savoir-faire, Jim Rutherford watched the game from the stands. The opposing eleven represented a much smaller college and was hardly powerful enough to prove dangerous to Coach Whiting's red-jerseyed warriors. A good crowd was out, however, and there was plenty of noise and enthusiasm, as State went about running up a big score.

On Tuesday of the following week grueling scrimmage work became the all-important item on the practice program. After selecting a varsity and a scrub team from the candidates Whiting gave the ball to each in turn and by making frequent substitutions managed to get every available man into action.

"All right, Rutherford," the coach snapped, during one of the pauses, "you go in at right tackle for the seconds. Keep low, and keep your eyes on the ball. Heads up, everybody!"

The ball was in the varsity's possession. After a substantial gain with a forward pass, and a shorter one around end, Quarter Back Keane sent Miller, varsity full back, off the scrub right tackle. Rutherford's opponent, a big, raw-boned, freckled sophomore, charged with the play and sent him crashing to the ground The attack netted eight yards.

Rutherford's head was ringing as he scrambled to his feet and crouched on the line, scowling fiercely into the perspiration-streaked face of the varsity tackle. Again the play came Rutherford's way and again he was charged off his feet and flung aside, spinning, helpless.

"What's the rub there? What's the rub?" Came the sharp tones of Coach Macy. "He's smearing you, Rutherford! Get low, low! And use your hands, man!"

Smarting under this rebuke, dazed and bruised from contact with the unyielding turf, Rutherford gnashed his teeth, and vowed grimly that they would pass next time only over his dead body. They passed—and the seething junior's prone form offered about the same resistance to their rush as would the corpse which he had sworn to emulate. Somehow he managed to stagger to his feet and weave a befuddled way back into the new formation.

"How do you like playing with the rough-alley boys, Your Highness?" the big sophomore jeered.

For an instant Jim Rutherford saw red. His head cleared with amazing suddenness, his hands clenched to fists, and he was on the point of springing forward to smash that leering grin all over that freckled, taunting face. Instead, however, he drew his lips back off his teeth in an answering sneer, dug in his cleats, and awaited the assault.

CHAPTER V.

HIGH AND MIGHTY.

A TIRED, disheartened, dejected figure limped painfully up the stairs and fitted a key to the door of Jim Rutherford's luxurious living quarters. His body was numb and bruised; his head ached dully; a long strip of court plaster formed an unbecoming arch just beneath the bridge of his classic nose.

He was through with football! Let the Mellingers and the Pasquays and the Sillmans be college idols if they wanted to. James Van Sant Rutherford was done! He had been "bawled out" for the last time by a leather-lunged czar in a sweater and a pair of gray baseball pants; he had been trampled upon for the last time by a charging horde of heavy-footed roughnecks.

With a sigh Rutherford sank into a deep, upholstered chair. Trying for the

team wasn't worth the struggle, he thought bitterly. Why keep it up? Hadn't he firmly made up his mind never to speak to Elizabeth Waring again, anyway? What a blessed relief it would be to go back to the old, comfortable, bruiseless life!

There was a letter from his mother on the table. Listlessly Rutherford took it and broke the seal. He turned on the light above his chair, for it was growing dark. It was a rambling, newsy letter of the sort his mother always wrote. Reaching the closing paragraph he stiffened in the chair. In part it read:

I am so sorry you have taken up football, James. It is such a rough, brutal game and one must associate with such a common class to play it. Your father just laughs and says it will do you good—as if anything of that sort would. He says not to worry, that you won't be able to stand it long, anyway, and, James, I do hope you will quit it. I hope——

Jim Rutherford allowed the sheet to slip from his fingers. For a long time he sat staring at the wall on the opposite side of the room. Gradually his lips framed a bitter, twisted smile. "So the governor thinks I won't be able to stand it," he soliloquized, grimly. "I can't stand the gaff, eh?" Rising, he began to pace the floor.

Presently he halted beside the chair and stooped to recover the letter. A sharp twinge of pain darted through his entire body at the effort. He sat on the chair arm and read that last paragraph again. "Oh, he does, does he?" Rutherford muttered savagely. "Well, I'll show him how I—— Ouch!" A vicious gesture brought another stab of pain from protesting muscles. "I'll show Mibs Waring, too, and that freckled-mapped young snipe of a sophomore!"

The days became a monotonous round of classes and football practice. Rutherford devoted himself to the gridiron game with an intensity which amazed both his fellow players and the coaches. He was first on the field, and the last to depart when darkness crept down over the scene. He did everything with a grim air of dogged determination.

"Gad, you'd think that fellow had a grudge against the world!" Captain Pasquay remarked to the coach one afternoon as they stood near the pit watching the dark-faced junior hurl himself at the canvas tackling dummy.

Whiting nodded without comment, but kept his eyes glued upon the perspiring toiler.

"He's playing a heads-up brand of football, too," Pasquay continued. "If he could only come out of that grouch——"

"That's his trouble," the other broke in. "I've about decided to put him on training table, cap," he went on, after a bit. "He's getting too good to pass up, and maybe the boys can kid him into acting like a human being."

"They'll kid him into something, all right," Pasquay said with a laugh.

Jim Rutherford received the coach's invitation to join the squad at the training table with a mere nod of the head. This meant that he was considered varsity material; yet he displayed no elation over the fact.

Whiting couldn't restrain a dry jibe. "You won't get cream puffs and pâté-de-fois-gras," he said sharply; "but you'll get darned good food—the kind of food a football player ought to eat.

"Rutherford"—the coach laid a friendly hand on the junior's arm as the latter turned away—"why don't you snap out of this sour, aloof mood, and unbend and be regular? Mix around more with the boys—they're A-1 scouts, and square shooters, every man of them. They'll like you a lot better if you do, and you'll feel better. The high-and-mighty stuff doesn't get you anything on the football field, you know."

Jim Rutherford drew himself up haughtily, his face darkened a full shade as he glared at the coach. "I reserve the right to pick my own associates, Mr. Whiting," he declared stiffly. "And if I don't chose to become intimately familiar with every man I come in contact with out here on the field I believe that is my business."

The coach flushed. A hot retort was on the tip of his tongue, but he fought it back. "Suit yourself," he said, with a shrug. "If you choose to continue being an egotistical snob that, as you say, is your business. We eat at six thirty." He swung on his heel and strode off toward the gymnasium.

Rutherford's initial meal at the training table was consumed in silence. He kept his eyes on his plate, paying no heed to, and taking no part in, the good-natured banter of the other men. Immediately after eating he left and went to his rooms.

CHAPTER VI.

FOR TEN SECONDS.

GRADUALLY the coaches molded their wealth of football material into a formidable gridiron machine. The entire first-string backfield, both regular ends, and a number of line candidates were seasoned veterans, and the team swept victoriously through the early and mid-season games, gaining power with every battle.

Rutherford was tried out at end on the seconds and later shifted to a backfield position. He played right half for a full quarter with the varsity in the Sidway game, and performed creditably. Two weeks later, against Welton College, he was used for one entire half. Except for a touch of nervousness at the start, he played the same steady, determined game he played during practice.

"Not brilliant like the old man," Coach Whiting commented shrewdly; "but he has football brains and he's fast on his feet. If he would only pep up and take a real interest in the game he'd be a hundred per cent better."

Rutherford, as may be supposed, was not popular with the other members of the varsity squad; on the other hand, he was not particularly unpopular. He attended strictly to business and was courteous to players and coaches alike in a cold, impersonal way.

As time went on he grew to keeping still more and more to himself, spending his evenings in his suite studying, or driving alone through the country in his big car. Elizabeth Waring seemed to have passed completely out of his life, if not his thoughts.

They met frequently, in classrooms and on the green floor of the campus; but, after his first few sullen refusals to make peace with her, the girl quite naturally brought her own pride to the fore and let him alone.

Elizabeth, Rutherford knew, was going out occasionally with other men. This hurt him more than he cared to admit, but it served only to make him more stubborn and morose.

However, when Howard Mellinger took her to an informal fraternity dance in mid-November this moroseness gave way to jealous rage. Rutherford had formed an instinctive dislike of Mellinger when Elizabeth and the dark-faced junior had quarreled, and when she had held the senior up as her ideal of a man. Mellinger sensed this distaste and had taken pains on a number of occasions to let it be understood that the feeling was mutual.

As star half back on the varsity Mellinger was not without considerable prestige at State, and the worshipful adulation the senior received on all sides galled Jim Rutherford—particularly since Elizabeth Waring was so obviously one of his admirers.

Now, when the girl to whom Rutherford would never speak again, according to the solemn promise made to himself, actually appeared in public with the one man at State whom he hated, a clash was inevitable. It came, with surprising suddenness, on the night before the last and biggest game of the season.

Jim Rutherford, bending over his plate at the dinner table, felt something hot, and wet, strike his neck and flow down his back, inside his collar. He swung about in his chair, eyes blazing. Howard Mellinger, balancing a tray laden with bowls of steaming soup, smiled down at him.

"Excuse me, Duke," Mellinger apologized gayly. "This uncouth sophomore bumped my elbow and I skidded a little. Here"—he proffered a napkin with his free hand—"mop it up with this and when I finish distributing these cocktails I'll come back and check up on the damage." He would have moved on, but Rutherford sprang up, blocking the way.

"You did that on purpose, Mellinger!" Rutherford declared furiously, his hands clenching and unclenching, blind rage distorting his dark face.

The senior stared aghast at the storm he had created. Then gradually a deep flush crept over his own countenance. He

bristled aggressively. "I did not," he said in a low, steely voice. "But it would be a pleasure to me to let you have the whole works, if you want to get unpleasant about it."

"You—you cheap, common bounder!" As this insulting epithet left his tense lips Rutherford swung viciously.

Mellinger saw the blow coming, thrust up one hand to ward it off, and with the other threw the tray and its steaming contents to the floor so that he might defend himself.

Tray and dishes crashed and clattered as they fell. Rutherford tore in, swinging both fists. Mellinger, his hands now free, met the assault with considerable gusto and launched one of his own. For a full ten seconds the amazed spectators sat rooted to their chairs; then they sprang up as one man. Coach Whiting and a number of others separated the combatants before any material damage was done.

The coach was angry. "A fine performance for a pair of so-called gentlemen!" he snapped. "And that will be just about all of the moving-picture comedy stuff for to-night."

"He did it purposely," Rutherford said, panting.

"I doubt it," the coach rejoined. He eyed them both for a moment, his hands on his hips. "Mellinger," he said abruptly, "get some one to clean up this mess on the floor. Give Rutherford a couple of napkins, somebody. And you, Rutherford"—he turned to the junior—"sit down and shut up! You will get all the fight you want to-morrow, if I should happen to let you play."

CHAPTER VII.

WHEN MAN MEETS MAN.

THIRTY thousand hoarse-voiced football devotees sprang to their feet and yelled encouragement to the two groups of gridiron warriors who trotted out onto the chalk-marked, green rectangle to resume their struggle. Gradually this welcoming din gave way to the sharp, barking rah, rah, rah! of State, from the packed east stands, and the longer, chanting war cry of Corwell, from the west, as the jerseyed figures in the red of State or the blue of the visitors, spread out over the field for the kick-off.

It was the start of the third quarter. Neither team had yet been able to score. Swathed in a huge red blanket Jim Rutherford crouched on the side line and watched the red-jerseyed horde follow the soaring pigskin into Corwell territory.

His sullen expression changed not a whit as two State ends brought the blue-jerseyed knight who had caught the ball crashing to earth a bare twenty yards from his own goal line. A jubilant, red-blanketed substitute pounded him upon the back.

"They've got to kick!" another elated neighbor shouted shrilly in Rutherford's ear.

From the stands behind him came a roaring torrent of sound. Rutherford drew his blanket closer about him and shifted beyond range of the punishing arm which had pounded him upon the back.

Corwell kicked, and Billy Keane wriggled and squirmed his way to the center of the field, with the leather oval, before he was downed. A blue-jerseyed end leaped high in the air to knock a State forward pass to the ground. Miller gained three yards off tackle. Mellinger brought the multitudes in the east stands to their feet in a frenzy of joy with a twenty-five-yard run around right end.

He followed it, on the next play, with an eight-yard gain around the same end. Jim Rutherford's scowl deepened. Why did it have to be Mellinger? Some one was thumping him on the back again. He turned fiercely and uttered a sharp rebuke between his teeth, but the delirious thumper didn't even see him. A pass, Seeley to Pasquay, netted State another ten yards.

"Touchdown, State! Touchdown, State! Touchdown, State!" Ten thousand voices began a monotonous chant.

Then the blue line stiffened under the shadow of its own goal posts. A plunge off tackle was hurled back for a two-yard loss. Miller recovered the lost ground through center; but Mellinger was downed in his tracks on an attempted double-pass play.

It was fourth down, with fourteen yards to make.

Jim Rutherford grunted savagely and pulled up a handful of grass. A breathless hush settled over the crowd as both lines crouched tense. Two red-jerseyed men dropped back. Billy Keane barked out a signal, slammed the end of the ball against the ground, and Howard Mellinger placed it squarely between the goal posts for three points.

The east stands became a cheering shrieking bedlam. Gamely the Corwell supporters smothered their disappointment in a yell of defiance to State and encouragement to the Blue team as play was resumed.

And the fighting eleven of Corwell responded with a vengeance. They began a brilliant offensive, made up largely of open play, which ended at last in a touchdown after a daring forward pass. The goal was kicked, giving the sturdy Blue team a lead of four points. There was no further scoring during the quarter.

Rutherford felt a firm hand on his shoulder as the panting men on the field were enjoying the brief interval of rest.

"Go in, Rutherford," Coach Whiting ordered tersely, "in Seeley's place—he's tiring. Your big job is interference. Keep your head, now, and smash 'em up, boy! You can do it. We can still win."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE WAITING QUARTER BACK.

FLINGING aside his blanket, the grim-faced junior dashed out onto the gridiron. Dimly, vaguely he realized that the east stands were shouting his name as he reported to the referee. He felt no thrill over it, nor over the fact that he was going to play in the biggest game of the year, and a game that seemed lost to the Red's mighty rival.

His nerves, however, were taut, and his hands trembled slightly as he stood apart from the rest of the team so as to observe beyond any question the rule against talking until after the first scrimmage. He would do his best, as always. The coach, Rutherford reasoned, must have had confidence in him or he wouldn't have put him in.

Rutherford was still trembling as he crouched behind the red-jerseyed line awaiting the signals. State held the ball. Keane forward-passed to Hayes, left end, for a six-yard gain. Two thrusts against the determined Blue line failed to gain. State was forced to punt.

The ball rolled across the goal line and Corwell took it on their own twenty-yard line. Corwell made two first downs but were forced to kick on the third. An exchange of punts folowed; then Coach Whiting's red-jerseyed machine began another march down the field.

Jim Rutherford played fiercely, grimly—performing his task, as a buffer for the man with the ball, with that dependable doggedness of spirit which had won the admiration of varsity coaches. At first down on the Corwell twenty-five-yard line, Keane called the big junior's signal for a plunge off tackle. Covington, the center, snapped the ball straight and true.

Rutherford, springing forward, juggled it in his outstretched hands for a heart-breaking second and uttered an inarticulate cry of despair as it eluded him and went bounding off across the turf. A charging blue-jerseyed guard fell on it.

The Corwell rooters yelled their joy while a groan of disappointment went up from State. On the side lines Coach Whiting muttered softly.

"The one thing I was afraid of," he repeated several times to himself. "Too green—not enough experience. Keane should have known better."

On the field the man who had made the disastrous blunder hung his head and walked round and round in an aimless, bewildered circle. His heart was leaden in his breast as he shambled toward his position on the defensive side of the line. An arm encircled his drooping shoulders and he heard a husky voice—Captain Pasquay's voice—in his ear.

"Tough luck, Jim, old boy," the captain said.

Another hand was on Rutherford's back; some one grasped his arm. Grimy, dirt-streaked faces above soggy red jerseys swam before his eyes. Voices all about him were saying: "Never mind that, old fellow!" "Hard luck, Jim!" "Stay with 'em, Rutherford—the old fight!"

He wanted to fling himself to the ground and bury his face in his arms.

These men were fighting back their own disappointment to sympathize with him —to encourage the man who had sneeringly termed them bruisers and roughnecks, and who had refused to associate with them.

In that awakening instant something snapped in Jim Rutherford's brain. He crouched low and tense behind the wall of red jerseys ahead.

It was a new, different Jim Rutherford who hurled his one hundred and seventy-five pounds of bone and muscle against the charging blue-jerseyed line. The old, grim doggedness had given way to a fierce, joyous enthusiasm. Jim Rutherford was playing football—not to spite Elizabeth Waring, not to prove to his father that he could stand the pace, but because of a sudden sheer joy of combat, and because he owed those ten men about him every ounce of his determination and loyalty.

To his amazement he discovered that he was talking incessantly; pantingly cheering his teammates with a word of encouragement, slapping a broad, red-jerseyed back; snarling defiance to the fighting blue-jerseyed horde which opposed them. Jim Rutherford was playing football! His example spurred the tired men about him and brought his name time and again to the lips of the cheering east stands.

Corwell opened up with everything in their passing repertoire in a desperate effort to score. State struggled grimly to hold them, using the same overhead tactics when the ball was in their possession.

Time was getting short. A long pass gave Corwell first down on State's thirty-yard line. Three efforts to pierce the Red defense netted a bare five yards. Then Corwell tried a place kick, but the ball went wide of the posts. State punted from the twenty-yard line and recovered the ball on an intercepted forward pass in the center of the field a moment later.

Jim Rutherford hurtled through left guard for four yards and on the next play—a neatly executed shift—found himself swinging around left end a few steps ahead of Howard Mellinger who was carrying the ball. The play had bewildered and flung the blue-jerseyed line off balance. Captain Pasquay put the Corwell end out of play and the two men raced down the field with the pack thundering in the rear.

Out of a corner of his eyes Rutherford discerned a fleet-footed Corwell back bearing down on them from an angle. Squarely ahead the Corwell quarter back, a sure and deadly tackler, awaited them tense and ready.

"Get him!" Mellinger cried, indicating the crouching quarter back with a jerk of the head.

"Got him!" Rutherford returned hoarsely, shooting a glance at the other blue-jerseyed figure who was drawing nearer. "Man, rear, right," he cried a warning between gasps for breath, watching both as he spoke, mentally timing the speed of each.

"Swerve left—now!" As the command left his lips Rutherford flung himself headlong at the blue-jerseyed form ahead. The two crashed to earth together and at the same instant Mellinger side-stepped the clutching arms of the other tackler.

Darkness settled down over Jim Rutherford.

CHAPTER IX.

WITH A WINK.

AS willing hands half led, half carried, him off the field, Rutherford fought to free himself.

"Pipe down, Jim! Pipe down!" the coach admonished, grinning, when the half-dazed player had reached the side line. "Mellinger, due largely to your interference, made a touchdown, and there's only a half minute left to play. You've done enough for to-day. Sit down and rest your hands and face."

Rutherford sank down on the wooden bench and permitted a couple of worshipping substitutes to bundle him in two huge red blankets. His head was buzzing and his arms and legs were strangely numb as a result of his brief journey into unconsciousness, but the fighting gleam was still in his eyes. Behind him tier upon tier of undergraduates and alumni were on their feet singing and cheering his name, and Mellinger's. He smiled grimly.

The game was over. A swarm of red-jerseyed figures, some of them battered and limping, scurried for the dressing

rooms to escape the happy, yelling mob. Inside they shouted and danced and put on a private celebration of their own. Jim Rutherford, fumbling at his soggy togs, came in for a word of praise from every man in the room.

"Nice work, boy!" "Atta boy, Rutherford!" "Nicest piece of interference I ever saw!" "Good old Jim!" "Atta boy, Jimmy!" There was an odd lump in Rutherford's throat as man after man addressed him. Old scores and his long-cherished dignity were forgotten in the thrill of victory. It seemed good—oh, so good!—to be slapped on the back; to be called Jim! The whole world—Jim Rutherford's world at least—had undergone a change in that last hectic quarter of an hour. His old aloofness seemed now to have been a vague, distant dream; a pose, perhaps, to conceal the actual lonesomeness of his soul.

"Will you shake hands with me, old man?" Howard Mellinger was bending over him, hand extended, a warm, friendly smile on his face.

"Why yes, of course—why not?" Rutherford heard his own voice saying dazedly; and he wondered vaguely why everybody laughed.

Rutherford was one of the last to leave the dressing room. At the head of the stairs leading to the main corridor of the gymnasium he came face to face with a stocky, gray-haired man, and a girl. They were chatting with Coach Whiting.

"Dad!" The junior gave a glad cry. "I didn't know that you——"

"Think I'd miss a football game with a son of mine in it?" The smiling man gripped his son's hand. "Boy, I'm proud of you!"

"Will you shake hands with me, too? Or am I still under the ban?" Elizabeth Waring asked, her eyes like silken stars.

Rutherford dropped his eyes, a slow flush creeping over his face. Presently he looked up and grabbed the girl's hand with both his own. "I promised myself that I would never speak to you again, Mibs," he said, smiling ruefully.

She nodded. "I know you did. And, Jim"—her voice was low—"I—I was afraid you were going to stick to it."

The elder Rutherford interrupted. "I guess I am partly responsible for the little tiff you two kids have been enjoying," he said brusquely. "Carl"—he turned to the coach—"can you show the boy that letter I wrote you in September?"

Whiting grinned. "It's on file in my coop," he said. "Come on in."

They followed the varsity coach down the corridor to his office. Here he produced a letter from a personal file in one of the desk drawers and handed it, without comment, to the staring junior. It was as follows:

DEAR CARL: Here is a confession, old-timer, that I am ashamed to make. My son, Jim, who is coming back to State a junior this year, is developing into a first-class blockhead and a snob. His mother—Lord bless her!—means well, and I blame myself far more than her for his failings. I have been too confounded busy chasing the almighty dollar to do my duty as a father.

Football may save him before it is too late. Rather than urge him myself to get into the game I have joined forces with Elizabeth Waring—my future daughter-in-law, if she will have him—and she has promised to do the persuading. As a rule, she can twist the young snipe around her little finger.

I realize it is pretty late now to expect you to do much with him, and I am asking no favors. Maybe he won't come out at all; but if he does just make it a point to ride him hard and give him Hades. I believe that, down in his heart, he has some of the old Rutherford stuff in him. If he has, football will bring it out; if he hasn't, I don't know what I am going to have to do with him.

Do the best you can for me, old-timer, and remember that mum's the word as far as the kid is concerned. As ever yours,

CHARLES RUTHERFORD.

Jim Rutherford's face was crimson when he finished reading the letter. He passed it back to the coach and stood blinking rather shamefacedly from one to the other of the trio. "Framed." He spoke the word slowly. "Framed," he repeated, gazing squarely down into Elizabeth Waring's eyes.

She gave an impish grimace. "Yes. And aren't you glad of it now, Jim?"

Jim Rutherford turned to his father. "Dad," he said, sincerely, "I guess you were right. I have some different ideas now about—about a lot of things, and I guess playing football has been responsible for them.

"And listen"—there was a new, authoritative ring in the younger Rutherford's voice—"I have a favor to ask, dad. Pasquay, Seeley, 'Skip' Covington, Herb Miller, and Howard Mellinger all graduate next spring. I want you to offer each of them a job when they get out—if they'll take it. They're the kind of fighters I want working with me when I start making and selling automobiles."

In the earnestness of his plea the changed Jim Rutherford failed to observe the wink which was exchanged between his father and the smiling girl.

How did this story strike you? A few words about it, if you will be good enough to write them and send them to the editor. We ask you to say, without reserve, just what you think of it. And in the same letter, please give us your opinion of TOP-NOTCH in general.

RANCHING—AS IS

By S. Omar Barker

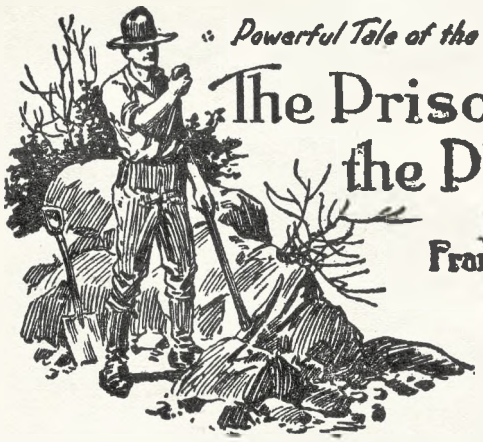
I'M a knight of the creakin' saddle, a sunburnt son of the West;
My legs is bowed to a straddle; my callin' is manifest.
Jest to see me or hear me cussin', folks knows me for what I am,
But you never do hear me fussin', fer I don't give a sheepman's damn!

Yet they calls me a King of the Open, a Sheik of the Western Sun;
For ridin' and r'arin' and ropin', they say I'm a son of a gun!
My name gits into the papers as "Dashin' Cowboy Joe,"
But whilst I cut sech capers, who works, I'd like to know?

Who strings all the crisscross fences? Who digs out the water holes?
Who tries fer to cut expenses by buildin' corrals with poles?
Whose hands gits raw with blisters through shovelin' snow from hay?
Does noble bronco twisters do ranchin' that a way?

In the spring when cows is dyin' fer lack of grass to eat,
Who rides till midnight tryin' to tail 'em to their feet?
Who singes off his eyebrows a-fightin' range-grass fires
Whilst we shows off fer highbrows? Who does it, I inquires?

Oh, sure we're Knights of the Saddle—roughridin' sheiks in chaps,
And a lot more fiddlefaddle they calls us boys—*perhaps*——
'Cause our names gits in the papers. Sech honors we don't shirk.
But capers or no capers, us cowboys does the work!



Powerful Tale of the Colorado Pioneers

The Prisoner and the Play Boy

By Francis Lynde

CHAPTER XXXI

DISCOVERED AT LAST.

WHEN Bromley came in at half past eleven, glowing from his brisk walk in the cool night air from the Demming house in upper Fourteenth Street, he found that Trask had not yet gone to bed; he was sitting with his hands locked over a knee and an extinct pipe between his teeth, his face the face of a man frowningly at odds with himself and his world.

"Heavens, Phil!" was the play boy's greeting. "You look as if you had lost every friend you ever had and never expected to find another. What's gnawing you now?"

"I suppose you would call it nothing," returned Trask moodily. "I've merely been finding out that I can be still another and different kind of a crazy fool."

Bromley grinned. "You have been to the Corinthian again?"

"No! I said a different kind of fool. Drop it, Harry! I don't want to talk about it."

Thus extinguished, Bromley slipped out of his overcoat and coat, struggled into a smoking jacket, and filled and lighted his pipe; all this in comradely silence. After a time the mere fact of his presence seemed to exert a mollifying effect, for when Trask spoke again it was to say, less irritably:

"I have found the Dabney family, at last."

"Good!" exclaimed the play boy. "Nothing so very foolish about that. How did it come about?"

In clipped sentences Trask told of the accidental street meeting with Jean, and of the dinner at Charpiot's, winding up with: "It fairly gave me a heartache to see how hungry she was. She said she hadn't had time to go out to luncheon, but I am morally certain that was only half of the truth. The other half was that she couldn't afford to feed herself in the middle of the day."

Bromley whistled softly. "Say, Philip, that is tough! I know, because I have been there myself. What else did you find out?"

"After dinner I walked home with her, though she didn't want me to. When we reached the place I saw why she had tried to shake me. They are living in a shabby tenement block down there within a stone's throw of the Corinthian. She apologized for not being able to ask me in."

"Suffering Scott—in that neighborhood? Wasn't there anybody to tell them what they were getting into down there?"

"She gave me to understand that there was no choice; that they were obliged to take shelter where they could find it—and afford it. They know—or at least she does—what sort of people they are mixing with. She says they are kind to her and her mother and the children."

Bromley nodded slowly. "People of that sort would be—to hard-luck people of her sort. That is one of the queer

things in this mixed-up world of ours. So far as sheer safety is concerned, she is probably just as safe in that tenement dive as she would be in the most respectable mansion in Denver. All the same, we ought to get them out of there. Have you thought of anything?"

"No; I can't think. I had a crazy fit just after she left me, and I haven't been able to think of much else since."

"Suppose you unload on me and get it off your chest," Bromley suggested.

"I will, because you ought to know. If you are to go on living in the same apartment with a howling maniac——"

"All right; tell me what the maniac has been doing."

"You have heard me speak of Middleton, the fat-faced railroad clerk I was rooming with when you first met me?"

"Yes."

"He isn't half a bad fellow in some ways, but, like a good many others in this demoralized town, he has a bad streak in him. He is—or was—engaged to a girl back in Ohio; but that hasn't kept him from seeking all sorts of other girls' company out here. To-night, after I left Jean, I found him loafing on the nearest street corner. He told me that he was waiting to meet a girl; a girl who worked in a millinery shop. I led him on until he told me her name, which he had got from one of her girl fellow workers. He said it was a boy's name—Jean."

"And you labored with him in good, old Puritan-dominie fashion?" suggested Bromley with a crooked smile.

"You know mighty well I didn't; though that would have been the sensible thing to do. He has a nasty twist in his brain, but for all that, I have no reason to believe that he hasn't some decent limitations. If I had told him who the Dabneys are, and that they are friends of mine, that would have settled it. Instead of doing that, I went crazy mad—knocked him down and beat him—made a shouting ass of myself."

Bromley laughed and thrust a hand across the reading table. "Shake, you old fighting Roundhead!" he said. "Now I know you are all human! Is that what you were looking so glum about? You needn't lose any sleep over such a little gust of righteous indignation as that. As a matter of fact, you ought to sleep the better for it."

"Wait!" said Trask soberly. "It isn't the mere fact that Middleton got what he was asking for; it is the other and bigger fact that I am no longer my own man, Harry. The frantic gold chase we have been through has done something to me; I don't know what it is; but I do know I am not the man I was when I left New Hampshire a little more than eighteen months ago. I'm hag-ridden—possessed of a dumb devil. Every now and then I am made to realize that there are hellish possibilities in me that I never even dreamed of before I came out here."

Bromley grew philosophical. "The possibilities, hellish or otherwise, active or dormant, lie in every man of us born of woman, Philip. If we are, at bottom, creatures of heredity, on the surface we are pretty strictly creatures of environment; by which I mean that the environment calls to the surface only those qualities in us that are in harmony with it—that will respond to it. Back home, I take it, you had your little commonplace round and lived in it. Out here, all the traditional strings are off, and we are free to revert to type, if we feel like it."

"M-m!" said Trask, thin-lipped. "Very pretty—in theory. But it doesn't get me anywhere. You can't argue from the general to the particular; not in my case, anyway."

There was the wisdom of the wise fools of all the ages in Bromley's smile. "Of course; you want to be specialized. We all do. I've prophesied for you before, and I can do it again if you want me to. You are of the tribe of those who have to emerge through great tribulation. There is a strong man and a broad man inside of you, Philip; at present he is a prisoner, but some day he will break out and come to his own. When he does, there will probably be a great smashing of windowpanes and a kicking out of door panels—wreckage a-plenty—and after it is all over you will doubtless wonder why there had to be an earthquake in your particular case. But the fact will remain."

Trask grunted. "Are you trying to tell me that I am hidebound?"

"Call it that, if you like. Life is little to you yet; some day you will see how wide the horizons really are. But, as I say, you are likely to pay for the privilege —pay in advance. It's coming to you."

There was silence for a few minutes while the smoke curled upward in delicate little rings from Bromley's pipe.

Then Trask said soberly: "You spoke a while back of reversion to type: I don't know what type it is that I am reverting to. My people are all decent and well behaved, so far back as I know anything about them."

"Oh, that!" said Bromley lightly. "When it comes to ancestors and the heredities, most of us can find anything we are looking for, if we go back far enough. It is a family tradition of ours that there was once a Wigglesworth who was a raw-head-and-bloody-bones pirate and wound up by getting himself hanged in chains. I shouldn't worry, if I were you."

"That is just the difference between us, Harry," was the somber rejoinder. "You wouldn't worry if you knew the world were coming to an end to-morrow. I don't happen to be built that way. For a time this evening, while I was with Jean Dabney, I was able to recognize myself as the normal Philip Trask. But a few minutes after we parted I was a murderer—in all but the actual accomplishment of the thing. I could have killed Middleton without a qualm. If the crazy fit had lasted a minute or two longer, I don't doubt but I should have killed him."

"Well, you didn't kill him; which is the main thing, after all. Let it go. You've got it out of your system now. I suppose your silly conscience will make you go and apologize to the masher, but that's a future—a bridge to be crossed when you come to it. Let's talk about me for a while. I've had a jolt, too, to-night."

"A jolt? You don't look it."

"That's it; no matter how sick a fellow is, if he doesn't look sick he gets no sympathy. Just the same, I'm stabbed to the heart. I have been discovered."

Trask's smile was grim, but it was a smile. "Sheriff after you with a warrant?" he bantered.

"Worse! At Mrs. Demming's to-night I met a man who knows me—knew me back home, I mean."

"Anything fatal about that?"

"The fatality lies in what he told me. Have I ever, by any chance, happened to mention the Follansbees to you?"

"Not that I remember."

"Friends of the family for three generations. Tom Follansbee was my classmate in college for the little time the powers that were let me stay on the campus. My governor and the judge were also classmates. You get the idea —the two families as thick as peas in a pod?"

"I'm listening."

"Just a minute and you'll get the full impact of my jolt. There are two daughters, Eugenia and Lucy Ann. Back in the dark ages, when we were both in frocks and pinafores, the two families settled it that Eugenia and I were to marry when we grew up."

"And when you did grow up you both reneged?"

"No; only one of us—more's the pity. Of course I like Eugie—like her immensely; we grew up together. The trouble is she likes me; not wisely, but a lot too well. She had always taken the pinafore arrangement as a settled thing. I am afraid she still takes it that way."

"Well, there isn't any other 'incomparable she,' is there?"

"Not so you could observe it. But that isn't the question. I haven't any conscience—not in your meaning of the word—but I have something that partly answers the same purpose. I don't want to be cajoled into marrying a woman that I don't love in a marrying way. It would be a sorry bargain for the woman."

"I see But this is all back-number stuff. Where does your jolt come in?"

"At the front door, and as large as life. The younger sister's health isn't good; weak lungs. Thurlow—he's the chap I met at Mrs. Demming's—tells me that the whole Follansbee clan is about to come to Colorado to try the effect of the altitudes on Lucy Ann. Philip, old boy, I'm a ruined commodity."

Trask smiled again, less grimly, this time. The play boy was presenting another facet of his many-sided character;

an entirely new and different one. "Afraid the charming Eugenia will marry you out of hand?" he jested.

"You've hit the nail squarely on the head! If she could find me as you found me last spring—a shameless down-and-out—there might be some hope for me. But now—— It's a fearful price to have to pay for bracing up, Philip!"

"What are you going to do about it—dodge?"

"I can't dodge. Thurlow will meet the Follansbees when they arrive, and the first thing he will tell them—— Oh, pot! Don't you see that I'm in for it up to my neck?"

Trask tossed his pipe aside and got out of his chair. "Better go to bed and sleep on it," he counseled. "Perhaps it won't seem so much like an unmixed misfortune in the morning." And as he reached his bedroom door he asked: "This Miss Follansbee—is she good-looking, Harry?"

"A glorious blonde, handsome enough to make your hair curl."

"Humph!" said Trask. "It strikes me you might be a lot worse off than you are. You might have epilepsy, or rheumatism, or smallpox, or something of that sort. Good night!" And he went off to bed.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE RESCUE PLAN.

EXUBERANT Denverites of the early 'eighties—not the bull-team pioneers of the 'sixties, most of whom looked on with dry humor, but the majority of tenderfoot later comers—lived strenuously in a boosters' paradise, acclaiming their city the Queen of the Plains and extolling impartially its Italian skies, health-giving atmosphere, matchless scenic surroundings, its phenomenal growth, wealth, and hilarious "wide-openness."

To this trumpeting mother of mining camps came the Follansbees, fresh from an America which is slow to concede an America west of the Alleghenies; the judge, a fine, upstanding gentleman of the old school, with silvering hair and beard; his wife, an ample and gracious lady corseted to the moment and expert in the use of fan and lorgnette; their son Thomas, a spectacled young man who had taken a post-graduate year at Oxford, returning with a pronounced English accent and as the introducer of the curious English custom of wearing spats; an elder daughter fully bearing out Bromley's description of her as a "glorious blonde," and a younger, thin and pale, with wistful eyes looking out upon a world which always would be alien to them.

True to his traditions, Bromley joined Thurlow in meeting the migrants-for-health's-sake at the Union Depot, saw them drive off to their hotel, saw to the transfer of their luggage, and afterward called on them, dutifully and at the proper hour, to pay his respects and to place himself, as a somewhat seasoned Denverite, at the service of the family in helping to find summer quarters in which the invalid Lucy Ann could have the benefits to be derived from the miracle-working climate.

"Their reactions to the 'wild and woolly' are delightful to behold," Bromley told Trask that night at dinner. "The judge and Lucy Ann take things as they are; but Mrs. Aurelia and Tom and Eugie are distinctly disappointed at finding themselves surrounded by all the comforts and most of the luxuries of civilization. I don't know just what they were expecting to find, but they evidently haven't found it—yet."

"They will live at the Windsor?" Trask asked.

"Oh, no; their idea is to take a villa, as Tom calls it, somewhere in the suburbs and settle down in a housekeeping way. And, by the by, Tom is a joke—a shout! He used to be a rather decent chap, as harmless as a cockroach; a trifle on his toes, perhaps, because the Follansbees date back to Colonial times, but otherwise quite bearable. But he spent last year in England, at Oxford, and now he does everything but drop his h's. He was out with me this afternoon, and he wore a top hat and spats. The grins we met, if put end to end, would reach from here to Leadville. He calls me 'my deah fellaw.'"

"And the fair Eugenia?' Trask inquired maliciously.

Bromley sighed and shook his head. "I'm still a ruined commodity. She is

as fair as ever, and she hasn't changed a particle. I was in hopes some really good chap had cut in by this time, but I am afraid she is still taking the parental bargain as a matter of course."

Trask's grin was sardonic. "And as long as she does, you'll have to. Still, this is a man's town, and perhaps you won't bulk so large in the lady's imagination after she has had time to look the Western collection over."

Bromley shook his head again. "I shall feel like a cad doing it, but she shan't lack for introductions, Phil; I'll promise you that. Want to go around to the Windsor with me after dinner and meet them?"

Trask's laugh was a bray. "And let you start the introduction with me? Thanks! I wouldn't be that unkind to you," he bantered.

"Let's talk about something pleasant," Bromley broke in whimsically; "our friends from Mississippi, for example. You remember the little rescue plan we were talking about last week?"

"I remember telling you that it wouldn't work."

"But it has worked—like a charm. I bought the West Denver cottage Saturday; you know the neighborhood—respectable and neat, but not gaudy—short walk across the Curtis Street bridge to the University School for the girls—short walk to business for the dear little hat trimmer. After I'd got the deed safely in my pocket, I called upon Mrs. Dabney and told her what I had 'found.' She wept tears of joy."

"I don't know how you do it," said Trask discontentedly. "As many times as I have been with Jean since I took her to dinner that first evening, she has never let me see the inside of their rooms in the Whittle Block."

The play boy laughed. "You know the saying about fools rushing in where angels fear to tread. I got my foot in the door the first time I walked home with her—the day you went to Boulder. The little girls took to me and called me 'Uncle Harry;' after that it was easy."

"Still, I don't see how you got Mrs. Dabney's consent to fall in with your cottage scheme. I tried to offer Jean a loan, and she froze me so quick——"

"Of course she would! That was what you might call the heavy-hand method. I had to tell a few white lies about the cottage, but that was all in the day's work. A mining friend of mine was moving his family to the Gunnison country and was willing to let his furnished house cheap to the right kind of tenants. Past that, all that was needed was to make the rent fit the Dabney purse."

"But you haven't fooled Jean with any such cock-and-bull story as that."

"Haven't I? That remains to be seen. Anyway, they are taking possession tomorrow, and I'm to help them. You are not in it; not in one side of it."

"Evidently!" was the morose agreement. "As I said before, I'd like to know how you do it, Harry. You can get closer to people in ten minutes than I can in a year. The first evening we were together with Jean I could see that she accepted you that quick"—with a snap of his finger. "And she knew what you are—or rather what you were a year ago. Don't women, good women, care whether or not a man makes a consummate fool of himself?"

Instead of laughing at this thrust, his usual reply to Trask's censorious references to his past, Bromley grew thoughtfully silent. When he spoke, it was to say: "You may analyze women, good, bad, and indifferent, until the cows come home, Philip, but you'll never fully understand them; no man ever does, I think. That remark of yours rubs shoulders with a pretty large truth. Why a man who has sown a pretty generous acreage of wild oats should stand a better chance with a good woman than the other sort of man—your sort—is a question that has puzzled better brains than yours or mine. But the fact seems to remain."

"I don't believe it!" said Trask doggedly.

"All right; your belief isn't obligatory, and we won't quarrel over it. You asked me a question, and I gave you the best answer I had in the box. Would you like to amble across the Creek and have a look at my 'mining friend's' cottage on the West Side? It is too fine an evening to be wasted indoors. Besides, you'll want to know the way."

Together they walked down Larimer

and across the bridge, turning south in a street paralleling Cherry Creek. Three short squares brought them to a darkened cottage on a corner; a small box of a place with a pocket-handkerchief lawn and two half-grown cottonwoods for shade trees. Bromley found a key and they went in.

When the gas was lighted, Trask looked around. There were three bedrooms, a sitting room, a small dining room, and a lean-to kitchen, all plainly but comfortably furnished. True, the carpets were worn, and the furniture did not match; but there was a homelike air about the place that made it seem as if the former owners had just stepped out.

"Did you buy it all, just as it stands?" Trask asked.

"No, indeed! Just the empty house. I spent a whole day ransacking the secondhand shops for the fittings; didn't dare buy anything new, naturally—that would have been a dead give-away. Like it?"

"It will do well enough—considering who did it. Of course, it's understood that you let me in with you on the expense?"

Bromley did not reply at once. When he did, his answer was a conditional refusal. "No; I think not, Phil. You don't owe Jean Dabney anything, and I do. If the time ever comes when you are in debt to her as I am, we'll have an accounting. If you have seen all you want to, let's go." And he reached up to turn off the gas.

In their common sitting room that evening, while Bromley was chuckling over a magazine article which showed how little the writer really knew about the Colorado to which he had evidently made no more than a flying visit, Trask shut "The Lady of the Aroostook" upon a place-keeping finger to say:

"I think I owe it to myself to tell you that I went to Middleton to-day and apologized."

"Of course; I knew you'd do that, sooner or later," returned the play boy, with his best impish grin. "That is what you get for having a conscience. What did he say?"

"He was very decent about it: doesn't seem to bear malice. Shook hands with me when I got up to go and said he couldn't blame me so very much for losing my temper. Altogether, he made me feel like a fool—or rather like a whited sepulchre."

"Why the similitude?" queried the magazine reader.

"Because I profess better things, and he doesn't. He is a hopeless pagan, but he shows a better Christian spirit than I did."

This time Bromley's grin was good-naturedly cynical. "Deep down in your heart, Philip, you don't really believe any such things as that; you know you don't," he said accusingly.

"Why don't I?"

"Because, at this very moment, the old self-righteous Puritan in you is patting itself on the back for its superior virtue and for the humility in which you kept the letter of the Gospel to your own satisfaction and comfort."

"Oh, to the devil with you and your hair-splitting philosophy!" said Trask morosely; and, relighting his pipe, he went on with his reading of the novel.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

OUT OF THE CLOUDS.

THE spring of 1881, memorable for the jangling aftermath of the bitter factional political struggle of the previous year which had resulted in the nomination and election of President Garfield, waned to its close, and on the second of July the nation was shocked by the news flashed over the wires of the shooting of the president in a Washington railway station by Charles J. Guiteau.

Isolated by distance from the populous East and Middle West, the new Colorado yet felt the shock and responded to it. Partisanship and the harsh preëlection epithets of "329" and the anti-Chinese cry of "Remember the Morey letter" were forgotten, and The City of the Plain marked its sorrow and indignation, as it did everything else, with a magnificent Western gesture.

Trask, now following out his plan of a blind search for his father in the various mountain mining camps, returned to Denver early in the week following the national tragedy with other failures to add to those which had gone before.

"You mustn't let it dig too deep into you," Bromley urged sympathetically, after the story of the added failures had been told. "You know you admitted in the beginning that there was only the slenderest chance that you might turn him up here in Colorado. You haven't had any later clews, have you?"

"It is all groping in the dark," was the discouraged answer. "All I am sure of is that he would bury himself out of sight. To be the first of his name to have the finger of suspicion pointed at him, however unjustly—— You'd have to be New England born yourself to know how these things cut to the bone, Harry."

Something of the same nature he said to Jean Dabney that evening as he was walking home with her from Madame Marchande's. He had long since told her about the cloud on the Trask name, and of his determination to dispel it; as he made no doubt it could be dispelled if he could trace his father and persuade him to return to New Hampshire, there to fight reinstatement with half the wealth of a Colorado gold mine to back him.

"I do hope you will succeed," said Jean who was to the full as sympathetic as Bromley. "You owe it to him to do your very best to find him."

"To him, and quite as much to myself," Trask amended decisively. "While the cloud remains, it rests upon all of us who bear the Trask name. Until it is cleared away I can't ask any right-minded woman to marry me."

They had reached the bridge over Cherry Creek and had paused to look down upon the damp sands lying dark in the starlight.

The young woman's tone was merely argumentative when she said: "Don't you think that is carrying it rather far?"

"Not as I see it. The name a man gives to his wife ought not to have even a shadow of disgrace upon it. Don't you believe that?"

"Y-yes; I suppose I do," was the half-hesitant reply. "Yet that seems frightfully sweeping, when you come to think of it. It seems to shut out all idea of repentance and forgiveness."

"Take it home," said Trask shortly. "Would you marry a man who had a bad record, or whose father had been accused of a crime and was still lying under that accusation?"

Jean was still staring down at the dark sands in the creek channel. "Since the beginning of time both men and women have been forgiving worse things," she answered.

Never before in their renewed acquaintance had Trask felt so strongly the difference that a year's burden of heavy responsibilities courageously taken up and carried had made in the dark-eyed young woman standing beside him. It was only at rare intervals that a flash of the old-time, teasing mockery came to the surface. He told himself that her burden had not only sobered her; it had brought her too crudely in contact with a world of compromises—ethical compromises.

"If women like you take that attitude, what is the use of a man's trying to keep his record clean?" he demanded.

"Dear me! How savagely righteous you can be!" she exclaimed with a little laugh. Then she cleared the air with a plain-spoken declaration that served to increase the aloes taste in his mouth: "I suppose I am like other women. When the time comes—if it ever does come—that I think enough of a man to marry him, I shan't ask what he has been; only what he is and means to be."

"That is heroic, but entirely wrong," Trask decided magisterially. "My code is stricter than that, and it applies to men and women alike. I mean to be able to give as much as I ask. If I can't give, I shan't ask."

"What terrible spiritual pride!" Jean commented, laughing again "Don't you know, I shall be truly sorry for the woman you marry."

"Why do you say that?"

"Because you don't know women, at all—or yourself. And, besides, you don't know the meaning of love; the unselfish kind that takes for better or worse. Let's not talk about such things. We always get lost in the woods when we do. Where shall you go next to look for your father?"

"I haven't decided. There are some camps in the San Juan that I haven't been to. Perhaps I shall go down there next."

They went on across the bridge and presently reached the cottage on the West Side. At the gate Trask declined Jean's invitation to come in. The bitter taste was still with him, and as he walked slowly back to town he was placing Bromley as the one upon whom Jean's tacit defense of the sinners was based. The play boy's acceptance by the Dabneys one and all was of the unreserved sort that Bromley seemed to be able to win wherever he went, and it was he who oftenest walked home with Jean when she was kept late in the millinery shop.

Trask assured himself that he wasn't jealous; he was merely sorry. Jean was much too fine to be wasted upon a man who, by his own confession, had "gone all the gaits." True, Bromley showed no indications of any desire to return to his former ways; but that made no difference; Jean knew about his wasted years and was willing to condone. That was the bitter part of it. Did she, in common with other women he had heard of, accept the devil's maxim that a reformed man makes the best husband?

Trask climbed the stairs in the Alamo Building determined to have a straight talk with Bromley. But the time proved to be unpropitious. The play boy was dressing to go out—conscripted for a theater party with the Follansbees, as he put it.

"Have to be decently chummy, of course," he grumbled, "but I'd much rather go across the Creek and play parchesi with Mysie and Mary Louise. That reminds me of something I've been chewing on ever since you went away this last time, Phil. Even with the rent of the cottage as low as I dared put it without giving the whole snap away, the load is still too heavy for Jean—much too heavy. Can't you see it?"

Trask nodded. "I have seen it all along. I don't know what Madame Marchande is paying Jean, but it stands to reason it isn't enough to keep a family of four properly alive."

"You can bet your bottom dollar it isn't. I've been with them enough to note the little pinchings and scrimpings, and they make my heart bleed. It is up to us, one or the other of us, to climb the breach, and I have found the way to do it. There is a spare bedroom in the cottage, and last evening I asked Mrs. Dabney if she would be willing to take a lodger. She was so willing that she cried."

"Well?" said Trask.

"As I say, it's up to us—or one of us; the room isn't big enough for two."

"Go over there and live with them, you mean?"

"That's it. And since they were your friends before they were mine, you shall have the first chance at it. But if you don't go, I will. They need the money. Think it over, and we'll thresh it out after I come back."

For some time after Bromley had gone, Trask sat in his reading chair thrilling to his finger tips. To live under the same roof with Jean; to be with her daily in the close intimacies of the home life; to be able to help her legitimately in the carrying of her heavy burden until the time should come when, his own filial duty discharged and the Trask name cleared, he might persuade her to shift the burden to his shoulders—to his and not to Harry Bromley's——

There was only one fly in this precious pot of ointment, that saying of Jean's scarcely an hour old: "I suppose I am like other women. When the time comes —if it ever does come—that I think enough of a man to marry him, I shan't ask what he has been; only what he is and means to be." Was she trying to tell him that Bromley was the man?

It was in that hour that the virtuous ego rose to its most self-satisfied height. Jean, wise in the hard school of adversity, but innocent as a child in matters touching her soul's welfare, should be made to see that she must not risk her future happiness by marrying any man who, however lovable, had once shown the weak thread in the fabric of his character and might show it again. It should be his task to make her see it; to convince her that her duty lay in quite a different direction.

In the exhilaration of this thought the room suddenly became too close and confining to contain him, and Trask put on his coat and hat and descended to the street. Conscious only of an urge to keep moving, he began to walk aimlessly; through Curtis to Sixteenth Street, past

the new opera house now nearing completion and with its opening scheduled for the coming autumn season, and so on down toward Larimer.

It was in the last block that he saw something that jerked him down out of the clouds and set his feet upon the pavement of the baser realities. In the center of the block was one of the evidences of Denver's "wide-openness"; a luxurious gambling palace running, like many others in the city of the moment, without let or hindrance from the police. Through the green baize swinging doors, as he was passing, Trask saw an entering figure and recognized it.

"Jim Garth!" he muttered and hung upon his heel. He knew that Bromley had been "staking" the big miner from time to time, and had himself refused point-blank to join in the contributions, arguing that it was not only good money thrown away, but that it was merely giving a man of ungoverned appetites the means of further degrading himself. But now, in an upsurge of righteous responsibility—the legitimate child of the thoughts he had been entertaining—he was moved to lay a restraining hand upon this weak-willed giant who had toiled with him and Bromley through the bitter winter in the Saguache. Before he realized exactly what he meant to do, or how he should go about it, he had pushed the swinging doors apart and was ascending the softly carpeted stair.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

A TERRIBLE REVELATION.

AT the top of the stair Trask found a doorkeeper guard, but with a single appraising glance the man let him pass into the room beyond. For a moment he stood just inside the door, blinking and bewildered. The transition from the cool outdoor air and semidarkness of the street to the brilliant light and smoke-drenched atmosphere of the crowded upper room dazed him. It was the first time he had ever set foot within a gambling "hell," and it was some little time before he could force himself to begin a slow circuit of the room in search of Garth.

To the soul inspired by predetermined righteousness the scene was a blasting commentary on the depravity of human nature. The haggard, eager, lusting faces of some of the players contrasting with the blank immobility of others—the seasoned gamblers; the monotonous click of the chips as some nervous amateur ran them through his fingers; the spin of the roulette balls followed by the *rat-tat-tat* as they came to rest in the red or black—— Trask saw and heard and hastened, with a feeling that if he should linger too long the fell madness of the place might somehow find a lodgment in his own brain. He must find Garth quickly and drag him out.

It was at the upper end of the room that he came to a green-covered table with inlaid cards in its center and a double row of players ringing it, the inner row sitting and the outer standing. Upon a high stool at one end sat the "lookout," a man with the face of a graven image and watchful eyes that marked each bet as it was placed upon the table; and at one side sat the dealer, turning up the cards with practiced dexterity out of the nickel-plated box on the table before him.

Trask's gaze swept the ring of faces until he came to that of the shirt-sleeved dealer, flipping the cards two by two with automatic precision out of the box under his hands. One glance at the clean-cut, deeply lined face with its cold eyes, thin nostrils, and lean jaw was all that was needed, and Trask's heart skipped a beat and stood still. His fruitless search of the past few weeks for his father had ended—here!

Gropingly, and as if his sight had suddenly failed him, he edged his way around the table and touched the shirt-sleeved man on the shoulder.

The cold gray eyes were lifted to his for a flitting instant; then the dealer made a sign to his substitute and got up from his place, saying quietly to Trask: "I've been expecting you; we'll go upstairs."

Wholly speechless, Philip Trask followed his father into the hall, up a stair and into a room on the third floor where a gas jet, turned low, was burning. John Trask reached up and turned the gas on full.

"Might as well sit down," he said to

his son; and the young man sank into a chair and fought for speech. But the words would not come. The crushing silence was broken at length by the father:

"You've been looking for me?"

Philip nodded and moistened his dry lips to say, "Everywhere."

"I thought most likely you might—after I saw your name in the papers as one of the 'lucky-strikers.' You knew me—without the beard?"

"Of course," replied Philip dully. "You look just the same, only older."

"I am older; a good deal older than the six years will account for. Tell me about your mother and sisters: you hear from them, don't you?"

"They are well—and well provided for, now."

"I suppose they have given me up for dead, haven't they?"

"I don't know; I only know that I hadn't."

"Maybe it would have been better if you had."

"No!" Philip broke in desperately. "There is something for you to do—a thing I can help you do, now that I have money."

"What is it?"

"To go back to New Hampshire with me and fight those liars, who said you stole from the bank, to a finish in the courts; to make the Trask name once more what it has always been—an honest one. I'll back you, to the last dollar there is in my half of the mine."

The thin lips of the older man parted in the ghost of a smile. "Spoken like a good son—or at least a dutiful one," he said, in a tone that seemed slightly acid. "But why be so anxious about the name?"

"Why—why?" Philip demanded. "Why shouldn't I be anxious about it? Isn't it the name I bear?"

"A name is nothing unless you make it something—but we won't argue about that. You say you want me to go back to New Hampshire and set things right. It hasn't occurred to you that there might be a certain difficulty in the way?"

"You mean the fact that you didn't stay and fight it out at the time?"

The ghost of a smile came again. "No; I didn't mean that. I mean the fact that not all of your money could help me to prove what isn't so. I took the money from the bank; stole it, you'll say, though I chose to call it squaring accounts with Hiram Witherspoon, who had kept me on starvation wages for years. I took it and got away with it."

Once again Philip's heart skipped a beat and stopped, and for a moment the room whirled in dizzying circles for him. "You—you stole it?" he faltered, in a voice that he scarcely recognized as his own. "I—I don't understand."

"You wouldn't," was the curt reply; "you are too much of a Sanborn. They never kick over the traces." After a pause, he added: "You'll never understand in a month of Sundays, Phil. Your grandfather was a hard man and a hypocrite. He never took his hand off my collar until after I was a man grown—bull-necked me into everything I ever did, even to my marriage with your mother, forgetting that I had the same blood in me that he had in him. He lived a double life until he died, and I waited until the time came when I could help myself and bolt—with another woman."

"Oh, my God!" Philip groaned, and covered his face with his hands to shut out the sight of the man who sat opposite, calmly indifferent, as it seemed, to the havoc he had wrought. When Philip looked up it was to say harshly: "Where is the other woman now?"

"She is here—in Denver. I married her. She doesn't know about your mother. She does a turn now and then at the Corinthian when the cards run queer for me."

Philip staggered to his feet in a desolate rage.

"Then I'm the son of a thief, a gambler, and a bigamist!" he blazed out madly. "That's the name I bear, is it? The reward I get for believing in you, like the damned fool that I was, when everybody else was against you?" He shook his fist in his father's face. "Do you know what you've done to me? You've killed my soul—that's what you've done! —blasted my faith in all humankind! Let me get out of here, before I——"

He choked and clapped his hands to his face, stumbling toward the door.

As he fumbled for the knob and twisted

it, the chill voice behind him said: "You had no call to chase me, and you needn't worry about the name. I haven't called myself John Trask since I left New Hampshire. And one thing more: I've put a bullet through a man before this for saying less than you said a minute ago. That's all, I guess."

Philip Trask groped his way through the upper passage and down the two flights of stairs to the sidewalk. The reaction from the fit of mad rage set in as he stepped into the open air, and he went suddenly weak and nauseated. The Tabor Building was just opposite, and in the alley beside it he saw the light of the saloon at the back. Two minutes later he had staggered across the street, up the alley and into the lighted barroom, which proved to be momentarily empty of other patrons.

"Whisky!" he gasped, leaning against the bar. "I'm sick!"

The bartender set out the bottle and a glass of water and spun an empty whisky glass along the polished mahogany. With a hand that was shaking as if with palsy, Trask tilted the bottle, poured himself a drink that ignored the miniature pig etched in the side of the glass with the motto. "Don't drown the hog," and gulped it down.

The neat liquor was like a draft of liquid fire to his unaccustomed palate and throat, and he choked and strangled until the bartender reached over and put the glass of water into his hand with a grinning comment:

"Guess you hain't got the knack yet o' takin' it straight, son. Wash 'er down with a chaser o' water."

With his throat still afire, Trask took to the streets. Since the huge drink he had just swallowed was the first he had ever taken, its intoxicating effect was almost instantaneous. Before he had walked half a dozen blocks his brain was spinning, and he fancied he was treading upon thin air. From that time on, consciousness faded little by little: all he knew was that he was walking, walking endlessly, sometimes through streets that seemed dimly familiar, at other times with all the surroundings singularly strange.

How he passed that night, Trask never could remember. It was early morning when he realized that he was pacing the streets. He looked at his watch. It had run down, and he swore at it under his breath. The aftermath of the single gluttonous drink was still with him in the shape of a parched throat, a dry tongue, a fiercely aching head, and a set of jangled nerves.

At first, he thought he would go to his rooms and take a cold bath; but after he had gone a block or two in that direction he changed his mind and once more sought the saloon in the rear of the Tabor Buildings. The night bartender was still on duty, and he grinned when Trask came in.

"Want a little of the hair o' the dog that bit you, I reckon?" he said, setting out the bottle and glasses.

Trask poured a drink, a small one, this time, and since the mere smell of the liquor sickened him, he held his nose as he drank. The stimulant steadied the twittering nerves; and it did more—it cleared his brain and brought the desolating revelation of the night back with a vividness that hurt like the stabbing of needles. He set his watch by the barroom clock. It was quite early. Bromley would not be up yet. Suddenly it came to him that he could not face Bromley; not yet, at any rate. He must eat breakfast first; and he went around to Charpiot's for the meal.

The breakfast, a light one, was hastily despatched; and as he was leaving the table the play boy came in.

"Hello, there!" he exclaimed. "You are still in town? I looked into your room and saw your bed hadn't been slept in, so I concluded you'd taken a night train to somewhere."

"No," Trask replied soberly; "I haven't been out of town."

"Well, don't rush off. Sit down and be neighborly while I get a bite of breakfast."

"No," Trask repeated; "I've got to go." Then he turned back and forced himself to look his partner in the eyes. "That matter we were talking about last night before you went to the theater: I'm not going to take that room at the Dabneys'. You are the one to go there."

The play boy looked his surprise. "Why, what's the matter with you, Phil?

When I spoke of it last night, I thought you looked tickled purple."

"Last night was last night, and this morning is another day. Say that I don't care to give up the stuffy luxuries of the apartment in the Alamo, if you like. Anyway, I'm not going to move; that is all there is to it."

And with this curt refusal he turned his back upon his partner and left the dining room.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE CHAOTIC CRASH.

PASSING out through the hotel office with one thought effacing all others, namely, that companionship of any sort was not to be endured, Trask, a prey to the instinctive urge that drives the wounded animal to seek a hiding place, pulled his hat over his eyes, signaled to a passing cab and got in, telling the driver to take him to the Alamo Building.

Reaching his rooms, he scribbled a note for Bromley, merely saying that he was going out of town, filled a traveling bag, jamming things into it with little regard for long-established habits of care and orderliness, and was presently on his way to the Union Depot, urging the cab driver to haste and still more haste.

By a margin of seconds he caught the South Park train for Leadville; and as the short string of top-heavy, narrow-gauge cars went swaying and lurching out over the switches in the West Denver yard, he was choosing an isolated seat in the chair car where he could settle himself to look the catastrophic revelation of the night fairly in the face.

With the scene of the revelation withdrawing into actual distance, a vast incredulity seized him. Could it be that he had grown up in daily association with his father without so much as suspecting the existence of the iron-hard, desperate underman biding his time beneath an exterior so like that of other men in his walk in life as to be wholly unremarkable? It seemed fantastically unbelievable. Yet, in looking back upon the conventional New England home life he saw how it might be possible.

The atmosphere of the home, as he had always known it, had been one of silent restraint, and there had been nothing like man-to-man comradeship between his father and himself. Not that this was at all singular He had known many other households in the homeland in which the same spirit of reticence and aloofness, the same repression of all the emotions, were the natural order of things. The attitude was ingrained in the bone and blood; a heritage which, as he now realized, was his and his forbears'.

Such reflections as these, however, did not serve to lessen the crushing completeness of the blow that had fallen. Where was now that righteous pride of race he had paraded before Jean Dabney; the boast of honest and upright ancestors he had so confidently made? He, the son of a thief, a gambler, a hardened breaker of the laws of God and man? Of what use to him now was the growing hoard of gold in the Denver bank, since it could never buy back that which was irretrievably lost? How could he go on living from day to day with the knowledge that the accident of any day might give some sensation-mongering newspaper reporter the chance to write up "Lucky-strike" Trask of the Little Jean as the son of a well-known local faro dealer and sporting man? In his mind's eye he could visualize the mocking headlines, and a wave of impotent rage, the agony of a tortured ego, swept over him.

He had no desire to eat when the train halted at the midday dinner station and did not leave his place in the chair car. Later, through the long afternoon, he looked out, with eyes that saw without perceiving, upon the passing panorama of cañon cliffs and forested mountain slopes, of undulating distances in the South Park and the uplifted peaks of the Mosquito Range, deep in the misery of his wounding; aghast at the prospect of the future.

It was with an added degree of wretchedness he realized that his love for Jean Dabney, restrained and calmly calculated hitherto, seemed to have been set free in the chaotic crash of things, blazing up in passionate intensity now that its object was, as he told himself bitterly, snatched out of reach. That he could never go to her with the story of his humiliating discovery was the first sickening conclusion that had burned itself into his conscious-

ness; and now this was followed by the appalling after-conclusion that he could not go to her at all; that the discovery in the gambling hell had cut him off at once and irrevocably from all association with her.

It was only natural that the thought of his own lapse, the fact that he had been drunk, seemed of small account in the general wreck. With the family honor already dragged so deeply in the mire of disgrace and criminality, what he might or might not do made little difference one way or the other. Not that he cherished as yet any desperate or boyish determination to take a fool's revenge by plunging into dissipation. There was only a dull indifference. Pride was dead and the barriers of self-control had been broken down, but life had to be lived, in some way.

Upon arriving in Leadville he had himself driven to the hotel where he and Bromley had put up after they had come out of the mountains with Drew in the spring. Still having no desire to eat, he tried to smoke; and when the pipe, on an empty stomach, nauseated him, he went to the bar and called for a drink.

As in the morning, the swallow or two of whisky wrought a miracle, and he sought the dining room and ate a hearty meal. Afterward, with a mild cigar that had none of the dizzying effects of the pipe, he sat in the lobby, and it was there that Drew ran across him.

"Back with us again, are you?" was the genial promoter's greeting as he drew up a chair and planted himself in it for his own after-dinner smoke. "When did you arrive?"

"Just an hour or so ago," Trask answered, surprised to find himself able to tolerate and even to welcome the companionship of the older man. "I came up on the South Park day train."

"And how is Henry Wigglesworth—still making a quiet joke of the world at large?"

"Harry is all right. Good luck hasn't spoiled him, as I was afraid it might."

"Inclined to be a little wild, was he?"

"When I first met him, yes. And I was foolish enough to think that I had to brother him. Queer what notions a man gets into his head, sometimes."

Though he did not look aside, he knew that Drew was regarding him curiously.

"You come of brothering stock, don't you, Trask?"

"At one time I was fool enough to think so. That was another of the queer notions. How is the Little Jean coming along?"

"Splendidly! The vein values are increasing as we drive in on the lode. We are making another clean-up from the plates this week, and you'll get a dividend that will warm the cockles of your heart."

"Money!" said Trask half contemptuously. "When you don't have it, it's the most desirable thing in the world. And when you get it——" He broke off, leaving the sentence unfinished.

The promoter smiled. "Money is only a means to an end, of course. If it is not too personal a question, what are you doing with yours?"

"Nothing, as yet. Bromley is investing his share here and there, setting me a good example. But I haven't followed it."

From that the talk went back to the gulch on the western slope, and Drew told how the shut-in valley had been overrun by prospectors as soon as the snow was off. A few small leads had been discovered higher up the gulch, but nothing at all comparable with the Little Jean. Reference to the hard winter the discoverers of the Little Jean had put in led Drew to ask about Garth; and the mention of the big miner's name stabbingly reminded Trask of the chance incident in which Garth had figured and which had led up to the blotting out of all recollection of him.

"Garth is in Denver; or he was yesterday," he replied.

"Pity about Jim," said the promoter. "At bottom he's a man, right; but he can't let liquor and the pasteboards alone. He has been moderately well fixed at least three times, to my certain knowledge, and each time he has blown it all; gambled it and given it away—or so much of it as he didn't pass across the bar."

Trask was conscious of a curious little shock when he realized that this cataloguing of Garth's weaknesses now stirred no resentful or condemnatory emotion in him. "Perhaps that is the way in which

he gets the most out of life," he offered colorlessly. "There is no accounting for the difference in tastes."

"No; but Big Jim is really worth saving, if somebody would take the trouble," Drew put in. "I don't suppose anybody has ever cared enough for him to try to brace him up—at least, nobody since his wife died."

"He was married?" Trask queried. "I worked beside him all winter and never knew that."

"It was one of those cases you read about—and seldom see in real life," Drew went on reminiscently. "It happened in one of the intervals when Jim was on top, financially. A gambler, whose name I have forgotten, brought a girl here from the East and then abandoned her. Jim heard about it, and after marrying the girl offhand, hunted up the gambler and shot him within an inch of his life. The girl turned out to be a jewel as Jim's wife; stuck to him through thick and thin, and actually got him to stop drinking and gambling. Then the altitude, and the hard life she had lived before she met Jim, grabbed her and she died. Naturally, poor old Jim went all to pieces again."

"Naturally!" Trask agreed. His eyes were narrowed, and he was conscious of a curious deadening of the heart. The story of Garth's tragedy did not move him as it would have moved him no longer ago than yesterday. Instead, he was asking himself why shouldn't Garth take to drink and dissipation to drown his grief? For that matter, why shouldn't any man, if he happened to lean that way?

Drew looked at his watch and rose. "I have an appointment that I nearly forgot," he said. "Intending to stop over with us for a while?"

"Perhaps; I haven't made any plans."

"All right; we'll get together again. While you are here, my office is at your disposal, of course. Come around and make it your loafing place."

After Drew had left him, Trask lighted another of the mild cigars and took to the streets, walking until he was weary. Again and again the meager details of Garth's tragedy passed themselves in review. How crassly he had misjudged Garth! Bromley's insight had been better. Was the play boy's assumption that there was no hard-and-fast line to be drawn between the sheep and the goats—that there was good in the worst and bad in the best—the right one, after all?

Tired out at last, Trask returned to the hotel and went to bed. In the life which was already withdrawing into a far-away past he always had been able to fall asleep as soon as his head touched the pillow; but now, though it was past midnight, and he was weary to utter exhaustion, sleep would not come. Over and over the harrowing details of the discovery of his father and the scene in the upper room over the gambling den rehearsed themselves as he tossed and tumbled and tried to banish them; and at last, in sheer desperation, he got up and dressed and went down to the lobby floor. The barroom was closed, and he appealed to the night clerk, money in hand.

"I'm sick and can't sleep," he said. "Couldn't you break in back there and get me a drink? I don't want to take to the streets at this time of night."

The clerk smiled knowingly. "Got a hang-over, have you? I guess I can fix you." He disappeared, to return presently with a pint bottle of whisky. "Think that will do the business for you?" he asked.

"Yes; thanks. Don't bother about the change."

Once more in his room, Trask slipped out of his clothes, took a stiff drink, and stretched himself upon the bed. In a little time the curious and altogether pleasant feeling of levitation came, and he floated off through a spacious region of dreams which grew vaguer and vaguer until they vanished in an abyss of forgetfulness.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

ABSOLUTELY INCREDIBLE.

BROMLEY had been occupying the spare bedroom in the Dabney cottage for nearly a fortnight on the Saturday when, calling at the Windsor Hotel to tell the Follansbees about a bargain in furnished houses he had happened to hear of, he saw Stephen Drew registering in at the room clerk's desk and crossed the lobby to shake hands with him.

"This is a piece of luck," said the lessee of the Little Jean, after the greetings were passed. "I didn't know your address, and was expecting to have to dig you up through the bank or the post office. I came down on business, but also I was anxious to get hold of you. If you have a few minutes to spare?"

"All the time there is," returned the play boy cheerfully, leading the way to a couple of the lobby chairs. "I hope you are not going to tell me the Little Jean is petering out."

"Nothing like that. The mine is all right. The values are increasing, as your next dividend will show. I wanted to talk to you about Trask Do you know where he is?"

"I haven't the remotest idea. He dropped out between two minutes one morning early last week, leaving a note which merely said that he was vanishing. It's all right, though. He has been making a good many swings around the circle in the past month or so, on a sort of still hunt for his—for a man he is trying to find."

"Did you see him before he left Denver this last time?"

"Why, yes; I was with him the evening before he left; and I saw him, for just a minute or two, the next morning."

"Anything wrong with him then?"

Bromley took time to think back. Previous to that meeting in the breakfast room at Charpiot's, Trask had been out somewhere all night. Now that he recalled it, he remembered that the meeting had been only momentary; that Trask had looked rather the worse for wear; that his refusal to take the spare room in the Dabney cottage had been almost brutal in its abruptness.

"I can't say there was anything definitely wrong," he replied. "I remember he looked a bit gloomy and wrought up, but that is nothing new for him. He has pretty bad attacks of conscience at times —if you know what that means."

Drew nodded. "I understand. But that isn't to the point just now. Your partner is in Leadville, and he is badly in need of a friend: somebody near enough and intimate enough to take him by the neck."

Bromley laughed easily. "There must be some mistake about that. Philip, himself, is the one who rushes around taking people by the neck."

"You are off wrong, this time," the promoter cut in shortly. "I don't believe he has been entirely sober at any one time during the past two weeks, and he seems to be permeated with an idea that he can use up all the red paint there is and break all the gambling banks in the camp if he only sticks at it long enough."

"Good heavens!" Bromley gasped. "Not Philip!"

"Yes, Philip. Of course, I understand that it's none of my business, but I hate to see such a fine, upstanding fellow as he is go to the devil in a hand basket. Has he had trouble of any sort?"

Bromley took a moment to consider whether he had a right to tell about Philip's search for his father, and decided quickly that the present crisis warranted him. Very briefly he told Drew the little he knew about the Trask family tragedy and of the futile search Philip had been making.

"Ah!" said the shrewd-witted developer of mines. "That may be the clew. You say Philip believed in his father's innocence?"

"Absolutely and utterly! But from what he has told me, I gathered that he was pretty much alone in that belief; that, as a matter of fact, not even the other members of the family shared it with him."

"I see. Then that may be the key to the present situation. Trask is pretty sensitive on the family-honor question, and all that, isn't he?"

"Exceedingly so! It, and his conscience, are his little tin gods."

"There you are, then. You say his search for his father has been futile; you don't know positively that it was, do you?"

"It was, up to the night before he went to Leadville."

"Well, many a man has had his world turned upside down for him between dark and daylight in a single night. Whatever the cause may have been, the effects are as I have indicated. Philip is setting a pace that not even a half share in a gold mine can stand indefinitely. If you think you can do anything with him, you'd bet-

ter go after him. As I say, he is needing a friend mighty badly."

"Sure I'll go!" agreed the play boy promptly. "I owe Philip a lot more than I'll ever be able to pay. And you mustn't judge him by this one fall-down, Mr. Drew. There are some people who suffer most from an excess of their virtues—if you know what I mean—and Philip is one of those. He has stood up stiff and straight all his life, and when a fellow who lives that way gets bowled over——"

"I know," assented the man of large experience. "The greatest danger in a case of that kind lies in that 'excess of the virtues' you speak of. When the barriers are once thrown down, the job of rebuilding them is apt to seem hopeless."

"That is where it will hit Phil the hardest, I'm sure. But we won't hope for the worst. Are you stopping over for a few days?"

"Until Monday or Tuesday. Are your quarters here in the Windsor?"

"Oh, no; I have a boarding place in West Denver—with friends. I'm here just now to call upon some other friends —people from Philadelphia. And that reminds me: you said you used to live in Philadelphia; perhaps you know these friends of mine—the Follansbees?"

"Not Judge John?"

"You have called the turn; Judge John and Mrs. Judge John and Tom and Eugenia and Lucy Ann."

"You don't tell me! I know the judge and his wife very well, indeed; and the children, too, though they were only children in my time. You say they are here, in the hotel?"

"Yes. Wait a minute and I'll carry the word to them."

He was gone only a short time, and when he returned to the lobby, the judge and Mrs. Follansbee came with him. He stood aside while the three were happily bridging the gap of the years, and at the first lull broke in smoothly to say to Drew:

"Mrs. Follansbee has been good enough to include me in a dinner party for this evening, and I have just told her that I am unexpectedly obliged to leave town, but I was quite sure you would be willing to substitute for me."

"Of course you will, Stephen," put in the lady patroness, surveying the stocky figure of the promoter through her lorgnette; then, with a sigh for the vanished years, she added: "My, my, what a man you've grown to be! I should never have known you, with that clipped beard and the eyeglasses. Can't you spare a few minutes to come up to our suite and see Eugenia and Lucy Ann? They both remember you."

CHAPTER XXXVII.

A GLIMPSE FROM THE TRAIN.

GLANCING at his watch, Bromley slipped away. He had promised to take Jean Dabney to luncheon, and there was barely time to reach Madame Marchande's place in Sixteenth Street by the appointed noon hour. When he did reach the millinery shop he found Jean waiting on the sidewalk for him, and he took her to a new chop house lately opened in the block next to the St. James, steering clear of the subject that was uppermost in his mind until after they were seated in one of the boxlike private stalls and their order had been given and served. Then Bromley began without preface:

"I want to ask you something about Philip, Jean. He walked home with you a week ago last Monday evening, didn't he?"

"Let me think," she answered reflectively; "to-day is Saturday; yes; it was a week ago Monday."

"Did he—did he act as though he was especially troubled about anything?"

"Why, no; not that I saw. I remember he scolded me a little because he seemed to think I wasn't quite as savagely righteous as I ought to be. But he has done that lots of times. He walks so straight himself that he can't bear to see anybody lean over, ever so little."

Bromley winced. If Drew's story were true—and there was no reason to doubt it—Philip was not walking straight now; he was groveling. What would Jean say if she knew? He had not meant to tell her what he had just heard; did not yet mean to tell her. Still, she would have to know, some time. If he could only be sure that the knowledge wouldn't

smash her! He would have to feel his way carefully.

"I am wondering if Philip ever told you anything about his father," he said; and he tried to say it casually.

"Oh, yes; he has told me all there was to tell, I think; how his father went away under a—under a cloud, and how he has been searching for him out here. Was that what you meant?"

Bromley nodded. There was nothing in her tone or manner to lead him to believe that she had anything more than a friendly interest in Philip's problem, and he went on:

"He has been away for two weeks, or nearly two weeks. He left town the next morning after he walked home with you that Monday evening. He didn't tell me where he was going. Did he tell you?"

"He said he might go to the camps down in the San Juan next. But he didn't say anything about going so soon. Haven't you heard from him since that time?"

"No; he hasn't written me," Bromley hastened to say, telling a half truth which was little short of a lie direct.

"But you are not anxious about him, are you?"

"Anxious? Why should I be?"

"But I think you are," Jean said, looking him fairly in the eyes.

As upon certain other occasions, Bromley tried hard to plumb the depths of the dark eyes that were lifted to his, striving to read the answer to a question that had been tormenting him ever since his first meeting with her. How much did she care for Philip? Was she as much in love with him as he was with her? If she was, this was neither the time nor the place for the repeating of Drew's story. But if she were not—— He made up his mind suddenly and took the plunge.

"Jean, you know you can trust me to the limit, don't you? Tell me honestly what there is between you and Philip."

"What there is between us?" The steady gaze of the dark eyes did not waver. "We are friends, of course; good friends, I hope."

"Nothing more?"

"What more could there be?"

"Then I may talk to you just as I might to any other friend of his?"

"I don't know why you shouldn't." Tone and manner both gave him the assurance that he might go on; that there was nothing more vital to be wounded than the friendship she had admitted.

"Something has happened to Philip. I lied to you a minute ago; said I hadn't heard from Phil: I haven't, not directly; but Mr. Drew is down from Leadville, and he tells me that Philip is up in the big camp, ripping things wide open. I couldn't believe it—can hardly believe it yet."

The deep-welled eyes were downcast now, and Bromley held his breath. If there were a little quiver of the sensitive lips when she spoke, the play boy missed it; missed everything but the steady tone of her reply.

"I have been afraid of something like that, haven't you? Of course, you know what has happened?"

"I don't—I can't imagine!"

"It is perfectly plain. He has found his father."

"You think that is it?"

"I am sure of it."

"But, even so——" he began.

"Don't you see? He hasn't—he didn't find things as he hoped to find them. Don't you know him well enough to know what that would do to him?"

It was said coolly enough, almost coldly, and Bromley marveled. He had never imagined she could be so dispassionate. Before he could pull himself around to some halfway adequate matching of her mood, Jean went on:

"Philip has always walked in a very narrow and straight path for himself, and he is very proud, in his own way. If something has happened to break his pride—I know that is what has happened; I am sure of it."

The play boy drew a deep breath. The worst was over, and it wasn't nearly so bad as he had feared it would be. She either didn't care, no more than a friendly soul should care, or she had more adamantine self-control than had ever fallen to the share of any other woman he had ever known.

"I'm going up after him to-night," he said. "When I get him back here you'll have to help me."

"Of course—if I can," Jean agreed.

"But if it is as I think it is, I'm afraid neither of us will be able to help him very much."

"Why do you say that?"

"Just because he is what he is. Some people have to be helped; they can't get up unless they are helped. But there are others—and Philip is one of them—who have to fight their way back the best they can, alone. It's hard to think of it that way, for a—for a friend. But it is true."

Bromley forced himself to smile. "You are a very wise little woman; much wiser than your years call for. But see here—you're not eating enough to keep a kitten alive. How do you expect to be able to work if you don't eat?"

"I'm not as hungry as I thought I was," Jean replied. "It's the hot weather, maybe."

"Couldn't you eat another cream puff if I should order it?"

"No, thank you. Besides, my time is up. I know it isn't nice to eat and run, but if you will invite a working girl out to luncheon, you'll have to take the consequences."

Bromley walked back to the door of the millinery shop with her and at the moment of parting she said:

"You'll be gentle with Philip when you find him, won't you? It won't do any good to be the other way."

"I shall take him by the neck," he threatened good-naturedly; adding: "He's old enough and man enough to have better sense. I'm going to be fearfully busy this afternoon. Do you suppose Mysie could pack my grip for me if I should send a messenger after it with a note?"

"Mysie would be dreadfully humbled if she could hear you ask such a thing as that." Jean smiled. "She isn't the child you seem to persist in believing her to be. She will be sixteen in a few days. How long do you think you will be away?"

"Heaven knows; no longer than I can help, you may be sure. Good-by! Take care of yourself, and don't work too hard. If you want to do anything for me while I'm gone, just say a little prayer or two. It runs in my mind that I may need all the help I can get. Good-by!"

Having become, in a desultory way, a working capitalist, or at least an investing one, Bromley had a number of business matters to be despatched before he could leave town for an indefinite stay. None the less, out of a well-filled afternoon he clipped time enough to go around to the Colorado National Bank where Trask kept his account. Since he was known in the bank as Trask's partner, he had no difficulty in finding out what he wished to learn. Trask had been drawing heavily on his checking account during the two weeks, and the drafts had all come through Leadville banks. Bromley asked for the approximate figure and gasped inwardly when he was told that the recent withdrawals totaled something over twenty thousand dollars.

Quartered in the sleeper for the night run to Leadville, Bromley, generously distressed, was still groping for some reasonable solution to the problem presented by Trask's wild splash into the sea of dissipation; a plunge so wholly out of keeping with his character. Was Jean's guess that he had found his father, and that the discovery had proved to be a calamity instead of a cause for rejoicing, the right one? If not, what other upsetting thing could have happened between half past seven on the Monday evening, when he had left Trask in their common sitting room in the Alamo Building, and the next morning when he had met him leaving the breakfast table in Charpiot's? Where had Trask spent the night? And what had occurred during those few unaccounted-for hours to put a look of morbid gloom in his eyes and to make him refuse, almost savagely, to become an inmate of the West Denver cottage?

"He'd had a knock-down fight of some sort with that strait-laced conscience of his, I suppose, and it must have been a bloody one to make him let go all holds like this," the play boy told himself, balancing on the edge of the made-down berth to take off his shoes as the train began its swaying, wheel-shrilling climb in the snakelike sinuosities of Platte Cañon. Then, as he drew the curtains and essayed the irritating task of undressing in the dark, cramped berth, with the car careening to right and left like a ship at sea, he added: "He'll find it bad

medicine and bitter; but if it will only end by making a normal human man of him——"

It was deep in the night, and the train was halted at a mountainside station, when Bromley awoke, shivering in the chill of the high altitude, and sat up to reach for the extra blanket at the foot of the berth. As he did so, a thunderous murmur in the air announced the approach of the Denver-bound train for which his own was sidetracked, and he ran a window shade up to look out just as the Eastbound train, with its miniature locomotive and short string of cars, coasted down, with brake shoes grinding, to the meeting-point stop.

Reflecting upon it afterward, he thought it a most curious coincidence that the night chill should have awakened him just at this time, and that the momentary stop of the opposing train should place the one pair of lighted windows in its single Pullman opposite his own darkened one. While one might have counted ten he sat staring, wide-eyed, across the little space separating the two standing trains.

The lighted windows opposite were those in the smoking compartment of the Eastbound sleeper. Around the little table bracketed between the seats sat three men with cards in their hands and stacks of red, white, and blue counters before them. Though two of the men were unknown to the play boy, he was able instantly to label them as birds of prey. The third man was Trask; a Trask so changed and wasted by two weeks of unrestraint as to be scarcely recognizable.

As Bromley looked he saw one of the birds of prey pass a flat pocket bottle across the table; and his last glimpse through the lighted window as the down train slid away showed him Trask with his head thrown back and the tilted bottle at his lips.

"Good Lord!" groaned the play boy, falling back upon his pillows. "Drew didn't stretch it an inch! Those two blacklegs will strip Phil to the skin before they let go of him and before they will let him get sober enough to realize what they're doing to him! And I've got to go through to Leadville and come all the way back before I can get a chance to stick my oar in!"

At the word the Westbound train began to move, and he pulled the blankets up to his ears, muttering again: "There's only one ray of comfort in the whole desperate business, and that is that Jean isn't going to break her heart over this diabolic blow-up of Philip's. I'm glad I took the trouble to make sure of that, anyhow."

If, at this precise moment of midnight, however, Bromley could have looked into the bedroom next to his own in the West Denver cottage, the room occupied by Jean and her sister Mysie, the comforting reflection might have lost something of its force. The younger sister was sleeping peacefully, but the elder had slipped quietly out of bed to kneel at the open, westward-fronting window with her shoulders shaking and her face buried in the crook of a bare white arm.

The succeeding chapters of this novel will appear in the next issue of TOP-NOTCH, dated and out October 15th. It began in the August 1st issue. Back numbers may be obtained from newsdealers or the publishers.

Friendly Interest

THE waiter was exceedingly slow and the diner began to get annoyed.

"Look here, waiter," he said at last. "Bring me a cup of coffee, and while you're away don't forget to drop me a line occasionally, just to let me know how you're getting on!"

One Witness

HIST!" exclaimed the villain in the play. "Are we alone?"

"Not quite," said the solitary occupant of the orchestra; "I'm here."

Making History

WHO fiddled while Rome burned?" asked the schoolmaster.

"Hector, sir."

"No," said the schoolmaster.

"Towser, sir."

"Towser! What do you mean? It was Nero."

"Well, sir, I knew it was somebody with a dog's name."

Too Big to Hate—

By William Merriam Rouse—

(COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE)

CHAPTER I.

AN EVENT OF IMPORTANCE.

INVARIABLY the heart of Jules Paradis lifted with elation as he drew near his home. There was the feeling that a man has when he comes in out of the cold to a snapping wood fire and beyond and above this, as the pale moon hangs above the earth, there was the light in the eyes of his wife, Mariette. Wife and home and the little fox terrier, Bijou—the priest spoke of heaven, but the mind of Jules Paradis could imagine no better home than that which *le bon Dieu* had given him on earth.

One afternoon, as usual, Jules marched over the rolled and packed snow of the road which led up from the main highway, the Chemin de la Canardière, toward La Concession. The winter sunset of Quebec was facing; the dark Laurentian hills were growing black with the hint of night, although it was not yet five o'clock. A world of white fields, long and narrow as they had been laid out by the *seigneurs* in the ancient days, with their fence tops showing only where the wind from the frozen St. Lawrence had been able to sweep away a little of the snow.

Ahead, close to the mountains, gleamed the few lights of La Concession, like a handful of stars flung against the hillside. Jules picked out his own light, set a little apart from the others. Mariette would have the blue-glass lamp in the window for him, and Bijou would be chilling his nose against the frosted pane as he watched to give her notice of the master's coming. It was good to be going to that low stone house, with its broad chimney and its neatly whitewashed walls. The stone that built it had been quarried at La Concession two hundred years before.

The *bottes sauvages* of Jules creaked faster over the frozen snow. He half smiled; a pleasant smile upon a good-natured face, smooth-shaven and windblowned. He began to unbutton his sheep-lined *capote* as he swung along the path to his door. He must not hold Mariette against the chilled cloth of his coat, which had been powdered with snow.

There was a yelp of joy and a flash of white at the opening of the door. Bijou leaped breast-high from the floor, and fell back and leaped again with frantic squeaks and futile efforts to lick his master's face. Past the dog Jules smiled at his wife. She had just finished scrubbing the always irreproachable floor, and her sleeves were rolled shoulder-high over arms milk-white and round. Her blue eyes sparkled in the lamplight as she ran to him.

Inside that *capote à mouton* she was folded by strong arms. She rested in their strength, with her head thrown back and her lips waiting to be kissed, while Bijou danced around them his nightly joy dance at the coming of the master. It was not necessary for them to speak. After a long moment Mariette tripped away, singing softly, to get ready the supper of *soupe aux pois* and meat pie.

"A la claire fontaine
M'en allant promener——"

Jules watched her, slowly taking off his coat. Yes; that always seemed the song for her to sing. Ever, each day, she went to the clear fountain of happiness and brought of its waters for her husband. She kept all things in the *maison* Paradis as they had been in the old time because Jules liked them thus. The great stove of two bridges was always shining with silver paint, and the loom with which she made imperishable gray homespun cloth stood in one corner of the kitchen.

Now Bijou must be played with a matter of five minutes. After that Paradis washed his hands and face and sat down to a table covered by an immaculate oilcloth. He lifted the long brown loaf, set it firmly against his chest, and cut skillful slices with a shining ten-inch knife. The incomparable pea soup of *beau Canada* steamed up in his nostrils.

"Edouard Taschereau comes to-night to call upon us, my angel," he said. "Edouard, he is the third cousin of my mother."

"Bien!" cried Mariette. To the family of a *habitant* the coming of a guest, and particularly a stranger, is an event to be welcomed with joy and some considerable excitement. "He has been in the States? But yes; I have heard you say so!"

"Mon Dieu! You will see when he comes! Never was there a man more *Yankifié* than this Edouard! A high white collar, shoes with buttons on them, and I thought his shirt was of silk! It does not seem possible, however, and I never heard of a silk shirt for a man. But think of shoes with buttons, and in the winter! *Parbleu!* When you see him, Mariette, you will stare, and at the same time you will want to laugh!"

"He must be rich!"

"I don't know. Things are different in the States. They have machines for everything, and everything costs a great deal. It is not pleasant as it is here. They hurry, and there is no peace."

"Nevertheless, I should like to see some of those machines that they have," murmured Mariette.

"Poof. Machines to make music, instead of the violin! Machines to sweep, that do not get the floor clean! I have heard all about them, me! The people have machines for hearts, I believe. *Le bon Dieu* is not in them, certainly."

CHAPTER II.

ALTOGETHER DIFFERENT.

MOST certainly Edouard Taschereau was a curious sight to the eyes of Jules Paradis when he entered the kitchen that evening, stamping his feet and shivering a little in spite of the smile that showed gold in several of his front teeth. He shivered while he glittered bravely in raiment such as one could hardly buy, even in Quebec, ready to put on.

His overcoat had a narrow collar, which was not worth turning up, and many straps and buttons with no apparent use. He took off his overshoes and exposed the shoes with buttons; they had gray cloth tops. His muffler was a flimsy thing of silk and, most strange of all, he wore a hat and earmuffs instead of a fur casque. It was clothing in which to freeze.

Mariette," said Jules, "this is Edouard Taschereau, the cousin of my mother." Then he added, with the politeness of the true *Canadien*: "Edouard, *vous êtes chez vous!"*

To tell this guest and kinsman that he was in his own house was the correct thing to do, and yet Jules felt that Taschereau did not belong there in that kitchen of the old time, with the silvered stove of two bridges and the tall clock ticking mightily in its corner. As guest and kinsman he should not have looked so long and admiringly into the blue eyes of Mariette.

"Bon soir, madame," he said. "If I

had known that Jules had such a beautiful wife I'd have come out here when I first returned from the States! The cold is enough to kill a man but, *parbleu*, I do not regret this night's march!"

"Ah!" exclaimed Mariette, pleased. "You have not forgotten how to make compliments, even if you are *Yankifié!*"

"Yankifié?" echoed Taschereau, laughing. "But yes; I am civilized! They know how to live in the States!"

Jules had been a little contemptuous of a man who complained of the cold when it was no more than twenty degrees below zero, and he would have been much annoyed at the scornful comparison implied in the remark of Edouard if it had not been for Bijou.

That little scrap of white, spotless except for the brown patch over one eye, had been investigating the stranger; but silently, like the well-mannered dog that he was. Now, at a snap of the fingers of Teschereau, he leaped wriggling into his lap. The paw of Bijou braced itself against a heavy gold watch chain unrebuked, and he chewed a finger of the guest while his stumpy tail beat the air.

"Look!" cried Mariette delightedly. "Your cousin must be a good man, my Jules! Bijou likes him! It is not with every one that he makes friends!"

"Truly!" agreed Jules, and a smile broke over his face. "Bijou is a dog of good judgment but—he is still a puppy."

They laughed, the others, and Paradis was a little sorry that he had put those last few words to his remark, although Taschereau did not seem to mind. It was not good-natured. He liked Edouard, even while the superior air of the young man irritated him. Thus it was with all of those who lived among machines for long. He had known them before this.

"In the States," Taschereau was saying, "this dog would have to have a collar with a license tag on it. *Mon Dieu!* One pays even for keeping a dog! But it is not too bad. The money, ah, that comes for a few hours' work, eight or nine, and plenty of it! One has a chance to do almost anything with that money! Moving pictures and dances every night. More places than a man can find time to go to!"

"We went to a dance last winter at St. Joachim, and to another at St. François du Lac!" cried Mariette. "They were fine, M. Taschereau! We danced all night!"

"Ah, but these dances here are twenty years behind the times!" exclaimed Taschereau. "Where's your phonograph? I'll teach you a foxtrot!"

Jules met the eyes of Mariette, and he was furious that she blushed. Neither he nor she need be ashamed because they did not have one of those things.

He looked at Edouard steadily. "We have no machine to make music," he said.

"No phonograph?" The astonishment of Taschereau was real. He shrugged and smiled agreeably; and it could not be denied that he was an attractive young man. *"Pardon!* I've forgotten that I am back once more on the Côte de Beaupré. You could afford a dozen phonographs, Jules, but you do not buy one. *Nom de Dieu!* Mariette would like this music that comes out of a box!"

"What do you say, Mariette?" asked Jules pleasantly. He had recovered his poise. "Me, I would rather hear you sing."

"I have heard a phonograph," replied Mariette softly. "They—are nice."

"Alors!" Jules thoughtfully rubbed his pipe bowl against the sleeve of his flannel shirt. "In that case we will get one of these machines. Mariette must be happy. *Parbleu!* And Bijou must be happy also, even if we have to get him a license from the States!"

Edouard found this a good joke. He pulled out some cigarettes and offered them to Paradis. Jules shook his head, with thanks, and filled his pipe with *tabac Canadien.* It seemed to him that there was something symbolic in what they smoked; he did not object to cigarettes, but he knew that he was as different from Taschereau as his black brier was from one of those little white rolls.

CHAPTER III.

IN SEARCH OF A PLAN.

ONCE more *Noël* had come and gone. *Le Jour de l'An* should have brought a new year of happiness to the *maison* Paradis, but certainly it had not

brought joy to the heart of Jules Paradis. That first visit of Edouard Taschereau had been like a gray finger of smoke against a clear sky. At the end of a month the heavens had darkened.

Now it was not one of those cases where a wife of light affections turns them lightly to the first stranger who interests her. Jules knew that he had no complaint against Mariette, and he was not at all sure that Taschereau had even attempted, at least consciously, to break the laws of hospitality.

However, things were as they were. One of those machines for making music stood in the kitchen, and on the evenings when Edouard came he and Mariette wound the accursed thing up and played it over and over again. They danced. Paradis tried to dance, but although he was able to do well enough in a quadrille his feet would not accommodate themselves to this foxtrot. He marveled that in the States the young girls would allow themselves to be held thus tightly when they danced.

Mariette had taken to arranging her hair in new ways, and about the house there were magazines full of pictures of women's dresses. It was well that Mariette should be happy, and he had no base suspicions of her conduct; but at the soul of Jules Paradis a great fear gnawed. He thought that the heart of his wife was turning to Edouard Taschereau. That was his terror by night and his agony by day. As well lose her entirely as to have the light come into her eyes for another man.

His wrath was against Taschereau. This fellow knew better than to pay so much attention to the wife of another man. Paradis began to hate him, and at the end of six weeks he was brooding upon action. Things could not go on as they were. This Edouard Taschereau talked about going back to the States, Talked of the money he could make there and the gay times he could have, but he did not go. Why should a thin-blooded man stay in cold which often went down to thirty and forty below zero if he did not have some very good reason? Jules convinced himself that Taschereau was in love with Mariette and that slowly, unknown to her own heart, he was winning her away from her husband.

It is but the shadow of a man who will not do something in a situation like this, provided he cares and is not a philosopher. Jules Paradis cared greatly, and he was not philosophical. The light of his life was going out. Even Bijou felt it. He lay in his master's arms in the evening, while Mariette and Edouard played music and danced, and there were wrinkles upon his forehead between the brown and the white eye. A dog knows things before they are spoken.

Jules Paradis thought of many things to do, as a man will in such a case. He thought of meeting Edouard under the stars, with a knife, and settling the matter. But that would not settle it. He did not want to kill a man, at least not in that fashion. Paradis hated Taschereau—he could not help that—but he wanted to be fair. He struggled to be fair even though he believed that he had lost what was more than life to him.

Through these latter evenings Jules Paradis had burned as with a slow fever. The brighter became the eyes of Mariette and the gayer the ribbons in her hair, the more lively were those flames which ate at the soul of her husband. They jested with him because he sat and glowered at them. He tried to laugh, but he knew that his laughter was a cackle. If only he could get rid of that dancing fool perhaps the old calm happiness would come back to the *maison* Paradis.

"*Hélas!*" exclaimed Edouard, at the end of a dance. "It is time for me to go. And the time is coming when I must go back to the States!"

"You can't scare us any more!" Mariette laughed. "You are going to stay until Easter, at least, Edouard!"

"Impossible!" But his voice did not carry conviction.

"Yes! I like to dance so well and—I like—ah, all this in the evening! The music, it is wonderful!"

"But you will have the phonograph! Did not Jules buy it for you?"

"It will not be the same," replied Mariette.

Jules Paradis set his teeth together to hold back his wrath. He forced it down

as one forces a horse back upon its haunches. Just now a thought came to him, as the result of his nights and days of search for a solution. It was a little vague at the moment, but it held promise of setting him free. He could see the end, and he made his lips go back in a smile.

"You must not go too soon, Edouard," he said. "I have to go into the woods on business to-morrow, to the camp Garneau, for a week. Mariette will need you to play music and dance in the evenings. She and Bijou will be lonesome while I am away."

"Jules!" cried Mariette. "You had not told me about that!"

The sharp eyes of Edouard Taschereau went from her to the face of Paradis. Jules knew that they were searching him. The long fingers of Taschereau, a little stained by tobacco, scratched the neck of Bijou slowly.

"Ah, it is unfortunate, but I shall have to go to Quebec to-morrow, and I may be gone a week!"

CHAPTER IV.

STRANGE WORDS.

IN order to drive to the house of Jules Paradis one followed a lane which turned back around the end of a narrow field. Jules, however, had a short cut which went in nearly straight from the main road and came up to his back door after having passed through a clump of woods. This path he and Taschereau alone had used during the winter, as the few others who came to the house on foot were from La Concession and found the lane more convenient. Both Paradis and Taschereau took the short cut when they came up by night from the Chemin de la Canardière.

Jules Paradis departed, as he had said he would, to go into the Laurentians, with snowshoes and a heavy pack. He went up through the scattering houses of La Concession, into the forest, and there he waited in a sheltered ravine for the coming of night. With darkness he marched back to the hamlet, carrying his snowshoes on his pack, and followed the short cut to his house until he was in the clump of woods.

He left the path near a sharp turn and waded through snow nearly waist-deep until he was concealed among the trunks. It was moonlight, and he could watch the path without himself being seen. He was leaving no tracks which might later be identified as his; he would not put on his snowshoes until he was again above La Concession. By traveling all night he could reach the camp Garneau as soon as if he had slept in some chopper's abandoned shack and marched only by day.

"If he comes it will not be my fault, but his own," muttered Jules to himself as he crouched, half buried, behind a big hemlock. "If he has lied then he deserves—what will happen to him. I am not doing it! He said he was going to Quebec—said it to Mariette and me! *Sacré!* He will surely deserve what he gets!"

The night bit through the sheep-lined *capote* of Jules, which meant that it was very cold, even for the north country; forty, perhaps fifty below. So much the better! A frost-tortured branch snapped, cutting the stillness as with a rifle shot. Then came the steps of a man, harried by the searching chill. Creak, crunch! The snow complained beneath his feet.

Jules Paradis gathered himself like a panther about to spring. Tense, he raised his body higher out of the snow. He watched while a dark blot flitted among the trees, hurrying in the direction of his house. He drew in his breath with a hissing sound and became as still as the great trunk behind which he waited. A cry came horribly from the direction in which that dark form had vanished. Surprise, pain, terror—all were in the one swift sound. Then there was a groan and silence.

"Bon Dieu!" breathed Paradis, standing upright. He trembled from head to foot; his breath came in gasps. "He has done it himself! I left it that way! If he had not lied—not lied——"

Paradis floundered through the snow until he reached the path. There he went forward slowly, and still more slowly, until he saw what he had expected to see ahead of him—a black heap against the snow, moving a little like a wounded bird. Jules took cover and

crept nearer. Yes; Edouard Taschereau had been caught in the bear trap which Jules Paradis had set in the path and carefully covered with beaten snow that afternoon.

The great steel jaws had taken him by a leg; it might be that they had broken it. It required a lever to set the trap, and there was no means at the command of Taschereau for pulling the jaws open. Only a giant could have done it with his hands. The trap was chained to a tree, and the voice of the prisoner would not carry to the ears of Mariette. Long before the woods filled with gray dawn Edouard Taschereau would be frozen to death.

It did not seem real to Jules, now that he saw what he had done. That awkwardly moving heap, from which now and then came a groan, could not be a man who was going to die. By the hand of Jules Paradis? Yes; it was true. This way of ending it had come to him in a flash of dark inspiration when Edouard had said that he was going to Quebec. At first Jules had merely intended to come back and watch. Then he had thought of the trap. If Taschereau had lied, then he would meet this fate. It was his own fault.

Jules Paradis moved still nearer, appalled and yet fiercely determined. Now indeed would be the old times come again to the *maison* Paradis. Mariette would forget this bold-eyed traitor. Paradis had the lever for the trap in his pack. Later on he would take that trap away and hide it in the woods. The jaws had no teeth. There would be nothing left there to show how Edouard Taschereau came to fall and freeze. A bruise, perhaps, or a broken leg; but what would that prove?

A sound that was not a groan came from Taschereau. Jules listened. The man was praying, he thought at first, and he tried to shut his ears to the sound. He himself did not dare to pray this night. No; Edouard was talking. Strange! He could not have gone mad in these few seconds. Paradis crept forward his own length and listened.

"Courage, my poor little one! Courage, my Bijou! Thou, at least, shalt not die!"

CHAPTER V.

BY SUBTLE MAGIC.

ON hearing these words Jules Paradis was bewildered, and fear took hold upon him. Bijou? What had Bijou to do with this? He should be at home now, safe with Mariette; worried and whining because the loved master had not come. The dog was allowed to run about freely, but he seldom stayed out after dark; that was the time when his sharp ears and nose went on duty at home.

Jules waited, peering through the moonlight. He heard a groan; saw a movement. A yelp of pain came. That was the voice of Bijou. There could be no doubt: Paradis knew every intonation. He had brought this little animal up from earliest puppyhood, and no sound that came from the fox terrier's throat could meet his ears unrecognized.

Why didn't the fool let the dog go? Bijou would run home fast enough. Yes; perhaps he would bring help for the trapped man. Was Taschereau holding him? Surely he was not fool enough to do that when the dog was his only hope of life! Had Edouard hurt him? Jules became furious at the thought, absurd as he knew it to be.

"Pauvre petit!" said Taschereau, in a strained voice. "It was a bad dog, that monster that tried to kill my Bijou! Little one, thou art not able to crawl home. I will wrap thee up close to my body, inside my coat, and when they find me dead they will find thee still alive! Little dog, thou hast been very dear to me!"

For a minute there was silence, and then a tortured moan wrung from the depths of the suffering of Edouard Taschereau. The mittened hands of Paradis clenched into the powdery snow, and he drew in a long, deep breath. His eyes stared, straining toward the man he hated and the dog he loved.

It was quite possible to accomplish the death of Taschereau without sacrificing Bijou. He understood that Bijou had been mangled in a fight and that he could not get home alone. However, if the dog were kept warm there he would survive. After the cold had done its work upon Taschereau Jules could take

Bijou home and leave him to bark at the door.

The safety of Bijou was not the matter with which the soul of Jules Paradis was concerned at present. Something had happened within him. He felt as though he had been bathed very thoroughly in a medium which mysteriously cleansed the spirit. He felt lighter in weight. The night was no longer darkness patched by the moon. It was a fantastic form of beauty which had none of the hindering and obscuring properties of darkness as he had known it. The night became a gentle blessing and the cold a stimulant like good wine.

His feeling toward himself and toward everything external to him was becoming changed by a subtle magic. The fever that had been in his blood and brain for days was gone. Most astounding of all was the discovery that he no longer hated Edouard Taschereau. Jules felt as though his stature had increased. Looking up he seemed to be brother to the night sky. He had grown too big to hate.

"It is my love for Bijou," he whispered to himself thickly. "Name of a name! Behold this scoundrel who loves my Bijou, even in the face of death! How can I desire that man to die? It is this love that is my undoing—no—my salvation! It is a flood! *Maudit!* It has wiped things out!"

The lever for the trap was in the pack of Jules. He got it out and went toward Taschereau; looked down into the white, shadowed oval of his face. Inside his coat there was a whine. Bijou had caught the scent of his master.

"Be still, *mon petit!*" said Edouard. "Ah, it is you, Jules! You are come in good time. Some one has put a bear trap here. It could not have been you?"

"It was a foolish thing for any one to do," muttered Paradis. Taschereau was not an imbecile; he must know that no one would try to trap bears that near to La Concession. "I will get you out. Is your leg broken?"

"I think not. To-day, because my feet were cold, I bought some *bottes sauvages* and put many pairs of socks inside them. *Nom de Dieu!* I should have frozen soon!"

"Yes," agreed Paradis. "Let me get at the jaws."

"Bijou——" Taschereau cried out with pain as he moved. "Bijou fought with a big sled dog. By good luck I came along and stopped the fight, but he was too much hurt to walk. I was taking him home to Mariette——"

"Voilà!" interrupted Jules. "Stand up if you can."

Taschereau leaned heavily upon his shoulder; Paradis threw one arm around him and held Bijou with the other. Thus they came to the *maison* Paradis. Mariette cried out once, and then her hands became busy; for an hour she and Jules worked at the frostbitten hands and cheeks of Edouard and at the leg that had been in the trap.

CHAPTER VI.

THE WISDOM OF JULES.

EVEN when Edouard Taschereau had been filled with hot drinks and was wholly himself again, no one said anything of importance. Mariette was told that he had been caught in a trap in the woods; which might, of course, happen in the forests of the Laurentians. She did not ask questions, and Taschereau did not reveal the surprising presence of that trap in a well-used path.

Jules Paradis meditated as he rubbed lard upon the wounds of Bijou and made him a bed in the warmest corner behind the stove. He looked at the silent machine for making music; he looked at the face of Taschereau. It was mottled with spots left by the frost, but it seemed chastened and made finer by the little time he had spent alone with death. Jules no longer was able to think of him as an enemy, as a bad man. He was different; that was all. It might be that Edouard thought of Jules Paradis as a bad man. The quality of Jules had been changed by the love of Taschereau for a dog. It was absurd, and marvelous.

Paradis knew that the clear-seeing brown eyes of Bijou had found them both good men. And Mariette? It must be that whatever her blue eyes saw was right and true. Her face was so fine to look at! It had curves shaped by tenderness; the light of love was in

her eyes always for something. This love that had tripped the vengeance of Jules! Perhaps he had imagined that it shone more brightly than it should for Edouard.

Jules Paradis confessed to himself that his own small stock of wisdom was counterfeit, a shadow with no substance in it. It was time to ask *le bon Dieu* for wisdom. When he had finished with Bijou he rose and walked over to the phonograph. He wound it up, and the strains of a foxtrot filled the room. He listened with his head bowed, and looked up to find the eyes of Mariette upon him with a curious expression. He smiled gently.

"The new things are perhaps good," he said. "It may be that all things are good."

"Perhaps all people, also," added Mariette softly.

Edouard Taschereau sat with his head in his hands, considering the toes of his socks. He raised his eyes and smiled. *"Parbleu!* I have just been thinking that I have found the old-fashioned ways of La Concession good. I have been here half the winter!"

"Ah, yes!" Jules Paradis drew in his breath sharply, and his hands shut. He had come to a decision. It was hard, this thing he was about to do, but he knew that the idea was given him out of that greater wisdom upon which he had called. "Me, I must march! I am due at the camp Garneau to-morrow noon!"

"Oh!" cried Mariette, deep in her throat.

"Take care of my Bijou, Mariette! And—and Edouard. I shall return as I have said. *Adieu, mes amis!"*

He went quickly, before either of them could speak again. He ran from his home, in order that his reluctant feet might not play him traitor and turn. He had left it to *le bon Dieu!* He would go to the camp Garneau and wait through that long week for *le bon Dieu* to settle it. When he returned he would greet Edouard as kinsman and friend. New things might come; sometimes the old had to die.

When Jules Paradis forced slow feet toward his home a week later he was like a man who has lived many years in a strange land; a man who has passed through hardships and longings, and comes again to find whether there is anything left of the life that was his before the going away.

The shoulders of Paradis were stooped under his pack, his eyes heavy from lack of sleep and yet bright with a touch of fever. At the door he slipped the tump line from his forehead and pulled his arms stiffly out of the straps. He let the pack down upon the snow, but the weight was not lifted from his heart. Slowly he pushed open the door.

Ah! There was the stove of two bridges, rising monumental and bright in the center of the room. The pipe had been freshly silvered. The floor was scrubbed as white as a floor could be. Bijou came bounding across the room in an ecstacy of joy and with only the slightest limp. He leaped into the air, and his pink tongue reached for the face of the master.

Jules Paradis looked beyond him. Mariette was coming out of the pantry. The light was there in her eyes; the white, round arms were held out to him. He tore open his *capote,* that she might not be chilled, and swept her into his arms.

"Ah, my angel!" he cried brokenly after a moment. "You—why—you have smoothed your hair down again, after the old fashion!"

"Yes, my Jules!" She laughed and grew pink.

"And—Edouard?" he asked, with the name sticking only a very little in his throat. "Where is he?"

"He has gone back to the States, my husband."

"Ah!" breathed Jules Paradis. He stripped off his *capote* and flung it across the room. "Come, Mariette! Play the machine for music! I am going to dance that foxtrot with you if I have to get wooden legs in order to learn!"

Letting Her Down

BERTIE: "You look charming to-night, Elsie."

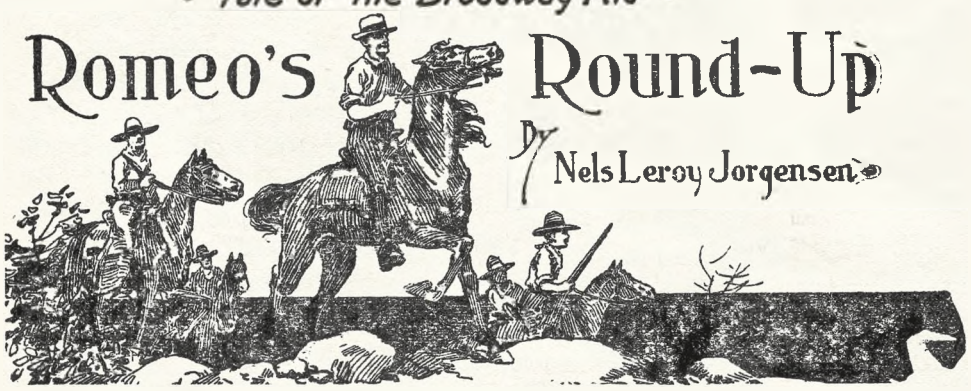
Elsie: "Stop your joking."

Bertie: "You really do. I hardly recognized you at first."

• Tale of the Broadway Kid •

Romeo's Round-Up

By Nels Leroy Jorgensen



(COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE)

CHAPTER I.

FLICKERING LIGHTS.

THE face of Jack Sevrance, United States marshal for the district, was always a mask; but a slight frown creased his sunburned forehead as he stared across his desk at Dan Winslowe. The summer afternoon was as lazy as only a summer afternoon in the far corner of Southern California can be; but there was an atmosphere of distinct unrest in the marshal's tiny office.

Dan Winslowe raised his sleek head, his amber-green eyes quiet and imperturbed. Actually he looked tremendously out of place in these surroundings, with his fine-chiseled features and his air of belonging to clubs along Fifth Avenue, thousands of miles from this ranch country.

"I don't want to get you all worked up, Jack," he said quietly, "but I think you ought to know. I got a tip from a captain of rurales across the border that assures me Vedas' friends are busy. They're going to make some kind of an attempt to get him out of jail."

Jack Sevrance bit his lip. He was a much older man than Dan Winslowe, more essentially a part of his surroundings, weather-beaten and slightly graying in his long service. Typically a man of the open ranges, he was the sort to despise Easterners. But Sevrance was different. His Western companions all wanted to despise him and his quiet, polished ways, but to no avail. Winslowe had a way of producing what they admitted was "the goods."

"The tip was probably a good one," Sevrance said at last, frowning more deeply. "But that's all. I don't see any way of getting Manuel Vedas out of this jail until after his trial."

"Which should be in about a month," Winslowe added. "If his gang is going to do something, they'll do it before then. And the San Resedas jail is a remarkably flimsy piece of work, isn't it?"

Sevrance nodded gloomily. It was almost two months since Dan Winslowe and some of the men from his father's horse ranch, the Circle W, had captured the marauding Mexican horse thief, Manuel Vedas, by trapping him on the American side of the line. Vedas was powerful across the border and his friends had not forgotten.

His trial had been delayed. Extradition proceedings were under way; it might eventually end up in Vedas' being transported to his own government authorities for trial. Meanwhile, his friends were active, and the San Resedas jail was a favorable place for just such an attempt as Winslowe suspected.

"Know any more?" Sevrance asked thoughtfully.

"I've learned enough to justify my suspicions," Winslowe replied promptly. "Yesterday two Mexicans came to the ranch house looking for work with the governor. Father sent 'em away. Well, I'd been watching them; and when they left, I followed at a good distance."

Winslowe sat on the desk, and con-

tinued: "Just at dusk, the pair joined a gang in a ravine about half a mile this side of the border. Which means to me," he continued smoothly, "that Vedas' gang is already on the job. If those birds had got positions on the ranch, with their pals lying ready right near here, they'd have had things pretty easy."

Sevrance nodded, watching his young companion wonderingly. "The Broadway Kid," they had dubbed Dan Winslowe when he returned from the East to his father's ranch. He never carried a gun; he never quarreled. Always he seemed calm and gay, anxious to laugh. But underneath it, Sevrance sensed the hardness of steel; sometimes it showed in Winslowe's eyes, with their flickering green lights. But always he seemed calm, polished, fastidious to the point of foppishness, careless of everything but his own ease.

Sevrance grunted. "You'd make a good secret service man, Dan," he observed. "Too bad you were born lazy."

Winslowe grinned. "I'm enjoying myself," was all he said, as he got loungingly to his feet with the grace of a cat. "If you decide you want Vedas smuggled off to another jail—San Diego, for instance —without having to know about it yourself, officially, let me know. I think I can handle it."

"Not a bad idea." Sevrance nodded. "And I don't doubt that you could handle almost everything." He hesitated. "Lawes Brandison of the rangers will be here to-night; I'm going to talk with him."

Winslowe's head jerked up suddenly. The door to the marshal's office had swung open without warning and now, framed in it against the bronze bell of the sky, stood a girl in riding clothes, a wide, soft sombrero holding down a mass of golden, tawny hair. For a moment Winslowe could only stare. Her blue eyes were smiling at the look of wonder in his gaze; but she tried to keep her red lips straight.

Sevrance laughed shortly. "Pardon me, Dan—this is my daughter. Ethel, this is Dan Winslowe; you've heard me speak of him. His father owns the Circle W."

She put out her hand with a little, friendly gesture. "I've certainly heard of you," she said; "even 'way up there in Los Angeles, where I've been exiled at school. The Broadway Kid! Isn't that it?"

He bowed laughingly. "In person!" he exclaimed, and drew down one eyebrow carefully. "And I think, Miss Ethel, that I've heard of you. There's a young man on the Circle W who hasn't been able to talk of more than one thing since you've come back from boarding school."

She blushed becomingly. "I'm sure I can't imagine who——"

"No; of course, you can't!" Winslowe laughed. "But in the last two weeks, 'Skip' Raynor has sworn off liquor, started to save his money, and taken up religion. All we can get out of him on the ranch is, 'Blue eyes, red lips, an' gold hair, just like you poured it'!"

She looked away. "Skip Raynor," said Ethel Sevrance quietly, "is a nice boy."

A little later, she and the younger man went out of the office, together, toward where the girl's horse was tethered beside Winslowe's. Sevrance stayed at his desk, studying the crumpled, dust-covered architect's plans of the old San Resedas *cuartel*.

"I've heard so much of your adventures," said Ethel Sevrance, "from father and Skip and everybody around here, that I'm going to make you tell me all of them sometime. Will you?"

"Hasn't Skip told you any of his own?" Winslowe asked.

She halted by her horse's neck, snuggling the soft nose of the beast against her cheek. Winslowe watched her eagerly; horses were a religion with him, and he could tell instinctively a true lover of the animals, such as this girl must be.

"I didn't know Skip had any adventures," she said, looking up at him. "I thought he was just—just a nice boy."

Winslowe laughed. Raising his eyes slowly, he became aware of a still, stiff figure standing just opposite them, on the farther side of the wide, dusty main street of San Resedas. It was a puncher, in wide, flapping chaps and a battered Stetson, from beneath which narrowed blue eyes were gazing with unconcealed anger

at the picture Winslowe and Ethel Sevrance made.

"Skip!" Winslowe cried.

CHAPTER II.

GETTING AN ODD IDEA.

THE girl turned at the name. Skip Raynor stood glaring for a second, obviously undecided; and as the girl called, too, he swung across the street with a lithe, rolling stride. But his eyes were still angry when he joined the two figures by the horses. He simply nodded to Winslowe and grunted a "Hello!" to the girl.

Winslowe bit his lips, the hint of a smile in his eyes. Raynor was jealous. Winslowe never had considered that. He glanced at the girl with appraising eyes. Yes; she was uncommonly pretty, he thought, and, if it weren't for Raynor, perhaps—— But he shrugged. Raynor was being a fool.

"Yes; I'm going," Winslowe heard the girl say, in answer to the young puncher's question; then she swung on him. "Are you coming, too, Mr. Winslowe—to the dance to-night?"

"I'd forgotten," he murmured.

"Out at the Bar V!" she explained. "Colonel West is giving a party." Entirely unconscious of Raynor's angry stare, she laid a hand in light, comradely fashion, on the silk sleeve of Winslowe's white shirt. "You must come. And you're going to tell me of some of your adventures."

Winslowe nodded lightly. "I'll probably be there," he said. Then he glanced apprehensively at Raynor's glowering countenance. "You'd better get Skip to tell you some of his, though," he said. "They're more exciting than mine."

He walked away soon after, swinging into his saddle and turning his mount toward his father's ranch. The Circle W, which bred some of the finest horseflesh in the Far West, was located over a wide area between San Diego and the little town of San Resedas, which was snuggled at the bottom of one of the slopes of the western Sierra de los Cucapos. Resedas was nearer to the ranch, however; and below, scarcely more than a mile to the south, was the international border between Mexican California and the United States.

Winslowe, as he rode, tried to forget Raynor's obvious jealousy. Naturally the young horse-wrangler had disliked seeing him, in all his fastidious glamour, with the girl who had caused such a devastation in the region of his own heart; but Winslowe felt confident that the first resentment would wear off. Raynor was young; younger, in the ways of women, than most.

If only the girl weren't so insistent upon hearing of his exploits! Lord, he thought, he'd had more exciting adventures on Broadway, than here! But Raynor had little to tell of himself; little, besides loyalty and a fierce, untiring courage and devotion to his friends. Those things were noble but not picturesque; and Winslowe was conscious that he had an unfair advantage which was not of his own making.

He shrugged, turning southward toward the border in the hope of discovering some sign of the Mexicans' rendezvous. He had a personal reason for not wanting Vedas to escape; he had been instrumental in the bandit's capture in the beginning, and Vedas had stolen a number of the Circle W's finest horses during the days when he was free to raid at will.

Winslowe hoped Sevrance would take precautions. One had to be on his guard when Manuel Vedas and his friends were up to their tricks.

When Winslowe found the little gully where only the day before he had come upon a dozen or more Mexicans encamped, it was completely deserted. Where could the Mexicans be now? he wondered. Whistling, he turned his mount's head and started back for the ranch.

It was dusk when he reached there, after a roundabout route which had taken him along the barbed-wire fence protecting his father's wide acres. Tucker, the ranch foreman, was sitting on the corral bars when Winslowe approached and dismounted. At sight of the newcomer, the foreman slid lazily to the ground and slouched over to where his employer's son was unsaddling.

Winslowe gave his horse a slap on the flank and the animal trotted into the

corral placidly. Then he turned to Tucker. Between him and the wiry, typically Western ranchman, there had been from the first a real sympathy and understanding, none the less deep and rooted because it happened to be unspoken, each of the two men being what they were.

"What's up, Tuck?" Winslowe murmured, detecting the frown on the foreman's grave features.

Tucker rolled a cigarette carefully in brown paper before replying. "I hear y' been tryin' t' pull a Romeo around Skip's gal."

Winslowe laughed. "So that's it! Skip must've beat me back from town." And he proceeded to relate the incident of his meeting with Ethel Sevrance and the young puncher, explaining Traynor's unfounded jealousy.

Tucker nodded when he had finished. "I figured it'd be something like that. But you can't convince Skip. He come back from San Resedas and announced that if he wasn't afraid of losing his job, he'd commit many and divers impolite acts upon the person of one Winslowe, Jr."

The other smiled and then instantly sobered. He jumped up to where Tucker had been sitting on the corral fence, rolled a cigarette with care, and blew the smoke thoughtfully through his nostrils. The foreman watched him philosophically. At last Winslowe slipped to the ground, a smile on his lips but his eyes grave.

"You tell Skip he ought to know better," he said quietly. "The governor wouldn't even fire his Chinese cook on my account and he likes Skip plenty, in the bargain.. Tell him that if he wants to pick a fight with me to relieve his feelings, to make it a good one, and he and I will have it out just between ourselves. Sabe?"

Tucker nodded as he slouched away. "That's the best answer," he agreed. "I kinda thought you'd suggest it. Goin' to the dance to-night?"

"Yes; and so is Skip—and Ethel!"

"Exactly. I'll ride over with yuh."

Tucker moved away toward the bunk house and Winslowe stood looking after him, a slight frown between his eyes. Naturally, the only redress Skip Raynor knew would be a fight. A fight—probably to prove that he was a better man than Winslowe, for all the latter's picturesque adventures East and West.

Winslowe nodded. Suppose he should allow the young puncher to humiliate him decisively at the dance—in front of Ethel Sevrance? he asked himself. That would be a big thing to do; but Winslowe had some strange kinks. Never in his life had he been in love with a girl, and there were a great many women who had been in love with him. Consequently he had developed a quiet respect and almost awe for real love when he saw it.

Lovers to him were charmed creatures; before them his arrogance was quieted and his reckless, laughing nature was sobered. If Raynor wanted Ethel, therefore, the puncher was going to have her; and Winslowe would do his part to help, even if it cost him his pride.

CHAPTER III.

AT THE END OF THE DANCE.

THE mind of Winslowe was made up when he and Tucker rode toward the ranch of Colonel West a little before nine that night. Tucker had been ready at eight o'clock; Winslowe had spent the remaining hour in the exquisite pains he always took with his dressing. When he finished, he was a picturesque, gallantly handsome figure; Tucker looked at him, grunted soulfully, and began to sympathize with Skip Raynor.

Colonel West was a perfect host. The massive living room of his big *hacienda* was tastefully decorated, subtly lighted, and a stringed, Mexican orchestra was playing behind a screen of ever-present palms. Punchers in their holiday best and laughing girls from all the ranches surrounding San Resedas filled the rooms and hallways when the last two men from the Circle W made their entrance.

Ethel Sevrance was charming. Winslowe looked around for her father and then remembered that the marshal had told him he was meeting Lawes Brandison, the ranger, back at his office in Resedas that night. Ethel, in the arms of Skip Raynor, was circling about the floor through a dreamy waltz.

When the young puncher caught sight

of Winslowe standing near the doorway with Tucker, Raynor's look of exalted happiness was altered to one of sullen anger. Winslowe smiled. Yes; he must certainly give Raynor his chance; the boy was taking his delusions hard, Winslowe felt certain. Probably Ethel had been tactlessly talking about him.

The dance that followed was a tango, which Winslowe had not learned in West Coast or border dance halls, but in Paris, where his father had sent him to complete his education. Winslowe had mastered a perfect tango and let the education go.

Raynor could not dance that number; neither could most of the punchers standing about.

"Stay here, Tuck," Winslowe said, "and then turned to his companion, when I want you, I'll come after you."

With that, he crossed the floor purposefully to where Raynor and the girl sat. and, bowing carefully, asked for the dance. Most of the guests stood about the edge of the floor watching admiringly, as Winslowe and Ethel Sevrance glided out to the lilting refrain of "La Paloma."

The number was a poem in their hands. Winslowe forgot everything in the world except the girl, who danced as lightly as a wood sprite. Raynor stayed in a corner and glared. By the end of the dance, only Winslowe and the girl in his arms were left on the floor; the other dancers had left to make room for them and to admire.

A ripple of applause went up when it was finished; and Winslowe, catching the girl's arm, led her, flushed and radiant, out through the big living-room windows, which opened on a low porch, toward the fountain that played in the wide patio beyond.

She was looking up at him and laughing delightedly at the success of their efforts, completely carried away for the moment. Winslowe had almost forgotten Skip Raynor; Vedas' crowd had left his mind completely. For the moment, he, too, was lost in the charm of his partner.

"You were the most glorious thing on the floor," he told her.

"If I was," she replied gayly, "you were the setting."

Winslowe swung around at a snarl from behind him, to find Raynor there, his usually handsome, boyish face dark with fury. They were well out of sight from the big living room and the orchestra had begun another dance. These three were forgotten.

"Dancin' and talkin'!" Raynor exclaimed. "Did yuh ever think to back up any o' yore bluffs by real action, Winslowe?"

The other caught his breath. This was the moment he had planned on and he found it hard. Somehow he wanted this girl's good opinion; and it was going to be more of an effort than he had thought to back down as he had expected to do. But Winslowe bit his lip and looked at the ground, conscious that the girl, after a half-stifled exclamation of reproof, was watching him.

"Have you got any objections to dancing, Skip?" he asked quietly.

"None whatever!" snapped Raynor, carried away by his jealousy. "Only I like a man who can do something else beside dance an' talk. An' when it comes right down to it, I ain't heard o' yuh doin' much else!"

It was a flagrant insult and Raynor's fists were clenched in readiness. However, Winslowe, every muscle in his body tensed, did not move. He looked up into Raynor's blazing eyes and then turned away.

"Maybe you're right, Skip," he said softly. "Suppose we let it go at that." Holding himself leashed by a furious effort of his will, he walked off.

The girl's eyes followed him amazedly and Raynor's jaw sagged. He had expected anything but this. He knew well the courage of his employer's son. His anger had impelled him to desire physical expression of itself, that was all; a good, tearing fist fight with the man he considered his rival, would have been a relief. But this! He shook his head mutely. He failed to understand.

Suddenly Ethel Sevrance swung upon him, tears standing at the edge of her long lashes. "If you think that was funny, Skip Raynor, I don't!" she exclaimed. "I'm going inside and don't ask me for another dance; you might just as well save yourself the trouble."

So Raynor was left alone. Gradually the meaning of Dan Winslowe's incom-

prehensible actions forced itself upon his understanding; and then he began to swear, long and softly, to himself, while the fountain played on in the moonlight at his elbow.

Winslowe, however, had not heard the dénouement of the scene. His head was bent as he walked away into the darkness toward where a clump of mimosas whispered together in the slight breeze, pink and white blossoms nodding sagely to each other. It had hurt to abase himself before this girl. He didn't love her, but it had hurt. His own opinion of himself had suffered. Winslowe had never permitted himself to look like a coward before—anywhere!

He stopped suddenly, impressed with a new sound unrelated to the intense silence of the Bar V grounds outside the range of the orchestra. He had heard the stamp of horses' feet and the creak of saddle leather. Immediately all the suspicions he had had in the last few days flooded back upon him.

Vedas' men! There was no reason for them to be here, and yet! His every sense quickened to alertness.

CHAPTER IV.

TOO LATE.

GLANCING back over his shoulder, Winslowe realized that he had walked a good distance from the ranch house. The orchestra was playing; he could not hear it, but through the leaves, he caught glimpses of Colonel West's guests dancing. And the horses of all the men from the ranches who were attending the dance, were, he knew, tethered in front of the hacienda entrance court. West's corral was on the farther side of the bunk house, the black, unrelieved bulk of which he could just make out to the westward.

There was no reason for horses to be in this lonely spot and the fact that they were was suspicious in itself. He moved forward cautiously toward the screen of mimosas, reminding himself that the ground suffered a sharp break downward just beyond the spot where the horses must be. He at last reached the shelter of the trees and shrubs, parting the green growth with both hands.

There were more than a dozen horses tethered there. Winslowe caught his breath. No human was near them; he moved forward carefully. Then, examining the saddles and bridles, he muttered gently. "Mex!" he exclaimed.

There was no doubt about it; a gang of Mexicans had tethered their mounts here, and they were lying somewhere in the dark about the West ranch house this very minute. He crouched low at a sound that came to him from along the ridge of earth where he stood; at his feet was a sharp declivity.

Peering through the half dark, he made out the figure of a man coming toward him, brushing the rustling mimosa leaves with his shoulders as he moved. As the figure came between him and the glimmering lights of the hacienda, he caught the high, conical shape of a Mexican sombrero and held his breath. A cigarette end reddened like a tiny, angry eye.

Winslowe held himself tense, waiting. The man was alone—a guard left behind to watch the horses, obviously.

Just as the Mexican came to within a few feet of where he was crouching, Winslowe leaped outward. His long athletic figure shot into a dark streak and the Mexican made not even a sound as Winslowe's fingers wound about his throat and the two tumbled headlong off the ridge into the darkness beyond.

Over and over they rolled, down the slope, until they brought up, arms wound tightly about each other, in the pit at the bottom. Winslowe's fist came up from underneath and caught his opponent on the side of his jaw. The man's struggles ceased temporarily and Winslowe took advantage of the Mexican's fleeting daze to swing himself to the top. In the next second he was astride the half-conscious trespasser, had thrown the man's pistol off into the dark, and had his fingers fastened securely about a coarse, hairy neck.

"Now," he said softly, "we're going to have a little tea party right here until I find out what's up."

"No sabe," the Mexican growled sullenly.

"No sabe, eh?" Winslowe whispered grimly. His fingers tightened; his knees clamped his prisoner's arm rigidly inert.

"Maybe you'll sabe in a minute, if you realize that my fingers are going to keep on tightening till I get some news."

The Mexican spluttered. Winslowe smiled softly, but the zest of struggle was in his heart.

"Uncomfortable? I'm sorry. Suppose you let loose a bit now, and I'll oblige, too. Who's the gang—Vedas' friends?"

The prisoner started, turning his gaze from the ruthless light in the other's eyes. Winslowe's fingers tightened. The Mexican gasped in agony.

"*Diablo*—stop! I will tell."

"Gracias!" Winslowe exclaimed, laughing, and relieved the pressure considerably. "Proceed."

The man burst forth into a mixture of Spanish and English, only part of which Winslowe could understand. But he discovered enough. The horses, as he had suspected, belonged to Vedas' gang, and the men were there for the purpose of rescuing their chief.

"But Vedas is in the San Resedas jail," Winslowe interposed. "What are you doing here?" He reflected that he was glad Brandison and his rangers were with Sevrance that night.

The Mexican was reluctant. Then his ears pricked up at the sound of clinking bridles and stretching stirrup leather from above them.

Winslowe did not notice at first. "Out with it!" he commanded. "What are you doing here?"

At that instant, he heard a soft-voiced command in Spanish come out of the dark overhead. His fingers tightened mercilessly and stifled the cry on his prisoner's lips. "Tell me, pronto," he commanded, "or you die!"

"It is too late!" the Mexican said, choking in the midst of a triumphant laugh. "They are taking the marshal's daughter and will hold her until Vedas is released."

CHAPTER V.

SPEED NEEDED.

STUNNED, Winslowe fell back involuntarily. In that instant, his prisoner cried out. As he tried to rise, the Mexican caught at his boots; and in a moment, the clatter of hoofs passed above them.

In those fleeting seconds the entire plot became clear to Winslowe. Vedas was in the county jail; but he was a Federal prisoner and Sevrance, as marshal, had him in custody and could release him at any time.

The man was holding to Winslowe's boots with a tenacious grip. The American staggered back and brought up his fist sharply. With a groan, the other sank back into the pit. Winslow started a mad scramble up the steep bank; but before he reached the top, the Mexican horsemen had vanished into the long line of trees bordering the hacienda grounds.

For a second he hesitated, and then turned back toward the house. There seemed no untoward excitement there. The orchestra still played and women and men were laughing. Had they really kidnaped Ethel Sevrance or were they merely planning her abduction? He brushed his clothes and made a quiet entrance, looking about for Tucker.

He found the ranch foreman in the corner where he had left him, and Skip Raynor was there, too. At sight of Winslowe, the young puncher sprang up hastily.

"Will you ever let me apologize, Dan?" he asked. "I was just a plain, horse-headed young fool and I've had plenty of time to realize what you did."

"Where's Ethel?" was Winslowe only answer, while Tucker looked up at him sharply.

Raynor shrugged disconsolately. "She went home a few minutes ago with young Wingo Sands, one of Colonel West's punchers. Wouldn't talk to me. Said I was—I was—well, just what I called myself!"

"She went home with Wingo Sands?" Winslowe repeated. The young man thought rapidly.

The Mexicans hadn't abducted her, then; they had waited to see her leave and planned to waylay her and her lone escort somewhere between West's ranch and San Resedas. Before morning, if they sent in their demands quickly enough, they would force Jack Sevrance to deliver up his prisoner in exchange for his daughter.

Part of the story and his surmises, Winslowe sketched in quickly for the

benefit of his two startled listeners. Then he caught Raynor's arm fiercely.

"There's a short cut between here and San Resedas," he said. "A rough bit of riding. Do you know it?"

Raynor nodded briefly and Winslowe continued: "Take it and get to Sevrance's office; Lawes Brandison and his rangers will be there, too. If you get 'em started at once, they may be able to intercept those Mexicans before they have a chance to get away."

Without another word, Raynor hurried out on his errand. In a few seconds, they heard his mount tear off into the dark.

Winslowe turned brusquely to Tucker. "Round up all the boys from our outfit," he ordered quietly, "and get 'em out to their horses without any noise or confusion."

"What's your game?" Tucker asked coolly.

"To see if we can't trap that gang in Dead Man's Gully until Sevrance and Brandison come up with the rangers," Winslowe explained. "You see, they'll follow Wingo Sands and Ethel out over the main trail and they ought to come up to them just about there. A few of us stand a chance of bottling 'em up in the gully for awhile, anyway. But once they leave the trail, they can hide forever in the mountains and no one would ever find them."

Tucker only nodded his approval of the plan and hurried away. Winslowe helped him in his task. In less than three minutes, eight Circle W ranchmen were tightening saddle girths and preparing for their dash. Dan vaulted to the back of his black mount and gave the word.

"It's speed that's going to count now," he said. "Let's go!"

CHAPTER VI.

OUT OF THE PICTURE.

THE place known as Dead Man's Gully lay about halfway between Colonel West's ranch house and the town of San Resedas, and it had received its gruesome name during an ironic moment from Colonel West himself, who had observed one day that nothing ever had happened there and that it was an excellent spot for almost anything to happen; therefore it should have a name in keeping with its looks.

"Something's going to happen there tonight, though," Winslowe murmured grimly to himself.

When he and Tucker, riding in the van of their posse, came to within a half mile of the place, the silence of the night was suddenly shattered by the echo of a single shot. Its only effect upon the group of riders was to make them bend farther over in their saddles and spur more furiously onward.

No one spoke. It was too big a venture. Jack Sevrance was a well-loved man and his daughter, too, had her place in the affections of all. Winslowe spread his men onto the turf bordering each side of the trail as they came nearer to the gully, so as to deaden the sound of their approach. He wanted, if possible, to gain the brief heights on either side of the place before the Mexicans became aware of their presence.

They would hardly be anticipating trouble from this direction, he reasoned, unless the man who had been guarding the horses had caught up with his fellows already. A loud cry drifted down on the still air; another pistol shot, and then an interval of silence.

Their destination loomed up—two steep hills in the center of which was a narrow opening, its walls shelving gently downward. Like automatons, at Winslowe's word, his men spread out and swept up on either side of the opening, loosening their pistols as they rode.

Just as he swung past the mouth of the gully, Winslow caught a glimpse of those sheltered within, a black, indistinguishable mass, but apparently getting ready to move. He gave a sudden cry of command when he and Tucker reached the top, and the silence was shattered further by a wild volley. His men had not fired to kill; they hoped to scare the enemy into panic. The moon came out from behin l a bank of clouds and painted the scene a pallid blue.

Winslowe, leaning sidewise from his saddle, peered down into the semidarkness of the gulch fifty feet below. The Mexicans were churning about in astonishment. One of their number, however,

bearing a dark bundle across his saddle, lifted his arm and shot out a string of rapid commands.

Instantly a sort of order was restored. The leader pointed toward the opening of the gully on the side toward San Resedas, and his men started for it.

"Block 'em!" yelled Winslowe across the gulf to the men who were on the farther side.

When the Mexicans reached there, they were met with a hail of shots. A few of Winslowe's men moved to close the western end of the pass. The leader of the Mexicans hung behind and his men recoiled almost upon him at the first attack. He still held his quiet burden across the saddle bow.

"Again!" he cried to his men, using, rather, the Spanish equivalent of the word. He accompanied the command with a volley of spluttering oaths that drove them on. They massed.

Winslowe looked nervously from the prone figure of little Wingo Sands lying motionless under his unmoving horse, toward the handful of punchers trying to hold the pass at the east. They could never withstand a determined attack, and the Mexicans, outnumbering them more than two to one, were desperate.

"Hold 'em for another minute!" Winslowe pleaded, above the crackle of pistol shots, his eyes on the Mexican leader in the rear of his men.

Winslowe caught Tucker's arm. The two sat their mounts alone on the summit of the rise over the battle ground. He pointed toward the Mexican leader.

"You're a good shot, Tuck," Winslowe said; "so good that I'll trust you with this job. I don't carry a gun, anyhow. Can you get that fellow without touching Ethel?"

Tucker's jaw was set. "I can wing 'im," he replied quietly. "I make it a point, Kid, never to shoot a man when I'm under cover myself; but I'll stretch it this once. I won't shoot to kill, though!"

"It isn't necessary," Winslowe said coolly. "Just get him out of the picture for awhile."

He waited quietly while Tucker sighted, the long-barreled .45 laid across the crook of his arm.

At the gate to the pass, there was a fierce struggle, half of it fists and pistol butts, in which animals and men were milling about as if in a fantastic dream, punctuated with the spiteful flashes of red pistol fire. The men of the Circle W could hold out for only a few seconds more.

Crack! Tucker's pistol spoke. Winslowe caught up his bridle with steady fingers, certain of what would happen following that shot, without even waiting to see the Mexican chief toss up his arms and slump heavily from the saddle to the ground, leaving the motionless bundle slung across his horse's back.

"Draw the boys off as soon as I get away, Tuck," Winslowe said calmly. "Then hang on the heels of this gang till Sevrance and Brandison come up. Adios!"

"What the——"

Winslowe tossed his hand into the air without any reply and Tucker watched amazedly as his employer's son touched spurs to his mount and forced it to slide precariously down the steep incline into the bottom of the gully. Before he was halfway down, one of the Mexicans caught sight of him and aimed.

Winslowe grinned as he heard the crack of a pistol from overhead and saw the man topple backward. He leaned forward; his mount gave a last leap, and, in a volley of dust and loosened stones, Winslowe slid to the bottom, just as the group of Mexicans became aware of his presence.

There was a loud, wild cry of anger and rage commingled as they turned upon him. Winslowe laughed, hung low over his horse's neck, and swung toward the western mouth of the pass. Ethel, bound heavily, was where he had last glimpsed her, flung helplessly across the leader's saddle.

Winslowe swooped down upon the riderless horse; it shied and his own mount followed. A scattering of shots rang out behind him but none struck. Reaching out, he swept the girl into his arms, swung backward into his seat, and tore for the western mouth of the gully. Shots and angry cries followed him as the Mexicans made for their horses and Winslowe vanished into the dark.

CHAPTER VII.

FAR IN THE REAR.

AS he rode, Winslowe loosed his bridle rein and let his animal take its head, devoting his time to undoing the girl's bonds. When he was finished, he propped her up in the saddle in front of him and she swung around, her eyes wide.

"You!" cried Ethel Sevrance. "Dan Winslowe!"

"The same," he assured her, "only slightly the worse for hard wear. May I apologize for the inconvenience of your seat?"

She ignored his levity; her eyes, wide and blue as the bowl of quiet skies overhead, searched his face. She shook her head slowly. "And you tried to make me believe you were a coward," she murmured. As he did not reply at once, she went on: "I know why you did that, you know—back in the patio."

"Maybe you guessed wrong." He glanced apprehensively over his shoulder at the sound of a shot behind them and the clatter of hoofs. "I'm running now, you'll notice."

He swung his mount in a wide circle and for a brief while threw off their pursuers. In ten minutes he had reached the San Resedas trail again; and by virtue of the loop he had made, the gully lay a long distance behind him. Still those hoofs thundered far in the rear; but the girl seemed unconcerned, perfectly content and confident when he told her why she had been captured.

Winslowe's arm was about her waist and he held her close, thinking of Skip Raynor. After all, he didn't blame the young puncher for being almost mad with jealousy.

"We ought to run into Skip soon," he ventured. "I sent him after your father. I say, Ethel, you're going to make up with him, aren't you?"

"Do you think I should?" She was sweet and little-girlish under the stars.

Winslowe envied Skip. "He loves you, you see," he said simply. "That should excuse him for anything."

"I suppose so," the girl mused. "But you—— No, you're not that sort, I suppose. Yes; I shall forgive Skip. Only I wish that you—— But look!"

Trying to follow the half-formed vagaries of her speech, Winslowe looked up suddenly. Outlined against the sky line under the soft glow of the moon, he made out a string of men riding outspread, riding hard, and with grim, silent purpose, toward them.

"Brandison's rangers," he cried breathlessly, "and your father!"

Behind them, the hoofbeats of the pursuing Mexicans still clattered; but in a few seconds Ethel and Winslowe were surrounded by the wave of hard-riding border police under Brandison. Half of the posse went on as the pursuing Mexicans turned in panic and ran in the opposite direction; the others stayed behind.

In those fleeting seconds when Winslowe's horse, bearing its double burden, had dipped into a little gully before rising to meet those riding to their aid, something had happened. Just what it was neither Skip Raynor nor the marshal, by whose side Raynor rode, could see.

"Bend down, Broadway Kid—this is adios!"

The girl's whisper was in Winslowe's ears still when he relinquished her to her father's arms; and Raynor, dismounting, took his hand.

The puncher listened eagerly to her account of her rescue and then turned to Winslowe. "If I was sorry before, you can step on my neck now, Kid," Skip Raynor affirmed with sincere humility.

However, Winslowe only laughed and wrung Raynor's hand. "Forget it!" he said. "She's forgotten; she told me so. And—look, Skip, she's waiting for you to say hello!"

The girl had turned and Raynor went up to her timidly. Sevrance turned away. In another moment, the rangers had returned, with them the men from the Circle W that Winslowe had left behind with Tucker, a batch of prisoners trooping before them, and Wingo Sands, grinning broadly in spite of his crimson stained forehead.

The attempt to rescue Manuel Vedas from the arms of the law in the United States ended with that moment.

A little later, Winslowe took up the homeward trail by Tucker's side. Neither,

characteristically, mentioned much of the fight, nor the bullet that had saved Winslowe's life as he rode down for Ethel.

Tucker spoke of the girl and Skip Raynor.

"He's a good youngster," Winslowe said quietly, "and I sure hope they're both going to be happy."

Tucker grunted and was silent. Winslowe put his fingers gently to his lips in the dark, when the foreman could not see. They were still warm and he wondered to himself how long a single kiss could linger.

How did you like this story? Will you write us a short letter giving us your opinion of it? At the same time we should be glad to have any criticisms that you care to offer on any other story in this number, or on the magazine as a whole. Any letter that you may send will be appreciated by the editors.

WHERE THE SHAMROCKS GROW

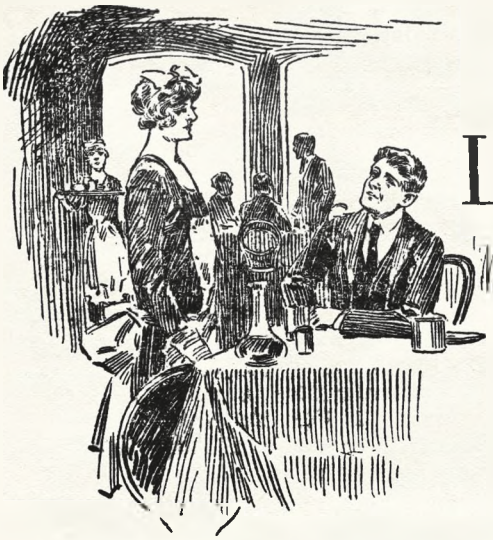
Pat B. Costello

IF you would like to find the angels' nationality,
Or where God goes for saints to light the stars;
If you would like to find the wealth of cordiality
That not a touch of self or wishing mars;

If you would care to see the height of nature's witchery,
When sun and moon and stars describe its charm;
If you would care to scan the Master Artist's etchery
Of cabins, while the ruddy sunset's warm;

If you would like to watch the revels of the fairy clan,
Or spy upon the gnome or leprechaun;
If you would chance a lure far stronger than the Pipes o' Pan,
Gaze in the eyes of any colleen bawn.

If you would like to taste of Eden's hospitality,
You'll find it where the shamrocks chose to grow;
There with a cabin and a colleen, and a cup o' tea
And yarns spun round the hearthstone's fitful glow.



Lucky Stuff

By D. J. Westheim

IT is risky to choose a waitress for the heroine of a story. To judge from the works of the great writers of fiction, the cashier, in her golden cage, is a much more attractive subject. The reason is hard to see; but so are most reasons. Judge for yourself if a waitress is as attractive as a cashier.

Hilda Peterson—yes, you have guessed it—was of Swedish extraction but American born. Her father had traveled faithfully between their home in the suburb and the planing mill; but one day he took it into his head—or perhaps it was his fate—to go on a journey whence he never returned. This left his widow with Hilda, two small children, a thousand dollars in life insurance, a five-room cottage—and luck.

Yes, luck! Hilda got a position as waitress in the ham-hash café on the corner of Fourth and—— But what is the use of telling you? You wouldn't find her there now, anyway. All the Petersons were proud the day she went to work. Hilda's mother walked by the place twice that one day to get a glimpse of her daughter cavorting among the tables laden with shining silver, real china, and white table linen.

Hilda was certainly good to look at. There were those, beside her mother, who feasted their eyes upon her. She was small and round and plump. Her head was crowned with heavy yellow-golden hair. From beneath a low, wide forehead looked a pair of light-blue eyes that on occasion took on a deeper hue of violet. Her cheeks were round and red like Wenathchee apples. The mouth was a trifle large; but the lips were full and rich. Her nose—well, it was bit flat and a bit tilted, but it did not detract from her general good looks.

She had on a spotless white dress with a blue collar and cuffs to match. A sort of diadem, also in blue, was perched daintily on the top of her head. She was quick in her movements. And whenever she hurried by, there was a flash of orange hose, neat if not slim ankles, and high-healed French shoes. She had bought them at the bargain counter for three ninety-eight.

II.

AMONG the guests of the café was Henry Masterson, sired by a million dollars and mothered by a French fashion plate. He didn't exactly sit down with good old Alexander and weep because there were no more worlds to conquer; but, for his young years, he had laid siege to many a fortress in the land of girl-soul and devastated many a proud heart.

The sight of Hilda thrilled him through and through. Her clean, healthy beauty

made him fairly dizzy with admiration. Handsome, rich, genial, Masterson at once set about to lead this daughter of the far North away captive. After the first two or three days, the talk ran something like this:

"Will you take a ride with me tonight, Hilda?"

"No, thank you, Mr. Masterson."

"Oh, quit calling me Mr. Masterson! Call me Henry or Hen."

She would smile, gather the dishes to one side, and inquire in businesslike manner: "What'll you have for dessert?"

Thus was he gently rebuffed. Try as he would, he failed to storm the citadel of her quiet reserve. He began to understand that Hilda could not be handled in the usual manner: but this only made her all the more attractive. He must be careful and go slowly.

Once or twice he saw her downtown with a young man, tall, broad shouldered, deep chested, with an air of prosperity despite his calloused hands. He might have been her brother. Then again, he might not.

Masterson was not exactly jealous. Nevertheless, he couldn't find in himself an overflow of kindly feeling toward the young man. While he took good care not to pester Hilda, Henry Masterson grimly bided his time, and watched for his opportunity.

His opportunity came one night when Hilda was leaving the café. He had just driven up to the curb in his expensive, high-powered car. She saw him and nodded smilingly. In a flash he was at her side.

"Just caught you in time. Now you will have to let me take you for a drive —home—around the boulevard—anywhere you want to go."

She started to shake her head; but, glancing quickly up the street, she changed her mind. "All right. It would be nice to take a spin around the boulevard, and then home."

Masterson was in the seventh heaven of delight. Things were coming his way at last. She stepped into the car, and confidently he took his seat beside her. At that moment the young man he had seen in Hilda's company drifted by on the sidewalk.

"Who is that young man, Hilda?"

"What young man?"

"Why, the young man who went by just now. The tall fellow in the brown suit. There he is, crossing the street."

"Oh, that is Hans."

"And who is Hans?"

"Hans Nilson. He is just a friend of mine."

III.

IT is customary that something should happen on a ride like that. The fiction writers usually tamper with the engine, puncture a tire, run out of gas, or something. It does not matter which, just so there is sufficient delay to allow the moon to shine and the parties involved to fall in each other's arms and whisper sweet nonsense—or is it a matter of weight and wisdom?

We should like to conform to the established rules; but we are concerned with facts. For that reason we are forced to report that the ride around the boulevard and cross city to Hilda's suburban home had no such romantic developments.

It is true that Masterson threw out plenty of feelers. But he was a young man of enough experience not to spoil his chances by being too abrupt or too insistent. And thus it came to pass that the drive came to an end without any of the intimate and thrilling episodes rendered immortal by the poets of all ages.

When they drew up in front of her door, it was already dark. Hilda started to get out.

"See here, little girl—are you not going to give me a kiss before you go?"

She swung lightly from the car, shook her golden curls, and ran up the narrow walk to the house. Masterton looked after her in dismay. He was not sure; but he thought somebody in a brown suit rose from the lower step of the porch to meet her.

Well, anyway, he told himself, the ice was broken. He had made some progress. By careful manipulation of the powers he knew were his, he would soon break down her reserve and inspire her with confidence.

So when he dropped in for lunch the next day, he looked at her with an air

of proprietorship. He had a moment alone with her while she was setting the table.

"May I come for you, to-night, Hilda?"

"If you want to."

IV.

IT seemed to Masterson as if that afternoon would last forever. Never had he seen a girl who meant so much to him as Hilda did, never had he been so deeply in love as now. That evening he told her so.

"How many have you told that story to before, Mr. Masterson?"

"To nobody. You are my first and only love."

"Tell that to Sweeney."

"No, honest; it is true. Oh, I have been smitten a little now and then! But I have never been really in love before. Why should you doubt me, Hilda, dear?"

"Because young men of your type are not in the habit of marrying poor working girls."

"Oh forget it! You are more precious to me than a princess. I want you, Hilda. I want you to—to be my wife."

"How can I know that you mean it?"

"I will get a license. Then we will go off to-morrow night and get married."

They had reached her door by this time. He wanted to put his arms around her and hug her. The only reason he did not do it was her quickness in getting out of the car. As it was, he caught her hand and started to draw her back into the car.

"No, no!" she exclaimed, half frightened. "Not to-night. I'll see you to-morrow." She pulled her hand loose and ran toward the house.

This time Masterson was sure he saw the brown suit on the porch. "The little vixen!" he said to himself. "She is pretty coy; but to-morrow will tell the story."

The next day Masterson sat in his accustomed place for lunch. It was a time when but few customers were present. Never had he seen Hilda so radiant. A feeling of victory surged through him.

She was waiting on a young couple who had a baby in a high chair, and he had a good chance to study her. That slightly tilted nose looked a bit saucy; but he felt he could kiss it. At last she come to his table.

Beaming with conscious victory, he could not refrain from saying: "You will not work in a café much longer, will you, Hilda?"

She smiled sweetly and blushed. "No; I am quitting Saturday night."

"Saturday night! I thought it was understood that you were going to quit to-night."

She merely shook her head and went out to give his order. When she came back he continued:

"Why can't you quit to-night instead of Saturday night?"

"Because I have to give notice."

"Blah! What does that amount to? If they don't pay you it's all right. You don't need any money. I've got plenty."

"Yes, but—but you see, Hans told me to quit Saturday."

"Hans! What in thunder has he got to do with it?"

She smiled, still blushing. "I am going to marry him next Monday. He was a bit slow; but I guess you fetched him."

"Fetched him! You mean you let me take you out just in order to—to——" He had difficulty in bringing himself to say it.

She smiled happily and nodded. Then she hurried out to get his order. When she came back, though, the product of millions and of fashion had disappeared —vamoosed in ignominious haste.

Now wasn't that luck?

The Wrong Time

CORA: "And when he proposed, I couldn't keep back my tears."

Dora: "You couldn't, my dear?"

"No; he had been eating onions."

These Days of Suffrage

MY husband has rooms at his mother's house," said a woman to a magistrate, "and as I object to living with relations. I would not go there. He can come and live with me."

"Where are you living?" asked the judge.

"With my mother!"

Crossed Signals

By Burt L. Standish

WHEN a likable young sports writer named Brennen was strangely done to death on Coffin Key, an island in the Gulf, Sidney Warren, crack pitcher of the Pelicans, in the Seminole League, tried to unravel the mystery. The island—near Palmdale, home city of the Pelicans—was inhabited by a grim hermit known as Maisel. It was just outside of the hermit's home that Brennen had been murdered. A New Yorker named Hunter was present with Warren on the Key the night of the tragedy. Hunter had come to Florida, he explained, to try to solve the disappearance of his friend, Courtlandt Vance, a wealthy youth, who last had been heard of in Maisel's company. Shortly before the murder of Brennen, Corbin, the disgruntled field captain of the Pelicans, had been drowned. The circumstances were suspicious, and the name of the sinister Maisel was connected with the affair.

Led by "Rabbit" Ramsey, the Pelicans were making a desperate effort to capture the pennant. During a crucial game, Hunter, who was pitching, suddenly saw in the stands a large, frowning man, whose eyes were fixed upon the playing field.

CHAPTER XX.

NOT GOOD ENOUGH.

IT had been "Punk" Edmonds, champion "ivory" hunter and a competent judge of baseball timber in the rough—otherwise he would not have been on the Vernon pay roll—who had picked Warren from the bushes the year before and given the rookie an opportunity to unpack his samples among the high-priced buyers.

Edmonds, who wandered the country over, making it his business to collect ivory on the hoof for the Metropole rodeo, had strayed south several times during the summer, and on each occasion Palmdale was included in his itinerary; which seemed to indicate that the Seminole League contained a few prospects.

However, nothing of moment had passed between Warren and the scout on those visits; nothing had been dropped to indicate that the Pelican artist, for all his twirling record and the strings attached to him, might be asked to leave the Ramsey arena and travel northward; but whenever Edmonds roosted in a field box and fixed his critical optics on the hopefuls that cavorted over a diamond, whether it was under the tropic sun of Florida or the mile-high ozone of Colorado, the selfsame hopefuls perked up mightily and displayed their goods to the best advantage.

Gus Vernon, master mind of the Metropoles, winner of a dozen pennants, was the Barnum of baseball. Every aspiring cub that handled or mishandled a spheroid, technically known as a ball, yearned to win a smile of approval from Vernon's casting director—a smile that might be translated into a contract and instructions to pick a locker under the big-show canvas.

Warren nodded to Edmonds, and the

scout nodded casually in return. There was a total absence of cordiality in his greeting; but that was not alarming. The Metropole representative was noted for his poker face and a perpetual grouch against the world in general.

"When did Edmonds show up?" Warren inquired of Ramsey when he joined the manager on the bench.

"About ten minutes ago. Sneaked in without a word. Guess I know what's in the wind," Ramsey added with a smile. "First time he hasn't warned me in advance, though."

Edmonds' presence in the stands, broadcast by word of mouth, spread magically over the playing field and into the dugouts. The horsehide warriors took on a new lease of life.

The lowly 'Gators presented an airtight defense against the assaults of the Pelican batsmen; and in the two frames following, not a hit was registered.

With but a one-run lead and brilliant opposition, Warren found himself bearing down on every ball pitched. He studied every man to face him, for a season on the local mound had given him a fair idea of their weaknesses, changed his pace unexpectedly, and pinned a great deal of faith in his backstop's judgment.

Between them, working cautiously and deliberately, Warren and Griggs managed to cross up the opposing willow waggers; kept them popping high ones into the outer garden, where they were devoured, or tapping weak rollers inside the diamond that were easily handled by the Pelican crew.

The 'Gators, however, were not to be denied their brief day in the sun. After two were out in the opening of the eighth, they worked on Warren for a free transportation and a double, which crowded a brace of cushions; then Anders, laboring in the short-field sun as Corbin's substitute, juggled a bounder and added to the disaster with a wild peg. When the dust of battle had cleared away, the visitors had put two men across the old-home doorstep and were leading by a chalk mark that looked as big as the Gulf of Mexico to the locals, considering the brand of baseball being exhibited.

Quick work in starting a double saved Warren's bacon in the next stanza, after a hit had been collected off his corkscrew samples and the man following had laid down a tricky bunt along the first-base line. But the Pelican mound worker blasted the 'Gator hopes of annexing additional runs by tightening up and striking out a pinch hitter on three pitched balls.

In what should have been the last session, with a one-run lead hanging over them, Griggs coaxed a pass from the 'Gator artist, Lockly sacrificed him, and Hopple, picking out a likely offering, came through with a wallop that brought the backstop across the rubber in a cloud of dust and a tangle of legs to knot the reckoning.

With Hopple perched expectantly on the keystone sack, Warren went to the plate, but failed to come through with the punch that would have beckoned home the winning run. The best he could do was rap a hard one across the infield straight into the second baseman's glove. In the rôle of a hit producer, the Pelican ace was a total eclipse; but, as with the majority of twirlers, a low batting average did not indicate the value of a slant-and-hook producer.

Nothing daunted, the locals trooped from their dugout to start the extra session, with Ramsey's sharp instructions buzzing in their ears.

Warren made up for his fiasco at the rubber by whiffing the first 'Gator to challenge his slants; held the next one down to a weak roller for a toss-out at the initial cushion and outguessed a menacing pinch hitter that the visitors rushed to the firing line, who bit at a floater and died on a lofty sky-rider to the far middle garden, retiring the side.

Coming back in whirlwind fashion in the last of the tenth stanza, intent upon writing finis to the prolonged battle then and there, the murderers' row at the top of the Pelican batting order tendered a Chinese-tong reception to the 'Gator slant artist, buried him under a fusillade of hits, and put across the winning marker before a man was out, leaving two of their number stranded on the corners.

To add to the general rejoicings in the clubhouse after the game, the news drifted in that the high and mighty Mullets had been trounced on their home

grounds by a score of six to two. So the Pelicans, as runners up for pennant honors, found themselves but one game behind the leaders.

Singularly enough, Punk Edmonds did not put in another appearance. He had spoken casually to Ramsey, had a word or two to say regarding the local baseball situation and the Pelican chances of annexing a brace of pennants—and vanished. Breath-taking finishes evidently held no attraction for the scout, for he was reported to have made an exit from the stands before the last localite scored.

The locker room buzzed with comments on the game in general, tempered with much speculation over Edmond's unheralded appearance. Ramsey had no explanation to account for the man's conduct. As a usual thing, the scout remained in town overnight and visited the Pelican leader; but on this occasion he had come and gone and left no word behind him.

Sometime later, on his way up from the playing field, Ramsey looked in at the hotel where Edmonds always stayed, only to learn that the scout was not registered and had not been seen that afternoon. Still later, Hunter, who had shown unusual interest in the scout's presence, appeared with the news that Edmonds had been a passenger on an outbound bus half an hour before.

"Sure it was Edmonds?" Ramsey asked.

"Positive. I was sitting in the box next to him all through the game. Couldn't very well mistake that mug of his. He hopped out of the park in the tenth inning, when your crowd came in to bat. After the game I walked uptown and spotted him at the bus station."

"He must have gone over to Belleview," said Ramsey. The manager was vexed and did not attempt to conceal the fact. "It's a sure thing Edmonds came over here to watch you, Warren," he went on. "I've no other ivory for him to be interested in. I figured the minute I laid eyes on him that he was here to leave orders for you to report to Vernon next week. Just as sure of that as I was of winning to-day's game."

Warren did not seem to share in his manager's disappointment. "I didn't hang up a particularly bright record this afternoon," he remarked. "Nothing for Edmonds to get excited over. It was the unlimbering of bats that won our ball game."

"I don't figure it that way," Hunter protested. "Why, you had those visitors eating out of your hand most of the time. It was up to you to keep them from scoring, and for the rest of the bunch to come through with hits. If that crab of a scout didn't admire your performance, he's blind."

"He might have stayed long enough to tip us off one way or another," Ramsey contended, aggrieved. "It isn't like Edmonds. I'll be hanged if I can account for his actions. It isn't fair to keep Warren on the anxious seat. Something must have happened that——"

The Pelican manager broke off and did not complete his sentence; did not voice the suspicion that must have been passing through his mind. But Warren understood readily enough, and smiled to cover up what disappointment he felt.

Edmonds' departure looked ominous, so far as the twirler's immediate future was concerned. That act could not be discounted. It seemed strange that the scout, on what must have been his final visit to Palmdale, should have had nothing definite to say to the manager or to Warren —nothing that would lead them to believe the Pelican ace was scheduled to don a Metropole uniform.

What was the answer? Had Edmonds been disappointed in Warren's showing? Had the twirler's summer record failed to measure up to expectations? Was he doomed to remain with Ramsey's low-rated club for another season?

Up in the big-time arena, the Metropoles were having a hard fight to retain their major-league crown. But a few games separated the first division teams; and each day the standing shifted. A breath-taking finish loomed ahead, with four clubs battling for the coveted top rung.

Unlike what had been the case in previous seasons, Gus Vernon's warriors were not assured of another pennant. Their million-dollar infield, their murderers' row of horsehide assassins, all were traveling at a fast clip; but their pitching staff,

once the mainstay of the Metropole fighting machine, had begun to crack.

The sports writers of the country pounded out reams of copy, predicting dire calamity. Vernon himself could not deny it; and all his cash customers howled indignantly for reinforcements on the twirling slab to ward off the impending disaster.

Warren knew that much—knew the material for which Vernon was combing the country. He had hoped for the opportunity to demonstrate his worth in fast company, and now, at the moment they were highest, his hopes had been dashed to earth. His chance was to be denied him. He had failed to make the grade.

Not good enough! That seemed to be the answer, the thing that would account for Edmonds' disappearance. And perhaps the scout had not considered it necessary to deliver the sentence by word of mouth; his conduct was sufficient.

Yet for all his interpretation, Warren accepted the verdict philosophically and maintained a smiling countenance, although Ramsey, and even Hunter, looked glum and downcast at what the afternoon had brought them.

CHAPTER XXI.

TWO'S COMPANY.

BEFORE the men separated shortly afterward, putting an end to the discussion relative to Edmonds' conduct, Chief Cosgrove appeared on the scene with a new bit of information that touched upon the Brennen tragedy.

"Just learned that Maisel tied up at the pier a while ago," he announced. "Being curious, I'm having him watched. I've assigned a plain-clothes man to the job."

"Good enough," said Hunter, once more alert. "You ought to get a slant on his activities, if he has any on this side of the bay. He'll bear watching. I'd like to draw that assignment myself," he added grimly.

"You'd better not show yourself," advised Cosgrove. "You're known to Maisel and my man isn't. If the hermit suspects he is being shadowed by you, there'll be nothing to learn."

"Of course. I didn't intend to horn in on the affair. I'll be interested to hear what your man reports. We've let Maisel alone for a couple of days, and he probably figures we've dropped the charges against him and that he's safe. Maybe he's brought back my jacket," Hunter added quickly. "Brought it back to keep us from paying another visit to his island."

"Not likely," remarked the chief. "Look me up to-morrow," he said in parting. "I may have news."

Riding out toward Bayvista later with his manager, Warren put aside all thoughts pertaining to Edmonds' recent visit and silence. The unmistakable verdict had been accepted, and for the present it was to be barred from his mind. Other, more pertinent matters took possession of his thoughts.

He was pleased at the news Cosgrove had imparted. In all probability, Hunter would accept the chief's advice and keep to himself during the evening; and with Maisel in Palmdale under police surveillance, with little chance of his returning home before the early hours of morning, the Coffin Key domain would remain untenanted.

The situation left nothing to be desired and the outlook was promising for the fulfillment of whatever uncertain plans Warren had had in view.

After dinner, however, when he revealed his purpose and asked for the loan of the manager's motorboat, Ramsey was quick to argue against the excursion.

"I understand how you feel about the affair," Ramsey admitted. "You consider it a duty toward Brennen. You want to produce some evidence to back up what you've said and put a stop to all these rumors. I can see that, Warren. I suppose it's the right thing to do; but if the situation is what you claim, there's no little risk attached to the venture."

"Maisel's in town," Warren answered. "I can look things over on the key without interference and be back here long before the hermit returns home."

"Yes; I suppose you could," Ramsey agreed, recalling the distance by water between Palmdale and Coffin Key and the approximate speed of Maisel's ancient boat. "Still I'm not in favor of it. I

don't like this lone-hand arrangement. If Hunter——"

"I'd rather not have him along," the other objected. "Not on this occasion at least."

Ramsey may have been surprised at the stand Warren had taken, but he did not seem to question it. "Don't forget that wing of yours," he admonished. I'm depending upon it for at least another game—perhaps two more if the series are pulled off. You ought to consider that, Warren. An injury to you or your arm now would be a calamity."

"I'll take care of myself," the twirler promised, undeterred by the arguments. "This is about all I have," he added, looking down at his right hand. "It's a mighty small peg to hang a future on; and I'm taking care of it."

Ramsey surveyed his companion speculatively. "I'm glad to hear that, Warren," he said. "You've had a bitter pill to swallow to-day. Some men would blow up and—well, grow careless. You get what I'm driving at, don't you?"

Warren nodded. "I won't deny I'm a little disappointed," he confessed. "Maybe hurt, too; but I'll get over it. There's no use beating about the bush, Ramsey. We may as well look at things as they are. I have yet to make the grade. That's the situation. Edmonds realized it and handed us the verdict to-day. But I'm not discouraged. I'm going to fight all the harder; and perhaps next season I'll achieve a Metropole contract."

"You're worth a contract right now," Ramsey declared stoutly. "I ought to know baseball material. You've hung up a record this summer that ought to have every big-league scout in the country on your trail."

"You're belittling Edmond's judgment, aren't you? He evidently knows what he wants. I may be going like a house afire down here, but matched against the company he's traveling for I'd be a flop. He must feel I'm not yet fast enough to join the Vernon regiment."

"Then he's a poor feeler! I've about lost confidence in his judgment!"

"Let's not discuss that now," Warren protested. "You're a mighty fine friend and manager to have, Ramsey; a sure-enough champion. If I do get into the big show and make good, I'll have you to thank. But to get back to where we started——"

The argument that had led up to the discussion of pitching merit was resumed, with Miss Dempster, appearing on the scene and learning what was on foot, taking sides with the manager; but in the end and against the odds, Warren won his point.

After preparations had been made, Warren did not object strenuously to Miss Judy accompanying him as far as the dock, where Ramsey's boat was moored; but he turned a deaf ear upon her entreaties and scoffed at her suggestions of danger.

"I'll be as safe on Coffin Key as you'll be on Ramsey's veranda," he told her. "Don't worry, Judy."

"But Mr. Brennen must have thought the same way," the girl protested quickly. "I wish you'd listen to reason and not start out alone."

Warren shook his head. "You run along home. I promise to be back before midnight."

Unfortunately, just when he was getting the engine warmed up and was prepared to cast off, Sheriff Graham strolled into view and at once interested himself in Warren's activities.

"Going out for a ride?" he queried, glancing at the pair with a knowing grin.

"A fine night for it, isn't it?" Warren returned, prompt to take advantage of the suggestion.

Graham's unexpected appearance threatened to complicate matters; but happily Warren saw a way to circumvent it. While there seemed to be no harm in divulging his real purpose, he was just as well satisfied to keep the sheriff in ignorance of his plans. It would avoid answering questions, to begin with, and Warren was not minded further to delay his departure.

"All set, Judy!" he announced, holding out a hand toward the girl. "Watch your step!"

The girl, alert to grasp the situation and quick to play the part assigned her, obeyed without hesitation. She stepped into the boat and seated herself as Warren cast off.

Once they were beyond earshot of the

inquisitive sheriff, Warren addressed his passenger. "Thanks for your assistance, Judy," he complimented. "Graham may have suspicioned what I was up to; but he won't figure I'm bound for Coffin Key with you along. That's why I played a ruse on him. Don't want him meddling to-night. As soon as we round the point I'll set you ashore."

The girl, after a brief period of silence, spoke quietly, determinedly, leaving no doubt of the ultimate purpose she had in mind. "I don't believe I want to go ashore," she said.

Warren frowned. "Now don't be foolish! You can't go, because——"

"Why is it so foolish? It's a wonderful night; the moon will be up presently and you know how I enjoy the water."

"But I can't take you with me," he protested. "Don't you understand that?"

"No; I don't understand," she returned calmly, making herself comfortable in the bow of the boat. "You assured me there was absolutely no danger connected with the trip. You said you'd be as safe as I'd be at home on the veranda; so I'd much rather be here, if it's all the same."

"But it isn't all the same," he objected. "It's no place for you. Of course, I don't expect to run into danger; but it's hard to tell just what might happen after I land on the key. Be sensible, now. Please do. Won't you, Judy?"

She shook her head emphatically. "I'm perfectly sensible. I'll remain in the boat and you can go ashore. Surely you can't object to that arrangement."

Despite the misgivings that assailed him as to the probable outcome of the night's adventure, Warren rather admired the ruse the girl had played upon him, the more so, perhaps, because he himself had made her an unwitting participant in one of his own and had complimented her upon it.

"You're stubborn, aren't you?" he rebuked with an assumed displeasure.

"Perhaps. But you've been stubborn all evening," she came back, undaunted.

He opened the throttle and spun the wheel, setting a course for Coffin Key without further parley, surrendering to the indomitable will of a woman. A point of land soon shut them off from the Bayvista dock; so Graham's prying eyes would be unable to follow their course.

"All right," Warren said resignedly. "You win."

CHAPTER XXII.

MOONLIGHT AND MYSTERY.

THE trim little boat plowed swiftly through the water under a sky of dim stars, leaving a fiery wake of tattered phosphorescence. Once away from land, a deep and slumberous peace brooded over the wide bay, the boat's muffled and rythmic exhaust scarcely audible.

The moon would not be up for an hour, which was to Warren's liking. He showed no lights, although it was contrary to maritime regulations; but there was practically no travel in these waters after dark, no danger of collision. Besides, he did not want those who might be abroad to guess at his destination.

Warren was not an expert navigator; but he was familiar with gas engines, and, during the summer, on frequent fishing trips with Ramsey, he often had taken the helm and listened to such advice as his companion felt called upon to give. However, there was no channel to follow on the present trip, no shoals to avoid, and Coffin Key lay three miles almost dead ahead.

Pilot and passenger did not enliven the short trip across the bay with conversation; and it was not until Maisel's lonely hermitage reared vaguely through the night mists, and Warren had throttled down his engine, that a word was spoken between them.

"Aren't you going to tie up at the pier?" the girl inquired, as the wooden structure loomed dimly ahead and the boat had not put in toward it.

"No; a bit farther on," Warren told her. "Maisel may return unexpectedly and I don't want him to know there are visitors abroad on his island."

He steered cautiously into the thick mangroves, cutting off his power and using an oar for a paddle. Then, with the craft well hidden, he secured it.

"Don't think you'll be seen here," he stated. "Keep awake! Don't advertise your presence unless you have to. Afraid?"

"Not a bit," she assured him.

Warren had neglected to provide himself with a weapon of any nature, considering it unnecessary. But he had brought along an electric torch and, as an extra precaution, a box of matches. Light, more than protection, he felt was advisable.

"Sorry to leave you alone," he said, ready to depart; "but you would come."

"I may be useful—in some way," she reminded him.

With a low goodby and another warning to the girl, Warren swung overboard and waded knee-deep through the warm, phosphorescent water, skirting the edge of the thick-growing mangroves until the pier was reached. There he got ashore, assured himself that Maisel's boat was gone, found the trail, and plunged along it, using the torch to guide his footsteps.

Somewhat familiar with the way and aided by his light, he experienced little difficulty in penetrating the jungle, arriving at length on the edge of the clearing.

Around him the silence was heavy, unbroken, and tomblike. He remained among the trees, listening, peering across the open space beyond, alert to danger, although he had no reason to take those precautions, since the hermit was absent.

The shack was shrouded in darkness; but as he stood watching it the moon began to climb the sky and gradually, as it mounted above the ragged roof of the tallest palms, the house and the clearing and all the objects surrounding it, came into being, like a photograph negative under a developing fluid.

Warren watched, fascinated by the picture that presented itself, charmed by the radiant loveliness that only a Southern moon can provide, almost forgetful of the mission that had brought him to the spot.

Presently, unafraid, he crossed the clearing and entered the shack without hesitation, again making use of his torch, although that was unnecessary, for the moonlight streamed through the open windows and doors, flooding the room.

So far as Warren was able to determine, nothing had been changed since his former visit. The chairs, the bench, and the table, all seemed to be in the positions he last remembered them. Even Hunter's leather jacket, which he had neglected to take away with him, and over which he had expressed so much concern, still lay on one end of the bench where its owner had tossed the garment two days before, after the discovery that the pockets had been rifled.

Apparently Maisel had not bothered to pick it up. Looking upon the jacket, Warren wondered if the hermit had found the note Hunter had written; wondered if it had been deciphered and if the message to Vance had been at the bottom of the tragedy. At all events, the note was missing, and that in itself seemed significant.

After a swift, embracing survey of the premises, Warren endeavored to visualize, bit by bit, every move of the three actors in that short scene preceding the tragedy; picturing the business of the characters, recalling the speeches and all that which had led up to them. His alert mind became a page of script on which he jotted down the stage directions.

He placed himself at the window where Brennen had stood at the moment of sighting the unknown outside the shack during the height of the storm; followed his probable and most likely course across the room to the threshold of the lean-to, remembering as he did so, the chair which the man apparently had stumbled against and which must have called forth the angry exclamation.

Warren, enacting the scene, reconstructing it from memory, tried to recall all that had been said and done in those few critical minutes; and lastly, he walked to the door of the lean-to, by which Brennen must have left the premises. The pitcher stood looking off into the white moonlight, his eyes straying from object to object until at length they came to rest upon the tall spikes of palmetto behind which the Coffin Key victim had been found.

For a considerable time he remained there, motionless as the ancient palms beyond the shack, the world about him steeped in the brooding jungle silence, his mind filled with supposition and conjecture, his eyes troubled. Then he bestirred himself, again to survey the rooms, the dingy walls and furnishings of which,

now magically touched by moonlight, were softened and beautified.

He sat down upon the bench in the larger room, leaning against the thin partition. The bench, some distance from the open windows, was wrapped in shadows; and through the windows he glimpsed the wall of trees beyond that reared itself, a seemingly impenetrable barrier, between himself and the Gulf, whose distant surf crooned like the far murmur of wind among the pines.

The damp air was sensuous with perfume from the flowers that embowered the shack, for tropic blossoms ever were prodigal with their fragrance after nightfall. And with all the troubles that oppressed him, with all the mystery yet to be solved, Warren was not wholly immune to the subtle beauty that enveloped him. It lulled him; wove a magic spell about him that he did not at the moment attempt to shake off.

He came to understand, more fully perhaps, why Maisel had made of the spot a hermitage, a refuge far removed from the haunts of men and their distracting artifices: a haven of quiet and peace; a place wherein to dream and forget, carefree, untroubled——

Abruptly, coming out of his reverie, Warren's head bent forward, his muscles stiffened, and his eyes fixed themselves upon a patch of moonlight beyond the open doorway. For an instant, but only that, he fancied he was dreaming, that what he looked upon was a thing of his imagination, conjured out of his drifting thoughts and induced by the witchery of the night.

At once, however, he knew better; knew that what his eyes beheld was of flesh and blood. For the man he saw, at first standing like an image against the background of jungle, clear-cut in the moonlight, had started across the clearing.

Incredulously, his pulse quickening at the sudden, unheralded vision, Warren stared. He saw it was not Maisel, not the Coffin Key recluse; and as the figure approached, Warren's alert eyes appraised it swiftly.

The newcomer was thin, bare of head and feet, clad in frayed shirt and trousers. He advanced slowly, almost warily, as if suspecting some unknown danger lurked in the shack beyond, his arm swinging by his side, his neck thrust forward. He looked, suddenly, grotesque and unreal—a figure that had stepped from the pages of a fairy book, trailed by a misshapened shadow.

Warren aroused himself from the bench and pressed back against the wall, his mind filled with a dozen conflicting plans. What was to be done? Should he try to leave through the lean-to door? It could be done, if done swiftly, and the stranger left in ignorance of the shack's former occupant. Should he remain among the shadows, to watch, to confront the newcomer, perhaps to seek a reason for the man's unheralded visit?

He realized he was unarmed; but so was the visitor, so far as Warren could determine. And in the end, curiosity got the better of him. He was reluctant to retreat at this critical moment—to leave the unknown in possession of the place—to find himself confronted by still another unsolved mystery. He resolved to wait, accept whatever the future held, to close with the man if violence became necessary, trusting to his fists and wits to protect himself.

The stranger continued to advance noiselessly, with the same even, cautious tread. Upon reaching the doorway he halted expectantly, his eyes seeking to probe the shadows that lurked within. And standing there, as if beneath a revealing spotlight, Warren, himself concealed, was enabled to study the visitor at close quarters.

He saw now that the newcomer was thin, almost emaciated; gaunt of features, his hollow cheeks covered with a stubble of beard. His hair was black, long, and unkempt. His eyes were deep-set and heavily lidded; across one cheek, showing up vividly, ran an ugly scar that touched one corner of his mouth and twisted it into a leer.

To Warren, swiftly taking in those details, it was a face not readily forgotten; a face, at once repulsive, sinister, and brutish, that stamped itself indelibly upon his mind.

After the unhurried scrutiny, a host of baffling conjectures began to crowd themselves into his thoughts. Who was this

man? Why was he on Coffin Key? Could he be Vance—Hunter's missing friend? Had the man remained here, hidden, and until now, undetected, for all this time?

If it was Vance, then Maisel had lied deliberately about having a companion. What lay back of that? Was the hermit protecting the man? Was it possible, as Hunter had suggested, that the man lived in some remote part of the key, or had he come across from a neighboring island merely as a visitor for the night?

Then suddenly, overwhelmingly, a far more significant question assailed Warren's alert mind—a question that swept all else aside. Had this skulking, scarred-cheeked man been abroad on Coffin Key during the storm two days before? Was this the man Brennen had glimpsed from the window. Had he played a part in the tragedy that followed? Was this actor, and not the hermit, the man guilty of murder? And had he, later, spirited away the evidence of his crime?

Warren, in the grip of the amazing suppositions that rushed upon him, caught at his breath. Any one of the startling theories might be correct; evidence alone was missing.

But the all important thing—the thing now to be considered and taken advantage of—was that a new character had appeared upon the scene; that he must have a purpose in visiting Maisel's shack during its owner's absence, and that, left to his own devices, the man might be the instrument of his undoing; that he might furnish, in some way, the key to unlock the mystery.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THINGS TO REMEMBER.

THE unknown visitor, after his first show of hesitation at the doorway, stepped into the room. Warren, instantly alert and prepared for an encounter, nevertheless was grateful that, crouched among the deeper shadows, he would be reasonably secure from observation unless the newcomer decided to make a thorough investigation of Maisel's premises.

However, the man seemed satisfied that, except for himself, the shack was untenanted. Moreover, it dawned upon Warren, who watched the intruder narrowly, that he was more or less familiar with the house, for he picked his way through the larger room and walked directly into the lean-to adjoining.

What the man did there, Warren was not in a position to observe; but from the sounds that ensued, he concluded the visitor was making a hurried search of the place.

A minute or so later the man appeared again and crossed the room to the large fireplace. His hands went out to explore the rough coral-rock surface of the structure; and next, from his shadowy retreat, Warren saw the man tug at one of the rocks, as if in an effort to dislodge it.

Before he succeeded in that undertaking, whatever it implied, the worker halted, came erect, and sprang toward the nearest window, as if some noise beyond had alarmed him, although Warren himself heard nothing. For some time the stranger remained there in an attitude of uncertainty, as motionless as if carved in wood, his head thrust forward, the scar on his cheek standing out in vivid relief under the moonlight that streamed upon him.

Then, before Warren was aware of the man's intention, he whirled, crossed the room with swift steps, darted through the lean-to, and apparently left the shack by the rear door.

Profound, unbroken silence followed that strange piece of business. After waiting, ever alert, and at length assured that the man had fled, Warren stood up, grateful for the opportunity to ease his cramped muscles. The abruptness of his visitor's departure had taken Warren by surprise. He saw that it was too late now to set off in pursuit; too late to entertain hope of overtaking the man of mystery.

Perhaps, after all, it was just as well, Warren reasoned comfortingly. To know he had been watched—had been seen at all—might interfere with whatever program the intruder had had in mind. Up to the present, Warren, for all his mistrust and suspicion, had no charge to bring against the man. To take him prisoner, if that had been possible, to demand a reason for his appearance on the scene, would be barren of result.

Warren remembered that he, himself, was a trespasser, and that he was not in a position to challenge the presence of another.

With all this passing through his mind like a roll of flickering film, Warren moved quietly along the wall that separated the rooms, reached the lean-to door, and cautiously peered out; but the clearing beyond, almost as bright as day under the moonlight, was deserted.

Debating a new problem that confronted him, Warren was momentarily nonplused. If the hermit had returned so early—and he could think of none other abroad at that hour—Warren's position was uncomfortable. He did not care to be found as a trespasser, aside from the possible danger entailed; moreover he did not want Maisel to learn of his visit to the key.

Yet to leave the shack now, to cross the clearing, would be to disclose his presence to the recent intruder, who probably lurked watchfully among the trees. Either situation would defeat the purpose he had in mind.

Still there were no sounds beyond the far-away murmur of the surf and the whispering breeze that stirred the jungle foliage. After a careful observation from the door and windows, with nothing to reward his vigilance, Warren found himself more puzzled than ever. He was unable to fathom the cause of his visitor's hasty departure. Something—some sound or sign—must have frightened him away; but what it had been remained uncertain.

Warren found himself at that juncture engaged in another mental skirmish; and, as before, he came out worsted. Conjectures were plentiful; but they produced little satisfaction in the end, however plausible.

He decided, after a speculative glance at the high-riding moon, to remain in the shack for another hour, unless forced to leave, for by that time the moon would drop behind the tall trees and a greater part of the clearing would be in shadow, facilitating an undetected departure.

During his enforced wait, yet ever on the alert for possible interruption, Warren gave his attention to the fireplace. Unfortunately he dared not bring the torch into action. He scanned the roughly laid coral rock, examined it closely with his fingers, but failed to detect anything unusual—nothing that might account for the interrupted activities of his late visitor.

The walls of plastered rock, reaching from floor to ceiling, seemed to be solid both in appearance and by test; and, after subjecting them to a critical inspection, so far as the light permitted, Warren gave up the quest.

Fireplaces, he knew, were long the favorite caches of those who kept their valuables at home and put not their trust in banks; yet it seemed a remote chance indeed that Maisel would have anything worth hiding. Then, swiftly, Warren recalled the reputed legacy left to Vance. The hundred thousand in currency, so Hunter had reported! And as also reported, it had been brought to Coffin Key intact.

Even with that thought taking definite form in his mind, Warren refused to consider it seriously. If the man he had seen to-night should be Vance, that at once exploded Hunter's murder theory; and with Vance on the island, alive, it was doubtful if his fortune would be in Maisel's possession.

However, the stranger had been industriously occupied at something and must have had a purpose both in his visit to the shack and his unmistakable interest in the fireplace. If it was Vance, that would leave his sneak-thief deportment to be accounted for, with his appearance during the hermit's absence and his reason for being so oddly frightened away.

Sitting back among the shadows on the bench, Warren gave himself up to somber reflection. Hunter's jacket still lay on the far end of the bench. Brought to his attention again, Warren recalled the anxiety expressed by its owner at leaving the garment behind, two days before, and how Hunter had suggested returning for it that same night after putting the sheriff ashore.

Remembering that, Warren decided to carry the jacket back to Bayvista with him and turn it over to the pilot the next day, although that act would disclose the fact of his night's visit to the key. Hunter doubtless would think it strange at

not having been invited to accompany Warren; but the latter felt his visit could be explained in some satisfactory manner.

During the period of his reflections, Warren became aware that the light was dimming about him, slowly but none the less perceptibly; and from a window he saw the shadows were creeping nearer to the shack. Soon a part of it would be covered, and in the darkness Warren could make his exit unobserved.

The luminous dial of his watch proclaimed the hour past midnight. Judy would be growing impatient with her lonely vigil among the mangroves. There was nothing to keep him longer, he decided; little hope remained that his unknown visitor would return to resume his interrupted labors.

With the jacket in his hand, folding it in a manner to make carrying easier, Warren voiced a sudden exclamation; then his pulse quickening, he replaced the garment upon the bench, in the position he had found it, his eyes fixed upon the distant edge of moon-bathed clearing.

Across it, a man strode: a tall, lithe figure that Warren at once recognized as Maisel. The pitcher, already on his feet, slipped noiselessly through the lean-to door and, befriended by the deep shadows, with the shack between him and the approaching man, reached the safer refuge of the trees.

Turning then, he saw Maisel enter the shack; saw, an instant later, the glow of a lighted lamp. After that, Warren followed the fringe of trees and at length came upon the trail, along which the hermit must have traveled a few minutes before.

Reaching it, assured that his movements had not been detected, he hastened to thread its length, once more calling upon the aid of his torch to guide his footsteps, leaving the shack and the clearing behind him in possession of their owner.

His few hours on Coffin Key had been replete with interest and surprises, his discoveries significant. Speculations still were rife in his mind; there remained many puzzling questions to be answered and plans as yet unmatured to be perfected and carried out. Still he was content.

Warren reached the end of the trail without mishap, stepped into the water below the dock, and, after a glance at the hermit's moored boat, waded along toward the spot where his own craft had been concealed.

He found it at last, after some difficulty, when a low, guarded voice reached his ears. It startled him until, a second later, he heard his own name spoken.

"Hello! That you, Judy?" he responded softly.

Presently he was on board and the girl was speaking to him rapidly. "I heard some one coming. I wasn't sure——"

"Why? Any one else in the neighborhood?" he asked.

"There was another boat close by, just before Maisel arrived," she answered.

Warren was at once alert. "Another boat?" he echoed, while the thought flashed to him suddenly that perhaps it had been the stranger seen on the key putting off toward some neighboring island. "Did you see who it was?"

"Yes; there were two men aboard. One was Mr. Hunter."

The news surprised him, but after a moment of reflection, he smiled. "Hunter must have taken advantage of Maisel's absence to come over and do a little investigating on his own hook. Not so strange, after all. Both of us on the same mission, and both trying to keep the fact a secret. Where did the men go? I didn't see but one boat at the dock just now."

"It put off without landing," the girl replied. "I heard the voices of the men and recognized Mr. Hunter. And almost at once I heard another boat coming across the bay."

"Maisel?"

"Yes; it turned out to be."

"That probably scared Hunter off," said Warren. "He made a mistake by waiting so long before reaching here. You're quite sure neither of the men went ashore?"

"Positive. They went past me—not a dozen feet away—headed toward Bayvista. I watched them out of sight and the boat didn't try to put back or change its course."

"Well, they probably were forced to call off their program," said Warren, confident that Hunter would not try to set foot on Coffin Key so long as he knew Maisel was at home. "Hard luck."

"Did you learn anything?" the girl asked quickly.

"A little." Warren untied the boat and poled it out from the mangroves before starting the engine. "Among other things," he resumed later on, "I've discovered that Maisel doesn't seem to be the lone occupant of the key, and that's enough to set me thinking."

"Thinking? About what?"

"We may find out, in the end, that the hermit had nothing to do with Brennen's death," he told her.

CHAPTER XXIV.

LUCKY BREAK.

ALTHOUGH Miss Dempster was all eagerness to learn every particular regarding his visit to Coffin Key, Warren divulged very little, merely sketching an outline of his adventures. As to his new theories, interesting as they seemed, he said nothing. And while the girl may have suspected much that had been left unsaid, she avoided asking too many questions.

He disclosed a little more to Ramsey the following morning, but warned the Pelican leader to keep the revelations strictly to himself, particularly the knowledge that a new actor had made an appearance on the Coffin Key stage and seemed destined to play an important part in the tragedy-drama.

"Why, it's the biggest thing yet," Ramsey declared, at once excited over what had been told him. "The sheriff ought to be tipped off. It throws an entirely new light on the affair. The fact that Maisel has a companion——"

"I'm not so sure he's a companion," Warren broke in. "May have been a trespasser like myself. In fact, there are any number of things I'm merely surmising; and I don't want Graham on the scent until I've made more headway. Chances are he wouldn't believe what I could tell; so it's better to say nothing about it."

"Do you think this man could be Hunter's friend—the man he came here to find?"

"There's that chance; yes."

"And the same chance he murdered Brennen?"

Warren nodded. "Why not? In my opinion he's as likely a suspect as Maisel, although I've found no motive as yet to support any charges against him."

"Well, that puts a queer twist on things, doesn't it?" Ramsey asserted. "Wonder what Hunter would say to this thing? A friend of his a murder suspect! Not so very complimentary, is it?"

"I don't propose to tell him just yet," said Warren.

"Seems to me it would be the decent thing to do. He's bound to learn of it. You could tell him just what you've told me and let him draw his own conclusions."

Ramsey's proposal failed to make an impression on Warren. "A better plan would be to let Hunter find this out for himself," he suggested.

"How can it be arranged?"

"He might join me on the next trip to Coffin Key," Warren replied. "That would simplify matters."

"It probably would, if the other chap conveniently appeared on the scene for Hunter's benefit."

"Chances are he'll show himself again when Maisel leaves the island; and we'll try to be on hand."

In Palmdale, shortly before noon, Warren visited Cosgrove's office, to learn from the chief that the plain-clothes man assigned to shadow Maisel the night before had had nothing of interest to report. The hermit had met no one, and after making a few purchases at the stores along the water front, had set off again in his boat. No effort had been made to detain or question him.

"I didn't expect we would learn much," Cosgrove said, after rendering an account of Maisel's visit. "In fact, I don't think there's anything to learn," he added, "although you and Hunter probably won't agree with me."

Warren did not volunteer to argue the question; neither did he think it necessary to refer to his activities of the night before. Cosgrove was still a skeptic, so far as Brennen's death was concerned,

and Warren realized that whatever he chose to reveal would be taken with a grain of salt.

Besides, the Palmdale authorities had no jurisdiction over Coffin Key. That was Graham's field; and as the sheriff viewed the situation in Cosgrove's light, Warren could expect very little aid or encouragement from those in power.

Hunter did not make an appearance during the morning, nor did Warren seek him out at the hotel or pier, where the hydroairplane was moored; but before the game was called that afternoon, he saw Hunter take his accustomed chair in one of the lower field boxes.

At the end of the batting practice, after Warren had worked up a perspiration knocking fungoes to the outfielders, Hunter beckoned to him.

"Thought we would learn something worth while to-day," Hunter began, when Warren came up to the netting; "but Cosgrove reports that our hermit friend behaved himself last night."

"Yes; I heard the same."

"I'm getting a bit anxious to visit Coffin Key again. Don't you think we've laid off long enough? How about venturing over in that direction to-night?"

"Suits me," returned Warren. He was not at all disappointed that Hunter had failed to reveal his own activities of the night before. The deception was mutual.

"We can't use the plane, of course," Hunter stated. "Too noisy. I suppose we can pick up a boat and get over to the key without much trouble."

Warren informed him that transportation could be arranged; that Ramsey would lend them a power boat and that it would simplify matters to leave from the Bayvista pier instead of Palmdale, a saving of perhaps a dozen miles.

Hunter seemed pleased at what he heard, although it was obvious that he already was in possession of the facts. "Good! We can start right after dinner —before the moon gets up. My jacket's still over there, you know," he added. "I'll bring it back with me unless Maisel's appropriated it himself."

Warren might have convinced the owner to the contrary; might have told him that, when last seen, perhaps twelve hours before, the jacket still rested upon the bench; that after picking it up, intending to bring it back with him, Warren had abruptly changed his mind. But he was not tempted to impart that news.

"I don't think the hermit would be in need of a leather coat this sort of weather," Warren remarked.

The clang of the gong in the scorer's box and the umpire's sonorous announcement of the batteries for the game, put an end to the conversation, and Warren walked over to find a seat in the dugout as the hostilities commenced.

Ramsey had delegated Wilson to operate on the slab that afternoon; and the lanky, erratic twirler, having rested for the better part of a week, strolled out to the mound with his manager's implorations ringing in his ears.

After suffering the humility of two defeats at the hands of the locals, the vengeful 'Gators marched to the rubber, determined to maim, maul, and otherwise disfigure the preening Pelicans. It marked the 'Gators' last appearance for the league season and they proposed to end it in a blaze of glory and grandeur.

With a broadside of clean hits that sounded like a presidential salute from a battleship, the first four 'Gators assaulted the offerings of Mr. Wilson, alleged slant-and-hook magician; deluged him under a torrent of screaming horsehides; had him wabbling and groggy and frantically pleading for assistance before the stunned Pelican boss, emerging from the dugout, realized the deplorable fate that had overtaken his prize bet of the afternoon.

Then, when three runs had crossed the pan and two of the corners were still crowded and no one was down—when a mighty 'Gator mauler advanced to the rubber with destruction in his eyes, Ramsey yanked his tottering southpaw and rushed Darby to the rescue.

As a relief twirler, Darby fared some better, although things looked dismal at the beginning. He managed to snare a bunt, after a man had worked on him for a pass, started a double that accounted for two deaths, and eliminated the third visitor by the strike-out route, which retired the side; but in the process one more 'Gator scampered across the rubber.

When the smoke of battle had cleared, the bewildered Pelicans trotted in from the field facing a four-run handicap; and four markers were not to be readily overcome at the pace the lively 'Gators had started to travel.

Coming up for their session with the willow, the Pelicans failed to turn their connections into base hits. They worked hard, pelted the pill lustily, but somehow a grinning 'Gator was always camped in a position to swallow the apple.

At the opening of the second frame, Darby was touched for a circuit clout on the second pitched ball. Ramsey had Johnson and McBride warming up at once; but after that, Darby settled down. Fast fielding, coupled with favorable decisions on the part of the umpire, pulled the Pelican twirler out of a bad hole.

In the second and third stanzas, with a five-run lead to surmount, the locals tried valiantly to get a man around the circuit. Twice they put men on the corners and things began to brighten; but invariably the breaks were against them. The 'Gator boox continued to wave its deadly wand, leaving misery in its wake.

Although they found little difficulty in connecting with the hooks of the visitors' mound artist and hammered the ball to all sections of the orchard, they were robbed persistently of what on ordinary occasions would have gone for legitimate base hits. Fate seemed against them. It seemed written in the book for the lowly 'Gators to collect a victory in their final clash on the Palmdale grounds.

"Never saw such breaks," stormed Griggs, as he came back to the dugout after pasting one on the nose that looked good for three bags, only to have a fielder, running backward at top speed, throw up a hand and trap the sphere. "We just can't hit 'em safe," he complained. "It's uncanny."

"Aw, we'll bust up the game in another innin' or so," predicted Block. "This fool luck can't last."

"Suppose you get in and start the bust-up," ordered Ramsey, when the second Pelican had died.

"Cross 'em up and bunt," suggested Griggs. "They're layin' way back for you. Maybe we'll get goin'."

Block was a good bunter and fleet of foot, but after he had fouled two offerings, he laid his bludgeon against a curve and straightened it out for a line drive.

The stands roared delightedly; Block dug his spikes into the cinders and raced toward the cushion. But it was labor lost. The 'Gator shortstop leaped like a tarpon after a flying fish, snared the ball, unexpectedly dropped it, bent down, and, with a single motion that combined a scoop and throw, whipped it across to first. The juggled horsehide thumped into the baseman's extended mit a fraction of a second in advance of Block's descending spikes.

But if the jinx could not be broken one way, it was another; and if the Pelicans could not collect a victory, which they needed, at least they were spared the ignominy of a recorded defeat, for when the 'Gators trotted out into the field in the last of the fourth inning, jubilant over their six-run lead and confident that the locals were so many cold potatoes, the storm broke.

Apparently unnoticed, a cloud had rolled up from behind the grand stand and blotted out the sun. Preceded by a vivid flash of lightning and a crash of thunder, stagelike in their abruptness, the torrent descended.

Bleacherites scampered wildly for shelter and the players jumped for their respective dugouts. And presently, when the dugouts became uninhabitable, the men scampered forth, floundered across the diamond, and vanished into the clubhouse, leaving the spectators in the stands to stare dismally at the pouring water and search through their pockets for the coveted rain checks.

Half an hour later, when the torrent had ceased and the sun tried to remedy matters, the two managers and the umpire ventured out upon the muddy field, inspected it carefully, and decided to call off the contest for that afternoon.

Since the 'Gators were scheduled to open a three-game series with the Mullets the following day, the postponed battle could not be staged, which may have been disappointing to those who relished double-headers, but did not disturb the Pelican diamond laborers.

Moreover, the gods of chance, having thrown a scare into the Pelicans, sud-

denly turned and presented them with a bouquet, for the same storm that saved Ramsey's outfit, traveling southward, broke an inning later over the Miramar diamond; and in the fifth stanza, the Mullets were on the short end of the reckoning.

Therefore the league leaders were credited with a marker in the defeat column, their contest having reached the minimum period, while the Pelicans stood still, their four-inning exhibition not recognized officially as a ball game.

That whim of weather cut down the Mullet lead to half a game. In golfing parlance, the Miramar, nine-some, coming home, were a half up with three to go.

CHAPTER XXV.

PLANS FOR ACTION.

THE storm that had benefited the Pelicans and made the Palmdale rain checks worth while, conspired against the plans Warren and Hunter had entertained. Before dark the rain began once more, accompanied by a stiff wind, and the proposed trip to Coffin Key was called off. Rain alone might have been endured; but crossing a wind-swept, choppy bay in a small boat was an adventure not to be undertaken lightly by amateur navigators.

Although Warren was keenly disappointed over the postponement of their excursion that night, a condition which Hunter shared, he was cheered by the day's baseball results and the altered standing of the league leaders.

Ramsey was jubilant at the prospect ahead of his team and aired his views during a talk-fest that evening, having remained in town to discuss pertinent matters with Warren and Griggs, the latter acting as captain and field marshal since Corbin's death.

"Some folks I could mention must be worrying about now," Ramsey declared. "The hope of a championship series is getting mighty slim. We won the pennant for the first half of the season and now we're only half a step behind the Mullets in the second dash for the flag. Unless I'm a poor guesser or my outfit of ball tossers cracks under the strain in the next three skirmishes, we'll close this season as we did last year, with both pennants tacked to our flagpole. No series will be necessary."

Griggs nodded approvingly; but his eyes remained troubled. "Nobody wants to see it more than me," he began. "It's strictly baseball, and I'm always for it, Ramsey; but, just between ourselves, something's bound to crack unless the boys see a little real money. You ought to know it. The gang's been travelin' at a fast clip since we got home and there's no reason, but one, why they shouldn't keep it up. I'm hearin' remarks dropped in the locker room, although I won't mention any names, and they sound like trouble."

"That's what I've been afraid of, Griggs," the Pelican leader confessed after listening to his backstop's warning. "The salary proposition is the club that's being held over my head. The new officials talked big the other day; but it was mostly apple sauce. They want a championship series to wind up the baseball season, and they're doing all they can, without making it look too raw, to put the thing across. And the sorry part of it is, my hands are tied."

"Sure. A blind man could see that," responded Griggs. "I know what you're up against and so do the gang, for that matter; but they don't all get the same slant at things. There's two or three spreadin' all the talk. Kickin' 'em out wouldn't help any when we can't fill their shoes.

"These chaps say they're fed up on promises," Griggs went on, "and they can't figure the use of winnin' both halves when it'll get 'em nothin'—when to loaf on the job the last few games and make sure of a series takin' place, would be to collect all that's owin' 'em and share in a healthy cut of the championship gate receipts. It's a great temptation and the club owners aren't discouraging it. Of course, they're lookin' at the proposition from the wrong angle; but it's the wrong angle that may make it hard sleddin' for the rest of us."

"What do you suggest, Griggs?" Ramsey asked, after weighing the field marshal's candid discourse. "How are we to handle things? I'm depending a lot on you, remember."

"I've got no suggestions to offer," the

backstop responded. "I can't stop the talk that's goin' on; but if anything queer's pulled off on the field you watch me get into action! I'll have the satisfaction of hammerin' daylight out of some of these yellow birds, even if it costs me my job."

"You think something of that nature may happen?"

"Most anything's liable to happen," Griggs answered unhesitatingly. "I'm a free agent, and after this week, unless the series is on, I won't be the property of any ball club. And you can gamble on it, I'll dust out of here. I like baseball and so far baseball's been pretty decent to me, but I'm not workin' for an outfit whose owners aren't above throwin' a close game or two just for the profit in it."

"You and me both, Griggs," Ramsey came back. "I guess this season will finish me as a Pelican leader. It's tough on you and the rest of the right-thinking boys to do the square thing and not even get your dues. I don't blame you for cutting loose."

"I didn't think you would."

"We'll keep our eyes open. I'm not asking you for any names, Griggs, but I've a pretty fair idea who will bear watching in the next few games. And if anything crops up you don't like, go the limit. I'm behind you. If there's an eruption, the club owners possibly may discover, in case a series is necessary, that they've no ball team to perform for them."

"Serve 'em right," the backstop declared.

"Meanwhile I'm going right ahead to win this half," Ramsey announced. "I'll keep on fighting. If it comes to a pinch, I can use Warren in two of the remaining games, although he's only had a day's rest. Have him on the firing line ready to rush into action, at least. Then if we can't win, provided the team holds together, I'll say a better club trimmed us; and that's no disgrace."

"That'll help a lot," Griggs admitted; "but pitchin' alone isn't goin' to win for us, even against the Smokers," he added, referring to the outfit that was scheduled to meet the Pelicans.

"They haven't been so dangerous all season," said Warren. "Haven't given us much trouble."

"Maybe not," Ramsey answered; "but look what the 'Gators did! These tail-end teams are always uncertain factors at the tag of the season. It's that way here as well as up in the big show. They come in at the finish and upset all the dope. If the 'Gators exhibit the speed against the Mullets they did against us, I'll say the present league leaders will know they've been in a few tough ball games."

Manager, captain, and pitching ace of the Pelicans talked together until midnight before separating, planning their campaign against the Smoker invasion, displaying as much generalship as warlords plotting the morrow's battle. One by one the enemy players were dissected, one by one their weaknesses were ferreted out or their prowess considered. Past performances in the field and at the rubber were weighed in the balance and most carefully noted.

More than ordinary attention was directed upon the Smokers' array of pitching talent. Several new batting orders were drawn up and discussed, any one of them ready to be followed depending upon the visitors' selection of mound material. New signals were arranged and perfected, new schemes hatched that might prove useful in emergencies. Nothing was left undone, so far as Ramsey and his lieutenant were concerned, to further the chances of a Pelican victory.

Position by position the players of the opposing teams were subjected to a critical analysis. With but two possible exceptions, the Pelicans had a stronger line-up and a higher average in field and at bat.

"For all his faults, Corbin was a real ball player," Griggs remarked when the short-field positions came up for discussion. "He's left a big hole in our defense and we'll miss his bat. Anders is doin' fair; but he hasn't had time yet to judge distance or engineer doubles. The Smokers know it and they'll give him plenty of trouble. His territory is goin' to be a hot one."

"I could shift Block to short and put Anders at second," Ramsey stated; "but I figure Block isn't fast enough."

"No; Anders is our best bet, so long's there's no chance of pickin' up new material," said Griggs. "But I suppose, if the series is to be pulled off, the club bosses will have you on the jump tryin' to locate a good shortstop."

"I could find one in twenty-four hours," asserted Ramsey. "A crackerjack."

"Ever entertain any private suspicions as to how Corbin met his death?" Warren asked, his thoughts drifting back to the late member of the Pelican squad.

The backstop shook his head. "Haven't been able to fathom it out at all," he admitted. "Queer, wasn't it? Corbin had plenty of enemies, includin' myself; but none I know of who'd be tempted to do murder, although maybe I myself have threatened to do the trick."

Through the efforts of the police, relatives of Corbin had been found in the North and the remains shipped to them. After that the local authorities apparently lost all interest in the case, marking it down as unsolvable.

"We haven't accounted for the bank roll found on him," Ramsey said. "I'd like to know where he made the touch."

"I wouldn't mind knowin' that myself," Griggs returned. "If we don't get a look at some real coin soon, I'll be pawnin' my uniform. You gettin' anywhere with the Brennen puzzle?" he inquired, looking across at Warren.

"Not far enough," the twirler answered.

"Huh, there's been a pack of queer doin's in the last week; a whole lot of mystery," Griggs said. "And so far no one's been able to get to first base. Well, let's hope the finish of the ball season will see the finish of 'em all."

"Let's hope so," Warren echoed fervently.

While eating breakfast early the next morning at Bayvista, Warren heard a plane overhead. Looking out from the Ramsey veranda, he was quick to recognize the Hunter machine. He watched it for a long time, more or less speculatively; watched it sweep over the Gulf in the vicinity of Coffin Key. No effort was made to land, however, and presently the hydroairplane disappeared far to the south.

Later, just before Warren and Ramsey were leaving for town, the plane hove in sight again, landing this time off the Bayvista dock. The thought that the pilot might have news to impart, or would explain his early-morning jaunt, sent Warren hastening to the water front, Ramsey hot at his heels. Any bit of information that would shed light upon the dread mystery of Coffin Key would be valuable almost beyond telling.

The succeeding chapters of this novel will appear in the next issue of TOP-NOTCH, dated and out October 15th. It began in the August 15th issue. Back numbers may be obtained from news dealers or the publishers.

The Rascal

A CELEBRATED wit, coming from a bank which had been obliged to close its doors, slipped down the steps into the arms of a friend.

"Why, what's the matter?" said the latter.

"Oh," was the quick reply, "I've only lost my balance."

The Rude Cutter!

JIMMY: "She felt badly the way he cut her."

Henry: "Snob, eh?"

"No; barber"

Just a Minute

AREN'T you nearly ready, dear?"

"I wish you wouldn't keep asking that question, Clarence. I've been telling you for the last hour that I'll be ready in a minute."

The Deep Thinker

JIMMY giggled when the teacher read the story of the man who swam across the Tiber three times before breakfast.

"You do not doubt that a trained swimmer could do that, do you?"

"No, sir," answered Jimmy; "but I wonder why he did not make it four and get back to the side where his clothes were."

TOP-NOTCH TALK

News and Views by the Editor and Readers

OCTOBER 1, 1925.

A Touchdown for Top-Notch

WE are always interested in hearing how readers first became acquainted with TOP-NOTCH, and we should like to get more letters giving us this information. One reader told us he first met TOP-NOTCH in the desert. That was certainly interesting, but he did not give us any details as to how our magazine happened to bob up before him in such an unlikely spot.

Mr. Max Terry, of West Union, Iowa, tells us in the following letter how he came to read TOP-NOTCH:

Editor of TOP-NOTCH MAGAZINE.

DEAR SIR: I have read your magazine for nearly a year, and can truly say that it leads all the rest by a long way. I wish to state just how I became attached to TOP-NOTCH. The copy of the October 15, 1924, issue had upon the cover a picture of a football player carrying the ball for a touchdown. Being a football man myself, I was greatly interested and bought the copy. "Bookworms Will Turn," by Freeman Harrison, the story featured on the cover, is the greatest football story I have had the pleasure of reading.

I would be glad to see another football story in the future by this author.

I wish to congratulate Mr. Goodchild on the fine story he has written in "The Rider of the Ranges." Tex Inskip had me gripped in this fast-moving story. It is by far the best Western story I have ever read, and Mr. Goodchild may be proud of it, for I am sure every one of your readers was as interested as myself. I could hardly wait for the next issues to appear.

My favorite authors are Albert M. Treynor, George Goodchild, William Wallace Cook, E. Whitman Chambers, and Nell Martin.

Wishing TOP-NOTCH continued success, I remain, Sincerely yours, MAX TERRY.

In Mr. Terry's case it was the cover which attracted him to our magazine, and we are sure that our covers often prove good salesmen; they serve to introduce new friends to TOP-NOTCH. As all salesmen, however, know, repeat orders depend upon the quality of the goods first sold, and had Mr. Harrison's story not come up to Mr. Terry's expectations, Mr. Terry would not have continued buying our magazine, as he has been doing. A cover will sell many first copies, but it takes the stories inside to bring the purchaser to the news stand twice a month afterward to ask for TOP-NOTCH.

A word of praise may be accorded to the artist whose work attracted Mr. Terry's attention. It was Mr. D. C. Hutchison who painted the picture which was reproduced on that TOP-NOTCH cover, and no doubt his work is familiar to many of our readers.

In the Next Issue

THE complete novel in the number that you will get on October 15th will be by James French Dorrance, always a popular author with TOP-NOTCH readers. His story is entitled "Skedaddle Gold;" it is one of those gripping tales of the West for which Mr. Dorrance is famous, and we know you will enjoy this story of a big deputy sheriff, whose guns were tied in a remarkable manner.

The novelette will be a football story by Frank T. Tucker, which he calls "The Paper-Made Man." Mr. Tucker does not write a great deal, but what he does write is always entertaining, and you will find his latest tale of the great autumn sport one of the best football stories you have read.

The shorter stories will include: "Shove Off!" a tale of navy boxing, by Frank Richardson Pierce; "Silver Threads," a Bildad Road story, by William Merriam Rouse; "Brothers of the Rod," a fishing-detective story, by Hapsburg Liebe; "Lights Out!" a bit of realism in the moving-picture world, by Ted Westman, Jr.; and "With Feathered Fury," an eagle yarn, by Harold de Polo.

There will be the next installments of the serials, "The Prisoner and the Play Boy," the tale of the Colorado pioneers, by Francis Lynde, and "Crossed Signals,"

the baseball novel by Burt L. Standish. In addition there will be the opening chapters of a powerful serial by Edmund Snell, called "Green-Jade Magic." Mr. Snell is a newcomer to TOP-NOTCH, but when you have read this remarkable tale of adventure in the Far East you will admit that he is entitled to a place among your favorite authors.

The poems will be: "Look Out for the Golf Bug!" by Edgar Daniel Kramer; "The Blasé Bachelor," by James A. Sanaker; "One Viewpoint," by Rena H. Ingham; and "A Fishy Reverie," by Pat. B. Costello.

A Lucky Accident

Editor of TOP-NOTCH MAGAZINE.

DEAR SIR: In your August 1st issue of TOP-NOTCH I saw where you would like to have comments on the story entitled "The Waters of Fear," by John Milton Edwards. Well, let me say right here that it is *the best* story I have ever read, and I have read quite a few. I think Mr. Francis Lynde deserves special mention for his story, "The Prisoner and the Play Boy."

As for the other stories, I think that the "Treasure of the Dunes," by Albert N. Treynor, is also very good.

It was by a lucky accident I picked up your magazine, but please let me congratulate you on your fine stories. Sincerely,

THOMAS B. CURRY.

Miami, Fla.

A Real Author

Editor of TOP-NOTCH MAGAZINE.

DEAR EDITOR: I have just finished reading "The Waters of Fear" in your August 1st issue of TOP-NOTCH, and I have never read a story that I enjoyed more. I think Mr. Edwards a real author and TOP-NOTCH is my favorite of all magazines.

JOHNNIE E. CAPELL.

Camden, S. C.

The Best Yet

Editor of TOP-NOTCH MAGAZINE.

DEAR SIR: I have decided that it is about time that I wrote you in appreciation of your work with T.-N.

I have been a steady reader of your splendid magazine since May, 1923. I used to take three others besides yours, but I found that yours beats them all.

I have just concluded your greatest story, "The Rider of the Ranges," by George Goodchild. In my opinion it is the best yet, although "Law of the North," by Albert M. Treynor, was splendid. I know, because I have read between two and three thousand stories in books and magazines.

T.-N. has them all beat.

RALPH M. FLINT.

Lowell, Mass.

Edwards Scores Again

Editor of TOP-NOTCH MAGAZINE.

DEAR SIR: I read "The Waters of Fear," by John Milton Edwards, in a recent issue of your magazine and found it to be a very interesting story, as are most of the stories in TOP-NOTCH. I hope there will be more baseball stories in your issues in the future. "The Rider of the Ranges," by George Goodchild, was a good serial. Hoping to read more of the good stories in your future issues, I am,

Yours truly, LESTER B. MICHAELS.

Brooklyn, N. Y.

A New Reader's Opionion

Editor of TOP-NOTCH MAGAZINE.

DEAR SIR: The August 1st number is the first copy of TOP-NOTCH that I have read, and I certainly enjoyed it.

I have enjoyed mostly in this issue "Waters of Fear," by John Milton Edwards; "Not Beyond Recall," by Nels Leroy Jorgensen, and "At the Siren's Call," by Harold de Polo, which is a baseball story.

I wish to suggest that you continue these baseball stories in spite of all the kicks put in by W. E. Clair about them.

Success to TOP-NOTCH MAGAZINE!

Very truly yours, EDW. SCHIRMER

New York City.

A Great Reader

Editor of TOP-NOTCH MAGAZINE.

DEAR SIR: Better late than never! That is how I feel about writing you. Have just finished reading some stories in the August 1st number. I have intended writing before, but it has always escaped me.

I am a great reader and buy at least ten *different* kinds of magazines a month, besides all the latest books. But of them all I like TOP-NOTCH best, and wherever I go I always get my TOP-NOTCH. I doubt if I have missed a half dozen numbers in eight years.

I don't ask for stories from any particular authors; they are *all* good. As long as my eyesight remains you can count on me as one of your readers. Sincerely yours,

JAMES E. LEAHY.

Main Street, Oakland, Me.

At Close Quarters

By Harold de Polo

PERHAPS no other animal, in all the vast wilderness territory, rejoiced so wholly at the coming of spring as did the big bull moose of the Meguntic region. It had been a bitter winter of deep snows and intense cold, and the mere labor of sustaining life for himself and his herd—composed of three cows and two calves—had been a tremendous task.

All about the yard and along the various avenues leading from it, the bark of the trees was stripped bare and the branches of the evergreens were woefully barren of foliage. On every side of him, ironically, countless provender swayed enticingly in the breeze, but, with a full dozen feet of frozen, crusted snow to batter down and through, the tempting limbs were mighty hard to attain. Yes; the spring thaw meant much to him.

Looking back through the many seasons he had successfully survived and guarded his herds, he could remember none that had been so cruel as the present one. Never had he lived in a yard so small, never had the lanes jutting out from it been so short and narrow. As it was, it had taken all his strength, all his resourceful will, to accomplish as much as he had.

A herd of the size of that over which he ruled, during a winter, needs a formidable amount of fodder, and he had been busy literally day and night fighting his way to new pastures for them. He had been forced to contend against the worst winds and the heaviest snowfalls he had ever known; but pride instinctively came to his eye when he realized that he *had* won through.

Now, noting that the snow had dropped a generous foot since the day before, it occurred to him that many of his tribe, in the past grim months, must have succumbed to the weather. He was more certain of this, too, when he remembered that he had expected a bad winter and had deliberately chosen well-sheltered ground. Many others — particularly among the younger bulls—doubtlessly had picked their quarters carelessly. These, of course, must have perished.

For that matter, his own kind had not been the only ones to suffer. Most of the furred and the feathered creatures, his wisdom of the years told him, had probably paid heavy penalties to the elements. Spring, in fact, would be a boon to one and all.

But the winter, if it had been a severe one, had also its bright side in consequence of this very harshness. The wolves and the panthers—dreaded by all the moose and deer family—likewise had found the going so difficult that they had not been able to accomplish the wholesale marauding in which they usually indulged. In his retreat, during the entire season, the big bull of the Meguntic had not once been attacked.

Again, he proudly mused, he had managed victoriously to fend off disaster through the cold and snow. Majestically he raised his great, antlered head and surveyed his following. As he did so,

his keen nostrils detected the scent of an unexpected rain in the air. It meant that more snow would be eaten away, that progress would be easier from then on, that escape from these close quarters and freedom of movement would soon be his.

Stoically he set to work on the tiresome task of clearing a path of some sort to a clump of low-hanging junipers in the distance.

II.

POSSIBLY an hour later, while he was still valiantly struggling against the snow barrier, the bull moose came to a quivering halt with ears erect. Plain fear, and nothing else, was in his eyes. Faint and far off, yet unmistakable, he had heard the sound that he dreaded, when the snows were deep, above all others—the long-drawn hunger cry of the wolf pack. Haunting and terror bringing, it came to him through the rain that was by now steadily pouring down.

Furtively he glanced behind him. The cows and young, he saw, were not as yet aware of the distant cry; but just as he told himself this there rose another shrill howl that caused the females to stir restlessly. As well as he did, they knew what a wolf attack meant when the ground was covered as it was now. There was no hope of retreat, no hope of waging any sort of formidable battle. Penned in as they were, with bodies too heavy to travel on the crusted surface, they would eventually be slaughtered by the lighter and nimbler gray killers.

The wise old bull, battle-scarred veteran that he was, made his way calmly to his herd. By his demeanor, and his low and confident grunting, he comforted them, encouraged them. Cautiously, after ordering them to follow him, he walked over to the highest wall of snow that flanked the yard. There he burrowed out a type of cave that was large enough to hold his body.

After setting them this example, he bade the others copy him, urging them on commandingly, and demanding haste. By doing this, he figured, the scent of the herd might not be so readily discovered by the wolves; no matter how little, it was bound to increase his chances. During a long career the bull of the Meguntic had learned that just such thoughtfulness regarding apparently trivial details had frequently meant the difference between victory and defeat, between life and death.

The inactivity, the helpless waiting, were not easy to bear. He kept his ears strained to the utmost—that was all. Perhaps, finding other game, the wolves would not come near him; perhaps, even, they might not find his whereabouts. But this, he sensibly told himself, was practically impossible. He was too much a master of the forest ways not to know that the gray hunters, no doubt on the point of starvation, would range over the territory in the vicinity in a manner that would allow nothing to escape them.

Possibly, he decided, they had realized that he himself—famed as he was—must of necessity be somewhere in this immediate neighborhood. He would have liked to be certain about this.

With his nerves frankly on edge, he continued waiting. Occasionally he heard the cry of the pack—heard it, too, coming nearer and nearer in his direction. They were not, he judged, much more than a mile or more away. Knowing their methods, he pictured them as combing the woods for places that seemed likely to yield a moose or deer yard.

The heavy rain, which was by now coming down in great sheets, of course had been the cause of not letting the wolves detect the scent. Maybe, if the downpour lasted long enough, it might be the means of saving him, for there was always the slim chance that they would grow impatient and pass on to other ground.

Ironic as it was, just as this slight hope came to him, the torrent of rain abruptly began to lessen. It changed, all in a brief while, into huge drops, splattering down far apart. Then it ceased completely; more than that, a breeze sprang up—a breeze straight from the west. And the gray killers were toward the east.

III.

THE Meguntic moose, whose spread of antlers had called many a man to the chase, felt his heart sink despairingly. For a minute or so he lay there motion-

less, with an expression close to bitterness in his eyes. If the wolves came upon him in this yard, he was aware that it would be death for some of his company —or for them all.

With this west wind, too, he was certain that the pack would eventually discover him. He had avoided, season after season, the wily men-creatures who had come in search of him—foiled the shrewdest stalkers that the breed boasted—and he had been largely able to do so because he himself had always taken the initiative.

He did so now. The rain, he saw, had greatly lowered the snow, wearing it away far into the trail he himself had been breaking to the junipers. Rising, he admonished the herd to keep silent while he stalked over to the path he had been making. No plan, as yet, had formulated in his brain; but he had decided to get as far away from his followers as he possibly could.

He had no method of telling, as yet, how numerous the wolf pack would be; but he preferred to fight them alone. So, with an energy and a strength born candidly of terror, he put his great head and shoulders to the task of making his way toward his enemies.

A trifle later, he simultaneously found out that the pack had scented him and that, luckily, the tremendous downpour had made the going unbelievably easier. With the knowledge, too, an idea flashed into his alert mind, and he switched the direction of his endeavors toward a mass of gigantic boulders which he knew could not be more than a couple of hundred feet ahead of him.

Through it all, his ears rang with the hunger-urged cries of the wolves—of the wolves, he figured as he feverishly worked, that could not be more than eight in number. Their howls, indisputably, told him that, as well as the fact that they were almost mad with hunger. So much the better on both scores, he thought.

How long it took him to make his way to that clump of huge rocks he never rightly knew. It seemed, naturally, an interminable age, for the hunger howls were constantly growing louder and more ravenous.

At last, however, he reached his goal. His body swaying, his legs trembling with weakness, his breath coming in great gasps, he stood there desperately trying to get back his strength. It seemed to return to him, too, as he caught sight of the first wolf—caught sight of a gaunt gray thing with dripping fangs and menacing eyes in which there was a glint of almost insane anticipation.

The heart of the seasoned old bull, now that the crisis was upon him, beat more evenly. Courage came to it, as coolness, also, came to function in his brain. With a steady eye, he watched the killers appear—two more, three more, and then the last straggler, a weakling, seven, that would make, in all.

Often, in the past, he had beaten odds of this comparison; now, it was true, everything seemed to be against him; but, at least, he would go down fighting, he resolved, as he had never fought before. And, with painstaking caution, he once more adjusted the footing of his cloven hoofs.

IV.

THE leader of the gray killers, as the grim wolves approached their quarry, started to pull back in order to scrutinize the lay of the land. This inherent instinct, which had so helped to put him at the head of the band, was useless now. His followers, hunger crazed beyond all sense of reason or obedience, charged blindly forward and even snapped angrily at his flanks. The fever for meat, at the same time, gripped the leader, and he, too, with a shriek, hurled himself onward at the great bulk of the animal who meant food to satiety.

The antlered king of the Meguntic, at the attack, seemed to be trying to set himself for the rush. As he did so, and while apparently feeling for a firmer footing, his left foreleg slipped—slipped and crumpled weakly under him. A bellow of pain, of surprise, of fright escaped him, for the snow under him gave way, on the rocks, and, threshing madly, he slid down the side of the pit formed by the boulders.

At the bottom—a good twenty feet below—he came to a writhing halt. There, lying on his side, and with a hind foot

dangling, he emitted a series of piteous roars that must have caused untold agony to the waiting herd.

This distress, though, did not affect the wolves; if anything, it tended further to whet their appetites. With cries of wild joy, they surged down that slanting and uneven wall of rock into the pit. Demoniacally and utterly without any trace of sanity, they hurled themselves at the throat of their intended prey.

The majority of the pack—which, incidentally, once had numbered a full score and ten—were too crazed by starvation to realize much of what afterward happened. The ruler, whose brain had never failed him, saw the ruse of the intended victim too late. He was, also, the first to go under at the terrific onslaught of the moose who had been judged to be such a sure and easy prize.

The veteran of the Meguntic, as the seven wolves swept down upon him in the pit which he knew so well, lost all trace of fatigue, of fear, of broken limbs. He became, suddenly, the very epitome of all that was active. With a thunderous roar—now of courageous challenge—he got to his feet and began his work.

His slaughter—for it could be called nothing else—was swift and charitable. The quarters of his yard, considering the footing, had been too close for him; but here, with solid bottom under him, he had things his own way. As if they were creatures of pasteboard, he tossed off the gaunt marauders.

He got them, all in a heap, beneath him—beneath his powerful cloven hoofs. He worked rapidly; so rapidly that not one of the seven marauders was able to get away. Like helpless and crippled flies on a wall, he brought them down with his destructive hoofs and antlers. The carnage, indeed, was complete and hurried, but it was at least merciful. In three minutes—four minutes, at the most—not a wolf remained alive.

V.

THE big bull of the Meguntic, after it was over, laboriously went through the business of climbing to safety. He got to the top. There he surveyed the damage he had accomplished. His eye lighted up proudly, his head unconsciously rose, and he began idly and nonchalantly to paw the dirt that was now showing through the snow.

A plaintive call came from a cow in the herd, and he coolly ignored it. The cry sounded once more—questioning, troubled—and this time he answered it. Throwing back his great head, he allowed a trumpet of assurance to leave his throat, while he nonchalantly looked at the sky.

It was clearing in the west—clearing in a manner that presaged a warm day on the morrow with a sun that would further shrink the melting snow.

Proudly, majestically, he started back to his herd. Strength of numbers might be well enough, but strategy, after all, was not yet a futile art.

A Story Told by Thousands

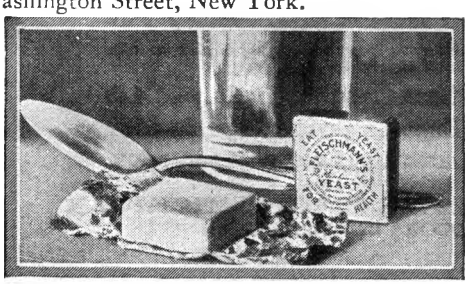
How they corrected their ills—regained the vitality of youth—through one simple food

NOT a "cure-all," not a medicine in any sense—Fleischmann's Yeast is simply a remarkable fresh food.

The millions of tiny active yeast plants in every cake invigorate the whole system. They aid digestion—clear the skin—banish the poisons of constipation. Where cathartics give only temporary relief, yeast strengthens the intestinal muscles and makes them healthy and active. And day by day it releases new stores of energy.

Eat two or three cakes regularly every day before meals: on crackers—in fruit juices or milk—or just plain. *For constipation especially, dissolve one cake in hot water (not scalding) before breakfast and at bedtime.* Buy several cakes at a time—they will keep fresh in a cool dry place for two or three days. All grocers have Fleischmann's Yeast. Start eating it today!

And let us send you a free copy of our latest booklet on Yeast for Health. Health Research Dept. Z-21, The Fleischmann Company, 701 Washington Street, New York.



This famous food tones up the entire system—banishes constipation, skin troubles, stomach disorders. Eat two or three cakes regularly every day before meals.

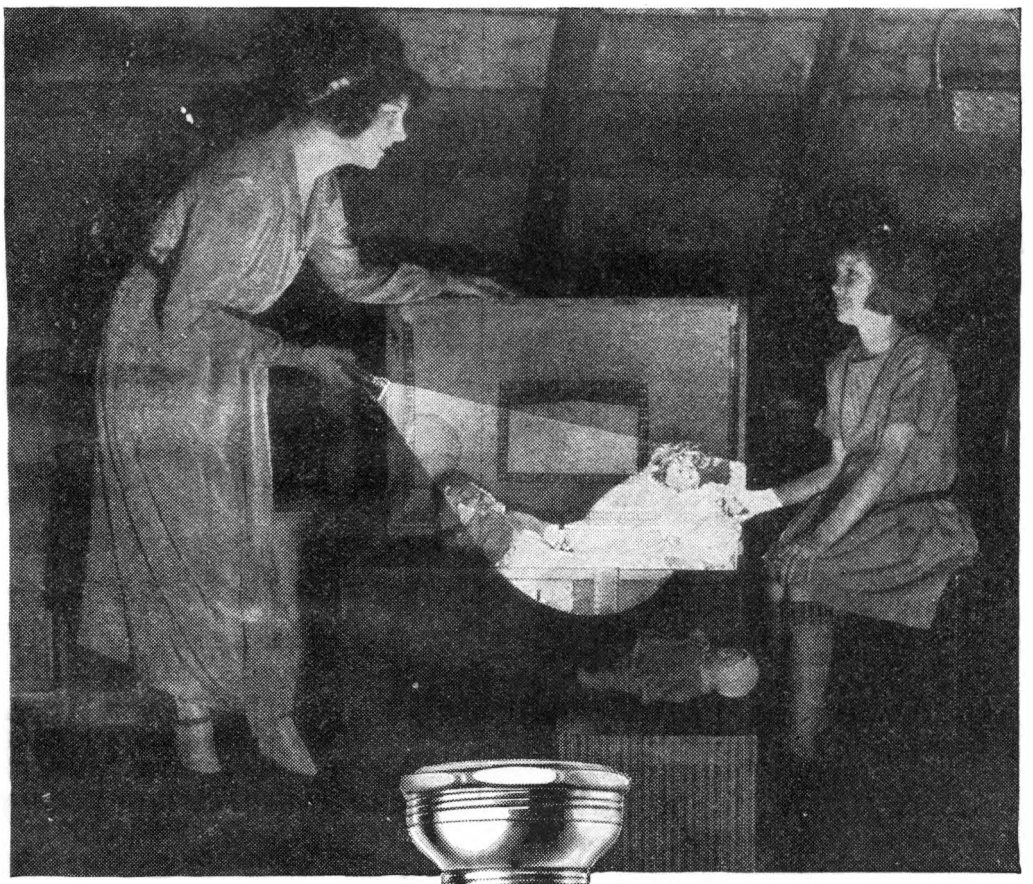
"THIS SPRING, desperate from years of constipation and unavailing attempts to cure its resultant evils, I read this definition by a physician: 'Yeast is an antiseptic and is effective in all diseases in which there is threatened putridity.' I began taking one cake in warm water before breakfast and at bedtime. My looks a month later demonstrated a release from cathartics. Continuing the treatment, I gained daily in vigor. Years of intestinal poisoning take their toll of youth; so I shall continue to drink my yeast."

MRS. CARRIE M. CREMA, Philadelphia, Pa.

"ABOUT EIGHTEEN MONTHS AGO I was a complete wreck: could not eat or sleep, was anemic and my color had faded to a sickly green. My friends began to exchange pitying glances, and one day, an old lady insisted on giving me her seat. That was the crowning humiliation. I decided to give yeast a trial. I started eating three cakes daily. In about six weeks found I could eat a real meal once more; in two months my natural color began to return. I kept on, and now, thanks to Fleischmann's Yeast, I am a well woman."

MRS. F. R. CONNER, Florence, Ky.

To find things in the dark—*use your flashlight!*



CLIMB the garret stairs without stumbling. Use your flashlight! Find what you're after without fumbling. Use your flashlight! Eveready Flashlights lay a path of safety with their bright, white light. Use your Eveready to burrow into trunks or closets without fear of fire. Use it wherever you want to see in the dark. There are 365 days in a year—365 reasons for owning one or more Evereadys. Improved models meet every need for light—indoors and out. There's a type for every purpose and purse, and an Eveready dealer nearby.

The type illustrated is No. 2616, the Eveready 2-cell Broad-beam Flashlight. Handsome, ribbon black-metal case. Safety-lock switch, proof against accidental lighting. Octagonal, non-rolling lens-ring.

* * *

Eveready Unit Cells fit and improve all makes of flashlights. They insure brighter light and longer battery life. Keep an extra set on hand. Especially designed Eveready-Mazda bulbs, the bright eyes of the flashlights, likewise last longer.

Manufactured and guaranteed by

NATIONAL CARBON COMPANY, INC.
New York San Francisco
Canadian National Carbon Co., Limited, Toronto, Ontario

EVEREADY HOUR
EVERY TUESDAY AT 9 P. M.
(Eastern Standard Time)

For real radio enjoyment, tune in the "Eveready Group," broadcast through stations—

WEAF	New York	WSAI	Cincinnati
WJAR	Providence	WWJ	Detroit
WEEI	Boston	WCCO	Minneapolis
WFI	Philadelphia		St. Paul
WGR	Buffalo	WOC	Davenport
WCAE	Pittsburgh		

EVEREADY
FLASHLIGHTS
& BATTERIES
—they last longer

SCIENCE has conquered the air surrounding the earth. It has also conquered the hair surrounding the face. The former is called aviation, the latter dermutation.

The airplane, like Mennen Shaving Cream, established new standards of speed. But flying is still nerve-wracking, expensive and dependent on Nature's mood.

Shaving, thanks to Mennen, is now comfortable, economical, and divorced from natural conditions such as weather, or the temperature and hardness of water.

Ask any Mennen user which invention is more vital to his well-being and happiness—aviation or Mennen Shaving Cream.

Jim Henry
(Mennen Salesman)

Regular type tube with threaded cap

YOUR CHOICE OF TUBES 50c

New-style tube with non-removable top

Two brushings a day—
Teeth free from decay.

ORO TOOTH BRUSH

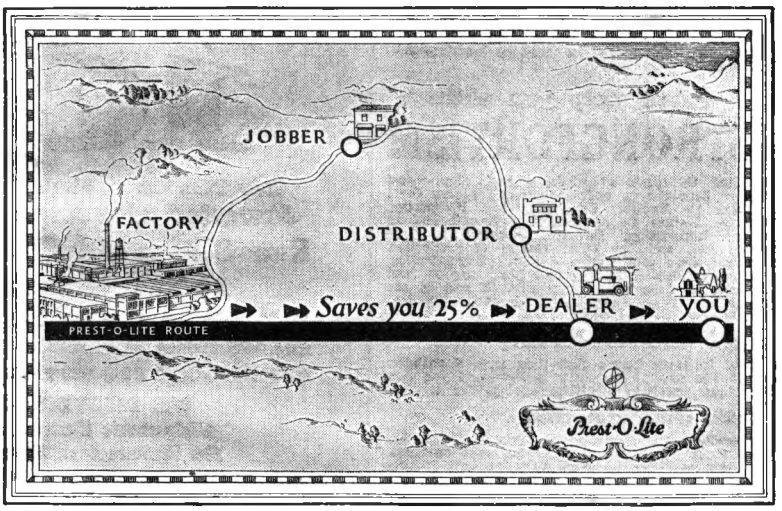
the best tooth brush on earth for a quarter

A sterilized brush that is skillfully made to clean teeth. In its own individual carton—free from handling. ORO is outstanding in quality. The one standard nationally advertised 25c brush that you can buy at any good dealer's. An official "warranted perfect" stamped on handle of each ORO. A substantial saving; ask for ORO at your dealer's.

PRICE 25¢
In sanitary carton

Prest-O-Lite

takes the short cut—*saving you 25% on battery costs*



IN ACTUAL money—this means that for only $15.50 you can get the same Prest-O-Lite Storage Battery for your car that cost $20.50 a short time ago. Remember, it's the same twenty-dollar battery—only the price has been changed. Not the quality or the service.

A Prest-O-Lite costs you less today because it costs us less to get a Prest-O-Lite to you.

We send Prest-O-Lite Batteries to you by a short cut. Right from our factory to your dealer or service station. We have eliminated the two profits that result when batteries are sent over the expensive, round-about road through jobbers and distributors.

The saving is *yours*—and it's a saving that you can't afford to pass up.

No matter what size Prest-O-Lite you need, the saving will be the same—about 25 per cent.

When you need a new battery for your car, see the Prest-O-Lite man near you. You'll save money, you will secure honest, satisfactory service and you'll have in your car an efficient, rugged, well-made, long-lived battery that has a real name back of it. A battery perfected in the world's largest electro-chemical laboratories.

For more than 20 years the name "Prest-O-Lite" has stood for the highest quality, for constant progress and for better all-round service to the motorist.

You'll find Prest-O-Lite Service—"The Oldest Service to Motorists"—better than ever. Take advantage of its friendly help any time, no matter what make battery you are using. You're never very far from a Prest-O-Lite Service Station.

THE PREST-O-LITE CO., INC.
INDIANAPOLIS, IND.
New York San Francisco
In Canada: Prest-O-Lite Co. of Canada, Ltd.
Toronto, Ontario

FOR RADIO—*Prest-O-Lite Radio Batteries—both "A" and "B"—are especially designed for radio, and combine many improvements that insure long life and satisfactory service. Buy them and save money.*

Write for Free Road Map

We have prepared up-to-date road maps of every state in the United States. These maps show all towns and principal highways and which of the roads are hard surfaced. Ideal for tourists. We'll gladly send you the maps of any states you specify—free upon request. Address Prest-O-Lite Company, Department B, Indianapolis, Ind.

STRONGFORT
The Perfect Man

Let Me Make a Man of You

Nobody wants or cares for a weakling. Your friends may be sorry for you, but that won't bring you back to glorious health.

A man's happiness entirely depends upon his physical condition his success in social, domestic and business life centers around this. If he is not virile, he is not attractive, magnetic, popular—his very manly strength is the axis upon which his whole existence revolves. Men become weak through overwork, worry, and other causes fatal to health, and gradually lose their strength. Stop and think what your health, strength and vitality mean to you and ward off the consequences. No matter what your condition is or what caused it, don't be discouraged—I want to help you

I can help you with STRONGFORTISM

Strongfortism has lifted thousands of weak, ailing, discouraged men out of the bog of hopelessness and despair and placed them on the Straight Road to Health, Happiness and Prosperity. **Strongfortism** has aided Nature in overcoming such ailments as Catarrh, Constipation, Indigestion, Rupture, Nervousness, Bad Blood, Poor Memory, etc., and the other results of neglecting and abusing the body. (See consultation coupon.) **Strongfortism** gave them renewed confidence, vitality, ambition, success and fitted them for the Joys of a healthy, happy life. I can do the same for you, irrespective of your age, sex, occupation or surroundings. I guarantee it.

Thousands Are Guilty

They know deep down in their hearts that they have knowingly, wilfully contributed to the wrecking of their bodies and you may be numbered among them, perhaps a pitiful apology for a man.

Let's Get Together

But don't stand by and see your body go on down to destruction and perdition. Stop right where you are and get your bearings. Let's get together you and I—and see what we can save see if we can't put you on your feet again and make a 100 per cent. man out of you. I've done it with almost countless numbers—I can do it with you. Let's look facts right in the face. You tell me your story—then I'll tell you how I can and will help you.

First Get My Free Book

It's a startling revelation of undisputable facts about the human body that will open your eyes to new visions of life and happiness and success.

"Promotion and Conservation of Health, Strength and Mental Energy" will tell you frankly how you can make yourself over into a vigorous specimen of Vital Manhood. It is absolutely free. Just mark the subjects on the free consultation coupon on which you want **special confidential information** and send to me with a ten-cent piece (one dime) to help pay postage, etc. I will do the rest. Send for my free book **Right Now.** TODAY.

LIONEL STRONGFORT

Physical and Health Specialist Over 25 Years

Dept. 51, Newark, New Jersey, U. S. A.

FREE CONSULTATION

Mr. Lionel Strongfort,
Dept. 51, Newark, N. J.

Please send me absolutely free enlightenment on the Promotion and Conservation of Health, Strength and Mental Energy. I enclose a ten cent piece (1 dime) to help cover postage and have marked (X) before the subjects in which I am most interested.

.. Colds	.. Increased Height	.. Weak Eyes
.. Catarrh	.. Pimples	.. Weak Heart
.. Asthma	.. Insomnia	.. Poor Circulation
.. Hay Fever	.. Impotency	.. Round Shoulders
.. Headache	.. Short Wind	.. Lung Troubles
.. Thinness	.. Constipation	.. Muscular Development
.. Rupture	.. Indigestion	.. Great Strength
.. Lumbago	.. Nervousness	
.. Flat Chest	.. Rheumatism	
.. Youthful Errors		

NAME .....

AGE ..... OCCUPATION .....

STREET .....

CITY ..... STATE .....

Send Only

10¢

For This Latest Model Imported
Jewelled Movement Watch
Runs 8 Days with One Winding
20 Year Guarantee

Only a down payment of 10c required and we make immediate shipment of this beautiful and serviceable watch.

WE TRUST YOU
Shipment Same Day
No References Needed

Elsewhere you would probably be required to pay upwards of $16 for a full-jewelled open face 8 Day watch of this quality. Our price reduced to $12 and you may pay it $1 per week.

Make first payment only to postman when he delivers package.

Send name and address at once. Our money back and 20 year guarantee protect you.

L. E. Deelite Co., 530 Broadway, New York

Have You Ever Read

Picture-Play Magazine?

Bubbling Over With Screen News

PRICE, 25 CENTS

$100.00 a week for YOU!

We pay you *BIG* to take orders for Val-Style Made-To-Measure Millinery. Absolutely No Competition! Every hat covered by our Absolute Guarantee of Satisfaction. Write TODAY for special offer and Exclusive Territory.

Val-Style Hat Co. A-104 Val-Style Bldg. CINCINNATI, OHIO

It was a lesson to her

SHE certainly learned something that evening. And that was: Never to accept an evening's invitation to dance unless she had danced *before* with the man who asked her.

He seemed very fond of her and almost monopolized her dance program.

By the end of the evening she not only disliked him cordially but he was almost revolting to her.

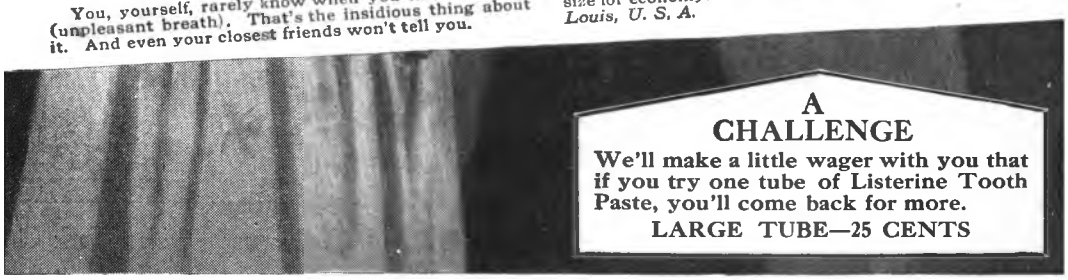
* * *

You, yourself, rarely know when you have halitosis (unpleasant breath). That's the insidious thing about it. And even your closest friends won't tell you.

Sometimes, of course, halitosis comes from some deep-seated organic disorder that requires professional advice. But usually—and fortunately—halitosis is only a local condition that yields to the regular use of Listerine as a mouth wash and gargle. It is an interesting thing that this well-known antiseptic that has been in use for years for surgical dressings, possesses these unusual properties as a breath deodorant. It puts you on the safe and polite side.

Listerine halts food fermentation in the mouth and leaves the breath sweet, fresh and clean. *Not* by substituting some other odor but by really removing the old one. The Listerine odor itself quickly disappears.

This safe and long-trusted antiseptic has dozens of different uses: note the little circular that comes with every bottle. Your druggist sells Listerine in the original brown package only—*never in bulk*. There are four sizes: 14 ounce, 7 ounce, 3 ounce and 1¼ ounce. Buy the large size for economy.—*Lambert Pharmacal Company, Saint Louis, U. S. A.*



A CHALLENGE

We'll make a little wager with you that if you try one tube of Listerine Tooth Paste, you'll come back for more.

LARGE TUBE—25 CENTS

With a few strokes of a pen American patriots registered their Independence

A Waterman's Pen—with one filling—would have written many times the entire Declaration of Independence. It would have startled these patriots into an appreciation of its remarkable efficiency.

IN MILLIONS of homes and offices today it is freeing men and women from pen-discomfort and aiding them in "the pursuit of happiness."

FOR THE sake of independence try a Waterman's. We recommend the model illustrated. Black, mottled or cardinal holders; fitted with pen points that write as you would write.

Illustration is exact size of $4 model

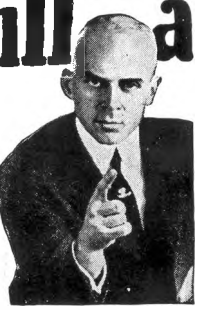
From $4 to $6.50, according to size

Sold and guaranteed by 50,000 merchants

Waterman's Ideal Fountain Pen

Electrical Experts are in Big Demand! —L.L. Cooke

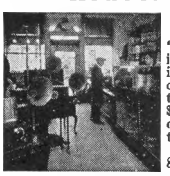
I Will Train You at Home to fill a Big-Pay Job!



L. L. COOKE
Chief Engineer

It's a shame for you to earn $15 or $20 or $30 a week, when in the same six days as an Electrical Expert you could make $70 to $200 —and do it easier—not work half so hard. Why then remain in the small-pay game, in a line of work that offers no chance, no big promotion, no big income? Fit yourself for a real job in the great electrical industry. I'll show you how.

Look What These Cooke Trained Men are Earning



Makes $700 in 24 Days in Radio

"Thanks to your interesting Course I made over $700 in 24 days in Radio. Of course, this is a little above the average but I run from $10 to $40 clear profit every day; you can see what your training has done for me."
FRED G. McNABB,
848 Spring St., Atlanta, Ga.

$70 to $80 a Week for Jacquot

"Now I am specializing in autoelectricity and battery work and make from $70 to $80 a week and am just getting started. I don't believe there is another school in the world like yours. Your lessons are a real joy to study."
ROBERT JACQUOT,
2005 W. Colorado Ave.,
Colorado Springs, Colo.

$20 a Day for Schreck

"Use my name as a reference and depend on me as a booster. The biggest thing I ever did was answer your advertisement. I am averaging better than $500 a month from my own business now. I used to make $18 a week."
A. SCHRECK,
Phoenix, Ariz.

Plant Engineer — Pay Raised 150%

"I was a dumbbell in electricity until I got in touch with you Mr. Cooke, but now I have charge of a big plant including 600 motors and direct a force of 34 men—electricians, helpers, etc. My salary has gone up more than 150%."
GEORGE ILLINGWORTH,
63 Calumet Road,
Holyoke, Mass.

Be an Electrical Expert
Earn $3,500 to $10,000 a Year

Today even the ordinary Electrician —the "screw driver" kind—is making money—big money. But it's the trained man—the man who knows the whys and wherefores of Electricity—the Electrical Expert—who is picked out to "boss" the ordinary Electricians—to boss the Big Jobs—the jobs that pay $3,500 to $10,000 a Year. Get in line for one of these "Big Jobs." Start by enrolling now for my easily learned, quickly grasped, right-up-to-the-minute, Spare-Time Home-Study Course in Practical Electricity.

Age or Lack of Experience No Drawback

You don't have to be a College Man; you don't have to be a High School Graduate. As Chief Engineer of the Chicago Engineering Works, I know exactly the kind of training you need and I will give you that training. My Course in Electricity is simple, thorough and complete and offers every man, regardless of age, education or previous experience, the chance to become, in a very short time, an "Electrical Expert," able to make from $70 to $200 a week.

No Extra Charge for Electrical Working Outfit

With me, you do practical work—at home. You start right in after your first few lessons to work at your profession in the regular way and make extra money in your spare time. For this you need tools, and I give them to you—5 big complete working outfits, with tools, measuring instruments and a real electric motor.

Your Satisfaction Guaranteed

So sure am I that you can learn Electricity—so sure am I that after studying with me, you, too, can get into the "big money" class in Electrical work, that I will guarantee under bond to return every single penny paid me in tuition, if, when you have finished my Course, you are not satisfied it was the best investment you ever made. And back of me in my guarantee, stands the Chicago Engineering Works, Inc., a two million dollar institution, thus assuring to every student enrolled, not only a wonderful training in Electricity, but an unsurpassed Student Service as well.

Get Started Now — Mail Coupon

I want to send you my Electrical Book and Proof Lessons, both Free. These cost you nothing and you'll enjoy them. Make the start today for a bright future in Electricity. Send in Coupon—NOW.

L.L. Cooke, Chief Engineer
Chicago Engineering Works
Dept. 77, 2150 Lawrence Av. Chicago

L. L. COOKE, Dept. 77, 2150 Lawrence Ave., Chicago — **The Man Who Makes "Big-Pay" Men**

Send me at once without obligation your big illustrated book and complete details of your Home Study Course in Electricity, including your outfit and employment service offers.

Name .....

Address .....

Occupation .....

5 big outfits given to you — no extra charge

MAIL COUPON FOR MY FREE BOOK

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

Black Jack

"that good old licorice flavor!"

D. X. OR B. J.—WHICH?