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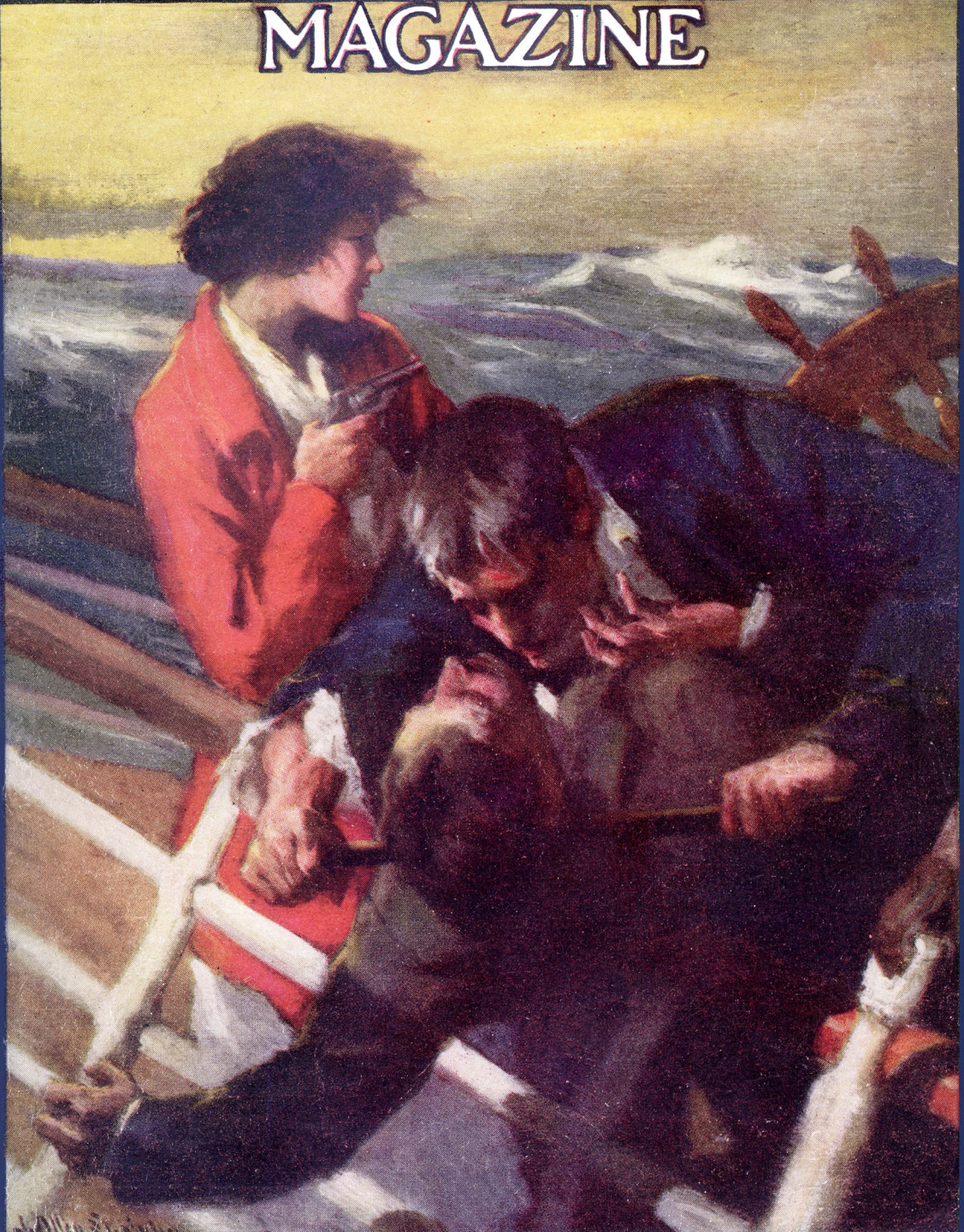
PRICE 20 CENTS

FEBRUARY 1920

THE BLUE BOOK

MAGAZINE

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IN THIS ISSUE : H. Bedford-Jones, Henry Leverage, Edison Marshall, Culpepper Zantt, Randall Parrish, Clarence Herbert New, Chester T. Crowell and others.

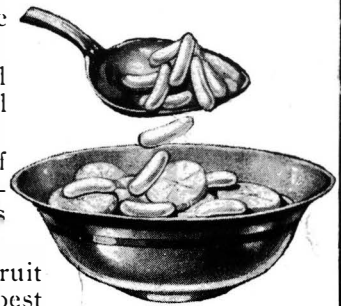
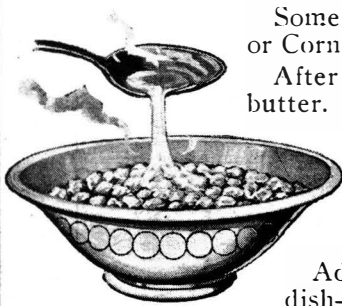
Surprises

You Can Serve With Bubble Grains

Some morning serve Puffed Rice or Corn Puffs in this way:

After crisping, douse with melted butter. Then add your cream and sugar.

It will taste like a dish of confections. And men enjoy it just as much as children.



Add Puffed Rice to your fruit dish—any fruit. Fruit tastes best with some flimsy crust. That's why we have pies, tarts and shortcakes.

These fragile, nut-like bubbles add that crust. After a test you will never omit them.

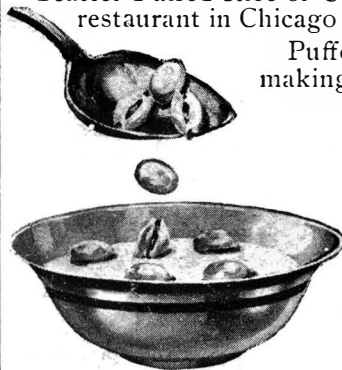
For supper, float Puffed Wheat in milk. These are whole wheat bubbles toasted. They are four times as porous as bread.

Children need whole wheat. They need the minerals in the outer coats. Served in this way they will revel in it.

After school surprise the children with these tidbits: Douse Corn Puffs or Puffed Rice with melted butter. Let them eat like popcorn. Children can eat these grain dainties to their hearts' content—they so easily digest.

Scatter Puffed Rice or Corn Puffs like nut-meats on ice cream. A famous restaurant in Chicago first suggested this.

Puffed Rice is also used like nut-meats in home candy making—to make the candy porous, light and nutty.



**Puffed Wheat
Puffed Rice
Corn Puffs
Also Puffed Rice
Pancake Flour**

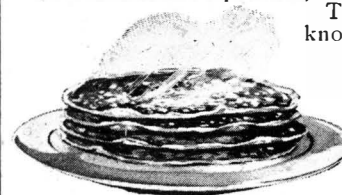


All steam exploded—puffed to eight times normal size. Every food cell blasted by Prof. Anderson's process, so digestion is easy and complete.

These are the greatest grain foods in existence and you should know them all.

Like Pancakes Made With Nuts

Now we make a pancake flour containing ground Puffed Rice. It makes the pancakes fluffy and gives a nut-like flavor. The flour is self-raising, so you simply add milk or water. You never tasted pancakes such as folks make with Puffed Rice Pancake Flour.



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THE BLUE BOOK

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DONALD KENNICOTT, Associate Editor.

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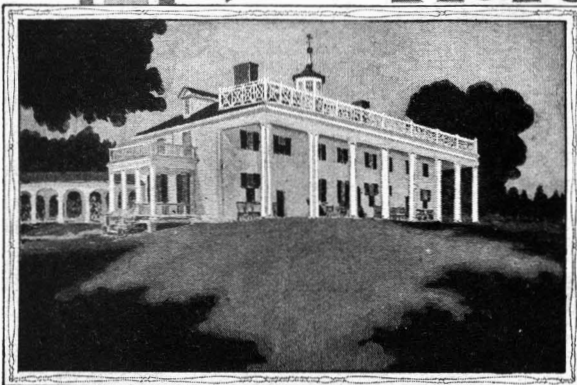
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AT THEATRES WHERE QUALITY RULES

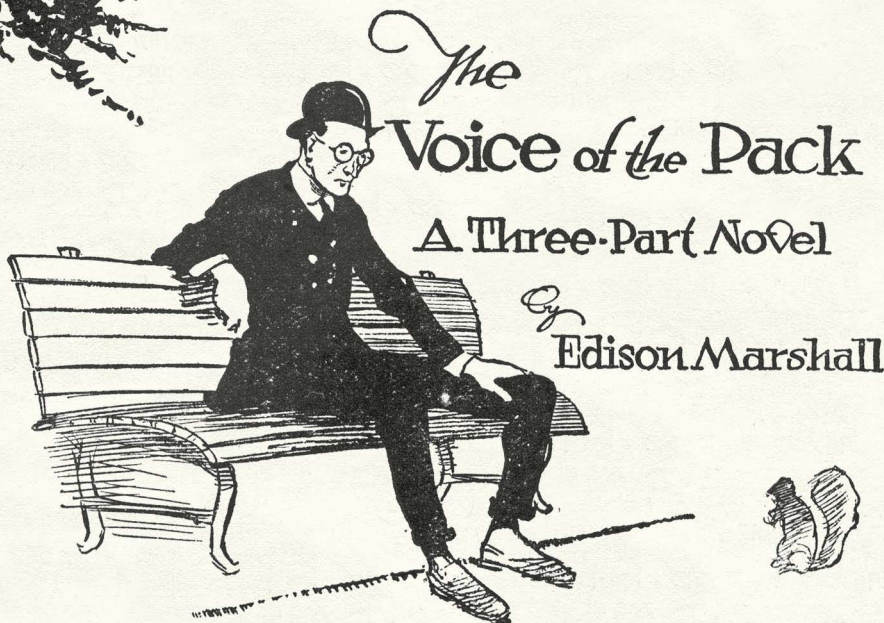
February

1920

THE
BLUE BOOK
MAGAZINE

Vol. XXX

No. 4



If one can just lie close enough to the breast of the wilderness, he can't help but imbibe some of the life that pulses therein.—From a Frontiersman's Diary.

CHAPTER I

LONG ago, when the great city of Gitcheapolis was a rather small, untidy hamlet in the middle of a plain, it used to be that a pool of water, possibly two hundred feet square, gathered every spring immediately back of the courthouse. The snow falls thick and heavy in Gitcheapolis in winter; and the pond was nothing more than snow-water that the inefficient drainage-system of the city did not quite take care of.

Now, snow-water is occasionally the most limpid, melted-crystal thing in the world. There are places just two thousand miles west where you can see it pouring fresh and fresh from the snow-fields, scouring out a ravine from the great rock wall of a mountain-side, leaping faster than a deer leaps—and when you speak of the speed of a descending deer you speak of something the usual mortal eye can scarcely follow—from cataract to cataract; and the sight is always a pleasing one to behold.

Incidentally, these same snow-streams are quite often simply swarming with trout—brook and cutthroat, steelhead and even those speckled fellows that fishermen call Dolly Vardens.

But the pond back of the courthouse was not like this at all. Besides being the despair of the plumbers and the city engineer, it was a severe strain on the beauty-loving instincts of every inhabitant in the town that had any such instincts. It was muddy and murky and generally distasteful. And lastly, there were no trout in it. Neither were there any mud-cat such as were occasionally to be caught in the Gitcheapolis River.

A LITTLE boy played at the edge of the pond, this spring day of long ago. Except for his interest in the pond, it would have scarcely been worth while to go to the trouble of explaining that it contained no fish. He bitterly regretted the fact. In truth, he sometimes liked to believe that it did contain fish, very sleepy

fish that never made a ripple; and as he had an uncommon imagination, he was sometimes able to convince himself that it was so. But he never took hook and line and played at fishing. He was too much afraid of the laughter of his boy friends. His mother probably wouldn't object, he thought, if he fished here, particularly if he was careful not to get his shoes covered with mud. But she didn't let him go down to Gitcheapolis Creek, to fish with the other boys for mud-cat. He was not very strong, she thought, and it was a rough sport, anyway; and besides—she didn't think he wanted to go very badly.

As mothers are usually particularly understanding, this was a curious thing. The truth was that little Dan Failing wanted to fish almost as much as he wanted to live. He would dream about it of nights. His blood would glow with the thought of it in the spring-time. Women the world over will have a hard time believing what an intense, heart-devouring passion the love of the chase can be, whether it is fishing or hunting or merely knocking golf balls into little holes upon a green. Sometimes they don't remember that this instinct is just as much a part of most men, and thus most boys, as their hands or their lips. It was acquired by just as laborious a process—the lives of uncounted thousands of ancestors that fished and hunted for a living.

It was true that little Dan didn't look the part. Even then he showed signs of physical frailty. His eyes looked rather large, and his cheeks were not the color of fresh sirloin as they should have been. In fact, one would have had to look very hard to see any color in them at all. These facts are interesting from the light they throw upon the next glimpse of Dan, fully twenty years later.

THIS story isn't about the pool of snow-water. It is only partly about Gitcheapolis. *Gitche* means *great* in the Indian language, and everyone knows what *polis* means. There are a dozen cities in the Midwestern part of the United States just like it—with Indian names, with muddy snow-water pools, with slow rivers in which only mud-cat live, utterly surrounded by endless fields that stretch level and even to a drab horizon. And because that land is what it is, because there are such cities as Gitcheapolis, there has sprung up in this decade a farseeing breed of men.

They couldn't help learning to see far, on such prairies. And like little Dan by the pool, they did all their hunting and their fishing and exercised many of the instincts that a thousand generations of wild men had instilled in them, in their dreams alone. It was great exercise for the imagination. And perhaps that has had something to do with the size of the crop of writers and poets and artists that is now being harvested in the Middle West.

Except for the fact that it was the background for the earliest picture of little Dan, the pool back of the courthouse has very little importance in his story. It did, however, afford an illustration to him of one of the really astonishing truths of life. He saw a shadow in the water that he pretended he thought might be a fish. He threw a stone at it.

The only thing that happened was a splash, and then a slowly widening ripple. The circumference of the ripple grew ever larger, extended and finally died at the edge of the shore. It set little Dan to thinking. He wondered if had the pool been larger, the ripple would have still spread, and if the pool had been eternity, whether the ripple would have gone on forever. At the time he did not know the laws of cause and effect. Later, when Gitcheapolis was great and prosperous and no longer untidy, he was going to find out that a cause is nothing but a rock thrown into a pond of infinity, and the ripple that is its effect keeps growing and growing forever. The little incident that is the real beginning of this story was of no more importance than a pebble thrown into the snow-water pond; but its effect was to remove the life of Dan Failing, since grown up, far out of the realms of the ordinary.

THIS brings all matters down to 1919, in the last days of a particularly sleepy summer. You would hardly know Gitcheapolis now. It is true that the snows still fell deep and deep in winter, but the city engineer had finally solved the problem of the snow-pool back of the courthouse. In fact, the courthouse itself was gone, and rebuilt in a more pretentious section of the city. The business district had increased tenfold. And the place where the pool used to be, and the playground of Dan Failing, was now laid off in as green and pretty a park as one could wish to see.

The evidence points to the conclusion that the story some of the oldest settlers

told about this district was really so. They say that forty and fifty and maybe seventy-five years ago the quarter-section where the park was laid out was a green little glade, with a real, natural lake in the center. Later the lake was drained to raise corn, and the fish therein—many of them such noble fish as perch and bass—all died in the sun-baked mud. The pool that had gathered yearly was just the lake trying, like a spent prize-fighter, to come back. And now it was rather singular that buildings had been torn down and money had been spent to restore the little glade to its original charm; and even now construction had been started to build an artificial lake in the center. One would be inclined to wonder why things weren't kept the way they were in the first place. But that is the way of cities.

Some day, when the city was more prosperous, a pair of swans and a herd of deer were going to be introduced to restore some of the natural wild-life of the park. But in the summer of 1919 a few small birds and possibly a half-dozen pairs of squirrels were the extent and limit of the wild creatures. And at the moment this story opens, one of these squirrels was perched on a wide-spreading limb that arched a gravel path that slanted through the sunlit park. The squirrel was hungry. He wished that some one would come along with a nut.

There was a bench beneath the tree. If there had not been, the life of Dan Failing would have been entirely different. In fact, as the events will show, there wouldn't have been any life worth talking about at all. If the squirrel had been on any other tree, if he hadn't been hungry, if any one of a dozen other things hadn't been as they were, Dan Failing would have never gone back to the land of his people. The little bushy-tailed fellow on the tree-limb was the squirrel of Destiny!

DAN FAILING stepped out of the elevator, and was at once absorbed in the crowd that ever surged up and down Broad Street. Once in the crowd, Failing surrendered all individuality. No one glanced at him in particular. He wore fairly passable clothes, neither rich nor shabby. He was a tall man, but gave no impression of strength because of the exceeding spareness of his frame. As long as he remained in the crowd, he wasn't important enough to be studied. But soon he turned off,

through the park, and straightway became alone.

The noise and bustle of the crowd—never loud or startling, but so continuous that the senses are scarcely more aware of them than of the beating of one's own heart—suddenly and utterly died almost at the very border of the park. It was as if an ax had chopped them off and left the silence of the wild place. Although Dan Failing had plenty of other things to think about, the phenomenon of the sudden silence went home to him very straight indeed. The noise from the street seemed wholly unable to penetrate the thick branches of the trees. He could even hear the leaves whisking and flicking together, and when a man can discern this, he can hear the cushions of a mountain-lion on a trail at night. Of course, Dan Failing had never heard a mountain-lion. Except on the railroad tracks between, he had never really been away from cities in his life.

At once his thought went back to the doctor's words. "I've made every test," the doctor had said. "They're pretty well shot. Of course, you can go to some sanitarium, if you've got the money. If you haven't—enjoy yourself all you can, for about six months."

Dan's voice had been perfectly cool and sure when he replied. He had smiled a little too. He was still rather proud of himself about that smile. "Six months? Isn't that rather short?"

"Maybe a whole lot shorter. I think that's the limit."

THERE was the situation—Dan Failing had but six months to live. Of course, the doctor had said, if he had the money he could go to a sanitarium. But he had spoken entirely hopelessly. Besides, Dan didn't have the money. He pushed all thought of sanitariums out of his mind. Instead, he began to wonder whether his mother had been entirely wise in her effort to keep him from the "rough games" of the boys of his own age. But he harbored no resentment against his mother. It was all in the game. She had done what she thought was best. And he began to wonder in what way he could get the greatest pleasure from his last three months of life.

"Good Lord!" he suddenly breathed. "I may not even be here to see the snows come!" Perhaps there was a grim note in his voice. There was certainly no tragedy, no offensive sentimentality. He was look-

ing the matter in the face. But it was true that Dan had always been partial to the winter season. When the snow lay all over the farm-lands, and bowed down the limbs of the trees, it had always wakened a curious flood of feelings in the wasted man. It seemed to him that he could remember other winters, wherein the snow lay for endless miles over an endless wilderness, and here and there were strange, many-toed tracks that could be followed in the icy dawns. He didn't ever know just what made the tracks, except that they were creatures of fang and talon that no law had ever tamed.

But of course it was just a fancy. He wasn't in the least misled about it. He knew that he had never, in his lifetime, seen the wilderness. Of course, his grandfather had been a frontiersman of the first order, and all his ancestors before him—a rangy, hardy breed whose wings would crumple in civilization; but he himself had always lived in cities. Yet the falling snows, soft and gentle but with a kind of remorselessness he could sense but could not understand, had always stirred him. He'd often imagined that he would like to see the forests in winter. He knew something about forests. He had gone one year to college, and had studied all the forestry that the university heads would let him take. Later he had read endless books on the same subject. But the knowledge had never done him any good. Except for a few boyish dreams, he never imagined that it would.

In him you could see a reflection of the boy that played beside the pond of snow-water twenty years before. He had still rather large, dark-gray eyes, and perhaps the wasted flesh around them made them seem larger than they were. But it was rather hard to see them, as he wore large glasses over them. His mother had been sure, years before, that he needed glasses; and she had easily found an oculist who agreed with her.

NOW that he was alone on the path, the utter absence of color in his cheeks would have been startling to see. Perhaps an observer would have noticed lean hands, with big-knuckled fingers, a rather firm mouth, and closely cropped dark hair. He was twenty-nine years of age, though he looked somewhat older. But he knew that he was never going to be any older. A doctor as sure of himself as the one he had

just consulted couldn't possibly be mistaken.

It was rather refreshing to get into the park. He could think ever so much more clearly. He never could think in a crowd; the hurrying people always seemed to bewilder him. Here the leaves were flicking and rustling over his head, and the shadows made a curious patchwork on the green lawns. He became quite calm and reflective. Then he sat down on a park bench, just beneath the spreading limb of a great tree. He would sit here, he thought, until he finally decided what he would do with his remaining six months.

He hadn't been able to go to war. The recruiting officer had been very kind but most determined. The boys had brought him great tales of France. It might be nice to go to France, and live in some country inn until he died. But he didn't have very long to think in this vein. For at that instant the squirrel came down to see if he had a nut.

It was the squirrel of Destiny. But Dan didn't know it then.

Now, it is true that it takes more than one generation for any wild creature to get completely away from its natural timidity. Quite often a person is met who has taken quail-eggs from a nest and hatched them beneath the warm body of a domestic hen. Just what is the value of such a proceeding is rather hard to explain, as quail have neither the instincts nor the training to enjoy life in a barnyard. Yet occasionally it is done. And the little quail spend most of their days running frantically up and down the coop, yearning for the wild, free spaces for which they were created. But they haven't, as a rule, many days to spend in this manner. Mostly they run until they die.

It is said to work both ways. A tame canary, freed, will usually try to return to his cage. And it is known to be true of human beings just as of the wild creatures. There are certain breeds of men, used to the far-lying hills, that if inclosed in cities run up and down them until they die.

Bushy-tail was not particularly afraid of the human beings that passed up and down the park, because he had learned by experience that they usually attempted no harm to him. Nevertheless he had his instincts. He didn't entirely trust men. Occasionally a child would come with a bag of nuts, and he would sit on the grass not a dozen feet away to gather such as were

thrown to him. But all the time he kept one sharp eye open for any sudden or dangerous motions. And every instinct warned him against coming nearer than a dozen feet. After several generations, probably the squirrels of this park would climb all over its visitors and sniff in their ears and investigate the back of their necks. But this wasn't the way of Bushy-tail. He had come too recently from the wild places. And he wondered, most intensely, whether this tall, forked creature had a pocketful of nuts. He swung down on the grass to see.

"Why, you little devil!" Dan said in a whisper. His eyes suddenly sparkled with delight, and he forgot all about the doctor's words and his own prospects in his bitter regret that he had not brought a pocketful of nuts. Unfortunately he had never acquired the peanut habit. His mother had always thought it vulgar.

AND then Dan did a curious thing. Even later, he didn't know why he did it, or what gave him the idea that he could decoy the squirrel up to him by doing it. That was his only purpose—just to see how close the squirrel would come to him. He thought he would like to look into the bright eyes at close range. All he did was suddenly to freeze into one position—in an instant rendered as motionless as the rather questionable-looking stone stork that was perched on the fountain.

He didn't know it, at the time, but it was a most meritorious piece of work. The truth was that he was acting solely by instinct. Men who have lived long in the wilderness at last learn a very important secret in dealing with wild animals. They know, in the first place, that intimacy with them is solely a matter of keeping still and making no sudden motions. It is motion, not shape, that frightens them. If a hunter is among a herd of deer, and he wishes to pick the bucks off, one by one, he simply sits still, moving his rifle with infinite caution, and the animal intelligence does not extend far enough to interpret him as an enemy. Instead of being afraid, the deer are usually only curious.

Dan simply sat still. The squirrel was very close to him, and Dan seemed to know by instinct that the movement of a single muscle would give him away. So he sat as if he were posing for a photographer's camera. The fact that he was

able to do it is in itself important. It is considerably easier to exercise with dumbbells for five minutes than to sit absolutely without motion for the same length of time. Hunters and naturalists acquire the art with training. It was therefore rather curious that Dan succeeded so well the first time he tried it. He had sense enough to relax first, before he froze. Thus he didn't put such a severe strain on his muscles. And this was another bit of wisdom that in a tenderfoot would have caused much wonder in certain hairy old hunters in the West.

The squirrel, after ten seconds had elapsed, stood on his haunches to see better. First he looked a long time with his left eye. Then he turned his head, and looked very carefully with his right. Then he backed off a short distance, and tried to get a focus with both. Then he came some half-dozen steps nearer.

A moment before, he had been certain that a living creature—in fact one of the most terrible and powerful living creatures in the world—had been sitting in a curious way on the park bench. Now his poor little brain was completely addled. All the time, Dan was sitting in perfectly plain sight; it wasn't as if he were hiding. But the squirrel had learned to judge all life by its motion alone, and he was completely at a loss to interpret a motionless figure.

Bushy-tail drew off a little further, fully convinced at last that his hopes of a nut from a child's hand were blasted. But he turned to look once more. The figure still sat utterly inert. And all at once the squirrel forgot his devouring hunger in the face of an overwhelming curiosity.

He came somewhat nearer, and looked a long time. Then he made a half-circle about the bench, turning his head as he moved. He was more puzzled than ever, but he was no longer afraid. His curiosity had become so intense that no room for fear was left. And then he sprang up on the park bench.

DAN moved then. The movement consisted of a sudden heightening of the light in his eyes. But the squirrel didn't see it. It takes a muscular response to be visible to the eyes of the wild things.

The squirrel crept slowly along the bench, stopping to sniff, stopping to stare with one eye and another, just devoured from head to tail with curiosity. And then he leaped on Dan's knee.

He was quite convinced, by now, that this warm perch on which he stood was the most singular and interesting object of his young life. It was true that he was faintly worried by the smell that reached his nostrils. But really, all it did was further to incite his curiosity. He followed the leg up to the hip, and then perched on the elbow. And an instant more he was poking a cold nose into Dan's neck.

But if the squirrel was excited by all these developments, its amazement was nothing compared to Dan's. To him, it had been the most astounding incident in his life. He sat still, tingling with delight. And in a single flash of inspiration he knew he had come among his own people at last.

The creatures of the wild—they were the folk he had always secretly loved and instinctively understood. His ancestors, for literally generations, had been frontiersmen and outdoor naturalists who never wrote books; was it possible that they had bequeathed to him an understanding and love of the wild that most men did not have? But before he ever had time to meditate on this question, an idea seemed to pop and flame like a Roman candle in his brain. He knew where he would spend his last six months of life.

His own grandfather had been a hunter and trapper and frontiersman in a certain vast but little-known Oregon forest. His son had moved to the Eastern cities, but in Dan's garret there used to be old mementoes and curios from these savage days—a few claws and teeth, and a fragment of an old diary. The call had come to him at last. Tenderfoot though he was, Dan would go back to those forests, to spend his last six months of life among the wild creatures that made them their home.

CHAPTER III

THE dinner hour found Dan Failing in the public library of Gitcheapolis, asking the girl who sat behind the desk if he might look at maps of Oregon. He got out the whole question without coughing once, but in spite of it she felt that he ought to be asking for California or Arizona maps, rather than Oregon. People did not usually go to Oregon to rid themselves of his malady. A librarian, as a rule, is a wonderfully well-informed person; but in spite of it her mental picture

of Oregon was simply one large rain-storm. She remembered that she used to believe that Oregon people actually grew webs between their toes, and the place was thus known as the web-foot State. She didn't know that Oregon has almost as many climates as the whole of nature has in stock—snow in the east, rain in the north, winds in the west and sunshine in the south, with all the grades between. There are certain sections where in midwinter all hunters who do not care to sink over their heads in the level snow, walk exclusively on snowshoes. There are others, not one hundred miles distant, where any kind of snow-storm is as rare a phenomenon as the seventeen-year locusts.

Distances are rather vast in the West. For instance, the map that Dan Failing looked at did not seem much larger than the map, say, of Maryland. Figures showed, however, that at least two counties of Oregon were each as large as the area of the whole of the former State. He remembered that his grandfather had lived in southern Oregon. He looked along the bottom of his map and discovered a whole empire, ranging from gigantic sage-plains to the east to dense forests along the Pacific Ocean.

Those sage-flats, by the way, contain not only sage-hens as thick as poultry in a hen-yard, and jack-rabbits of a particularly long-legged and hardy breed, but also America's one species of antelope. Had Dan known that this was true, had he only been aware that these antelope are without exception the fastest creatures that run upon the face of the earth, he might have been tempted to go there instead of to the land of his fathers. But all he saw was a large brown space on the map, marked at exceedingly long intervals by the name of a fort or town, and so of course he didn't know these things. He began to look around for Linkville.

TIME was when Linkville was one of the principal towns of Oregon. Dan remembered the place because some of the time-yellowed letters his grandfather had sent him had been mailed at a town that bore this name. But he couldn't find Linkville on the map. Later he was to know the reason—that the town, halfway between the sage-plains and the mountains, had prospered and changed its name. He remembered that it was located on one of those great fresh-water lakes of southern

Oregon; so, giving up the search, he began to look for lakes. He found them in plenty—vast, unmeasured lakes that seemed to be distributed without reason or sense over the whole southern end of the State. Near the Klamath Lakes, seemingly the most imposing of all the fresh-water lakes that the map revealed, he found a city named Klamath Falls. He put the name down in his notebook.

The map showed a particularly high, far-spreading range of mountains due west of the city. Of course they were the Cascades—the map said so very plainly. Then he knew he was getting home. His grandfather had lived and trapped and died in these same wooded hills. Finally he located and recorded the name of the largest city on the main railroad line that was adjacent to the Cascades.

The preparation for his departure took many days. He read many books on flora and fauna. He bought sporting equipment. Knowing the usual ratio between the respective pleasures of anticipation and realization, he d'd not hurry himself at all. And one midnight he boarded a west-bound train.

There were none that he cared about telling good-by. The sudden realization of the fact brought a moment's wonder. He had not realized that he had had such a lonely existence. Perhaps, after all, the cards of life had been stacked against him. There were men who were fitted for living in cities, but perhaps he was not one of them. He saw the station lights grow dim as the train pulled out. Soon they were just a spark, here and there, from the outlying homes. And not long after this, the silence of the farm-lands closed down upon the train.

He sat for a long time in the vestibule of the sleeping-car, in anticipation of this final adventure of his life. It is true that he had not experienced many adventures. He had lived most of them in imagination alone; or else with tired eyes he had read of the exploits of other men. He was rather tremulous and exultant as he sank down into his berth. For a long time he watched the shadowy march of the telegraph poles along the road.

HE saw to it that at least a measure of preparation was made for his coming. That night a long wire went out to the chamber of commerce of one of the larger southern Oregon cities. In it he told the

date of his arrival and asked certain directions. He wanted to know the name of some mountain rancher where possibly he might find board and room for the summer and the remainder of fall. He wanted shooting, and he particularly cared to be near a river where trout might be found. He had always heard of trout. But they never came up Gitcheapolis River, or leaped for flies in the pond back of the courthouse. And he signed the wire with his full name—*Dan Failing*, with a *Henry* in the middle, and a "III" at the end.

He usually didn't sign his name in quite this manner. The people of Gitcheapolis did not have particularly vivid memories of Dan's grandfather. But it might be that a legend of the gray, straight frontiersman who was his ancestor had still survived in these remote Oregon wilds. The use of the full name didn't hurt.

Instead of hurting, it was positive inspiration. The chamber of commerce of the busy little Oregon city was not usually exceptionally interested in stray hunters that wanted a boarding-place for the summer. Its business was finding country homes for orchardists in the pleasant river-valleys. But it happened that the recipient of the wire was one of the oldest residents, a frontiersman himself, and it was one of the traditions of the old West that friendships were not soon forgotten. Dan Failing the First had been a legend in the old trapping, shooting days when the man himself was young. So it came about that when Dan's train stopped at Cheyenne, he found a telegram waiting him:

Any relation to Dan Failing of the Umpquaw Divide

DAN had never heard of the Umpquaw Divide, but he couldn't doubt that the sender of the wire referred to his grandfather. He wired in the affirmative. The head of the chamber of commerce received the wire, read it, thrust it into his desk, and in the face of a really important piece of business proceeded to forget all about it. Thus it came about that except for one thing, Dan Failing would have probably stepped off the train at his destination wholly unheralded and unmet. The one thing that changed his destiny was that at a meeting of a certain widely known fraternal order, the next night, the chamber of commerce crossed trails with

the frontier in the person of another old resident who had his home in the farthest reaches of the Umpquaw Divide. The latter asked the former to come up for a few days' shooting—the deer being fatter and more numerous than in any previous season since the days of the grizzlies. For it is true that members of the most magnificent breed of bears that ever walked the face of the earth once left their footprints, as of flour-sacks in the mud, from one end of the region to another.

"Too busy, I'm afraid," the chamber of commerce head replied. "But Lennox—that reminds me. Do you remember old Dan Failing?"

Lennox probed back into the years for a single instant, straightened out all the kinks of his memory in less time than the wind straightens out the folds of a flag, and turned a most interested face. "Remember him!" he exclaimed. "I should say I do."

The middle-aged man half closed his piercing, gray eyes. Those piercing eyes are a peculiar quality in the mountain men, and whether they come from gazing over endless miles of winter snow, or from some quality of steel that life in the mountains imbues, no one is quite able to determine. "Listen, Steele," he said. "I saw Dan Failing make a bet once. I was just a kid, but I wake up in my sleep to marvel at it. We had a full long glimpse of a black-tail bounding up a long slope. It was just a spike-buck, and Dan Failing said he could take the left-hand spike off with one shot from his old Sharpe's. Three of us bet him—the whole thing in less than two seconds. With the next shot, he'd get the deer. He won the bet, and now if I ever forget Dan Failing, I want to die."

"You're just the man I'm looking for, then. You're not going out till the day after to-morrow?"

"No."

"On the limited, hitting here to-morrow morning, there's a grandson of Dan Failing. His name is Dan Failing, too, and he wants to go up to your place to hunt—stay all summer and pay board."

Lennox's eyes said that he couldn't believe that it was true. After a while his tongue spoke too. "Good Lord!" he said. "I used to foller Dan around—like old Shag, before he died, followed Snowbird. Of course he can come. But he can't pay board."

IT was characteristic of the mountain men—that the grandson of Dan Failing couldn't possibly pay board. But Steele knew the ways of cities and of men, and he only smiled. "He wont come, then," he explained. "Anyway, have that out with him at the end of his stay. He wants fishing, and you've got that in the North Fork. He wants shooting, and if there is a place in the United States with more wild animals around the back door than at your house, I don't know where it is. Moreover, you're a thousand miles back—"

"Only one hundred, if you must know. But Steele—do you suppose he's the man his grandfather was before him? If he is—well, my hat's off to him before he steps off the train."

The mountaineer's bronzed face was earnest and intent in the bright lights of the club. Steele thought he had known this breed. Now he began to have doubts of his knowledge. "He wont be—don't count on it," he said humbly. "The Failings have done much for this region, and I'm glad enough to do a little to pay it back, but don't count much on this Eastern boy. He's lived in cities—besides, he's a sick man. He said so in his wire. You ought to know it before you take him in."

The bronzed face changed: possibly a shadow of disappointment came into his eyes. "A lunger, eh?" he repeated. "Yes—it's true that if he'd been like the other Failings, he'd never have been a lunger. Why, Steele, you couldn't have given that old man a cold if you'd tied him in the Rogue River overnight. Of course you couldn't count on the line keeping up forever. But I'll take him, for the memory of his grandfather."

"You're not afraid to?"

"Afraid, nothing. Those two strapping children of mine are too husky to worry about. Snowbird weighs one hundred and twenty pounds, and is hard as steel. Never knew a sick day in her life. And you know Bill, of course."

Yes, Steele knew Bill. Bill weighed two hundred, and he would choose the biggest of the steers he drove down to the lower levels in the winter, and twisting its horns, would make it lie over on its side.

And even as the men talked, the train that bore Dan Failing to the home of his ancestors was entering for the first time the dark forest of pine and fir that is the

eternal background of the Northwest. The wind came cool and infinitely fresh into the windows of the sleeping-car, and it brought, as camels bring myrrh from the East, strange, pungent odors of balsam and mountain-flower and warm earth, cooling after a day of blasting sun. These smells all went straight home to Dan. He was wholly unable to understand the strange feeling of familiarity that he had with them, a sensation that in his dreams he had known them always, and that he must never go out of the range of them again.

CHAPTER IV

DAN didn't see his host at first. For the first instant he was entirely engrossed by a surging feeling of disappointment—that he had been tricked and had only come to another city, after all. He got down onto the gravel of the station, and out on the gray pavement he heard the clang of a trolley-car. Trolley-cars didn't fit into his picture of the West at all. Many automobiles were parked just beside the station, some of them foreign cars of expensive makes such as he supposed would be wholly unknown on the frontier. A man in golf clothes brushed his shoulder.

It wasn't a large city; but there was certainly lack of any suggestion of the frontier. But there were a number of things that Dan Failing did not know about the West. One of the most important of them was the characteristic way in which wildernesses and busy cities are sometimes mixed up indiscriminately together—one can step out of a modern country-club to hear the coyotes wailing on the hills. He really had no right to feel disappointed. He had simply come to the real West—that bewildering land in which To-morrow and Yesterday sit right next to each other, with no To-day between. The cities, often built on the dreams of the future, sometimes are modern to the point that they give many a sophisticated Eastern man a decided shock. But quite often this quality extends to the corporation limits and not a step further. Then, like as not, they drop sheer off, as over a precipice, into the utter wilderness of the Past.

Dan looked up to the hills, and he felt better. He couldn't see them plainly, for the faint smoke of a distant forest-fire half obscured them. Yet he saw fold on

fold of ridges, a rather peculiar blue in color, and even his untrained eyes could see that they were clothed in forests of evergreen. It is a strange thing about evergreen forests that they never, even when one is close to them, appear to be really green. To a distant eye they range all the way from lavender to a pale sort of blue for which no name has ever been invented. Just before dark, when, as all mountaineers know, the sky turns green, the forests are simply curious, dusky shadows.

The pines are always dark. Perhaps after all they are simply the symbol of the wilderness—eternal, silent, and in a vague way rather dark and sad. No one who really knows the mountains can completely get away from their tone of sadness. Over the heads of the green hills Dan could see a few great peaks—McLaughlin, even and regular as a painted mountain, Wagner, with queer, white gashes where the snow still lay in its ravines, and to the southeast a misty range of snow-covered hills that were the Siskiyoues. He felt decidedly better. And when he saw old Silas Lennox, waiting patiently beside the station, he felt he had come to the right place.

NOW, it would be interesting to explain why Dan at once recognized the older man for the breed he was. But unfortunately there are certain of the many voices that speak within the minds of human-beings of which scientists have never been able to take records. They simply tell their messages; and their hearer, without knowing why, knows that he has heard the truth. Silas Lennox was not dressed in a way that would distinguish him. It is true that he wore a flannel shirt, riding trousers and rather heavy boots. But sportsmen all over the face of the earth wear this costume at times. Mountain men have a peculiar stride by which experienced persons can occasionally recognize them; but Silas Lennox was standing still when Dan got his first glimpse of him. The case gets down to a simple matter of the things that could be read in Lennox's face.

Dan disbelieved wholly in books that tell how to read characters at sight. Yet at the first glance of the lean, bronzed face his heart gave a curious little bound. A pair of gray eyes met his. They didn't look past him, or at either side of him, or at his chin or his forehead. They looked right at his eyes: two fine black points in

a rather hard gray iris. The skin around the eyes was burned brown by the sun, and the flesh was so lean that the cheekbones showed plainly. The mouth was straight; but yet it was neither savage nor cruel. It was simply determined.

But the strangest part of all was that Dan felt an actual sense of familiarity with this kind of man. To his knowledge, he had never known one before; and it was extremely doubtful whether in his Midwestern city he had even seen the type. Yet all his life, Dan felt, he had known this straight, gray-eyed mountain breed, even better than he knew the boys who went to college with him. At the time he didn't stop to wonder at the feeling. He was too busy looking about. But the time was to come when he would wonder, and conclude that it was just another bit of evidence pointing to the same conclusion. And besides this unexplainable feeling of familiarity, he felt a sudden sense of peace, even a quiet sort of exultation, such as a man feels when he gets back into his own home country at last.

LENNOX came up with a light, silent tread and extended his hand. "You're Dan Failing's grandson, aren't you?" he asked. "I'm Silas Lennox, who used to know him when he lived on the Divide. You are coming to spend the summer and fall on my ranch."

The immediate result of these words, besides relief, was to set Dan wondering how the old mountaineer had recognized him. He wondered if he had any physical resemblance to his grandfather. But this hope was shot to earth at once. His telegram had explained about his malady, and of course the mountaineer had picked him out simply because he had the mark of the disease on his face. As he shook hands, he tried his best to read the mountaineer's expression. It was all too plain: an undeniable look of disappointment.

The truth was that, in spite of all the chamber of commerce head had told him, Lennox had still hoped to find some image of the elder Dan Failing in the face and body of his grandson. But at first there seemed to be none at all. The great hunter and trapper who had tamed the wilderness about the region of the Divide—as far as mortal man could tame it—had a skin that was rather the color of old leather. The face of this young man was wholly without tinge of color.

Because of the thick glasses, Lennox could not see the young man's eyes; but he didn't think it likely they were at all like the eyes with which the elder Failing saw his way through the wilderness at night. Of course he was tall, just as the famous frontiersman had been, but while the elder weighed one hundred and ninety pounds, bone and muscle, this man did not touch one hundred and thirty. Evidently the years had brought degeneracy to the Failing breed. Lennox was desolated by the thought.

Lennox helped him with his bag to a little automobile that waited beside the station. They got into the two front seats. "You'll be wondering at my taking you in a car—clear to the Divide," Lennox explained. "But we mountain men can't afford to drive horses any more where a car will go. This time of year I can make it fairly easy—only the last fifteen miles on low gear. But in the winter—it's either a case of coming down on snowshoes or staying there."

And a moment later they were starting up the long, curved road that led to the Divide.

DURING the hour that they were crossing over the foothills, on the way to the big timber, Silas Lennox talked a great deal of the frontiersman that had been Dan's grandfather. A mountain man does not use profuse adjectives. He talks very simply and very straight, and often there are long silences between his sentences. Yet he conveys his ideas with entire clearness. Dan realized at once that if he could be, in Lennox's eyes, one fifth of the man his grandfather had been, he would never have to fear again the look of disappointment with which his host greeted him at the station. But instead of reaching that high place, he had only—death.

He had never dreamed that the fame of his grandfather had spread so far. For the first ten miles, Dan listened to stories—legends of a cold nerve that simply could not be shaken, of a powerful, tireless physique, of moral and physical strength that was seemingly without limit. Then as the foothills began to give way to the higher ridges, and the shadow of the deeper forests fell upon the narrow, brown road, there began to be long gaps in the talk. And soon they rode in utter silence, each of them evidently absorbed in his own thoughts.

Dan did not wonder at it at all. Perhaps he began to understand faintly the reason for the silence and the reticence that is such a predominant quality in the forest men. There is a quality in the big timber that doesn't make for conversation, and no one has ever been completely successful in explaining what it is. Perhaps there is a feeling of insignificance, a sensation that is particularly insistent in the winter snows. The trees, all towering and old, seem to ignore one as a being too unimportant to notice. And besides, the silence of the forest itself seems to get into the spirit, and the great, quiet spaces that lie between tree and tree simply dry up the springs of conversation. Dan did not feel oppressed at all. He seemed to fall into the spirit of the woods, and no words came to his lips. He began to watch the ever-changing vista that the curving road revealed.

FIRST there had been brown hills, and here and there great heaps of stone. The brush had been rather scrubby, and the trees somewhat sickly and brown. But now, as they mounted higher, they were coming into open forest. The trees stood one and one, perfect, dark-limbed, and only the carpet of their needles lay between. The change was evidenced in the streams, too. They seemingly had not suffered from the drouth that had sucked up the valley streams. They were faster, too, whiter with foam, and the noise of their falling waters carried farther through the still woods. The road kept up the long shoulder of a ridge, an easy grade of perhaps six per cent.

The smaller wild things of the mountains began to present themselves in breathless instants beside the road. These little people give a note of sociability, of companionship, that is sorely needed to dull the edge of the stark lonesomeness and severity that is the usual tone of the mountains. The fact that they all live under the snow in winter is one reason why this season is dreadful to the spirit.

Every tree-trunk seemed to have its chipmunk, and they all seemed to be suffering from the same delusion. They all were afflicted with the idea that the car was trying to cut off their retreat, and only by crossing the road in front of it could they save themselves. This idea is a particularly prevalent one with wild animals; and it is the same instinct that makes

a domestic cow almost invariably cross the road in front of a motorist. It also explains why certain cowardly animals, such as the wolf or cougar, will sometimes, without seemingly a cause on earth, make a desperate charge on a hunter. They think their retreat is cut off, and they have to fight. Again and again the chipmunks crossed at the risk of their lives. Sometimes the two men saw the big, flat-footed rabbits that seem especially constructed for moving about in the winter snows, and more than once the grouse got up with a whirl and beat of wings.

Every mile was an added delight to Dan. No wine could have brought a brighter sparkle to his eyes. He had begun to experience a vague sort of excitement, an emotion that was almost akin to exultation, over the constant stir and movement of the forest life. He didn't know that a bird-dog feels the same when it gets to the uplands where the quail are hiding. He had no acquaintance with bird-dogs whatever. He hadn't remembered that he had qualities in common with them—a long line of ancestors who had lived by hunting.

ONCE, as they stopped the car to refill the radiator from a mountain stream, Lennox looked at him with sudden curiosity. "You *are* getting a thrill out of this, aren't you?" he asked wonderingly.

It was a curious tone. Perhaps it was a hopeful tone too. He spoke as if he hardly understood.

"A thrill!" Dan echoed. He spoke as a man speaks in the presence of some great wonder. "Good heavens, I never saw anything like it in my life."

"In this very stream," the mountaineer told him joyously, "you can sometimes catch trout that weigh three pounds."

But then as he got back into the car, the look of interest died out of his eyes. Of course, any man would be somewhat excited by his first glimpse of the wilderness. It was not that he had inherited any of the traits of his grandfather. It was absurd to hope that he had. And he would soon get tired of the silences, and want to go back to his cities.

He told his thought—that it would all soon grow old to him; and Dan turned almost in anger. "You don't know," he said. "I didn't know myself, how I would feel about it. I'm never going to leave the hills again."

"You don't mean that."

"But I do." He tried to speak further, but he coughed instead. "But I couldn't if I wanted to. That cough tells you why, I guess."

"You mean to say—" Silas Lennox turned in amazement. "You mean that you're a— a goner?"

"That's the impression I meant to convey. I've got a little over four months— though I don't see that I'm any weaker than I was when the doctor said I had six months. Those four will take me all through the fall and the early winter. And I hope you won't feel that you've been imposed upon."

"It isn't that." Silas Lennox threw his car into gear, and started up the long grade. And he drove clear to the top of it and into another glen before he spoke again. Then he pointed to what looked to Dan like a brown streak that melted into the thick brush. "That was a deer," he said slowly. "Just a glimpse, but your grandfather could have got him between the eyes. Most like as not, though, he'd have let him go. He never killed except when he needed meat. But that—as you say—ain't the impression I'm trying to convey."

He seemed to be groping for words. "What is it, Mr. Lennox?" Dan asked.

"Instead of being sorry, I'm mighty glad you've come," Lennox told him. "It's not that I expect you to be like your grandfather. You haven't had his chance. But it's always the way of true men, the world over, to come back to their own kind to die. That deer we just saw—he's your people; and so are all these ranchers that grub their lives out of the forests—they are your people too. The bear and the elk, and even the porcupines—though you likely won't care for 'em—it's almost as if they were your grandfather's own folks. And you couldn't have pleased the old man's old friends any better, or done more for his memory, than to come back to his own land for your last days."

There were great depths of meaning in the simple words. There were significances, such as the love that the mountain men have for their own land, that came but dimly to Dan's perceptions. The words were strange; yet Dan intuitively understood. It was as if a prodigal son had returned at last, and although his birthright was squandered and he came only to die, the people of his home would give him

kindness and forgiveness, even though they could not give him their respect.

CHAPTER V

THE Lennox home was a typical mountain ranch-house—square, solid, comforting in storm and wind. Bill was out to the gate when the car drove up. He was a son of his father, a strong man in body and personality. He too had heard of the elder Failing, and he opened his eyes when he saw the slender youth that was his grandson.

Bill led the way into the white-walled living-room. The shadows of twilight were just falling; and Bill had already lighted a fire in the fireplace to remove the chill that always descends with the mountain night. The whole long room was ruddy and cheerful in its glare. At once the elder Lennox drew a chair close to it for Dan.

"You must be chilly and worn-out from the long ride," he suggested quietly. He spoke in the tone a strong man invariably uses toward an invalid. But while a moment before Dan had welcomed the sight of the leaping, life-giving flames, he felt a curious resentment at the words.

"I'm not cold," he said. "It's hardly dark yet. I'd sooner go outdoors and look around."

The elder man regarded him curiously, perhaps with the faintest glimmer of admiration. "You better wait till to-morrow, Dan," he replied. "Bill will have supper soon, anyway. To-morrow we'll walk up the ridge and I'll see if I can show you a deer. You don't want to overdo too much, right at first."

"But good heavens! I'm not going to try to spare myself, while I'm here. It's too late for that."

"Of course—but sit down now, anyway. I'm sorry Snowbird isn't here."

"Snowbird is—"

"My daughter. My boy, she can make a biscuit! That's not her name of course, but we've always called her that. She got tired of keeping house, and is working this summer. Poor Bill has to keep house for her, and no wonder he's eager to take the stock down. I only wish he hadn't brought 'em up this spring at all—I've lost dozens from the coyotes."

"But a coyote can't kill cattle—"

"It can if it has hydrophobia—a com-

mon thing in the varmints this time of year. But as I say, Bill will take the stock down next season, and then Snowbird's work will be through and she'll come back here."

"Then she's down in the valley?"

"Far from it. She's a mountain girl if one ever lived. Perhaps you don't know the recent policy of the forest service to hire women when they can. It was a policy started in war-times and kept up now because it is economical and efficient. She and a girl from college have a cabin not five miles from here on old Bald Mountain, and they're doing lookout duty."

DAN wondered intensely what lookout duty might be. His thought went back to his early study of forestry. "You see, Dan," Lennox said in explanation, "the Government loses thousands of dollars every year by forest fire. A fire can be stopped easily if it is seen soon after it starts. But let it burn awhile, in this dry season, and it's a terror—a wall of flame that races through the forests and can't hardly be stopped. And maybe you don't realize how enormous this region is—literally hundreds of miles across. We're the last outpost—there are four cabins, if you can find them, in the first seventy miles back to town. So they have to put lookouts on the high points, and now they're coming to the use of airplanes so they can keep even a better watch. All summer and until the rains come in the fall, they have to guard every minute, and even then sometimes the fires get away from them. And one of the first things a forester learns, Dan, is to be careful with fire."

"Is that the way they are started—from the carelessness of campers?"

"Partly. There's an old rule in the hills—put out every fire before you leave it. Be careful with the cigar-butts too—even the coals of a pipe. But of course the lightning starts many fires; and I regret to say—hundreds of them are started with matches."

"But why on earth—"

"It doesn't make very good sense, does it? Well, one reason is that certain stockmen think that a burned forest makes good range—that the under vegetation that springs up when the trees are burned makes good feed for stock. But you must know, too, that there are two kinds of men in the mountains. One kind—the real moun-

tain men, such as your grandfather was—live just as well, just as clean as the ranchers in the valley. Some of this kind are trappers or herders. But there's another class too—the most shiftless, ignorant people in America. They have few acres to raise crops, and they kill deer for their hides, and most of all they make their living fighting forest-fires.

"A fire means work for every hill-billy in the region—often five or six dollars a day and better food than they're used to. And they can loaf on the job, put in claims for extra hours, and make what to them is a fortune. You'll likely see a few of the breed before—before your visit here is ended. There's a family of 'em not three miles off—and that's real neighborly in the mountains—by the name of Cranston. Bert Cranston traps a little and makes moonshine—you'll probably see plenty of him. Sometime I'll tell you of a little difficulty that I had with him once. You needn't worry about him coming to this house—he's already received his instructions in that matter.

"But I see I'm getting all tangled up in my traces. Snowbird and a girl friend from college got jobs this summer as lookouts—all through the forest service they are hiring women for the work. They are more vigilant than men, less inclined to take chances, and work cheaper. These two girls have a cabin near a spring, and they cook their own food, and are making what is big wages in the mountains. I'm rather hoping she'll drop over for a few minutes to-night."

"Good Lord—does she travel over these hills in the darkness?"

THE mountaineer laughed—a delighted sound that came somewhat curiously from the bearded lips of the stern, dark man. "Dan, I'll swear she's afraid of nothing that walks the face of the earth—and it isn't because she hasn't had experiences either. She's a dead shot with a pistol, for one thing. She's physically strong, and every muscle is hard as nail's. She used to have Shag, too—the best dog in all these mountains. She's a mountain girl, I tell you—whoever wins her has got to be able to tame her!" The mountaineer laughed again. "I sent her to school, of course—but there was only one boy she'd look at—the athletic coach! And it wasn't his fault that he didn't follow her back to the mountains."

The call to supper came then, and Dan got his first sight of mountain food. There were potatoes, newly dug, mountain vegetables that were crisp and cold, a steak of peculiar shape, and a great bowl of purple berries to be eaten with sugar and cream. Dan's appetite was not as a rule particularly good. But evidently the long ride had affected him. He simply didn't have the moral courage to refuse when the elder Lennox heaped his plate.

"Good heavens, I can't eat all that!" he said as it was passed to him. But the others laughed, and told him to take heart.

He took heart. It was a singular thing, but at that first bite his sudden confidence in his gustatory ability almost overwhelmed him. All his life he had avoided meat. His mother had always been convinced that such a delicate child as he had been could not properly digest it. But all at once he decided to forgo his mother's philosophies for good and all. There was certainly nothing to be gained by following them farther. So he cut himself a bite of the tender steak—fully half as generous as the bites that Bill was consuming across the table. And its first flavor simply filled him with delight.

"What is this meat?" he asked. "I've certainly tasted it before."

"I'll bet a few dollars you haven't," Lennox answered. "Maybe you've got what the scientists call an inherited memory of it. It's the kind of meat your grandfather used to live on—venison."

Both of them had seemed pleased that he liked the venison. And both seemed boyishly eager to test his reaction to the great wild huckleberries that were the desert of the simple meal. He tried them with much ceremony.

Their flavor really surprised him. They had a tang, a fragrance that was quite unlike anything he had ever tasted, yet which brought a curious flood of dim, half-understood memories. It seemed to him that he always had stood on the hillsides, picking these berries as they grew, and staining his lips with them. But at once he pushed the thoughts out of his mind, thinking that his imagination was playing tricks upon him. And soon after this, Lennox led him out of the house for his first glimpse of the hills in the darkness.

THEY walked together out the gate, across the first of the wide pastures where, at certain seasons, Lennox kept his

cattle; and at last they came out upon the tree-covered ridge. The moon was just rising. They could see it casting a curious glint over the very tips of the pines. But it couldn't get down between them. They stood too close, too tall and thick for that. And for a moment Dan's only sensation was one of silence.

"You have to stand still a moment, to really know anything," Lennox told him.

They both stood still. Dan was as motionless as that day in the park, long weeks before, when the squirrel had climbed on his shoulder. The first effect was a sensation that the silence was deepening around them. It wasn't really true. It was simply that he had been aware of the little continuous sounds of which usually he was unconscious, and they tended to accentuate the hush of the night. He heard his watch ticking in his pocket, the whispered stir of his own breathing, and he was quite certain that he could hear the fevered beat of his own heart in his breast.

Then slowly he began to be aware of other sounds, so faint and indistinct that he really could not be sure that he heard them. There was a faint rustle and stir, as of the tops of the pine-trees far away. Possibly he heard the wind too, the faintest whisper in the world through the underbrush. And finally, most wonderful of all, he began to hear one and one over the ridge on which he stood, little whispered sounds of living creatures stirring in the thickets. He knew, just as all mountaineers know, that the wilderness about him was stirring and pulsing with life. Some of the sounds were quite clear—an occasional stir of a pebble or the crack of a twig; and some, like the faintest twitching of leaves in the brush not ten feet distant, could only be guessed at.

"What is making the sounds?" he asked.

He didn't know it, at the time, but Lennox turned quickly toward him. It wasn't that the question had surprised the mountaineer. Rather it was the tone in which Dan had spoken. It was perfectly cool, perfectly self-contained.

"The one right close is a chipmunk. I don't know what the others are—no one ever does know. Perhaps ground-squirrels, or rabbits, or birds, and maybe even one of those harmless old black bears who is curious about the house. The bears have more curiosity than they can well carry around, and they say they'll sometimes come up and put their front feet on a

window-sill of a house, and peer through the window. They must think men are the craziest things! And of course it might be a coyote—and a mad one at that. I guess I told you that they're subject to rabies at this time of year. I'll confess I'd rather have it be anything else. And tell me—can you *smell* anything—”

“Good Lord, Lennox! I can smell all kinds of things.”

“I'm glad. Some men can't. No one can enjoy the woods if he can't smell. Part of the smells are of flowers, and part of balsam, and God only knows what the others are. They are just the wilderness.”

Dan could not only perceive the smells and sounds, but he felt that they were leaving an imprint on the very fiber of his soul. He knew one thing: he knew he could never forget this first introduction to the mountain night. And then both of them were startled out of their reflections by the clear, unmistakable sound of footsteps on the ridge. Both of them turned, and Lennox laughed softly in the darkness. “My daughter,” he said. “I knew she wouldn't be afraid to come.”

CHAPTER VI

DAN could only see Snowbird's outline at first, just her shadow against the moonlit hillside. His glasses were none too good at long range. And possibly, when she came in range, the first thing that he noticed about her was her stride. The girls he knew didn't walk in quite that free, strong way. She took almost a man-size step; yet she did not seem ungraceful. Dan had a distinct impression that she was floating down to him, on the moonlight. She seemed to come with such unutterable smoothness. And then he heard her call lightly through the darkness.

The sound gave him a distinct sense of surprise. Somehow, he hadn't associated a voice like this with a mountain girl. He had supposed that there would be so many harshening influences in this wild place; yet the tone was as clear and full as a trained singer's. It was not a high voice; and yet it seemed simply brimming, as a cup brims with wine, with the rapture of life. It was a self-confident voice too, wholly unaffected and sincere, and wholly without embarrassment.

Then she came close, and Dan saw the

moonlight on her face. And so it came about that neither in dreams nor wakefulness could he see anything else for many hours to come.

The girl who stood in the moonlight was simply vibrant with health. It brought a light to her eyes and a color to her cheeks, and life and shimmer to her moonlit hair. It brought curves to her body and strength and firmness to her limbs, and the grace of a deer to her carriage. Whether she had regular features or not, Dan would have been unable to state. He didn't even notice. Yet there was nothing of the coarse or bold or voluptuous about her. She was just a slender girl, perhaps twenty years of age, and weighing even less than the figure that can occasionally be read in the health-magazines for girls of her height. And she was fresh and cool beyond all words to tell.

Dan had no delusions about her attitude toward him. For a long instant she turned her keen young eyes to his white, thin face; and at once it became abundantly evident that beyond a few girlish speculations she felt no interest in him. After a single moment of rather strained, polite conversation with Dan—just enough to satisfy her idea of the conventions—she began a thrilling girlhood tale to her father. And she was still telling it when they reached the house.

Dan held a chair for her in front of the fireplace, and she took it with entire naturalness. He was careful to put it where the firelight was at its height. He wanted to see its effect on the flushed cheeks, the soft dark hair. And then, half standing in the shadows, he simply watched her. With the eye of an artist he delighted in her gestures, her rippling enthusiasm, her utter, irrepressible girlishness that all of Time had not years enough to kill.

BILL stood watching her too, his hands deep in his pockets—evidently a companion of the best. Her father gazed at her with amused tolerance. And Dan—he didn't know in just what way he did look at her. And he didn't have time to decide. In less than fifteen minutes, and wholly without warning, she sprang up and started toward the door.

“Good Lord!” Dan breathed. “If you make such sudden motions as that, I'll have heart-failure. Where are you going now?”

"Back to my watch," she answered, her tone wholly lacking the personal note which men have learned to expect in the voices of women. And an instant later the three of them saw her retreating shadow as she vanished among the pines.

Dan had to be helped to bed. The long ride had been too hard on his shattered lungs; and nerves and body collapsed an instant after the door was closed behind the departing girl. He laughed weakly and begged their pardon; and the two men were really very gentle. They told him it was their own fault for permitting him to overdo. Lennox himself blew out the candle in the big cold bedroom.

Dan saw the door close behind him, and he had an instant's glimpse of the long sweep of moonlit ridge that stretched beneath the window. Then all at once, seemingly without warning, it simply blinked out. Not until the next morning did he really know why. Insomnia was an old acquaintance of Dan's, and he had expected to have some trouble in getting to sleep. His only real trouble was waking up again when Lennox called him to breakfast. He couldn't believe that the light at his window-shade was really that of morning.

"Good Lord!" his host exploded. "You sleep the sleep of the just."

Dan was about to tell him that on the contrary he was a very nervous sleeper, but he thought better of it. Something had surely happened to his insomnia. And the next instant he even forgot to wonder about it in the realization that his tired body had been wonderfully refreshed. He had no dread now of the long hunt up the ridge that his host had planned.

But first there was target practice. In Dan's baggage he had a certain very plain but serviceable sporting rifle of about thirty-fourty caliber—a gun that the information-department of the large sporting-goods store in Gitcheapolis had recommended for his purpose. Except for the few moments in the store, Dan had never held a rifle in his hands.

OF course the actual aiming of a rifle is an extremely simple proposition. A man with fair use of his hands and eyes can pick it up in less time than it takes to tell it. The fine art of marksmanship consists partly in the finer sighting—the instinctive realization of just what fraction of the front sight should be visible through

the rear. But most of all it depends on the control that the nerves have over the muscles. Some men are born rifle-shots; and on others it is quite impossible to thrust any skill whatever.

The nerve impulses and the muscular reflexes must be exquisitely attuned, so that the finger presses back on the trigger the identical instant that the mark is seen on the line of the sights. One quarter of a second's delay will usually disturb the aim. There must be no muscular jerk as the trigger is pressed. It was never a sport for blasted nerves. And usually such attributes as the ability to judge distances, the speed and direction of a fleeing object, and the velocity of the wind can only be learned by tireless practice.

When Dan first took the rifle in his hands, Lennox was rather amazed at the ease and naturalness with which he held it. It seemed to come up naturally to his shoulder. Lennox scarcely had to tell him how to rest the butt and to drop his chin as he aimed. He began to look rather puzzled. Dan seemed to know all these things by instinct. The first shot, Dan hit the trunk of a five-foot pine at thirty paces.

"But I couldn't have very well missed it!" he replied to Lennox's cheer. "You see, I aimed at the middle—but I just grazed the edge."

The second shot was not so good—missing the tree altogether. And it was a singular thing that he aimed longer and tried harder on this shot than on the first. The third time he tried still harder, and made by far the worst shot of all.

"What's the matter?" he demanded. "I'm getting worse all the time."

Lennox didn't know, for sure. But he made a long guess. "It might be beginner's luck," he said, "but I'm inclined to think you're trying too hard. Take it easier—depend more on your instincts. Some marksmen are born good shots and cook themselves trying to follow rules. It might be, by the longest chance, that you're one of them."

Dan's reply was to lift the rifle lightly to his shoulder, glance quickly along the trigger, and fire. The bullet struck within one inch of the center of the pine.

For a long second Lennox gazed at him in open-mouthed astonishment. "My stars, boy!" he cried at last. "Maybe I was mistaken in thinking you were a born tenderfoot. But you can't do it again."

DAN did it again. If anything, the bullet was a little nearer the center. And then he aimed at a more distant tree.

But the hammer snapped down ineffectively on the breech. He turned with a look of question.

"Your gun only holds five shots," Lennox explained. Reloading, Dan tried a more difficult target—a trunk almost one hundred yards distant. Of course it would have been only child's play to an experienced hunter; but to a tenderfoot it was a difficult mark indeed. Twice out of four shots, Dan hit the tree-trunk, and one of his two hits were practically a bull's-eye. His two misses were the result of the same mistake he had made before—attempting to hold his aim too long.

The shots rang far through the quiet woods, long-drawn from the echoes that came rocking back from the hills. In contrast with the deep silence that is really an eternal part of the mountains, the sound seemed preternaturally loud. All over the great sweep of cañon the wild creatures heard and were startled. One could easily imagine the Columbian deer, gone to their buck-brush to sleep, springing up and lifting pointed ears. There is no more graceful thing in the whole animal world than this first, startled spring of a frightened buck.

Then old Woof, feeding in the berry-bushes, heard the sound too. Woof has considerably more understanding than most of the wild inhabitants of the forest, and maybe that is why he left his banquet and started falling all over his awkward self in descending the hill. It might be that Lennox would want to procure his guest a sample of bear-steak; and Woof didn't care to be around to suggest such a thing. At least that would be his train of thought according to those naturalists who insist on ascribing human intelligence to all the forest creatures. But it is true that Woof had learned to recognize a rifle-shot, and he feared it worse than anything on earth.

Far on the ridge-top a pair of wolves sat together with no more evidence of life than two shadows. One of the most effective accomplishments a wolf possesses is its ability to freeze into a lifeless thing, so that the sharpest eye can scarcely detect him in the thickets. It is an advantage in hunting, and it is even a greater advantage when being hunted. Yet at the same second they sprang up, simply seemed

to spin in the dead pine needles, and brought up with sharp noses pointed and ears erect, facing the valley.

A HUMAN being would have likely been moved to wonder. It is doubtful that human ears could have detected that faint tremor in the air that was all that was left of the rifle-report. But of course this is a question that would be extremely difficult to prove; for as a rule the senses of the larger forest creatures, with the great exception of scent, are not as perfectly developed as those of a human being. A wolf can see better in the darkness than a man, but not nearly so far in the daylight. But the wolves knew this sound. Too many times they had seen their pack-fellows die in the snow when such a report as this, only intensified a thousand times, cracked at them through the winter air. No animal in all the forest has been as relentlessly hunted as the wolves, and they have learned their lessons. For longer years than most men would care to attempt to count, men have waged a ceaseless war upon them. And they have learned that their safety lies in flight.

Very quietly, and quite without panic, the wolves turned and headed further into the forests. Possibly no other animal would have been frightened at such a distance. And it is certainly true that in the deep winter snows not even the wolves would have heeded the sound. The snows bring Famine; and when Famine comes to keep its sentry-duty over the snow, all the other forests laws are immediately forgotten. The pack forgets all its knowledge of the deadliness of men in the starving times.

The grouse heard the sound, and silly creatures that they were, only for a single instant raised their heads from their food. The felines—the great, tawny mountain-lions and their smaller cousins the lynx, all devoted at least an instant of concentrated attention to it. A raccoon, sleeping in a pine, opened its eyes, and a lone bull elk, such as some people think is beyond all other things the monarch of the forest, rubbed his neck against a tree-trunk and wondered.

But yet there remained two of the larger forest creatures that did not heed at all. One was *Ursus* the porcupine, whose stupidity is beyond all measuring. He was too slow and patient and dull to give attention to a rifle-bullet. And the other

was Graycoat the coyote, gray and strange and foam-lipped on the hillside. Graycoat could hear nothing but strange whinings and voices that rang ever in his ears. All other sounds were obscured. The reason was extremely simple. In the dog-days a certain malady sometimes comes to the wild creatures, and it is dreaded worse than drouth or cold or any of the manifold terrors of their lives. No one knows what name they have for this sickness. Human beings call it hydrophobia. The coyotes are particularly susceptible to it.

ORDINARILY the name of coyote is, among the beasts, a synonym for cowardice as well as a certain kind of detested cunning. All the cowardice of a mountain-lion and a wolf and a lynx put together doesn't equal the amount that Graycoat carried in the end of his tail. That doesn't mean timidity. Timidity is a trait of the deer, an arrangement of nature for self-preservation, and no one holds it against them. In fact, it makes them rather appealing. Cowardice is that lack of moral courage to remain and fight when nature has afforded the necessary weapons to fight with. It is a sort of betrayal of nature—a misuse of powers. No one calls a rabbit a coward because it runs away. A warlike rabbit is something that no man has ever seen since the beginning of the world, and probably never will. Nature hasn't given it any weapons.

But this is not true of the wolf or cougar. A wolf has ninety pounds of lightning muscles, and teeth that are nothing but a set of very well sharpened and perfectly arranged daggers. A cougar not only has fangs, but talons that can rend flesh more terribly than the cogs of a machine, and strength to make the air hum under his paw as he strikes it down. And so it is an extremely disappointing thing to see either of these animals flee in terror from an Airedale not half its size—a sight that most mountain men see rather often. The fact that they act with greater courage in the famine-times, and the fact that either will fight to the very death when brought to bay, are not extenuating circumstances to their cowardice. A mouse will bite the hand that picks it up if it has no other choice.

A coyote is, at least in a measure, well equipped for fighting. He is smaller than a wolf, but his fangs are almost as terrible. Yet a herd of determined sheep, turning

to face him, puts him in a panic. The smallest dog simply petrifies him with terror. And a rifle-report—he is known to put a large part of a county between himself and the source of the sound in the shortest possible time. If a mountain man feels like fighting, he simply calls another a coyote. It is more effective than impugning the virtue of his female ancestors.

BESIDES being a perfectly unprincipled coward, the coyote is utterly without pride. And that is saying a great deal. Most large animals have more pride than they have intelligence, particularly the bear and the moose. A mature bear, dying before his foes, will often refrain from howling even in the greatest agony. He is simply too proud. A moose often greatly dislikes to appear to run away in the presence of enemies. He will walk with the dignity of a bishop until he thinks the brush has obscured him; and then he will simply fly! And there was a dog once, who meeting on the highways a dog that was much larger and could not possibly be mastered, would simply turn away his eyes and pretend not to see him.

A coyote is wholly without this virtue, as well as most of the other virtues of the animal world. He not only eats carrion—because if anyone started to condemn all the carrion-eating animals of the forest he would soon have precious few of them left—but he also eats old shoes off from rubbish piles. Unlike the wolf, he does not even find his courage in the famine-times. He has cunning—but cunning is not greatly beloved in men or beasts. Most folk prefer a kindly, blundering awkwardness, a simplicity of heart and spirit, such as are to be found in Woof the bear.

But Graycoat has one tendency that makes all the other forest creatures regard him with consternation—he is extremely liable to madness. Along in dog-days he is seen suddenly to begin to rush through the thickets, barking and howling and snapping at invisible enemies, with foam dropping from his terrible lips. His eyes get yellow and strange. And this is the time when even the bull elk turns off his trail. No one cares to meet Graycoat when the hydrophobia is upon him. At such time all his cunning and his terror are quite forgotten in his agony, and he is likely to make an unprovoked charge on Woof himself.

Graycoat came walking stiff-legged down

through the thickets. And the forest creatures, from the smallest to the great, forgot the far-off peal of the rifle to get out of his way.

CHAPTER VII

DAN and Lennox started together up the long slope of the ridge. Dan alone was armed; Lennox went with him solely as a guide. The deer season had just opened; and it might be that Dan would want to procure one of these creatures.

"But I'm not sure I want to hunt deer," Dan told him. "You speak of them as being so beautiful—"

"They are beautiful, and your grandfather would never hunt them either, except for meat. But maybe you'll change your mind when you see a buck. Besides—we might run into a lynx or a panther. But not very likely, without dogs."

They trudged up, over the carpet of pine needles. They fought their way through a thicket of buck-brush. Once they saw the gray-squirrels in the tree-tops. And before Lennox had as much as supposed they were near the haunts of big game, a yearling doe sprang up from its bed in the thickets.

For an instant she stood motionless, presenting a perfect target. It was evident that she simply heard the sound of the approaching hunters, but had not as yet located or interpreted them with her near-sighted eyes. Lennox whirled to find Dan standing very still, peering along the barrel of his rifle. But he didn't shoot. A light danced in his eyes, and his fingers crooked nervously about the trigger, but yet there was no pressure. The deer, seeing Lennox move, leaped into her terror-pace—that astounding run that is one of the fastest gaits in the whole animal world. In the wink of an eye, she was out of sight.

"Why didn't you shoot?" Lennox demanded.

"Shoot? It was a doe, wasn't it?"

"Good Lord, of course it was a doe! But there are no game-laws that go back this far. Besides—you aimed at it."

"I aimed just to see if I could catch it through my sights. And I could. My glasses sort of made it blur—but I think, perhaps, that I could have shot it. But I'm not going to kill does. There must

be some reason for the game-laws, or they wouldn't exist."

"You're a funny one. Come three thousand miles to hunt and then pass up the first deer you see. It could have almost been your grandfather, to have done that. He thought killing a deer needlessly was almost as bad as killing a man. They are beautiful things, aren't they?"

Dan answered him with startling emphasis. But the look that he wore said more than his words.

THEY trudged on, and Lennox grew thoughtful. He was recalling the picture that he had seen when he had whirled to look at Dan, immediately after the deer had leaped from its bed. It puzzled him a little. He had turned to find the younger man in a perfect position to shoot, his feet placed in exactly the position that years of experience had taught him was correct; and withal absolutely motionless. Of all the many things to learn to do in the wilderness, to stand perfectly still in the presence of game is one of the hardest. The natural impulse is to start—a nervous reflex that usually terrifies the game. The principle of standing still is, of course, that it takes a certain length of time for the deer to look about after it makes its first leap from its bed, and if the hunter is motionless, it is usually unable to interpret him as a thing to be afraid of, gives a better chance for a shot. What many hunters take years to learn, Dan had seemed to know by instinct. Could it be, after all, that this slender weakling, even now bowed down with a terrible malady, had inherited the true frontiersman's instincts of his ancestors?

Then all at once Lennox halted in his tracks, evidently with no other purpose than to study the tall form that now was walking up the trail in front of him. And he uttered a little cry of amazement.

"Listen, Dan!" he cried suddenly. "Haven't you ever been in the woods before?"

Dan turned, smiling. "No. What have I done now?"

"What have you done? You're doing something that I never saw a tenderfoot do in my life, before. I've known men to hunt for years—literally years, and not know how to do it. And that is—to place your feet."

"Place my feet? I'm afraid I don't understand."

"I mean—to walk quietly. To stalk, Dan! This brush is dry. It's dry as tinder. A cougar can get over it like so much smoke, and a man who's lived all his life in the hills can usually climb a ridge and not make any more noise than a young avalanche. Just now I had a feeling that I wasn't hearing you walk, and I thought my ears must be going back on me. I stopped to see. You were doing it, Dan. You were stalking—putting down your feet like a cat. It's the hardest thing to learn there is, and you're doing it the first half-hour."

Dan laughed, delighted more than he cared to show. "Well, what of it?" he asked.

"What of it? That's it—what of it? And what caused it, and all about it? Go on and let me think."

THE result of all this thought was at least to hover in the near vicinity of a certain conclusion: that at least a few of the characteristics of his grandfather had been passed down to him. It meant that possibly, if time remained, he would not turn out such a weakling after all. Of course his courage, his nerve, had yet to be tested; but the fact remained that long generations of frontiersman ancestors had left their influence upon him.

But before even Lennox had a chance to think all around the subject, actually to convince himself that Dan really was a throwback and recurrence of type, there ensued on that gaunt ridge a curious adventure.

They were slipping along over the pine needles, their eyes intent on the trail ahead. And then Lennox saw a curious thing. He beheld Dan suddenly stop in the trail, and turn his eyes toward a heavy thicket that lay perhaps one hundred yards to their right. For an instant he looked almost like a wild creature himself. His head was lowered, as if he were listening. His muscles were set and ready.

Lennox had prided himself that he had retained all the powers of his five senses, and that few men in the mountains had keener ears than he. Yet it was truth that at first he only knew the silence, and the stir and pulse of his own blood. He assumed then that Dan was seeing something that from his position, twenty feet behind, he himself could not see. He tried to probe the thickets with his eyes.

Then Dan whispered—ever so soft a

sound, but yet distinct in the silence. "There's something alive in that thicket."

Then Lennox heard too. As they stood still, the sound became ever clearer and more pronounced. Some living creature was advancing toward them; and twigs were crackling beneath its feet. The sounds were rather subdued, and yet, as the animal approached, both of them instinctively knew that they were extremely loud for the usual footsteps of any of the wild creatures.

"What is it?" Dan asked quietly.

LENNOX was so intrigued by the sounds that he was not even observant of the peculiar subdued quality in Dan's voice. Otherwise he would have wondered at it. "I'm free to confess I don't know," he said. "It's booming right toward us, like most animals don't care to do. Of course it may be a human being. You must watch out for that."

They waited. The sound ended. They stood straining for a long moment without speech.

"That was the dumbest thing!" Lennox went on. "Of course, it might have been a bear—you never know what they're going to do. It might have got sight of us and turned off. But I can't believe that it was just a deer—"

But then his words chopped squarely off in his throat. The plodding advance began again. And the next instant a gray form revealed itself at the edge of the thicket.

It was Graycoat, half blind in his madness, and desperate in his agony.

There was no more deadly thing in all the hills than he. Even the bite of a rattlesnake would have been welcomed beside his. Graycoat stood a long instant, and all his instincts and reflexes that would have ordinarily made him flee in abject terror were thwarted and twisted by the fever of his madness. He stared a moment at the two figures, and his red eyes could not interpret them. They were simply foes—for it was true that when this racking agony was upon him even lifeless trees seemed foes sometimes. He seemed eerie and unreal as he gazed at them out of his burning eyes; the white foam gathered at his fangs. And then, wholly without warning, he charged down at them.

He came with unbelievable speed. The elder Lennox cried once in warning, and cursed himself for venturing forth on the ridge without a gun. He was full twenty

feet distant from Dan; yet he saw in an instant his only course. This was no time to trust their lives to the marksmanship of an amateur. He sprang toward him, to wrench the weapon from his hand.

But he didn't achieve his purpose. At the first step his foot caught on a projecting root, and he was shot to his face on the trail. But a long life in the wilderness had developed Lennox's reflexes to an abnormal degree; instantly he rolled on, into a position of defense. But he knew now he could not reach the younger man before the mad coyote would be upon him. The matter was out of his hands. Everything depended on the aim and self-control of the tenderfoot.

HE looked up, and the whole weird picture was thrown upon the retina of his eyes. The coyote was still racing straight toward Dan, a gray demon that in his madness was more terrible than any charging bear or elk. For there is an element of horror about the insane, whether beasts or men, that simply cannot be denied. Both of them felt it, with a chill that seemed to penetrate clear to their hearts. The eyes flamed; the white fangs caught the sunlight. And Dan stood erect in his path, his rifle half raised to his shoulder; and even in that first frenzied instant in which Lennox looked at him, he saw there was a strange impassiveness, a singular imperturbability, on his face.

"Shoot, man!" Lennox shouted. "What are you waiting for?"

But Dan didn't shoot. His hand whipped to his face, and he snatched off his thick-lensed glasses. The eyes that were revealed were narrow and deeply intent. By now, the frenzied coyote was not fifty feet distant.

All that had occurred since the animal charged had possibly taken five seconds. The passage of time is wholly subject to circumstance. Sometimes five seconds is just a breath; but as Lennox waited for Dan to shoot, it seemed like a period wholly without limit. "Shoot!" he screamed.

But it is doubtful that Dan even heard his shout. At that instant his gun slid into place; his head lowered; the eyes seemed to burn along the glittering barrel. The finger pressed back against the trigger, and the roar of the report rocked through the summer air.

The gun was of large caliber; and no living creature could stand against the shocking power of the great bullet. The lead went straight home, full through the neck and slanting down through the breast, and the coyote recoiled as if an irresistible hand had smitten it. The rifle-report echoed back to find only silence.

Lennox got up off the ground and moved over toward the dead coyote. He looked a long time at the gray body. Then he stepped back to where Dan waited on the trail.

"I take it all back," he said simply.

"You take what back?"

"What I thought about you—that the Failing line had gone to the dogs. I'll never call you a tenderfoot again."

"You are very kind," Dan answered. He looked rather tired, but was wholly unshaken.

"But tell me one thing," Lennox asked. "I saw the way you looked down the barrel. I could see how firm you held the rifle—the way you kept your head. And that is all like your grandfather. But why—when you had a repeating rifle—did you wait so long to shoot?"

"I just had one cartridge in my gun. I fired nine times back at the trees, and only reloaded once. I didn't think of it until the coyote charged."

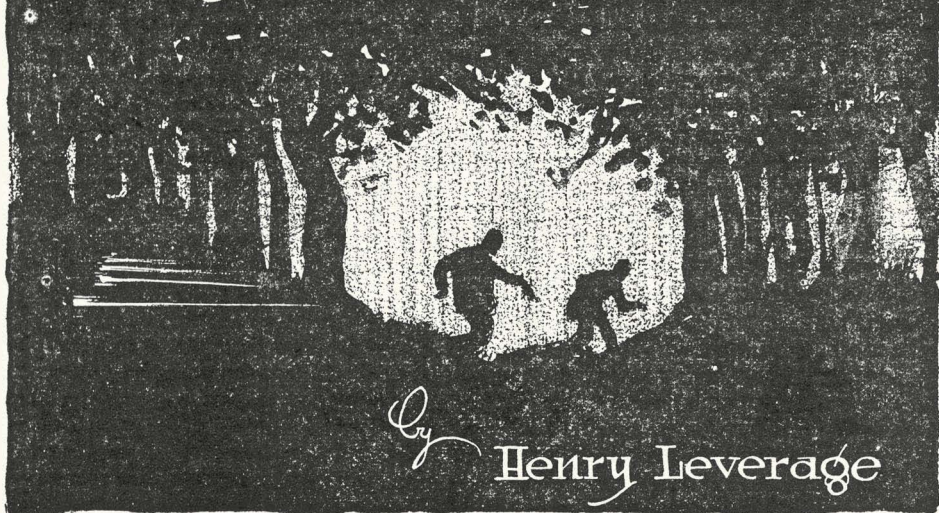
Lennox's answer was the last thing in the world to be expected. He opened his straight mouth and uttered a boyish yell of joy. His eyes simply seemed to light. The eyes of the two men met, and Lennox shook him by the shoulder.

"You're not Dan Failing's grandson—you're Dan Failing himself!" he shouted. "No one but him would have had the self-control to wait till the game was almost on top of him—no one but him would have kept his head in a time like this. You're Dan Failing himself, I tell you, come back to earth. Grandson, nothing! You're a throwback, and now you've got those glasses off I can see his eyes looking right out of yours. Step on 'em, Dan. You'll never need 'em again. And give up that idea of dying in four months right now—I'm going to make you live. We'll fight that disease to a finish—and win!"

That is the way in which Dan Failing came into his heritage in the land of his own people, and in which a new spirit was born in him to fight—and win—and live.

Further remarkable adventures in woodcraft of this city-bred man will be related in the next, the March, issue of THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE.

Beyond *the* Wall



By Henry Leverage

THE first of a remarkable series of underworld stories by the author of "Thirst" and "The Harvest of the Deep." Few other writers have Mr. Leverage's keen sense of drama and ability to describe swift action clearly.

CHESTER FAY, a slender, keen-eyed, gray-haired young man,—clad in prison shoddy, serving life and fifteen years at Rockglen,—glanced through the rain and over the wall to where a green-cloaked hill loomed.

"Charley," he whispered, "we might as well try it this afternoon. Are you game?"

Charley O'Mara, sixty-five years old, bent, broken, and bitter at the law, coughed a warning. He raised his pick and started digging around a flower-bed.

A guard in a heavy raincoat, carrying a dripping rifle, came toward the two prisoners. He stopped a few feet away from Fay.

"Quit that talkin'!" he snarled. "I'll chalk you in if I see any more of it!"

Fay did not answer the guard. He spaded the earth, dug deep, tossed the shovelfuls to one side and waited until the guard had strolled within the shelter of a low shed.

"Charley!" he continued without moving his lips. "Listen, old pal. See that motortruck near the shed?"

"I see it, Chester."

"See where the screw is standing?"

"He's watching us."

"And I'm watching him, Charley. We

can beat this stir in an hour. Do you want to try it?"

"How you going to do it?"

"Will you follow me?"

"Yes, pal."

"Wait till it gets a little darker. Then we'll take the chance."

The prison guard stood with his rifle lowered to the moist earth beneath the shed. His eyes ranged from the two convicts to the wall upon which were other guards sheltered in tiny guardhouses. He yawned and drowsed, standing.

Fay worked in a slow circle. He had seen the auto-truck come into the prison yard at noon. It was part of the road-gang's outfit. There was no road-work that day, on account of the rain. The inmate driver had gone into the cellhouse.

Old Charley O'Mara let his pick dig into the earth with feeble strokes. He paused at times. There was that to Fay's actions which presaged much. The gray-haired young man was gradually closing in on the drowsing guard. He was like a lean panther getting ready for a spring.

THE attack came with lightninglike suddenness. Fay dropped his shovel, crossed the earth, struck the guard a short-

arm uppercut and bore him down to earth, where he smothered his cries with a flap of the raincoat.

Charley O'Mara came limping toward the shed.

"Get a rope!" snapped Fay. "I don't want to croak him."

"Croakin's too good for the likes of him, Chester."

"Get a rope. We've got about fifteen minutes to work in. We ought to be beyond the wall by then."

Fay worked quickly. He took the rope the old convict found, and trussed the guard, after taking off the raincoat. He made sure that the man would make no outcry. He fastened a stick in his mouth and tied it behind his head. He rose and glanced through the down-pouring rain.

"I knocked him out," he said. "Now, Charley, put on that raincoat, take the cap and rifle and walk slowly toward the auto-truck. Get in the front. Stand up like a guard."

"But they might know me!"

"They wont know you. It's raining. The screws on the wall will think you are taking the truck out, by order of the warden. I'll drive. An inmate always drives."

The guard who sat huddled in the little house which loomed over the great gate at Rockglen rose, opened a small window and glanced out as he heard the motortruck mounting the grade from the prison yard. He saw what he thought was the figure of a guard standing by a convict. The convict crouched with partly hidden face over the steering-wheel.

"All right!" shouted Charley O'Mara, motioning with his rifle toward the closed gate.

The guard squinted for a second time. He caught, through the rain, the gleam of brass on the cap Charley wore. He saw the rifle. He reached and pulled at a lever. The gate slowly opened, first to a crack, then wide. Fay pressed forward the clutch pedal, shifted from neutral to first speed, stepped on the accelerator and let the clutch pedal up gently.

The truck mounted the top of the grade, churned through the gate, turned in front of the warden's house and took the incline which led over the hill from Rockglen.

ALL might have gone well for the convicts had it not been for the rain. Water had formed in deep pools along the

road. Into these pools Fay guided the clumsy truck. He heard the engine miss an explosion. A sputter followed. The truck slowed. An explosion sounded in the muffler. The insulation wires ground and short-circuited. The truck stopped.

Fay sprang from the driver's seat and opened the hood. He attempted to find the trouble. A dangling wire, touching the engine's frame, was sodden with water.

"No go!" he said to Charley. "Come on! We'll leave the truck and take to the woods. That means a chase as soon as the big whistle blows."

The two convicts were crossing an open field when they heard the first menacing blasts from the prison siren. They ran for shelter. A dog barked. A farmhand came through the underbrush. He stood watching.

"Keep your nerve!" said Fay. "You've got the rifle. Night is coming on. Follow me."

The trail led away from Rockglen. Fay sensed the general direction. He attempted to gain a railroad junction where a freight could be taken for Chicago. He was headed off by a motorcar load of prison guards. He saw the danger in time.

"To the right," he whispered to O'Mara. "Follow me. Don't cave, pal."

"I'm all in," sobbed the old convict.

Fay braced his arm beneath Charlie's elbow. He took the rifle. They crossed a swollen brook, broke through the hedge of a vast estate and came suddenly upon a trio of watchmen who had been alarmed by the blowing of the prison's siren.

The fight that followed was entirely one-sided. Fay pumped lead in the general direction of the watchmen. He was answered by a salvo. Crimson cones splashed the night. Bullets whined. A shout sounded far away. Other watchmen and constables were surrounding the estate.

Old Charley O'Mara, crouching in the shelter of a hawthorn clump, coughed, rose, spun and fell face downward. A great spot of scarlet ran over the raincoat. His aged face twisted in agony. Fay knelt by his side.

"I'm croaked, pal," said the convict. "They winged me through the lungs. Good-by, pal."

"Anything I can do, Charley?"

"Do you think you'll get away?"

"I know I will."

"To Chi?"

"Yes!"

"Will you go see my little girl?"

"Where is she?"

"At the Dropper's, on Harrison Street. She's in bad, Chester. Take her away from them low-brows."

"How old is she?"

"Sixteen."

"What is her name?"

"Emily—little Emily."

"I'll take care of her, Charley. I promise you that!"

FAY let the convict's head drop to the ground. He heard the death-rattle. He kicked aside the empty and useless rifle.

The way of escape was not an easy one. Forms moved in the mist. He darted for a row of bushes. He crawled beneath them. He gained the high fence around the estate, where, freed of the necessity of setting his pace to that of the old convict, he broke through the far-flung cordon of guards and watchmen and gained a woods which extended north and west for over a score of miles.

He discovered, toward morning, a small house in course of erection. Its scaffolding stood gaunt against the velvet of the sky. A carpenter's chest rested on the back porch.

Fay pried this open with a hatchet, removed a suit of overalls and a saw, and dropped the lid. He emerged from the woods, looking for all the world like a carpenter going to work.

To the man who had wolfed the world—to the third cracksman then living—the remainder of his get-away to Chicago was a journey wherein each detail fitted in with the others.

He arrived—after riding in gondola-cars, hugging the tops of Pullmans and helping stoke an Atlantic type locomotive—at the first fringe of the city of many millions.

With sharp eyes before him, and dodging police-haunted streets, he mingled with the workers—seemingly a carpenter.

No one of all the throng seemed to notice him. He walked slowly at times. He thought of old Charley O'Mara, and of the dying convict's request.

A speck in the yeast, a chip on the foam, he quickened his steps and entered a small pawnshop where money could be borrowed for enterprises of a shady nature.

MOTHER MADLEBAUM peered over the counter at the gray-haired young man who held out an empty palm and

asked for a loan on a mythical watch. She removed her spectacles, polished them with her black alpaca apron, and glanced shrewdly toward the door.

"What a start you gave me, Chester. And me thinking all along you were lagged."

"Five C's on the block," laughed Fay pleasantly. "Remember the blue-white gems I brought you last time? Remember the swag, loot and plunder from the Han-over job? You made big on them."

"I always do with your stuff, Chester."

"Can you lend me five hundred? I've just beaten stir."

The old fence opened her safe and brought forth a money-drawer. Fay took the bills she handed to him, without counting them. He touched his hat and started toward the door.

"Wait, Chester."

"What is it?"

"Want to plant upstairs till the blow is over?"

"No. I promised old Charley O'Mara I'd see his girl for him. Poor Charley is dead."

"He wasn't in your class, Chester. Nobody is."

"Where's the Dropper's scatter?"

"Five doors from the corner, on Harrison Street. Is the girl there?"

"Yes."

"Then may God help her. You can't!"

Fay passed from the fence and lost himself in the clothing-department of a dry-goods store. He entered the place a carpenter—down in the heels and somewhat grimy from his train-ride. He emerged with a bamboo cane hooked over the sleeve of a shepherd-plaid suit. His hat was a flat-brimmed Panama, his shoes correct.

A bath, shave, shampoo and haircut completed his metamorphosis. He left a barber-shop—the proper figure of a young man. He walked briskly, seeing everything.

THERE were detectives in that city—discerning ones. He avoided the main streets and crossings. Wolf-keen and alert for the police, he turned toward the dive where little Emily O'Mara lived. He distrusted the place and cursed himself for the venture.

The Dropper's reputation among the powers that preyed was—unsavory. There had been rumors in the old days that he was a pigeon. The den and joint he man-

aged sheltered cheap dips, pennyweighters and store-histers who bragged of their miserable exploits.

Fay entered the hallway that led up to the Dropper's, like a duke paying a visit to a tenement.

A gas-light flared the second landing. An ash-can, half filled with empty bottles, marked the third. Fay paused by this can, studied a fist-banged door, then knocked with light knuckles.

As he waited for a chain to be unhooked and a slide to open, he sniffed the air of the hallway. Somewhere, some one was smoking opium.

A brutish, shelving-browed, scar-crossed face appeared at the opening. Steely eyes drilled toward the cracksman.

"What d'ye want here?"

"*Gee sip en quessen, hop en yen?*"

"Who to hell are yuh?"

"A friend," said Fay. "A man to see Charley O'Mara's daughter."

Fay carried no revolver. He scorned such things. The police rated him too clever to commit murder. Only amateurs and coke-fiends did things like that.

He wished, however, that he could thrust the blued-steel muzzle of a gat through the panel and order the Dropper to unlatch the door. The thug was so long in making up his none-too-alert mind.

It swung finally. Fay stepped into the room. He narrowed his eyes and mentally photographed a mean den, made translucent by the greenish-hued smoke that swirled over a peanut-oil lamp and floated before the drawn faces of many poppy-dreamers who were peering from bunks.

The Dropper stood waiting. His elbows were slightly bent. His huge, broken-boned hands came slowly in front. He measured Fay from the tip of the shoes to the prematurely gray hair that showed beneath the cracksman's straw hat.

"Well, when did you get out of stir?" he snarled with sudden recognition. "I thought they threw the key away on yuh."

"Easy, Dropper! Who are all these people?"

"Aw, they're all right! There's Canada Mac and Glycerine Jimmy an' three broads over there. Then there's Mike the Bike and Micky Gleason with us to-night. Know them?"

Fay unhooked his cane from his arm. He swung it back and forth as he studied the faces in the bunks. His stare dropped

to the peanut-oil lamp and the lay-out tray around which reclined two smokers. He saw a piglike dog crouching by a screen. Behind this was the entrance to another room.

"Suppose we go in there," he said. "There's something I want to speak to you about, Dropper."

"Spit it out, here!"

"No!" Fay's voice took on a metallic incisiveness. He flashed a warning at the Dropper. The big man shifted his eyes uneasily, and followed Fay around the screen and into a room where two chintz-covered windows looked out into Harrison Street. There were a poker-table, a couch and many chairs in the room. The floor was covered with a cheap matting.

"Listen," said Fay, still swinging his cane: "I came here to see Charley O'Mara's daughter. I want to see her quick! I can't stay around here. It's no place—"

"Aw, cut that kid-glove stuff. What d'ye think we are—stools?"

"I want to see Charley's daughter—Emily!"

"You can't!"

"What have you done with her?"

"I aint done nothin'. She lives right here."

Fay hung his cane on a chair, removed his hat, turned, backed against the poker-table and fastened upon the Dropper a glance of white fire.

"Tell that girl to come to me."

"Well, who the hell are you orderin' around?"

"Go! Get—that—girl!"

The Dropper was in his own castle. The bunks in the den were filled with the reclining forms of a number of men who would commit murder at his bidding. He had, safely planted, the only hundred toys of choice Victoria hop in all of Chicago. One could buy most anything, from virtue to a man's soul, with opium at the current prices.

He considered the matter of Fay with a slow brain. Back in the heart of him there lurked a fear for a five-figure man. They did big things. They were super-crooks. Their weight might be felt through political influence.

"I'm hep!" he said sullenly. "You want to cop the skirt from me. You want to tell her about diamonds and rubies and strings of pearls—of swag and kale and the easy life swillin' wine."

"I don't want to do anything of the kind. I've got a message for her from her old man. He's not well," Fay added cautiously, remembering that under the law the Dropper might be considered Emily's guardian.

"So he aint goin' to get sprung? I heard he had a swell mouthpiece who was workin' with the pollies."

"The appeal was denied last week. The governor turned it down—cold. Charley may have to serve his full term."

"Ch, well, if that's the straight of it—I'll get the moll an' let you chin with her a bit. Remember, no fancy stuff."

Fay stared at the dive-keeper disgustedly. The Dropper weighed over two hundred and fifty pounds. He moved his gross form across the matting, paused at the screen where the piglike dog lay, and lumbered out of sight. His voice rasped in a shout: "Emily!"

HER entrance came a minute after Fay had seated himself at the poker-table. His hand rested on his hat. He heard the Dropper's nagging oaths.

Emily entered, propelled by a strong arm.

Fay rose. He flashed an assuring glance. He reached and offered her a chair.

The picture she left with him, as he turned for the chair, was one he could never forget.

Golden-glossed hair, fine-spun as flax, an oval face, big sherry-colored eyes, long lashes, a round breast and straight figure—was his summing up of little Emily O'Mara.

The Dropper lunged for the girl. He lifted her chin. He leered as she cringed from him.

"This guy wants to see you, kid!"

Fay pressed the sides of his trousers with the sensitive tips of his fingers. He waited, with h's teeth grinding. He wanted to leap the distance, reach, clutch and throttle the purple neck of the brute.

The Dropper swung a terrible jaw and eyed Fay.

"Go to it!" he rumbled. "Get done with the kid, damn quick. Tell her she'll never see her old man again. That's wot I've been tellin' her—all the time."

Fay waited until the Dropper disappeared. He moved the chair he had offered to the girl, so that she could see it.

"Wont you sit down, Emily? I left your dad last night. He wasn't well."

A flash of interest and gratitude crossed her features. She clutched her skirt, stared at the door, bent one knee and sank into the chair timidly.

Fay leaned and whispered:

"Your father sent me to you. He wants you to leave this bunch. He's afraid you are not being well treated. He thinks you ought to go to some good home," he added as he realized the girl's underworld upbringing.

"Is Father coming back to me?"

"No, never."

"Why not?"

The naïveté of the question struck Fay as an indictment against society.

"Because the laws are unjust!" he declared. "They keep a man in prison after he is reformed. They don't keep a man in a hospital after he is cured."

"Did you escape from Rockgen?"

"Would it make any difference to you if I had broken out of prison?"

"No, it wouldn't make any difference to me—but I don't know what you mean."

"I mean I want you to go away with me. I want to get you out of this den of petty-larceny addicts and low-brows. That's what your father wanted, Emily."

"But I don't even know your name. Why should I run away with you?"

"Because the Dropper is a brute. Because he will beat you—if he hasn't already. Because the life here leads to the gutter—and mighty fast you'll drift down to it, little Emily."

THE girl arranged a black velvet bandeau on her hair. Fay noticed that the rings on her fingers were brassy and childish. They grated on a man who had never handled any but first-water jewels.

He leaned forward and suggested:

"Come with me—say, to-morrow night. We'll go East together. I know a motherly woman who has an old mansion on the Hudson."

Little Emily fluttered her lashes in an anxious glance at the open door, beyond which was the sound of dreamy voices.

"I'm afraid I can't."

"Why?"

"He wont let me."

"What is he to you?"

"Nothing, but I'm afraid of him. He's so strong."

"He's a big mush, little Emily—a woman-beater, a peddler of opium—a Fink, if you know what that means."

The girl pulled her dress down to the tops of her broken shoes. She twisted, glanced up, smiled faintly, and blanched as the Dropper thrust his head into the room.

"What are you tryin' to pull off?" he asked.

Fay stared over the girl's cringing shoulder. His steel-blue eyes locked with the brute's. They burned and blazed into a sodden brain. The Dropper leered, said, "Oh, all right, cul," and went back to the smokers around the lay-out tray.

"Quick, Emily! Make up your mind. Can I come for you to-morrow night? I owe it to your old man. We'll go East, and this woman I know will take care of you. I hate the coppers, and I'm out to collect from the world. They sent me away to Rockglen—dead, bang wrong! They gave me life and fifteen years. I didn't serve fifteen weeks!"

Fay ceased pleading. He watched the girl. There was a mark behind her left ear which could only have come from a blow. She fingered a black velvet bandeau. She clenched her hands. She started to rise. Suddenly she dropped to the chair.

"I can't go—even if Dad wants me to. I can't leave the Dropper. I am afraid he'll kill me if I go away with you."

"He's got you cowed!"

"I can't help it."

"And you slave for him—work for him—touch his hand when he calls for you?"

"I do. You don't understand my position."

"It's an outrage. Poor Charley O'Mara's daughter held in the clutches of that beast!"

"He is going to kill me some day. I saw him kill a man once. He hit him with his fist. They carried the man to the river."

"Suppose I come here to-morrow night with a gat, stick up the joint, make the Dropper whine like a cur. What would you do?"

"He wouldn't whine. He'd kill you—the way he killed that man who didn't pay him for a card of hop."

Fay caught the underworld note.

"Do you smoke?" His voice was suspicious.

"No, I don't smoke opium. I watch other people do that."

"You're too sensible. Does the Dropper smoke?"

"He don't smoke, either. He sells the stuff."

THE girl's naïveté brought a smile to Fay's lips.

"You're going East," he said. "I'll make the money for your education. I've got two big jobs located. One is in Maiden Lane."

"Diamonds?"

"Yes, gems. What do you say, little Emily?"

"I—I am afraid."

"But think what a beautiful world this is. There is London and Paris and Rome."

"London and Paris and Rome mean nothing to me. I wouldn't know how to behave in those places. All I've known is Harrison Street, and the back rooms of saloons, and getting beat up."

"But your dad was a high-roller."

"He wasn't always. Sometimes he was broke. Sometimes we didn't know where we were going to get things to eat."

Fay's voice grew tender.

"Emily," he said, "that's all a bad dream. Yesterday afternoon I made a get-away. A man who was dying—a mark for the prison screws—told me to go and save his daughter. I don't want you to think I forgot that request. I could never forget it. Charley was a pal o' mine. I came right to you. I see the lay-out. You're cowed, beaten, crushed, by the Dropper. I'll croak him when you ask me to."

"You can't! I want you to go away. Please don't suggest anything like that. I like you, but I can never run away with you. I'm afraid."

"Good God, do you want me to leave you in this joint?"

"It's the only life I've ever known."

"Where do you sleep?"

"On a cot upstairs."

"And you ought to have a palace. Did you ever look at yourself in the glass?"

"Sometimes, after he beats me."

Fay started toward the door. He heard a chair upset. Little Emily dragged on his arm.

"Don't go to him! He'll kill you."

"Then you come with me."

"I'm afraid to."

The girl spoke the truth. Her color was ashen.

Fay went to the table, lifted her chair, turned it and motioned for her to sit down. She hesitated between the table and door.

"Please," said Fay.

He might have been addressing a princess. Her color returned in rippling waves. She tried to smile. Her lips trembled—she took one step in his direction, swayed, and pressed her fists to her breast.

The Dropper's form completely filled the doorway.

"Come here!" he snarled.

"Hold on!" snapped Fay.

"Come 'ere, yuh!"

The girl between the two men, made her choice, or rather, had it made for her.

Shrinkingly demure, and altogether tearful, she pressed by the Dropper and glided across the den where the poppy-smokers lay.

"Go to bed!"

Fay saw the brute's chin move in a slow circle over his shelving shoulder. He swung back his jaw.

"You're next," he said. "Better beat it, bo. I'll tame yuh like I've tamed her."

"Tamed is good." Fay picked up his hat. He hooked the cane over his left sleeve. "Rather pleasant evening, Dropper. . . . I see you understand women."

"I guess I do. Yuh want to let 'em know you're the biggest guy alive. I'm that guy. Nobody ever took a broad away from me."

"But she's only a kid, Dropper."

"Another year—"

"Yes, you're right. Well, so long. There'll be another night, too. I'm coming back."

"I'll be ready for yuh!"

FAY had no set plan as he left the scatter of Mike Cregan—alias the Dropper. He wanted to thrash out the matter of Emily O'Mara in his mind. Her behavior, and the fear she held of her unsavory guardian, puzzled the cracksman.

He had accomplished much in a brief time. There were not many men living who could have broken out of Rockglen on one afternoon and strolled down Michigan Avenue the next. It was an exploit in keeping with his reputation.

Midnight found him working over the problem of the girl. He recalled old Charley's last instructions:

"Get her away from the low-brows."

A promise, Fay had never intentionally broken. There was the girl—naïve, doll-like, docile. There was the Dropper—demanding, brutish, a fink.

Fay slept that night at a stag hotel.

He woke early, bathed beneath a shower, dressed and went down to breakfast.

On Harrison Street he gulped the air. He avoided being seen by the detectives of the city. Once he took a cab for a distance of five squares. He dismissed the driver at the side entrance of a cheap hotel—sauntered through the lobby and emerged with a sharp glance to left and right.

The game gripped him as he dodged into the tenement and started climbing the gas-flared stairways to the hop-joint. He knew, in the soul of him, that Chicago was a danger-spot.

He knocked on the door and was admitted by the Dropper—who seemed alone.

"Back again," said Fay. "I said I'd be back. Where is Emily?"

"Wot t'hell!"

"Where is the girl?"

A gliding sounded over the matting of the room beyond the screen. Emily thrust her head through the doorway. Her sherry-colored eyes were red-rimmed, glazed with tears, sullen. The Dropper had just finished his morning hate by upbraiding her.

"Wot t'hell's comin' off?" rumbled the dive-keeper. "Beat it, cul, before I wake up. I'm going to wham yuh one."

Fay swiftly hooked his cane over the edge of an empty bunk, removed his hat, took off his coat, and rolled up his sleeves.

"I didn't bring a gat!" he snapped. "I don't need one. Get into that room, set the card-table back and pile up the chairs. Get ready, you fink, for what's coming to you."

THE DROPPER found himself in the grip of a situation not exactly to his liking. He backed from Fay. He crashed over the screen. He turned, thrust Emily aside, and shelved forward his shoulders in an aggressive posture. His brows worked up and down. The scar on his cheek grew livid.

"Hol' on," he started to protest.

Fay stepped swiftly forward, whipped over a lightning uppercut, and jabbed with his left fist toward the brute's stomach. Both blows had force enough to land the Dropper against the card-table.

He went down like a pole-axed bullock. He rose in his might and rage. His bel-lowing could have been heard a block away. He came at Fay unskillfully—thrown off balance by the sudden attack.

The clean life of a supercrook stood Fay in good stead. His weight was less than half that of the Dropper's. But he more than made up for this by the swiftness of his blows. He tormented the brute by jabs, hooks and side-stepping.

The Dropper was no novice at boxing. Once, years before, he had been Honest Abe's chief bouncer. He had broken men's heads and hurled derelicts from barrooms. He knew the rudiments of wrestling.

Slowly his thick brain came into action. He covered his jaw with a shelving shoulder. He put down his bulletlike head and started to bore through the rain of blows. With wild swings he forced Fay against the poker-table. It went over and riddled to the wall near where Emily crouched.

The cracksman glided around the Dropper and shadow-tormented him. He struck straight from the shoulder. He was two-fisted and agile. Each flash of his eye was marked by a stinging blow. A crescendo of effort, all to the brute's purple face, had its effect. The Dropper started gasping. He lowered his fists. He breathed, waiting. He grunted as he followed Fay—blindly, grossly. A red gleam showed where his lids were puffing.

FAY felt his own strength waning. He called on all his latent nerve-force. He became a tiger. He leaped, drove a smashing fist between the Dropper's gorilla-like brows, stepped back, dodged a swing, then repeated the blow. He played for this mark. The fury of his assault was like an air-hammer on a rivet. It deadened the brute's brain. It made him all animal.

A bull's roar filled the room. Goaded to an open defense, the Dropper abandoned science. He tried to grasp his tormentor. His huge hands groped through the air. He stumbled and searched. He fell over a chair. He rose to his knees. Fay waited, hooked a short, elbow-jab between the eyes. He followed with his left. His arm snapped in its sting. He backed, side-stepped, and started around the Dropper, delivering blows like a cooper finishing a barrel.

A red rage came to the cracksman that was terrible in its ferocity. He forgot Emily. He saw only the swollen thing before him. He wanted to kill. He sought for the opening.

Abandoning his straight jabs, he danced in and out with short-arm swings to the face and neck and eyes. He pounded the ears until they resembled cauliflowers. He made a pulp of the Dropper's face.

The end came in less than a second. Beaten into near-insensibility, tottering and bloated—the Dropper attempted to reach the door that led to the opium-joint. He remembered a gat he had planted there. He lowered his shielding left shoulder. His jaw was exposed.

Fay poised on tiptoes, drew back his right fist and sent it home with the tendons of his legs strained, in the effort. His weight, his rage, his science and clean living were in that blow. It milled the brute, staggered and brought him crashing, first to his knees, then over on his back, where he lay with his swollen face turned toward the ceiling.

Little Emily glided to the door. She waited with her eyes fixed and shimmering.

Fay breathed deeply. He turned, unrolled his silk sleeves and said:

"Will—you—get my hat and coat and cane, please?"

Little Emily helped him on with his coat. Her hands trembled.

"Now get *your* things. You're going away from here."

She returned within three minutes.

"I'm ready," she said.

"You saw me knock him out?"

"Yes."

"Go look at him."

Emily hurried into the room. She knelt by the Dropper's head. She came back to Fay and whispered:

"I'm not afraid of him any more."

"Why, little Emily?"

"Because you are stronger than he is."

Fay opened the door that led to the hallway where the gas-flare showed in the gloom.

"Have you everything?" he asked.

Emily pointed to a pasteboard hatbox. Fay lifted it gallantly.

"Come on," he said.

"Where are you going to take me?" she asked, humbly.

"I'm going to take you to the house of the good woman on the Hudson."

"And what are *you* going to do?"

"I? I'm going to get word to Charley O'Mara that I kept my promise—and his kid's all right."

The second of Henry Leverage's stories of real life in the underworld will appear in an early issue of THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE.

Mack Mason Enters Oil

By
Chester T. Crowell



SENATOR LOGWOOD helps his astonishing friend Mack Mason in one of his most remarkable achievements—a joyous tale of wild days in the oil-fields, written in Mr. Crowell's most engaging style.

“I WISH you would not do that,” pleaded Senator Robert Culpepper Logwood in a soft, calm voice that none the less suppressed anxiety.

“Now don’t you fret yourself,” responded Mack Mason as he lay on his back under the big touring-car in which he and his friend the former State senator had made the trip from San Jacinto to Zephyr, two hundred and eighty-five miles across the bad roads of the western portion of the State of Mesquite.

“Are you sure you know where all those things go?” asked Senator Logwood as he surveyed the miscellaneous assortment of automobile-parts which Mack Mason had extracted.

“I’m not so all-fired sure, Senator,” replied Mack Mason, “but I think I do. I’ve taken them out before and always got them back without having to tie any big ones on the running-board.”

“What are they?” asked Senator Logwood, still anxious.

“I don’t know, Senator,” said Mack Mason. “I just call them giblets. They came out of the inside of the thing. Feel ’em. They’re still warm.”

“I would dislike very much to have to ride back on that train,” remarked Senator Logwood.

“I don’t see why,” asserted Mack Ma-

son. “It’s a client of yours and you pack a pass around with you.”

“The engine annoys me,” said Senator Logwood. “I used to have a partner years ago when I was in the senate of the State of Mesquite, and the unfortunate gentleman had asthma.”

“Did he get it riding on that train?” asked Mason.

“No, but this engine makes a noise like the one he used to make, poor man, and I seem to feel too heavy for the thing to pull.”

“See that?” asked Mason extending a grimy hand from under the automobile and exhibiting a part of the machinery.

“Yes.”

“Well, Senator, b’less my soul, I never can remember where that damn’ thing goes. I had to ride fifty miles once without it to get to a garage and have it put back in.”

“And the car ran without it?” demanded Senator Logwood.

“Seemed to go all right,” replied Mason. “I forget what the garage man told me it was. I always call it the appendix.”

“Mason, I wish you would remember that you are an attorney and have a little more dignity and poise about you,” began Senator Logwood, while Mason smiled broadly as he worked under the automo-

bile, for this was an old and familiar lecture. "You are not a mechanic, and I am afraid that we will have to spend the rest of our days out here in this God-forsaken country."

"I'm an American citizen, though," declared Mason with burlesque seriousness, "And all American citizens know how to fix automobiles. I know, because I read that in a newspaper one time. It said Americans are born with a genius for mechanics, and can do things with machinery by instinct that it takes years and years for any other people to learn to do." Something clicked under the car and Mason exclaimed: "There you go, dad gum ye!"

"Now what?" demanded Senator Logwood.

"I got that appendix back in," replied Mason. "It snaps into a hole in the big giblet next to the right lung or something; anyway, it's all right now."

SENATOR LOGWOOD showed his relief by lighting a cigarette. Mack Mason crawled out from under the automobile, grinning boyishly, because he knew his face was smeared with grease and that Senator Logwood would be certain to make some comment. The Senator viewed his friend with disgust and offered him two handkerchiefs, which Mason proceeded to use vigorously. They climbed into the car, and a few minutes later were bouncing over a rocky road.

"Is that the smoke from the boiler?" asked Senator Logwood as they reached a ledge which gave them a view of surrounding sand and rocks spotted with clumps of stunted trees and patches of cactus. He pointed toward an oil-well derrick and boiler faintly visible under a thin film of smoke.

"That's it," asserted Mack Mason proudly. "Aint it a beauty?"

"Well, I would scarcely call it a beauty," Senator Logwood remarked, "but it seems quite like a boiler should be."

"That's what I mean," explained Mason, "—because the thing is made out of pieces of tin fastened together on a wooden frame." Senator Logwood looked incredulous.

"There is smoke coming out of the stack," he asserted.

"You bet your sweet life there is," Mason hastened to exclaim. "I had a hot time getting the smoke, but it's all right, and it didn't set fire to anything inside the boiler.

It's good smoke, too. You can see it for ten miles. It comes in a powder."

"But the steam, also—I see the steam from here!" Senator Logwood was too astonished to accept Mason's explanations.

"That's made with a gasoline torch and a can of water down in a hole near the derrick," Mason continued. "And Senator, I sure have had an awful time with that derrick. Every time the wind blows, down it goes. We could easy enough pull it up again, but you know an honest-to-goodness derrick can't be pulled up that way, so we have to rebuild it."

"What is it made of, paper?" asked Senator Logwood as the humor of the situation began to dawn upon him.

"It's made out of the boards from some sheds I bought in Zephyr," replied Mason. "But we'll get everything all right in time, Senator. You know derrick-timbers are heavy and we can't get them here by parcel post."

"What is the wire fence for?" asked Senator Logwood as this part of the "improvements" became visible.

"That's to keep off the scoundrels who might come up and find out how far down we've drilled," explained Mack Mason with a smile. "Also it is a mighty protection to that poor weak boiler." Senator Logwood nodded approvingly as the strategy became more apparent.

"I didn't know much about these here mineral rights leases," remarked Mack Mason, "and when I bought this lease next to the Bushel of Gold Petroleum Gas and Development Company's well, I thought the dad-burned thing was good for a hundred years, but it seems like you have to begin drilling within a certain time. First thing I knew, the ex-cow-thief I bought the lease from was offering it for sale again. I asked him what the Sam Hill and so forth, and he said he reckoned I was going to let it lapse since I didn't have no drilling outfit on it.

"Senator, I told him that my outfit was coming by fast express and by automobile and some of it by airplane. And sure enough, the whole thing was on the ground before I said it would be."

"AREN'T you afraid the men working there will consider it too good a joke to hold, and will tell some one?" asked Senator Logwood.

"Not a chance," asserted Mack Mason. "I sent down to the Polish settlement and

got some *hombres* that can't speak any English or Spanish or anything else. They got the funniest language in the world, Senator. A Mexican would have to get him a new kind of a nose and throat before he could speak a word of it. I'm safe unless the prairie dogs can understand them, but a prairie dog don't say much. They stand around here and laugh sometimes, but I can't blame them for that."

"Well, neither do I," Senator Logwood remarked, as they came still closer to the camouflage well-drilling outfit. "I wonder sometimes," he added, "why it is that some men can do everything and others can do so little. Mack Mason, you are so many kinds of a genius that my astonishment grows day by day. I do not see, though, why you should employ me as your attorney."

"I'll tell you just how it is," asserted Mack Mason with a broad grin. "I've always wanted to know just how it feels to hire a lawyer. You know, I never have hired a lawyer. With me it's always being hired. I used to know a great old sport that ran a gambling-house, and he'd go out sometimes and buck the other *hombre's* game just to see how it felt. Haven't you never seen a bartender in the place next door, buying a drink, Senator?" asked Mason.

"Mason, for the honor of the profession, do not use that awful expression, 'hire a lawyer.' If you do not respect yourself, then, please respect me enough to refer to this transaction as the retaining of an attorney."

"All right, Senator," agreed Mack Mason. "We'll say it that-a-way if you like. But that aint all. I wanted to see how it would feel to have the best lawyer on earth working for me."

"In heaven's name, Mack Mason," pleaded Senator Logwood, "your crudities grow more offensive each minute."

"I beg pardon, now, Senator," Mason hastened to apologize. "What I meant was—"

"I know what you meant, and it is all right," interrupted Senator Logwood. "Let us get down to business. Let me ask you first what you are going to do when your real derrick-timbers and boiler and machinery arrive?"

"THAT'S easy, Senator," Mack Mason responded. "I'll just call it a second well and go right on. Then after a while

we'll blow up this bum boiler or lose that wooden outfit down the hole or something, and abandon the first well. It's easy."

"Very well, then. So far as your lease on the four thousand acres is concerned, your compliance with the terms is all right. Now as to the suit for possession on the ground of insufficient payment, let us go over the details of that again."

"All right, Senator," Mack Mason began, "—hold onto your seat with one hand and grab your hat with the other and I'll tell it to you fast. Oliver Goldsmith Cullinan of the Bushel of Gold Petroleum Gas 'em and Develop 'em Company whispers in my shell-like ear that he is not going to abandon the hole on his lease as usual and leave the stockholders to conduct funeral services over their scraps of paper, but he is going after oil. An *hombre* which makes a living looking clean through the earth and telling what is down there, sees oil right under Gold's derrick. That was the geologist shark. Goldy goes ahead to drill. He oozes a sad story in my direction about how he is broke or he would buy all the oil-leases for miles around. I listen carefully in my capacity as attorney, next friend, and other things, and then make up my little mind to get me some oil-leases. I am riding along these here boulevard boulevards in my magnificent leather-upholstered six-cylinder Jinx, when the carburetor blows up and the engine dies of a broken heart and the crank-shaft gets smallpox, and an epidemic breaks out among the cylinders. There was hell all over the place with that magnificent Jinx speedster, and our well-known hero Mack Mason was sitting on the upholstered seat puffing black smoke out of one side of his mouth and purple curses out of the other. Do you follow me?"

"You make it as difficult as possible," Senator Logwood commented, "but I seem to have a general knowledge of what you are discussing."

"All right, Senator," continued Mack Mason, "turn loose your hat and I'll go a little more slowly." Senator Logwood discovered for the first time that he actually had taken hold of the brim of his hat when Mack Mason suggested it. He smiled as he released his firm grip on it. Mason laughed heartily.

"While our hero, which is me, is sitting in his luxurious but rheumatic six-cylinder Jinx," Mason continued, "along comes a farmer person who passes the time of day

and borrows some ice-water from the well-known thermos-bottle. A conversation ensues. The farmer person likes the leather upholstery and opines that some day he may have a car like that, except that the Democratic administration has ruined the country."

"I would have closed the conversation right there and had nothing more to do with him," asserted Senator Logwood, who was a straight-ticket Democrat.

"Well, what I done to him was a-plenty," continued Mack Mason. "I drug forth from the well-worn leather wallet a blank form for an oil-lease. We wrote in the description of his property, which is bounded on the north by Onion Creek and on the south by some prairie-dog villages and on the east by the skeleton of a cow and so forth and so on, and I took an oil lease on his four thousand acres, he retaining one copy and me the other and so forth, and I gave him possession of the afore-mentioned six-cylinder Jinx automobile right then and there. He didn't know how to run it, so we agreed that I'd ride in with him, after locking the car so it couldn't be stolen, and he'd bring back some one that could run it. Well, sir, Senator, that scoundrel is now ready to testify that when he brought back a mechanic to run the car, it wouldn't run. What do you know about that?"

"WHAT do I know about it?" repeated Senator Logwood, astounded. "I know nothing about it except what you have just told me, and I would conclude from your statement, that the car was damaged and would not run at the time you sold it."

"Now, that is where you are mistaken," asserted Mack Mason with baffling inconsistency. "You are using against me in evidence a confidential statement to my attorney. The evidence up to this point shows that I had operated that magnificent six-cylinder Jinx automobile along the rough uphill roads of Bocanegra County, State of Mesquite, for a distance of many miles and had merely stopped for a moment in the road. During that stop a sale was negotiated and closed then and there. During the time the automobile was standing in the road—subsequent to the sale—all kinds of fool things happened to it. It is beyond me to guess who might have pespered with that car. It wasn't my car. It belonged to another man. He came back

to run his car, and it wouldn't run. He goes and gets excited and files a suit against me alleging fraud, embezzlement, lese majesty, *e pluribus unum*, theft by bailee, conspiracy, and some other things, and wants back his oil-lease.

"In the meantime, Senator, some innocent parties have bought some leases from me on small subdivisions of the four thousand-acre tract, and that's the money I'm using to drill the well. In fact, I used some of that money to buy my tin boiler and my toothpick derrick and that gasoline torch. You can see for yourself, Senator, that I have at all times acted in perfectly good faith, and that so far as any fraud is concerned, I am the most innocent oil speculator in seventeen counties. As a matter of fact, Senator, I never alleged that automobile would run, anyway. All the purchaser was interested in was the leather-upholstered interior. The only additional statement I made was that the thing had six cylinders, which I stand ready to prove, and that it was a Jinx car."

"I follow your general drift," remarked Senator Logwood as he lighted another cigarette, "but it will not do. I happen to know that the plaintiff in this case will bring forward his son to prove that said son was stationed on guard to see that no one touched the car. He will swear that no one touched it."

"But, Senator, that's just a plain lie," asserted Mason.

"I do not doubt that it is," agreed Senator Logwood, "but the fact remains that the plaintiff and his son reside in this community and you do not. It is also a fact that you have purchased an oil-lease worth many thousands of dollars, giving in payment a secondhand automobile. It would be hard enough to handle such a case if you had given the man a good automobile, but when he alleges fraud as to the worth of the car, the case grows still more difficult."

"Now, wait a minute, Senator," objected Mason. "You want to remember that if the car had been a good one, it was not such a bad trade for that ex-cow-thief at the time. Ten cents an acre was a fair price for a lease on four thousand acres at that time. That price has advanced since then, owing to the Bushel of Gold Petroleum Gas 'Em and Develop 'Em Company bringing in its well."

"That is correct," agreed Senator Logwood. "I had overlooked that point."

AS they talked, Mason had driven past his own holdings and was now near the derrick of the producing oil-well.

"Senator," he said, "there is Goldy's oil-well. It's filled all the steel tanks, and now it's flowing into the creek. They dammed the creek. There must be thirty thousand barrels of oil in that dry creek bed. It sure is a real well, Senator. Oil is worth about two dollars a barrel."

"I think we had better return now," remarked Senator Logwood. "I feel a slight headache coming on. I always have that headache when it is going to rain. We have a long way to go, and I would not like to be caught in the rain out here."

"Senator, it don't never rain out here," asserted Mack Mason. "You must be suffering from the heat. I don't want to go back yet. I'd like to go over to the main highway and watch the cars pass by for an hour or so. There's a transcontinental highway passes about ten miles from here, and I sure want to go over there for a while and watch the cars pass by."

"Don't be childish," said Senator Logwood impatiently. "Moreover, I assure you that it is going to rain. My feet hurt a little also."

"But there aint a cloud in the sky," objected Mason.

"That makes no difference," declared Logwood. "It is going to rain."

"I wish I was as sure of that as you are," remarked Mason. "A good rain would be worth about fifty thousand dollars to me right now."

"Fifty thousand dollars!" exclaimed Senator Logwood. "Then the money is as good as yours, because I know it is going to rain to-night."

"You stay with me and keep saying that frequently, Senator, and I'll split the fifty thousand with you," Mack Mason proposed.

"Very well, young man, very well," Senator Logwood agreed.

"How much money have you got with you?" Mason asked. Senator Logwood examined the bills in his wallet.

"I have eight hundred dollars with me," he said, "but that is all the money I brought along."

"Well, that will be enough," Mason commented as he took possession of the wallet. Senator Logwood looked anxious but said nothing. Mason turned the car back toward his own derrick and drove rapidly. A few minutes later he was giv-

ing directions to the crew of Polish workmen who had been sitting in the shade of the derrick or under heavy farm wagons. They departed in a group in the direction of the dry creek-bed carrying shovels and picks. As Mason reëntered the automobile, there was a broad smile on his boyish face.

"Senator, I sure have to use my arms a lot when I talk to them *hombres*," he remarked. "Now we'll drive over to the main road, and you can leave me there and drive back to Zephyr. On the way over, we'll stop and see that ex-cow-thief that's suing me. I got a little deal to make with him."

TWENTY minutes later Senator Logwood and Mack Mason had drawn up an instrument whereby Mason purchased outright ten acres of land, including the creek-bed at the point nearest his well. He explained that he would have to construct there a dam to catch water for his drilling operations. The owner of the property flatly refused the offer of ten dollars an acre which Mason made, and demanded one hundred dollars an acre. Mason closed the deal with the payment of five hundred dollars, the remainder to be paid in five days at the First State Bank of Zephyr with interest at ten percent. Then they drove to the main road, where Mason stepped out of the car and turned the steering-wheel over to Senator Logwood.

"I'll tell you what you do, Senator," Mason suggested. "You drive on back to town and get in out of the wet." Mason laughed heartily because there was not a cloud in the sky.

"I will be glad to do that," Senator Logwood agreed without a smile. "I do not fancy being out here where these torrents rise so rapidly in a heavy rain."

"Yes, it looks to me like a cloudburst," Mason remarked, this time without a chuckle.

"How will you return?" Senator Logwood asked.

"I've got to buy a car right here on the road," said Mason. "If I buy the right car, we win this suit. If I don't, we compromise it with my rain-money in the morning. You be on hand in the courtroom when the case is called, and stall along all you can. You'll hear from me, all right. Make them produce the car. I think they are getting ready to drag it in

in the morning as Exhibit A. Let them drag it. So far as I know, Senator, and so far as you know, there aint a thing the matter with that car."

"I follow you this time," said Senator Logwood with a smile. He stepped on the starter, and a few minutes later the car was roaring along the sandy road, leaving a trail of dust. Mason sat down on a rock and leaned against a gaudy marker which indicated the name of the transcontinental highway.

An hour passed—two. Twelve automobiles had gone by, Mason anxiously studying each from the moment it appeared in the distance. As the sun was sinking behind the horizon, he was startled by the rumble of distant thunder. There was still not a cloud in the sky. Twenty minutes later, in the twilight, he saw a faint flash of lightning along the horizon indicating where the storm was. In the last orange glow of the setting sun he saw the clouds appear over the southwestern rim of the earth.

"That silver-haired old darling was right, after all," he muttered to himself. "He aint only the best lawyer in the world; he's a weather prophet, too."

ONLY the bright stars illumined the gray dust of the road when Mack Mason stepped out into the middle of the highway and waved his arms as a signal for a passing automobile to stop. The driver at first put on more gas, but seemed to think better of it a moment later as he observed more clearly that Mason held nothing in his upraised hands. Nevertheless, when the car stopped, Mason found himself staring into the blinding light of a movable lamp on the side of the car while the driver pointed a pistol at him.

"What do you want?" a gruff voice asked from within the darkness of the car.

"I want to buy that car," declared Mason, "if it's a 1916 Jinx. How much?"

"Two thousand dollars," replied the driver. "Cash—it's a 1916 Jinx."

"One thousand six hundred cash," said Mason, "—otherwise notes. That's all I got with me."

"Sold," said the gruff voice. A moment later the driver of the car had climbed out, his form being faintly outlined.

"Sheriff chasing you?" asked the gruff voice with just a suggestion of sympathy.

"Yes," Mason replied. "Where'd you steal it?"

"Far enough away to be safe here," was the prompt reply.

"That's all I wanted to know," said Mason. "Count your money." The seller counted the bills.

"One hundred dollars short," he announced. Mason reached into Senator Logwood's wallet and drew forth the three hundred dollars which remained after the purchase of the ten-acre dam site. The seller observed the money and then reached over and took all of it.

"Price has gone up," he announced gruffly. Mason smiled.

"That's what I get for being caught bluffing," Mason agreed with a good-natured laugh. "Take it."

"Don't worry; I'm taking it," growled the seller. "Now, you climb in and beat it."

"Your advice is excellent," said Mack Mason. "I still have fifty cents, and I'm going to drive fast."

"Come back here," the gruff voice boomed out. Mason stopped suddenly with one foot on the running-board of the automobile.

"I told the truth that time," said Mason with a laugh. "You can go through me." There was a delay for a few seconds while the handful of bills was stuffed into various pockets; then the possessor of them searched Mason carefully. The search uncovered exactly fifty cents.

"Here's ten dollars," said the gruff voice. "You may need it."

"Thanks," said Mason, accepting the money. He stuffed the ten-dollar bill into his coat pocket, then climbed into the automobile and drove rapidly for an hour.

NEAR an overhanging cliff Mason turned off the lights and proceeded slowly. Finally he left the main road and proceeded still more slowly, guided by the starlight as the car went winding along between clumps of cactus. Eventually he stopped in front of a shelter-shed for cattle, which was open to the south. He switched on the lights of the automobile and disclosed the six-cylinder 1916 Jinx car which was to be the subject of suit the following morning. Strong ropes had been fastened to the front axle and attached to the rear axle of a heavy farm wagon. On the wagon lay the harness for four mules. Protected by the five miles of distance from the home of the owner of the automobile, Mason went to work to repair the

damaged car, using whatever he needed from the car which he had just purchased.

Mason had been at work three hours before he stepped into the damaged Jinx and placed his foot on the self starter. The roar of the engine was his reward. Rain was beginning to fall, and he examined his watch carefully at more and more frequent intervals as he sat waiting under the shed. Finally a heavy wagon drew up close to the shed. Mason stepped into the light and signaled for the Polish driver to stop. The newly purchased car, or rather what was left of it, was attached by rope to the wagon, and the procession started across the trackless pasture through a heavy rain.

Mason paid no attention to the down-pour, but was in high good spirits as the wagon bumped along toward the camp near his derrick. Even when he arrived there, he did not join in the general scurrying to cover. He walked over to the dam in the creek-bed and examined it with greatest care. The water was not rising, because of two sections of steel pipe thrust through the bottom of the dam, providing, in effect, gates which could be closed when the time had come to impound the flow. He summoned the leader of his Polish clan out into the rain and gave him elaborate instructions as to the opening and closing of the pipes through the bottom of the dam. After much gesturing and repeating, all seemed to be clear. Mack Mason was wearing a broad grin.

IT was about nine o'clock in the morning when he telephoned to Zephyr to have Senator Logwood send the car after him. In due time he arrived at the courthouse to find that Senator Logwood and counsel for the owner of the leather-upholstered six-cylinder Jinx car had each answered ready for trial.

As he took his seat at the attorney's table, Senator Logwood stared blankly but for a long time at Mack Mason. Mason appeared not to notice it for fully twenty seconds; then he slowly nodded. After that Senator Logwood knew exactly how to proceed.

The first witness was the owner of the car. The car was standing just outside the courtroom door. It was described and identified by the plaintiff. The story of the failure of the car to run was told, and the lease was read to the jury. That closed the plaintiff's case.

Mack Mason took the stand, told his

name, admitted that he was the person referred to by the previous witness and then launched off into a statement which counsel vainly endeavored to stop.

"Never was nothing the matter with the car," declared Mack Mason, as though thoroughly angry. "Aint nothing the matter with the car now. If there is, I'll go out there and fix it in a minute. If there's anything the matter with the car, I'll pay him ten thousand dollars."

"Hold on, hold on," roared Senator Logwood. "Answer my questions and don't make statements at random like that."

"We object! We object!" shouted opposing counsel.

"Well, I'll just show you," declared Mason in the excited manner of speech he had adopted. The jurors were smiling. So was the judge. The sheriff had turned his back and was laughing heartily. Before anyone realized what had happened, Mack Mason was out of the courtroom and sitting in the automobile which was the subject of the suit.

"Mr. Sheriff, go and get that witness," roared the judge. The sheriff ran out of the courtroom. The jurors stood up to watch the proceeding. As soon as the sheriff was out of the courtroom, they were crowding around the window, watching Mason. As they watched, he stepped on the self starter, and a moment later the six-cylinder leather-upholstered 1916 Jinx car was roaring with the muffler cut out, and a cloud of blue smoke issuing from the rear. Mason met the sheriff on the running-board and preceded him back into the courtroom, the officer hurrying to keep up with Mason and losing hold of his arm. The car was still roaring.

"Aint nothing the matter with that car," Mason asserted.

"I will fine you one hundred dollars for contempt of court," declared the judge.

"Beg pardon, Judge," said Mason pleasantly. "I thought all the time there couldn't be nothing the matter with that car. I was right out in the road when—"

"Will you shut your mouth before I send you to jail?" yelled the judge. "I will fine you another hundred dollars for contempt of court."

"All right, Judge," agreed Mason, still unperturbed, "but you see for yourself—"

"Silence," yelled Senator Logwood. Mack Mason collapsed. The jurors were holding their sides and falling against one another.

"Mr. Sheriff, have order in the courtroom," shouted the judge.

The sheriff yelled: "Have order, gentlemen."

Eventually quiet was restored, and counsel for the owner of the Jinx automobile rose to say that there must be some mistake about the identity of the car.

"They proved the identity of the car," said Senator Logwood. "We are not asserting that that is the car, but we admit that it is."

Opposing counsel motioned for Senator Logwood to come closer for a whispered consultation. Five minutes later the case was dismissed with the agreement that the plaintiff would pay the costs.

MASON waited long enough to hear Senator Logwood accept the proposed dismissal, and then rushed from the room. Senator Logwood looked after him, wondering what might be the occasion for such haste.

The motion for dismissal having been presented and ruled on by the court, Senator Logwood strolled out of the courtroom and down the one street of Zephyr. He had not gone far when the stout and florid Oliver Goldsmith Cullinan called after him. Senator Logwood turned to see Cullinan trying to run in his direction and signaling for him to hurry. Senator Logwood made it a rule of his life never to hurry, but he turned and walked briskly. Any hurrying or unseemly excitement were things which he invariably left to Mack Mason; they did not comport well with his classic appearance, his neatly combed wealth of snow white hair and his faultless attire.

"Senator, some one has stolen thirty-three thousand barrels of petroleum from me," shouted Cullinan as soon as he was close enough to be heard clearly. "I want you to come right over to my office and look up the law."

"Why not look up the thief?" suggested Senator Logwood.

"Well, it's a queer case," explained Oliver Goldsmith Cullinan. "I had that oil stored in the bed of a dry creek. When the rain came last night, the water rose behind the dam, and the oil flowed over. I had men out all night in the rain building another dam further down to catch that oil, but it never did come. Somebody's got that oil. I want you to tell me what to do."

"I will have to consult the law," said

Senator Logwood. "You were right in your first statement, after all. I do not know whether this constitutes a theft or not."

They walked over to Cullinan's office, which was one room in the frame building he had constructed as a home. Among the baggage Senator Logwood had carried to Zephyr with him were a few law-books, and he sat down to read. He had not been sitting there very long when Mack Mason came noisily across the flimsy board floor and flopped into a chair. He drew forth Senator Logwood's wallet, now empty, and laid it across his knee. Then he drew from his pockets two bundles of currency, which he began dividing equally. Senator Logwood looked up several times with interest, but asked no questions. Finally Mack Mason stuffed one of the bundles of currency into Senator Logwood's wallet and handed it to him.

"There's your half of the rain-money," he said.

"I am looking up the law for Mr. Cullinan," explained Senator Logwood, "to determine whether the stopping of a flood of petroleum en route along the bed of a creek—"

"Hell, I looked that up a week ago," Mason interrupted. "The oil belongs to the *hombre* that grabs it on the way. Gimme that book. I'll show it to you in the decision of the court in the case of—" By this time Mason had the book in his hand. "You got the wrong book, Senator," he said. "It's a late decision."

"You are sure about that?" asked Senator Logwood, puzzled.

"Senator, if I hadn't been sure, I wouldn't have gone to all the trouble to buy that ten acres and dam that creek to get the oil."

"What!" exclaimed Senator Logwood.

"You better go on and tell Goldy what the law is and get your fee," continued Mason, "because that rain-money I just gave you is your half of the oil. I sold it this morning, and the man is putting in a pump right now to load it in the tank-cars."

"So that was the rain-money," mused Senator Logwood.

OLIVER GOLDSMITH CULLINAN entered the room.

"Goldy, the Senator here tells me you had another dam down below that first one," boomed Mack Mason.

"I did," said Cullinan.

"Did you have some pipes through the bottom of it?" asked Mason.

"No, but it was fourteen feet high, and I thought it would catch the little freshet," explained Cullinan.

"Lord, no!" roared Mason. "That aint no way to build a dam to catch oil. You have to put some pipes through the bottom to let the water out. If you don't, all the oil goes over the top, and you don't catch nothing but the water."

"I see that very clearly this morning," said Cullinan with a wry smile.

"I got a dam that catches oil and holds it," asserted Mason. Senator Logwood coughed slightly and looked embarrassed.

"What do you want with such a dam?" asked Cullinan, smiling.

"I caught thirty thousand barrels last night," declared Mason bluntly.

"That was my oil!" exclaimed Cullinan.

"It was till it went over your dam and under that bob wire fence. Then it was my oil. If I hadn't caught it then, it would 'a' been your oil again on the other side of the south fence. I looked up the law on that last week."

"This is an outrage," roared Cullinan.

"Now, you listen to me," said Mason, smiling broadly. "Forget that outrage stuff. I had to have the money to pay for my drilling-outfit that comes with sight draft attached and me broke. I don't want any more of your oil than I need to pay for that outfit. I'm gonna drill me a well of my own. But you need that dam of mine. I'll sell you that ten acres with the dam for five hundred dollars an acre. It's

worth that to you to see how I fixed that dam. That's the kind of a dam you ought to have. Better jump in the car and come on out."

"Is it really his oil under the law?" asked Cullinan of Senator Logwood.

"I am persuaded that it is," replied Senator Logwood.

"Sure it is," interjected Mason. "Come on out, and I'll show you that dam. It's a bear. I don't need it no more, because I already got enough oil to pay for my drilling-outfit. That's all I needed." Cullinan stared blankly at Mason for several seconds, then laughed long and heartily.

"Mason," he said, "you are a character. All right, I'll go out and buy your dam if it holds oil."

As Mason started out of the room with Cullinan following, he looked back over his shoulder and remarked to Senator Logwood: "Goldy's a good sport, aint he, Senator?"

"I am persuaded that he is," replied Senator Logwood with a smile.

"I aint only persuaded, I know he is," shouted Mason as he slapped Cullinan on the back. "Goldy," he continued, "if you an' me was partners, we'd show this here whole world how to grab 'em and develop 'em, wouldn't we?"

"We would do exactly that," replied Cullinan with a smile, "but we would also have a steel safe in which I would keep my shoes and my false teeth."

"Did you hear that?" shouted Mason, addressing Senator Logwood. Senator Logwood's reply was lost in the roar of the automobile engine.

"THREE MEN FROM HOPE HILL"

CHESTER T. CROWELL has written for the BLUE BOOK a novelette, "Three Men from Hope Hill," which is in a distinctly new vein. Watch for this story, which will appear in an early issue of the magazine. You will find it one of the most impressive stories you have ever read.

The Affair at Tala'at



A COLORFUL and dramatic story of an American's extraordinary adventure in the Sahara, told with splendid verve and conviction—

By
George A. Seel

"M'SIEUR LE COLONEL, a letter for you!" The untidy, corpulent little French proprietor of that unique establishment, half hotel, half caravanserai, the Hotel Moresque, at Marakeesh, exuding perspiration from a shiny fat countenance, stood at the door of Hawke's apartment and bowed.

Stretched out in a Madeira chair, his sleeves rolled up, his collar opened at the neck and his hair tousled, Richard Hawke turned in irritation.

"Didn't I tell you I wasn't to be disturbed, you swine!" he snapped, glaring furiously.

Jacques Bezique shrugged his shoulders volubly, quailing before the vivid flash of those golden-gray eyes.

"I beg a thousand pardons, m'sieur—a thousand pardons. But ze little ma'm'selle, she tell me it ess ver' important zat she should see ze Colonel on business mos' urgent."

"Well, hand the letter here, jackanapes. Since you've taken the liberty to rouse me, I may as well find out what this female wants."

He took the envelope ungraciously. There was a faint scent of violets about the fine grade of white paper. The handwriting was manifestly that of a cultured woman.

"Humph!" grumbled Hawke as he tore it open, extracted a folded sheet, and read:

You will pardon my addressing you, an utter stranger, in so unconventional a fashion, I am sure, Colonel Hawke, when I tell you that the affair which has brought me from England to see you is of great, possibly, vital urgency. Could you do me the favor of stepping into my room while I explain?

The signature was "A. Claremont." The note-paper, Hawke observed, was monogrammed "AC" in gold.

NOW, Richard Hawke, American, soldier of fortune by profession, adventurer by choice, ordinarily was never known to turn a deaf ear to beauty in distress; but on this occasion there were mitigating circumstances. He had reached Marakeesh only the previous evening after a twenty-five-day camel-ride across a thousand miles of blazing sand, rocky plateau and steaming jungle from far Timbuctoo, where he had taken part in negotiations of the utmost importance to France, then in the first year of her struggle with Germany. A quarrel between the Hausa and Foulbe blacks was threatening to set all the Sudan seething in the throes of tribal warfare. Hawke had played a leading rôle in reconciling the opposing factions, a process which had not been entirely devoid of sharp incidents.

Three months in the miasmatic atmosphere of the Niger valley had caused an attack of intermittent fever, complicated by blood-poisoning, the outgrowth of a flesh wound. Though he was now rapidly convalescing, the severe journey had exhausted even his marvelous vitality, and he was in desperate need of rest. During the night he had been unable to sleep, and now the penetrating, deadly heat made slumber impossible. All morning he had dozed fitfully in the Madeira chair, a scantily-dressed black boy at his head, keeping the buzzing flies away with a palm-leaf.

Then too, Hawke distrusted the motives of A. Claremont. Some few tales of his exploits in North Africa had trickled to the outer world. Imaginative young gentlemen of the press had given him, a practical soldier, something of a colorful character, picturing him as another Caid Mac-Lean. At least one account had credited him with a harem at Fez. Tourist ladies of a certain class, and adventuresses, fascinated by such stories, were constantly seeking his society. His simmering brain was now in no mood to banter compliments with a pretty face.

So he tore the note into a thousand scraps and threw them out of the window.

"Tell Mademoiselle Claremont that I am unable to see her," he said with an air of finality.

"But m'sieur—" Jacques Bezique began to protest with eloquent shoulders and expressive features.

"But me no *but's*, m'sieur—do as you are bid," rapped Hawke. "And Bezique!"

"Yes, m'sieur?"

"Tell that rascally servant of mine to fetch me a bottle of wine from the well—the coolest there is!"

"*Bien, m'sieur!*" Bezique waddled off to do his bidding.

In the courtyard of the inn there was a very deep well, the water at the bottom of which was always cool and refreshing. Into this well, Hawke had had Cherif, his bodyservant, lower a basket of wine—it was the only method of refrigeration available in that compound of evil smells, that squirming, unwholesome, vermin-infested jungle of mud-structures—Marakeesh the inglorious, a place which the uninitiated have called Morocco City.

THE adventurer was in the act of raising a goblet of purple fluid to his lips when a sound at the door arrested his attention,

and he looked up into quizzical hazel eyes, twinkling at him over the edge of a concealing yashmak. A slight figure, shrouded in white muslin, stood before him. From beneath the edge of her Oriental garment the toes of a pair of white canvas English sporting slippers were visible.

Hawke set the glass aside and rose hastily, sending the black boy scurrying with a short word. As the door closed behind the boy, his visitor removed the enveloping cloak. A charming young lady in conventional European dress came out of the ungainly chrysalis.

"Colonel Hawke, I presume?" The young lady's voice had that pleasing quality which poets have attempted to convey in the term "silvery ripple." She came toward Hawke without the slightest indication of embarrassment, extending a small hand.

The casehardened soldier of fortune warmed to the picture. The sight of her swept the cobwebby feeling out of his brain, and the spleen out of his feelings. He returned her smile pleasantly, acknowledging the query with a bow as he took her hand for a fleeting pressure.

"I am Lady Alice Claremont of London. The mountain had refused to come to Mahomet; so Mahomet, perforce, has come to the mountain."

"I entreat your pardon for the incivility, Lady Alice," Hawke apologized humbly. "I have just got in off a frightful hike to Timbuctoo—twenty-five days of Hades—and I spent a miserably wretched night last night."

Lady Alice nodded sympathetically. "I know. I've been here ten days waiting for you. That's why I haven't disturbed you earlier."

Hawke drew a chair forward for her, and she thanked him prettily. He noted what a trim figure of a woman she was—well under middle height and slender. She was costumed simply in white linen, with a dash of red at the throat. Her features were not classically beautiful; but as Hawke looked at her, he thought he had never seen a face more expressive of womanly sweetness and refinement. There was an exquisite natural coloring in her cheeks and a wondrous charm in her hazel eyes.

"I have come all the way from England to see you, Colonel Hawke," she said. "From London to Algiers, and from Algiers to Mogador in my father's, Earl Horsley's,

yacht the *Diana*. From Mogador I came here with an escort of Arabs selected by the English consul."

"Indeed!" Hawke was genuinely surprised. "Had I known as much, I certainly should not have been so discourteous when I received your note. But your father—why did he not come with you? This is scarcely a safe place for a young English lady—even with an escort of Arabs selected by the English consul at Mogador."

"Lord Horsley is an invalid—he was compelled to remain at London. And there were other reasons, Colonel Hawke, why I did not care to appeal for assistance to anyone not in the family."

Hawke bowed. "Permit me to offer you a glass of wine," he said. "I have had it cooling in a well. It is not exactly what you would call cold, but I venture it is the coolest thing in Marakeesh at this moment."

She took the goblet from his hands, and touching the rim to her lips, replaced it on the tabouret.

"Wont you smoke?" she urged, noting the open box of panetelas. "Do, please—I sha'n't mind. Fact, I rather like it—I've become so accustomed to my father's smoking. . . ."

"And now I'll tell you what has led me to venture in here," she went on, leaning forward when he had lighted a cigar. Then she paused. "Are you quite sure we are wholly alone? Can anyone hear what we are saying?"

He got up and looked into the corridor. At the other end of it, by the stair, Cherif, Hawke's competent aide, a keen-eyed Arab of middle age, was engaged in oiling and cleaning their weapons. Hawke had him mount guard near the door. The apartment occupied one corner of the building. There was no possibility of eavesdropping in any other direction.

REASSURED by his precautions, Lady Alice resumed:

"Have you ever heard of an Arab called Ben Achmet?"

The name stirred no responsive chord in Hawke's memory.

"He lives back in a remote region of the Dra'a country. His residence is at Tala'at."

"I know the country by name only. I have never been through there. It is well off the main trails."

"Ben Achmet, until six years ago, was a student at Cambridge. He is a young man of twenty-five or -six, handsome, well-educated, cultured, not darker than many Englishmen who have lived in the tropics—and when he chooses, has delightful manners."

Hawke nodded; he knew the type. Quite a number of the wealthier Moors were acquiring the habit of sending their sons to English and French schools.

"Ben Achmet was an unusual young man. His birth and personal charm gave him entry into exclusive social circles, and after he became a caid, succeeding to his father's estate and office, he was lionized. My cousin Marjorie was a débutante that season. She and Ben Achmet were introduced at a garden-party given by the Persian ambassador, and straightway they proceeded to fall heels over head in love with each other.

"It was most distressing to us. Aside from a natural antipathy due to a racial feeling, I had never been particularly impressed by the Moor. There seemed to me to be something sinister about him in spite of his polished conversation and suave manners. My dislike for him, however, had no influence on Marjorie. She is an orphan; and to me, who am somewhat the elder, she had always been like a daughter. Until she met Ben Achmet, we had shared our secrets in common. She now not only refused to heed my plea but, discovering my opposition, kept me in complete ignorance of the progress of their affair.

"Unable to guard my cousin against the Moor, I tried to get her to hold off until we could learn something about him. But like most headstrong, inexperienced young girls, Marjorie had unlimited confidence in her personal influence over her lover, and she was blind to all reason. Within a month they eloped.

"We heard from them first at Paris, where they were married, and next we got cards from Nice, Monte Carlo, Venice, Rome and Naples, indicating the progress of a honeymoon-trip on the Riviera. Perhaps six months after their union a card came from Tangier advising us of their departure for Ben Achmet's home in the Dra'a country, via Fez.

"With their passage into Morocco they seemed to have been swallowed up in an unknown void. Nearly a year elapsed before we obtained any further news from

Marjorie—just a short note telling of the birth and death of a baby, of her joy in her new home, of moonlit rides in the desert, of their quaint old feudal establishment, and of the interesting people over whom she and Ben Achmet ruled. There was something so unlike Marjorie about the tone of the letter—it seemed so strained and unnatural—that I at once suspected something to be wrong with her, something that her pride kept her from writing about.

“My suspicions seemed justified when, some months later, her second communication came, a note even shorter than the first, colorless and uninformative.

“That was three years ago. Not a line, not a rumor did we hear from her—until last month the long, anxious spell of waiting was broken by a card.”

LADY ALICE opened the little hand-bag which she carried on her wrist and took from it an oblong bit of paper, soiled and torn. Without a word she handed the card to her auditor. One side bore the name of Lady Alice Claremont and her London address. The French stamp, Hawke noted, had been canceled at Ouargla. The other side, in fine feminine script, was covered with a letter in cipher which began thus:

TALA'AT, April 5.

Alice my nkz xrl olsw tl nla df myt aopz
wsjl. Tf lepszaluj loyl pz spxpun. Jotla pz
ilza. . . .

The card had seen hard usage. The lettering in spots was scarcely legible. The bit of battered cardboard, originally, part of a box from which it had been cut, was an eloquent testimonial of the straits to which the young Englishwoman had been reduced in endeavoring to communicate with the outside world.

“And here”—Lady Alice handed him a sheet of note-paper in exchange for the card—“is the translation. The cipher is very simple—an old schoolgirl code which Marjorie and I had made up years ago, never dreaming of the purpose to which it would eventually be put.”

The translation ran as follows:

TALA'AT, April 5.

Alice, for God's sake help me get away from this dreadful place. My existence here is horrible. Achmet is a beast. The veneer of European civilization he acquired in England has worn off. He has reverted to Orientalism at its worst. Cruel, indolent, he cares for nothing but the baser pleasures. Within a month after our arrival here he

broke his promise to me and married again. Now he has three official wives, and goodness knows how many of the other kind. His women regard me as an interloper and conspire against me. Oh, if I had only listened to you! My pride, which at first kept me from writing you the truth, has long been broken. Only the hope of getting back to you, of making up for the suffering I have caused you, sustains me. This is my fourth attempt to write you. Achmet has forbidden me writing, and punishes me terribly with the bastinado when he finds out. So I must be very careful. I am intrusting this letter to a camel-trader who is leaving for Ouargla. He has an honest face, and I am hopeful of its reaching you.

Your unhappy
MARJORIE.

THE lines of the American's lean face tightened; his eyes gleamed with an added interest as he handed the paper silently back to Lady Alice and nodded for her to go on.

Lady Alice did not at once continue. She sat fingering the note-paper, her eyes pensive and somber, her lips quivering. She was so pretty, so helpless, so distressed! Every virile corpuscle in the American's veins tingled with desire to serve. Although not a man given to impulsive action, Hawke reached out and took her hand.

“Before going any further,” he said earnestly, “permit me to assure you that I am with you in this, heart and soul, to the end.”

The little hand within his own tensed in a warm clasp; her radiant eyes thanked him; with her handkerchief she wiped away the tears which had started, and resumed:

“I was in a most perplexing quandary. Marjorie's appeal made me regret I was not a man. There was no one in our family to whom I could turn, and you can now appreciate my reluctance to call in an outsider to bear witness to my cousin's misfortunes. My two young nephews, fine chaps whose aid I might have invoked, were both in the army, serving in Flanders. So I sought Father's advice. I found Lord Horsley on the terrace, his gouty leg on a stool, playing chess with our clergyman, Mr. Russell, a dear old fellow. Both were deeply moved by the news I brought them of Marjorie. My father had loved her devotedly.

“She had always been the pet of the family, spoiled, of course, but one of the sweetest and best-hearted girls in the world. You may imagine how it wrung

our hearts, who had so loved her, and petted and pampered her, to think of her being immured in a Moorish harem in the wilds of Morocco, virtually the slave of a race which has held ours in such utter detestation for centuries!

"We at once held a council of war, deliberating as to the best course to pursue. There was but one thing to do, we were all soon agreed: to send some one to Morocco to get in touch with Marjorie and rescue her—by craft, if possible, by force if necessary. It was perfectly useless, it appeared, to think of asking the Government for aid, since Marjorie had married Achmet of her own free will, and England is too busily engaged with the Kaiser to be bothered about the fate of one poor girl.

"We were resolved that something must be attempted, but how to make a start, we did not know. A few days later I ran across an item in *The Times* about Morocco—anything about Morocco immediately attracted my interest. It told of the success of a French expedition, under the direction of Colonel Richard Hawke, in cleaning out an obnoxious nest of tribesmen who had been harassing the country between Timbuctoo and Arawan. It spoke very highly of you, Colonel Hawke."

Hawke frowned. "Silly rot!" he growled. "A soldier merely does what he is paid to do, and the papers make him a hero. Firemen, policemen, doctors, nurses and a dozen others in common life risk as much and no one ever hears of them. Silly rot!"

THERE was a light in the hazel eyes of his hearer that indicated her appreciation of his modesty as she continued:

"I ran into the Earl's study and showed him the paper. We quickly hit upon a plan. The thing to do was for me to go to Morocco and enlist the unofficial aid of Colonel Hawke. If anyone could help us in our sore necessity, we were convinced that he could.

"Through the foreign office my father got in touch with the minister of war at Paris, and we learned that Colonel Hawke was still in Timbuctoo, directing the final operations connected with the pacification of the territory between there and Arawan. You would be in Algiers, they said, in about two months.

"So it was my father agreed to put his yacht and fortune at my disposal. The Government made all sorts of objections

when we attempted to secure clearance-papers, and only Lord Horsley's influence enabled us to get away at all. The Earl's health did not permit him to accompany me, but he insisted on sending his solicitor, Mr. Sidgwick.

"We sailed from London to Algiers, where they told me you would return by way of Marakeesh, and that if I reached Marakeesh before your arrival there, I should probably intercept you. So we set out again. We reached Mogador, where Mr. Sidgwick and his wife are waiting with the yacht, one week ago. Mr. Sidgwick proposed that we stay on the yacht, where we should have the protection of the flag, and send a messenger for you; but I—I couldn't wait. There was an awful row—but here I am!"

Lady Alice paused uncertainly, a questioning appeal in her eyes.

Like most men to whom action is the rule of life, Hawke's mind had been made up from the moment he sensed the tenor of her wishes.

"You may wire Lord Horsley this message, Lady Alice," he said: "'*Veni, vidi, vici.*' My connection with the Bureau Arabe is strictly informal. I have a regular salary, but not regular hours. Whenever they have a difficulty in hand, one not to be controlled by ordinary methods, they call on me, either for consultation or assistance, or they place it unreservedly in my hands. In the present instance I have finished my work in the Timbuctoo country. They know where to find me, and my time from now until I hear from them again is my own. I shall be only too glad to do anything in my power to aid you."

Lady Alice's lips smiled at him tremulously; her eyes were mistily radiant as she came toward him. Her silence as she warmly clasped his hand was eloquent of gratitude too deep for verbal expression.

ADUSTY, leg-weary caravan toiled slowly up a mountain trail across a spur of the Western Atlas. In the lead was a Moor in flowing haik, well-mounted, carrying a modern rifle across the pommel of his high-peaked Moroccan saddle. Behind him at a short distance rode two Europeans in helmets, khaki, and pigskin leggins—one of them tall, spare-built, with bronzed, aquiline features; the other of slight, graceful mold and boyish countenance.

Lady Alice Claremont made a charming picture in the masculine riding habit. An

automatic pistol hung in a holster from the belt about her waist, and a rifle was tucked away in the scabbard under her stirrup-leather. Hawke was similarly equipped.

Behind them, at the head of a string of pack-mules, rode Hawke's right-bower the ex-Spahi noncom Cherif. It struck one that for so small a caravan there was a disproportionate number of muleteers, at least one each to the two dozen lead animals, all of them well armed. Horses and mules seemed to have been selected for speed and endurance—wiry, high-strung, light-footed beasts. Hawke's experience had enabled them to outfit and depart in secrecy with an expedition that otherwise would have created much stir and attracted a publicity that might have been fatal to their purpose.

The landscape about them was wild and desolate—a rough, irregular mountain-side, sloping gradually upward from a yellow, arid plain across which shimmering heat-waves danced under the hot mid-afternoon sun. On the crest of the small range across which their steps were directed, the guide halted and waited for Hawke to come up. Beyond the crest lay the desert. Hawke and Lady Alice reined in their horses, and for a space none spoke, viewing in awed silence the grandeur of the mighty Sahara. Beneath them, at a distance of perhaps a quarter-mile, lay the *hamada*, a rough, desolate stretch of splintered rock and crumbling boulders, spotted here and there with occasional palms, patches of *argan*, and brief strips of pasture on which Arab shepherds were grazing flocks of goats. Beyond, encroaching upon the solid land like the sea, lay the rolling desert, great undulating combers of tawny sand which reminded one so vividly of the ocean—as indeed it was, a vast and uncontrollable ocean of sand, with its varying moods of violence and tranquillity. From their vantage point the eye could cover a wide range.

THE American turned to Mansur, the guide, whose eyes were already seeking his.

"Well?"

"We are almost there, Sidi," said the man, a swart-visaged desert rider who had been with the adventurer on more than one previous expedition.

"Yes?" Hawke waited for the suggestion he knew Mansur must have in mind.

"You wish to strike at once?" The

man's dark, intelligent eyes questioned his superior.

Hawke nodded. He knew as well as Mansur that within forty-eight hours the presence of the expedition must be known to all the inhabitants of the region in spite of their utmost precautions. It was imperative for them to move promptly along whatever policy they intended to pursue.

"Achmet would at once recognize you, Lady Alice?" Hawke asked.

"Yes, I fear so. He knows me very well; and I know him quite too well."

"It would hardly do for us to ride in on him as if paying a call, then. Where does Tala'at lie, Mansur?"

The man pointed out over the desert to an oasis some twenty miles away.

"There it is, Sidi, upon the *oued* Aksa."

The American was peering through his binoculars.

"I see the *oued* plain enough—that green line of vegetation evidently follows its course; and yes, there are fields of grain and cattle grazing. Why, it is quite a place—I can see the tower of the *kasbah* and the minarets of the mosque. How close do you think we can go, Mansur, without giving the alarm?"

"It would not do for us to go any nearer. Even now, perhaps, some of the shepherds may have seen us."

Hawke frowned thoughtfully. Besides the shepherds, there were a number of Bedouin habitations in the country below, an occasional tent or thatched hut. News travels more rapidly than one would imagine in a land without railways or telegraphs. The American turned to Cherif, who had ridden up, and now sat his horse at rigid attention, as motionless and impassive as an image of graven mahogany.

"Cherif, Mansur and I will ride directly to Tala'at with three men and the pack-mules. With the other men you will guard Lady Alice until my return. I shall try, if possible, to be back to-night. Be prepared to move rapidly at any moment."

Hawke conferred shortly with his two lieutenants as to the best place for Lady Alice and her escort to await him. A small oasis could be seen on the edge of the desert, some three or four miles to the left of them. Half a dozen straggling date-palms clustered about a bit of herbage on which was a small group of buildings. This, Mansur said, was a caravanserai where they would be sure of finding fodder for the beasts and accommodations for

the men. Thither, accordingly, it was agreed Lady Alice and Cherif should proceed at twilight, remaining where they were in the meantime.

HAWKE addressed a few brief orders to his men. Three of them started forward, leading eighteen mules. The other nine dismounted, leading their mounts and the remaining six mules, and left them in a grove of stunted trees that clung to the side of the mountain near the trail along which they had come.

"Keep a vigilant watch, Cherif," said Hawke. "And above all things keep under cover. Put out one or two outposts, and if you catch anyone who might take word of your presence to Achmet, hold them until we return."

He took Lady Alice by the hand. "Do not be alarmed," he reassured her, speaking for her ears alone. "You can put implicit trust in Cherif. If all goes well, your cousin should be with you by this time to-morrow, at least—and perhaps sooner."

She returned his smile bravely. Their hands tightened in a parting clasp. After she had dismounted, she remained watching him with field-glasses from behind a boulder until the cavalcade was swallowed amid the sandhills of the desert.

It was a strange position for a gently nurtured English girl—in wildest Morocco, a country from which Europeans were excluded with fanatical zeal until the beginning of the twentieth century, surrounded by barbarous Moors whose atrocities at Casa Blanca were well known to her, as well as their hatred for Christians. But that rare courage for which Englishwomen have in past times distinguished themselves stood her in good stead. Her pride of lineage, no less than the urgent necessity of her enterprise, sustained her; and she awaited with fortitude, if not complete equanimity, whatever might develop.

THE adventurer's thoughts, as he rode at the head of his train toward Achmet's stronghold, were more often with the girl he had left awaiting his return than on the task before him. He was not so certain, in spite of his frank assurance, that she was quite so safe as he wished. Of Cherif he had no doubts. His sterling honesty was not to be questioned. But of the others, some of whom he had selected in haste, he was not so sure. As long as Cherif

ruled, Lady Alice was safe; but in the event of anything's happening to Cherif,—and almost anything may happen to a man in the Moroccan hinterland,—well, Hawke preferred not to think of the possibilities.

The oasis of Tala'at was several square miles in extent. Tala'at itself was located in the center and surrounded by dense groves of palms—these in turn being encircled by cultivated fields and pasturelands which gradually grew more barren and sterile until they merged with the desert.

It was late in the afternoon when their horses stepped out of the yielding sands upon the hard ground, and Tala'at lay but a short distance before them. Their road, a hardly visible trail meandering among bunches of esparto grass, became more sharply defined as they progressed. They passed occasional fields of yellow barley and maize, conical huts of baked mud and grass about which naked brown children were playing in the dust beside dogs, chickens and goats, while sullen-eyed women in black, dirty draperies were cooking over beds of coal. At one place a disreputable Bedouin in a ragged *gandoura* was plowing with a wooden plow to which he had yoked a mangy, little camel; a woman bent under the other end of the yoke, which was lashed to her shoulders with rawhide. The plowman wielded a whip of many thongs, his blows not infrequently falling on the woman. Such things are not uncommon in North Africa.

The trail wound between high mud walls inclosing date-groves on either hand; then their destination came into view—a jumble of square brown houses thickly sprinkled with the foliage of palms. Mansur now spurred forward to arrange for their entry at the village gate, and their accommodation at the caravanseraï, as well as to deliver an appropriate message from Hawke to the Caid Ben Achmet.

A POWERFULLY built Moor, his white, flowing burnoose gathered gracefully about him, sat at a small table in a bare stone room. A scribe squatted behind him, writing upon sheets of parchment with a quill pen which he dipped into a rude stone ink-well. At the door two turbaned orderlies in tawdry brocaded jackets of green velvet, red sashes, baggy brown trousers and sandals stood guard. Pistols and poniards stuck out of their sashes; curving scimitars hung from chains

at their sides—and the butts of two businesslike Mausers rested upon the stone floor.

Ali Mehmet, chief of horse and master of the *kasbah*, was a fine-looking man, and he knew it. He had beautiful silken mustachios which he caressed with fingers as delicate and daintily manicured as those of any woman; his cheeks were smooth, plump, olive and pink. He gazed upon the tall, warlike figure of his visitor with soft brown inquisitive eyes. Hawke had just finished stating the purpose of his visit.

"So you are an American, and you seek to find oil in the earth. Tell me, Rumi, why should you wish to get oil from the earth when it is more easily obtained from the olive and *argan*?"

"The oil from the earth is so much more abundant and suitable for burning—it is not good enough to eat," Hawke explained. "You have seen the wells that the French dug for water?"

"A most wonderful sight, by Allah!" exclaimed Ali Mehmet. "At Lailhat, with my own eyes I have seen the water spouting up out of the barren earth like a fountain, and falling back to the ground again winding away in a limpid and crystal brook!"

"In my country we have many wells from which oil gushes in similar quantity!"

Ali Mehmet's smile was polite but incredulous. "All the same, I do not think that you shall find oil here."

"That is as Allah wills."

"How dare you utter the name of the prophet, Rumi?" Ali Mehmet frowned disapprovingly. "You are no true believer?"

"No, but I admire and respect the prophet. He was a great man."

"There is but one God, and Mohammed was his prophet," the Moor declared piously.

"As you will! I have brought with me some small gifts which I hope may find favor in your eyes. Will you not allow me?"

AT Ali Mehmet's bow Mansur, who was waiting outside in the corridor, brought in a bundle of silks and satins and cloth of gold—exquisite material for burnoose or haik—which he unrolled on the floor. In the middle was disclosed a number of women's silver trinkets, anklets, bracelets, armlets, and the curious pin-buckles with which the women fasten their garments.

Mansur handed Hawke a small package from the jewelry.

"Here is something that I doubt you will find the equal in all Morocco. Behold, Ali Mehmet, is this not a truly pleasing gift?"

The adventurer held up a small gold-plated wrist-watch, with a band of the same material which he snapped upon the wrist of the Moor. Ali Mehmet's eyes gleamed with pleasure, but he only said:

"It is well!"

Until now it had been impossible for Ali Mehmet to ascertain when it would please his master to receive the foreign oil-explorer who had called to pay his respects—and incidentally to pay for protection to the territory of the next caid. With the little watch ticking upon his wrist, however, he had a sudden inspiration. He recalled a forgotten engagement with his master and bade Hawke await his return.

The adventurer passed a tedious hour upon one of the small three-legged stools, with Mansur squatting in the corridor, the two brown, imperturbable guards maintaining their pose, and the ancient scribe writing ceaselessly. Eventually, however, Ali Mehmet reappeared, his plump features wreathed with smiles.

Caid Ben Achmet was lolling upon a cushioned divan in a rose-bowered kiosk. He was a far different individual from the clean-cut Cambridge student whom Lady Alice had pictured. A thin, sensual face, deeply lined with dissipation; cruel, arrogant lips; an intolerant, heavy-lidded, insolent stare—this was the impression Hawke received as he followed his escort through the rug-carpeted entry. The Caid was richly although carelessly dressed. A burnoose of pale blue silk was lying at his side. He wore a bolero jacket of scarlet satin with gold embroidery; his flaring Zouave trousers were of yellow silk; *babooches* of soft Morocco leather, elaborately tooled, covered his feet. An enormous flaming beryl blazed like a green flame in his sumptuous turban; a necklace of coral suspended a lustrous pearl upon his breast; gems glittered upon his fingers, which were toying with a jonquil. He was a perfect exemplar, Hawke thought, of barbaric, voluptuous luxury.

Blasé, sensual, jaded, the young Caid acknowledged the American's presence with a languid nod, listened to his explanations and his plea in bored indifference.

This coldness, so different from the flowery nothings with which your true Moor will mask his antipathy or his hatred, put Hawke's wits to the test. Ben Achmet failed to display a flicker of interest over the numerous, useful, novel and valuable gifts spread before him—ranging from vacuum bottles, electric torches, Cuban cigars, a pearl-handled automatic revolver and a magnum of champagne, to fine silks, laces and jewels. They were articles which Lady Alice, with uncanny foresight, had brought with her from London.

A month-old Parisian newspaper which Hawke had run across at Marakeesh previous to their departure had contained an account of an elopement involving a beautiful young dancer of the Ambassadeurs and a newly married Russian count on a honeymoon tour from Nizhni Novgorod with a charming bride. The American had merely glanced at the headlines of the affair at the time, but the savory narrative which he now retailed for Ben Achmet lacked nothing in detail, incident or color. The Caid's world-weary eyes lost a little of their dull apathy, and occasional bright darting glances bespoke an inner stimulus. Hawke gave his imagination free rein. He was three months behind on the gossip of Paris and London, but one listening to him would have said he was three months ahead. In half an hour he judged the moment propitious for the repetition of his plea.

"We have come far, O Caid; my mules are footsore, and their packs are beginning to gall them. We crave permission to remain a short space in your beautiful Tala'at to rest and recuperate."

THE Caid, who had been leaning upon an elbow, sat up and stifled a yawn.

"Seldom have I had so entertaining a visitor," was his unexpected reply. "Buried as I am here in the desert, occupied with the concerns of my people, I hear little of that great world in which I passed several of the most interesting years of my life. You must be my guest during your stay at Tala'at, and tell me more about what is going on at the capitals of Europe. Mehmet shall escort you to an apartment and care for your men. I shall expect your company in an hour to dinner."

With a languid wave of his jeweled hand, Ben Achmet checked Hawke's thanks and terminated the interview.

To become an inmate of the *kasbah*, under direct surveillance of Achmet's guards, did not accord with the American's plans. He would much have preferred to remain at the caravanserai, where he could be with his men and map out his campaign. Above all, he wished to get some idea of the entries and exits of the *kasbah*. The Caid's invitation thus knocked his plans completely askew. A born fatalist, however, he did not allow himself to appear put out, and cheerfully followed his escort through a maze of halls and passages to an inner chamber, where he found his personal effects had preceded him. He enjoyed a refreshing Moorish bath, made a careful toilet and presented himself in Ben Achmet's sumptuous dining-room fresh and alert, at the appointed time.

Neat Arab boys in spotless white served the meal. Ben Achmet and his guest sat upon cushions before an inlaid table of citron-wood less than a foot in height. A Berber orchestra made low, weird music in an adjoining room, the notes filtering through a fretted screen. A rich rug of deep crimson covered the tiled floor, hangings of the same color worked in odd Arabic designs of dark blue were draped upon the walls, and looped back here and there to reveal exquisite carved filigrees. From a bronze brazier a thin, grayish-blue stream of incense was rising to the ceiling, where it hung in an obscure cloud. Ben Achmet had donned a gorgeous burnoose of purple silk embroidered in bizarre designs of red and green.

Hawke's host was no more communicative than he had been earlier. He was evidently expecting his guest to supply the deficiencies in conversation. This being what the latter had anticipated, he picked up the thread of cosmopolitan gossip where he had left off, and continued weaving skillful imaginative tales of happenings in the *haut-* and *demi-monde* of Paris and London. This did not prevent him from enjoying the rich viands which the Arab boys brought in.

WHEN the polished surface of the citron-wood table was finally bared, and the Arab boys were pouring a French liqueur into tiny glasses, Ben Achmet remarked lazily, his first complete sentence during the meal:

"You must be tired after your long ride, M'sieur Howard." (Hawke had given him this *nom de guerre* in the beginning.)

"I am used to long rides; yet I confess I shall be glad to take advantage of your hospitality and retire early to-night," he replied.

He had not realized, it appeared, until that moment, how tired he actually was. A sudden lassitude had come over him; a great weariness gripped at his limbs; and the very act of lifting the liqueur-glass to his lips was exhausting.

It was certainly very strange; he had not been feeling quite so young as usual these last several years, and yet he had not considered himself so near the breaking-point. He did not feel especially drowsy, or he would immediately have become suspicious of a narcotic in the coffee. It was a curious lassitude, weighting his limbs down, leaving his brain clear.

It was clearly a matter of duty for him to inspect the housing of his men and animals, if for no other reason than to ascertain their location in case he should have to use them during the night. This, however, he did not hesitate to forgo when his host called a Libyan boy carrying a smoking oil-lamp of antique design and bade him conduct M'sieur Howard to his room.

Hawke followed the negro with slow, deliberate steps, each of which cost him an effort, and was shown into a narrow room with a divan in one corner on which covers had been spread. The divan was partly inclosed by hanging curtains. The negro set the lamp upon a pedestal and helped Hawke to retire. The adventurer lapsed into unconsciousness at once.

HAWKE slowly emerged from the thrall of one of the most gorgeous dreams he had ever experienced, to find himself on the divan, hands and feet tightly bound! A sunbeam, shining through a latticed window, looked peculiarly old and yellow. The air was dry and warm. It must now be the following afternoon.

With an effort he raised himself to a sitting posture. His arms were tied down to his sides, a rawhide rope being wound many times about his chest. His legs, save for the lashing about his ankles, were free.

The glistening black face of a turbaned Sudanese appeared in the beam of sunlight, peering about the curtain. A sinewy arm, holding a naked gleaming scimitar, followed the head.

"Give me water," gasped Hawke in Moresque patois.

The man shook his head, frowning. "Can't do," he declared.

Hawke swore at him impotently. The guard merely grinned.

His vocabulary of anathema and epithet exhausted, the American lay back on the cushions and closed his eyes. A seemingly interminable period followed. He cursed himself for ever being so stupid as to fall into such a child's trap as a drugged cup of coffee. He wondered how Lady Alice was faring, what would become of her when Achmet spitted his sun-dried head on a spike above the village gate.

Hawke did not give up hope; like most soldiers of fortune, a fatalistic nonchalance sustained him in adversity. If death were to come on him in this venture, he was as ready to go now as another time. And yet, for Lady Alice's sake, he would have preferred to delay the event until he had rescued her cousin.

ALL things have an end, and the afternoon slowly wore itself out. The faded yellow sunbeam turned into a pale saffron, and the gray twilight in the room deepened, to be broken presently by the flickering light of a bronze oil lamp.

A fierce, heavily bearded Moor whom Hawke had not seen before appeared with a file of men all bristling with pistols, knives and swords. Most of the pistols were of ancient flintlock vintage, though some were modern. Without a word they picked Hawke up, bound as he was, and carried him to a large, richly furnished chamber where Achmet sat on a raised divan, smoking one of the select Cuban cigars his captive had presented him. They laid the helpless adventurer upon a rug.

Although his mouth was dry and his tongue swollen from thirst and the effects of the poison, the American was still game. He eyed his captor with studied insolence.

"And what good do you think you're going to get out of this, my bucko?" he said truculently. "Maybe I've been fool enough to come all this way without any precautionary measures for my safety, and maybe I haven't. The sultan at Fez will have a word or two to say to you that may not sound pleasant in the event of anything happening to me."

Ben Achmet toyed with the jeweled hilt of his scimitar, the damascened blade of which gleamed fitfully in the poor light. At the mention of the sultan's name his black eyes took on a darker gleam.

"Ha, you fool! It is as I thought!" he exclaimed. "The sultan will hear from you again in a way that will surprise you. All the help you may get from Mulai Hafid may aid you in Hades—it will not avail you this side of Styx!"

"You are more likely to need succor in Hades than I," was his victim's retort.

Achmet's slender fingers were fumbling nervously with his sword-hilt. A deep crimson flush underlaid the swarthy hue of his cheeks.

"You came to me, accursed Rumi," he said with deliberate emphasis, "as a peaceful traveler, and craved my hospitality. I received you as my guest. You came as a spy. You have transgressed the rules of decency."

"You are a dirty liar, you baboon-faced human mistake," Hawke shot back cheerfully.

Ben Achmet sprang up in a passion. "I lie, eh? Then how about this letter which was found in your pocket?"

HE snatched a paper from his belt and held it before Hawke's face with quivering fingers.

"You insufferable dog!" blazed the Moor, spurning the prostrate man with his foot.

"You couldn't expect an unclean beast who pilfers the private effects of his guests to refrain from abusing a man who cannot hit back," was Hawke's comment. He had recognized the letter, and reproached himself for having been so imbecile as to bring any identification along. It was a letter from Mulai Hafid, sultan of Morocco, thanking Hawke for his services in assisting to exterminate a thieving band of Rifian Berbers whom the sultan's own troops, by reason of their racial affinity, had failed to suppress. He had intended to leave it with other personal sundries in charge of a certain man at Marakeesh. It was a gross oversight to have included it in his things on this occasion.

"So you have been a jackal for Mulai Hafid? And you have been sent here to enmesh me in the toils! Don't lie—I know your game well. It is useless to prevaricate. You have only one choice—to die painlessly or by torture, whichever you see fit to elect."

Hawke made no reply. Achmet stood over him, the point of his scimitar resting on the rug.

"You have but one choice, to die in the

throes of excruciating torture or to die easily and painlessly," repeated the Moor slowly. "I leave you to decide."

He clapped his hands. Immediately several half-nude Sudanese slaves entered. Two of them bore a wooden chopping-block which they placed upon the coarse rug beside Hawke. One of them, a powerfully built fellow, carried an enormous broadax not unlike a butcher's cleaver, brilliantly polished and wickedly sharp. The others brought in a brazier of glowing coals and a pair of tongs.

Ben Achmet bent over until his face was less than a foot from that of his prostrate victim, his eyes shining from the intensity of his fury.

"Now, Rumi, choose your death! Shall it be speedily, upon the block, or shall it be lingering with the red-hot coals eating into your tender flesh?"

"What would you have?" queried Hawke in no little perplexity.

"What would I have? Ha, still dissimulating, fool! You are in Hafid's confidence; you know his plans—what are they, what does he know, how do the caids stand? Are they for or against me? Speak!"

A GREAT light broke over the adventurer's puzzled mind. He could not imagine at first what his captor was driving at. His impassioned demands were a revelation. Hawke possessed as much cold grit as any man, but he disliked torture, especially *à la Maroc*. A twinkle crept into his golden-gray eyes as he looked into the burning black orbs above him, and he chuckled sardonically.

"Ha, you mock me!" shrieked Achmet.

"Easy, tar-baby, easy!" cautioned Hawke. "I'm going to tell you what you want to know."

The American was well aware of the futility of protesting ignorance. His unfortunate error in bringing Mulai Hafid's letter had undone him. He must at least conciliate his captor with a fabrication. This he did, deftly sketching a fanciful tale of intrigue and politics at the imperial court. Achmet's fault, he readily surmised, had to do partly with piratical forays, and partly with a lack of promptness in remitting taxes, and partly with a failure to furnish his quota of men for the sultan's army.

Ben Achmet heard him out with close attention, interjecting a question here and

there. As Hawke finished, the Caid, faithful to his promise for a speedy execution, nodded to the executioners. Hawke was seized, lifted and set upon his knees. The block was placed before him.

Satisfied that nothing could save him, that his death was a matter of only a few moments, he was quite unafraid. He bitterly regretted that it was this sort of death. He had always desired that death should come upon him in the heat of action when his blood coursed strong and his spirits ranged high.

"A moment!" he managed to gasp.

"Well, are you afraid to die?" Ben Achmet's lips curled.

"No, but I crave a favor."

"Speak!"

"I presented you with a case of wine yesterday." Hawke's vision was becoming clearer. His brain no longer swam; his eyes no longer blurred.

"Yes?"

"I have told you fairly all that I know. I ask of you but a single glass to cheer my way to where I go."

The Moor hesitated, frowning, then abruptly decided:

"It shall be as you wish. The wine has been tested and found pure. You at least did not try to assassinate me with it." He gave a curt order and returned to his divan to await the consummation of the tragic episode.

The scene was one to delight the heart of your fanatic Moslem. A Christian bound hand and foot before the execution-block; negro slaves and Moors standing about to carry out the orders of an Oriental potentate sitting comfortably among his cushions; the yellow light of flaring wicks playing upon the vivid colors of the brocaded hangings, picking out the mosaic designs upon the tiled floor and frescoed ceiling.

The moments passed. The brawny executioner had more than once tested the edge of his cleaver with an experienced thumb. The group grew restive, Hawke no less than the others, and repeated glances were cast toward the ogival doorway through which an Arab boy had gone on his errand.

Complete silence reigned throughout the palace. A nightingale was singing among the orange trees in the garden; soft, cool airs, lush with the perfume of flowers, filled the room. Out in the darkness shrouding the village, a dog was barking.

The hoot of an owl, perched in some corner of the minaret on the mosque, sounded faintly in the breeze.

Achmet stirred uneasily, his feelings divided between anger at his servant for the delay, and a growing disposition to complete the function he had arranged.

A scurrying of footsteps in the corridor turned all eyes upon the doorway, when through it, coming like a thunderbolt, with blond hair loosened and streaming, her hazel eyes flaming, there sprang the trim, lithe figure of Lady Alice Claremont in khaki riding-breeches and pigskin puttees, brandishing a pistol in either hand.

THE crack of a pistol shattered the stillness. The burly Sudanese executioner clapped a hand to his breast, gulped and dropped limply to the floor, his broadax clattering upon the tiles.

Close behind Lady Alice came Cherif, his burnoose flying, the light of battle blazing in his fierce eyes. Mansur was right after Cherif. Other robed figures followed in close succession. The roar of pistol-firing filled the room; the air grew lurid and thick from smoke; the acrid smell of powder combined with the sickening odor of freshly spilled blood.

The fight ended as quickly as it had begun. Ben Achmet sat on his divan; near him stood Cherif, directing a vicious-looking automatic at the head of the late master of Tala'at. The slight figure in the khaki riding-costume knelt by Hawke, cutting feverishly at the thongs.

"Our horses are in the garden," panted Alice. "We overpowered the guard and rode directly in. We must make haste to get away before the village is aroused. Have you seen Marjorie?"

"Not yet—but we shall soon," Hawke declared, chafing his wrists and ankles to restore the circulation.

Alice Claremont had never seemed so radiantly beautiful in Hawke's eyes as she stood there before him in that plight of peril, her cheeks and eyes glowing from excitement, her lips parted, her silk outing-shirt torn open at the throat.

"Now we shall see!" he exclaimed, striding toward Ben Achmet.

A quick jerk at the pile of cushions on the divan revealed what Hawke had surmised—a regular arsenal of pistols and cartridges, including the French automatics and belts he himself had worn into Tala'at. In a trice he had them buckled

about his waist. Armed, he felt his old daring self again, the palms of his hands caressing the butts of his pistols lovingly.

Hawke stood in front of Ben Achmet, an ominous light in his eyes.

"I've a little account to square with you, my prize beauty," he said, his deliberate manner lending an added emphasis to every word. "That, however, can await a more propitious moment. At the proper time you and I shall have a little settlement—put that into your pipe, you monkey-faced heathen, and never let it go out! At present other concerns than mine are paramount. Do you recognize this lady?"

He drew Lady Alice forward. Beyond a passing glitter that the American did not fail to catch, the Moor's impassive countenance gave no sign.

"You know her," Hawke asserted harshly, "and you know where her cousin is—we have come for the Honorable Marjorie Claremont!"

A spasm of rage contorted Ben Achmet's visage.

"She is not here," he declared huskily.

"Don't lie to me, hound!" Hawke leaned toward him threateningly. "She is here, and you know she is here. If she is not here, you will die with the hot kisses of the coals clinging to your vile body! Now, understand me! We want nothing of you save Lady Alice's cousin. Let us have her, and we depart in peace. Refuse to give her up, and your path to Hades will be one of infinite torture."

Ben Achmet glared at Hawke in baleful silence. For a brief space neither moved; then the Moor dropped his lashes.

"I will send for her," he said.

"Good enough!" Hawke turned to one of the younger Sudanese and signed to one of his men to bring him forward. "Give this man his instructions, and remember that the least indication of treachery will mean your death! When we leave Tala'at, you go with us as hostage until we pass the mountains. It will be well for you to bear that constantly in mind. Yours will be the first blood spilled if we encounter opposition from your people. Do you get that? Answer me, you beast!"

Achmet nodded silently.

"Then go ahead!"

The Moor instructed his servant briefly in the Arabic dialect of the district, with which Hawke was well enough conversant to catch the tenor. At one point he interferred.

"You haven't told him all that I told you."

Ben Achmet flashed a glance of mingled surprise and hatred at Hawke.

"So you know the dialect, Rumi!" he said bitterly. "I knew you were in the pay of Mulai!"

"You lie," Hawke answered easily. "I'm not in the service of Mulai—but if the knowledge will be satisfying to your sense of deduction, it may interest you to know that I shall be as soon as I get through with this little matter. It will be a great pleasure for me to assist the sultan in cleaning his dominion of your fouling presence. But enough of this! Tell that man what I told you. If Lady Alice's cousin is not here in ten minutes, you and I will lead a party in search for her."

Ben Achmet did as he was bid with the worst grace possible. The Sudanese boy departed hastily.

"IN the name of all that is wonderful, how did you manage it?" Hawke was standing close to Lady Alice, and his voice was low.

"It was Mansur," she replied simply. "He escaped from Tala'at and brought us the news only this afternoon. We came at once. It was really splendid of him. Achmet had sent orders for his arrest, but he had already grown suspicious—he had had no word from you; and when the Askaris came to take him, he was watching from a neighboring roof-top. At the first opportunity he made his way out of the village and hastened to the caravanseraï where we were waiting."

The whole *kasbah* was awake by this time, and within less than five minutes from the time of leaving, the Sudanese reappeared, followed by a veiled figure.

Alice Claremont started. "Marjorie?" she cried questioningly.

The figure stopped stock-still. Then her hands went up to the veil and tore it away, revealing the haggard features of what was once the bonniest girl in England, the Honorable Marjorie Claremont. Lady Alice's arms enfolded her cousin lovingly. For a long moment the sisters remained in affectionate embrace,

"You have no time to lose, Lady Alice," Hawke reminded her. "D'you bring your cousin's riding-togs with you?"

"Marjorie, this is Colonel Hawke who has made our meeting possible." Lady Alice led her cousin forward.

"We shall soon have you out of this," Hawke assured the unfortunate girl, taking her frail hand in a cordial clasp.

Marjorie's lips trembled in an inaudible reply. She kept her eyes down, and avoided looking in the direction of the man on the divan. She was a terribly pathetic little creature. There were circles under her eyes; the bloom had gone from her cheeks; her lashes and eyebrows were stained with kohl, her nails with henna and her lips rouged. She had a submissive, spiritless air.

Lady Alice returned from the corridor with a bundle and took her sister into an adjoining room. Directly two slim figures in khaki riding-habits reappeared.

Hastily to attend the hurts of his men, to leave Tala'at hurriedly by a secret gate in the *kasbah* gardens and find the rough trail westward with Ben Achmet riding between Hawke and Cherif, while Lady Alice escorted her sister—these were simple details.

Dawn saw the party cresting the cold gray mountain pass. Their arrangements for the flight to Mogador were singularly perfect. At convenient intervals Hawke had provided fleet relays of horses. He realized that Marjorie Claremont would not be safe until on board the *Diana* and out at sea. Moslems are singularly resentful of the least violation of the sanctity of the harem, and any intimation that Marjorie Claremont was the lawfully espoused wife of the Caid Ben Achmet would have sufficed to bring a horde of fanatical friends against them.

Halfway between their first relay post and the mountain, they set Ben Achmet at liberty on foot and pushed onward. It was a terrible ride, trying even to such hardened horsemen as Hawke and the Arabs. But the high courage of the English girls sustained them in a three-hundred-mile flight to safety. On the morning of the fourth day they rode through the teeming streets of Mogador to the beach where boatmen were speedily found to transport them to the yacht which lay at anchor in the roadstead.

"CAN'T you go with us?" Lady Alice looked up at Hawke, appealing, her small hand resting quietly in his. They stood alone on the after-deck. Marjorie was below in charge of Mrs. Sidgwick and a physician. Steam was already up on the yacht, the boilers having been kept hot

in anticipation of their coming, and the *Diana's* crew was preparing to get her under way. The chain cable was even now rumbling in its course.

Under the brilliant sunlight, the white, cubical houses of Mogador showed in plain relief. The waters of the Atlantic were clear and cool. A wistful frown wrinkled the adventurer's brow. The prospect of giving up the plots, intrigues and dangers of North Africa for the comfortable security of an English home with this sweet girl made a powerful appeal. They had grown very close during the past four weeks. More than once Alice Claremont had shown a woman's tenderness and solicitude for him. Her modest, unassuming personality had stirred his heart wonderfully. But it could not be. He had other things to consider.

"I am sorry," he told her slowly, meeting her anxious gaze tenderly. "Your presence has made the last month one of the brightest periods in my life. I shall never forget you. But I must go back. The call of duty is imperative."

Lady Alice turned her head quickly away.

"Good-by—Alice," he said softly. She did not answer. "Good-by—dear," he repeated.

Something like a sob escaped the girl. She raised tear-brimming eyes to his. "You have been so good, so good!" she told him tremulously. "It breaks my heart to see you go, to be unable to repay you."


Neither could explain how it happened. For one glorious moment they were in each other's arms, their lips meeting in an exquisite ecstasy. Then they parted.

"Wait for me at the gangway," whispered the girl.

He watched her dart down the companionway in wonderment. As he stepped on the platform to descend into the waiting boat, she pressed a package into his hand.


Ten minutes later Hawke stood on the beach watching the *Diana* departing under full steam northward. On the bridge some one was waving a handkerchief. The yacht's whistle boomed out a farewell blast.

Later, in the privacy of his room at the Spanish hotel, he opened the package and found himself looking upon a photograph of dainty Alice Claremont. It was signed simply, "In memoriam, Alice Claremont." Hawke raised it to his lips gently, and sighed.



The War and the Law

By
Samuel Scoville, Jr.



"IT'S got to be done!" shouted John W. Logan, banging his fist down on the desk so that the papers and the ink and his lawyer all jumped together. Old man Logan was a study in grays. His bristling hair was iron-gray; his bushy eyebrows were snow-gray; his ponderous face was pale and gray; and the eyes beneath them had the cold gray gleam of steel.

"There seems to be no doubt about the facts," objected Mr. Van Artsdalen, of Van Artsdalen, Van Artsdalen and Vaughn. "As I have them, the young man is a private just back from France. He ran away with a girl under eighteen and married her down in Elkton. It's a serious thing in this commonwealth to marry girls under age." And the lawyer regarded John W. reproachfully.

"Don't stare at me," growled the latter irritably. "I didn't do it. If I did," he went on, "the only consent I'd ask would be the girl's."

"Quite so, quite so!" assented his attorney soothingly. "Unfortunately, the law has to be considered even in matrimony. Moreover, in this case," he went on smoothly, "the young lady took with her some ten thousand dollars in cash and bonds from her father's safe."

"Why the devil doesn't he arrest *her*, then?" rumbled the old man. "Somethin' crooked, somethin' crooked! You've got to go in there to-morrow and get the boy off."

"Me!" exclaimed the distinguished author of "Corporation Mergers." "Why, my dear man, I've never been inside of a criminal court in my life. I wouldn't know what to do if I got there."

The aforesaid steel-gray eyes of Mr. Logan narrowed in an extremely unpleasant fashion.

"It's up to you, Van Artsdalen," the financier said slowly, "to save this boy. The man who organized the Iron Trust ought to be able to win a consentless marriage case. Now, I'm going to tell you why we've got to get this boy off. He's a reckless young devil; but—he fought at Château-Thierry and helped stop the boche when only a lot of reckless young devils could have done it. Moreover"—and the old man's voice shook a little—"he came out of that hell on earth all shot to pieces, but dragging with him another boy who died in his arms. That boy was my son," he finished softly.

There was a little pause while the corporation lawyer and the trust magnate both stared out of the window. Then

"THE law," said Judge Biddle, "takes no cognizance of uniforms." But— And thereby hangs this engaging tale.

Mr. Van Artsdalen scribbled for a moment on a card.

"Take this down to young Bob Joyce," he said finally. "He's smart and honest, and he'll do better in a case like this than any of the old-timers of the criminal bar."

TEN minutes later John W. Logan had passed through a tiny waiting-room into a still tinier inner office, where Robert Joyce, Esq., sat waiting for clients—who usually didn't come. Joyce had baby-blue eyes and the round, chubby face of a boy of fifteen. Only by looking closely did one notice that he had a square jaw which bulged well out on either side and that his eyes had a trick of looking unflinchingly at the world. All of this Mr. Logan observed, together with the fact that Joyce had a most disarming and appealing smile.

"You're mighty young," he remarked disparagingly after giving him the facts.

"Yes," admitted Joyce. "I was born that way. Nevertheless, just leave this to me. The law's against us, but what's the law in a case like this?"

"That's the talk!" exclaimed John W. Logan approvingly. "I wish I could get Van Artsdalen to feel that way. To hell with the law!" And with this commendable sentiment he departed.

Joyce wasted not a minute. Advising his unimpressed stenographer that he was called to court on an important matter, he hurried over to the office of the indictment-clerk in City Hall. That official was conscientiously smoking a new meerschau pipe with his feet on his desk after a long day of assorted crime. Pushing open a wicket marked "No Admittance! Keep Out!" Joyce produced a good cigar which he thrust into the clerk's dangling hand. Automatically said hand closed upon the offering. This ritual for such occasions having been duly observed, Mr. Joyce proceeded to do business.

"Louie," he queried, "did the Grand Jury find any indictment to-day against a young chap by the name of W. W. Jones?"

"Yep," responded that functionary.

"What for?"

"Abduction, kidnaping, unlawful detention of a minor, perjury, subornation of perjury and accessory to larceny as bailee," came trippingly from the unoccupied corner of Louie's mouth.

"My Godfrey!" exclaimed Joyce, exam-

ining the sheaf of indictments which the clerk languidly thrust toward him. "You've left out homicide, arson and misprision of treason."

"I'm here," observed the indictment-clerk, tamping down his pipe, "to draw up every possible indictment that the facts will allow."

"Well, you sure were right on the job to-day," responded the other, shuffling the indictments together. "But I want you to have a heart. W. W. is just back from the front all shot up at Château-Thierry. All he's done anyhow was to get married."

"That's enough," interpolated Louie, a confirmed grass-widower. "I had a cousin at Château-Thierry," he went on, irrelevantly stretching out his hand for the indictments. From the pack he drew out the one marked "*kidnaping*," which he proceeded to tear up into small bits and drop into the wastepaper basket. "They haven't gone to the district attorney yet," he explained, "and we couldn't hold him on that one, anyway."

"Where do you get this stuff about perjury and larceny?" inquired Joyce, unmoved by this exhibition of generosity.

"Don't you suppose he had to swear to the wrong age and persuade his girl to do so too in order to put it over at Elkton?" explained the clerk.

"Well, if he did," retorted the attorney for the injured Mr. Jones, "it was done out of the State, and you know blamed well that you ought not to indict him for anything that was done out of this county."

"Perjury" and "*subornation of perjury*" silently followed "*kidnaping*" into the basket. Still Bob was not satisfied.

"Have you indicted the girl for larceny?" he inquired.

"Nope," responded Louie. "Her old man wouldn't stand for it."

"Well, how in the mischief then can you indict him as an accessory without making any charge against the principal?"

"Pretty smart, aint you?" said Louie a moment later, after consulting a page pointed out by the young lawyer in a dog-eared volume on criminal procedure. "You see," he went on to explain, "it's good business to put in all you can. The district attorney can abandon the bad ones and impress the jury that he's a regular fellow. No," he said virtuously a moment later as he purged the record of "*Perjury*" and "*Larceny*," "I'll not take another ci-

gar. It wouldn't look right. If you happen to have a box of mild Perfectos, though, kickin' round your room, you might mail it over to my house. This pipe is killin' me."

"I'll do just that little thing," returned Joyce heartily. "Who's sitting to-morrow?"

"Judge Biddle at Oyer and Terminer. The case'll be on the first thing in the morning, and you'll not have much time to get up the law."

"This case," remarked the other as he adroitly pressed the secret spring which controlled the wicket, "is one for equity, not law."

"That means," observed Louie sagely, putting his feet back on the desk, "that you're going to touch somebody. Don't try old man Biddle. Take it from me, it can't be did!"

"And it wont be tried," retorted Joyce as he disappeared out of the door.

NINE o'clock the next morning found Joyce yammering at the gates of Court of Common Pleas Number Five, where Judge Cadwallader Biddle presided when not taking his turn in one of the criminal courts.

"Judge Biddle is not sitting to-day," he was informed by Mac, who had been clerk of Number Five from a day beyond which the memory of man runneth not.

"I know it," agreed Joyce conciliatingly. "He's in Oyer and Terminer, but I want to see him for a minute in chambers before he goes on the bench."

"He wont see no one in chambers when he's sitting in criminal sessions," said Mac positively.

"Say, Mac," said Joyce suddenly with his disarming smile, "I've just got to see him, and I'll tell you why. By the way," he broke off, "here's a book of O. Henry's I'll bet you've never read. I've written your name in the front, and you just add it to your collection."

Now, Mac regarded cigars as insults, and bank-notes, silk umbrellas, traveling-bags and other recognized propitiatory offerings he was accustomed to reject with scorn and contumely. He had but one weakness—O. Henry. In spite of himself he ruffled the pages.

"Well, that's mighty nice of you, Mr. Joyce," he said doubtfully. "I'll be glad to borrow it for a while."

"Borrow, nothing!" returned the young

lawyer. "Your name's written in ink on the first page."

Mac kept the book, albeit with some suspicion.

"What did you want to see the Judge about?" he parleyed.

For the second time within twenty-four hours the story of the charge of one William W. Jones was related, and it lost nothing by the repetition. Mac surrendered unconditionally to the triple entente of Henry, Joyce and Jones.

"I oughtn't to do it," he said, "but you go up on the sixth floor. You'll find a little passage right next to the sheriff's office. It leads to the gown-room just back of the courtroom of Oyer and Terminer. The Judge'll pass through there about quarter of ten, and you'll have a chance to speak to him, but you'll have to talk quick—and don't on your life say I sent you!"

THE chimes outside were striking the quarter as the presiding justice of Common Pleas Number Five came down the passageway. The Honorable Cadwallader Biddle had the silkiest white hair of any judge on or off the bench. He bore himself as a Biddle should, and yet had the courtly tolerance which distinguishes a Cadwallader from lesser breeds. Before he had a chance to take up the burdens of his high office for another day, the eminent jurist was halted by a smile. Back of said smile was young Joyce.

"Can Your Honor give me a moment?" came to the Judge's astonished ears.

Judge Cadwallader Biddle shook his head emphatically and essayed the door of his *sanctum sanctorum*.

"It's a matter of life and death," persisted the lawyer.

The Judge stopped, looked at the other sharply and then opening the door, motioned him to enter.

"Well?" he inquired when the door had closed behind them, in the icy diction which made him the most feared of all the fifteen judges on the Courts of Common Pleas.

"I want to speak to you about a case which will come before Your Honor this morning," Joyce was beginning, when the Judge interrupted him.

"Sir," he said sternly, "you astonish me. Anything which you have to say to me about a case which I am about to try should be said in open court. If it were

not for your extreme youth, I would be inclined severely to resent this most irregular action." And he rose to his feet as a sign that the interview was over.

Joyce did not move.

"I must ask you to hear me out," was all he said.

Judge Biddle regarded him frowningly for a moment and then sat down.

"If after this warning you insist upon continuing, I will hear you. I will also hold you responsible for anything you may say. Proceed!"

"I represent William W. Jones," began the young attorney steadily. "He's accused before you of abduction and detention of a minor. Under my advice he will plead guilty. I want you to suspend sentence. He's nineteen years old. He fought at Château-Thierry and came out with five wounds—but with his dead buddy in his arms. Then he fell in love with this girl, and she loved him, and he married her without her father's consent. He has been foolish and hot-headed, but—he fought for us."

There was a silence while the men looked steadily at each other. At last the Judge stood up heavily, and Joyce noticed for the first time that he wore a tiny gold service-star, and remembered that Poultney Biddle, the ace, had been his grandson.

"Very irregular," was all the Judge said as he opened the door with a gesture which admitted of no further conversation.

JOYCE hurried around to the front of the court, entered his appearance for the accused at the clerk's desk and went to the barred cage filled with the motley crowd which the dragnet of justice had collected for that court day. As the deputy called "W. W. Jones!" a slender, pale-faced boy in khaki limped slowly to the side of the cage. His left arm was in a sling, and there was a deep red crescent-shaped scar clear across his forehead.

"Son," said Joyce rapidly, "I'm your lawyer. My name is Joyce. When your case is called, stand up and say guilty. Don't say anything else. Do you get me?"

The boy nodded, and Joyce hastened back to the courtroom just as everybody arose at the entrance of Judge Biddle. After the usual preliminaries the case of Commonwealth versus William W. Jones was called loudly and sonorously by old Colonel Sellers, the tipstaff. It had never

been definitely decided in what war the Colonel won his title. Some claimed the honor for the Mexican War, and there were a few who stood out for the War of 1812. At any rate, before the Bar, before the Bench, before the oldest clerk, there had always been Colonel Sellers and his deep, awe-inspiring voice. Occasionally he would fall asleep during a trial and wake himself up by a sudden snore. Whereupon he would pound the table with his gavel and rumble out "S-s-s-silence in the Court!" thereby adding much to the innocent enjoyment of the spectators.

"William W. Jones, you stand charged with abduction and detention of a minor child without the consent of her parent," bellowed the Colonel impressively. "How plead you—guilty or not guilty?"

William W. gazed dumbly at his counsel and finally murmured weakly: "Guilty."

"How will you be tried?" thundered the Colonel again, adding in a stage-whisper: "Say, 'By-God-and-my-country.'"

After several efforts the prisoner finally muttered something which was understood to represent that common-law formula.

"Who is your counsel?" once more roared the Colonel.

"Mr. Joyce," piped the prisoner, finding his voice for the first time.

"May God grant you a safe deliverance," ended Colonel Sellers pityingly, while said counsel blushed.

THERE was a pause while the old Judge, high above them all, gazed impassively down at the prisoner and the world in general.

"Who is the prosecutor in this case?" he finally asked quietly.

"I am, sir," snapped a little, wizened man, jumping from his seat like a jack-in-the-box.

"Where is the young woman whom the accused has abducted and feloniously detained?" continued the Judge.

A slender girl with big, appealing brown eyes and a tip-tilted nose stood up. At first she stared at the impassive Judge with pitiful bravery. Then her eyes wavered as the prisoner turned his head, and with an unconscious gesture she half stretched out her arms toward him while great tears ran unheeded down her face. A little murmur almost like a sigh ran back and forth across the crowded courtroom, and the Judge's voice was very gentle when he spoke again.

"What do you wish done with this young man?" he inquired of the wife.

"I want him back," sobbed the girl. "I want to nurse him and take care of him and love him. The minister said: 'Whom God hath joined together, let no man part asunder.' That means everybody, fathers and district attorneys and—and—even judges." And she flashed a smile through her tears at his Honor Cadwallader Biddle which was worth more to the prisoner than all the eloquence of his attorney.

"Do you desire to press the charges against him?" went on the Judge imper-turbably of the girl's father.

"Indeed I do!" rasped out that individual exasperatedly. "This young chap made my little motherless girl run away with him and carry off ten thousand dollars of Government bonds."

"They had been left to me by my own dear mother," interrupted the girl. "And Bill didn't make me run away with him, either. I was only too glad to go."

"I had claims against them bonds for commissions and support!" shouted the indignant father. "The law says that a man who carries off a girl under age is guilty of a crime, and I say he ought to be punished. I don't suppose he will, because he wears a uniform!"

The Judge's clear-cut face flushed.

"The law takes no cognizance of uniforms. Sometimes it does of impertinence," he observed ominously.

"I didn't mean to offend Your Honor," mumbled the other, much subdued. "I only—"

"I wish to hear nothing further from you," interrupted the Judge sternly. "Prisoner at the bar," he questioned, "in what battle were you wounded?"

"Château-Thierry," mumbled Private Jones.

"How did you come by that decoration?" went on the Judge, pointing to a Croix de Guerre showing against the boy's faded uniform.

"It wasn't nothing," stammered the prisoner. "My buddy got hurt, and I kind o' helped him back."

The Judge leaned forward on his desk.

"William W. Jones," he pronounced,

"you have fought bravely in France. You have wrought foolishly in America. Over there you helped save the world. Over here you have made a young girl a fugitive from her own father and have encouraged her to take property which technically does not belong to her."

"So help me, Judge," blurted out the prisoner, in spite of a warning kick from his counsel, "I never knew she did it until I heard her say so just now."

JUDGE BIDDLE stopped and looked questioningly at the girl.

"I never told him," she said simply. "I was afraid he might make me give it back."

"Even with that out of the case," continued the Judge, "you are confessedly guilty of a crime. It is the duty of this court to set the seal of its disapproval upon all unlawful acts. William W. Jones, you are hereby sentenced to five years—" And the Judge paused, while a smile of satisfaction spread slowly over the craggy face of the unconsenting parent. The straight figure at the bar swayed slowly, and a little moan came from the girl's parted lips. "Five years," repeated the Judge firmly, "on probation. Under the Probation Act the court has the right to name a special probation-officer where it seems necessary," he continued. "The court accordingly in this case appoints Mrs. William W. Jones. You are hereby discharged from all further custody, save that of your said officer. Mr. Crier, call the next case."

"But Judge," piped her father, his smile all gone, "what about them bonds and my commissions and claims?"

"That, sir," returned the Judge, "is a matter for you to take up with the prisoner's counsel, Robert Joyce, Esquire. Look to him for all claims, commissions and costs."

"But Judge!" objected that attorney, springing to his feet.

"This case is closed," replied Judge Cadwallader Biddle.

"Commonwealth-versus-Stoutenborough-for-unlawful-receivin'-three-bottles-of-stolen-maple-syrup! Prisoner to the bar!" bellowed Colonel Sellers.

NEXT MONTH: "Cross Currents," a remarkable new novel of Wall Street and the West, by Frank H. Collins.

Leatherneck Tales



HERE two casehardened old members of the Marine Corps undertake a strange mission—with most interesting results: one of Barney Furey's most appealing stories.

WITHIN the captain's office at Marine Barracks in the Brooklyn Navy Yard, Sergeant Ed Delaney and Corporal Mickey Brogan stood stiffly at attention until the officer should look up from his work. At last, in answer to his nod, they took a step forward.

"The captain sent for us, sir?"

"Yep!" The rather red-faced, gruff yet genial old officer pawed his papers a second. "You men are from the Williamson detail?"

"Yes sir." Sergeant Delaney was doing the talking for the two.

"I understand you're about to be transferred. That right?"

"Yes sir. We're taking a detail of fifteen men to Santo Domingo, to relieve duration-of-war men."

"What I thought. Shoving off Thursday, aren't you?"

"Yes sir."

"Lieutenant Knapp tells me you've been in Santo Domingo before."

"Eight times, sir."

"Nine, begging the sergeant's pardon," chipped in the corporal. Delaney blinked. "Corporal Brogan's right, sir. It's nine."

"Doesn't make much difference, just so you're familiar with the men down there. Are you?"

"All the old ones, sir."

"We know 'em all backwards," Mickey had chimed in again. The captain stared at his memorandum.

"Know anything about a fellow named Bagley?"

The eyes of both Marines narrowed. "Corporal Brogan and I knew a Horton Bagley, sir. He was a private in the 44th Company."

"How long ago?"

"Three years, sir."

"What ever happened to him?"

"Dishonorable discharge, sir, for drunkenness. If I may say, sir, it wasn't quite all his fault. He—it was a kind of a disease with him, and Corporal Brogan and I've seen him go through hell to try to keep from falling off the wagon. But he'd always slip, and one night it got him at the wrong time. Went to sleep on post, sir, while we were out on a hike after a bunch of spicks over by San Pedro de Macoris. He drew a general court martial, and got canned out of the service."

"Humph!" The captain arched his shoulders and stared at the memorandum again. "Better forget that part of it for a while. I want you two to go out and see his mother; here's her address. Of course, he's been out of the Corps for a

good while, and it isn't any of our business; but if it'll do any good for her to talk to some one who knew him, why, go ahead. Only,"—and the captain fumbled about his desk to cover the little show of sentiment,—“try to remember something about him that sounds better than what you've told me—that he always meant well and tried his best and that sort of thing. And if you can, when you get back to Santo Domingo, try to locate his grave for her and—”

“Grave, sir?” The two had started. “Why, he aint dead. We saw him—”

“When?”

“Two weeks ago. The *Williamson* put into Santo Domingo Bay for fruit for the officers' mess.” Delaney was doing the talking again. “Corporal Brogan and I got shore-leave. We saw him then.”

“Sure?”

“Absolutely, sir.”

A SLOW frown crossed the captain's features. He rose, and clasping his hands behind his back, stood for a moment looking out the window. At last he turned.

“What was he doing?”

“The same old thing, sir. He's been a beachcomber for the last year or so.” Delaney smiled coldly. “Oh, there isn't any doubt about him, sir; he bummed Mickey—Corporal Brogan—and me for a dollar—as usual. So unless he's died within the last couple of—”

“It's supposed to have happened more than two months ago.” The captain was staring out the window again. Finally, with a quick movement, he turned back to his desk, and motioning the two Marines to chairs, took down the receiver of the telephone. “Get me Lieutenant Brady—John D. Brady—in the Adjutant and Inspector's office at Washington,” he ordered of the barracks central. There was a wait, followed by the heightened conversation over the long-distance wire, then a wait again. At last his nod brought Delaney and Brogan to their feet. “No chance for a mistake in the name,” he said shortly. “I had Bradley look it up in the truth-teller at Washington. Only one Horton Bagley on the records. Dishonorably discharged, December, 1916. Go ahead and see this woman—”

“Aye-aye, sir.”

“But”—and the captain leaned over the desk—“don't tell her what you know. Lie

your heads off if necessary—the other might break her heart. She's old.”

“Aye-aye, sir.”

THEY about faced. Far out in the suburbs of Brooklyn they halted before a small house, looked grimly at each other; then with a straightening of the lips they opened the gate. A little woman met them at the door, white-haired, her hands reddened from work. She smiled at them, then patted their arms as she drew them within.

“You've come to tell me about my boy!” she beamed as she led them into the tiny old-fashioned parlor with its quaint plush-covered chairs, its spotless white doilies, on the back of each; its huge Bible and ever-present album; its crystal flowers under glass globes—an out-of-date place, used only for great occasions, such as this. But the two Marines failed to notice it all; they were staring toward a framed picture on the mantel, draped with a small silk flag. It was of Horton Bagley, dressed in the uniform of the United States Marines. Distantly, Delaney heard the voice of the woman prattling about her son, and remembered that he had a duty. With a quick motion of the elbow he brought Mickey Brogan to his senses and nodded in reply to the inevitable question.

“Oh, yessum. Mickey and I knew him well. We were in the same company with him.”

“All the time?” A shadow of pain was in the voice.

“Yessum.”

There was a long wait, while Delaney pulled dejectedly at the collar of his blouse, while Mickey Brogan slumped deep in his chair, and while the little old lady picked nervously at the fringe of the old-fashioned sofa.

“You were there—you knew about it when he left the Corps?”

Delaney gulped. He had not prepared for this angle.

“Yes—yessum.”

“Then tell me,”—fear was dragging at the corners of her lips,—“he wrote me that he left because he couldn't stand the life, that it was too hard for him. That was really it, wasn't it?”

Mickey Brogan, from the depths of his red plush chair, looked appealingly toward his sergeant. But Delaney, forcing his eyes to gaze straight into the pleading ones of the mother, already had begun the lie.

"Yessum, that was it. He—you know—he never was so awful strong. I know what you're thinking of, Mrs. Bagley—about his father?"

She leaned forward, her hands knitting. "He told you about it?"

"Yessum—that he'd—he'd inherited the taste for it. But he'd always managed to fight it down ever since he'd been in the Corps."

"And it wasn't the reason he left?"

"No ma'am, nothing like it."

Again a galling silence, in which the little old lady plucked at the fringe of the sofa and the two Marines stared doggedly ahead. At last:

"I'm so glad. I'd always been afraid—even though he denied it. And especially so when he stayed down there and didn't come home. I wanted to be sure. He's gone now, and it's a comfort to know what you've told me." Ed and Mickey, without looking, knew that the tears were on her cheeks. "You weren't there when he—"

"When he died? No ma'am."

"But you're going there, aren't you? The captain said he'd sent out some one who—"

"Yessum. Next Thursday. We'll be glad if we can do anything."

"I knew you would." She had risen and was wiping away the tears with the back of her hand. For a moment she searched the mantel, then in a drawer of the rickety old writing-desk, at last to bring out a worn sheet of yellow paper. "This is the cablegram they sent me. You might take the chaplain's name; maybe it'll help you find Horton's grave. I wanted you to put something on it for me, if it isn't too much trouble."

"We'll be glad to." Mickey Brogan spoke for the first time as the white-haired woman started out of the room. Then, safe with Delaney, he moved closer to read the cable:

Regret inform you Horton Bagley died Marcorps hospital this date. Impossible account climatic conditions return body States for burial. Deepest sympathies.

J. H. SOUTHWORTH,
Chaplain, U. S. N.

"The liar!" whispered Mickey as he glared toward his sergeant. "It's all a frame of some sort. There aint any Marine Corps hospital, and there aint any chaplain by that name down there. What's the—"

"Sh-h-h-h!" Delaney moved far to one side and apparently studied the cable as the woman again entered.

SHE came toward him, a small package extended. Hope was in her eyes.

"You don't suppose that could mean he had gone back in the Corps?" she asked, with a nod toward the cablegram. "I was always asking him to go back." Wistfully her eyes turned toward the picture. "I was always so proud of him in his uniform."

But for once Delaney had the strength to tell the truth.

"I'm afraid not. He—he—well, you see, there aren't many hospitals down there, and they probably took him in because he was an ex-Marine. Once a Marine, always a Marine, you know." He tried to smile. "Was that what you wanted us to take?"

"If you will." She pressed the package into his hands. "It wont be too much trouble?"

"None at all—honest. None at all!"

"It may seem foolish to you when you unwrap it." She touched the corner of an eye with a finger. "But I'll always think of him, you know, as my little boy. It wont be any trouble?"

"Not at all." They were moving toward the door. She laid a hand on Delaney's arm.

"I wonder," she begged, "if you could write me?"

The two Marines looked at each other in despair. This time it was Brogan who found the answer.

"Yessum. Only sometimes our mail gets pretty badly tied up. The last time we were down there a lot of letters got lost."

"Yessum!" Delaney hurried to second his comrade. "But we'll do our best."

"I know you will." She stood in the doorway, looking hungrily at them, the uniformed beings who connected her with that which she loved. "Good-by. God bless you!"

"Good-by," answered two husky voices.

THUMPING down the street, shoulders drooping, faces doleful, Mickey and Ed made their way to the car-line. Once in a while they strove to talk, to reason it all out, but lumps can come even into the throats of fighting men. They were silent, silent until they had reached the barracks, there to tell the story to the captain. Ed held out the package.

"I'd like to take this with me, sir—for a little purpose of my own," he requested. The captain nodded. And when the lights gleamed on the old Marine Corps transport *Henderson* in Santo Domingo Bay two weeks later, the bobbing whaleboat bearing Mickey and Ed with their detail of fifteen bore something else also: a small, paper-covered package stuffed under Delaney's blouse, a package designed for the grave of a man who yet lived. Time after time, during the long journey from New York, the two Marines had turned it over and over, their fingers hesitating at the thin cord which bound it. But they had won against temptation.

Closer came the harbor lines, then the crunch of the shore and the bark of commands. Fifteen men landed to a new life of spick-hunting, the continual struggle of bandit eradication which has been the job of the Marine Corps in the Indies for years. Mickey and Ed landed to that and more—something far more difficult than setting one's sights for a six-hundred-yard shot at a *mal' hombre*.

NOT until the next afternoon did either speak of it. Then simultaneously they went to headquarters for their passes and walked past the sentry, to take a straight course for the beach. Long they wandered, silent, searching, at last to start forward at the sight of a stooped, sodden figure a few hundred yards ahead, clad in dingy white, plodding along the beach, while the frowsy form of a native woman slouched near by. A call, and he turned, to await the Marines, sending the woman on with a quick, petulant gesture. Doggedly he watched their arrival; then into his weak, lined face came an expression of pleasure. "Hello, buddies!" It was the same old husky, toneless voice. "I was just looking at that old packet out yonder, wondering who was on it." He nodded toward the transport. "Listen,"—he moved closer,— "you aint lucky enough to have had a payday, are you? If I could just set my eyes on an American dollar, I'd—"

But something in the sharp, centered gaze of Ed Delaney stopped him. His lips moved wordlessly for an instant; a queer sense of fright came into the bleared eyes.

"What's eating you fellows. Can't you speak to an old friend?"

Ed Delaney put forth a hand—in the direction of Brogan.

"Got that package?"

"Yeh—here."

The tiny parcel traveled into the brown hand of the sergeant and lay there. Delaney, measured the thin, haggard being before him, and the bark died from his voice.

"Bagley," he said quietly, "I've been thinking all the way down here what I was going to say to you when I saw you. But I guess I'll pipe down on that sort of thing. I never like to call a man names when he can't fight back. Why did you send your mother that cablegram?"

The man's lower jaw seemed suddenly to loose in its sockets; it dropped, then moved in a jerking, palsied fashion. A thin, shaking hand rose at last to his face, traveled in trembling fashion over his eyes, then fell limply. Twice a choking, inarticulate sound came from his throat before he could master words. At last:

"You know about it, huh?"

"Evidently."

Mickey Brogan came closer.

"We were out to see her. She showed us the cable."

A sudden flash came into the almost dead eyes.

"What'd you tell her?"

"We lied, Bagley."

Tremblingly the man brought forth a crumpled paper and took from it a half-smoked cigarette. The match broke when he attempted to strike it; Delaney filled the need. Horton Bagley, beachcomber, reached forward eagerly; then applying the flame, he inhaled deeply.

"I'm glad there are some men left in the world, anyway," he said at last, the smoke curling out with the words. Delaney laid a hand on his shoulder.

"Why did you do it, Bagley?"

"Principally because I got enough money together. Listen,"—the voice became vicious, animal-like,— "I had to sacrifice to send that cable. I *wanted* to buy hootch!"

"But why—why did you do it?"

"You've got eyes, haven't you?"

"Of course."

"Can't you see enough reason? Do I look like anything that a mother'd be proud of—alive? Huh?"

"But there's always a chance, old man! There's—"

"You saw what just left me?"

"That spick woman?"

"Yeh. My wife!"

Ed Delaney's hand, on Bagley's shoulders, gripped like clawing steel.

"Bagley! You haven't done that?"

"I seem to."

"Legally?"

The man shrugged his shoulders.

"What's the difference—legal or illegal? We're together, aren't we?"

"It makes a lot of difference. That woman doesn't care. If she did,"—the tone suddenly became cold and studied,—"she wouldn't be living with the sort of thing that you've let yourself become. You're not a man. You're a—"

"Go on and say it!" His smile became ugly and sneering. "You know I can't fight back."

A GAIN Mickey Brogan cut in.

"Fight? Man that's what we're trying to make you do. But we want you to fight yourself. We—"

"Look at what's in this package. Then give us your answer." Delaney thrust forth the tiny parcel. "Your mother gave it to us. She wanted us to lay it on your grave."

"But instead, you're giving it to the corpse. Is that it?" Horton Bagley was making a last desperate effort at cynical humor. It failed. Weakly he put forward a thin, lined hand, then drew it back. "Break the string."

Delaney obeyed silently. Again the man put out his shaking hand and took the tiny package. The cigarette dropped from his trembling lips. Slowly the other hand came up, and while the Marines watched intently, he drew the paper from the memento it had guarded. Silence. Then a coughing, strangling gasp. In the agitated hands of the beachcomber lay a tiny, worn pair of baby shoes.

Tottering he stood there, staring down at them, his jaw sagging, the red rims of his eyes seeming to draw away from the orbits. He gasped again, like a man choking. Then with a sudden motion he clutched at the little shoes and crouching, snarled at the men before him.

"Don't you ask me any questions!" he shrieked. "Hear that? Get away from me—get away from me! Don't ask me what I'm going to do—don't preach to me! Just—just"—the voice died down to a trailing groan—"let me alone, will you—let me alone!"

Ed Delaney moved close to his comrade. "He's right," he said in a low voice. "It's up to us to beat it—he's got more than he can handle."

Then, with a last look at the sagging, weaving figure, they turned and hurried back to camp. Nor did they look back again. The message of the little parcel had done its work—how well or how badly, it was not for them to know.

NOR could they learn. The next day when they sought out the little tumble-down lean-to where Bagley had made his home, only the slovenly native woman was there, to shrug her shoulders in answer to their questions, and to exhibit not the slightest interest in their concern over the man. One thing was certain: he was gone.

Again, the day following, they made their pilgrimage, but with the same result. This time, it is true, the native woman was more inclined to give details, but they told little. Bagley had come home, with two little shoes clutched in his hands. He had railed and cursed. He had gone and he had not come back. That was all she knew. The two Marines turned away, to look out toward the uneasy sea as they made their way back to camp. Delaney nodded.

"I wonder if somebody'll pick him up out there," came at last.

"Drowned, you mean?" Mickey scratched his head. "I don't think so. Fact is, I aint giving him that much credit. But—" He stopped and grasped his comrade by the arm. "I wonder if he's really making a fight."

"Look out! You've said something!" Delaney's eyes grew wide with speculation. "Maybe he's beaten it up in the hills and is making a new try for it. He could get work on any of those plantations up there you know, and—"

"Gosh! Let's hope so!"

They turned back to camp, to idle about, to make their evening assault on the chow in the mess hall, then to gather beneath the palms with the members of their detail, lounging and smoking and talking of far-off days and lands, of their wanderings in the many years of their service in the cause of the globe, anchor and eagle. Suddenly, however, it all ceased. Men leaped to their feet, running almost before they landed. Clear and sharp, the bugle was sounding assembly!

A shadowy company in the half-light, they lined up to hear the orders read, then to hurry for their equipment. Don Moraes was off the straight and narrow

path again. His bandits were burning and pillaging—and the call had come for the United States Marines.

Like ghosts in the darkness, they trailed forth, a second lieutenant in the lead of the first detachment, Sergeant Delaney and Mickey Brogan close behind, breaking the way for the main body, with its captain in command, following.

A shavetail, a sergeant, a corporal and twenty men, they were traveling in advance along the rutty road toward the mountainous region where Don Moraes had taken his refuge after his assault upon three plantations. It was a matter for men experienced in "spick" fighting, men who could make their way slowly and silently along the roads by night, hiding by day, until at last the time should come when the final rush be made, and Don Moraes gathered into the fold of the prisoners or the dead. Life in Santo Domingo is one serrated succession of such expeditions as this—a blood-red streak in the brain of a bandit, the hasty summoning of a few supporters, an assault, then the stealthy hunt on the part of keen-eyed, hard-muscled fighting men who seldom return without their quarry.

Through the hours they marched, the rattle of a rifle or the clank of accoutrement bringing forth a whispered reprimand from the lieutenant, their course constantly in the shadow, while far ahead, the advance patrol spied out the road, and in the rear the guard watched constantly for the ambushade which is ever menacing in the land of the bandit.

MIDNIGHT came, and with it the form of one of the advance guard as he hurried back to the lieutenant.

"Something ahead, sir!" he announced. "Private Budde and I thought we saw something move in the bushes, and then I got a glimpse of something white. It moved away before I could stop it."

A halt, a reconnaissance. Then the march began again, while the lieutenant growled:

"Delaney! You and Brogan better get up ahead. Those two men must have been nervous. Probably saw a goat and thought it was the enemy. We're not anywhere near their territory."

A salute, and the two Marines hurried ahead. The march proceeded. The gray streak of dawn appeared at last. Hurriedly the camp was made in the rocky

ledges of the first of the heavy, massed hills.

The long day—night—the march again: hours which passed silently, except for the slow, soft tread of men who seemed to creep rather than walk. They were in the deep hills now, threading trails which seemed to lead nowhere, which wound about through the scrub brush and prickly grass in never-ending circles, taking them on and on to—

A gasp—a man fell. Then from straight ahead came the delayed sound of a machine-gun as it began to clatter at them. Ambushed!

There was no need to notify the rear. Already rifles were flashing as the first of the Marines slapped their guns to their shoulders and shot without sighting. A whistle blew—Delaney and Brogan, already crawling forward on their stomachs toward the spitting streak of flame, knew that the skirmish-line had been thrown out and was advancing.

Deep in a gully, Brogan sought to aim, then fired. At his side Ed Delaney, his rifle in readiness, waited to learn the effect of his comrade's shot, then he too fired, five times in rapid succession, changing his aim slightly with each pressure of the trigger, seeking to locate the group at the quick-firer. But in vain. The steady stream of bullets continued to clip the gaunt shrubbery in an ever widening circle. The second member of the advance guard plunged forward, clawed at the scrubby grass, then lay still.

Minutes passed, minutes of death, in which the skirmish-line made its slow way forward, came abreast of the two men in advance, rested there a moment, then at the signal, rushed on, Delaney and Brogan with them. Men spun in their tracks and fell as the rush of steel caught them. Others cried gaspingly, then stifling their suffering, went grimly forward. A circling process began, crouched, dogged figures dragging themselves nearer and nearer. At last, with Brogan and Delaney, in command of growling, dogged privates, the final rushed started—to end in descending bayonets which struck flesh again and again. The machine-gun was stilled.

BUT with the death to the men who had manned the gun, a new menace broke forth from the hills, in the scattering flashes of rifle-fire from the main body of the bandits concealed in the rear. Again

the creeping, slow advancing tactics began, while patrols of two and three made their way about, circling behind and at the sides of the main body to prevent the flanking of the small group of men, fighting against at least twice their number. Once as a patrol passed on its rounds, a man asked hoarsely for the lieutenant, then crawled to him.

"Something queer in the rear, sir," he reported. "We came across the body of Private Jamieson, sir, and it's been stripped."

"Stripped?"

"Yes sir. His uniform and helmet have been taken off him, and his equipment, sir."

"Sergeant Delaney! Corporal Brogan!"

"Aye-aye, sir!"

"Make a reconnaissance of the rear. See if you can get a line on this—looks like some spick has gotten behind our lines and is robbing the dead of their clothes. It might mean an effort to flank us by making us think it was our own men. Hurry."

"Aye-aye, sir."

"See if you can get any dope on whether the second detachment has heard our fire and is coming up. They ought to be moving along soon now."

"Aye-aye, sir"

The sergeant and corporal hurried away. A quarter of an hour later, they were back, bending beside the lieutenant.

"Something awful funny about that, sir. Only one man has been touched—Jamieson. Looks like the clothes were taken off him in an awful hurry. We struck the advance patrol of the second detachment, sir. They're making it here as fast as they can. It's only a matter of minutes now until—"

"Listen! What's that?"

From far ahead had come the sound of firing—the quick yet steady firing that told of a rifle in the hands of a United States Marine. Almost under the edge of the hills where the bandits lay, he was answering shot for shot, as the desultory flares bespoke the position of the enemy. Again and again while the shattered detail watched and listened, came the fire. Then the lieutenant turned.

"Pass along the line. Tell the men to move forward as fast as they can for fifty yards, when I give the signal. It'll be a safe advance—whatever's up in front is drawing all their fire."

The two noncommissioned officers hurried away to relay the orders. They returned, to find a messenger reporting.

"Thirty men of the second detail are flanking on the left, twenty on the right, sir. Left flank under First Sergeant Bergen, right under Lieutenant Masters. The main body coming up in your support. Captain Andrews says to hold the fire until he can get here with reinforcements, and leave plenty of men in reserve and support."

"My compliments to Captain Andrews and tell him I am moving fifty yards forward, holding my fire."

"Aye-aye, sir!"

THE messenger scurried away in the darkness. From far ahead the firing sounded sharper than ever, as rifles flashed from twenty places in the hills at once. But the bullets had ceased to whistle over the heads of the men in the tiny gully—all were aimed now at the glare which spurted from the rifle of the Marine in advance. The lieutenant raised to his hands and knees. He gave the signal. The line moved. Then, as the shadowy figures settled for their second wait, the officer turned again and beckoned to Delaney and Brogan.

"Move ahead there and tell that gyrene to pipe down! Tell him to cut out that firing. Listen! He must think that he's a machine-gun!"

For the clattering crack of the rifle had become faster than ever now. Whoever he was, that man was firing as fast as he could work the bolt and slap the clips of cartridges into position. From the hills, the spark-spurts of flame were bursting in a score of places. The two Marines, crawling forward, their elbows digging into the gravel soil, guided their course for a hundred yards by the almost electric-like consistency of the fire. Then suddenly it slowed.

A shot—then a long wait—then a shot again. A longer wait now—and still a longer one. It all told its one story. The bullets from the hills had struck home—the fire from above lulled. At last, both from the hidden form in the shadow of the hills and from the higher ridges themselves there was only silence. Delaney and Brogan crawled stolidly on.

They stopped—rose on their hands and knees. From somewhere close had come the sound of a groaning gasp. Hurriedly

they turned in their course and moved toward the huddled, cramped figure of a man, groaning in agony as he again sought to raise his rifle. Delaney's hands went to his mouth.

"Pipe down on that," he ordered. "Hear me—pipe down! Cease firing!"

"Who's there?" The questioning whisper was weak with exhaustion.

"Sergeant Delaney and Corporal Brogan. Pipe down."

"Come here!"

They crawled to him. Then Delaney reached out in the darkness and grasped tight at the arm of Mickey Brogan. Neither needed to speak—on the ground, a dying man was whispering, a man in the blouse, trousers and helmet of a United States Marine.

"It's Bagley," came the husky voice. "They've got me in the lungs—I'm coughing blood. Not much longer—thank you!" It was the old cynicism. "I'm about gone. I—"

"But how—"

"Easy." They knew the strained, weak face was smiling in the darkness. "Tried to beat back. Only lasted a day—on a plantation. Heard you were coming—the natives all seemed to know it. Hid by the road until I was sure and—say, listen—listen, fellows." The words were coming between the spasms of gurgling coughing. "Do me a favor, will you. No; don't want any money—nothing like that. Just want to be—buried—on the field here—you know—before the C. O. finds me out—and takes off this uniform—get me—huh?"

From the right, from the left, from the rear came the sudden roaring concert of volley-fire. A second more, and figures made their appearance, rushing toward the hills. Above, harassed on three sides, the enemy began to fire spasmodically. The

first of the advancing line passed on the run. Delaney bent low.

"Mickey!" he whispered. "Do what he wants you to. You've got an intrenching tool?"

"Yeh. Listen—he's dead—I can't feel his heart."

"All right. It's the least we can do. I'm going ahead."

"Get one for me, Ed!" Then grimly, as the rest of the line rushed by, Mickey Brogan turned to his task of mercy.

IT was two weeks later that a little woman sat in a tiny old-fashioned parlor. The tears were on her cheek—but in spite of that, a smile, faint though it was, touched the corners of her lips. She was just finishing a letter:

We did what you wanted us to about the package. Corporal Brogan and I took the shoes and put them on his grave. We thought we'd lost them, but we found them again, and so everything's all right. Now, about that grave, Mrs. Bagley, it's just under the big hills, where he fell. You see, while he didn't exactly go back in the Marines, he couldn't keep away from the uniform when there was need of him, and he went into action with a bunch of men that were up against it. We found out all about it, and we're awful glad to be able to tell you this, because we know that you will be relieved to learn that he died as any Marine would be proud to die.

Sincerely,

EDWARD DELANEY.

Tears made the room hazy and dim, and the picture on the mantel, the one with the tiny silk flag draped above it, seem far away. But the little woman saw it nevertheless, and saw in it a being who had gone away, a long, long time ago. Slowly her tired old hands folded the letter. Just as slowly the faint smile played about the corners of her lips, while the tears came.

"My boy!" she whispered.

"JUST PLAIN HOMESICK," one of Barney Furey's best stories, will appear in our next issue. Along with it you find a remarkable group of exceptional stories and articles by such writers as Edison Marshall, Culpeper Zandt, Chester T. Crowell, Courtney Ryley Cooper, J. Frank Davis, Elmer E. Ferris and other authors of distinction.

The Profiteer Plunderers

The Sportsman in Pajamas



By
W. Douglas Newton

THE catch slipped under the pressure of the knife, and Boyd slipped through the French window into the house. He waited, holding his breath, behind the heavy velvet curtains of the windows, but there was no sound. Then, switching on his electric torch, he passed through the curtains, through the richly decorated room and out into the hall.

The floors of rich men's houses were beautifully constructed, he realized. Not a board creaked under his weight, and the hall was parquet-floored. Under these conditions his rubber shoes made not the slightest sound. He even felt that it was all too easy. Burglary was, after all, humdrum. The whole thing had been child's play.

He crossed the hall and put his hand on the door-knob of what he felt must be the rich man's study. The door was not locked; the handle turned. "This is childish," he said to himself. He went into the study.

The young man sitting at the big, flat banking desk in the room looked up and stared at Boyd.

Instinctively Boyd noticed that the smoke from the amber-and-gold cigarette-holder in the other's mouth ceased to come in puffs. In the stark light of the electric

THE first of a delightful series of amiable rascalities is here graphically described by the clever author of "Green Ladies."

desk-lamp, he could see it ascending in an uneven, waggling spiral. For all his air of coolness, the young man at the desk had stopped smoking, was allowing a cer-

tain nervousness to show in this unsteady smoke-thread.

Boyd himself stood paralyzed for a moment, held in the stiff bonds of fear. Then he made a quick step toward the desk.

"If you utter the slightest sound—" he began. The thread of smoke broke into steady puffs again.

"One doesn't utter sounds," said the young man in a pleasant, low, drawling voice. "Uttering sounds is not done in this century on these occasions." Boyd was taken aback and showed it.

"You see, there's an electric bell-push three inches from my right foot," explained the unabashed young man. Boyd slipped his hand to his hip.

"Don't," said the other. "I always carry my means of offense in my hand." His right hand, resting on the desk, opened. In it was a tiny steel and mother-of-pearl automatic pistol. It was pointing at Boyd. That newly made burglar paused; a half-strangled sob of anger and misery rose to his lips. Should he risk the pistol?

"I wouldn't," said the other. "Your weapon is probably only a life-preserver—yes, I see from your face that it is. And

in any case I take it you are really not a thoroughpaced man-killer. I'm rather ruthless myself."

"Well," snarled Boyd, "do you want me to put up my hands?"

"Not unless you think it adds to your charm. But would you mind telling me your name? No, you needn't refuse with an oath. I'll save you the trouble. I think I know it. I happen to like your songs, rather, Boyd Muir."

"What the deuce! But that isn't my name," said Boyd desperately.

"Oh, yes, it is. I saw you conduct your own symphony at Queen's Hall, and then your photograph is on the cover of some of your songs. And, I repeat, I like your songs. Might I ask why a composer with a future should also be a burglar?"

"You may ask, but I shall not answer. Call your infernal policeman."

"Perhaps it was a rather stupid question. Music-writing isn't a profitable trade in this country, and composers must live."

"It's true, but what the blazes does it matter?" said Boyd fiercely. "Let's get this over." He moved forward angrily.

"Please," said the young man, and he showed his pistol. "I may find you attractive, but that wont prevent my shooting you. Sit down." The young man's voice was low and drawling, but Boyd knew he must obey. He sat down. He said: "Since I seem to be a failure as well as a burglar, I am at your mercy."

"Oh, I don't think you failed," said the young man. "You did the burglary rather well. I didn't hear you until you showed at the door. I assure you I got the shock of my life when you came in. You make a good burglar; you are bold and silent; it was only my being here on the spot that made the venture unlucky for you."

"Anyhow," growled Boyd, "it was unlucky enough to spoil the whole of my future as a burglar, as well as a composer. You'll call your policeman, and I'll be locked up, and there's the end of me."

"But why should I lock you up? Personally I don't see why I should. I think that music should be encouraged. I think that all musicians should be free from money-worries so that they can do good work unhampered by care."

"What exactly are you driving at," asked Boyd in hoarse amazement, but with a sudden flicker of hope in his voice.

The young man put his pistol on the table, and his hand reached down to a

drawer in the desk. He had trouble with the drawer, and changed from one key to another, but presently it opened, and plunging his hand amid some papers, he fished out a thick wad of notes. He examined them, separated a number from the top, and tossed them to Boyd.

"What are you doing?" asked Boyd huskily.

"Take them."

"I can't," gasped Boyd overcome.

"Please don't be a fool. In order to go on with your music, you need a great deal of cash. You were ready to commit a robbery in order to get that cash, but when it is given you, you refuse. You can't logically do that."

"But—"

"Take the notes."

"I can't say how—" began Boyd in a choked voice as he took the money.

"Don't try to say it. I know it all. I've read it in all the stories. You'd be a prize wretch if you weren't grateful; of course you are; and we'll take it as said. Now get out; get out as quickly as you can, and the way you came. I'd like to know you better. I like you as much as I like your music, but—well, go."

With a full heart Boyd made three steps toward the door to go, but the door opened, and a very large revolver came through it, followed by a very large and brutal-looking man in pajamas.

THIS large man looked at them savagely, and particularly he looked at the cool young man at the desk. Then he said harshly:

"Put up your hands, both of you. You," he barked at the cool young man, "you—if you move as much as an eyelash toward that toy pistol on the desk, I'll smash you to pulp with a bullet from this." He wagged the big revolver. "Understand?"

"Your meaning is unmistakable," said the cool young man without a quiver in his voice, and he raised his hands over his head as Boyd had done. "I should hate to be mauled by your howitzer. You can trust me not to move."

Boyd was amazed. This cool young man with his hands up before the pistol of the obvious householder was, then—heavens. the young man was also a burglar! He and Boyd were both burglars, and they had been caught.

But the young man remained perfectly cool. Although the fierce man in pajamas

had cornered them, he behaved serenely; he even whistled a few bars out of "La Bohème." Boyd with a quiver of laughter recognized the air as that which announced the arrival of the hard, rent-seeking landlord at the Bohemians' quarters. The little melody was beautifully rendered. It was soft, but clear and piercingly penetrating. The big man scowled and swore as he heard it.

"Stop that infernal row," he snarled.

"They have no sense of humor, none of them," said the young man. "No householder who ever caught burglars has made the most of the occasion." The big man scowled again.

"You think it a matter of amusement, do you? I'll make you laugh on the other side of your face, you blinking jerry-built thief. What have you got to say for yourself?"

"Nothing," said the cool young man. "I never have anything to say to a revolver like that. As an argument they are beyond dispute."

The big man scowled and swore; and Boyd, who had been a bystander all the time, too bewildered by the sudden change of events even to speak, saw that the fellow, if not drunk exactly, had at least taken a nightcap of full-bodied proportions, and was still under the effects of it. He was unstable and truculent, and it seemed to Boyd that he was spoiling for a fight. Indeed, the young musician-burglar had a very definite impression that the man with the revolver was anxious to use his weapon, and was doing his best to goad the cool young man into some action, some movement that would give him an excuse for loosing off.

He wanted to shoot somebody, but at the same time, Boyd also saw that alert and calm young man was not going to give him an excuse to shoot.

"Why did you break in here?" the big man snarled.

"That's the sort of elementary question that doesn't need an answer, surely?" said the easy young man.

"You're thieves, an' you think you're mighty clever at it," went on Pajamas. "Thought you were on a soft job, eh? Well, you're damn well mistaken."

"It's easy to make mistakes these days," said the young man. "My friend here made several. We all make mistakes. To err is human; to—"

"Shut up," said the big man. "I can

tell you one person isn't making a mistake. I'm not. I've got you, the pair of you. And by James, you're my meat!" He scowled at them sneeringly. "Though you are pretty poor meat, I must say. I could eat the two of you. I could take the two of you on, myself. No fight in you—a pair of worms! Say, do you know who you've been fools enough to run against? Do you know what you've taken on? I'm something of a handful, I am. When I was in Africa—"

"Look here," said the young man with an unexpected touch of asperity. "We're burglars, not poor relations of yours, or people who have to put up with being bored by the tedious story of your life. We don't want to hear your life-story. Cut it out."

THE big, brutal man was also startled by this sudden change from smoothness to defiance on the part of the young man. But he was not altogether displeased. It gave him his chance of letting loose his temper, and when he lost his temper, he could do things. With snap of rage he said:

"You dirty little pup, I'll teach you! Let me tell you I'm James Briant Callagan, known in Africa as Jim the Man-Breaker."

"And also as Shifty Jim and Big Drunk Jim, and some other names too ugly to mention," said the young man biting. "You see, you needn't tell us. We know all about you. We know that you came to England before the war, swindled a man out of an engineering works, and then during the war by means of shameless profiteering made a pile. That's why we came to rob you; it's our business to snatch from the profiteer what he has snatched from a defenseless public. You see, we know all the details. It's our business to know all about people we're going to rob. Let it go at that."

During this extraordinary speech, a speech so insulting that it seemed deliberately to provoke the big man to violence. Big Drunk Jim had gaped at the young fellow with an amazed anger. Then he cried with a fierce, low snarl of animal rage:

"Oh, you know all that, do you. But perhaps you don't know that I've killed my man."

"Yes, I do. And I know you ought to have been hanged, only a jury of pals as shifty as yourself worked the oracle for you. But it was a close touch even for Shifty Jim."

The big brute bared his teeth in a horrid grin of passion.

"There wont be any close touch about this, you little swine! When I shoot you, --aye, an' your dumb pal,—shoot you dead, by God, the jury will be on my side."

"Will it?" snapped the young man. "Don't forget this will be a British jury, not a jury of skunks like yourself. They wont be so lenient, even in the case of dead burglars."

The sharp lash of the astonishing young man's tongue had unmistakable effect. The slippered feet of the big man shuffled in rage.

"You dog!" he growled. "I'm only defending myself against a dog."

"With no sign of a struggle in the room," whipped out the young man.

The revolver that had been lifted, wavered. And then:

"I don't care, you scum, I'll risk it!"

AS he said that, there was a low, penetrating scream from the door. And through the door there ran a young girl, a dainty girl, an exquisitely lovely girl. She ran into the room, and between the men. She stood deliberately in front of the leveled revolver.

"Don't," she whispered. "Don't shoot!"

The men gazed at this tall, slim and delicious girl in amazement. There was anguish in her face. Her beautiful eyes pleaded tearfully with the angry yet now astonished eyes of the big man. Her hands moved in fearful and desperate appeal.

"Don't shoot him," she whispered, "don't!" The big man lowered his revolver and gaped at her.

"Who in the name of Hades are you?" he gasped. His anger seemed to have vanished; there was that in his tone which the male cannot keep out of his voice when he talks to a beautiful girl.

"My brother—" began the girl, her vivid soft lips quivering. And then the young man butted in.

"Nora, my dear," he said evenly, "this isn't quite the right moment for a woman. Perhaps you'd be better outside."

The big man looked at the speaker and then at the lovely girl as she stood tall, deep-bosomed and beautiful in the lamplight. His eyes took on a look of crafty cunning.

"Another of 'em, are you?" he said hoarsely. "What is it, a family combine? You're his sister?"

"Yes," whispered the girl. "I know he's done wrong. But please—"

"A deuced pretty sister, too," said the big man. "Oh—deuced pretty! And one of the gang, hey? One of the gang—no better than they are, hey? Where were you all the time?"

"Outside," she said faintly, "waiting."

Boyd knew now why the young man had whistled.

"Any more of you? Any more in the family?" growled the big man.

"No—no, really I was quite alone."

"Good!" said the man, and his eyes leered on her. "You're pretty enough for a crowd, anyhow, me girl."

"As I said, Nora," the young man cried impatiently, "the best place for you is outside. This type of brute is peculiarly offensive."

"But—he'll shoot you," said the girl.

"He may not, after all, be a particularly good marksman," said the young man flippantly. "Anyhow, it's our gamble. Meanwhile, Nora, please go."

"Go," breathed the brute, who had not taken his eyes off the girl. "Oh, no, you don't go." The girl started slightly. "You stay here, see? I mean you to stay here." He lifted his revolver menacingly.

"He'll shoot you, too," said the young man ironically. "He'll shoot anything, no matter the sex—a very resolute sportsman."

"You shut up," said the big man. He waved the girl away from the door with his weapon. "Stand over there, girl," he said to her, following her with satisfied eyes as she moved proudly yet timidly in obedience. Then he turned to the young man.

"You don't think I can be a sportsman? Well, I am a sportsman. I'm going to be one."

"I was afraid of that," said the young man.

"You don't make me angry with your talk," said the brute. "I am going to be a sportsman. I was going to shoot you like a dog, and him too." Boyd was indicated with the pistol. "But I'll make a sporting offer instead. I wont do any killing. I wont even ring up the police, if you're willing, my dear. Just a kiss from you—"

"I told you so, Nora," cried the young man. "The beast is true to his type. But you *would* stay; you asked for it."

"You can't possibly mean that," cried the girl in a startled voice. "It's not—it's not the act of a gentleman."

"This isn't exactly a gentlemanly moment, is it?" sneered the big man. "Besides, it's a sporting offer. You can make your choice, shooting or jail for these scoundrels, or a kiss. I'm willing to let 'em go; you ought to be willing to give me that kiss. I'm the generous one; but then, good-lookin' women can always get the better of me—an' you're deuced pretty, my dear."

"I couldn't," whispered the girl. "You can't really expect it."

To Boyd's astonishment, the cool young man said nervously, and, yes, cravenly:

"Well, you know, Nora, you asked for it. If you hadn't waited, we'd have taken our chance. But you see, you did wait—"

"Still," whispered the girl, "you must see that a girl couldn't—there are things she can't do."

"Bosh!" said the brute. "Rather squeamish for a thief, isn't it? Well, you've got your choice. A kiss and freedom, or by James, I'll shoot 'em dead with this. Come, now, no hanging about!"

BOYD MUIR reached explosive point. This was beyond endurance. He could not stand by and see this exquisite girl insulted and shamed. To remain indifferent was a crime against his manhood.

"Shoot and be damned!" he rapped. "I'll see you to blazes before I allow such a thing. Shoot— And Miss Nora, run." He made a step forward. The big man covered him with his revolver.

"Get back, you dog! Get back—all right, then, take—"

The girl flashed between the two men.

"Stop! Take your kiss," she cried. "Take it, take it and let us go." The big man lowered his pistol.

"No," cried Boyd, trying to catch at her arm. "Not for my sake. I wont submit."

The girl turned and looked at Boyd, and there was a gentle light in her eyes; her soft lips trembled in gratitude, and—

"Please!" she whispered. "I've agreed. I'm quite willing—quite. Please! It's fine of you, but let me do it."

Boyd, looking into that beautiful face, wanted to protest with all the fervor of his being. But the light in her eyes quieted him. He fell back. He looked at the young man, and the young man's smile was rather mocking. Boyd, at once, abominated that young fop. The big man had looked on all the while with a cynical leer.

"I don't mind a little drama," he said,

"the honorable-young-knight stunt gives a charm to the occasion. But it doesn't seem to fit in, does it?"

The girl faced him. "I submit," she said coldly. "Please!"

"I thought you would," said the brute. "That's where the little touch of drama suited my book, see! Brought things to a head."

"And you promise to let them go," said the girl, brushing aside his remarks.

"I'm a sportsman. A promise is a promise to a sportsman."

"I've given in. Take your kiss."

The man leered at her. "Come here," he said coarsely. "Closer! Put up your face. Aint your skin white and soft, like peach skin. And—eh—ugh!"

AN astonishing thing had happened. The brute had put out his hand to paw the girl. The girl's hand had moved—then an earthquake seemed to strike and destroy the big brute.

He twisted violently, crumpled in the air and struck the floor with a heavy thump. He had collapsed with indescribable violence and suddenness. The earthquake had been a whirling affair, but it was an earthquake with fluttering feminine garments in it, and a flash of a lithe, strong girlish body, as a Japanese wrestling-hold took effect. The big brute was down on his face, and the girl was kneeling on the small of his back and holding his arm twisted back in a painful but effective way. It was the neatest and most astonishing throw Boyd had ever seen.

But he had no time to wonder and admire. The cool young man was at the girl's side at once; with lightning swiftness he had taken the brute's arm, transferring the hold to himself.

"Quick, sis!" he snapped. "Vamoose, and get *her* on the move. Take his gun and my automatic, and that wad of notes on the desk. Right! You!" This was snapped over the shoulder at Boyd, as the girl with swift movements gathered up weapons and money and vanished from the room. "You, get something to tie him up—quick. Those curtain-rope things. . . . Oh, Lord, no! Go! The old boy's giving tongue."

He was. Recovering from the partial stunning his fall had caused, the big brute immediately began to yell. He was a powerful yeller. His voice had an enormous volume.

"Hades!" cried the young man. "I don't want to stun him, but we must get away. I suppose I must."

But Boyd had already acted. He had swung a massive saddle-back armchair forward. With a quick movement he had toppled it over and across the sprawled householder, pinning him flat. Without exchanging opinion, both young men nipped out of the room. The door was slammed, and the cool youth turned the key in the lock, wrenched it out and pocketed it. They rushed across the hall, through the room, and out of the windows by which Boyd had made his entrance. In the garden Boyd cried breathlessly:

"Better divide. More chance of escape if we divide." The young man caught his arm and dragged him forward.

"Come along," he said. "You don't know the game. You'd get caught in about thirty minutes. Come on."

THEY crossed the lawn, burst through a hedge, ran across a field and dashed into a small thicket. On the farther side of this thicket a small yellow automobile, of a queer shape, was moving from among the trees to a side road. The young man dragged Boyd to the car, bundled him into the back seat and fell in after him.

"Let her rip, Thecla!" he panted; and Boyd understood that what he had meant by "her" back in the room was the car. And he also understood that *Nora* was a name only used for business purposes, for the Thecla who was to let her rip was none other than the girl. "Let her rip, old girl!" said the young man. "Big Drunk Jim is alive and raising Cain on the top note. It's got to be a lively get-away."

The girl spun the car deftly down the rough road. They swept down this side road and came to the main highway stretching to the left and right. To the right was the house they had burgled. It was blazing with light at every window. Doors were open; people were running through them and shouting. The girl looked at the house, glanced back at the young man.

"We'd better not pass it, Cyprian," she said.

"No, turn left." The car bumped onto the highroad and whirled to the left. As it did this, there burst out a new outbreak of shouting from the big house. "They don't seem to have missed us," said Cyprian with a grin. "A nuisance! A house like that is packed with cars of the most powerful kind,

and we'll have to run like billyhooly. And my aunt, they've already roused the majesty of the law."

The majesty of the law was standing well in the middle of the road in their very path. They could see this fool policeman in the light of their headlamps, with arms stretched out, "to shoo us like chickens," chuckled Cyprian; and he cried: "Drive at him, Thecla. The shooing sort always jump at the last moment."

Cyprian was right: the policeman jumped. They caught a glimpse of his pale, terror-stricken face staring at them from a hedge as they flashed by.

"He's got our color and build, and perhaps our number, all right," said Cyprian as they ran on, and to Boyd's amazement he seemed pleased.

TEN minutes later Boyd understood the reason for this. The car was slowed and then turned right round. The girl and Cyprian did nimble things to the shape of the car, and in a way almost magical it was no longer yellow but royal blue (afterward Boyd learned that the yellow was merely camouflage panels of cloth). The odd shape vanished, as the pair unfolded a neat, beautifully made canvas-and-wood structure that turned the vehicle from an open car to a limousine. The number-plates were whipped off, and other number-plates stood revealed.

The girl then pulled Boyd into the light of the lamps, scrutinized his face with the eyes of an artist, and then demanded a beard. Marvelously a false beard was plucked by her brother from some locker of the car, and a heavy ulster. These were put on Boyd. "If you have to speak," said the girl, "be husky and grumpish."

Meanwhile Cyprian himself had undergone a change. His dandified aspect had vanished; he had become a chauffeur with a ragged mustache and a slightly larger nose (false, of course). All this took but a minute or two. In another minute Boyd was lolling back in the tonneau, with the girl Thecla huddled into an amazing small space beneath the seat and the rug he had over his knees, while Cyprian was driving the car at a positively reckless speed *back toward the very house they had burgled.*

Half a mile along the road a brilliant piece of driving saving them from a bad smash-up at the hands of Big Drunk Jim's chauffeur and his powerful car, and Cyprian in cockney accents of a virulent kind

was speaking his mind about reckless driving, and the moral vileness of the other car's chauffeur, and the other car's passenger. The passenger, none other than Big Drunk himself, was trying to be mild because he wanted to know if the cockney chauffeur, whom he did not recognize as Cyprian, had seen a small yellow car, holding three people, one a woman; and if he had seen it, how far away it was.

With exasperating slowness Cyprian admitted that he had passed such a car five miles back along the road, and he added the fervent hope that in it might be the questioner's wife eloping, and that the questioner would be badly ditched just as he caught sight of the flying tail-light. With this pleasant parting shot the cars parted, Big Drunk rushing recklessly off to catch nothing, Cyprian driving them, at an astonishing speed, toward London.

A FEW hours later they were in a beautiful Kensington house; the car had been garaged by Cyprian and Thecla Xystus, for so were the strange pair named; and they were eating what Cyprian called "a burglar supper-breakfast," served by a silent Chinese servant.

"To-night's little episode," said Cyprian, counting his share of the wad of notes, "will pay some rent, buy some attractive food, and perhaps a picture by a good artist—and, I think, a grand piano, too. We have always wanted a grand piano, and now it's a necessity."

"A grand piano!" echoed Boyd, amazed at this amazing pair.

"Naturally," said Thecla with a radiant smile. "It's for you. You don't think we're going to let you go, now we have met you?"

"Moreover," said Cyprian with a grin, "it'll be safer for you. You're a much better composer than a burglar, and should you need to replenish your banking-account, as no doubt you will, you had better do your burgling under our management. We're masters at it."

Boyd laughed; he lifted up his glass.

"Here's to the study of music, and the means of supporting it at the expense of the profiteer."

They all laughed and drank, and the alliance of the arts against the profiteer was cemented.

Further adventures of "The Profiteer Plunderers" will be described in the next, the March issue of THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE.

Percy Johnson



PEOPLE who gave an opinion of Percy Johnson were apt to consider him from several different angles: To his customers on the road Percy was a hospitable soul who dispensed entertainment with due disregard of the company expense-sheet, and preferred talking business over a table in the town's best hotel or after an evening at the town's burlesque-show. To the slenderly fleshed, meagerly fed young things he supplied with royal dinners at his own expense, he was a brotherly sort of person who tied no strings to his invitations. But to the office-force of the Banner Company, dealers in dry-goods specialties, he was just Percy, their star salesman, who returned from his trips bearing largesse in his hands in the shape of orders for the firm and candy-boxes for the stenographers, his plump face beaming, his familiar plaid suit and red tie immaculate as ever. For Percy—*Percival* was the name his sentimental mother had afflicted him with in the days when he was a blue-eyed chubby-cheeked baby—was of those who believe in wearing the uniform of their profession, and everyone knows a plaid-suit red-necktie combination spells traveling man!

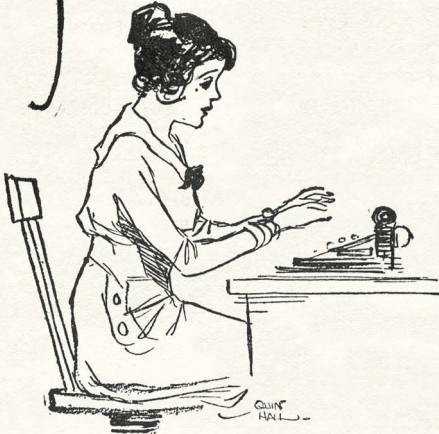
So Percy was liked by all and frowned upon by none. His days were spent basking in the warm approval of his fellow-beings—until the advent of Miss Callista Burke.

She came into Percy's range of vision when he returned from two profitable weeks in Minnesota, during which interim Miss Callista Burke, twenty-two, pretty, with hair of a gorgeous red-gold, and a grim determination to be efficient, superseded Miss Hattie Miller, plain, past her

Falls in Line

By

Jay Gelzer



first youth, and joyfully ready to indulge her pronounced domestic tastes by marriage to a widower with three children.

Percy, busily engaged in distributing candy, approved the change.

"Well, just look who's here!" he admired. "Say, girls, don't little Miss Sunshine brighten up this dingy office of ours? Some little ornament!"

Then, to Miss Burke:

"Here's some candy for you, little un. I bought it for your predecessor—God rest her cranky soul! But if I'd known *you* were here, I'd have made it twice that size." He held out the ribboned box with a typical Percy Johnson smile. The other stenographers exchanged meaning winks. Percy always devoted himself to rushing the newest girl if she were pretty.

Miss Burke regarded the candy with disfavor. "Thank you," she declined coldly. "But I don't care for candy."

"Might as well think of a bumblebee without honey as a pretty girl without candy, little un," protested Percy.

"My name is Burke. And I draw a salary here for being efficient and not for serving as an ornament," informed Miss Burke, her eyes already seeking her notebook, her fingers hovering over the keys of her machine preparatory to descending in a cascade of sound.

"Brrr!" shivered Percy Johnson, turning up his coat-collar. "Cold in here, isn't

it, girls?" A wrinkle of distress crossed his bland forehead as he surveyed his rejected candy.

PRESENTLY, happening to need a pencil as he prepared to fill in his reports, he spied one high in Miss Burke's hair. Possessing himself of it, he allowed his fingers to pass caressingly over the ruddy wealth and to tweak one of the soft pink lobes of her ears gently. "Some hair, kid," he complimented. "If that guy Jason were living now, he wouldn't have to hunt far to find the golden fleece." The giggle of appreciation which greeted this sally spurred him on. How was poor Percy to know that Miss Burke was from a small country town, every adult inhabitant of which had warned her before her departure cityward of the perils threatening the poor working-girl in a big city? Or that Miss Burke scanned even casual conversation with an eye alert for possible insult?

Recklessly he continued: "On the level, little un, you're some peach, and you can put your shoes in my trunk any time you want to!"

The immediate effect was somewhat startling. Miss Burke rose with something of the snap and vigor of a Jack-in-the-box, wrenching her ear violently from Percy's tender grasp. "Oh-h!" she said shudderingly, and an instant later the door of the manager's office slammed behind her indignant back.

Percy regarded his still extended hand in paralyzed astonishment. "Well, I'll be blamed!" he exclaimed helplessly, appealing to the others. "Can you beat it? *Can you?*"

Inside the private office the manager looked up wearily at Miss Burke's headlong interruption. He was a tall, thin person, slightly bald, with a new baby which cried nights, and an income which seldom managed to keep pace with his expenses. Naturally he was inclined to regard the troubles of other people with a jaundiced eye.

"Yes, Miss Burke?" he murmured interrogatively.

"I've been insulted!" declared Miss Burke quiveringly.

A shade of mingled anxiety and annoyance crossed the face of the manager, since to insult the poor working-girl in a strictly moral city like Chicago is a dangerous pastime. "Dear me!" he said nervously. "Who was this—ah—person?" "Nui-

sance," was what he wanted to say, but Miss Burke was a good stenographer, and the manager prided himself on his tact.

"A fat, plaid-suited, red-neck-tied person!" blurted Miss Burke, between sobs.

The manager sighed with relief, recognizing the apt description of Percy. "Oh, that's just Percy Johnson," he soothed. "That's his little way with everyone. You'll have to get used to Percy, Miss Burke. He doesn't mean anything."

"Doesn't mean anything!" echoed Miss Burke indignantly.

Then the manager paved the way for security from future interruptions of similar character. "You're—ah—from the country originally, are you not, Miss Burke?" he queried smoothly.

"Yes!"—in puzzled surprise.

"Quite so—quite so!" mumbled the manager, biting his mustache. "And the chief topic of conversation in little towns on quiet nights is the hell of temptation in a big city! But you mustn't believe all that, Miss Burke. There's nothing in it. There is, in fact, neither more or less temptation in a big city than in a small town. It all depends upon the person, Miss Burke, and I'm quite sure you are far too nice and too sensible a girl to continue looking for insult in every trivial occasion. Er—confidentially, Miss Burke, I have always believed that nine times out of ten a woman is insulted only because she wants to be!" He leaned back, fingers in his lapel, thoroughly admiring the clearness with which he had stated the case.

"Oh!" gasped Miss Burke, her ears still tingling from the impact of that word so frequently found in the Scriptures but never in polite conversation. Then again, with something of the temper which naturally accompanied her red hair and her Irish name, as she realized the manager was at the same time upholding the plaid-suited person and subtly accusing her of being evil-minded: "Oh-h! I shall get another position at once."

"I trust not, Miss Burke," soothed the manager. "We have liked your work. But it is a matter you must decide for yourself." To himself he muttered an ironical something about women in business.

MISS BURKE went forth and sought the seclusion of the four-by-six-foot space where the stenographers of the Banner Company washed typewriter-ink from their fingers, powdered their noses and re-

paired during the busiest hours of the day to retail and retell choice bits of office gossip, exchanging samples from paper bags of confectionery. There she proved that she was only twenty-two and temperamental by indulging in a burst of tears.

After some minutes, sullen, suspiciously pink of eyelids, and with an abiding hatred of Percy as the cause of her troubles, she went back to her desk and began a vicious pounding of keys.

Percy observed the reddened eyes uncomfortably. Then he lounged over and settled himself on the corner of her desk with due regard of the creases over his knees. "Say, little un," he began remorsefully, passing a plump hand over his thinning hair,—Percy himself said his forehead was getting higher,—"I'm sorry you're so upset. Why, I didn't mean anything!"

Miss Burke regarded him with cold fury. "Will you get off my desk?" she snapped.

"Such a temper!" sighed Percy with resignation, getting down. "Aren't you afraid you'll explode some day if you keep so much steam up?"

"You—you fat blot on the landscape! Get where I can't see you!" commanded Miss Burke, her eyes shooting flames.

"'Blot!' 'Fat blot?'" queried Percy gently and reprovingly. "These be harsh words."

But on his next leisurely progress toward the sales-manager's door, he stopped and covertly eyed his silhouette in the office mirror. Yes, he admitted uncomfortably, undoubtedly he had a protuberance in a spot where a bulge does not make for beauty. But *fat*? His suits were getting tighter, it was true, but *fat*! Glancing back, he saw Miss Burke staring at him cruelly, with eyes which probed his unwelcome thoughts with the exactness of a surgeon's scalpel. She smiled.

Hastily he continued his progress.

"**N**OW, Miss Burke!" protested Imogene Fitzgerald a few days later when they met in the washroom. "Ease up on Percy." She paused during the critical operation of lip-sticking her mouth. "He's a good sort," she continued then, patting her hair into place. Miss Fitzgerald spent much time on her coiffure and little on her nails.

Miss Burke said nothing.

"Percy's gone on you," pursued the fair Imogene, admiring her waist-line. "He'd take you out to dinner and show you a big time if you'd let him."

"I don't care to go to dinner with Mr. Johnson," said Miss Burke loftily.

"He certainly knows how to order *some* dinner," enthused Miss Fitzgerald, adjusting the gathers more smoothly over her hips and darting a glance at Callista from shrewd eyes. "Fifteen a week to cover everything don't buy us girls many of the kind of meals Percy comes through with."

"I don't care to eat with people of that sort," explained Miss Burke, with red spots on her cheek-bones.

"He aint so bad," protested Imogene. "He's square, Percy is. You find out the worst about him right at the start. He aint ever any worse than he is the minute you meet him. He aint one of these insidious devils that talk the brotherly stuff at first and then pull down the shades in a taxi going home!" Miss Fitzgerald's tone was filled with injured sophistication.

"Did he tell you to speak to me about this?" accused Callista hotly.

"Now, dearie," evaded Miss Fitzgerald uneasily, "you know he didn't mean nothing that time—"

"Don't anybody say that to me again!" stormed Callista, and she rushed out, leaving Miss Fitzgerald with a suspended jaw.

"Well, for Gawsake!" ruminated Imogene, resuming the chewing of her wad of gum. "You can't ever tell about these quiet people."

JUST why a man's perverse affections will sometimes persist in centering where they are undesired is still one of the unsolved riddles of existence. During the few days which elapsed before his next trip out, Percy Johnson afforded the office much amusement by his desperate attempts to bridge the gap between himself and Miss Burke. She had not fulfilled her threat of obtaining another position, for positions of as good hours and good pay as offered by the Banner Company were not easy to get. And between her and the threatened change yawned the recollection of various job-hunting interviews with persons who handed out oily compliments and wanted to discuss every subject under the sun but work, and of a frightening time when she had eaten both sketchily and infrequently in an attempt to make her capital last until the desired work was forthcoming. Wherefore, despite Percy, Miss Burke was loath to leave the security of her present berth. Rather bitterly she wished that red-gold hair and brown eyes and a peachblow skin

were not so provocative. Even the rampart of strictly business clothes and manner she had reared around her hardly sufficed to convince people she was a machine and not a woman.

"Honest, Miss Burke, I like you," argued Percy on the eve of his next trip. "Let's bury the hatchet and be friends. If you'd let your hair curl as it wants to, and quit wearing those horse-collar things, you'd have them all knocked cold for looks."

"But *I* don't like *you!*" retorted Miss Burke crushingly. "And I don't waste time worrying over my looks. I'm thinking of my work. It isn't my business to be pretty. And if you were as smart as you think you are, you'd see the writing on the wall and know that the day for your kind of man is over. Traveling men don't advertise their profession any longer except by the orders they turn in." She gave an unkind look at the plaid suit and red tie. "Look at you—fat, forty, and your sales-record falling behind all the time! Wonder you wouldn't cut out two of those three chins of yours and put some pep into your work instead of handing out sloppy advice to other people!"

There was enough truth in her words to make them sting. It was true his sales had been falling and that stiff collars had been discarded by him some time before. The plump, care-free countenance of Percy Johnson assumed the expression of a baby undeservedly and unexpectedly slapped.

"It's any woman's business to be as pretty as she can be, sister," he said soberly. "But you needn't worry—you're pretty in spite of yourself. And you needn't worry about me—even if I am forty, and fat. I've still enough pep to keep 'em coming! You don't hear the firm kicking about me, do you?" he concluded boastfully.

"Not yet," said Miss Burke quietly, and carried off the honors.

DURING Percy's absence in Kansas something else happened. The firm acquired a new sales-manager. The tall, thin, baldish man afflicted with a crying baby and an extravagant wife seized gladly at a better-paying job, and in his place came an apostle of efficiency—one of these efficiency-mad people who believe that efficiency consists in overturning all established customs and precedents and trying something new. Some of his ideas were

good, and some of them were not—which is a fair average.

Percy became acquainted with him upon his return, and to say that Percy was not pleased is making a conservative statement.

Nor was the new S. M. pleased with Percy. In fact, he grasped at Percy as a horrible example of all he was trying to overthrow, and his conversation ran much along the lines—slightly expanded—of Miss Burke. Everyone knows it is one thing to listen to something unpleasant from a pretty girl, and entirely another to listen to the same thing from the English-mustached lips of an alert college graduate at the self-confident and self-sufficient age of thirty.

"Now, Mr. Johnson," the new sales-manager had said to Percy, "I have no wish to seem unduly critical, but your sales have been falling off for some time. And I think I can detect the difficulty, if you don't mind my speaking plainly. You don't? Well, now, you, Mr. Johnson, are a salesman of the old school, and you haven't yet waked up to the fact that times are changing. Business isn't done on the old terms any more. It used to be that you took a man out, gave him a big time, and when he was half-seas over, you got him to put his *John Hancock* on a contract, having previously ascertained his requirements."

Percy Johnson reddened slightly. "But I—" he began feebly.

"Business isn't being handled that way any longer," the new S. M. continued brightly, disregarding his attempt at an interruption. "The average buyer doesn't drink nowadays. And besides, business obtained that way cannot be held. Somebody else can come along and play the same little joker. Personality counts a little, of course—" He would pause then, and his estimating glance obviously discounted Percy Johnson's personality. "But what really turns the trick in salesmanship nowadays is sheer ability and knowledge of your firm's goods. Keeping fit helps, of course," he would conclude lightly. "A man must not allow himself to get—er—overweight and antiquated in his notions. He must watch what he eats—and drinks. In fact, no man can really afford to drink nowadays." Then he smiled the entirely satisfied smile of a man who neither drank nor smoked and weighed under one hundred and sixty pounds.

VERY nice! About as pleasant for Percy as having a dentist probe a painful tooth. The new S. M. seemed to have a genius for finding Percy's sensitive spots and landing upon them. Percy began to look harried and driven, and to look forward to the day he could leave town again and escape the presence of this man who affected him much as a buzzing insect. His persiflage directed at Miss Burke grew strained. His jauntiness had a lining of doubt. He became visibly uncertain of himself. As Miss Fitzgerald succinctly put it: "The new S. M.'s got old Percy's goat."

Certainly the new sales-manager was indefatigable in his efforts to convert Percy to his arguments. He even obtained a carefully compiled chart showing just when the average man drinking as much as two drinks a day would die of alcoholism, and laid it on Percy's desk.

And Miss Burke saw it! Percy knew she had, when he found the thing. He perused it grimly, and then, stuffing a wad of expense-blanks into his grip, went forth and purchased two suspicious-looking quart bottles to carry with him. This for Percy, who had never been a real drinker, meant passing the dividing line which separates a man who drinks alone from those who drink only in company. Such is the power of suggestion!

As time went by, Percy's sales continued falling off. Whether it was because of his new lack of confidence in himself, or because things were really changing, he was unable to determine. There was, however, a time when the biggest buyer in Kansas City turned down an evening's invitation with a light: "Sorry, Percy, but I've cut out all that stuff nowadays. It's straight business with me from now on."

"Straight business!" Why, that—that hurt. He had always thought his business *had* been straight, had prided himself on making fair prices on good quality stuff—had, in fact, told himself he wouldn't work for a firm which wasn't on the square. And now here was MacArthur, one of his oldest customers, talking about straight business!

And then, in St. Louis, some weeks later, another buyer had turned down his glass with a laughing refusal. "The good old days are over, Percy. I'm not paying tribute to John Barleycorn any longer." And Percy had felt a little queer, as if some tie which held them together in good

fellowship had been sundered; and his tongue, confined strictly to prices, terms and deliveries, had seemed to lack its accustomed fluency. At any rate, the order he ultimately received was much smaller than usual. *Was* there anything in this efficiency talk of the new S. M.'s, he wondered. *Were* the times changing, and was he out of line as Hendrick hinted? Stubbornly he fought against the conviction which was gradually gaining ground as his sales declined.

AND then something more unpleasant happened: his salary was cut! Oh, with all sorts of tactful remarks about reducing expenses, but nevertheless, it was cut, and when a man is near forty and his salary is cut instead of boosted, it begins to look like the down grade. Percy told himself stoutly that it wasn't that. The expense of doing business was undoubtedly higher than it had ever been before, although the bulk of business was better. Besides, he reflected, he needn't stand for it. So he went calling, really gunning for a better job to soothe his injured ego.

But the better job was, strangely enough, not forthcoming. Instead, Collins, of the Barry-Collins Company, gave him a straight, keen look from his shrewd eyes. "Been with the Banner Company ten years, haven't you, Johnson? Thought so! Bit of a drinker, aren't you?"

"Why," stammered Percy, "I'm not exactly a drunkard!"

"Not much difference in the end, between a drinker and a drunkard. No, Johnson, I don't hire drinking men. Haven't a one! They mean big expenses and small sales."

And from Hendrick of the Empire Company: "I'm sorry, Percy, really sorry. Wish I could help you out, old man. But don't you see that we can't give you more than the Banner Company when you've been with them ten years and ought to be worth more to them than to anyone?" He put a hand on the plump knee incased in expansive plaid. "We're old friends, Percy—so here's a word of advice: Get hep to yourself and fall in line! Those selling tactics of yours are old stuff. You're slipping, Percy. Sand the path before it is too late."

So, in the end, Percy came back to the Banner office, a bit discouraged and disheartened, with something of the cowed aspect of the unsuccessful man. Forty, as

some one once said, is the beginning of success or failure. Percy Johnson was seeing the down grade before his unwilling eyes.

He said nothing else about the lessened salary. And Percy, who wore eighty-dollar tailored suits when clothes were cheap, began to wear ready-mades when clothes were far from cheap. But they were still plaid. Worry came to sit upon that plump, unlined face. A few gray hairs added their dignity to his temples. All his light, care-free manner fell away from him. He discovered that the same people who had lauded him as a royal spender failed to applaud him as a conservator. Even his occasional sparring passages with Miss Burke lacked spirit. She was like the others, he told himself bitterly. Worse, she had seen through him before the others suspected. All that comfortable, easy-going personality he had built up had been exploded by a few shafts of acrid criticism.

But had Percy not been too deeply sunk into a slough of despond to see it, he might have seen that Miss Burke regarded him with inscrutable eyes. Just what spirit lay behind her steady gaze is uncertain, but there were times when it resembled sympathy. And gradually began to appear an unwilling partisanship.

"The big boob!" commented Miss Fitzgerald scornfully, observing the set of a smart spring turban with satisfaction. "Why don't he get out?"

"The trouble is with him, not with the job," observed Miss Burke quietly. "And it isn't fair to say what we'd do in another fellow's shoes until we've had a chance to wear the shoes."

"Ahem!" sniffed Miss Fitzgerald. "Changed, haven't you? Or has Percy changed?"

"I haven't changed," explained Miss Burke, slipping into her coat. "And he hasn't changed—not yet. It's just that I understand a little better."

THEN came the day they had him on the carpet for high expenses, with wearisome repetition of such coupled phrases as "high expense—poor sales." There were some hot words from Percy, an unexpected inflexibility on the part of the new sales-manager, and Percy came out into the outer office to idle around until the others had gone for the day.

Alone, he let himself sink down into the

chair before the desk which had been his so long, and laying his arms out straight before him, dropped his head to their friendly snelter. "Ditched!" he said aloud. "Ditched at forty!"

"Oh!" said a voice—a very soft voice.

Percy sat up, his astonished eyes falling upon Miss Burke. "I thought everybody had gone. I was—er—sleepy," he said haltingly, yawning ostentatiously but unconvincingly.

"I came back for something," explained Miss Burke, but she did not explain that, her desk being very close to the door of the sales-manager, she had come back to give him the word of encouragement she felt he badly needed. Instead she rummaged futilely in her desk.

Silence. Percy Johnson stared at the opposite wall, watching with much interest an early fly crawling up its pale green expanse.

"I'm sorry," said Miss Burke bravely, looking at him.

"Sorry for what?" He roused himself with an effort.

"Sorry I've been so horrid to you!"—penitently.

"That's all right," he said awkwardly. "I thought maybe you meant you were sorry for me."

"Why should I be?" asked Miss Burke with spirit.

"Why indeed?" said Percy dejectedly, drumming on his desk.

"Why should I be sorry for a man who is able to solve all his difficulties for himself?" explained Miss Burke in confusion.

He looked up in surprise. "You don't talk like the rest of them. To hear them, you'd think forty was past the time for solving anything—that forty was an age for whiskers and the shelf!"

"But you're not forty!"—with quiet certainty.

"Not quite, but how on earth did you know that?" wondered Percy.

A dimple appeared in Miss Burke's round cheek. "I know a lot about you," she confessed. "And I know that you're not done by a long shot. You've just been traveling the wrong road."

"Now that you mention it," said Mr. Johnson oddly, "I don't think I am, either! I seem to be regaining a measure of the confidence these gentlemen with the hammers took away from me."

ANOTHER silence. Miss Burke moved as if about to go, and delayed again. A scrub-woman peered in and went away softly. The sun dropped down until its rays came horizontally into the room.

"I'm awfully sorry I made so much trouble for you in the beginning," said Percy after a long time. "I didn't mean any of that slush I handed you."

And then occurred a surprising change in Miss Burke. Her eyes filled with tears. All the trim starchiness melted out of her as if it had been a physical attribute. You saw that it was just the expression on her face, and that after all, Callista Burke was only a girl—a very lonely girl, extremely desirous of the very attention she had fled so diligently. She gave a quick sob. "That's what made me so angry!" she confessed. "Knowing that it meant so little to you, and so much to me!"

Percy stared blankly, dazzled as if the aurora borealis and the gates of paradise had suddenly dawned upon him at the same time. "Why, Callista!" he stammered breathlessly in an oddly urgent tone. "Why, I never even dreamed you would look at an old has-been like me!"

"Has-been!" choked Callista resentfully. "You're *not*!"

Later, after an entirely satisfactory interval filled with "When did you first—" and "Now, how could you ever fall in love with an old hulk like me?" Percy Johnson reached for his hat and started for the doorway with much determination.

"But where are you going?" protested Callista.

"At exactly seven o'clock I will call and take you to dinner," said Percy Johnson, his eyes snapping, his chin up.

"But what are you going to do *now*?"

Percy gave a rather sheepish smile. "A man who isn't willing to learn from another man, even if a younger man, is antiquated," he explained. "The new sales-manager told me to come back whenever I was willing to try it his way. So between now and seven o'clock I am going to join a gymnasium and declare war on my three chins, sign the pledge, and order a suit from my tailor which will not be plaid." Then he gave Callista a smile which was not at all the usual Percy-Johnson brand. "A man with the care of a wife about to devolve upon him must fall in line," he finished.

Deep Water Men

A Port Unknown



by Culpeper Zandt

THE Europeans or Americans in Singapore who happened to meet them in the clubs where they had been put up or in the bungalows out Tanglin way had merely a vague impression that the five Americans and two Englishmen from the little motor-ship *Bandarwallah* anchored over near Pulo Brani were members of a scientific expedition which had been doing hydrographic work and studying marine growths among the islands of the Eastern Archipelago. Occasionally somebody fancied their names were familiar in connection with newspaper articles—but people in the tropics waste little effort trying to remember things in which they have no personal interest.

Among the Asiatic population, however—which covers ninety-five per cent of all in the Straits Settlements and Federated States—it is doubtful if anyone except the naked children playing in the dirt had failed to hear and remember the story which had traveled through the Orient with the rapidity of a typhoon, an epic of seven white men who had recovered in some mysterious way a large amount of treasure from the bottom of Flores Sea, including jewels which had been stolen from the Rajah of Trelak by a thieving German financial agent—the amazing, unbelievable

part of the saga being that these white men had actually gone out of their way to return said jewels, valued at a million and a quarter, gold, to their rightful owner, the Rajah. It was a demonstration of individual honesty which reminded the brown races of that far-gone day before white men penetrated the Orient, when the simpler virtues were so naturally a part of their ethical code that the one who transgressed them became an outcast.

The "scientific expedition" was nominally under command of James Medford, former war-correspondent, and of Samuel Torrey, an ex-lieutenant, U. S. N., and of Engineer Lawrence Stevens, ex-warrant machinist, U. S. N., with a chief's ticket for steam. And the seven men had aroused earlier newspaper interest by capturing two submarines which had not been turned over to the British Navy by the Germans—sinking one of them on the south coast of Lombok—and delivering the other to the British authorities at Port Darwin.

THEY had not been twelve hours in Singapore when Medford and Torrey began to notice little things in the attitude of various people with whom they had dealings which struck them as different from anything in their previous experience.

The anchorage assigned them by the harbor-master was a coveted one for any steamer lying for several weeks in Singapore—far enough out of the main channel to be in no danger from the heavy traffic through Keppel Harbor, yet having plenty of room to swing with the tide, entirely clear of Pulo Brani Reef. And they were given to understand that there would be no port charges in their case—an exemption so unusual that the harbor-master had demurred when receiving the order. But it was hinted to him that the request came from the Chinese Chamber of Commerce—to which the British authorities had reasons of their own for deferring.

Upon going ashore, Medford and Stevens took a motorcar at Tanjong Pagar for the ride into the city, and their Javanese chauffeur respectfully begged to make a detour of several blocks in order that a Chinese merchant on Telok Ayer Street might speak with them for a moment. It seemed, of course, like a case of mistaken identity—until the chauffeur mentioned Wu Ching Lun, in Batavia, who had chartered to them the two thousand-ton motorship for their scientific expedition. This put the matter in a different light; they promptly consented to see the man in Telok Ayer Street. He was standing under the arcade in front of his *godown* as they drove up—and appeared, by his brocaded silk clothes, to be a man of education and substance.

Introducing himself as Lee Fong Yan, he pointed out that with but seven of them aboard the *Bandarwallah* they couldn't all be ashore at the same time if they so desired—and suggested that he put eight or ten of his coolies aboard in charge of a number-one boy who would be responsible for every item of their personal property and keep the boat in first-class condition, serving their meals whenever they returned. For this service he mentioned a nominal sum that was ridiculous.

To a European with little knowledge of Oriental character—particularly Chinese—the proposition would have been suspiciously naïve. It was suggesting that they trust their ship, their laboratory and scientific instruments, all their clothing and personal belongings, to a crew of coolies whom they knew nothing about. Yet Medford and Stevens were beginning to suspect that they had incurred the good will of a powerful secret organization the ramifications of which they could but faintly im-

agine. So they courteously thanked their new acquaintance for his kind offer (judging by the glances of neighboring shopkeepers in the arcade that he was not in the habit of leaving his office for anyone), accepted it—and gave him a note to that effect for Sam Torrey, who had remained aboard.

AS they drove away toward Cavanagh Bridge, a well-built Englishman in white drill and sun-helmet, who had been standing under one of the arches, turned from an inspection of their faces which had been less casual than it seemed, and glanced speculatively after Lee Fong Yan as he stepped back into the salesroom of his *godown*. In a moment or two he followed him—and was met inside by a polite Chinese clerk who doubted if the merchant would see anyone just then—Lee being the descendant of a well-born Kwangtungese who had settled on the island before the Portuguese and Dutch. By tradition, inheritance and business experience he was admittedly one of the leading Asiatics in Singapore—an influential member of that Chinese Chamber of Commerce whose dealings, though less open and parliamentary than those of the British association, were none the less respected by the British authorities.

In this case, the Englishman took no offense at what people with less knowledge of the Orient would have termed “a native giving himself airs.” He merely handed the smiling “boy” one of his engraved cards—penciling in a corner a small Chinese ideograph. In a moment or two the boy returned to open several doors and usher him into a cool private office at the rear of the ground floor—fetching cigars, wine and Chinese cakes before he silently disappeared. Lee glanced imperturbably from the card in his hand to his visitor's face—then casually noted the muscular lines more clearly indicated where the white suit drew tightly over the flesh.

“I've seen you about the city, Major Worthington, of course. Would probably have known you by sight. I think the general impression is that you are a retired army man who takes an occasional flyer in rubber or tin, just as a matter of speculative interest. But this little ideograph in my language—well, it implies knowledge that few Englishmen have. It leads me to assume that you may be of the British Secret Service. Of course, I do not ask

such a question—and you wouldn't answer it. Let us say, then, that I might consider permissible other questions from you which, from the average man, would be impertinence." (Lee Fong Yan is a graduate of Cornell University, and speaks three European languages fluently—in addition to Malay and several of the dialects.)

The Major's face lighted up with a charming smile as he touched a match to his cigar. "I can't help your drawing any inference you please, Lee—particularly as I've the advantage of knowing a lot about you for several years back. Of course, I admit nothing of the sort—as you say. My reason for calling upon you just now is merely the possibility that you may care to drop a suggestion in certain quarters which might work out to the advantage of your people as well as mine. You probably know there have been a number of rather unusual deals made in shipping circles up and down the China Sea within the last five years—deals which apparently were strictly legal, yet carry a vague impression of something underneath which connects them all—and which might prove dangerous to govern'm't and business int'rests throughout the Archipelago.

"Govern'm't—naturally—is supposed to be well-equipped for handling anything which may arise. But when all's said, it can only go about so far without overstepping the limits of legal action. Now, there *are* men out here between Suez and Hakodate who'll go most any length for a bit of excitem'nt. Not bounders, you understand—not in the least of the criminal temperam'nt! But men who have lived rapidly, seen much, go stale from inaction—such men, for example, as those chaps who captured the subs an' recovered the Rajah's jewels. That's the sort I have in mind. They wouldn't stop at a technical breach of the statutes, to win out—as long as the result justified any sort of means. Well, you get what I mean! If certain int'rests here in Singapore could manage to dig up a clue, one way or another, an' turned it over to a few chaps like that, with a word or two by way of hint—eh? In that case—no use of goin' into it further. Possibly you don't in the least savvy what I'm drivin' at—eh? Again—you may see a glimmerin' after mullin' it over a bit. What? Pleased I made your acquaintance anyhow, Mr. Yan. Fancy we may have a good many int'rests in common, don't

you know—if one could only figure out just what they are. Superb tobacco, this! Many thanks!"

For half an hour after the Major went out, Lee Fong Yan partly reclined in his carved ebony chair, with the heels of his brocaded silk shoes perched upon one corner of his desk—while he thoughtfully consumed a long brown cigar. The position was anything but Chinese,—a habit, in fact, acquired during his undergraduate days at Ithaca,—and as he well knew, the brown cigar, of a quality which may not be purchased in the average shop, was less conducive to long life than the equally good but milder tobacco with which his native pipe was usually filled. No man of the western races will ever fathom the mental processes of an Asiatic, and so a description of what was passing through Lee's mind would be obviously fiction.

Presently his heels came softly down to the floor. He stepped across to a time-lock vault built into six-foot masonry, and took from one of the inner shelves a sheaf of tough rice-papers covered with ideographs and held together at the top with brass fasteners. They were much too large and complicated for laundry-tickets, but the average American might have thought them weekly accounts of such an establishment. Taking a blank sheet of the same paper, Lee scribbled from them a list of names,—and steamers and ports and dates,—after which he reread what he had written and made certain verifications from a large-scale map of the East Indies. Then rolling the list into a spill, he held it against the glowing end of his cigar until it was entirely consumed—glancing up, as he did so, at the framed lithograph of a steamer which Messrs. Maltby & Worden of Raffles Place had distributed among the leading merchants as an advertisement of their shipping and exporting house.

THUS you get some idea of certain forces, working beneath the surface of everyday affairs in Singapore, which were more or less responsible for shaping the subsequent activities of Jim Medford, the former war-correspondent, and the members of his supposed scientific expedition. Medford had one or two old friends in the city, as he had in various other Asiatic ports, formerly visited, and three of his companions had seen enough of the East to form pleasant acquaintances.

Just when Major Worthington was in-

troduced to them, or what he did for a living, neither Medford, Torrey nor Stevens had any definite idea. The man's face seemed familiar in that vague manner which implies casual acquaintance during some earlier visit to the place, and that impression was strengthened by a remark which showed that he had followed with interest the details of their recent experiences and was in no doubt as to their identity. But it was not Worthington who directed their thoughts into a channel of inquiry as to further activities which might appeal to them. This came about one hot moonlit evening on an upper veranda of the Singapore Club—overlooking the harbor, with its mass of Chinese houseboats close inshore, twinkling lights from anchored battleships and steamers reflected in the water—when Rundell Worden, partner in a big Raffles Place shipping-house, answered a question of Medford's concerning a steamer he had formerly known.

"I fancy one of our firm should be able to tell you what became of the *Naroona* if anyone in Singapore could—but Lloyd's people had her on the missing list by the end of nineteen-fifteen. There were, however, certain features connected with her disappearance which have never been satisfactory or conclusive evidence to some of us in the shipping trade—such, for example, as a peculiar similarity between her case an' approximately thirty other boats of various tonnages which have also turned up missing since the war started. The *Naroona*, as you'll doubtless remember, was a new boat in nineteen-twelve—built at Newcastle for the British India at a probable cost of eighty thousand, sterling. Well, she'd been out here a few months on the Bombay-Mauritius run, when a couple of Swedes in Batavia got the notion she could be made to pay in a passenger an' cargo run between Java an' the Pacific island groups—so they offered ninety-five thousand. Said it was worth the extra cost to have such a boat when the season was right for their proposed trade.

"Of course, they got her at that price. Spoke of adding other boats as the business warranted 'em—but meanwhile incorporated as the Steamship *Naroona* Comp'ny, Limited. Lloyd's Register is full of single-steamer comp'nies, as you know. An' in order to get back some of her cost as workin' capital, they sold shares to Chinese provision-dealers, ship-chandlers and the like—in Hongkong, Saigon, Singapore an'

Batavia. Then they insured her in one of these private mutual coöperative associations which are right enough when all the subscribin' shipowners are honest, but a dead-loss proposition when they're not."

"How long did they run her in that Island trade? I don't remember hearing of her in the Pacific."

"She left Batavia on her first voyage, with a dozen passengers for Makassar and Zamboanga. Took on six passengers at Zamboanga for one of the German ports in East Papua—an' has never been reported since! Lloyd's posted her missing, as I said—but the 'mutual' comp'ny in which she was insured would never accept her loss as proved—or claimed there was something fishy about it. Anyhow, they never paid up, as far as the smaller Chink shareholders could find out. Then, after a few months, a circular was sent to each of 'em by the two Swedes who bought her, sayin' they'd take a chance on eventually collectin' something by way of insurance, an' offerin' sixpence in the pound for their shares. Looked like that much salvage out of an otherwise dead loss, and so the Chinks all parted with their shares on that basis."

"**H**AS anybody an idea how much they held, altogether?" inquired Medford.

"I was comin' to that. Rather diffic'lt, tracin' every holder of single or five-share certificates between Surabaya and Hakodate, you know; but the big influential natives turned up enough to make something of an estimate. They figure that over a hundred thousand pounds, in small shares of the *Naroona*, were held by the Asiatics of one breed or another."

"Which makes—at sixpence in the pound?"

"A beggarly two thousand, five hundred p'unds! Representin' a clean profit to them on that boat of a hundred an' two an' a half per cent—plus the boat herself if they salve her, plus the seventy thousand insurance, if they don't."

"If they collect the insurance or ever find her again—very neat! Otherwise they make but two thousand, five hundred!"

"Man, dear, for why d'ye suppose they offered that sixpence in the pound? D'ye fancy for one moment it was a gamble? Aye? Now listen to the rest of my story! In the last six years there'll be nigh thirty boats which have been purchased some-

where between Zanzibar an' Vladivostok, incorp'rated as single-ship or two-boat comp'nies—an' either posted as missing or resold at some ridiculous price for diff'rent reasons.

"Eight of 'em were condemned by surveyors in some out-port as unseaworthy an' sold as junk. But not one was broken up. The purchaser managed to get to sea in 'em an' has never been heard from, since. Fourteen were run out an' back a couple of times on the proposed new services for which they were bought,—some as half-passenger, some as cargo-boats only,—then sold for a song to pay accumulated port-charges because they'd lost money steadily on their runs, as every practical shipping man said they would. In each case, mind you, the boat has eventually disappeared. In each case a lot of small shareholders—mostly Chinese, Malay or Hindu—have been forced to sell at sixpence or ninepence in the pound an' charge up their experience to profit an' loss. Of course, with all the millions of natives out here, few of them have been 'done' twice—but your native is a born gambler, an' always will be."

"Hmph! I suppose none of this has been going on since nineteen-sixteen? England and France commandeered practically every bottom after the submarine business commenced!"

"Every bottom under one of the Allies' flags—aye! Of course! But d'ye see, every blasted one of those boats was incorporated under the flag of a neutral! They were bought by Swedes, Danes, Norwegians, Dutch, Spaniards an' even Argentinians! Bought in each case before the war broke—in 1914, but they've been disappearin' right up to the time the armistice was signed."

"Well—but— Look here, Worden! Of course, with all those boats actually missing, it would be ridiculous to assume any prearranged plan beyond the individual cases of swindling the little shareholders on each steamer! But as a matter of cold legal fact, with the insurance still unpaid, the actual owners of those boats, to-day, are the neutrals who now hold the shares—wherever they are, eh? And there's absolutely nothing to prevent those same neutrals from selling out for a mere pittance to some heavily capitalized German company any time after a peace-treaty is signed—or before, for that matter!"

"Precisely! The British Secret Service

has had that possibility in mind for some time—also the one that German capital may have been used all through—the whole thing planned to provide Germany with a future East Indian fleet long before the war was started. An' not one of those boats'll run under four thousand tons, d'ye see; they're from that up to eight or nine thousand. We'll get a good bit of deadly competition out here if a fleet like that is suddenly turned loose on us before we can make up the tonnage lost in the war!"

"You're figuring, of course," commented Medford, "that most of them may be simply hidden somewhere—or possib'ly sunk in shoal water where they can be easily raised? Why the devil haven't the British and French navies been hunting for them during the past two years?"

"Among the Dutch Indies, for example—where such a proceedin' would be out-an'-out violation of their sovereignty an' neutrality? Every one of 'em is under a neutral flag, you know! What could we do or say if we did find 'em? What's to prevent their bein' sent up the River Plata under changed rig, paint an' name—an' hidden in some of the South American bayous runnin' into it? Supposin' the Argentinian officials had their own reasons for winkin' at it? Everyone who's not a bally fool knows that Germany's makin' colossal preparation to capture world trade after peace is signed, an' that she's just as determined to rule the world as she ever was—one way, if not another. If we play into her hands in future, as we did before, she'll jolly well do it! An' that's no joke! If those missin' ships could be located, it would be something to go upon. But the legal ownership is the stumblin'-block; I fancy there'll be no way of gettin' around that in Admir'ly or international law, d'ye see."

IT was getting along toward midnight. One by one, members and guests of the club had left the upper veranda for a motor spin before retiring—along the moonlit Buena Vista Road with its magnificent ocean views, or out along Orchard Road to their homes in Tanglin. Medford and Stevens had been rooming at the club for several nights, and they remained for an hour longer on the veranda, stretched in bamboo deck-chairs, after Worden had left them—half dozing, yet with their minds full of what he'd been telling them. The

lighted ports in the shadowy hulls of warships and steamers disappeared as the current was switched off, leaving but a solitary riding-light, forward and aft, on each craft. From the mass of Chinese houseboats alongshore, the murmur of voices had died down to an occasional guttural exclamation—startlingly distinct in the stillness which had fallen upon the harbor.

In the morning the Americans took rickshaws across Cavanagh Bridge to the "Raffles," at five o'clock—routing out Sam Torrey and Fred Sayre, who were staying there with another of their men, and went aboard the *Bandarwallah*, where their number-one boy soon had a most appetizing breakfast ready under the awning on the after-deck. The early morning hours in Singapore are delightful, with their usual cool breezes, and Medford's mind had been so busy with the story of the missing ships that he was obsessed with the desire to discuss it with his companions in some place where there was little chance of their being overheard. While the meal was being served, he avoided the subject, but when the table was cleared and their cigars lighted, he sauntered over by the rail to see what other craft were in their immediate vicinity. Then he told the number-one boy to keep all of his crew up forward until they were sent for. Looking after the amiable Chink, who padded quietly away with a smile of perfect comprehension, he wondered how far it was really safe to trust him—but unconsciously became more positive when Stevens raised the same question.

"By thunder, I like that boy! And yet—damned if I've ever been able to make 'em out! I've had Chink oilers and stokers below with me on many a voyage; never had one mite of trouble unless they got scared or superstitious about something. Come to think of it, we did have one nasty mess when three Fukien men started a tong war among themselves and cut the mate rather badly as he was trying to separate them! That might happen anywhere. But—about our number one and his crew? What d'ye think of 'em, Cap'n?"

"You went through your clothes and stuff, below—didn't you, Larry?"

"Yep—not a single thing missing, far as I could see! Nothing disturbed except clothes. All my white drill had been washed and put away neatly folded. Three pairs of shoes beautifully pipe-clayed—and half a dozen neckties pressed as good

as new. There were even three Straits dollars in a pocket of my uniform coat, exactly as I'd left 'em when the Chinks came aboard. But the point I had in mind was whether they might have had orders to be straight in little things and yet try to get a line on us from what they could overhear? Hey?"

"I think not. Unless I'm way out in my reckoning, we just by a fluke did something so unprecedented in the matter of the Rajah's jewels that every Asiatic between Suez and Japan is strong for us and feels like treating us the same way if he ever gets the chance. Major Worthington inferred—from a remark he overheard in one of the bazaars—that our number one and his crew are considered lucky men by their friends ashore. The main consideration with me is that they were put aboard by Lee Fong Yan, whom I know to be a wealthy and influential man here, with a Cornell education—also, that he is undoubtedly a pretty close friend of Wu Ching Lun in Batavia—to whom we're under considerable obligation, one way or another. According to my figuring, if any one of these boys aboard of us failed to be absolutely straight or defend our property to the limit—well, he wouldn't live very long after he got ashore! I'll even bet the drinks that they won't let anyone come within hailing distance of us while we're having our powwow here."

"What you got on your mind, Cap'n? I reckon we're safe enough."

Medford gave them in detail the story of the missing ships, repeating, as nearly as he could remember it, everything Worden had said about them. Then he leaned back in his chair and lighted a cigar, waiting to hear their remarks. Presently, Fred Sayre began to speculate a little.

"Cap'n, if you've fed us the dope just as that shipping feller gave it to you, it looks like to me as if the whole game was a plant! Ships turn up missing—of course. Lloyd's publishes a report every three months of all the boats overdue. And the quarterly missing-list of steamers runs from six to twenty—all tonnages, all over the world. 'Twont average more'n one ship a month, bigger than two thousand tons. Twelve a year, in peace times—out of, say, twenty thousand, that size. Or, say, a hundred an' twenty a year—all sizes—out of forty-five thousand steam vessels afloat. Durin' the war the raiders out in these waters sunk a lot, but not over

twenty that haven't been accounted for—and far as anyone knows, there wa'n't any subs out here. So your thirty missing steamers, all above four thousand tons, would be about on a peace-time reckonin' in Asiatic waters. Which makes the number four or five times bigger'n Lloyd's average missin'-list. Get me? When you're right down to cold figgerin', there's something mighty fishy about them boats!"

"Yes—I sort of guessed you'd see it that way. Well, for a side speculation, about where would you say they might be?"

"Say, Cap'n, if a boat is lyin' on sand bottom in ten fathoms, some little bay where there's never any rough water to jolt her, no holes or nothin' in her, just a case of openin' her seacocks, how expensive a job is it to raise her with pontoons?"

"Probably not over a few thousands—if you get cables under her without too much trouble. But why go to even that expense when she can be easily hidden without sinking her? And in ten fathoms, her masts would be above water—top of the funnel too. At fifteen or more fathoms, raising her would be far more expensive!"

"Where could you hide 'em—in these waters? Not in any country belongin' to the Allies, 'cause their coasts an' rivers has been too closely patrolled."

"Well—let's consider that a bit! We've a specially equipped chart-room below. I guess perhaps it would look a bit more like our own professional work if we continued the discussion down there. It's still cool enough to be comfortable."

IN a few moments they were perched on stools around a big table in what had been formerly the after saloon, but which had been converted into a marine laboratory with various instruments and glass receptacles filled with specimens. Medford had unrolled two large-scale charts—one of Borneo, and the other of the entire Eastern Archipelago. An Admiralty "Pilot" lay open upon one corner of it.

"Let's consider the possibilities in Borneo first—because it's the biggest and least explored of the lot. Sarawak, of course, is out of the question—Rajah Brooke knows what goes up every river or creek in his territory. Brunei and Sandakan are both English—nothing doing in either. The rest of the island is Dutch—and the Dutch Government has more or less sympathized with Germany

all through the war, though the people have not. But the bulk of Dutch Borneo is ruled by its own native sultans and rajahs, with merely a Resident to advise them. On the south and southeast, the only sizable rivers deep enough for any such boats as we have in mind are the Barito and the Kutei. There's so darned much foreign trade with Banjermasin that no big steamer could get up the Barito without being spotted and reported. Same with the Kutei—the petroleum-boats going up to Samarinda are a procession; nothing would get by 'em."

"How about this Great Kapuas River on the west coast?"

"That's a possibility. Of course, one would say that nothing would get by the town of Pontianak, which is a regular port touched at by the Koninklijke boats every three or four weeks. But you'll find mighty little information about Pontianak and its exports; there are practically no white men in it except Hollanders. It's on one of the river's smaller mouths. There's another entrance farther south, with two fathoms on the bar at low water—fourteen-foot rise when the sou'west monsoon is blowing; and a boat getting in that way wouldn't go within fifty miles of Pontianak. There's been no British survey of that river, but it's longer than the Barito, if anything, and probably has a fairly deep channel.

"Suppose the bar of this entrance has been dredged, on the quiet, to four fathom? Anyone planning so big a game would scarcely overlook a detail of that sort if he needed more depth. That river is close to four hundred miles long, with a number of tributaries running into it. Malay country under native rajahs—no white men up there at all, unless Dutch Government agents. Not in the least impossible for some German, supposed to be a naturalist or botanist, to have confabs with the rajahs—make them generous presents to see nothing, hear nothing, of any steamers hidden away up some of their rivers. Presumably, none of the Dutch agents would accept bribes from Germany—eh? Nobody's suggesting that. Might be possible for several boats to be hidden away up that river without the Dutch Government's knowledge—if we admit some collusion upon the part of the rajahs and sultans."

"Wasn't there a river on the east coast where Captain Sam Nickerson found a steamer and salvaged her?"

"Yes—the Sesajab, the only river along there in Dutch territory where a good-sized boat might get across the bar after a week or two of heavy rains. There's a trading village on Tarakan at the south entrance, but you can get in by another passage farther north without being seen by any except native river-boats. The Resident does some patrolling in his launch to keep tabs on the rubber and spices coming down the river from the up-country rajahs, who get better prices from outside traders when they can run the stuff through to them, but it wouldn't be so difficult a matter to dodge him if one knew his habits pretty well—or was tipped off by one of the natives. Aside from those two rivers, there are hundreds of landlocked coves in the Moluccas and along the east coast of Celebes where boats might be hidden away for a year or two without much chance of being seen by a white man. In fact, I'd almost undertake to put away thirty steamers myself where the chances would be a hundred to one against their being reported to any white authorities for at least three years. Might slip up with some of 'em—but not if I'd been laying my plans several months in advance, as the Germans did in so many cases! If this is a boche scheme, you can gamble the big noise who put it through knew exactly what he was about and what he could do, long before he made any break at it."

NEXT to Medford, Sam Torrey and Larry Stevens were the best educated of the remaining six—men of wide experience in many different lines. They had been intensely absorbed in the missing-ship proposition, as much so as Medford himself, but they now began to experience a sense of futility as they both unerringly spotted the stumbling-block to any sort of action by people who had no financial interest in the boats.

"Say, Cap'n! This story of yours sure got us going. But the plumb aggravating part of it is that there doesn't seem to be a chance for us to do anything about 'em! If they happen to be anywhere on top of the water, they're under neutral flags—undoubtedly in neutral territory, where there aint a ghost of a chance for salvage on 'em. Even if we located each one of the possible thirty, we couldn't lay a finger on her, legally!"

"Oh, that's understood, of course! But

the legal side of it isn't bothering me such a lot. The whole proposition smells to heaven of fraud—and unfair commercial advantage upon the part of a nation which has proved itself an enemy of the civilized world! Fraud against the innocent shareholders who considerably oversubscribed the value of each vessel in perfect good faith. Fraud against Lloyd's and those mutual marine assurance companies—which may actually exist in each case, and may not. Suppose we locate one of those boats and fetch it in here to Keppel Harbor—or up to Hongkong. They'd claim, of course, that we were pirates—seizing the property of other people, not on the high seas but in territorial waters, which makes it an even worse offense. We'd say, on the other hand, that we'd found a missing steamer and saved her. If they say they purposely hid her, they convict themselves of criminal intent. If they don't, our claim for salvage would be allowed by any court, and the laugh would be on them. Lloyd's and those mutual companies would libel any ships we brought in—and hold them in a British port until the claim was settled."

"Not unless they'd actually paid over the insurance! Otherwise they'd have no claim!"

"H-m-m-m—that's a point I'd overlooked! You're dead right, Larry! To the best of my recollection, Worden didn't mention a single case where the insurance had been actually paid on one of them—which means they'd be just as much the owner's property in Hongkong as wherever they're now hidden. By thunder, the gang who planned this game are no fools! They've managed to get the boats under flags where they couldn't be seized for war use—and then freeze out every minority shareholder who might have a claim!"

"Well, we're just about where we started, aint we? Not a thing in the world to be gained by hunting 'em out or taking any further interest in the matter—eh?"

"Apparently not! And yet somehow I've a hunch that we may do a lot with those boats—before we're through with them. Haven't the faintest idea how. But there's money in the proposition somewhere, and the game looks as though it might offer a lot of excitement. If we could get at the identity of the men who are actually the legal owners to-day, keep tabs on 'em for a while, I'll bet we'd find some loophole where they've been just a

little mite careless. Wonder if there's anyone in Singapore who really knows any of 'em?"

"How about that Major Worthington? Kinda seemed to me, when he was talking with us, that he knew half the white men in the East Indian ports—and he's lived out here a good many years."

"I was thinking of him myself. He frequently plays bridge at the Singapore Club after dinner—and drops in for tiffin when he's anywhere near Collyer Quay."

AT one in the afternoon Torrey and Medford ran across the Major in the club grill—and afterward adjourned to the upper veranda with him for a smoke. Presently Medford spoke of the story Rundell Worden had told him the night before, and asked if anyone knew just who the actual owners of the missing ships were. The Major puffed thoughtfully at his cigar for a moment or two—until they began to wonder if he had heard the question. Then he said—with a smile:

"You young men are like others I could mention—you all seem to be itching for a chance to burn your fingers against something which is too hot a chestnut for even His Majesty's Governm't to handle. However, that's none of my affair. I can give you the names of two Danes, a Swede, two Norwegians and three Spaniards who are on Lloyd's records to-day as owners of steamers in that missing lot. Some are here in Singapore, some in Batavia, Hong-kong—and I believe one is now in London. No connection between them has been established, to my knowledge; yet I have just a belief of my own that a certain big Swede, in Singapore at this moment, not only knows every one of them but may be secretly directing their actions.

"I'll tell you why I think so. There's a Chinese snake-dealer up yon in Rochore Road who'll sell you any sort of a serpent to be found in Asia—used to supply Hagenbeck regularly. He has quite a sizable *godown* with a big cellar underneath, where one never feels precisely comfortable. It's not over well lighted, d'ye see, an' some of his pets are always crawlin' about the place; he says they keep healthier, movin' about. Well, Svenson, the big Swede, drops in there frequ'ntly to order snakes for one correspondent or another in Europe. At least, that's his excuse, but the trade in snakes must be more extensive than one ever dreamed, if he's not

lying. An' I've heard that every one of those steamship owners has been there, one time or another, for a chat with Sam Wong—presumably about snakes. Fascinatin' subject, of course—but why particularly so to shipowners? What?"

"Does Svenson live here, in Singapore?"

"He's rubber int'rests, up on the Peninsula—looked after by a cousin who has a bungalow near the Botanical Gardens at Tanglin—naturally, the cousin puts him up when he's here. But the man rarely stays more'n fortn't. Just now he's here—shippin' a good bit of rubber. I say! If you've realy an int'rest in the chap, you might take a rickshaw up there about five this afternoon an' drop in to look at snakes in Sam Wong's *godown*. Of course, it's purely a gamble. Svenson mayn't go there for another month or so, but you might happen upon some of the other crowd. I'll go along if you like—as if we were doin' the town, d'ye see, an' if there are other men about the place, I may recognize 'em. But I'll not go in myself—don't care to have the appearance of nosin' about as if I were lookin' for somebody, you know."

NEARLY everyone traveling in Asiatic waters has heard of the bird-and-animal shops along Rochore Road in Singapore. If he can stand the prevailing smells, he's probably seen them—for it is doubtful if in any other city of the world there is such a market for every sort of beast, bird or fish, no matter how rare. In fact, the Chinese and Malay dealers will quote an approximate price for any desired creature, all the way from fifty cents to twenty thousand Straits dollars. Topographically, Rochore Road runs back from the sea in the northeast corner of the city—which is the Chinese and Japanese quarter.

Dismissing their rickshaw *wallahs* at the corner of Victoria Street, Medford and Torrey sauntered to the *godown* pointed out by the Major—who was pricing fantailed goldfish a little further up the road—and went in to inquire if Sam Wong had ever heard of a coral-snake with peculiar markings, said to inhabit the interior of Borneo and to be the most poisonous reptile known. Wong said, without a moment's hesitation, that he had sold perhaps half a dozen.

Seeing that Medford knew something about snakes, the Chinaman began dis-

cussing the habits of different varieties, taking cobras and other deadly species from their cages to illustrate his remarks, until his visitors' nerves were fairly on edge. His size and rolls of glistening fat would have qualified him for an Eko-in wrestler in Tokyo. During the talk they descended to the big cellar which the Major had mentioned—and the Americans were obliged, several times, quickly to sidestep a friendly reptile on the floor which evidently wished to climb their legs.

While they were talking, the cellar steps creaked under the tread of a heavy man who approached them in the dim light with the certainty of one quite familiar with his surroundings. His manner was insultingly arrogant, as if dealing with inferiors, and he didn't hesitate to break in upon their discussion with the evident purpose of causing the two Americans to leave. Although his accent was Swedish, there was to their accustomed ears an unmistakable German flavor in it. Some instinct caused Medford to turn his face away from the light as Svenson came toward them, and nudge Torrey to do the same—but Sam misunderstood, and stepped directly under the swinging lantern which hung from one of the beams. With a low growl of recognition, Svenson came nearer and peered into his face.

"So! One of the scoundrels in our U-boat—who try to sink us in the Molucca Sea! *Ja!* Andt this other man iss the *verdammte* Medford, who steals the boats of other people andt makes sinkings of them! *Ja!* Well—I settle wit' both of you at once!"

AIMING a blow from his huge fist that would have broken a man's neck had it landed squarely, the brute—who was now unmistakably Prussian, with years of army training—sprang forward. Torrey barely escaped by ducking to one side—but the only move that Medford made was to extend one leg and plant it firmly against a near-by post until, stumbling over it, Svenson pitched headlong upon the floor near a mass of squirming snakes, which were around his shoulders and arms before he could pick himself up.

So far, the affair had lasted scarcely more than a minute, and Wong hadn't stirred from where he stood, placidly filling his mandarin pipe with tobacco from a silk pouch. While Svenson was clawing with rage and horror at the cold slimy

things writhing about his neck, the Shantungese observed—as if their conversation had been merely interrupted by some ordinary occurrence:

"I think, pelhaps, you better catchee top-side pletty much *chop-chop*. Man cally gun in pocket. Mebbe so him come plenty shooting this side when he take off my pets from neck. Can happen. Mebbe so you keep 'bout six feet away when cobras passing—they like stick out head for apple. Goo'-by! Come 'gain this side—talk snake more pleasan' day. Yaes?"

It sounded like fairly good advice, though both of them wondered why—if Sam Wong really had secret dealings with Svenson and his gang—he hadn't mixed in and finished them on the spot. It would have been a simple enough matter to dispose of the bodies after dark, in a city whose population is ninety-eight per cent Asiatic. They would have been still more surprised had they heard the talk when Svenson finally got rid of the snakes and saw that the Americans were gone.

"The defil! Why you did not stick in them the knife, you fool? Why you let them go and more trouble make for everybody! *Donner!* Those scoundrels are dangerous—*damn'* dangerous! They steal my U-boats! *Ja!* Look you, Vong! You catchee some of your Chinks *chop-chop* andt follow t'ose men! Slip der knife between their ribs to-night! I give a t'ousand dollars cumshaw—five hundredt now—five hundredt when I hear they are deadt! *Ja!*"

Wong shook his head.

"No can do! Man, man velly numbeh one individuals! No Chinamans touch 'em for million dollehs. No Malay, no Hindu, no Tamil, no Japanese. No can do! Velly top-side individuals."

And that was all the satisfaction the big Swede got.

MEANWHILE—with nerves on edge from their hour or so in the house of reptiles—the two had regained the street and picked up Major Worthington in a rickshaw down near the Raffles Reclamation, taking him along with them in a motorcar as far as Tanjong Pagar—where a launch took them off to their ship. The moment he stepped on deck from the accommodation-ladder, Medford called his number one boy.

"Wun! You savvy Sam Wong, the snake man, in Rochore Road?"

"Yep. My savvy Wong. Him this side me—like fam'ly in Shantung."

"Ever see a big Swede that buys snakes from him—altee same Svenson?"

"Yep. My savvy Svenson—all time him catchee Singapore."

"Well, we left him there half an hour ago. He tried to kill us—and he's a bad lot. I want him followed! Want to know where he stops—who he talks with! If he goes away, I want to savvy what boat—what port or direction! Must savvy before he actually go! Can do?"

"Maskee! My plenty savvy. Can dòi!"

Wun Hop beckoned a passing harbor-boat and slid down the accommodation-ladder into it before they realized that he thoroughly comprehended his instructions. Inside of an hour he was back—it seemed incredible that he could have made any arrangements to carry them out. Yet in that time he had jabbered for ten minutes in the Shantung dialect with a fellow-countryman who—had anyone been observant enough to notice such things—was invariably squatting on his haunches somewhere about the Tanjong Pagar wharves during the entire time that any of the white men were known to be aboard the *Bandarwallah*. And from the moment Svenson finished dinner in his cousin's bungalow at Tanglin, that evening, his every move was shadowed. On board the little motor-ship—when an American mint-julep was standing on the skylight-coaming at Major Worthington's elbow—he inquired how they happened to get into a mix-up with the big Swede. Medford explained—without the least suspicion that he was talking to a British Secret Service man who had unerringly calculated the possible moves on the board when he first secured an apparently accidental introduction to them. It was of course impossible to guess in advance what crazy adventure such men were likely to attempt, but he was banking on the law of averages and what he knew concerning the general make-up of their sort.

"This thing is getting pretty interesting, Major—goes back further than you think! Several months ago, in New York, John Satterlee and I figured out from a bit of chance information that two German U-boats had never been turned over to the British Navy as required in the armistice terms—also that they were in possession of a Swedish syndicate which had managed to hide them among the less-known Pacific

atolls for some future use that looked mighty serious to us. Satterlee—you know him, I think—financed an expedition, fitted out a menhaden-trawler for me on the Pacific coast, found these jolly good chaps to go along—and we nabbed those subs as you've heard.

"Before we left, however, that syndicate nearly got me in Frisco; and in giving them the slip, I learned who some of the outfit were,—two are wanted for murder in New York. Then, in the Molucca Sea, the big chief and one of the others sighted us in a sub from the *Kokura Maru's* deck and tried to shoot us. That man—whom I have reason to believe handled the whole U-boat scheme from start to finish—is a German Count, von Sommerlich, and no Swede at all! Do you get it? We run up against your man Svenson in a Rochore Road snake-cellar—and find that he's von Sommerlich! You say he appears to be the main squeeze in your missing-steamer proposition. We know him for a Prussian who had two of the latest, most efficient subs up his sleeve until we swiped 'em! Do you begin to see how it figures out? Eh? I'm onto von Sommerlich's trail until I somehow get the goods on him—if it takes a leg! That man and his gang have got to be put out of business—or they'll make the old Malay pirates look like thirty cents and give you some deadly competition out here!"

"My word!" Worthington was apparently flabbergasted, but inwardly he was shaking hands with himself.

A WEEK later Medford received a message at the Singapore Club that the polished and wealthy Lee Fong Yan would like to see him "*chop-chop*" in the private office of his *godown* in Telok Ayer Street. As it was but a step from the clubhouse on Collyer Quay, he was lighting one of Lee's choicest cigars inside of fifteen minutes—listening to information which he had not anticipated from that source.

"Several months ago, Mr. Medford, the cousin who manages Svenson's rubber plantations two hundred miles north of Penang bought a little coasting steamer to fetch his shipments down here, because there's not water enough in the river to get a good-sized tramp up there and load at the source. She was docked at Tanjong Pagar, her engines ripped out and turbines installed. With a half-load, or in ballast, that coaster will do better than twenty

knots to-day—and her little saloon in the 'midship house is fitted up with a degree of luxury rather amazing on a cargo-boat, though very few people know anything about it, or her speed. As a matter of fact, Svenson uses her for business trips among the islands and has picked up several cargoes of native rubber from the Borneo rajahs."

"And Svenson is sailing for some place unknown on that coaster to-day—is that the idea?"

"The boat is clearing for Sandakan, and will get away before sunset; probably not more than half a dozen people know of his leaving on her. Of course, you can't keep up with him in your motor-ship—the best she ever did was a little over seventeen. But one of my people in Sandakan has a fast power-boat. He'll keep track of Svenson and follow him for a day or so after he leaves—communicating with you the moment you reach that port."

Thanking his Chinese friend, Medford hurried out to a rickshaw and spent the next hour rounding up his men. When they were all aboard the *Bandarwallah*, Wun Hop surprised him with a statement that the ship had been provisioned for three months and her oil-tanks filled, several days before, by Lee Fong Yan's orders—settlement for which could be made upon their return or at any time that suited their convenience. This left nothing to do by way of preparation save getting his clearance and bill of health from the port authorities,—a detail which occupied little more than two hours,—and Medford decided to take the Chinese crew with them. At dinner that evening he told the others that he had no intention of stopping at Sandakan.

"I'm going to play a hunch! Lee says that Svenson usually stops a couple of days at Sandakan, getting reports from his agents up-country and enjoying himself with the women—fancies himself a lady-killer. That ought to give us time to run into the Sesajab ahead of him—and I'm gambling on that being where he means to hole up for a while."

NOW, the experiences of Medford and his companions up that river in the northeast corner of Borneo, practically unknown to the outside world, would make a story by themselves. They avoided the little native village of Linkas on the island of Tarakan by going up one of the other

passages—and had painted the hull of their ship with a camouflage design which gave it very low visibility. A few miles up the river they were met by the launch of the Dutch Resident, whose native deputy was entirely satisfied with their scientific-expedition permit for territorial waters. Thirty miles from the delta of the Sesajab—examining, in a small boat, every creek on either side—they discovered one of the missing seven thousand-ton steamships with no evidence of life aboard save a couple of cats, and so covered with vines that it would have been impossible to find it without careful search. Within the next forty miles they found fifteen other steamers, none of them under four thousand tons. On three, there were a few men, evidently caretakers who occasionally visited the other ships to see that nothing was injuring them. A former North German Lloyd boat, the *Graf von Pappenheim*, appeared to be a flagship of the hidden fleet. She was so thoroughly concealed by dead brush and trailing lianas that Medford and his companions supposed the voices they heard to come from a small village or native hut half a mile up a fairly deep tributary stream. But next morning a launch with four unmistakable Germans aboard ran down the river, and they were able to make a thorough examination of the boat. Inside, she had been kept in disciplined order—even to hot and cold baths, galleys, pantries and dining-saloon. The staterooms were fully equipped with fairly clean bedding and wash-basins. The Captain's room and two larger staterooms were securely locked, but they managed to get a partial view of them through the ports—enough to reveal a small safe built into the bulkhead of one, and various objects indicating their use as business offices of a sort.

Next morning, when their own boat was carefully hidden a little farther up the Sesajab, they saw the coaster in which Svenson had left Singapore anchor in mid-stream, and the man himself run up in a launch to where the *Graf von Pappenheim* lay. A few hours later the coaster dropped down the river again—proceeding, as they supposed, to the port for which she must have cleared from Sandakan. Svenson was now at home in the jungle headquarters he had prepared for himself—but whether the time was yet ripe for him to make some definite move, they couldn't determine. So—through the intense darkness of a tropic

night in the rainy season—four of the Americans, with three of their Chinese crew, silently paddled down the river and up the tributary until they were alongside the former German liner.

WHEN five of them had climbed to the deck, like so many shadows, they stowed themselves away in a corner of the after well until Wun could do a little scouting which he had previously suggested—having once made a trip on the boat as saloon-steward, and knowing her as he did Singapore streets. For nearly an hour they waited—until it seemed as if something must have happened to him. Then—he was standing by them like a ghost which had materialized out of nothing.

According to his muttered report, there were but four of the Germans on the entire ship—two bo's'ns, who relieved each other on a regular watch at the fo'c'stle-head, which commanded the approach from down-stream, and acted as mess-stewards when their superiors were aboard. The others were Svenson—or the Graf von Sommerlich, as they knew him to be—and a man whom he called O'Grady, a presumable Sinn Feiner who appeared to be his chief executive in the steamship game. These two were holding a conference, over whisky and cigars, in the captain's room.

As the two bos'ns appeared to have been disciplined with sufficient brutality to keep entirely out of hearing, up forward, until they were called, Medford and his four companions noiselessly made their way up to the "B" deck and stole along to a niche in the house-bulkhead where, through an open window in the bathroom, they could distinctly hear what was said, and see the two men through a communicating door.

During the next half-hour the discussion ranged pretty much over the entire plan to spring the steamers upon Asiatic trade as the fleet of a brand-new passenger-and-freight company—acquired by purchase from former owners of the individual ships. They even discussed the cargoes they were sure of, and went into most enlightening details which showed that a number of exporting houses in various Asiatic ports, under neutral and even British names, were actually owned and controlled from Hamburg—in position to divert a large amount of trade to the new shipping-company.

In fact, it was quite evident that Prus-

sian interests would be in position to get and expand a proportion of Eastern trade never contemplated in the Peace Treaty then under discussion at Versailles—provided there was no legal or technical hitch in the question of ownership as it concerned the missing steamships. This seemed to be the only point upon which O'Grady was the least apprehensive. He finally asked Svenson if he was positive he had covered every possible contingency. With a muttered curse, the Prussian twirled the combination-knob on the safe and swung the door open.

"*Donner!* I haf gone over every paper many times! There iss no possible question! Look you! Here iss thirty packages—minority share-certificates of efery steamer—indorsed with names in English andt Chinese ideographs on the backs! The transfer of those shares iss beyond question. At der proper time, the nine of us whose names are now on the stock-transfer books as owners vill turn these shares over to the new company in exchange for its preferred stock. Andt there you are! Efery steamer on this rifer andt the Great Kapuas iss registered with the British Lloyd's andt the French Bureau Véritas under Svedish, Danish, Norvegian, Spanish andt Argentine ownership—andt one of those flags iss always flying at the ensign-staff by the stern of efery boat. *Ja!* There iss not'ing which can legally interfere with us. *Nein!*"

"Faith, 'tis confidence ye give me, Count! But it sames a dommed risky place for ye to be kaping those bits o' papers that'll be m'anin' so much to us! Why did ye not stow them in the safe-deposit vaults of the Hongkong an' Shanghai Bankin' Corp'ration—in a box of your own which none else could touch!"

"Andt—if we shouldt make one little mistake somewhere—have the *verdamnte* British Gofernment put seals on that box until the courts ordered it opened—yes? Even in Batavia they might get some extradition paper which would make the Holländische Gofernment open it. No! There iss nowhere else so safe as this—Eh? What the defil—" (Torrey's foot had slipped on a greasy plank, throwing him heavily against the bulkhead.)

FOR the next few minutes there were confusion and action enough on the promenade-deck of that former liner—hidden away in a Borneo jungle—to satisfy

the craving of any red-blooded man. From the second that Torrey pitched against him, Medford knew they were in for a fight of extermination in which quarter would be neither given nor asked. Through the window and open doorway he saw von Sommerlich's hand flash toward a light-switch—and fired two blazing shots before the current could be shut off.

As the big Prussian fell sideways across the table, smashing bottles and glasses to the deck, O'Grady sprang out of the door, pulling an automatic from under his coat as he ran. He was so dazed by the suddenness of the interruption that he'd no idea just where the attacking party were posted, but came out of the door blazing away, up and down the deck. Then he crept along the bulkhead in the darkness—hoping to slip inside the saloon gangway; but a pig-tailed shadow came from behind a ventilator-cowl and reached up over his left shoulder. There was a gurgling cry of horror as eight inches of steel were shoved down inside his collar-bone and ribs, severing the carotid artery and penetrating his heart.

Stevens—sensing a possibility that the two bo's'ns might spread an alarm which would result in a destruction of all the hidden ships, if they escaped—made it his business to get after them from the very start. Before they quite dared to leave the fo'c'stle-head and investigate the shooting aft, a voice addressed them in fairly comprehensible German, from the darkness, with an order to put up their hands. A few moments later they were handcuffed and shoved into the steamer's brig. To this day they have no idea what happened to Svenson or O'Grady.

AT first Medford was inclined to leave the *Graf von Pappenheim* where she was—after removing all traces of the struggle in Svenson's cabin. But the certainty that some of his subordinates would visit her, suspect that something was wrong and take action which could not be foreseen or guarded against, made him hesitate. Then Stevens clinched the decision by pointing out that bringing the steamer into Singapore harbor would prove their story indisputably and secure prompt Government requisition upon the Dutch Government for immediate possession of the others. So with the assistance of Wun

Hop and his Chinese boys, they managed to get both ships down the river, across the bar, and to cover the short run to Sandakan, where they obtained a larger crew for the passage to Singapore.

Upon reaching there, Medford took all of the share-certificates to Lee Fong Yan, knowing that his secret organization was far-reaching enough to hunt out the original owners and either return the shares, retaining a power-of-attorney, or buy them in at a reasonable price. A month later he was notified by the Hongkong & Shanghai Banking Corporation that an individual sum of fifty thousand pounds had been credited to his account and to that of each man in his party. That evening Lee—in brocaded-silk mandarin clothes—came out to the *Bandarwallah* and explained.

"It is very simple, my good friends—and you need have no scruples about accepting the money. On the assumption that all those steamers are fetched into British ports with their engines, hulls and fittings in fairly good condition,—the Dutch Government has given permission for a dozen ocean-going wrecking tugs to go after them,—they represent, to-day, a cash value of over three and a half millions, sterling—possibly more than four millions. So that three hundred and fifty thousand for you seven is but ten-per-cent salvage—which I think any Admiralty court would award you.

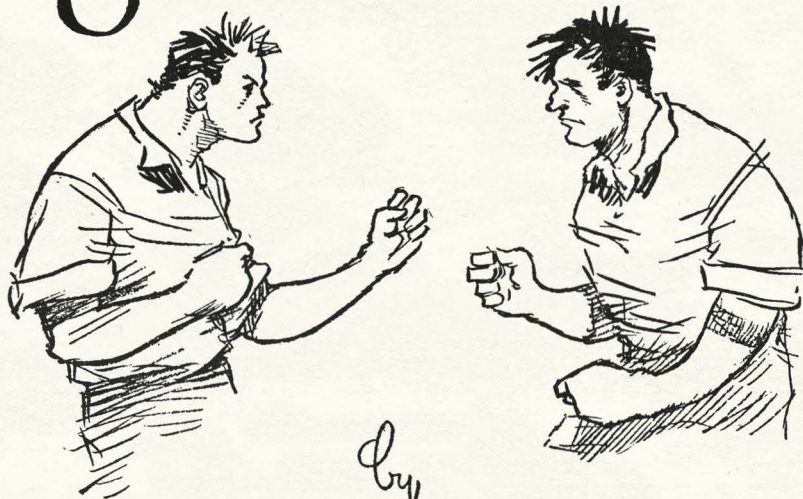
"Aside from that, however, you have for the second time returned stolen property to Asiatics—which is quite unusual, to say the least. And in every instance the shareholders have insisted that a large proportion of their holdings be handed over to you in cash. Our possession of them, of course, amounts to bona-fide ownership of the steamers—no matter in whose hands they may have been previously. Er—we are not meddlesome in other people's affairs, as a rule—but I must confess to very great curiosity as to where you got those shares—and how?"

"Why—er—that was simple enough. We—d'ye see—happened to run across 'em while we were pursuing our scientific investigations—so fetched 'em along. That's all. Can happen."

"Hmph! I hope the scientific societies appreciate your labors as fully as some less distinguished people I could name!"

There will be another absorbing story of the "Deep Water Men" in the next (the March) issue of The Blue Book Magazine.

Wager of Battle



by

Elmer E. Ferris

A STRIKING story of salesmanship under peculiar difficulties—wherein the sale was put over only by the use of keen wits backed by a good right arm.

THERE was an ancient English custom incorporated into the common law, known as "wager of battle," which constituted a method of settling a legal controversy by means of physical force—that is, by a regular knock-down-and-drag-out. The man who won the fight got the legal decision. It was a species of physical lawsuit. This form of action was long-ago discontinued, because based upon a fallacy—that might was right. Our ancestors took it for granted that Providence would not permit an unjust cause to win; a hazardous assumption, however, when that cause was a personal one and represented by the stronger and more skillful party.

However, there are some things to be said in its favor. For one thing, the consciousness of being right tends to make one irresistible. Notice the case of a small dog that is placed on guard over some of its owner's possessions. It will put to flight a much larger dog who attempts to interfere. The small dog knows it is right, and hence in the wager of battle it comes out victorious.

Furthermore there is something singularly convincing in a situation where wrong, having been hit in the solar plexus,

it is lying upon its back taking the count. There are conditions where that kind of a verdict seems the only one that will actually get across. But to our story.

"**N**O, Mr. Thomas," asserted Donald Ferguson, general manager and buyer of the Northwest Logging and Lumber Company, "I am not buying a thing just now."

"That coffee I sold you last was all right, wasn't it?" inquired Billy.

"Yes—all right," admitted Ferguson.

"The price was right too, was it not?"

"Yes, the price was right."

"Your present supply will last you only about thirty days?"

"Just about."

"Well, a good business manager like you doesn't do things without a reason. You must have a reason for keeping off the market," persisted Billy.

"You said it!" replied Ferguson. "I have a reason."

Billy waited for Ferguson to proceed, but he did not proceed.

"Let me in on it," said Billy presently.

"On what?" asked Ferguson.

"On that reason," said Billy.

Ferguson removed the pipe from his

mouth and glared at Billy. Ferguson's favorite indoor sport was bawling out salesmen, and Billy's cool persistence afforded an excellent opportunity. But he replaced his pipe and puffed silently for a time. Billy made no further overtures.

"All right!" cried Ferguson suddenly. "I'll tell you the reason, and maybe you will have a suggestion. My reason is this: these camps may not be running, thirty days from now!"

"Not running!" exclaimed Billy in amazement. "You're not going out of business?"

"Not if we can help it!"

"Going to bust?" grinned Billy.

"No sir—we were never better fixed financially."

"Men going on strike?"

"Now you said something!" declared Ferguson grimly. "We are liable to be tied up any day."

"You always seemed to get on well with your men; what's the matter with things now?"

"Sure, we always get on well with our men!" cried Ferguson. "I was a lumberjack myself once, and I know what is the right thing. I came up into these woods fifteen years ago without a dollar, and got a job as a lumberjack. I worked hard and saved my money, and after a while I got to be foreman of one of the camps. Then later on they made me superintendent of all the camps. After that I bought stock in the company and finally got to be vice-president and general manager. I have had charge of all ten camps for the last eight years.

"We have made money every year—not big money, but a good fair profit. We did it by hard work and careful management, and one of our business policies has been to give our men liberal treatment. Our labor policy has been to run an open shop and pay our men better wages and give them better treatment than union men get in other camps. It is true we ask our men to work hard, but no harder than we all work, and no harder than I always worked when I was a lumberjack. In return for this we pay them liberal wages and give them comfortable quarters and plenty of good, wholesome food. I built that gymnasium room just to give them recreation. During all the eight years since I have been general manager, this is the first time there has been any discontentment among our men."

"WHAT are they after—higher wages?" asked Billy curiously.

"They haven't formulated any demands yet," replied Ferguson. "The situation is simply seething and sizzling. Their attitude is changing. Instead of being on good terms, they are getting grouchy and independent."

"I presume they will organize and ask you to recognize them," suggested Billy.

"Worse than that!" growled Ferguson. "I am beginning to think we have some of those I. W. W. devils in the camps. And I think I know who the ringleader is, too: a big husky guy named Buchdorf—he looks like a Russian. He is a bully and a scrapper, and he is filling the men up with I. W. W. rot or I miss my guess."

"Why don't you fire him?"

"He's got a good hold on the men, and he'd hang around down at Black Duck, and it might make matters worse. Seems to me we've got to start a back-fire right here in the camp. I haven't decided how to do it. I am telling you this to see if you have any idea."

Billy rubbed his chin reflectively. "How does Finnerty stand in this matter?" he asked.

Ferguson broke into a laugh. "I see your mind is running in the same direction as mine," said he. "I've thought of Finnerty several times. I don't think Buchdorf has approached him—they wouldn't be exactly congenial, those two. Finnerty is a fair-minded fellow, and he's bright—he'd see through that I. W. W. game, all right."

"Yes, and I don't think Buchdorf could bluff him, either," grinned Billy reminiscently. "Finnerty is a bearcat when it comes to a scrap."

"By the way, did you and Finnerty ever go to a finish with the gloves?" asked Ferguson. "You boxed him a five-round draw in the gymnasium once, I remember."

"No, we never got around to finish that, but I am interested in Finnerty aside from his athletics. You remember I told you that I might get him a job with our company, and you said it would be all right. Well, I took it up with Mr. Boyd, and he has arranged to take Finnerty on."

"For the love of Mike, don't disturb him until after we get the I. W. W. business out of the way," protested Ferguson, quickly.

"Certainly not; but that job with our company—we plan to put him on the sales

force—may be an inducement for him to get busy on this I. W. W.," grinned Billy.

"What is the big idea?" asked Ferguson.

"Well, Finnerty is popular with the men, and he is one of them. If we could interest him enough so that he would go right to it, he could probably turn the tide—we might be able to run Buchdorf out of the camp. But Finnerty wouldn't get into the game unless he were convinced that the company is in the right. How about that, Mr. Ferguson—are the men really getting a square deal?"

"Absolutely!" cried Ferguson. "I will show you the books. They are getting the big end of it. I can prove that to your entire satisfaction!"

"Well, then, supposing I put a little time in on this thing, and supposing Finnerty and I succeed in putting it across? You know I am not a strike-breaker or a detective. My business is selling goods."

Ferguson reflected for a moment. "If you check those I. W. W. devils," said he, "I will give you a contract to buy from you all my supplies in your line at market price for one year! How is that?"

"That's what!" cried Billy. "I'll spend this evening with Finnerty."

THAT evening Billy and Finnerty were seated alone in a shanty back of the bunk-house. "I took that matter up with Mr. Boyd after I got in from that trip," said Billy, after recalling their former conversation, "and on my recommendation he is going to give you a try-out on the sales-force. And believe me, Finnerty, you'll make a go of it."

"Sure I will!" cried Finnerty enthusiastically. "When do you want me to come?"

"I want you to help me put over a big sale up here first," smiled Billy.

"What is that?" asked Finnerty.

Billy then related the conversation with Mr. Ferguson. "How about it?" he asked. "Are there some guys here talking I. W. W. stuff?"

"They are that!" asserted Finnerty. "And I am glad Ferguson is on to it. I had half a mind to go and talk with him about it. That man Buchdorf acts like a professional agitator. He's an I. W. W., or I miss my guess."

"How does he go at it?" asked Billy.

"Why, he gets after the men one at a time—takes the leaders. He's over there near the eating-shack right now giving old Larson an earful. Ole is a good, sensible,

hard-headed guy, but a kind of suspicious cuss, at that. Ole has a lot of influence with these Norwegian lumberjacks, and what he says goes with them, and of course Buchdorf knows it; and for several days now he has been getting Ole off alone and pumping him full of revolution. Ole sort of stands him off, but all the same, anyone can see that Ole is getting sour on the company."

"Have you taken a hand in the thing?" asked Billy.

"No, I have been cutting logs and minding my own business," replied Finnerty. "You see, Mr. Thomas, if I get into that thing, it would lead up to a scrap with Buchdorf."

"And then what?" grinned Billy.

"Then Buchdorf would get his!" shouted Finnerty, savagely. "But all the same, he's a fighter, and one of these dirty fighters, at that. He's the kind of a fighter that would break your arm or bite your ear off. He's a powerful cuss, too. He licked one of them big Norwegians last week, and the way he bit that fellow up was a fright. I'm not afraid of him, Mr. Thomas, but why should I mix it with him? I'll say I can lick him, but what's the use! Oh, boy!" cried Finnerty, suddenly breaking into a laugh. "I would give my shirt to see you go up against him!"

"Maybe I would be the one to get it," smiled Billy grimly, "but of course neither you nor I would side-slip Buchdorf if we had a job on hand that ought to be done. Of course, the company is absolutely right in this thing. Ferguson showed me their books. They cleared only ten per cent last year. The men are getting all that is coming to them. Now, unless this trouble is checked, there will sure be a strike, and the camps will probably close down. That would throw these men all out of work, and my company would lose a good customer, and you and I would lose a big sale. It's up to you and me to get into it."

"Get into it, how?" asked Finnerty.

"Why, get busy the way Buchdorf does it. You would be a good propagandist, Finnerty. You could beat Buchdorf at his own game."

"Will you get into it too?"

"Not just yet. I have no influence with the men. My part just now is to get you going. Then later on I may be able to do something direct. I would leave you my route and run down here at once if you should wire. I would act on your judg-

ment. I'll do teamwork with you, Finnerty. You won't be left in the lurch."

"We're on," said Finnerty grimly, and they shook hands on it.

OVER near the bunk-house Ole Larsen and Buchdorf were engaged in an earnest conversation.

"Who is it that really makes all the profit? Isn't it the workers?" asked Buchdorf savagely. "And who takes all the profits and puts them into their pockets? The bosses and the plutocrats take it all. Aint that so?"

"Yes, but those plutocrat, he bane got the brains to run the business," protested Ole.

"He has the brains to make you and me work like horses while he sets in a swivel chair or rides around in an automobile. He's got brains to take what we earn."

"But Ferguson, he bane work hard all the same," contradicted Ole.

"Yes, so he can save all the more money and hire more men to work for him and make him rich. He don't earn what he gets. He makes you and me earn it for him. The workers will never get what belongs to them, Ole, until they take the business and run it themselves."

"You tank me and you bane run it so good as Mr. Ferguson?" asked Ole skeptically.

"If we couldn't, then we could find some worker who could. The difference would be this: we would pick the boss instead of having a boss pick us."

"I tank Mr. Ferguson, he bane know more about business as any man in this camp," insisted Ole. "I tank when we bane run the business, we make hell of a mess."

"See here, Ole," said Buchdorf, taking a different tack, "do you get all you earn? Do you get enough so you can buy what you want? Are you satisfied with what you get?"

"No," admitted Ole, "every man he bane want more as he got."

"Yes, and these bosses and plutocrats want not only what they make, but what you and I make too. The workers earn these big profits, and they have a right to take them, and they are going to take them. These rich men have got to divide up. The workers are going to run business and the government too. We are fools, Ole, to be satisfied to live like cattle.

There's going to be a revolution some day, and the workers are going to get what belongs to them."

"I tank if they grab too much, they bane git it in the neck!" observed Ole sagely. Nevertheless, in spite of his resistance to Buchdorf's doctrine, Ole began to grow somewhat restive and discontented.

AMONG some of the other men, however, Buchdorf's ideas met with a much readier acceptance. Economic theories such as his are naturally congenial to certain types of minds, to whom they seemed reasonable enough when presented by a plausible talker like Buchdorf. "Go into any city of considerable size," Buchdorf would say, "and notice the heaps of expensive merchandise in the big stores, the fancy dresses and clothing and finery, and look at the stacks of fancy foods in cans and packages at the grocery stores, and just take a slant at the fine watches and diamonds and fancy adornments in the jewelry stores, and look at all the automobiles on the street and the elegant homes along the avenues—and tell me this: who gets all these good things? Why, the bosses and plutocrats get them, don't they? But who produced all these things? Who made them? The workers did! Aint that so? Then who ought to have them, the plutocrats or the proletariat who produced them?"

Now, it is a most attractive proposition, this dividing up theory, and it has never lacked enthusiastic advocates, especially among the proposed beneficiaries. The scheme certainly looked good to these lumberjacks. They talked about it and argued over it among themselves, and a good proportion of them were heartily in favor of it. It looked like everything to win and nothing to lose. It was not a matter of merely getting higher wages—it meant getting the whole business—that is to say, their "rights." They were ready for "direct action" on confiscation or any other plan of procedure that Buchdorf might advocate.

INTO this situation Hobe Finnerty projected himself with all the ardor and enthusiasm of an embryo salesman who is going after his first big order. He was too diplomatic to come out openly upon the side of the company. He was from Missouri—he wanted to be shown. If there was anything coming to the men that they

ought to get, he was in favor of it, he was one of them. But who was going to run the business if they should oust Ferguson. Would Buchdorf be as good a man to manage it, or would Ole Larsen, or who? How much money was the company making, anyhow? Finnerty had heard that they made only ten per cent last year. That was a pretty small margin when things were so carefully managed. Supposing the company was managed by some one who didn't understand the business, and it should run at a loss. Where would wages come from. If these camps should shut down, where could the men get a job at as good wages and have as comfortable quarters and as good grub as Ferguson was giving them.

Finnerty wanted to know, and being a man of force and personal popularity, he soon began to offset Buchdorf's propaganda. Buchdorf was not slow to realize that he had here an antagonist who was quite as skillful as he in the matter of personal persuasion. Several times he tried to pick a quarrel with Finnerty, but in Finnerty's judgment, the proper time had not yet arrived, and he skillfully avoided a physical clash without appearing to back down.

TWO weeks later Billy Thomas received a telegram as follows:

Come up on first train. Things are getting hot.
FINNERTY.

Billy wired back at once:

Shall reach there to-morrow noon.
THOMAS.

Upon Billy's arrival at the camp he got into conference with Finnerty at the earliest opportunity.

"The thing is coming to a show-down," said Finnerty after giving Billy the details. "We are going to have a meeting of the men to-night in the gymnasium room, and you are going to give them a talk."

"Holy smoke! A speech! Where did you get that?" gasped Billy.

"No—not a speech, just a talk. You can talk, all right. You see, you had a good introduction to the men that time when you and I had that boxing-match, and I've been telling the men that you are a friend of labor. You're a union man, aren't you?"

"Sure, I worked at a trade before I went

on the road," said Billy. "I joined the union, too—here's my union card."

"That's it," cried Finnerty approvingly. "And you can give them a talk about business and management and the rights of labor and then rub it into these cussed agitators—see?"

"Will Buchdorf be there?"

"Will he?" grinned Finnerty. "He sure will!"

"Your idea is to have me start something?" asked Billy.

"Sure," assented Finnerty. "Start something good and plenty."

"And who will take care of Buchdorf—you or I?"

"I don't know—that depends on how the thing moves," replied Finnerty. "I guess there will be a scrap, all right, and it wont make much difference whether it's you or I. Of course, it has got to be a fair fight—just one of us must get into it."

"Sure—a fair fight," agreed Billy.

"It wont be a fair fight on Buchdorf's part if he can make a dirty fight out of it. Believe me, if ever a man in this camp needed to have his face punched in, it is Buchdorf!"

"Here's hoping!" said Billy.

WHEN Billy faced the crowd that evening in the gymnasium, he sensed the fact that while his audience was not hostile, neither was it exactly friendly. He had met many of them once before and had parted on friendly terms, but just now there was a natural query in their minds as to what his relation to the present controversy might be. Billy went to the point at once.

"One reason why I have come here," began he, "is because I have a personal interest in this matter. Let us have a frank understanding. I sell goods to this company, and when things are going along well with them, I get more business, but when they get into trouble, I don't get so much business. I was up here recently, and Mr. Ferguson wouldn't buy any goods because he said he might be obliged to close up the camps if his men should go back on him. So you see, men, that I've got a personal interest, as well as you have.

"But I am interested in labor, too. I used to be a laboring man myself, before I became a salesman, and I was a member of the union, too—here is my union card." And Billy displayed the card before the men. "I am not saying that you men

ought to join the union; but I joined it, and I believe in labor unions, too.

"Now, then, the first point I want to make is this: It is mighty important for you men to have steady employment, and you can't have that unless the business makes money. If the business should run at a loss, it would soon shut down, and you would be hunting a job. Now, how much money is this business making, anyway? I had occasion to find that out awhile ago. It made just ten per cent net last year. That is not a very big margin. The management is economical, too. The manager works harder than the men. He knows the business, too. There is not a better lumberman in the woods than Ferguson. Now, then, boys, it is a hard matter to get hold of good business brains. The hardest man to find is a good manager. There are lots of jaw-smiths running around the country,"—and Billy glanced over in the direction of Buchdorf,—“but good business managers are scarce. It is an easy matter to wreck a business. It is a darn sight harder to build a business up. There are lots of these wind-jammers and jaw-smiths that are ready to tell how a business ought to be run, but put them in charge of it, and the business would not last six months. It has taken Mr. Ferguson fifteen years to build this business up, and if a man of his ability and experience can make only ten per cent net profit, why, if the business should be put under the management of a crowd of workmen, headed by some of these jaw-smiths, it would lose money and go to smash inside of three months. Isn't that so?"

Ole Larson, who was sitting in front, nodded his head gravely in approval.

"Now, then," continued Billy, "one big item of expense in this business is labor, and this company pays higher wages than any other company up in these woods. They do, don't they? And they spend more money making the quarters comfortable and more money on the food than any other company. Isn't that true? Now, then, how much is labor entitled to get out of it, bearing in mind that the most important thing in any business is the management?"

"Well, first of all, labor is entitled to a good, decent living. Then next it is entitled to a fair chance to lay up some money by exercising economy. Then in addition to that, if the business is prosperous, labor is entitled to a chance at some

of the luxuries that it produces. Now, I don't know whether you men are getting what you ought to get out of the business or not. I believe you are, although I don't know. But there is a fair, square way to find out: appoint a committee of three intelligent men—let Mr. Finnerty here be the chairman. Let the committee go to Mr. Ferguson and go into the question with him. Let them investigate it and see whether you are getting your share. That is the fair and honest way to go at it.

"And now let me warn you against one danger, boys. There are men going around this country pretending to be workingmen, but in reality they are nothing but agitators. They pretend to be interested in raising the pay of the workingman, but all they raise is trouble. They are professional trouble-makers. They are simply trying to smash things. They fool the honest laboring man and get him into all kinds of differences. They are nothing but a bunch of Bolshevists."

WHILE making these statements, Billy was looking straight into the eyes of Buchdorf, who for some moments had been shifting uneasily in his chair. Suddenly he sprang to his feet, his face flushed with anger.

"See here, my friend, are you talking to me?" he cried.

"You mean, am I talking about you?" corrected Billy ironically.

"Are you?" cried Buchdorf, glaring menacingly at Billy.

"If the coat fits you, put it on," rejoined Billy.

"Well, let me tell you what I think of you!" shouted Buchdorf. "I think you are a dirty four-flusher. I think you have been hired to come here and pull the wool over the eyes of these men. You are one of these hypocritical smooth-boys that pretend to be a friend of labor, but the plutocrats own you body and breeches!"

"Thanks!" rejoined Billy coolly. "And now I will tell you what I know about you. I don't think or guess—I *know!* You are a yellow I. W. W. You are no American. You remind me of a Russian Bolshevist. You ought to move to Mexico or back to Russia, where you belong."

Buchdorf's face grew purple with rage. "I'll make you eat them words!" he shouted as he threw off his coat and rushed toward Billy.

Billy had also removed his coat and was

awaiting Buchdorf's rush. Finnerty sprang in between the belligerents.

"Fight this out like men, not like dogs!" he shouted at Buchdorf threateningly.

"Out of the way!" roared Buchdorf. "Out of the way, or I'll break your neck!"

"Stand back, Finnerty!" cried Billy sharply. "Let him come!"

FINNERTY stood back. Buchdorf, with a snarl like that of an angry wolf, hurled himself upon Billy—but Billy was not there. He deftly side-stepped, and at the same time sent his right fist crashing into Buchdorf's left eye with such force that he was sent staggering back against the wall. Buchdorf gathered himself and made another rush, and this time he succeeded in seizing Billy in his powerful grasp. One arm was thrown around Billy's neck, and he tore at his face with fingers that were like clutches of steel, meanwhile bringing his teeth down near Billy's ear.

"Fair play, now—fair play!" shouted Finnerty, restraining himself with difficulty.

"Keep off, Finnerty!" cried Billy. "I'll get this bird!"

It seemed at first shock that Billy was overmatched, but right here his knowledge of wrestling came into play. He quickly secured a half-Nelson lock; and Buchdorf to his amazement suddenly found himself flung into the air and down upon the floor with a terrific shock. Billy quickly sprang back, and as Buchdorf arose, met him with a left hook upon the jaw. Buchdorf threw up his fists to ward off this blow and left himself unguarded. Quick as a flash, with every ounce of force he could muster, Billy sank his right fist flush into the solar plexus of Buchdorf.

There is one blow in a fight which inevitably spells defeat—the solar-plexus blow. Buchdorf crumpled up and sank to the floor. He lay there trembling and helpless, with eyes wide open—a look of abject fear upon his face.

"Are you through? Have you got enough?" shouted Finnerty, bending over him.

"Yes," gasped Buchdorf dazedly.

"He's licked! He's out!" shouted Finnerty to the crowd.

It was several moments before Buchdorf recovered sufficiently to get upon his feet. One of the men then helped him from the room.

This solar-plexus verdict was also the

verdict of these lumberjacks. Both Buchdorf and his theories stood utterly discredited—he had lost his case.

Ole Larson took the floor. "I tank I motion we make a committee like Mr. Thomas he bane tell us about," said he. The motion was seconded and carried, the committee appointed and the meeting adjourned.

PROMPTLY next morning the committee waited upon Mr. Ferguson at the office. They were courteously received. Ferguson produced the books and records and carefully went over the whole matter with them. The committee agreed that the men were getting fair treatment, both in the matter of wages and otherwise. "And now, since you men are disposed to be fair and reasonable," said Ferguson, "I am going to advance wages fifty cents per day for the balance of this year. If you give us good, hard work, we may be able to hold it right there next year; I hope so."

After the committee had gone, Billy Thomas presented himself. His right hand was wrapped in bandages, and upon his face were several strips of court-plaster. He radiated the aroma of tincture of arnica. As he entered the office, Ferguson's face broadened into a sardonic grin. He opened a drawer and drew out a couple of documents which he handed to Billy. "Here is your contract," said he, "and also a list of goods which you may ship at once—four thousand pounds of coffee among the rest, same grade as before."

Billy glanced over the list with a smile of satisfaction. "This is a bully good order!" cried he. "I am much obliged, Mr. Ferguson."

"Not at all," responded Ferguson. "You earned it. Buchdorf quit the camp this morning—good riddance. It was a workmanlike job you did, Mr. Thomas."

After leaving the office, Billy hunted up Finnerty.

"Well, I'm off," said he. "I guess you had better stick around here for a couple of weeks until Ferguson is ready to let you go. Then hike down to Chicago, and your job will be ready for you. By the way, Finnerty, here is a point in salesmanship that is worth remembering: About fifty per cent of the selling game consists in doing something else besides just selling the goods—see?"

"I get you!" said Finnerty.

Easy Money



(What Has Already Happened.)

THE whole thing came about through my going into a curio shop and buying the lacquered jewel-box—because I found it had a secret compartment in which was a part of a letter.

This letter made reference to 108, 876 Gans, a letter of credit deposited with Krantz, Waldron, what seemed to be a password,—*Cervantes*,—Watonian and a reference to a South American code. I set out to investigate and found that the box had been left by two men in a hotel room. They had registered as P. Horner and Gustave Alva; the box had not been claimed.

Krantz proved to be the name of a wealthy German banker; at 877 Gans Street was a deserted factory building, with the name, The Alva Malleable Iron Works, over the door.

An attractive girl and a man with a scarred face presently entered the building,

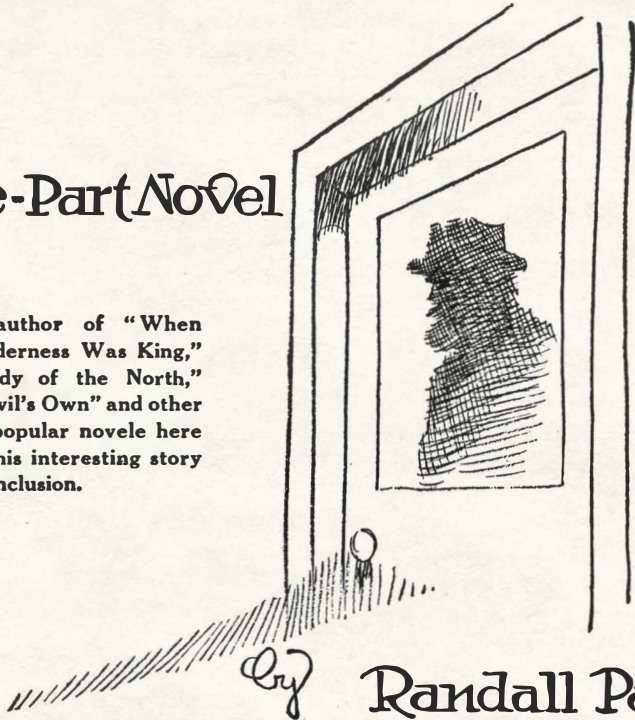
and I followed. While I was feeling my way along in the dark, a man came up and called me Charlett. I gathered from his conversation that there was some sort of a meeting taking place there. The answers I made to his questions seemed to satisfy him, and he assumed I was one of the gang. I heard voices coming from a lighted room further on, and listening, I learned that the girl was Marie Gessler, that she had come from Washington with a message from a man named Mendez who seemed to be the leader, and that the man with her was named Alva. They were plotting to start a war in South America. An unnamed man had to be put out of the way before things could be started.

Another man came upon me in the dark, and when he looked at my face, he took me for an English criminal named Daly.

Horner left me; the girl Marie Gessler came out and questioned me. She told me to meet her next day at two o'clock at 247 Le Compté Street and to ask for Miss Conrad.

A Three-Part Novel

THE author of "When Wilderness Was King," "My Lady of the North," "The Devil's Own" and other widely popular novele here brings this interesting story to its conclusion.



Randall Parrish

When the meeting in the other room had dispersed, Horner came back—and told me the whole story. Coming over from England, he had met a man named Horner and by accident discovered that he carried a letter of credit for a million dollars and was a secret agent of some sort using the number 108. After they reached New York, the real Horner mysteriously "disappeared" and Harris took Horner's name, came to Krantz as 108, gave him the letter of credit, and met Alva, who seemed to be the New York head of the gang. He and Alva spent a night in a hotel, and it was there they left the jewel-box. Horner's plan was to get the money when Krantz turned it over to Alva, and he offered to go fifty-fifty with me.

After Horner and I left the building, I went down the street alone and came upon a deserted automobile. In the front seat was Alva—dead. On the floor of the car lay a long, thin-bladed dagger like one I had noticed that evening used as a hat-pin by Marie Gessler. I took the knife and put it in my bag at the hotel.

There was no one by the name of Conrad at 247 Le Compte Street. The newspaper accounts gave nothing new about the murder. Costigan was worried about Harris, so I told him about the plot. In

response to a phone call, I met Marie Gessler, who had discovered who I was from my Yale signet ring, went with her to Perond's café, a dangerous place, where we saw Waldron and Harris and heard them quarrel about the money which had been turned over to Alva. When they saw us, there was a fight, and after knocking them out the girl and I got away. I found the dagger gone from my bag.

Harris called, and to find out what he had to tell me about Marie Gessler, I walked into a trap at Costigan's. Locking me in a small room, Harris, Waldron and Costigan told me they knew who I was and demanded the money. When I told them I knew nothing about it, didn't believe Marie Gessler killed Alva and was for her and against them, there was a fight and I was knocked out.

CHAPTER XX

A VENTURE OF PERIL

I MUST have remained unconscious for an hour or more. I never really knew how long, for my watch had disappeared; but it was still night when I again painfully opened my eyes and endeavored to perceive my surroundings.

At first all was a blank. Then it all came back with a flash of revelation—the three men facing me in Costigan's little office, Harris' threat, and the fierce fight which had followed my words of defiance. Memory of the blow which ended the struggle caused me to lift a hand to my head; the scalp was bruised and broken, the hair matted with clotted blood. My body ached, as if I had been savagely kicked after I fell, and my throat was raw from the pressure of Costigan's knuckles; yet no bones seemed broken, and with an effort I could use my limbs. I braced myself on one arm and in a sitting posture endeavored to survey my surroundings.

I was resting on the floor of a bare room of ordinary size, containing no vestige of furniture. What appeared to be a bedspread, originally white, had been thrown over me, and my head had reposed on an old coat, rolled up for a pillow. The place was cold, with that indescribable chill peculiar to unused apartments; and through the one window poured the light of an almost full moon.

I staggered to my feet. They must have felt that I was safe enough in this place, for they had left no guard. A glance without revealed the reason for such confidence. I was four stories up, and at the bottom was a concrete walk. The bright moonlight flooded everything about, but I saw nothing familiar; I was evidently at the back end of a house, with others closely set on either side, and beyond a small, inclosed yard an alley. Three stories below, and to the right, a narrow porch protected the back door. There was no movement visible anywhere, no gleam of light from the windows below me.

I stole as silently as possible across to the door. It was securely locked, of course, and could be forced open, if at all, only by creating considerable alarm. I stood staring helplessly about, feeling the impossibility of escape. I could only wait for my jailers to appear, impotent to aid myself—or her—in any way. After all, that last thought was the most impelling. Those fellows would turn to her, now that they had me securely in their hands. Inspired by the lure of that vast sum at stake, they would be restrained by no consideration of mercy, or even justice.

And the time in which to act was short. The fellows might already have her in their power, and if I waited until daylight

to attempt action, the danger of discovery would only be increased. Darkness, and the lateness of the hour, alone gave the slightest opportunity; if I escaped at all, it must be accomplished before my jailers returned. In desperation I crossed once more to the window and again looked out. The prospect appeared wildly impossible as ever, but I could not divorce my eyes, or thought, from that narrow stone coping above the window below. Could I—dare I attempt—to cling to that slight ledge in my stocking feet, even for the one or two steps necessary to reach the next window? The very conception of such a feat made my head reel giddily.

YET wait; there was a way—dangerous enough, to be sure, yet possible if I possessed the necessary nerve. I uncovered my eyes and looked out again, inspired by the new thought. There were opened blinds at each window; they would help as grasping-spots for the hands. The one within reach appeared solid enough, firmly anchored to the casement, and secured to the brick wall by means of an iron hook. Between the two the space to be traversed was not wide. If I had something to cling to above, I might hold my footing on the narrow stone and make the passage slowly. It was a daring, deadly venture, but possible.

But what could I hope to utilize as a support? The bare room offered but a single suggestion—the dirty coverlet which had been thrown over me. This was ragged but strong, and I tested it with both hands and feet to assure myself. Torn apart from corner to corner, and twisted into the form of a rope, it ought to safely sustain my entire weight in case a foot slipped. I started to tear with my teeth, and thus succeeded in ripping the thing from end to end. It was scarcely long enough for the purpose, which compelled me to make the noose correspondingly small. However, with this improvised lasso gripped in my right hand, I took position astride the sill of the window, in an endeavor to project the loosened end over some protuberance of the blind beyond.

By holding tight to the frame with my left hand, the right was left free, and I was enabled to lean out far enough to obtain a clear toss. There was little the noose could catch on, and I must have tried it vainly a half-dozen times before I conceived the idea of permitting the outer

end to slide down the face of the wall, rather than chancing it to a more direct throw forward. This experiment resulted in nothing for some time, the noose reaching its objective all right, but finding nothing to cling to, and so sliding along until it hung dangling below. The effort, however, made no noise, and I kept at it persistently, realizing that here was my only chance. Finally the ring of the cloth settled over an iron projection of the hinge and clung there, extending straight across from window to window. I hardly dared breathe as I drew the thing taut and tested the firmness with which it was held at the other end. The noose closed down tightly about the iron staple, and resisted every effort at release.

I easily found a secure fastening for the strip of bedspread at my own window, and then satisfied that it was taut and securely held at both ends, lowered my body cautiously over the sill, until my stockinged feet nervously gripped the narrow stone of the coping. I dared not look down or permit my mind to dwell for an instant on what was below. Slowly I straightened up until my entire weight was upheld by this precarious foothold. To advance step by step was impossible; all I could hope to accomplish in locomotion was stealthily to advance one foot a few inches, sliding it along the stone, ever retaining contact, and then, as carefully drawing the other after until they met, toe and heel. It was the slow progress of a snail, yet the slightest effort at hurrying would mean a certain fall.

This was not unduly perilous, however, so long as I retained firm hold on the sill, or even could grip my fingers over the lower frame of the open blind, as I was enabled thus to partly sustain my weight, and even if a foot slipped, the feel of the solid wood yielded confidence. But finally my hand reached out and grasped only the cloth cord, twisted into some semblance of a rope, and as it gave sickeningly to the pressure, the old fear swept over me in a torrent of agony. I could never make it—never! I would go swirling, crashing down to that death below. Yet there was no going backward; I tried this, only to realize at once its impossibility, and the perspiration burst out from every pore, as the full horror of my situation suddenly flashed over me. I must go on, trusting to that thin, unstable cord, balancing myself above the gulf. There was no other way, no re-

treat, no means of escape. I do not know now how the act was accomplished; it was done with closed eyes, with bated breath, with groping hands and feet working almost unconsciously, with a heart which seemed to have ceased functioning, and a deathly feeling of sickness no words can describe. Inch by inch I crept, hand encroaching on hand, foot pressing against foot, every slightest movement an inexpressible agony. Then I gripped the support of wood once more, and clung to it as with the grasp of death.

CHAPTER XXI

ANOTHER PRISONER

I CLUNG there until my mind came back, until I felt the return of strength to my body, and I could look down through the moonlight without reeling dizzily. The blind was strong, firmly braced, and I felt safe in its protection. I moved slowly, barely an inch at a time, each advancing foot feeling for support, but more confident now because of the grasp of my fingers on the upper wood. The window was closed, but dark and grimy-looking, as though the room within had been long unoccupied. I balanced myself on the precarious footing of the stone, clinging tenaciously with my left hand to the iron hinge of the blind, while my right endeavored to raise the sash. The posture enabled me to exert little force, and at first I believed the window firmly fastened down—the suspicion leaving me numb with despair. But reckless tugging loosened its hold, and enabled me to shove up the sash little by little, until finally the opening became sufficient for me to squeeze through. I felt as though I had returned from the dead, the nervous reaction so great that I lay for a moment on the floor where I had fallen, unable to move. I knew I was alone, the space untenanted, the walls as bare as in that other room from which I had fled. I knew this, and in my exhaustion cared to know no more.

Then I staggered to my knees, and with opened eyes stared curiously about, gathering my wits. There was nothing to see but the four walls, revealed in the dull glow of the sinking moon. I tried the door, and it opened silently, permitting me to glance out into a narrow, dark hallway, uncarpeted. I could dimly discern the top of a flight of stairs leading down to the

story below. I slipped out, closed the door softly behind me, and was plunged instantly into funereal blackness.

I groped a way forward toward the stairs, guided by a hand against the wall, until the touch of the upper rail assured me of my position. A narrow strip of carpeting extended down the center of the stairs, sufficient to muffle any footsteps, and I paused a moment, listening for the slightest noise amid the darkness beneath. All remained still and mysterious; I drew forth my shoes from my coat pockets and slipped them on.

The boards creaked ominously under my tread, but the noise must have been unheard, as no stir resulted, and I ventured again to slowly feel my way down gingerly. At last I attained the wider space at the bottom, and sought blindly to explore my surroundings. The darkness was intense; I could not even perceive my own hand before my eyes. And as a result of blindly groping about, I lost all sense of direction and must have wandered into a side room through an undraped recess, for I suddenly brought up against a table littered with papers and books.

STARTLED by this encounter into a realization that I was lost in a strange house at an unholy hour of the morning, and that the slightest misstep in that darkness might result in an alarm to awaken every sleeper, for a few minutes I did not venture to move in any direction. Yet I could not remain there indefinitely, and so, blindly choosing a course, I set forth, feeling a way cautiously forward until I first ran into a chair, and then struck one hand against a side wall. I followed this latter as best I could, colliding against various articles of furniture, but fortunately without noise, inspired by the thought that if I continued this course long enough I must attain the opening through which I had entered the room. In all probability this theory was a correct one, but on the way my hands felt the outlines of a closed door, and in groping about, encountered a key in the lock. It was so inserted as to be extracted at the touch of my fingers—and instantly a tiny ray of light shot forth through the vacated hole. It was such a relief in the heart of that darkness as to cause me quickly to bend down and endeavor to view the scene within.

The glimpse thus revealed was restricted, yet yielded a fair idea of the interior. It

was evidently a chamber of some size, and well furnished, a handsome green rug on the floor, and numerous pictures hung about the walls. I could perceive the outlines of a bed at one side, barely within the range of vision, and opposite this an ornate dresser with three mirrors. But what my eyes rested upon with greater interest was a luxurious leather couch beside the further wall on which a woman rested, with some sort of covering draped about her. She lay with face toward the wall, motionless, and to all appearances sound asleep. I could mark her regular breathing, but the only distinguishable features visible were the well-brushed hair, an ear, and the youthful contour of one upturned cheek.

There appeared nothing about her familiar, or of interest to me; to arouse her was the last thing I desired, and I would have slipped the key back into the lock and stolen silently along in the darkness had she not suddenly stirred, flinging out one hand as though in fear of some dream, and turned partly, so that her face became clearly visible. The sleeper was Marie Gessler! For a moment I could scarcely believe it; yet there could be no mistake.

Had she come voluntarily, or as a prisoner? Had Harris been right in his boasting that he knew who she was, and where she could be reached? Had he sought her the moment I was safely secured, and brought her here where we might be made to confront each other? Had she been tricked into coming, or brought by force? And was she held here helpless to escape? I tried the door softly—it was locked. This, coupled with the fact that the key had been upon the outside, served to answer the main question. However she came, she was now being held a prisoner.

Should I endeavor to escape from the house alone, and then return to her rescue with help—or face the greater danger of attempting to take her with me? The former move involved exposure of her whole connection with the affair, and I was afraid to take upon myself the responsibility. I knew not who she was, or why she had become involved in this mesh of crime. It would be better for me to tell her all first, and then act at her direction.

I REINSERTED the key in the lock noiselessly, shot back the bolt and opened the door, stepping quickly within to shut out the glare of light. It seemed

to me this was accomplished in utter silence, but she must have been sleeping very lightly, for as the door latched behind me, she was upon her feet, plainly startled.

"Who are you? What does this mean? Why, Mr. Severn!"

"Yes," I responded quickly, but making no effort to advance. "You've nothing to fear; only don't speak loudly."

"But please explain. I—I'm not afraid of you, of course; but—how do you happen to be here?"

I smiled, amused in spite of the danger at the absurdity of my situation.

"Perhaps you'll permit me to ask a question first, which may sound ridiculous enough—where am I?"

"You don't know?" she asked, her composure returning. "You are at 247 Le Compte Street."

"Waldron's house! That possibility never occurred to me. Sounds strange, doesn't it? But the truth is I was brought here unconscious, and have had no opportunity since to discover my whereabouts."

"You were attacked?"

"Slugged in Costigan's saloon," I explained shortly. "It took three of them to do it, but they did a good job. That must have been about midnight. What time is it now? They took my watch."

"It is after four; who are they?"

"Harris, Waldron and Costigan—some combination!"

"But why should they slug you, Mr. Severn?"

"Simply because of my connection with the mysterious Miss Gessler," I explained. "This seems to be the basis of all my troubles at present. Harris has chosen to associate us together, believing we know who murdered and robbed Alva, and where the spoils are hidden. They endeavored first to put me through the third degree, and when I refused to squeal—as you know, simply because I possessed no knowledge to communicate—they resorted to force, and here I am."

Her eyes, wide open, questioning, were upon my face.

"They—they asked you about me? Why should they suppose you know anything?"

"Largely because we were together at Perond's, I presume. Besides, there were certain circumstances which led Harris to associate us in other ways. He claims to know you—who you are. Is that true?"

"It may be," she admitted. "What has

happened to-night almost convinces me. I came here willingly, only to find myself a prisoner. Sarah Waldron telephoned me that she was ill, and needed me. I have known her ever since I was a girl—we were from the same town; so really I thought nothing unusual of her call. I have seen no one here since I came—no men, I mean—and did not remove my clothes, in anticipation of being called."

"Where is she sleeping?"

"In the room back of this."

"She claimed to be here alone?"

"There are roomers on the floor below, but I met none."

"Yet I found your door locked," I insisted. "The key was upon the outside, but turned."

"That is very strange. I heard nothing. Perhaps if you will explain what they asked you, we may come to some understanding of what this all means. Does Harris accuse me of the robbery?"

"Yes, and of the murder. He claims to possess proof, and threatened that he would denounce you to the police, unless he was let in on the division."

"Proof! What does he mean?"

"Well, the way he tells it, the thing does sound rather ugly," I confessed, believing the time had arrived for plain speech between us. "At least, I was in no position to controvert his claims."

"You imply you suspect me also of this crime?"

"No, not that! I have given you my faith; but it has been given blindly. You have refused me your confidence. I do not even know your name, how you became involved in this. You must acknowledge I am sadly handicapped when it comes to attempting your defense. When you are attacked, I can only close my lips and say nothing."

"You have been very true, very kind," she admitted, and extended her hand. "You must know how greatly I appreciate such faithfulness, Mr. Severn. But tell me what Harris holds to be proof against me. If all this be true, we can't waste time here in talk."

"NO, it will soon be morning, and all way of escape blocked. He is willing to swear you agreed to permit Alva to drive you downtown, and that you actually departed together. This charge can perhaps be answered by the testimony of Krantz, if he can be got on the witness-

stand, as you have told me he accompanied you on a street-car."

"Which is true?"

"I accept your word, of course, but Harris doesn't, and I must confess he has some evidence to create suspicion."

"You say that!"

"I must, to be perfectly honest. I will even confess there have been times when I doubted—never when I have been with you, but when alone, coldly facing the facts of the case. Let me tell you—Alva was undoubtedly killed with a dagger hatpin, exactly like that one in your hat there." And I pointed to it on the dresser.

Her eyes turned that way in an expression of startled surprise. "Killed with a hatpin like that of mine!"

"Yes; there is no doubt as to the nature of the weapon. I know more about that than Harris, even. The truth is, I was the first to discover the murder. I've never told anyone this, but it is true. I told you about my conversation with Harris, after the others had left the foundry. We must have been there alone for an hour. When we left, we separated, and I walked down Gans Street alone in the rain. Some blocks below the foundry I came on this car, bumped up against the curb, and apparently abandoned. Alva's body was hanging over the wheel, with a gash in the back of his coat sticky with blood. And on the floor I found the dagger hatpin, blood-stained. Then I knew."

"Knew what?"

"How the man had been killed. I believed then you were with him alone; I had reason to, for I overheard his invitation, and your answer. I recognized the weapon as one you had in your possession. My first thought was that it would utterly condemn you if ever found."

"And even then you sought to protect me?"

"I hardly know; it must have been true enough. I could not believe you guilty of deliberate murder. I meant to give you a chance; so I took the weapon away with me."

She drew a long breath.

"No one saw you?"

"Not a soul; the street was absolutely deserted. I wiped off the blood and hid the knife in my pocket until I reached the hotel; then I concealed it at the bottom of my valise."

"It is still there?"

"No; that is where Harris found his

other evidence, which he claims connects you with the crime. Something led him to suspect I was not Daly, and he set out to investigate. He had my telephone-number, and easily located both hotel and room. Waiting until I left the key, he entered and went through the valise in search of anything he could find. He came upon the dagger hatpin, remembered that you had just such a one in your hat that night, and instantly jumped to the conclusion, as he had seen the wound, that this was the weapon of murder. He believes we were working together, and this was why I had concealed the knife."

"And you—you believed what?"

"I believed in you," I said earnestly. "In spite of all, I believed in you. At first I thought it must be you; then I saw that pin in your hat again, when I knew I had one just like it hidden at the hotel. This gave me new hope, until I returned and discovered my valise slit open and the dagger gone. I knew of no one who would do such an act—or had occasion to—except you, in an effort to destroy evidence."

SHE did not move or speak, waiting for me to go on.

"Then later, when that was cleared up by Harris' acknowledging that he was the one who got the pin, I told him about your having your own in your hat at Perond's. I thought that might convince him he had made a mistake; but it didn't. He only laughed, and said you were smart enough to buy another, as soon as the first was found missing, that doubtless there were plenty to be had."

"He's right; there are. At least, I know of one shop on lower Broadway where they are for sale." She stopped suddenly, with a peculiar gesture. "Why, now I think of it, Sarah Waldron has one almost exactly like mine; I bought it for her."

"The woman here? Ivan Waldron's wife?"

"Of course; that's rather odd, isn't it?"

"It opens up a line of thought, anyway. Could you find out, do you suppose, if she has it still? What does she know about her husband?"

The girl laughed softly.

"Know! Less even than I do, I imagine. He doesn't show up here oftener than once in six months, and Sarah gets nothing from him. Why?"

"Because after all, it might be the Russian—not that I think he actually did the

job, but he might be mixed up in it in connection with some other crook. If he was, he would have to lie to Harris, and pretend to know nothing. You heard how those two talked at Perond's. What did you make of it?"

She frowned. "That they had planned together to rob Alva; that Waldron was to be hidden somewhere outside, and was to wait for Harris to signal him that the money had been paid over."

"Exactly! Harris failed to learn that the money changed hands, and consequently did not signal. But Waldron, nevertheless, was outside waiting—had no doubt spotted Alva's machine, and was ready to act. The one thing we do not know is—did Alva start home alone, or did one of the men accompany him? If the latter is true, then that fellow must have committed the murder, with Waldron a possible accomplice after the crime. The only other solution is that Alva picked Waldron up for companionship. Were they acquainted at all?"

"I think so, but am not sure; you said Waldron first reported this chance to Harris."

"So he did; then it is quite possible the two knew each other. That would make it easy for the Russian to ask a ride. Whoever struck the blow was in the rear seat. This theory fits in all right with his actions toward Harris."

"I am not sure I understand."

"Why, Harris hadn't signaled; therefore he had every reason to suppose Waldron knew nothing about Alva's having the money. Whether the murder and robbery was accomplished alone, or with assistance of some one else, Waldron would want all he can get out of the job. He wouldn't divide unless he had to. He was afraid of Harris that night; he had been keeping away from him all day, and he never got back his nerve until after he discovered that Harris possessed no knowledge of what had occurred—how Alva had met his death. When Harris first entered, Waldron gripped a knife in his hand, ready to defend himself; the fellow was frightened half to death. Since then he's done everything Harris has told him, accepted every suggestion, hoping in this way to conceal his own secret. That is how it begins to look to me."

"Just because Sarah has a hatpin like mine?"

"Knowing this makes the supposition

more convincing, but part of this theory has been forming itself in my mind ever since last night. The hatpin merely supplies a link in the chain."

"What do you mean to do?"

"Shadow Waldron; he is sure to expose himself sooner or later. I can see no other point to work from; but first of all, we must get away from here, out of the hands of these fellows. Could you find your way to the stairs in the dark?"

"Yes. I have been here often."

"Then I am going to turn out this light, before opening the door."

WE stood in the intense blackness, listening for any warning sound without, my grasp on the knob. The silence was so intense I could hear her soft breathing at my shoulder; then her hand rested upon mine in restraint.

"Just a moment, Philip Severn," she whispered swiftly. "You mustn't feel that I'm indifferent to all you are doing for me. It is wonderful to be trusted as you trust, when everything looks wrong. Perhaps that is why I cannot say more—it really means so much to me that you accept my word without a question."

"I am afraid I haven't—always."

"You have been considerate. I realize now how thoroughly this has tested you. Nor is the test over. I can't talk freely here, or explain—only insist that my purpose is a worthy one of which you need not be ashamed. You accept me just as I am?"

"Without a question, or a doubt," I answered, returning the firmness of her grasp.

She led the way confidently enough, moving silently along the wall, and I kept close so as to touch her. Intensely dark as the room was, she exhibited no hesitancy, and a few steps brought us forth into the hall at the head of a flight of stairs leading downward. My fingers gripped the banister while she stood aside to let me pass. Beneath, all was black and silent.

"You had better go ahead now; the next flight is directly beyond this, and ends at the street door."

"What is the next floor like?"

"Just a large reception hall; the chambers are all to the rear."

"You will follow?"

"Of course; I shall keep right behind you."

WE went down step by step, not a stair creaking, hearing no sound louder than our

own breathing. The staircase was wider than that above, and thickly carpeted; occasionally her hand encountered mine as we grasped the rail for guidance. I reached the last step, warned by the newel-post, and felt ahead with one groping foot to assure myself of the level beyond. Her fingers grasped my sleeve, and lips almost at my ear, whispered a barely audible warning.

"Look over there to the right! What is that?"

CHAPTER XXII

OUT OF DARKNESS, A CLUE

IT was a dull red glow, a mere pin-prick in the black curtain; yet it seemed to change in brilliancy, like an evil eye winking at us out of the dark. There was something uncanny about the thing, yielding me no suggestion as to what it could be, yet frightening by its baleful gleam at such a time and place. We crouched lower behind the rail, motionless, staring at the thing in startled fascination. Then there was borne to my nostrils the faint odor of tobacco-smoke; it must be a man sitting there smoking; what we saw was the red tip of his cigar.

Could we slip by unheard? I doubted it, yet whatever happened, one of us at least must escape from the house before any alarm was sounded. This fellow was probably a guard, but it was not likely that others were far away—beyond doubt within easy sound of his voice. There was but one chance left—for her to slip silently down that other flight of stairs to the street door, while I remained behind to protect her flight. If there was no alarm, no notice taken of her passage, possibly I might venture to follow without being overheard, but she must go first; her step was light, and she was more sure of the way. I put my lips close against the girl's ear.

"It is a guard there smoking. Don't try to answer, but do exactly as I say. One of us, at least must get out; you stand the better chance, with my remaining behind to hold these fellows back if there should be any alarm. If there isn't I'll follow. Do you understand? Answer with your hand."

I felt the firm pressure of her fingers in quick response.

"Go straight ahead, and never mind me. Whatever happens behind you, unlock the

door and get outside. Not a sound that you can help! Are you ready?"

Again the clasp of her fingers made answer, silent but obedient.

"The fellow evidently hasn't heard anything yet; you'd better go."

I felt her creep past me without a sound, her hand slipping from my grasp as her foot touched the level floor of the hall. She was invisible, no longer even a shadow in the black gloom. I only knew she was gone, as I bent anxiously forward, watchful of the red glow of that mysterious cigar. Now the fellow rose up and stretched, the silence echoing each sound. Would he come forward or sit down again? I could only crouch low behind the newel-post, judging his movements by the erratic motions of that glow of ash. The girl must be at the foot of the stairs by now.

THEN suddenly from somewhere a chain clanked faintly; the ear could not determine from what direction the sound came, but it was clear enough to be heard plainly. The man stood still, evidently listening; I lost sight of the red glow, as though he had removed the cigar from between his lips, and slowly straightened myself up, braced for any emergency. She had reached the outside door, and was preparing to open it. For an instant nothing happened; I caught a glimmer once more of the cigar-tip, as the fellow sucked to get it alight. He took a step forward, and stopped, assured by the silence that all was well. Then the sharp click of a heavy lock echoed up from beneath.

The fellow snapped on the electric, flooding the large hall, and uttering a gruff oath, started forward. We met face to face, both blinded by the sudden glare, although I was better prepared for the encounter than he. There was nothing else for it but to fight it out. If I ran, the act would only expose her before she could distance pursuit; besides, that first glimpse had revealed my antagonist, and I was glad—it was Gentleman George. He knew me almost at the same instant, spitting out a curse as he reached back for his gun.

"You, hey! How the hell did you get down here!"

But I was quicker, the move ready, gripping the wrist, and twisting the arm back until the torture caused him to drop the weapon, as we struggled back across the width of the hall. I had held him a coward, but he fought desperately enough now,

exhibiting a catlike strength and agility which tested my power unexpectedly. We were both weaponless, but he turned into a savage, a dangerous fighter who cared only to disable his opponent in any way possible. He gave me no chance to strike or to break away, but boned in relentlessly in regular barroom style, using fists, nails, teeth and knees, in the hope of winning quickly. It was like battling with a wild-cat, and for the moment the fellow had me, driving me back against the rail, helpless before the fierceness of his assault.

Some one was coming. I could hear a voice, and flying steps on the stairs—then a woman's scream from somewhere above. I broke away, getting a grip on his throat, and feeling my feet firm on the floor. He could see what I couldn't, and found voice in spite of my throttling.

"It's that damned skunk Severn got out. Hit him, Ivan! Smash in! I've got the guy—quick now!"

I whirled about, gaining as I did so one blurred glimpse of Waldron as he swung full at me with what looked like the leg of a chair. But it was Harris who caught the full force of the blow just over his eyes, and the power of it, added to the swirl of my arms, sent him hurtling along the rounded rail, headlong down the stairs. Waldron stood paralyzed, his hands still on the club, his eyes following that flying figure. With all my strength I drove a fist flat to his face, and as he reeled, stumbling backward, endeavoring to retain his feet. I sprang past and raced down the steps. Harris lay at the bottom motionless, huddled up in such fashion as to block the door. Without a doubt that the man was dead, I thrust the form to one side, leaped through the opening and crashed the door to behind me.

I had but one thought—to get away from there, to seek immediate security, and an opportunity to consider the situation. My mind was in a chaos, aware only of the horror I had witnessed, the scene from which I was endeavoring to escape. This was murder, a murder Waldron would doubtless attempt to attribute to me.

I TURNED to the left, afraid of the bright lights and the street-cars, and plunged into the depths of an alley. Beyond was a dark street along which I ran for two blocks, then suddenly crouched in an areaway to permit a policeman to saunter by. He saw nothing, but I kept quiet

till he turned from sight at the next block; and then I moved on, slinking through the shadows and cutting across an open lot through a tangle of weeds. I may have gone a mile, twisting and turning, before I came to what evidently was a small hotel. Here I encountered a cab, an old horse-cab, the driver half asleep inside. I hung back in the dark, afraid to awaken the fellow; yet I knew little of that part of the city, and must find transportation of some kind. An old-time cabby was not likely to care who his fare might be, so long as he was well paid. Encouraged by this reflection, I stepped over to the curb.

"Engaged, my man?"

He came to life in an instant, tumbling out of his comfortable quarters to face me.

"No sir; I never heard you comin', sir. Been a bit quiet about here to-night."

He stopped, as though just noticing my appearance under the dim street lights.

"Yer been hurt, sir?" he asked solicitously. "Yer coat's all tore, and there's some blood on yer face."

"A small figit; that's all—in a saloon over west. Any place around here where I could wash up?"

"Sure—right in yere; there aint nobody round to bother. I'll show you."

He opened a little side-door, and I followed down a narrow hallway to a small wash-room, lighted by a single gas-jet, turned low. A glance at the mirror proved how badly I needed the wash, and I flung off my coat and filled the basin with water. The cabby turned up the light and watched me curiously. He was a chunk of a man, with a red, good-humored face, round as an apple, evidently delighted to have some one to companion with at this weird hour of the morning.

"They got yer one good un, anyhow," he remarked. "Feller whut struck yer must've hed a ring on ter make thet gash."

"There were two of them," I answered, spluttering through the water I was using liberally. "I may have hurt one of the fellows; so you keep still—will you?"

"Me! Shucks, I don't talk about my fares none. Thet aint business. We git some queer ones, I tell yer, on a night cab. I picked one up night before last down by the West Side docks, who'd been in some kind of a fracas; anyhow, he was sure scared half ter death. Looked like a foreigner, an' was draggin' a grip 'long with him. Got off at Jersey ferry, I reckon."

"When was that?" I was using the towel

by this time, eying the loquacious speaker over the edge.

"Night afore last."

"Yes, but what time?"

"'Bout midnight; I'd hed a fare down thet way, an' was drivin' back empty, when he hollered to me to stop. Gosh, the feller tumbled in like there was a ghost after him, an' said I was ter drive like hell."

"What makes you think he was foreign?"

"The cut of his jib mostly; then he didn't git his English just right—excited, I reckon—an' once he ripped off a word er two I sorter took ter be Russian."

"Had a grip with him, did he?"

"Yep—black, 'bout medium size. The fellow wasn't overly big himself, an' it was quite a lug for him; it bumped against his leg when he toted it. I wouldn't 'a' thought nothin' more 'bout it, only I got hol' of a paper, an' read how there was a guy croaked that same night over in Jersey. It sorter made me think o' this feller, just because he was so scared. It was sorter funny where he had me set him down too, after midnight thet way."

"Where was that?"

"Colmar Buildin', on Broad Street. Wa'n't a darn light from top to bottom. He didn't let me pull up there. I had ter let him out a block away, around the corner. But somehow I sorter wanted ter know just where the bloke went, so I slipped off the box an' took a peek. He turned in there, where it was blacker than a stack o' black cats, an' thet's the last I seen of him. S'pose he was the duck who did that job, sir?"

"He might have been, of course. Did you report it to the police?"

"Lord, no! If us fellers told the cops half we know, them birds wouldn't get no sleep at all. I aint said nothin' to nobody. Only pickin' you up yere just now sorter made me think of the cuss again. Ready to go now, sir?"

CHAPTER XXIII

IN THE COLMAR BUILDING

A FAINT glimmer of dawn was in the air, and the streets we traversed were almost completely deserted. Arrived presently at my hotel, I paid off my informative cabby and stepped inside. A sleepy clerk handed out my key as though the arrival of a guest at this

hour aroused no interest, and the elevator-boy was so deeply immersed in an early edition of a morning newspaper as to give me no attention. I locked my door, and without undressing flung myself across the bed, almost instantly dropping asleep.

I awoke at eleven, rested and with a clear brain. Nothing had occurred to disturb me, and as I looked at my watch, and realized the hour, I felt no longer a doubt that Waldron had found some way in which to protect us both. It was a disappointment that the girl had not yet telephoned, but probably she would before night. If there was any mention of the affair in the papers, she would be sure to see it, and feel anxious to hear my version. With these thoughts in mind, and eager to look over the noon edition myself, I dressed rather hurriedly and descended to the lobby. The paper secured contained barely a stickful, devoid of particulars: Gentleman George Harris, well known to the police, had been found dead in the hallway of a rooming house on Le Compte Street, operated by Mrs. Sarah Waldron. His head was crushed in by the blow of a heavy club, and he had fallen the full length of the stairs. It was believed to have been a thieves' quarrel, from the evidence of those in the house, who heard the sounds of a struggle and saw a strange man escape through the front door. There were no arrests, although the police were searching for certain parties who might be implicated.

So far, so good; but now, what about the Russian? He had evidently escaped suspicion, but would be far from easy in his own mind. The situation in which he found himself would only serve to increase his desire to secure the money and get safely away while the going was good. If he actually knew where such money was to be had, he would scarcely delay seeking it. If he had personally hidden that bag of currency taken from Alva, he would be after the stuff in twenty-four hours; if another held it, he would as surely seek the fellow out and demand his share. This gave me two lines to follow; I might locate Waldron and shadow him; or I might see what discoveries I could make in the Colmar Building. Waldron would probably be suspicious and hard to follow unseen; he would imagine the police might be on his trail, and watch every sign. The better chance, therefore, seemed to me be in Broad Street. I ate a deliberate lunch,

planning how best to proceed, and hoping some bellboy would call me to the telephone. But I finished the meal uninterrupted.

BOTH Wall and Broad streets were busy enough when I elbowed my passage through the shifting crowds of men hurrying in every direction, and reaching the edge of the curb, I gazed upward at the ornamental front of the Colmar Building, a twelve-story stone structure. A directory of tenants occupied much of one wall in the rotunda, but I recognized no name of either individual or firm which gave me any clue to the man sought. I took an elevator to the twelfth floor, and walked slowly from end to end of the marble corridor, reading the names on the glass doors as I passed. I met but few people and attracted no attention, passing down the stairway to the floor below. All kinds of business seemed to be represented in the various offices, but among them no glimpse of a familiar name. In this manner, growing more pessimistic as I proceeded, I had reached the fifth floor, when as I turned at the front of the iron stairs, my glance rested on the letters stenciled along the frosted glass opposite: MUTUAL INVESTMENT COMPANY, GASPAR WINE, MANAGER. I stopped still, my heart beating wildly, feeling that I had stumbled blindly on the very thing I had been seeking. *Gaspar Wine*—it was the name of the man who, through accident, had opened to me the door leading into the Alva factory, the man who had left me alone in the entry while he disappeared to talk with Alva privately in the little side room. I could not be mistaken in the name, and I recalled the glimpse I had of his face, with its closely trimmed beard and oddly high forehead, the hair brushed straight up. Gaspar Wine!

There were seemingly two offices in the suite occupied by the Mutual Investment Company, and each had an outside door, one marked *Private*, the other *General Office*. The former was directly opposite the foot of the stairs, the latter a step or two down the corridor. The elevator-shafts were some distance away, across the hall, while the office space adjoining appeared to be unoccupied, though there was lettering, RAILWAY EXCHANGE, on the door. Several people left, and took the elevators as I stood there half hidden behind the curve of the wall, but no one approached Wine's office or perceived me on the stairs.

I stood there irresolute, undecided as to my next move. My best course seemed to be to keep an eye open for Waldron; if he came, there would be no doubt as to the exact nature of his errand.

Yet where could I remain to observe his arrival? And above all, how could I hope to overhear anything passing between the two? The stairway gave me no advantage; it was open and doubtless frequently used. To be seen loitering there for any length of time would attract attention. I ventured to try the private door, but as I expected, found it securely locked. The office remained quiet, no one either leaving or entering; nor did I observe any shadow on the frosted glass indicative of movement within. Baffled and uncertain, I had barely returned to my point of concealment when an elevator stopped at this floor level and three men stepped out into the corridor. Two of them attracted no attention, but the third was in his shirt-sleeves and wore a cap with some insignia upon it. He advanced briskly and flung open the door leading into what had once been the Railway Exchange, and motioned the others to enter. As the three vanished, I heard him explain that this was the only vacant suite on this floor, and then another voice complained that it was altogether too small for their purpose. They were not inside five minutes, and when they came out, the agent closed the door carelessly and pressed the elevator-button, saying he would show them something on the second floor above.

EVEN as they shot up out of sight, I was across the corridor with hand on the knob. I feared a spring-lock, but was pleasantly disappointed, for the door opened instantly, permitting me to slip inside. There were two rooms, both small, and littered with the fragments left by the late occupants. There were no shades at the windows; the walls were bare and not overly clean. What struck me most forcibly however, was that there was no connection between those rooms and the next suite; they were separated by a thick wall. I could hide here securely enough, and by slightly lifting the glass, gain good view of the corridor; but it would be impossible to overhear anything taking place in Wine's office. At that, the position was better for my purpose than the open stairway, and I unfastened the window opening on the corridor, propping it open a crack,

so as to afford me a fair view. If Waldron appeared, I would endeavor to discover some means of learning the object of his visit. Meanwhile I was safe enough, and able to observe every movement on the floor.

I must have been there for half an hour, seeing no one pass but an occasional clerk. I found an empty box to sit upon, and rested back in one corner, my eyes at the narrow opening. I began to think the investment office was without occupants, for no one approached the door, and no sound reached me through the solid partition. The elevators seldom stopped at this floor, and when they did, the passengers alighting mostly turned the other way.

Suddenly, when I least expected it, the door of the investment office opened, and a young woman came out. She had her hat on, and was buttoning her coat as she walked down the corridor. I took note of a pencil stuck into her hair, and felt no doubt she was Wine's stenographer, who had finished her day's work and was departing for home. Then the man was probably still there—alone. The girl disappeared down the elevator, and could scarcely have reached the lower floor, when a cage traveling in the opposite direction stopped and discharged a passenger. It was a woman who stepped out, glancing quickly about as though uncertain where to go; I instantly recognized Marie Gessler.

CHAPTER XXIV

GASPAR WINE—INVESTMENTS

I WAS so startled by the girl's unexpected appearance in that place as to be helpless. I could only stare motionless, with a queer sense of surprise completely stunning me. Could she be also seeking Wine? If so, for what end? I could at least be assured on one point: she had never visited him before, for she had no knowledge where his office was.

She started down the corridor, looking for the numbers on the doors, and then discovering herself wrong, retraced her steps, going past me so close I could have thrust out a hand and touched her. I possessed every inclination to speak, but hesitated, and in that instant she had gone by and approached Wine's door. Even then she appeared to doubt her next move, glancing around as though anxious to remain unobserved before venturing further. Then,

opening the door quickly, she disappeared within. In that moment, before the door closed, I caught the sound of a man's voice, startled, uttering a single surprised exclamation:

"You here! What does this mean?"

Then a low-spoken answer, the words inaudible, and ended by a click of the latch.

What could this visit portend? What was it possible for me to do? I stood there helpless, impotent, harassed with doubt. I had parted with this woman the night before completely convinced of her innocence, trusting her absolutely, believing that her secrecy hid nothing that was in any way wrong. I knew in my heart I loved her, and that the strength of my faith rested implicitly on that love. In truth it had no other basis on which to rest. I knew she must be worthy, and my love excused everything I could not understand. But when I was alone, when I fronted, as I did now, some strange conduct which no reasoning made clear, my faith staggered. I could not help it—I felt betrayed, disillusioned, a mere pawn in some game in which she matched her beauty against my trust. If she conceived that Wine was one of those most deeply concerned in this affair, why had she not confided in me? If she must visit him, why was I not asked to accompany her? There must be a secret reason. What could it be other than a desire to share the ill-gotten spoils of murder and robbery?

I must somehow learn the truth. Could I spy upon them? Such an act would be cowardly, unworthy, never be forgiven. But would it? If this was a conference of crime, my duty to society outranked any personal rule of honor; if the lady was in that office to expose guilt, she would be facing a danger that might require my protection. Surely her mission was either one or the other of these two, and in either case I would be exonerated, whatever action I took.

THAT closed door seemed to urge me to learn what was transpiring beyond; but would it open? The only way in which I could ascertain was to try.

The corridor was already beginning to darken with the lowering sun outside and remained silent and deserted. I approached on tiptoe the entrance to Wine's office. No sound reached me from within, and my fingers silently pressed the knob,

which turned without resistance—the latch was off. A half-inch at a time I opened the door, listening for any noise behind, my eyes peering through the narrow crack at what was revealed within. They perceived little, merely a small, unoccupied room, evidently an outer office, containing a cheap desk, two chairs and a typewriting-stand, the machine covered. Two maps hung upon the walls; in one corner was a glass water-holder, and in the other a diminutive closet, the door ajar. A gray matting protected the floor; an electric drop-light hung dangling over the desk. That was all, except that indistinguishable voices were conversing somewhere beyond. These did not cease, evidence that the movement of the door had attracted no attention. The speakers must be beyond the partition and well out of view of the door.

Encouraged to believe this, I thrust my head far enough forward to make sure. An alcove led to the inner room, where I could perceive one end of a roll-top desk, and a wastebasket filled with papers, but nothing more. A step to the left would doubtless have revealed Wine, but from where I stood, the end of the partition interfered. By slipping to the right, it would be quite possible for me to enter without being seen, and three cautious steps would bring me to the security of the closet. From there, with the door into the corridor closed, I might overhear all that passed between the two. I had ventured too far now to retreat, and without a second of hesitation, I pressed through the narrow opening and silently closed the door behind me. The rug muffled my footsteps, and confident that I had not been detected, I crouched in the narrow closet, scarcely knowing whether to be ashamed or proud of my success.

I could now clearly distinguish the words of conversation. At first these were hardly understandable, seemingly having no connection with any matter with which I felt concerned. The two were evidently discussing money, to be sure, but in terms involving the payment of interest, and the impossibility of extending a loan. I overheard her say quietly but firmly:

"I came to you, Mr. Wine, because of our connection in other matters. I overheard this discussion, and felt you ought to be forewarned."

"I appreciate your kindness," he answered, evidently surprised, "but simply

cannot raise the amount to-day; it is too late."

"It does not have to be raised to-day, but before the closing of banking hours to-morrow."

"I can have it by then."

"I was sure you could, if I only explained the necessity."

SHE arose as though her purpose had been accomplished, but apparently the man was not yet willing she should go. He was somewhat uneasy, and desired to know more.

"But I fail to understand your interest; why should you take the trouble to come here and tell me this?"

She laughed lightly.

"Why? Really, it is easily enough understood. We are together, are we not? Now that Captain Alva is dead, it is generally believed you will be selected to lead in this work. Oh, yes, it is; I have already been so informed. And in that case it is absolutely necessary that your bank-connections be excellent. There are other funds already in this country."

"Other funds! You learn this from Washington?"

"Yes, and from the bank; all these moneys pass through our hands in one way or another; that is how I first became used as a messenger."

"I know; Alva told me; but I supposed this last payment was to be all."

"Assuredly not; the cause had practically unlimited means under our present arrangements in London. It cannot stop for an instant merely because of this loss. Moreover, that will doubtless be recovered."

"Do you think so? Have the police found any clues?"

"The police! Hardly; but there are others searching, not so easily turned aside. We believe we know already who got the money."

"You—you think you—you know?" He could not keep the tremble out of his voice. "Was—was it one of us?"

"It could scarcely be an outsider, for the secret was guarded well. Only those of that circle knew the money was here, even; not more than two or three were aware of its having been passed over to Alva. I can't say any more at present, Mr. Wine. You knew Captain Alva very well, did you not?"

"Y-yes—that is, we were good friends;

he brought a letter to me when he first came."

"And you have been associated rather closely ever since?"

"We had much in common."

"Are you a South American?"

"By birth, yes, but of Polish blood; Captain Alva's mother was also a Pole; this brought us closer together."

"The special tie, then, was not Chilean?"

"No; I am a Red, a revolutionary. We really planned for a world republic," he explained eagerly, "—the downfall of all oppression; we would build anew on the ruin of nations. Chile came first, for it seemed ripe for the experiment. Surely you understand that?"

"Of course—international brotherhood. You were most intimate with Captain Alva. No doubt he told you about this money?"

"That is, that it had been sent—yes."

"You knew nothing of its delivery to him?"

"No."

"You were with him alone before the meeting?"

"We spoke of other things; not once was the money mentioned."

"And you have no suspicion of anyone who could have known, and been guilty of this murder and robbery?"

"Why should I? Why you ask me that?"—excitedly. "There were many there; perhaps all know, except me. I could not guess, for I was the second man to leave; only Charlett he go out before I do. Captain Alva, he still remain behind when I go. I saw him last then, talking with many. You not suppose I know how he die?"

"Oh, no; I merely thought you might have some suspicion; that was all. It was a strange weapon he was killed with."

"A strange weapon! What you mean, a strange weapon? Do they know what it was that killed him?"

"Certainly; it was picked up in the bottom of the auto—a dagger hatpin, such as women wear. See, it was just like this of mine."

She must have plucked the ornament from out her own hat and laid it on the desk, for I heard the faint click of its fall. There was a moment of intense silence, and I could vision the intense horror with which he was staring at the instrument, unable to command words.

"That thing!" he burst forth finally. "Killed with that!"

"No, not that; but one exactly like it."

"Who says so—the police? It could not kill a man. Why you tell me this—why?"

"Oh, only because I thought you might be interested. However, let's not talk about it any more. You will settle that account before the close of banking hours to-morrow?"

"I? Yes, I will settle."

There was the sound of a foot on the cement floor of the corridor without, and almost at the same instant the electric light which had been turned on revealed a man's shadow on the glass of the closed door. He seemed to stand there hesitatingly; then he rapped with his knuckles on the glass.

CHAPTER XXV

A QUARREL BETWEEN THIEVES

I FLATTENED myself out against the inner wall of the closet, aware that the two in the second office were coming forward together, Wine giving vent to a startled oath in his excitement. He strode straight to the door and opened it with a jerk, bursting instantly into speech at sight of his visitor.

"You, hey! What the devil do you want here?"

"A word with you, and damn' quick—"

It was Waldron's voice, but his speech ended abruptly as his eyes caught sight of the woman. She wasted no time.

"I was just going," she said calmly, ignoring him, but speaking directly to Wine. "You have been very nice indeed in this matter. I will see you to-morrow, then."

She passed between the two, without so much as favoring the Russian with a glance, and he stared after her with open mouth, then stepped back to watch her progress down the corridor. Wine caught him by the sleeve and drew him hastily aside, closing the door tightly and shooting the night-latch.

"The damn' girl never locks this door when she goes out," he muttered angrily, wheeling about to face the other. "Now, speak up, will you! What sends you butting in here?"

"Well, first you tell me," thundered Waldron, gripping the other angrily with one hand, "what business that female has with you. Wine, if you are trying to double-cross me, you'll find me no easy mark. Answer—what was she here for?"

"Nothing, only private business. I swear it was nothing else."

"You promised to see her to-morrow?"

"Yes, it was to pay a note. Come in here, and I'll explain all. There's nothing to frighten you, Waldron."

"The devil there aint! Perhaps I know better than you do, what is on tap. All right, I'll sit down and hear what you got to say, but I aint goin' to waste no time, let me tell you, in listenin' to no long story. I got to get a bunch o' money quick and get out of here."

THE two disappeared into the inner room, Waldron's voice still rumbling, with Wine interjecting a word now and then. I ventured to stand erect again in the confines of the closet, and press my ear to the crack of the inner door.

"Well," Waldron was saying, "now you begin to spill. Don't try to work any game on me. What do you mean by paying a note? You owe her something?"

"No; now, listen, and don't get mad. I tell you just how it was," Wine endeavored to be smooth and plausible, his voice pitched so low I had difficulty in hearing the words. "She said I was to succeed Alva, and be the revolutionary agent; partly she came to tell me this, but somehow she learned of my indebtedness, that I have an overdue note at the bank—"

"What bank?"

"Kulb, Krantz & Company."

"How did she know that?"

"I could not tell. I never asked, but maybe Krantz he told her. When they talked over my being given charge of the fund—yes, that must be the way, for she insisted I must straighten that matter up quick, before other money was given me."

"What other money?"

"That which is sent from across the water for the cause."

"Oh, I see; there is more coming, then."

"Coming, yes—maybe some is here already."

"How much did you owe the bank, Wine?"

"Between eight and nine thousand; it is overdue three months; now I promise to pay it all up to-morrow."

"Oh, you did, hey! Out of that stuff, I suppose?"

Wine's response was barely audible.

"Where else I get it, you think? I have no more."

"Say," burst out Waldron suspiciously,

"that's all right; but what bothers me is why this girl should hit you for it at just this particular time. Krantz must have sent her; but what made them think you had money now? It aint likely they was just takin' a chance, is it? What security did they have?"

"Captain Alva, he signed with me; that was all. I figured that with him dead, Krantz thought he better squeeze me."

EXACTLY; and he sent this young woman to tell you about other money coming. He knew you would recognize her, and jump at the chance to come through. I believe that is all a lie; they haven't got any more coming. Only I do think they imagined you might have some on hand. It don't look good to me, they jumping you just at this time."

"What you mean? You have not spilled nothing?"

"Me!" He laughed roughly. "I'm not the spilling kind. There's been plenty o' fellers after the dope, let me tell you, but I've let 'em hunt. Say, I've had to laugh sometimes the way they've been fooled. You know that guy who called himself Horner?"

"Sure—a smart fellow."

"You bet he is, smarter than you think. He aint Horner at all, if you ask me; his right name was Harris, as slick a crook as ever lived."

"Harris? What was it I saw in the paper? Wasn't he the same guy what was croaked last night?"

"You bet he was; that's what I'm telling you about; that's why I come up here to get this off my chest. He biffed this fellow Horner, coming over. I don't know nothin' about how he did the job, but Horner aint never showed up since. Instead, this guy Harris blew in with all his papers, an' started negotiatin' with Krantz and Alva. He an' Alva got awful thick."

"I know; what was the game?"

"To get that check into cash, of course. He hung around trying to do that for weeks, an' then missed out."

"An' you knew him, an' never said a word?"

"Sure I knew him, first time I got eyes on the bloater; but what was it to me? I'm not in this business for my health, Wine. I never gave a hang who got hands on that stuff, so I had my grab at it. Harris an' I had it framed; that's why I was out there, waitin' for a signal from

him. But when you beat him to it, I'd just as soon be your running-mate as his."

"Huh! Don't talk so loud! And now you say Harris is dead?"

"As a mackerel; he couldn't be no deader. But that was my house where he was croaked, an' so I got to get out o' town. The police aint wise, so far, but they might tumble if I hang around."

"That why you come here?"

"Sure; I've got to have some rino right away, and it's up to you to see that I get it. You know where the stuff is, and how to get it quick."

"I wouldn't dare use that money yet; I haven't even opened the bag."

"The devil you wouldn't! You're goin' to cop off enough to pay that note tomorrow, aint you? That's what you promised the girl. Well, I'm just as important as she is, I reckon, and I'm goin' to have my share, you bet, or else I'll make it hot for you—I'll say that."

"You haven't nothing but your own word."

"**A**INT I!" snapped Waldron. "Say, Wine, don't be a fool; there are others beside us that's got a nose in this affair. The hunt aint all over just because Harris is croaked. I don't count the police, for as far as I know, they haven't even struck a scent yet, but there's a saloon-keeper down on Sixth Avenue named Costigan who's got all o' Harris' dope, an' he's goin' to keep on the trail. Then there's another fellow who's liable to raise hell. I aint got him exactly placed yet, but he's the guy that led up to Harris' being killed. I'm the only one what knows that, an' I aint talked before."

"Who is he—a detective?"

"Maybe; Harris called him Severn. First he mistook him for a fly-bird named Daly, but after a while he got on to the fact that he wasn't Daly at all. They got the guy down into Costigan's, and the three of us slugged him. Harris wouldn't let us put him clear out, for he sorter had an idea the fellow might know where the stuff had gone. I didn't say nothin', of course, an' so they patched him up and then locked him into a back room over in my place. The next morning they was goin' to give him the third degree. Then with him safe, Harris went after this girl, thinking she would be made to talk."

"What could she know about it?"

"Don't ask me; I just drifted along to

please 'em. What made them think the two were together was, they were both eating at the same table over at Perond's the night before. I don't suppose I got it just straight, but Harris an' Costigan had got it doped out that these were the people that copped the stuff, an' were crazy to get one of them to squeal."

"Well, then what happened?"

"That's mostly guess-work. They had this guy Severn locked in upstairs. He was unconscious when we dumped him there, and later, when my wife got this girl to come over,—they was raised in the same town,—Harris, he turned the key on her. They was aiming to bring them together the next morning, but somehow Severn must have woke up an' got out o' the room, for the next thing I knowed he was fightin' Harris out in the hall, an' after that I found the girl had skipped."

"They both got away?"

"Clean, leaving Harris behind with his skull busted—deader than a door-nail, when I got to him."

"And you don't know who this Severn is—or what he is up to?"

"No, I don't, Wine; but he's sure got some game on, an' he's got my goat. He's in with the girl, all right, and knows too much. It seems they've found out one thing that haint been reported by the police—she knew what Alva was killed with."

"What's that! She told you what stuck him?"

"You bet she did; she had one of 'em herself, an' took it out of her hat, and put it right down here on the desk. I thought for a second I was going to keel over, but she didn't notice—just went on talkin'. How do yer suppose she ever found that out?"

"Severn told her; that's how. It was dropped there in the dark. That feller got it some way, and hid it in his valise. That was what made Harris so sure he was in on the job, 'cause he raided the room at some hotel and found the thing. I don't know what to make o' all this dope, Wine, but I'm sure I'm goin' to skip out for a while, an' you better do the same. It don't look none too healthy to me. What do you say?"

I could hear the other tramping nervously back and forth across the room. His failure to answer must have angered the Russian, for after a minute he burst out with an oath.

"Damn it, why don't you say something? Part o' this boodle's mine, aint it?"

"Y-yes—of course."

"Well, then, cough it up! Where did you plant the stuff?"

"It's put away in a safety-vault," Wine explained, his voice almost failing him. "Honest, Waldron, I can't get it to-night; it's too late. The valise is locked, and I haven't opened it."

"You're a liar! You never dared to lug the thing around! You wouldn't be seen with it in your hand in daylight. I know you. You brought the stuff straight to this office that same night, and I believe it is here yet. What do you want me to do—kill you, and then hunt? That is what's goin' to happen, unless you come across too. I'll shake the gizzard out of you, you little sneak, if you try any trick on me."

He must have gripped the other, for there was a struggle, Wine whimpering as though half choked.

"Speak up! This thing divides fifty-fifty. Where is it now? What's that—behind those books? I wouldn't believe you under oath. Go get it out from there; let's have a look at the stuff."

He must have flung the other clear across the room, for he came down sprawling, his body striking against the door of the closet behind which I crouched. The catch broke under the impact, and before I could draw back, I was in full view of both men.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE DEATH OF A MURDERER

WINE, outstretched on the floor at my feet, stared up at me, so startled by my sudden appearance as to be speechless. His face was chalky, and his lips opened and shut without uttering a sound. Waldron, oblivious of all else but the money now almost in his possession, was upon his knees before a bookcase, dragging out the heavy volumes from the lower shelf, dumping them on the floor. From behind a black leather valise, these had already been drawn into view, when Wine found voice, uttering a strange cry of terror, which caused Waldron to glance about. He leaped to his feet instantly, one hand flung back as though in search of a weapon.

I gave him no time. I cared nothing for that whimpering cur on the floor, but

this other was desperate and dangerous, and I leaped straight at him, striking so hard that the blow sent him reeling back against the bookcase. He knew me then, and the recognition brought with it a fury which transformed the Russian into a wild beast. Now that he was cornered, with the spoils of victory in his very grasp, he became a demon whose only desire was to kill.

"You damned spy!" he snapped savagely. "Take him from behind, Wine! Club him!"

We struggled back and forth, neither of us daring release a grip for fear of losing an advantage. His strength matched whatever skill I possessed, and I could not break away from the pressure of his arms. Yet I managed to hang on in such a way as to prevent his drawing a gun, and gained a grip on his whiskers which enabled me to twist his head to one side until I expected to hear his neck crack. Back and forth we stumbled over the books on the floor, and the valise, kicking these out of the way. In one of our fierce surges the bookcase was overturned, coming down with a crash, but with no interruption of the struggle. He struck with a knee at my stomach, grinning as I loosened my grip on his beard, and tried to butt into me with lowered head. I caught him instantly, with a free fist, rocking his head back, and cutting a gash in his cheek from which blood spurted. He tried the same trick again, but I blocked it, whirling him side-wise against the wall, and landing twice with short jabs to the body. If he possessed any self-control before, he lost it then, crazed with the desire to kill.

He was a barroom fighter, bound by no rules, capable of any ferocity—biting, gouging, using hands and feet, a ruthless savage. It was this which defeated him, for while I was neither cool nor clear of mind, I kept my head sufficiently to remember my training and accept every advantage that presented itself; more than that, the very threats with which he tried to goad me, were guides to his own action, giving me the swift hint needed for defense.

"**G**ET up, Wine!" he cried. "Now's your chance; I've got the cuss so he can't move—bean him with that chair! No! Don't use the gun. We don't want any police in here. Swipe him one over the head. Oh, did you ever see such a mutt! Say, this is the guy I told you about—

the fellow who was with the girl. Quick, now; soak him one!"

Realizing Wine was back of me, I managed to whirl the big bulk of the battling Russian about so as to block any surprise attack from the rear. This movement gave me the support of the wall, and using it as a defense, I resorted to the tactics adopted by Waldron, assaulting him with feet as well as hands, breaking his strangle-hold on my throat, and forcing him backward so that a swift kick sent him stumbling over a pile of books, clawing at the empty air for support. He would have gone sprawling upon his back if Wine had not been directly in the way. The force of his big body hurled the smaller man heavily against the fedge of the outer window. As the fellow struck, the glass shivered and crashed into a thousand pieces, but before Waldron could regain firm footing or realize what had happened, I was again upon him, breaking through his dazed guard and driving my fists straight into his face.

THE revolver in Wine's hand was discharged, the bullet whistling past me, but even as the report sounded, the pressure of the Russian's body forced the smaller man relentlessly backward over the sill. He gave utterance to one wild yell of fright, releasing the gun and gripping desperately at Waldron's collar for support, then toppled over backward and went down.

We both heard the crash as the splinters of glass gave way, and the dull, dead thud of the body as it struck somewhere far below. The Russian seemed paralyzed with horror, unable to quite comprehend what had occurred behind him. But I had seen the tragedy, and my mind worked like a flash. He made one weak effort to spring aside, forgetful of his own danger, his guard dropped, and I let him have it—straight on the jaw. The clenched fist crunched into his whiskers; and, with arms flung up, he went over as if shot, his head striking an edge of the overturned bookcase as he fell; he lay there motionless, a trickle of blood slowly oozing out upon the floor.

I stared down at the white, upturned face, dazed myself at the sudden ending of struggle. The fellow's limbs did not even twitch; one arm had fallen across the valise, as if even then he would hold the stolen money, but the only sign of remaining life was evidenced by a sobbing

breath. I stepped back and leaned out through the broken window; three stories below, on a graveled roof, lay something black, huddled up grotesquely, which I knew was a human body, crushed shapeless, its bones broken. I drew back from the gruesome sight, so sickened that I reeled dizzily, clutching at the sill for support.

AS I clung there, uncertain, dazed, my mind for the moment a blank, some one began rattling and pounding against the door leading into the corridor.

I crossed the room, my limbs trembling so I could scarcely walk. My breaths coming in gasps. I caught a glimpse of my face in a small mirror, and stared blankly at the reflection, scarcely recognizing myself. The glare of lights in the corridor threw shadows on the glass of the door, showing many outside seeking entrance. They were kicking against the wood and pounding with fists, seeking to break in the lock. I threw the door open and faced them. There were four policemen, the first a gray-mustached sergeant, revolver in hand, and behind these a jam of excited individuals of both sexes, peering over shoulders to gain view within. The sergeant gripped me by the collar, thrust me to one side, and as instantly wheeled about to bar the way.

"Guard this door, Halsey, and Morris," he ordered curtly. "Keep everybody out, except Carr and Kelly. Now, you; what's up here? Have you killed somebody?"

"No," I answered, making no effort to break away, still breathing hard, but able to express myself clearly. "There is a man dead, but he fell from a window. I have nothing to conceal, Sergeant. My name is Severn, and I am connected with the United States Consular Service. Give me a chance, and I'll hand you my card."

He must have been impressed by the way I acted and spoke, for he released his grasp and accepted the card I fished out of a vest pocket, holding it up to the light in order to read the script.

"Philip Severn," he repeated slowly, his glance wandering again to my face. "You are a friend of Clement Breckenridge—is that right?"

"Why, yes!"—in surprise. "I have known him for some years."

"I thought so; I don't forget a face often, but never heard your name before. I was waiting at the bank to see Brecken-

ridge a few days ago, when he came out with you from his private office. He seemed very friendly. Well, now, Mr. Severn, what's been takin' place in here? Some fight, haint there?"

"THIS is the end of the Alva murder and robbery," I said directly. "One of the men is dead; the other lies in there senseless; while the money they were after is there also in a valise, untouched."

"What money?"

"So you didn't know about that, even! Well, I'll tell you. Captain Alva was killed to gain possession of a large sum which had been paid him for revolutionary purposes in Chile. He was the authorized agent in this country for some conspirators down there, and London financiers remitted to him large sums. These fellows inside found out about such a payment having been made, and waylaid him. They had to kill him in order to get possession of the money."

"Who did it?"

"I am not quite sure, Sergeant, but I think Gaspar Wine committed the murder. He fell from a window, and is lying dead down below there. The other fellow is still alive, and was going to share in the money. You know him, I guess, a Russian by the name of Waldron."

"Evan Waldron, the Red orator?"

"That's the man. I had reason to suspect these two, and hid in that closet, where I could overhear them. The two quarreled, and my presence was disclosed. A fight followed; Wine was forced out through the window. Then I got the best of Waldron, just as you fellows tried to break in."

The sergeant looked about, plainly puzzled.

"I guess your word ought to be good, Mr. Severn," he admitted. "You live in Washington?"

"Yes—officially; my home is in Ohio."

"Where you stopping here?"

I told him, naming the hotel at which I was registered.

"All right, then. I'll look around a bit; Morris, run down and call the wagon; have 'em get that body down out of there first thing when they come; Kelly, you stay here with Halsey at the door."

I followed him and the fourth officer into the inner office. It was a wreck, but the sergeant took the scene in at a glance, and picked his way across to the shattered

window. The other policeman bent over the outstretched figure of Waldron. The former stared down into the dusk below, then straightened up, and again faced the room.

"How is the cuss, Carr?"

"Alive, all right, but some crack on the coco."

"Give him a glass of water in the face. Is this the grip you was telling me about, Mr. Severn?"

"Yes."

He pulled it forth from beneath the grasp of Waldron's arm.

"All right; I'll see it safe out o' here. I guess you'll have to go along with us, Mr. Severn; the captain will likely want to ask some questions."

CHAPTER XXX

THE PRIVATE SECRETARY

I TOLD my story to the captain much more in detail, and Breckenridge, being found, stood sponsor for my identity, so that I was not long detained. The next morning I testified before the coroner's jury over the crushed body of Wine, and later appeared in the room of the grand jury which indicted Waldron. On both these occasions I told enough to make matters reasonably clear, but I carefully avoided any direct mention of Miss Gessler. No doubt her name would be brought into the case later, but I was determined it should not be introduced through any indiscretion on my part. Krantz's name was used, but only indirectly, and the impression was left upon me that influence was being brought to bear to shield the banker from any direct connection with the crime.

I knew that when the time came for trial, I could scarcely hope to escape thus easily. Under cross-examination by the defendant's attorney the whole affair would be probed to the very bottom, and I should be compelled to disclose every bit of information I possessed. In the meanwhile I must discover the girl and learn from her own lips, if possible, just how deeply she was involved. Then, and then only, could I decide upon my own future course. But how was I to locate her? There were only two people to whom I could turn for even a suggestion—Krantz the banker, and Sarah Waldron.

I took a taxi, drove to the bank, and

approached a desk. A middle-aged man glanced up from his work, and listened quietly to my question, examining my card attentively.

"Ah, yes, United States consular service. I regret to say that Mr. Adolph Krantz is not in the bank to-day. In fact, he is out of town, possibly for a week. Yes, he left rather suddenly for Washington. Perhaps you might care to talk with his secretary?"

I hesitated, but decided to see what might develop.

"I will, if you please, for just a moment."

"Very good, sir. The third door down that corridor to the left. Walk right in."

I proceeded as he directed. The third door stood partly open, giving me a glimpse within, before I ventured to enter; it was richly furnished. A woman was bending over a desk, busied at some work. I saw no other occupant; nor could I obtain anything but an unsubstantial glimpse at her. With heart beating somewhat faster, I ventured to open the door sufficiently wide to enter.

THERE was no one else present, but her head instantly lifted, and she rose to her feet with a quick smile and outstretched hand, coming directly toward me.

"Mr. Philip Severn, at last!" she exclaimed pleasantly. "My faith is rewarded."

"Your faith," I echoed, rallying from my surprise at this greeting. "Then you were expecting me?"

"I have never felt a very serious doubt. Does that sound odd? Let me close the door, and then we will sit down and talk. I am never disturbed when the door is shut. Here is the best place. Yes, Mr. Severn, I was certain curiosity would cause you to seek me, even if there was no other motive. So—I waited."

"Yes, but I possessed no knowledge to guide me."

"You really had no suspicion I was to be found here?"

"None whatever. Why should I? Not even yet do I know whom I am speaking with."

"Oh, yes, you do—Marie Gessler, revolutionist, messenger to the Chilean junta." She laughed, her eyes sparkling. "Does not that satisfy?"

"Far from it; I believe I am entitled to even more."

"Indeed you are. I have the honor of

being also private secretary to Mr. Adolph Krantz. Now, what next?"

"Well, when he writes you a check, what name does he make it payable to?"

"Let me see; did you ever know anyone called Tom Longdale?"

"Did I! Why, Great Scott! You can not mean that you are actually Helen? It is not possible."

"Oh, yes, it is; little girls grow up, you know. And now, if you will be very good and quiet, I am going to tell you just how it all happened, what led me to become a desperate conspirator, and—well, yes—a famous detective. Are you all ready for my confession?"

SHE rested her hand on mine, and permitted my fingers to close over it in a spirit of frank good-fellowship.

"Then listen: I am Tom Longdale's sister Helen. The work isn't necessary to me, but I took the position at the request of Mr. Krantz, who has been a life-long friend of my father's. I enjoy the work, however, and have been here now nearly three years. Adolph Krantz is an Austrian by birth, and has found it more or less difficult to get away from that influence. Much money from Europe passes through his hands in financing various schemes, and among others this Chilean revolutionary fund was also intrusted to him. At first he accepted this in the ordinary course of business, without suspecting its real purpose; but later he learned how the money was being expended. I knew little of this at the time, as it was all done secretly, and outside the bank, but the moment he became doubtful, Mr. Krantz absolutely severed all connections with these plotters and their schemes. While this was thoroughly understood officially in Washington, where he reported his suspicions, certain circles, engaged in underhand work, still believed he could be used for their purposes. The body controlled by Captain Alva was evidently one of these, who later decided to make him their financial agent. This particular group, while pretending to be entirely Chilean, is in reality a branch of international revolutionaries—radical Reds—whose main object is the overturning of all existing forms of government. Their money comes largely from continental sources, and is seemingly unlimited. In this case it was doubtless sent in Adolph Krantz's name, before the leaders over

there learned that he was no longer a safe emissary.

"Yet he accepted the trust?"

"In a way, yes; but with perfectly loyal intent. As soon as word secretly reached him that he was to be thus used, he laid the full facts before the officials of this bank. I was present as his secretary, and learned then for the first time what I have already told you. They advised that he make the plot known immediately to the authorities at Washington. I accompanied him on that mission, and we then returned to New York to act under instructions. He was directed to accept the order, and thus, through seeming coöperation, learn the details of the plot, and the names of those directly connected with it. There was delay; for some reason Alva was not quite ready to go ahead, and refused to draw the money. Proof of conspiracy was lacking until this act was consummated.

"Mr. Krantz, being afraid that he would be followed if he went again to Washington, delegated me to go, as I was entirely unknown. The Secret Service there outlined a plan designed to hurry matters. I was to be sent direct to these men—Alva in particular—with positive instructions from the higher powers in Washington to draw the money and get busy. I accepted, feeling that this was a duty to my country; the necessary papers were carefully prepared, and I was given explicit instructions how to act. As I speak Spanish easily, and took the name of a well-known female revolutionist now in this country, the task did not seem at the time a specially dangerous one."

SHE paused for a moment, her mind gathering up the odds and ends of narrative.

"It is not necessary that I go further into detail. I met Captain Alva as planned, and was taken to the place where his gang gathered. Krantz was there with the money, and my message compelled the Chilean to accept, and receipt for it. Government agents were stationed in Jersey

City to intercept him on his way back to New York. He never got far enough to fall into their hands; before he had driven four blocks, he was murdered and robbed. The rest of the story you already know."

"The money was actually in that valise, then?"

"Some money was, but not all. We were afraid it might be opened, before an arrest could be made. Each package had real money on the outside; altogether, the amount did not exceed fifteen hundred dollars, and these bills were all marked."

"But you suspected Wine? I know of your call at his office."

"I wondered if you did. Were you there, then?"

"Yes, I followed you in."

"I wish I had known; I would have ventured more than I dared to while alone. I suspected—yes; but that was all. I possessed no facts, but I frightened him so when I exhibited that hatpin that I felt absolutely convinced that he was guilty."

"You had no reason to believe he possessed such a weapon?"

"None whatever; I merely took a chance. I think now the pin used must have belonged to Sarah Waldron, but how it came there can only be determined through a confession by her husband."

HER eyes lifted again to mine, questioning, and a bit anxious.

"Was my course right or wrong, Philip Severn?"

"Undoubtedly right, although I imagine few girls would have had the necessary courage."

"You believe in me still—in the woman?"

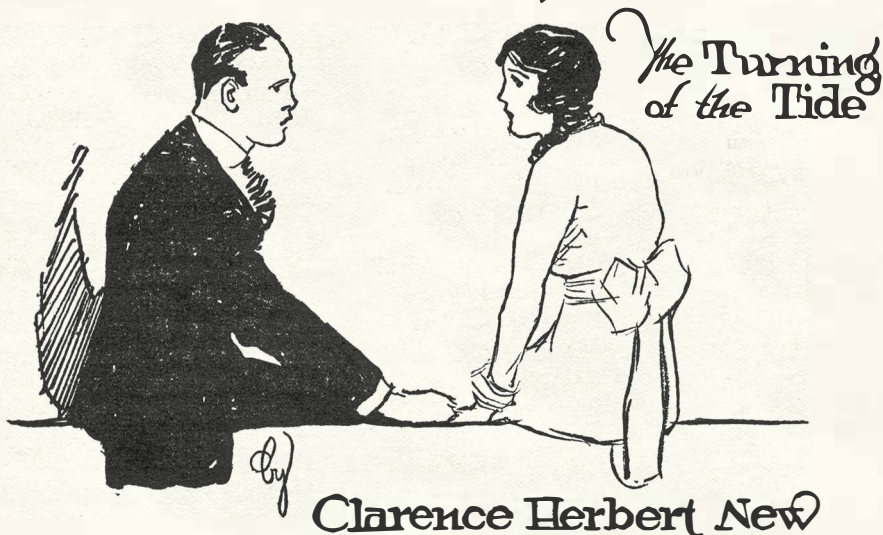
My handclasp tightened, and her eyes dropped before the message she must have instantly read in mine.

"This has been a test of us both, which we will never regret," I answered soberly, "for it has brought faith, hope, love; is this not true?"

She did not move or glance up, but I caught the whispered response of her lips.

T H E E N D

Free Lances *in* Diplomacy



Clarence Herbert New

A STIRRING STORY of these troubled times in this our America, wherein the Diplomatic Free Lance puts over a little *coup* no less dramatic than his many European achievements. You will find Mr. New in excellent form in this notable story.

IN the main arcade of the Equitable Building, New York—said to have a daily floating population of ten thousand people—a keen-eyed newspaper man, having the appearance of unlimited leisure, stood near the news-stand watching the men who came from the express elevators. Presently, a carelessly dressed, well-built man got out of one and was making for the Broadway entrance when he noticed the figure by the news-stand, stopped and went across to shake hands with him.

"I've been wondering where you were keeping yourself, Billy! Must be three or four months since we ran across each other—not?"

"Nearer six, Mac. I've been covering the I. W. W. situation on the Coast—and the strikes in between. In London a month or more, before that. Say! There's an English earl over here, looking after his American investments, who seems to be taking hold of this labor proposition as if he considered it a pretty serious menace to the United States and his own country as well. And he knows what the conditions are, too. You see his name and that of the Countess in the society columns almost every day, because they are some folks on the other side of the pond, but

his activities in the labor field, and in other directions which I suspect but can't prove, don't seem to have been associated with the same man. That Ironville experiment was carried as front-page news by every leading paper in America and Europe; but the man who tried it, and demonstrated exactly what he said he would, has been mentioned invariably as Lord Trevor. The society columns naturally play up the Earl and Countess of Dyvnaunt.

"Unless I'm very much mistaken, the man—and possibly his wife also—are among the most powerful individualities in the world just now. It seemed just possible that you might give me a little inside dope on them—not necessarily for publication unless circumstances arise which demand it. Look here!" He picked up an afternoon paper from the news-stand and folded it to show an unusually good half-tone of a man's head, without revealing the name under it. "Did you ever know this man—personally?"

The mining engineer took his glasses from his pocket—adjusted them—gave a brief glance at the newspaper cut—then grasped the edge of the paper and studied the features carefully for a second or two.

"*Know* him! Well, rather! That's Cyrus Grisscome, who came from Boston

originally, and who put me on my feet when it was pretty hard sledding to make enough for my grub!"

PARKER unfolded the paper, revealing the name under the cut: "The Rt. Hon. the Earl of Dyvnaint—who, with the Countess, is a guest this week of the Barrington-Snaiths and the Duchess of Farnmoor, née Gladys Barrington-Snaith, at Tuxedo."

McNairn's face clouded with perplexity. Again he examined the Earl's features—holding the paper in different lights.

"That's one of the most remarkable doubles I ever saw!"

"Mac, you know my word is good! I've told you I wouldn't use the information unless with your permission or unless it becomes impossible to suppress it longer. Now come across and don't stall. You knew Grisscome had come into money and estates abroad, didn't you?"

"Why—some of the old crowd out West said that he had. And I think most of us were sorry on our own account. Grisscome, as we knew him, was the sort of absolutely reliable man you don't often meet up with in this world. Of course we were pleased with his good luck—but we hated like the devil to lose him. After he and Colonel Bill Adams had struck it rich in two Arizona mines which have panned out millions for them, he was offered some other locations near the Gila, by an Eastern syndicate. I was nearly on my uppers in Frisco, but he had confidence in my engineering ability—sent for me to go in and examine those mines for him.

"Proposition looked unusually straight at first; I thought well of the properties until I sneaked into the tunnel one day and got a few specimens they didn't know about. Salted proposition, of course. They offered me fifty thousand dollars, cash, to report on *their* specimens and keep my mouth shut. I let on that I'd fall for it in order to reach the Coast alive—with my samples. Told Grisscome the whole story, and we put that syndicate out of business. Then he reckoned he ought to do as well by me as the sharks offered, considering I'd saved him twelve hundred thousand—and gave me fifty thousand in shares of the Marblehead mine—had a way of giving Boston names to his properties. Stock's worth double that to-day—and the dividends come in mighty handy when there's nothing doing in my line of work. I've

been up to half a million, and down to just that stock, in the last six years."

"Hmph! I was pretty sure it must be the same man. But why do your old Western crowd assume that you've lost him now? The boys on the press say he's one of the most genial, democratic celebrities they ever try to interview."

"Yes, he's just that! Always had that manner. If I met him to-day, there probably wouldn't be a particle of difference that anybody'd notice. But he's been hobnobbing with royalty and the biggest people in the world since he went over the other side. He's one of them. Comes back here and mixes with the biggest people we've got—can't accept half the invitations that your wife or mine couldn't get by any sort of wire-pulling. A man in that position simply hasn't the time to spend on folks in our walk of life."

WHILE they had been talking, a man stood with his back to them, glancing over the periodicals on the news-stand. After some deliberation he purchased a couple of trade reviews, leaned against the counter and opened one as if studying the listed quotations. And when he finally sauntered away, he had stored in his mind every word of the conversation he had overheard. At the door he met a man with Teutonic features. With no explanation he led him out again and up to an office in a neighboring skyscraper—where the two spent an hour or so piecing together what they knew about a famous Englishman.

In the meantime McNairn's remarks had been cut short by a hearty slap on the shoulder from a man who had caught a glimpse of his face, in passing, from the other side of the arcade. He had been somewhat in doubt at first, but in the strong light from the front entrance there was no mistaking the engineer's identity.

"Jimmy McNairn! By Jove! Been meanin' to look you up any time the last four years, Jimmy—but the beastly war kept us all too infernally busy! I say! This gentleman's a friend of yours—not? Why can't we go below to the café and have a bite?"

"My thunder, Grisscome! Er—excuse me—Your Lordship—"

"Cut it, Jimmy—cut it! I'm Cy Grisscome to you, as always! And your friend, here—"

"Is Billy Parker—of the *Tribune*."

"Of course! Knew your face was familiar, Parker. You came out to Ironville several months ago, looking into that experiment we were tryin'. Want to thank you, by the way, for the impartial way you handled it in your paper. All we asked was to have the experiment judged on its merits. I say! Let's have a bite of something while we chat—eh? I've had a busy three hours with the British Commission up yonder, an' I'm feelin' a bit peckish—what?"

Neither McNairn nor Parker really thought of declining—the opportunity was far too unusual and desirable. They sat for an hour or more chatting upon a wide range of subjects, during which Parker thought he was in remarkably good form—until he saw His Lordship, by the merest hint, draw out McNairn upon a subject which he knew in every detail. Then he suddenly realized that, as a diplomat or an interviewer, the Earl was past-master at the game. Before the party broke up, Trevor asked his old friend:

"Where you living, Jimmy? In one of the Oranges you said—not? Aye! Have you a spare room an' bed where you could put us up for a night? If you're full up with comp'ny, of course we could motor into town any hour after midnight—but we'd like to spend an evening an' see your family, at all events. Sorry Ivo and Sibyl aren't with us this trip."

FOR a second McNairn was fairly staggered—Parker was studying them both with much appreciation, making the most of such opportunity as rarely came his way. Then McNairn said that he and his wife would be delighted to put them up any night they cared to come—would enjoy the chat over old times, immensely. And both of the other men, in a side-glance of thorough understanding, marked up increased respect for the mining engineer. There wasn't an atom of servility or evidence of a social climbing ambition in his manner. He was inviting merely a friend and his wife—as old friends—to talk over old times—not the Earl and Countess of Dyvnaint. As they were parting, after Parker had left them, His Lordship said:

"You're to play fair with us, you know, Jimmy? No fuss! No elaborate entertainin'! We'd like specially to just take potluck, you know."

As it happened, Ruth McNairn was deep in the society page of the evening paper

when her husband reached home. Let us do her the justice to say she was not a climber—partly because she had been a rather level-headed Whitehall in Philadelphia when James married her, partly from the fact that she knew his income wouldn't go far in that direction and she had a horror of debt. But Connie was now nineteen, Fred in high school, and Esther was fifteen years old. Whatever advantage might be gleaned from chance opportunity as they moved on through life must be grasped, in passing—for the children's sake. And, with this instinct, was the feminine conviction that whatever added in a substantial way to the standing either of James, among his business associates, or of herself, in the neighborhood of which they were a more or less recognized part, must better the chances of all her children in the near future.

WHEN McNairn casually told her that the Earl and Countess of Dyvnaint were to spend Tuesday night of the following week with them, she naturally took it for a rather silly joke. When, at the dinner-table, he asked in an undertone what she thought would be nice to give them for dinner and breakfast, she first imagined that his mind was going, then was so amazed and upset that she couldn't eat.

"James! You didn't really set a night for people like that without consulting me! Where did you ever meet them? Why—why—they are the Earl and Countess who are staying with the Duchess of Farnmoor at Tuxedo, this week! I wish you wouldn't joke about things like that—it's weak-minded!" (Even in her excitement, she was careful to pitch her voice so low that the children would not become interested—and curious.)

"I'm not joking, Ruth. The Earl happens to be my old friend Grisscome, who gave me those shares in the Marblehead mine years ago! Had lunch with him today. Never saw his wife—but Billy Parker says she's one of the most charming women in Europe, and one of the biggest celebrities. He asked if we had a spare room—said if we were full up with guests, they'd spend the evening anyhow and motor back to the city after midnight. Now, how about the meals?"

"Oh, for goodness' sake, leave that till Monday! I must try to get the decorators and furnishers on the phone, at once—and see what can be done in the little time

you've given me. I suppose you know that we shall have to spend some money!"

"Now—now—Mother! Don't you bother about that end of it. I know—if you don't. The house is clean, and it's comfortable—every room in it. Let's go up and look at the southeast room after dinner—I think that'll be just right as it is. If Her Ladyship brings a maid, we can give her the small room in the attic. Might get some nice flowers for the dinner-table and library, and the room upstairs—but that's about all you'll need besides the food, and you mustn't make that too elaborate, either. I know they'll like a good turkey—"

"But—but James—who shall I invite to meet them? Would you make it a bridge evening—seven or eight tables—or have in some musician or entertainer—or—perhaps they dance?"

"We'll find out when they come—and we'll invite *nobody* to meet them! Great Pete, Mother—don't you s'pose they're fed up with that sort of thing! They're coming over here just for a quiet evening among old friends! Get that into your head—and go easy! If you invite anybody in or make any fuss whatever, I'll simply take them down to one of the Newark hotels—and I don't think they'll care for that—much!"

His tone was quiet, but she knew that in a matter of that sort, her husband would do exactly as he said.

AFTER leaving McNairn at the Equitable Building, His Lordship had walked around to where his car was parked in Pine Street. As he got in, he mentioned a German name to his Afghan chauffeur—asking if the man had been seen anywhere on that block. The Afghan had seen him, walking down toward William Street with another who, he thought, had been formerly in the Russian Embassy at London.

"Then I was not mistaken, by Jove! Never seem to forget a face if I've once looked at it a few minutes! Sabub, the vultures are flying across the Atlantic! This makes a round dozen I've seen in New York durin' the last month. Run up through Fifth Avenue—I'll take a look around in the lobbies an' dining-rooms of the big hotels. There's no diplomatic game bein' played in Washington, just now—nobody to play it with, since the Senate adjourned. But I'm beginning to think New York is worse than Vienna or Con-

stantinople in their palmiest days—an' I fancy I've escaped one or two personal casualties by a hair, durin' the last few days! Some of the bounders appear to have it in for me!"

The writer of these narratives has frequently pointed out that the matter of disguise is a far simpler one than most people imagine. Suppose, for example, that one of your intimate friends has been in the habit of wearing brown shades in his clothes, dark tan shoes, knitted four-in-hand ties, brown Alpine hats. Men who like to be well dressed usually fall into some particular color-scheme or cut which they have found by experimenting is becoming to them. Well—let your brown friend change suddenly to small gray checks, black shoes with gray gaiters, black derby, gray scarf of India silk, gray silk gloves, walking-stick (which he never affected before), eye-glasses, and shave just one quarter of an inch from each end of his mustache, giving it the narrow, bunchy effect. Would you know him? If you sat opposite in a subway car and he looked straight in your face without a sign of recognition, would you be positive as to his identity? Not once in ten thousand times! His face would appear familiar, but you'd give it up as just a fancied resemblance. Make such a change, some day—and see how many of your friends will stop you, if you pass without seeming to know them.

This was almost a matter of daily custom with Lord Trevor. The clothes he wore as a guest at Tuxedo, for example, were of entirely different cut, pattern and color from the suits into which he changed in the rooms which he occupied in one of the great hotels. Society folk sent their invitations to the Earl and Countess at the St. Regis—where their suite was beautifully fitted up for dinners of twelve and small receptions. But each of them maintained smaller suites in other hotels where their coming or going was neither observed nor commented upon in the press.

So, as Trevor lounged through the lobbies of several famous hostelries, none but the house detectives even thought they were sure of his identity—and eight or ten foreign diplomats (or political secret-agents) having no expectation of running across him in any such place, were too absorbed in matters they were discussing to give him more than an absent-minded glance as he passed through. Three he

recognized as French and Italian diplomats with whom he had worked in more than one political intrigue—and was somewhat relieved to see that they also had waked up to New York's being the center of the international web for the next year or two at least. If the United States proposed to remain aloof from European affairs, adhering to its time-honored custom, the foreign chancelleries meant to know how long and to what extent the American people would maintain that attitude—whether the social revolution under the crust would be able, finally, to uproot Americanism or not.

WHEN Tuesday evening came, Trevor and Lady Nan arrived at the McNairn house in East Orange just before dinner, sending their car and chauffeur to a near-by garage, where it could be phoned for when needed, and were taken up to a beautifully clean room with parquetry floor, Chippendale furniture and net curtains—the air fresh with the perfume from clusters of roses in big cut-glass bowls. Lady Nan was frankly delighted with it—and slipped an arm about Ruth McNairn's waist as she told her so.

"Wasn't it great luck that our husbands were pals in the old days, out West! If you've ever been there, in the mining country, you'll have met Colonel Bill Adams, Trevor's partner. Yes? Isn't he a dear! He's adopted me as a niece—comes across to us in Devon every spring. Was that your daughter in the drawing-room as we came up? What a lovely girl!"

Mrs. McNairn was a trifle breathless—but her guest was so unaffectedly charming that it was impossible to realize in her a world-wide celebrity. The Trevors made short work of their dressing and were down for dinner in less than half an hour. At first the children were naturally reserved with strangers whom they never had seen before, but this wore off unconsciously as they found themselves talking about things in which they were most interested—to a man and woman who seemed to have played every game, tried every fad or stunt that they had. The turkey, done to a brown turn, was brought in by the colored mammy who had been with them for years and was inclined to be a trifle nervous until she saw that "big quality folks" were just like other "quality"—and knew perfect cooking when they tasted it. After the meal was over, Fred asked Her Lady-

ship if she had ever taken pictures by flashlight.

"Dad gave me a bully camera for my birthday—but I don't know anything about interiors and night-exposures, yet."

"Have you the flash-powders or sheets, and the holder, Fred? You have? Capital! Get your camera and I'll show you how one takes them—we'll get a few shots at the whole family, and some more in the morning by sunlight, if you have the films."

So the pictures were taken—first by Lady Nan, and then by Fred—of the whole group. Then Esther played for them while they danced—the McNairns finding it difficult to realize they had not known the Earl and Countess for years, so thoroughly did the pair make themselves at home. In the midst of their dancing the doorbell rang and a caller was admitted—a Professor Müller, who had one of the political-history classes in the university where Constance was in her junior year, and quite evidently took more interest in the girl than merely such as might be aroused by a promising pupil. He was not over thirty, admittedly of German birth, and a graduate of Bonn, yet so methodically had he adapted himself to American customs and vernacular that one would not have suspected this had he chosen to conceal it. In the hurried way that introductions are usually given, he gathered vaguely that the Trevors were being mentioned as people of title—but as it was not conceivable in his German custom of upbringing that people in the McNairns' circumstances would be entertaining any of the aristocracy upon such intimate terms, he dismissed this from his mind as one of the silly forms of American humor and addressed them when he had occasion as "Mr." or "Mrs. Duveen"—the nearest his ears had come to "Dyvnaint."

RUTH McNAIRN'S mind, naturally enough, had been occasionally busy with vague pictures of Constance being invited to visit the Trevors in their Devonshire home, if she produced a sufficiently pleasing impression upon them. So the maternal eye became watchfully alert as to what Constance did or said. The girl had developed a lot of incomprehensible notions since she entered the university—ideas that sometimes exasperated her father to the pitch of threatening the most severe punishment he could think up unless she

got rid of them. His wife's heart skipped a few beats after dinner when she heard Constance expounding some of her socialistic theories to His Lordship—and not admitting the unanswerable statements by which he refuted them. It was all perfectly good-natured between them, but her mother could see the Earl wondering where a child of his old friend could have obtained such dangerous fallacies, and broke in upon them to change the subject—give the girl a momentary errand upstairs and whisper a few words of warning in her ear.

Professor Müller had never come out from the city to call before, though Connie had frequently spoken of him as one of the most progressive instructors in the college. There had been a time in the spring of 1917 when the newspapers had called for his dismissal from the faculty because of his unconcealed pro-German attitude, but the university heads merely stated that they considered an institution of learning one of unbiased, unprejudiced thought, and that a man's personal convictions had nothing to do with his value as an instructor. The impression he gave upon this particular evening was not so much that of a German propagandist as a man who meant to use every ounce of his strength and influence, at all times, in all places, to spread radical socialism.

AFTER he had monopolized the conversation for a time, he committed an unconscious *faux pas* by pointing one of his arguments with the Ironville experiment which had aroused so much discussion a few months before:

"Now, that English peer who came over here to meddle in our labor problems with the excuse of looking after some of his own properties—Trevor was his name, I believe—is an instance of the capitalistic viewpoint which must be eradicated in this country if we have to stand such men up against a wall and shoot them! His so-called experiment was preposterous from the very start! Labor does not claim the ability to manage or finance business enterprises. It proposes to hire the capitalistic class to do that for it! Labor has nothing to do with selling the product on the road—that again is the work of the capitalist class who have been trained for it, and labor would hire such men, not dream of taking them from its own ranks!"

"Er—one moment, Herr Professor."

(Müller started a little at this form of address and glanced sullenly at His Lordship.) "I must disagree with you upon that point. Labor will not hire the capitalists to manage its business, because in order to make a success of any enterprise, the capitalist would know how much it could afford to pay in cost of labor and material, and when such cost was obviously prohibitive. The capitalist would say: 'If I'm to run this business, I'll run it in a common-sense way—to pay a profit and succeed. Otherwise you may try running it yourselves—as they did at Ironville.' Aside from that, there would be disagreement at the very start over the question of salary for the management.

"Take one instance—the man who actually runs the business, president or general manager. A man who can successfully run a million-dollar enterprise and make it show a ten-per-cent profit is worth forty or fifty thousand a year in cold cash—because in the hundred and ten million population there are not more than five or six thousand of such men, and they command that price. If they can increase it to a two- or four-million business, they're worth fifty to seventy-five thousand. That's cold fact. The laborer, on the other hand, the man who can run a lathe in a shop, shovel grain or coal, handle a pneumatic riveter, is worth not more than four to eight dollars a day at the outside, depending upon the class of work—because, in the open market you can get such men to do such work, by the million. You can't beat the final wage-adjustments made by the law of supply and demand in a million years. Sooner or later it gets right down to that: a man's work is worth only what it will bring in the open market, be he capitalist or workingman.

"Now, answering your statement as to salesmen. Labor might hire salesmen—at the start. But a salesman on the road must feel every moment that he is solidly backed by his factory and his company. When his shipments are delayed, when the goods prove inferior, when remittances fail to reach him, when his trade is antagonized by letters from the home office which never should have been written, he simply quits—and goes to some concern under an efficient business management. Labor may hire salesmen, but if labor is running the business, it can never hold them. Same proposition with efficient bookkeepers, cashiers, treasurers."

THIS drew acrimonious retort from the Professor—but for the first time it occurred to Connie that he didn't show up in as favorable a light as usual. His Lordship's arguments sounded convincing, but she felt that there should be a ready answer to them—and the Professor gave nothing but glittering generalities which somehow didn't refute Lord Trevor's statements. The girl had been inoculated with so many poisonous germs of radicalism in high school and college that her mind had been warped beyond any ordinary appeal to common-sense, but she had taken a strong liking to the Trevors from the moment of their unconventional appearance in the house, and couldn't help drawing comparisons between the two men in which her favorite professor showed very much at a disadvantage.

Within a few minutes two other young fellows arrived to call upon Connie. The first was a sallow Russian from Kiev with a mop of uncombed black hair—a fellow-student in the university and a radical of the most extreme breed, who immediately entered into a discussion of socialistic theories with the Professor as if all others in the room should feel privileged to sit and learn profound truths from whatever it pleased them to discuss. The second boy, however, was of different breed. He exuded an atmosphere of gymnasiums and outdoor sports; his clear brown skin bore witness to an excess of scrubbing that would have been the death of young Provatski, and his gray eyes betrayed mental as well as physical health. He jokingly squelched the socialistic discussion by immediately starting one with Fred and His Lordship upon the big Yale-Harvard game of the previous Saturday—and when they would have started again, McNairn told his daughter she'd better go over into the parlor across the hall and have it out with her friends.

"We're not interested in socialism, Connie, and want to talk over old times out West. Besides, I know Henry wants to hear Trevor's account of his flying stunts. Now clear out of here—all three of you!"

On the surface McNairn was smilingly good-natured—but there was an edge to his tone which his daughter understood perfectly. She herself regretted that Provatski and the Professor had chosen that particular evening to call—because from the snatches of talk which floated in from the other room, it was clear that she was miss-

ing very exciting stories from real people who had been all through the big war and had done things which entitled them to the world's respect. For the first time she betrayed lapses of attention during the Professor's radical tirades until it finally penetrated his thick skin that she was not worshiping with her usual intensity, and he got up to go, suggesting that young Provatski accompany him back to the city in order that they might continue their argument. As there seemed no possibility of his getting a word with Miss Constance alone that evening, he agreed—pleading a lot of study before him that night.

AS they were putting on their hats and coats in the hall, McNairn appeared—saying that her mother wanted Connie to do something and that he would see her friends out. When the three were out on the veranda, with the door partly closed behind them, the engineer said very quietly—his tone was even courteous, at first:

"I listened pretty carefully to what both of you had to say by way of argument this evening, because I had an impression that you might be responsible for some of my daughter's recent ideas. And I noticed a certain veneer of polite repression which kept you both from blazing out at my friend's statements as you would have done in some beer-hall. You didn't really make a scene—I'll say that much, though I know it was a strain. But you made remarks in my house against the United States Government and our whole system of carrying on business over here which I never expected to hear from anyone under my roof. You weren't joking, either. I wouldn't believe you were, even if you claimed it—which you don't! You, Müller, are a disgrace to any faculty in this country—and your sort wont remain on any of them much longer. We're going to clean house presently. Such traitors as you, Provatski, have no business within the United States borders—you come over here to poison the hand that feeds you. Now—I'm just telling you, that if either one ever attempts to come into this house again, the consequences will be as unpleasant, physically, as I can make them. We're Americans here—my daughter included. There's the front gate—close it after you!"

WHEN Connie went back into the library, her mother drew her down upon the end of the sofa, merely saying

that Lady Nan had been telling them some of her experiences as a girl in the bazaars of India when her father was one of the most brilliant agents of the British secret service, and that she didn't want the girl to miss any more of it than necessary. Henry Crammond appeared to be simply fascinated—a mood she had never seen in him before. Subconsciously, as the Countess went on with her narrative, Connie was comparing him with Müller and Provatski. Afterward she admitted to herself that the clean, normal young American, their charming English friends, her own family, definitely stood for a certain type—the sort of people who for centuries have built up civilization out of barbarism, who have tried all schemes for government and social order which the mind of man has conceived, rejecting those which did not prove workable and beneficial in actual practice. She knew that Henry admired her—in fact, had asked more than once for a definite engagement. But so had Nicolai Provatski—and so, if she knew the symptoms, would Professor Müller in the near future. Provatski's scheme, as he outlined it, was for them to be coworkers for the cause of radicalism, living in slum tenements, even risking their lives for the cause, if necessary. But what matter, if they eventually brought about the uplifting of poor downtrodden humanity!

As Müller's wife she saw herself in somewhat cleaner quarters, living always, probably, in the university atmosphere, upon a very limited income, always in an atmosphere of theoretic contention—and from what she had observed of the few German families she knew, always in the subservient position in which every German places his women—his servants, his cattle.

With Henry the outlook was so clear and straightforward that it seemed to lack excitement or interest. Harry would succeed. Eventually he would have money enough to live cleanly, luxuriously, anywhere he pleased. He was tolerant, companionable. He would refer to her judgment as they went along building up their fortune. He would encourage her in making the most of her taste for writing and illustration. Once she blushing admitted to herself that he would be quite adorable as a father. Then came back the urge to do something toward the uplift of mankind—and she couldn't as yet see anything of that sort in Harry's daily activities.

The Trevors easily brought out the best

there was in Henry Crammond. On the way home that night it occurred to him that he must have talked rather well, for him, because Connie had paid unusually close attention to what he said, and seemed to be forming a somewhat different estimate of him. Just before he left, His Lordship smilingly remarked:

"Connie, didn't I hear something about a socialist meeting over on the East Side next Saturday night? In one of the big halls? And that some of the extreme reds were likely to debate with anyone who cared to take them on in the audience?"

The girl's face grew pink. Somehow she was losing all inclination to discuss socialism with the Earl.

"Why—yes sir. There is to be such a meeting, I believe."

"Er—I was just wondering, don't you know, if you'd care to go along with Leftenant Crammond an' me—to see what it's like? Eh—what? Used to be considered fairly good in debate, myself."

It was on the tip of her mother's tongue to forbid such an excursion. They'd had quite enough of that sort of thing! But it was His Lordship's proposition. She couldn't guess what lay behind it, though she hoped he had nothing but kindly feeling for her girl. Under other circumstances, McNairn himself would have forbidden her going to anything like this "red" meeting with a finality which left no room for argument—the same final way in which he stopped the completion of her university course next day. (If the Faculty were going to retain men like Müller, the engineer didn't intend to have his daughter exposed to further contamination.) But if his old friend had some reason for taking the girl along, with such a sound, wholesome boy as Harry—why, that was a different matter.

WHEN Henry finally went out into the hall for his hat, Lady Nan whispered in Connie's ear: "That's a perfectly charming boy—be nice to him!" And the remark was still in her mind when he stopped on the veranda for a word or two before leaving.

"Connie, mebbe you don't know it, but those folks in there are two of the biggest people in the world! I don't mean putting on lugs—nothing like that! But the things each of 'em has done, and the hundreds of things they've been honored for by kings and emperors—oh, boy! I recognized

them before we'd been talking five minutes—from their pictures in the newspapers. And to think of swine like that Professor and the bolshevist butting-in with their rot when they might have learned so much by just keeping their mouths shut and listening! Gee!"

"You don't seem to like my friends, Harry!"

"Yes, I do! Every friend you've got! Most of 'em are a fine bunch! But this mob you've been traveling with lately aren't your friends—they're the enemies of every red-blooded American in the country, and they'll drag you down into their own treason if you let 'em. Why, Connie, they're part of the scum we've been fighting against over there in France! I've had dozens of 'em surrender to me—and wished they hadn't surrendered. We'd all have preferred making good Indians of 'em. That Müller isn't a day over thirty; the bolshevist is about my age—and I'll bet that both of 'em found some way to dodge the draft! Why weren't they fighting over there—one side or the other?"

"Shucks! . . . Let's forget 'em. Let's talk about you and me. I want you, Connie! I know I can make something of myself—and I know you can too. Let's, hon! Wont you? Sometimes I get kinda woozy and dream of things—dream of putting you in a nice comfortable home of your own where you can do illustrations that'll appear on every news-stand in the country and make folks feel good when they look at 'em. Or where you can write stories that hundreds of thousands will read. Say, Connie—suppose that you have the idea in mind, now, that you can uplift a lot of poor humans some day by getting up on a platform and lecturing to 'em? All right! Say you give four lectures a week—in halls that wont hold over fifteen hundred. That's six thousand a week—three hundred and twelve thousand a year if your strength holds out and you don't get arrested. Now, suppose you write some story that'll really uplift 'em—something that'll put courage and backbone into some man or woman who's just about all in? And sell it to one of the monthlies with a million circulation. Hey? Just figure up how many of 'em you can reach in a year, that way! Beats the fool lecture-stunt all to smithereens, doesn't it? How 'bout it, Connie? Can't you start loving me a little—pretty soon?"

The girl's mind was whirling. Cram-

mond's personality, his fine war-record, his identification with the saner, cleaner type of people, like the two in the library, were all sweeping her off her feet. She looked up at him, not knowing what to say. And the mysterious something in her eyes made him impulsively take a chance. Slipping an arm gently around her waist, he drew her slowly toward him—and when his lips bent down toward hers, she didn't resist. Five minutes later, in the library, Countess Nan pulled the girl down beside her on the divan and kissed her in perfect understanding—then whispered: "I loved my husband six long years—while I was growing up—before he would marry me. He was my guardian, you know. But he was worth waiting for, don't you think? No other man has ever meant anything to me."

AMONG the letters on the breakfast-table next morning was a note for His Lordship—which he glanced over with an expression of amusement and passed to Lady Nan.

This is by way of apology to Your Lordship and the Countess for my tipping-off Dan Bryant, who handles the society page on the local sheet out there. Of course, the McNairns don't know a word about it—and if you give me away, Mac will never forgive me. But it's likely to do them a lot of good, one way or another, and I was pretty sure you'd stand for it. Of course your movements are always news to the city papers.

Respectfully,

WILLIAM L. PARKER.
Tribune staff.

Lady Nan smilingly put the note into her pocket and then got out of her chair as Fred came in to bid them a rather bashful good-by as he left for school. She warmly grasped his proffered hand and slipped one arm about his shoulder—which seemed to loosen his tongue.

"Gee! I wish you an' Mr. Earl would come again sometime! I stayed awake half the night thinking about all you told us! You two are regular folks."

"Why, if you really feel that way about it, Fred, I fancy it's a promise! One or both of us will try to come every time we are in New York. And when you get any negatives that you think particularly good, I wish you'd send me prints from them, will you? Er—I wonder if you're too big a boy to kiss?"

"Huh! Guess I can stand it if you can!"

The embrace which followed was of the sort which warms the heart for many a long year after, as memory brings it back. Then, with a somewhat pink face, the boy ran out of the house. Later the Trevors got away in their car before their hosts even thought of looking over the papers, but they stopped at a news-stand a few blocks away for a copy of the local sheet, and were conscious that their departure had been observed from behind numerous parlor-curtains along the Avenue. The Dan Bryant referred to had courteously handled his scoop in a conservative manner, but pictures of the Earl and Countess, with those of their hosts, were at the head of the society page in two-column cuts, and the accompanying article gave the McNairns, by clever imputation, a social prominence which their neighbors in East Orange had somehow failed to realize before.

When the Trevors reached their hotel, the clerk said that a gentleman had called twice to see His Lordship and was at that moment sitting in the lobby. Without turning around or giving any indication that the man had been mentioned between them, Lord Trevor quietly said, "You may send him up to our suite in five minutes," and then strolled to the elevator.

WHEN the hall-boy had taken the caller up to the Earl's suite, the door was opened by one of his Afghan household—some of whom always accompanied one or the other of them unless it happened to be upon some hurried or secret expedition. The *khansamah* was tall, bearded, well-educated, and a Chesterfield in politeness. If the stranger had any idea that he might explode a bomb or use any sort of weapon during a private interview with His Lordship, he would have been a much-disappointed man, for the *khansamah* after courteously asking him to be seated and placing cigars at his elbow, held out a hand for the note of introduction which he had presumably brought. This being taken to the Earl in another room, proved to be from the chief of the U. S. Secret Service in Washington—with a few inconspicuous strokes of the pen which guaranteed the initials no forgery—and said:

I'm sending you probably the best man in the Service for the rather difficult work you have over there—able to mix with any class. Might test him. Been associated with Ab-

botsford, in case you're anyway doubtful. Think you are dead right in regard to seriousness of situation there—so am sending ten more of our best men under his orders. N. Y. operatives, of course, at your service as before. Many thanks for assistance already given.

W. J. F.

In a few moments His Lordship came through into the drawing-room and cordially shook hands with his caller. Jokingly he dropped a few remarks in French, Italian, German and Russian—to all of which the man replied easily, in the same language. Then, after the smiling admission that his appearance and command of languages ought to get him most anywhere, he was asked his name—as if it were an afterthought.

"Walter Scott, Your Lordship. You wouldn't recall my appearance at the time, because it differed from this as widely as yours does—but I was twice in Berlin when a certain Doktor Hermann Liebknecht seemed to have the unlimited confidence of Wilhelmstrasse."

"Liebknecht? You're thinkin' of Karl—the socialist who was killed!"

His Lordship's expression of puzzlement was absolutely perfect—and Scott laughingly bowed to it.

"I have a stepbrother—Pemberton Barremore of the Amalgamated Press—who was in Berlin at the same time under another name. However, this seems to be all Greek to you. Let's get down to the job in hand. It's the reds, as I understand it—not?"

"The reds an' the even more serious force behind them! During the last forty-eight hours I've seen—around Wall Street and in several of the big hotels—seventeen of the most able and unscrupulous diplomatic secret-agents who were formerly attached to the foreign offices of Germany, Russia, Austria, Sweden, France an' Italy. And let me tell you those men wouldn't be in New York at this moment unless the United States were the absolute center of world-intrigue! I understand that the Chief has unearthed, this morning, a definite working-plot by which a hundred of the most extreme reds are being fetched into this country every day, through various ports and over the Mexican border—an' feels able to handle the situation. But my impression is that the Charlottenburg junta—which, through Russia, is the persistent and immensely powerful influence behind all this—will keep on pouring

them in to such an extent that the Chief may have to call upon United States troops before he's through!"

"You think that civil-war conditions here—which are what we seem to be approaching—would help Germany?"

"Size up the situation for yourself! Our presumable trade would help Germany to recuperate, of course—to some extent. But Germany herself has come out of the war intact—not even scratched! And she is penetrating Russia every hour of the day, every day in the year, bringing a semblance of order out of chaos in this corner and that, planting Germans where they will be in position to control every industry, every local government. And with a re-organized Russia under her control, she doesn't give a hoot for the whole world!"

"Again: we are about to raise a long-term loan of two billions for England, France and Italy. Without it they simply can't get on their feet for a good many years longer. By creating chaos in the United States before January or February, if she is successful, Germany almost certainly prevents that loan! Leaves those countries for years in a weakened condition for lack of machinery, locomotives and raw materials, while she is gaining strength and destructiveness with every successive hour. Why can't the short-sighted everyday people in all four countries learn something from the bloodiest, most destructive war in history! At least twelve of those diplomatic agents are here to foment trouble between the Allied governments, between the United States and the South American governments, between the business men who are the backbone and vitals of this country, and the labor they employ! The other five have followed the vultures across to help us if they can—an' you'll find their help worth having!"

"By godfrey! I believe Your Lordship is hitting pretty close to the truth! What's the first move you have in mind for me?"

"Follow me closely. By the merest chance, while spending last evening with friends in Jersey, we overheard a word or two concerning a big meeting of socialists an' reds in one of the East Side halls on Saturday night—the sort of meeting which is advertised only by word of mouth and between those who will not permit the information to reach any of the authorities. In fact, had not one of her German professors and a bolshevik fellow-student supposed the girl absolutely in sympathy with

their work, lacking the nerve even to mention it in other company, the meeting would never have been discussed between them. The three were in another room, across the hall—they supposed us all busy with our own talk. I frequently carry an audiphone for such possible emergencies—an' used it without bein' noticed while the Countess was talking."

"You think that possibly those two men may be among the 'executives,' here?"

"Positive of it! Heard a lot of their talk an' know deuced well how much they didn't quite dare say—in that house. Point of this particular meetin' is, however, that most of the leadin' reds from all over the country are to be present, including some of the more dangerous recently arrived ones which even the Chief has no line upon, as yet! An' they're goin' to debate red theories an' plans of action with anyone in the audience who wants to ask questions. All this by way of spreadin' the contagion *en bloc*. But I mean to be in that crowd and heckle 'em until they're mad enough to come back at me with the plainest talk they know how to use—in expressin' their views. You will be in that audience, with at least thirty Secret Service men, ready to act when I whistle. You'll easily see who the ones are whom we've got to get. Listen to the comments all round you—an' chalk the back of everyone who talks treason! It'll be quite a party eventually, I fancy—an' we'll need at least three hundred of the reserve bulls from Center Street ready."

ON Saturday evening the Earl and Countess of Dyvnaint entertained the well-known mining engineer, Mr. James McNairn of East Orange, with his wife and daughter, Miss Constance McNairn—one of the season's *débutantes*—and Lieut. Henry Crammond, A. E. F., in their private suite at the St. Regis.

This, with a description of the ladies' costumes, the floral decorations and flattering personalities, was carried at the top of column on every society page in the city and suburbs. Afterward it percolated in the usual manner throughout the length and breadth of three countries.

This bit of society gossip did not increase by one infinitesimal degree the selling ability of Harry Crammond in that portion of Murchieson & Co.'s business which he handled, but his sales-account grew upon their books in a most inexplicable manner, likewise the bearing of the

company management toward him—and his salary. It did not add by one grain to the large amount of technical knowledge in the brain of Mining Engineer McNairn, or his scientific efficiency, but inside of sixty days he was swamped with requests for analytical reports upon various undertakings, at almost unheard-of commissions. It did not add the smallest fraction to Mrs. Ruth McNairn's breeding, good-heartedness and tact, nor dull the simple everyday cordiality which is one of her greatest charms; yet the social mail by her breakfast-plate increased way beyond the point of being burdensome, and the finding excuses for declining multitudinous invitations taxed her ingenuity. It made her daughter Constance neither prettier, more tastefully dressed nor more desirable in any way as the intimate companion of far richer girls. But expensive limousines, landaulets and sedans upholstered in old rose, brought such girls to the McNairn house every afternoon. Oddly enough, about the same time a managing-editorship descended from the blue sky upon the partly bald head of one Billy Parker—formerly of the *Tribune*.

THAT particular dinner was over at a quarter before eight—which scandalized every imported flunky of every wealthy saphead in the immediate neighborhood. Such things really weren't done, you know. But the host and two of the guests had serious work on hand which waited neither for meals nor social amenities. Miss Constance rapidly changed to the sort of clothes worn by the average shopgirl—covering them with one of the Countess' long cloaks in order to get out of the hotel without comment. Then, with His Lordship and Harry Crammond, they motored down to the big hotel where the Earl had another suite, previously mentioned—where he and the Lieutenant changed into workingmen's clothes with gray flannel shirts and slouch hats—Trevor making a few slight alterations in the appearance of their features, consisting merely of scientifically placed smudges, such as one makes with his own dirty fingers, unconsciously. Twenty minutes later, having left their car at the corner

of Lafayette Street and Broome, they were in a foul East Side hall, packed with at least two thousand people.

A detailed account of that meeting is unnecessary. After Trevor, from different parts of the hall, had quietly but clearly asked the red speakers on the platform unanswerable questions until they frothed at the mouth and screamed out murderous treason against the United States Government, calling upon their hearers to slit the throats of every aristocrat, capitalist and employer in the country, he succeeded in evading their notice long enough to rejoin Constance and Harry Crammond and get them out into the street.

"Get away as far as you can without losing a second! Sabub will run you over to Orange in the car! There'll be merry hell breaking loose here in a few minutes; you'll get all you want to know in the morning papers! Never mind me—I shall be all right, I fancy—usually muddle through, don't you know! What?"

As the boy and girl crossed in the car on the Pennsylvania ferryboat from Desbrosses Street, a spasm of horror shook her. Clutching his arm desperately, she said:

"Oh, Harry! Tell the man to take us back on the next boat! We simply can't leave him in that place with those frightful beasts! If he's once recognized, even as the man who was arguing with them, he'll be killed! And they stood up there and said they were socialists! That what they called upon the people to do was practical socialism—direct action! I feel as if what little mind I've got had been defiled until I never can get it clean again! Tell the man to take us back!"

It was the stern-faced young Lieutenant of the machine-gun battalion in France who answered her—not the boy who had thought the war over, and dreamed of love.

"If they get him, Constance, it will be only the soldier's risk—and he's the bravest one I ever knew. He ordered me to take you home—we both know why. I'm a soldier. I obey orders!"

As his arm slipped around her waist, the shuddering little figure snuggled closer in his embrace—cured for all time of the thing she had just seen in all its loathsome nakedness.

There will be another story of the Diplomatic Free Lance, dealing with the serious problems of our day, in the next, the March, BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE.

Exploits of an Honest Grafter



Jinxville Runs to Form

W. O. G.

William O. Greynolds

SOAKEM WRIGHT, champion heavyweight pugilist, now appearing exclusively afternoon and evening, rain or shine, with the Mighty Maxwell Three-ring Circus, and meeting all comers for a forfeit of five hundred dollars, was indulging in his playful habit of beating up his wife. This fact, to Honest John Barker, immaculate "fixer" of the Mighty Maxwell, was more than apparent as he climbed over the flats of the circus train, located an unmistakable, yowling voice, then started on a lope for the champion's private car, whence came the shrieking sound, accompanied now and then by the crash of hurtling china, the smacking of a fist against flesh, and the musical cussing of Soakem Wright as he muffed a left swing to the body or a right hook to the face. Fifty yards away, Honest John tripped, and making a wild stab into the air, clutched at the white jacket of the Champeen's cook, just sidling into the privilege car.

"Why aren't you down there stopping that fight?"

"Me?" The chef stared. "Oh, no! I was just hired to cook!"

"But—"

"I like my face, Mr. Barker. I aint takin' no chances. An' you orter see her! She's got a shiner on one eye as big as a nonion. It aint no place for a plain, or-

dinary cook—specially with 'em breakin' all the dishes!"

Honest John loped disgustedly away, clambered up the steps of the private car and interrupted the festivities just as Mrs. Soakem Wright, bewailing her poor aim with a soup-tureen, received a rebuke in the shape of a heavy fist that knocked her clear of the dining-compartment furniture and into a Theda Bara position on the skin-bedecked couch at the opposite side of the car. Honest John, with a long-legged leap, placed himself between the frolicsome pair, and tried his best to look stern—and at the same time gaze upon Mrs. Soakem's rainbow eye. It was difficult, but Honest John was a poker-player. His best scowl came into action.

"Where do you get this stuff?" he snorted at the Champeen. "You're fined twenty-five dollars!"

"One hour's pay," sniffed Mrs. Soakem from her tiger-skin. "Some guys make me sick!"

"And you're fined ten!" raged Honest John, steering his glance clear of that purple orb as he said it. "Now shut up."

"I'm shut," said Mrs. Soakem, absently retrieving her switch from the floor. Honest John turned his attention to the sullen Champeen.

"What's wrong with you, anyhow?"

"Nothin' wrong with him; he's battin'

a thousand!" Mrs. Soakem mumbled it to herself as she brushed her hair from her one good eye.

"Shut up!" snapped Honest John. "You lip in again, and it costs you a dollar a word."

"Cheap at half the price."

"Five dollars!"

"Plus the original ten; that makes fi'teen don't it?"

"Nine dollars more!"

Mrs. Soakem rose belligerently.

"Well, f'r Gawd's sake—"

"And four dollars on top of that! Now shut up!"

MRS. SOAKEM'S lips opened—then closed suddenly as she placed a hand over her mouth and nodded her head in silent assent. Once again Honest John turned to the Champeen.

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself!"

But the Champeen pointed an accusing finger toward the person on the couch.

"She done it."

"Sure. Always blame the woman."

"Well, she did! She done it all. I wasn't doin' nothin' to nobody—eatin' my breakfast with my mouth full, and not sayin' a word, an' she ups an' calls me a four-flusher!"

"For what?"

"Fer nothin'—nothin' a-tall. Just because I wasn't takin' no chances an' was goin' to play sick t'day!"

"Play sick? And not appear at the show?" Honest John reached for his billy. "Say, if you'd ever pulled that off, you'd have had somebody to argue with that you couldn't whip. Understand? Play sick—you standing there as fit as an ox and deliberately plotting to leave this show in the hole after it's advertised you on every six-sheet stand within forty miles! She called it right; you're a four-flusher, a great, big, tin-eared, wooden-headed four-flusher. You're fined twenty-five dollars more for even thinking of such a thing, and if you look sideways at me, I'll dent your nut with this blackjack and cancel your contract into the bargain."

The Champeen gulped.

"Didn't I say this here town was Jinxville?" he questioned of the lady on the tiger-skin. But that person still held a hand clapped over her mouth. Honest John stared.

"Jinxville? You're off. This town's Riverdale, and you're matched to—"

"That may be the name on the railroad station, but it aint the real McCoy. This burg's Jinxville. Listen: didn't the Sells-Floto bunch come in here three years ago, and didn't their elephants run away on 'em an' smash up the whole joint? An' aint they been drawin' lawsuits over it ever since? Didn't the Big London trick get burned up on the lot here, an' didn't the Barton Brothers drop a center-pole here an' bump off three razorbacks? I know what I'm talkin' about. This here town's a jinx, a reg'lar he-man jinx, and there aint never a tent-trick come in here without runnin' into trouble. I'm givin' it to you straight!"

Over on the couch the woman smiled sneeringly. There was no fine for that. Honest John rammed his hands into his pockets with an air of disgust.

"You're not the whole show, are you?"

"No, but—"

"Then why take on all the responsibility?"

"Well,"—Soakem Wright sunk his head between his shoulders,—"there aint no use takin' chances. It might be me that drawed the jinx, specially with me matched up with a truck-horse!"

"A what?"

Soakem Wright poked forth a knotted finger.

"She sawr him."

HONEST JOHN turned toward the woman and nodded.

"All right. Go ahead and talk. But no funny stuff. Who's this man your loving husband's afraid of?"

"I aint afraid o' nobody!"

"Not even your wife. Now close up and let Mrs. Wright do the talking."

"But—"

"One more word out of you, and I'll slap on a fine that'll keep you awake nights. Now, Mrs. Wright, what about it?"

Mrs. Soakem, fully assured of safety, moistened her lips and blinked her good eye.

"Nothin' but an overgrown cow; that's all," she began vindictively. "I went uptown early and seen some guys talkin' to a big stiff standin' on the corner. When they says somethin' about Soakem, of course, I stalled around. Then I got the dope that this big cheese was going after the money to-night. And when I comes back an' tells Soakem, he gets scared pink-eyed an' wants to dog it."

"Who wouldn't, with the reputation this town's— Beg your pardon, Mr. Honest, my face just run away with me. I'm shut. I aint sayin' a word!"

"All right. Stay that way. Didn't get his name, did you, Mrs. Wright?"

"Sure. I aint no fool. They call him the Terrible Iceman."

"Not the one I'm thinking of. There's a match on for the afternoon with some bird named Lefty Frank. He doesn't amount to much. And for that matter, this other bird's only a local pug, isn't he?"

"That's all. I've seen Soakem knock his kind for goal without even half tryin'. Honest, he makes me sick!"

"For once I agree with you." Honest John turned to the Champeen. "Why should you be afraid of this bird? Go ahead and talk."

Soakem rubbed a tin ear.

"It's just the reputation this town's got, that's all," he mourned. "It's copped my Willie."

"Well, forget it. You never went up against a bad boy yet that I didn't fix it before hand for him to lay down, did you?"

"No—no I didn't."

"Then why didn't you come to me and tip off the deal instead of turning yellow and beating up your wife and wasting a lot of my time? Now, listen!" he looked at his watch. "I'm going to square this. I'll see this geek and grease his palm. I want you to knock the tar out of this baby they've got stacked up for this afternoon and not waste much time about it. That'll give you a better rep for to-night, and when the big deal starts, I don't want you showing a streak of yellow. Get me? Because if you do, I'll appoint a razorback to give you a real beating—with a tent-staub. And something more. I want you two to kiss and make up."

Mrs. Soakem spat rather derisively, but she rose and pursed her lips. Soakem met them gingerly. Honest John approached the door.

"You wont hear anything more out of me unless something goes wrong. But you'll sure hear plenty if you're not on the job!"

"I'll have him there," said Mrs. Soakem.

"I'll depend on you," answered Honest John—and started toward town.

HALFWAY up the main street, John stopped in a cigar-store. "Understand there's going to be a real mill at the

circus to-night," he volunteered as he paid for a handful of cigars. "Know anything about this fellow they call the Terrible Iceman?"

"I'll say I do," came from behind the counter. "Pretty good pug! Slow on his feet and slower in the head, but he's got a good punch if he ever gets a chance to untangle it. He's liable to give the circus champ a run for his money."

"So?" Honest John was mildly interested as he bent over the cigar-lighter. "Where's he hang out?"

"Down at the ice-plant."

"Regular iceman, then."

"Sure. Pulls the cakes away from the molds, and shoves them into the delivery wagons."

"Nothing puny about him, is there? Ought to be able to put up a good scrap. Guess I'll have to run out and see that to-night. Guess it's going to draw a good house?"

"A whale! Everybody in town's pretty much behind the Iceman. He's won a lot of scraps around here—local stuff, of course; but he swings an awful wicked mitt."

"Sure have to see that," agreed Honest John again. "What'd you say his real name was?"

"Thors Nelson. A big Swede."

"No?" asked Honest John with a grin, then faded from the store. Another block up the street he asked the direction to the ice-plant, and at another block—

"Mr. Barker! Oh, Mr. Barker!"

THERE was something in the voice which made Honest John think of Soakem's superstitious fears. A canvasman was approaching on a run.

"Been down to the cars lookin' for you," he announced. "Mickey Green run that big eight-horse tableau wagon against a fire hydrant up at the circus-lot, and everybody's sloshing around in water up to their ankles. The superintendent says we'll have to buy a couple o' tons o' straw if we're goin' to give a show this afternoon."

"Jinxville!" growled Honest John and hurried for the circus-lot. The canvasman had not exaggerated. True, the flood of water had been stopped by hurrying men from the street-department, but the mud was still there—gloriously present in fact. Honest John sought a hay-and-straw dealer and gave forth money. Then he

turned once more to the circus lot for a final survey of the muddy situation.

"Are you the manager?" came a voice, and Honest John knew what was behind it. He summoned his most judicial expression.

"I'm the official adjuster," he countered. "Barker's my name, attorney at law. What can I do for you?"

"Nothing for me, except to sign this in the name of the show, and come down and put up a bond," was the answer. "I'm only the deputy sheriff. Several of the neighbors around here noticed that their lawns had been ruined by a flood of water, and so they chipped in on an attachment suit. None of my business, y'know; I only follow out orders. Like show-folks myself, but you know how it is."

"Yeh," grunted Honest John, "I know how it is." And beneath his breath, he muttered again: "Jinxville!"

A trip to a justice-court and the making of a bond which would be forfeited the next day. Then the fixer somewhat fretfully made his way to the ice-house to find the terrible Thors.

He found him, a tremendous, small-headed, great-shouldered Swede, engaged in the gentle pastime of yanking two-hundred-pound cakes of ice around as though they were poker-chips. For a full moment Honest John watched him in sheer wonderment that anyone with so small a head should be able to navigate such a huge body. At last, when the ice-yanking Swede paused a moment—solely for the reason that every wagon at the dock was loaded to capacity—Honest John approached and suavely announced a desire for conversation. Thors the Terrible agreed, in a pig-eyed sort of way. A moment later, far at the end of the ice-dock, Honest John became confidential.

"Listen, Kid," he began, "you're going to fight Soakem Wright to-night at the circus, aren't you?"

"Ay bane."

"Wont you be tired after working this way all day?"

"Naw."

Honest John sighed slightly. It was easier to do business with persons who talked more than one word at a time.

"Listen," he began again, "have you ever fought a champion?"

"Naw."

"Then you don't know what you're going up against?"

"Naw!"

"Then take a tip from me. I like you, see? Get that? I like you. Seen you work around town here, and all that sort of thing. I happen to know who put you up to fight this champion. Listen—" Honest John stood on tip toe and whispered. "There are one or two guys around town that would like to see you get the tar knocked out of you."

"Naw?"

"Straight stuff. I happen to know. I could make money by letting the champion knock you cold in the first round. But listen; I aint built that way. I'm an honest guy. I'm the kind of a guy, Thors, that if I had to, I'd come to you and tell you a lot of lies to keep you from being beat up. But I know I don't have to do that. Now which would you rather have, the beating and get knocked cold, maybe, or fifty plunks to get a few halfway hard taps and lay down when the time come?"

THORS the Terrible Iceman thought long and hard. His face showed it. Slowly he scratched the place where his brains should be.

"You skol bane give me fatty dollars to lay down?"

"Surest thing you know."

"Ay bane tak it!"

"You said a mouthful, Thors. Here's the fifty. And to show you I'm a real guy, if you act right to-night, I'll slip you twenty-five more. But remember, it's to be in the fifth round. Don't wear yourself out in the other rounds—just put up a good fight and whang away at the champion and he'll let you get in a few blows, so the crowd'll feel good. Then, in the fifth round, start after him like you were going to make mincemeat of him, but when he hits you, act like it's stung you, see, and cover up. Then he'll hit at you a few more times,—wont hurt you, of course,—and then you go down for the count. Are you clear on that?"

"Ay bane," said the Terrible Iceman, and Honest John once more returned to the circus lot, a great hunk of worry lifted from his carefully coated shoulders. He was so clear in mind and heart, in fact, that for the first time that day, he fumbled the heavy, gold-flanged lion's claw which hung from his watch-chain, and whistled a tune with a few blue notes scattered through it. Then, as he reached the circus lot, he suddenly forgot everything except

the fact that there was an argumentative crowd in front of the main gate to the big top—and that it was too early for crowds to appear. Honest John rushed forward, and again Honest John muttered:

“Jinxville!”

It had all happened during the parade. True, the perfect gentleman in charge of the elephants had shouted a warning as the pachyderms came down the street, but the nearsighted farmer with the skittish horse hadn't heard. And the horse had run away. Damages, two hundred and fifty dollars. John argued; John cajoled; John settled for seventy-five, then turned toward the circus-cars with a sudden premonition.

“Soakem was right!” he mumbled as he raced across-lots toward the railroad yards. “Most anything's liable to happen in a burg like this. I'll probably get down to the cars and find that he's beaten her to death and hidden her body, or—”

But as he slid along the side of the Champeen's car, the old smile came back again. The world was good. Within, to judge from the sounds, Soakem Wright was at luncheon, devouring a menu which began with soup. And coupled with the straining sound was a sweet, gurgling, feminine voice, cooing:

“Shall I fix your salad-dressing for you now, Sweetie?”

Sweetie! Three hours before, she had been hurling crockery at him. Honest John turned away to his own car and his own luncheon.

“‘A woman, a dog and a walnut tree,’” he quoted, “‘the more you beat 'em, the better they be.’” To which he added a newer bit of philosophy along the same line: “‘Get 'em young, treat 'em rough and give 'em nothing!’” Following which he discovered for the first time since early morning that he had an appetite. Jinxville had relented, in one place, at least.

And as the afternoon went on, it seemed that Jinxville had failed completely. There had been clouds in the morning. There was bright sunshine now—sun which dried up much of the mud on the lot and made the straw covering nearly superfluous. And what was better yet, there was a crowd, a good crowd, a plentiful crowd.

ACT by act the show went on, without incident, and what was more important, without accident. Concert-time came, and Honest John's eyes grew anxious

for a moment. Then they cleared, and his long, carefully manicured fingers again fumbled his beloved lion's claw. There in the entrance, waiting for the signal, was Soakem Wright; at his side, hanging to his arm and looking up at him with an affectionate glow in her undecorated eye, was his chief second, rubber and ring adviser, his wife.

The concert came. Also Soakem Wright, his chief second and his antagonist. Concert-time went, while they carried away Lefty Frank, the local white hope, and while Mr. and Mrs. Soakem Wright went arm in arm back to their car. Honest John watched happily—then Honest John turned excitedly toward the front entrance.

Yes, there had been a fight, he discovered, an excellent fight, the sort of fight where the ambulance comes clanging along, followed closely by the patrol-wagon and those intrusive persons called harness bulls. From what Honest John could gather as they loaded both conveyances, some one with a belligerent nature had wandered into the sideshow and belittled the entertaining efforts of Gyppo the Great Magician. All of which had aroused the sensitive nature of the Half-Man-Half-Woman to the extent that he—or she—had arisen and firmly tapped the uncouth visitor over the head-with a bicycle-wrench.

All of this Honest John admitted at police headquarters, was nothing for a Half-Man-Half-Woman to do. But when one is torn constantly between the volatile nature of femininity and the deeper, baser instincts of the male, can one entirely govern one's actions—especially if one happened to be two? It was a good argument, so good, in fact, that the desk-sergeant listened attentively, accepted the generously-given “compliment” passed him by Honest John, and released the circus clan on their own recognizance. As for John—

He waited only until the sideshow, Cigarette Fiend, Turtle Boy and all, had passed out into freedom once more. Then he called a taxicab and hurried for the ice-house.

“You understand everything perfectly?” he asked somewhat querulously as he cornered the Terrible Iceman, just tossing a two-hundred-pound cake on the top of his last load. The Iceman nodded heavily.

“Ay bane.”

“Good. Listen: I've just been thinking about it. Fifty's a mighty small amount for a big fellow like you. Here's twenty-

five more—and remember, there's still another twenty-five waiting for you. Understand?"

"Ay bane."

BACK to the circus lot went Honest John, fully prepared for a riot. But there was naught save peace, and the raucous voice of the ballyhoo man, once more inviting the populace into the interrupted sideshow. Down to the cars hurried the fixer, to hesitate beside the Champion's domicile, then wander on again with a bit more complaisance in his soul. They were cooing like lovebirds. Night came; the lights shone on the circus lot. A "turn-away crowd" jammed before the ticket-wagons. The performance made its beginning—and its end, safely. Out in the entrance were four figures awaiting the concert, Soakem and his wifely, rainbow-eyed second, and Thors the Terrible Iceman, with his fidgety manager.

The tent cleared. The reserved seats filled with the thousand or so hang-overs who had paid their extra dollar to see their Thors in his greatest combat. The ring was erected. The fighters took their corners. The announcements were made. The gong. The fight was on!

Wildly, Thors the Terrible Iceman slashed forth, while the crowd yelled, and while Soakem Wright ducked easily and planted blows wherever he willed. Dully the Iceman grinned, felt the pit of his stomach, and came in again. And once more, while Mrs. Soakem yelled directions from her corner, the quick-hitting husband walloped Thors again and again. The Swede blinked. He wobbled once or twice, and Soakem let out a right. It hung the Terrible Iceman on the ropes for a second, but somehow he untangled and came in for more.

The gong and Honest John hurried to Soakem's corner.

"Not so hard!" he whispered. "We've got to give 'em a good fight. Stall a bit the next round."

"Yes, dearie," agreed Mrs. Soakem as she rammed half a lemon in her husband's mouth, "stall a little. The fight's five rounds."

"Glug!" answered Soakem in assent, as he sucked at the lemon.

The gong again. Soakem rose and tapped his adversary on the chin, lightly. A great hope seemed to come into the eyes of Thors, the Terrible Iceman. A

light punch on the ribs, and the hope strengthened. When the round ended, the crowd was yelling happily and Thors was still alive. Honest John again hurried to the Soakem corner to offer congratulations. But Soakem yawned.

"Guess I'll knock him for goal this frame," he said in a blasé tone. "I'm sleepy. Want t' get down t' the cars early. Slip me that there lemon, hon'."

"Sure, dearie." Again the lemon was rammed into Soakem's mouth, and again Honest John leaned forward pleadingly.

"Not this round," he begged. "Get me? Make it the fifth. Gosh, give these birds a run for their money. Anyway, it's framed for the Swede to lay down in the fifth. Why ruin a good man? Wait, kid, wait!"

Soakem pulled the lemon from his mouth.

"Oh, aw right," he responded wearily, "but if you was as sleepy as I am, you'd duck early. But aw right."

THE third time a round began. Soakem slouched into the center of the ring, while Thors the Terrible Iceman whanged away at him, and while Soakem ducked. Again and again—then Soakem straightened with a surprised look on his face. He had failed to sidestep a blow, and it had caught him full in the stomach. True, it hadn't hurt,—more than the kick of a mule would hurt,—but it was the theory of the thing. He'd failed to out-guess the wallop of a fourth-rater! He set himself for a straight left, an uppercut and a jab, then let go. His eyes went wider than ever. He had missed all three! And when again he sat in his corner, he pulled the ever-present lemon from his teeth long enough to growl at Honest John:

"Didn't I tell you to let me finish him in that round? See what I done? Muffed him three straight. Can you beat that? Muffed him three straight! Well, I'm tru with youse—both o' youse. I'm goin' to finish him! Gimme that lemon back an' cut out rubbin' me. Lemme doze a minute. I'm sleepy."

The bell. Soakem opened his eyes, blinked, and moved once more toward the hulky form of Thors. Arriving there, he uncorked a blow that would have killed a bay steer—and let it slide into nothingness. Soakem had missed again. From over in her corner, Mrs. Soakem suddenly grasped the ropes.

"What's the matter with you, y' big fish!" she yelled at her husband. "Take the dust out o' your eyes!"

Soakem half turned, and grinned in a silly manner. As he did so, Thors the Terrible Swede allowed a right hook to depart on its course. It connected. Soakem wobbled, then summoned a haymaker which swung three feet two short. The Terrible Swede, staring with a vague air of wonder, watched the blow circle through the air, then ramsed in and again lifted Soakem off his feet with that right hook. It was really pleasurable. The crowd yelled. The Terrible Swede looked around him in a puzzled sort of way, stood gaping a second, then hit out vaguely—only to connect with the tin ear of Soakem Wright, who had wandered in at just the wrong second, and neglected to duck. Mrs. Soakem's arms went high in the air.

"You bum!" she shrieked. "You dub! You big cheese! Cut out stoppin' them right hooks and turn loose with somethin'. One-two! Hear me? Use th' old one-two! That's it— Look out! Oh, f'r gawd's sake!"

She slumped to her seat again. Soakem had dully wobbled in and neglected to duck again. The eyes of the Terrible Swede were more wondering than ever. With the air of a man who sought to see just how far he could go with a wild beast, he carefully set, took deliberate aim, then swung a wide haymaker which should have missed Soakem by three feet. But instead, the Champeen, while the crowd roared, while Mrs. Soakem gritted her teeth, pulled her hair and cussed ladylike cusswords under her breath, and while Honest John went out to the ticket-wagon to get five hundred dollars, dully and stodgily walked straight into it, to be lifted high in the air, knocked over the ropes and slapped down into a pile of old canvas, just as the gong rang for the end of the round.

MRS. SOAKEM picked him up, jabbering to himself, and pulled him to his chair in the corner of the ring. Wildly she jammed the lemon into his mouth, and thus, having effectually stopped any remarks, spoke to him with words no husband should hear, as she rubbed him, slapped cold water in his face, waved the towel before him and relieved herself of her disappointment. Once Soakem rolled his eyes at her in a dull, cowlike sort of way, but sought to say nothing. The bell

rang for the fifth time; Mrs. Soakem pulled the lemon from between his teeth, and pushed him into the ring. And Soakem, evidently still stung from the blow that had sent him over the ropes, merely stood there, a silly grin on his cherrylike lips, one eye swelling to wonderful proportions, and his arms in a position like the posed pictures of John L. Sullivan. High went the voice of Mrs. Soakem:

"Get with it! Get with it! Do somethin', y' big mutt. Don't stand there like a hunk o' cheese! Look out—he's comin' at you. Look out, there!" Then as a sort of investigative blow on the part of the Terrible Iceman rocked the tin-eared dome of her husband, she deliberately threw the bucket of water far into the hippodrome track, and turned with only the anger that a disgusted woman can know. "Then don't, y' big boob," she squealed. "Let him knock y' for goal, for all I care. Hey, Iceman, set him on his ear. He aint no fighter; he's a dub—a plain, out-an'-out dub. Knock him for a row o' tombstones, for all it'll worry me!"

"Knock him o-u-t!" came from the thousand or so voices on the reserved seats. "Put 'im down! You've got him—you've got him! Knock 'im cold!"

Thors the Terrible Iceman looked about him in a kittenish sort of way. His small, beady eyes glittered. Before him was a sign, painted on canvas, announcing the fact that the man who could knock out Soakem Wright would receive a reward of five hundred dollars. Five hundred—

The Terrible Iceman swung. The Terrible Iceman connected. The form of Soakem Wright bounced to the mat and bounced back again. Again the hamlike fist of the Terrible Iceman jolted outward and found flesh. And again—and again, while the crowd howled its happiness, and while Soakem Wright, the Champeen, bounced around the ring like a recreant bean on a hot dish. The Terrible Iceman grinned happily. The Terrible Iceman hit again, and a few more times on top of that. Hurrying in from the treasury wagon, Honest John saw a great form that seemed to be all arms, hitting in all directions at once, while before him a wabbly thing with boxing gloves on his hands sailed into the air, started toward the mat, then sailed into the air again before he could ever strike it.

Down at last went Soakem Wright, while the referee counted and while Mrs. Soakem

in her corner, apparently forgetting her edict of a moment before, yelled for her husband to get up and show what he was made of. Out in the ring Soakem heard dizzily and arose, to display the fact that he evidently was composed for the most part of rubber. Again the crashing impact of a fist caromed him against the ropes and thence to the floor. Once more the pleading, strident voice of Mrs. Soakem enabled him to rise. For the third time Thors the Terrible Iceman rushed in with a collection of blows and sent the piece of hash-meat before him skidding around the ring. Then, while Mrs. Soakem screamed her anger, and while the white-faced Honest John reached for his roll of bills, Thors the Terrible Iceman grinned happily and knocked his opponent for a wonderfully acrobatic somersault over the ropes and into the hippodrome track, where he lay motionless until the referee grew tired of counting.

TWO razorbacks, with a strip of canvas between them, gathered him up, somewhat hard-heartedly and unceremoniously, and carted him away. No one seemed to notice—excepting, of course, a talkative little woman with one purple eye, who followed in the rear. Up on the stage, Honest John, his fingers sticking to every bill, was passing out the forfeit-money to a sorrowful-faced Swede. He reached four hundred. He reached four twenty-five; then the Terrible Thors leaned toward him.

"That skoll bane enaff," the Big Swede grunted. "Ay bane no tak nawthing ay no bane dasarve. Ay bane try, but he wadant lat me! Avary tam ay bane hat to mees heem, hay bane raght thare. Ay bane do may bast, Ay bane. Ay no bane tak more than four twantay-five."

"You win," said Honest John. "Jinxville! Jinxville, right—when a guy even tries to get knocked out, and the other guy wont do him the favor of helping him. Yqu win!"

He paid over the money. He watched the happy, shouting crowd lift the Terrible Iceman to their shoulders and carry him home. Then, as the roughnecks began the tearing down of the seats, he turned into the darkness outside the tent.

There he stopped as a woman's voice, soft, yet commanding.

"Mr. John."

"Yeh." Honest John turned half-heartedly. It was Mrs. Soakem Wright. Hurriedly she came to him and reached into her purse.

"How much do I owe you?"

"Owe me?"

"Yeh—how much did you pay that bird—the whole five hundred?"

"Of course."

"Oh, all right." Quietly Mrs. Soakem brought forth a roll of bills and laid it in the hand of the fixed. "I kind of hated to do it, at that, seeing you'd already slipped the guy seventy-five. But I told him that you had said not to lay down until Soakem knocked him down, and that to hit Soakem as much as he pleased, until Soakem told him to stop."

"But—but—" Honest John was stammering. Mrs. Soakem, like Aladdin, rubbed her wonderful lamp.

"You're wonderin' why Soakem didn't show more speed?" she asked innocently. "Well, 'twas funny, wasn't it? Funny as a crutch to me—I was enjoyin' it so. You see, that Iceman guy was the first bird that I ever seen that was big enough to give Soakem the kind of beatin' that I'd really like to see him get. An' I wasn't quite sure he could do it without help. An' so I just slipped a few slugs out o' the ol' black bottle into that lemon that Soakem sucked. An' bee-lieve me, it done the business."

Honest John, clutching the five hundred, gasped.

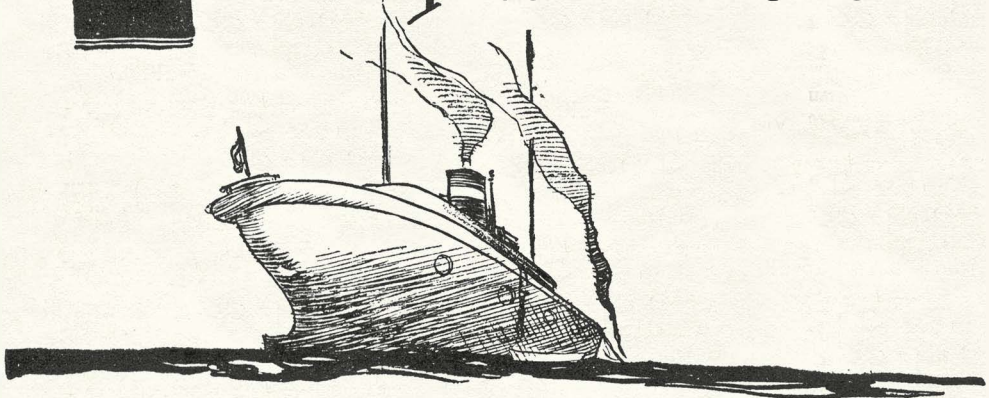
"Knockout drops!"

"You said it," agreed Mrs. Soakem as she turned airily away. "At both ends of the game!"

"THE BEST ACT OF ALL" is the title of the next of these "Tales of an Honest Grafter," and we are confident that you will find it well named. Along with it will appear: the first third of a remarkable new novel of Wall Street and the West by Frank Collins; "The Wildcatter," a vivid novelette of the oil-fields by Courtney Ryley Cooper; Edison Marshall's "The Voice of the Pack" and short stories by such writers as Elmer E. Ferris, Chester F. Crowell, Culpeper Zandt, Henry Leverage and J. Frank Davis.



The Ship of Shadows



THIS COMPLETE NOVELETTE is one of the most fascinating stories the gifted author of "The Junk of Laughing Girls" and "After the Manner of Asia" has ever written—a story you will read and remember with keen enjoyment.

CHAPTER I

DR. VENABLE HAS A CALLER

WERE this to be the tale, simply, of how Eric Venable fell and rose again from the depths, much might be said of his voyage to Tientsin River. It would bear much dwelling upon; it would in itself make, from the Horatio-Algerian viewpoint, an excellent moral tale. But it would delete all about Shinski and Marie, and the Shirvan diamond, and the burlap-wrapped parcel; it would have to touch upon Mrs. Ivanoff's pistol with discretion; and of course it could say little about the poet Gerin's company of shadows, or the devil Boris Kryalpin, or the ending of the *Kum Chao*. And these things, from a worldly and unmoral viewpoint, make up a glorious tale—a sordid and tragic and human tale, if you will, but a stirring and glorious one withal!

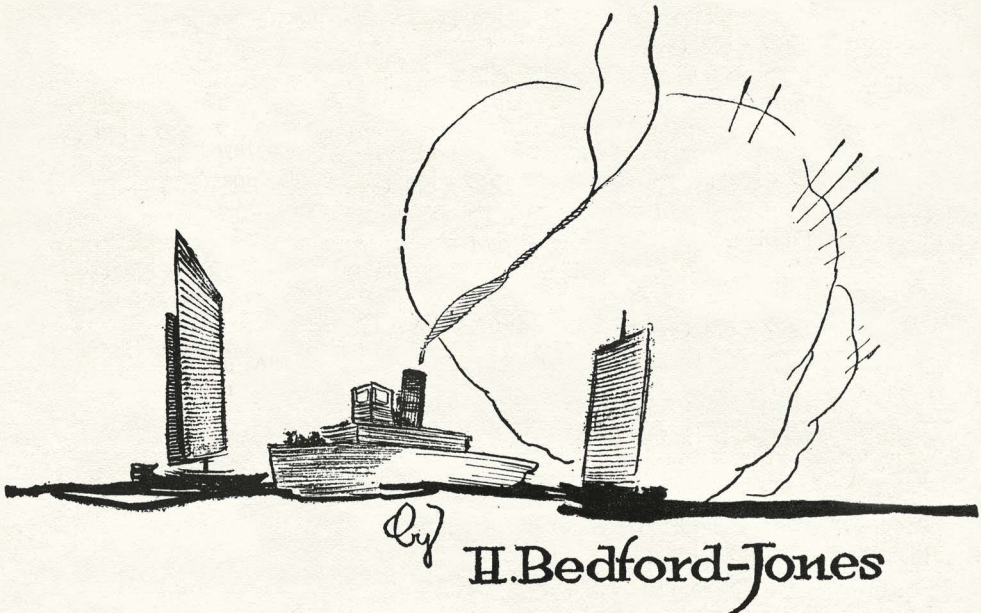
It is hard to speak of the downfall of a learned and respected man of God; doubly hard to speak of the piteous snare of drugs which had trapped Eric Venable. None the less, with his downfall began that tale of the *Kum Chao* and Garrity the magnificent—although such things were far from the mind of Venable as he sat in his gray house and waited for the hand of Fate to guide Mrs. Ivanoff to his doorstep.

Death stalked that gaunt gray house; it was no secret in the town. Everyone knew it now. Death, and stark tragedy, and utter ruination, gibbered on the shoulders of the man who sat in that house and faced his damnation with steely fortitude. In his darkened study sat Eric Venable and looked himself squarely in the eye. He scarcely recognized his face in the mirror. What was it the doctor had said—the doctor who had been his friend?

"You fool! You fool! I gave you that prescription temporarily—to help you to sleep and relax during that week your wife died. You kept on getting it filled, forging my name, for months. Heaven help you, Venable! I can't. I give up—I've fought with you to the end. Heaven help you!"

In those last three words was grim and tragic irony, perhaps unintended. For the gaunt gray house was St. Brendan's rectory, and Eric Venable was a servant of the Lord. A doctor of divinity, a doctor of philosophy, a man deeply learned and wisely read, Venable now faced the absolute destruction of his past life. He had come to ruin. The drug had cost him his parish, the respect of his people, the welfare of his soul—everything!

While filled with charity for the errant humans who sought his help, Eric Venable



H. Bedford-Jones

had ever been a savagely intolerant man in regard to things of his faith. To him there had been one denomination and one only; its tenets he had preached and followed narrowly, rigidly. Himself a man of iron, he had refused all compromise in theology. He was a fighter, a great battler in this arena. It gave him outlet for his furious energy. And now—was Heaven helping him or damning him?

He laughed savagely into the mirror. What was it the parish leaders had said?

"A younger man, Doctor!" They had evaded, but they had in a way spoken truth. "The parish needs a younger man. We have considered an assistant for you—"

Venable had given them his resignation on the spot. It was accepted.

Now he looked again in the mirror and scarce knew himself. The beetling, iron-cast features were gaunt, thinned down to skin and bone. Venable lowered his face in his hands, shrinking from the sight of himself as he was.

Somehow the dread secret had leaked out, reaching even to the higher councils of the church. And what had they said, those who sat so high? Venable thought of the letter, and groaned to himself. Vague but firmly impressed hints, eating into his soul like acid! He was suddenly shaken loose from all his foundations; he was rejected of men.

An acrid reek of smoke brought its unlovely odor to his nostrils. Out there in the yard lay in glowering ruin all the most sacred things of his past life—pictures, books, little loved things of the home. His home was gone, and on the morrow everything would be sold; but some things he had to burn.

His once rugged body was a whited sepulchre, a shaking wreck. Nobody wanted him—least of all the army. A year previously he had refused a chaplaincy, and now he could not have one for the begging. His church! Well, he would never be unfrocked, of course; but he could be delicately discouraged. Venable thought of the letters he had written, and the letters he had received; once again he laughed savagely, indomitably.

"You had it right, Tom Hood!" he muttered. "'Alas, for the rarity of Christian charity!' I've always denied that quotation, denied it vehemently, smashed it down with theological sophistry. But now—where is there a place to receive me? I'm fit for nothing. I'm conquered. I've nothing ahead but an empty future of degradation. I can't let go of the cursed thing that has overcome me. I've no future."

He started suddenly. Through the empty house of death thrilled the peal of the doorbell, the bell which now so seldom

answered the touch of those who had once come there in friendship and love and respect. Who was coming here?

"More misery, I suppose," reflected Venable, starting up. "More humiliation and shame to be heaped on my head! Very well. I deserve the worst that can come."

He squared his massive shoulders, threw back his iron-gray head, went to the door.

HE was astonished at sight of the woman who stood outside. She was a stranger; her clothes vaguely conveyed to him the idea that she might be a foreigner, begging for some charity. He had many such callers, for he had been a prominent man in church and city.

Yet had he noticed details,—which he did not—he should have known that her clothes might be a trifle odd in cut, but were of very expensive material. It was her face that astonished him. There was sorrow in it, and the strength of sorrow, but it also held a firm resilience. Her face fairly conquered him; and it disturbed him with its inner element of appeal. It reached into him somehow—particularly the eyes.

It was a scarred face, the strong, though womanly, contours marred by a slight red weal across the left cheek which though not a disfigurement, was a distinct mark. Yet it could not spoil the fine, level poise of those eyes that so stirred Venable—eyes sea-gray like his own, deeper and steadier than his own just now.

"You are Doctor Venable?" Her voice was full and richly vigorous, expressive of an intense and womanly personality. "If you can spare me a few moments—"

Venable had not meant to admit her or anyone else, but somehow he found her entering, and found himself asking her to be seated in the empty study. Then he excused himself for a moment and went swiftly to the dining-room. On the table there was a whisky-bottle; he poured himself a drink, feeling need of the stimulant. Then he returned to the study, quite careless whether his breath betrayed the indulgence. He was past much of his shame by this time.

"You wish to see me, madam?" he inquired in ministerial accents.

"That is why I am here." As she spoke, the woman opened a small handbag of metal studded with turquoise, and produced a letter which she extended to him. "If you will read this, Doctor Venable, you will better comprehend my mission. I

have two other gentlemen to see in this city, and I shall have need of your services—"

Had she gone to anyone else first, thought Venable grimly, she would have heard some news about him!

He impatiently opened the letter, taking for granted that it was the usual begging epistle of doubtful credentials but with plausible appeal. Somewhat to his surprise, he saw that it had been written some months previously by one of the Eastern officials of his own church, and it was addressed to him personally. Written, he reflected, before his disgrace had become public property!

THE words that met his eyes formed a bitter comment upon what he had been, and what he now was. Indeed, he was thinking of this more than of the letter itself, as he read, so that the curious phrases and unusually strong indorsement of the woman were entirely lost upon him. Otherwise he would have realized that no ordinary charity-beggar could have drawn such a letter:

Reverend and dear brother:

As one of the most outstanding ministers of the church, and a man of powerful influence among those who know you, I am appealing to you as a brother in Christ to give to the bearer of this letter every aid in money or influence at your command.

Mrs. Ivanoff's errand is not primarily concerned with the church itself; it is an errand of broad humanity, as you will realize when she makes you aware of its nature.

I have told her that you can put her in touch with the two or three prominent men in your city whom she wishes to interview. She is securing the backing of a dozen or so men for her cause—all of them men of the largest affairs in the country. You will see for yourself that her cause is a large one, above dollars and cents. I esteem it an honor to send her to you with the strongest indorsement within my power to give.

Venable silently folded up the letter, replaced it in its envelope and returned it to the woman.

"I am very sorry, Mrs. Ivanoff," he said bluntly, "that I am unable to serve you."

The shock in her sea-gray eyes made him stagger a little mentally.

"Unable!" she said, her rich voice thrilling him. "Why, you—I have not yet told you my mission!"

Venable shrugged his shoulders.

"No matter," he said. "If you had gone to anyone else in this city, you would not have come to me."

A slight frown of puzzled wonder creased her brow. He noted that she was older than he had at first thought; her hair was streaked with gray.

"I do not understand," she said slowly. "I was told that—that you—"

"Very likely," broke in Venable, bitterness tincturing his voice. "And if you had come to anyone else in this city first, you would have been told that I am leaving here to-morrow in disgrace. You would have been told that I am a drug-fiend, that I have been cast out by society and all who knew me formerly, and that my influence would be useless to you."

She did not seem startled by his disclosure. It seemed to him that he found a new depth to her eyes, a motherly solicitude in her voice.

"I am sorry, Doctor Venable," she said. "I knew nothing of all this—if indeed you mean your words literally, which is hard to believe! However, that does not affect my errand here. If you will let me briefly sketch who I am and what I am doing—"

"No!" struck in Venable harshly, throwing out his hands in an emphatic gesture. His craggy features bristled in vehement negation; he glared at the woman with animosity that was unconcealed.

"No! I can't be burdened with your troubles, madam; I can't even stand up beneath my own! I don't want to hear your story at all. There is nothing that I can do for you, in any case. You will do better in the community if you leave me alone."

STILL Mrs. Ivanoff seemed to take no umbrage at his manner or words. Her eyes dwelt upon him in a quiet steadiness, a poised searching, as though they probed for the wounds under his harsh exterior.

"But perhaps," she said softly, "I could help *you*, Doctor Venable."

He broke into a bitter laugh.

"You help me?" His voice was acid with a sneer. "My dear madam, the good Lord Himself can't help *me!*"

"That," she said, "is blasphemy."

A hint of iron in her voice carried the words to him with full force. He passed a hand across his brow.

"Blasphemy?" he muttered. "No—it is the truth! The truth."

Mrs. Ivanoff rose. A placid dignity filled her manner.

"I would not force aid upon your unwilling spirit," she said; "nor would I force

aid from you to my cause. You doubtless think you are suffering; but I, a mere woman, have suffered far more than your imagination can conceive. And I think that I am better qualified to speak of God's goodness than are you.

"I am sorry, very sorry, that this unfortunate state of affairs has arisen between us. I am sorry for your sake, sir, not for my own. If—"

"Can't you see that I want to be left alone?" said Venable brutally.

He was startled by the effect of his words. Mrs. Ivanoff's face whitened, became rigid; her eyes glittered with a flashing blaze of anger that reminded Venable of his younger days, when among the northern woodsmen he had fought and been fought in primitive, ungodly passion.

"I am not used to such bald discourtesy," she said, and again her voice held the ring of steel, "—especially when I came here seeking Christian charity. Good-by."

She passed him by, went to the door and was gone.

Venable slowly followed her to the front door and closed it. Now that it was too late, he regretted the gusty irritation that had mastered him, the ill temper, the vicious lack of decency. He now realized that she must have been no ordinary woman; the impression of her personality was strong upon him.

However, what was done was done. Shrugging his shoulders, he dismissed the matter for all time, as he thought, and returned to the dining-room. He poured himself another drink of whisky and downed it with a grimace. His only thought now was to dull his mind to grief and disaster, as soon as might be. He had given up hope, given up all things. Had he been a coward, he would have fallen to the temptation of suicide.

He thought how quickly, how terribly, he had succumbed; and he poured himself another drink. With the liquor, his mood changed.

"Where to go?" he asked himself. "Where is there a place that will receive me?"

Framed in the window he saw a strip of blue sky, and laughed.

"Out under the blue sky—in the north woods, on the sea! And chiefly, away from here and everywhere I am known! I have a little money. Out to the West, and the lumber-camps, and the sea, and the blue sky—first of all, San Francisco!"

He had taken three drinks, and was nearly drunk. His brain and body were in a ferment. Ahead of him he could see only the path to hell—that was the effect of the drug. His moral fibers were being destroyed as though by quicklime.

CHAPTER II

GARRITY THE MAGNIFICENT

ERIC VENABLE came to a drowsy awakening through which he was chiefly conscious of a medley of odors. He found himself lying in a miserable room lighted by a sick-flamed jet of gas; the windows betrayed a gloomy daylight, heavy with dark fog.

The odors were many, but were permeated by a general sweetishness which found vague recognition in the nostrils of Venable. Incense! Where, then, was he? A whisky-bottle stood on the table beside his unclean bed; beside the bottle was a small box. At this Venable clutched with eagerness, and was not disappointed.

A moment later he lay back and closed his eyes, all sense of his degradation gone, in the effort to place himself. He smiled inwardly at thought of his fruitless efforts to get the drug in San Francisco; it was not hard for everyone to get, of course, but it was hard for a man of his speech and mien to procure.

Then, somehow, had come a friend. He remembered this much, and no more. Struggling to pierce the veil, he opened his eyes and sat up. It must be morning, he reflected; there was a vile taste in his mouth; a cheap clock in the corner pointed to seven. Another bed, two chairs, and a suitcase, open and piled with a rumpled heap of clothes, completed the garniture of this choice abode, which was upstairs above a Japanese incense-factory.

Venable explored his pockets, found his old pipe and some loose tobacco, and began to smoke. He felt rather cheerful—because of the white powder working in his brain like optimistic maggots. He rose and glanced into a mirror; he must have been shaved the previous evening, for he looked fairly well. He had grown used to seeing his eyes like burning flames in black sockets, and the big-boned face of him like parchment stretched tight. As he turned from the glass, the door opened and a man entered.

"Ah! Good morning to ye, Parson!" exclaimed a rich and throaty voice, a voice compelling in its good humor yet vibrant with rough menace. "Looking like a fighting-cock, ye are!"

Disburdening himself of various bundles, which he set upon the table, the speaker held out a hand to Venable. He was a broad-beamed man, stockily built, wide of shoulder, with a coppery thatch of hair, a red mustache, and a broken-nosed, brick-hued face from which gleamed two blue eyes like stars.

Cloaking this ruddily resplendent figure was a suit of startling blue, a necktie of gay pink loosely knotted about a dirty collar, and chrome shoes. A gray derby was cocked jauntily over one large ear.

Venable, smiling hesitantly, gripped the proffered hand, as he was obviously expected to do.

"You must be my good Samaritan," he said; "but I can't remember—"

"Small blame to ye!" chuckled the other. "Garrity's my name, Terence Garrity, and it's glad I am to meet ye over again, Parson! 'Twas a wonderful night we had last night, and proud was I to have the company of such a man as yourself. We've money enough left for another of the same, praise be!"

Another of the same! Venable was unable to meet the suggestion, and so slurred the issue.

"This is your place?" he inquired.

"It is that, until I'm gone—which will be the Friday night. I've been out early the morn, as ye may see; here's milk and some sandwiches and such, beside the fine clothes I got for ye last night."

"Last night!" said Venable slowly, a flush rising to his brow. "Why, I must have been rather—er—"

"Ye were," assented Garrity with a grin. Then a soberness fell upon him, and he laid one huge paw upon the shoulder of Venable.

"Parson, if I do say it meself, it's lucky that ye fell into the hands o' Terence Garrity! Because why, ye told me all about a number o' things, Parson—all about 'em, ye did. Have no fear! I remember what happens in liquor, but I've a close tongue on me, and I'd have ye know that I think none the worse of ye, sir. What with your learning and all, you're the wreck of a better man than ever Garrity was nor will be, and I love ye for it! So that's done with, Parson; now, until I get off to sea

again, what I have is yours. First, for our breakfast!"

VENABLE was humbled and speechless. The rags that clothed him were the remains of the old fishing-suit in which he had left home; from the parcels, Garrity disclosed a ready-made suit that fitted fairly and was sober in color. Yet Venable gave little heed to these outward things, or even to the excellent breakfast that soon lay outspread on the table.

Strong upon him was the sense of his position—he realized that for him the die had been cast beyond any withdrawal; he had gone down into the depths; he was bound there by the absolute misery of his existence; and for him life held only an aching emptiness. The thoughtless but true word used by Garrity—the word "wreck"—lingered bitterly with him. It ate into his brain like a corrosive acid.

How long a time had elapsed since he had left the gray house behind him, since he had set forth for San Francisco, he had no definite idea; a week, perhaps two weeks, he had lived entirely independent of time or calendar. The fact that he had fallen into the ways of vice and drink meant very little to him, after the first sting of shame drawn by Garrity's words. He was no longer looking upward. But gradually, as he found that Garrity's attitude was purely one of comradeship, he lost his sensitiveness. He regretted only that his brain was not yet numbed and deadened.

AS for Garrity himself, that genial soul lost no time in setting forth his position beyond mistake. He was a first-class engineer of some kind, Venable gathered vaguely—an engineer against whom there was a conspiracy of prohibition skippers, so that Garrity was forced to take any berth he could get. He was at present engaged with a small tramp steamer which would leave sometime Friday night for the China ports.

For the rest, Garrity put himself, his purse and his friends at the disposal of Eric Venable. He washed down his breakfast with a draft from the whisky bottle, and waxed eloquent.

"Twice I've been married," he stated, "and neither time with any luck to speak of. The first was took with typhus a week after the weddin', and the second was a slip of a Russian girl in Vladivostok, who was in trouble an' needed to be an Ameri-

can citizeness, save the mark! So the consul married us, and I said good-by, and went my way—and the devil only knows what become of her, poor lass!"

Venable eyed him a long moment.

"Not every man would do a thing like that," he said slowly. "Something fine about it—"

"Oh, I was drunk at the time!" Garrity laughed. Then his shrewd, twinkling eyes filled with gravity and a compassionate inquiry. "Tell me, now! Is it a parson ye are this blessed minute?"

"I suppose so—in name," said Venable. He reached for the whisky. "I suppose so—yes. But not in act, mind—in name only. That's all behind and done with."

Garrity stared at him with an insistent gaze, wondering more than a little at the man. Venable drank, and a little color crept up into his cheeks of bleached iron. To the seaman, this anomaly of a man was beyond comprehension—a man anything but weak, indeed, of stronger fiber than most, yet now utterly abandoned to degradation. And a man, besides, of education and godliness! To the wondering Garrity it was a thing for pity and kindness. He had seen no lack of drug-users in his time, but seldom a man who had come so low from a place so high.

"Why did you ask me that?" demanded Venable suddenly. "Do you want to get divorced and married over again?"

"Not me!" said Garrity with a chuckle. "I'll never marry again, Parson; far's a wife's concerned, I'm tied to Mary for life. That was the first, ye mind. The Russian lass—well, that was fifteen year ago and more—nothin' more than a weddin' to that, Parson. Still, she was a girl o' fine spirit, unusual fine. I've often wondered what became of her."

"She was a revolutionist?"

"Heaven knows—I don't!" Garrity produced an evil black pipe and lighted it. "Not even her name! Well, Parson, let's go see a picture-show!"

"What—this time of day?"

"Why not? I want to make the most o' my opportunities. A week from now I'll be watchin' gauges and cursin' firemen, poor devils! Will ye go out? We'll get a bite o' lunch and maybe meet one or two pals, spend the afternoon in a show—"

VENABLE'S will-power was practically nil, and he cared little what he did. The two men sallied forth together in the

bright morning sunshine, an odd pair. Despite his condition and his ill-fitting black clothes, there clung to Venable some pathetic remnants of dignity, some vestige of untrodden years. He bulked high about Garrity, a gaunt scarecrow of a man, hell alight in his eyes, his face and mien derelict; and yet something held him apart from the street panhandlers. He would lose the barrier with time, but it was not yet lost.

They found a continuous movie-palace which was opening for the day, and bought seats. For two hours they sat, to emerge again into the blinding light of noon. Venable had with him his box of precious powders; but Garrity, out of whom the drink had died, was glum until they had entered a restaurant and secured something to eat. Venable again became conscious that he was living on the other man's money, but to his ventured protest Garrity returned scorn.

"Nonsense! It's glad I am of your company, Parson; and what's mine is my friends' while I have it. Would ye not accept a bit of hospitality in the spirit it's given?"

Venable assented. He was beginning to go to pieces physically and mentally, although he did not realize it. He was moving in a haze of events, scarce conscious what was passing around him. After the noon meal there were a few drinks, and quite a number of men who drank amazing quantities of raw liquor and who talked loud'y about things that had to do with the sea.

Quite vaguely, Venable gathered that his friend Garrity was being commiserated for being tied to the *John Ferguson*, which appeared to be the name of Garrity's steamer. It seemed that the *Ferguson* was chartered to Japanese, who were sending general merchandise to Dairen and Tientsin by her. At the latter port she was to take over certain Japanese officers, and Garrity firmly announced his intention of leaving her on the spot if this were done.

"Thank the good Lord," quoth he, "they'll not be able to do me out o' me wages, either! 'Twas at Tientsin I signed on, and it's there I'll end, most like!"

There was talk of ports from Africa to Falmouth, and it was not the sort of talk that Eric Venable had been used to hearing from traveled people. It went deeper, this talk; it reached into the hard groundwork of life—tales of meat and drink, of

women and men, of gross things and great things. Through all of it ran a strong and rank individualism—the deeds of such an one, the way a man had done such a thing, the impressions of the first person alone. It was primitive stuff. Venable did not understand it altogether, but he drank it in avidly none the less. It took him back to his younger days, when among the woodsmen he had gained the iron physique which still marked him out among men.

Afterward, Garrity dragged him forth to view San Francisco. They tramped Market Street, viewed the Fairmont and Palace hotels from the outside, and finally took a car out to Golden Gate Park. There they spent hours, ranging from the band concert to the animals, and toward the heel of the afternoon started for home again, worn out.

AS they neared the park gates they passed a jam of automobiles, held up by a car with a stalled engine. A woman in one of the automobiles caught sight of the two men as they went past, and she leaned forward, staring at them. Her face, although muffled in rich furs, showed itself as a strong, womanly face, starred by sea-gray eyes and slightly marked by a faint red weal across the left cheek.

Garrity sensed the stare, turned and saw the woman. He saw that she was devouring the figure of Venable with her gaze; so fiercely eager were her eyes that he knew his companion had been recognized.

"There's a woman back there looking as if she knew ye," he said to Venable, a moment later. "Want to stop? In an auto, she is."

Venable shivered a trifle, then quickened his pace.

"No," he answered. "Of course not! What did she look like?"

Garrity described her with some accuracy, but the image conveyed little to Venable's mind. He had entirely forgotten the strange woman who had called upon him the day before he left home. His disclaimer drew a puzzled frown from Garrity.

On their way downtown the engineer was silent, occasionally giving Venable odd sidelong glances of which the latter was unconscious. Indeed, he hardly spoke until they were downtown, when he proffered a request.

"Will ye have a drink, and then step around to the shippin' office with me?"

There's a bit o' paper there I'd like to have ye sign, if ye don't mind. After that, supper! We'll meet a couple o' the boys to-night, I expect. To-morry's Friday, and me last day, bad luck to it! Praise be, we'll not be leavin' until after the midnight, which will take off the curse."

Venable assented. Garrity took him to Pisco John's, and they had not one drink but three of subtle Peruvian punch; after that, Venable's recollections were very hazy. He went to a dingy little office with his companion, sat through a lot of talk, listened to some droned reading, and shakily affixed his signature to a paper.

He did remember meeting a queer man that night, a hulking fellow named Stormalong, or at least with that title—a black-browed giant who hailed Garrity as an old comrade. And there lingered in his brain something he heard Garrity telling this Stormalong:

"Mind ye, now, I don't want to be seen' him for a week out at least, maybe more! But I'll want ye to handle him gentle. Mind that! If ye have no bowels o' mercy, then by heaven I'll make the old ship a livin' hell for ye, man! I mean what I'm sayin', Stormalong."

The hulking giant gave Garrity a merry grin, and nodded as he lifted his glass.

"To the Parson's health!" he cried. "Drink deep!"

Venable did not understand at all.

CHAPTER III

AT SEA

VENABLE awoke to a racking headache, a violent nausea and a nerve-shattering need of morphia. His box of white powders was gone. This discovery startled him into immediate wakefulness.

He found his surroundings woefully strange. He was in a bunk that heaved oddly; everything around him seemed to be in the throes of an earthquake. Other men lay in other bunks; in the air was an odor of dirt and whisky and sweat. His bodily misery was acute, and was intensified a thousandfold by the jangle of his tortured nerves.

In vain he searched himself for the white powder. Satisfied that it was gone, he staggered from his bunk and stood for a moment gazing around. He was not a fool, and by the lamp swinging in gimbals

he decided that he was aboard a ship; also he knew that he was extremely seasick.

Overcome by nausea, he opened a door before him and reeled out into a passage. He missed the companion ladder, the hatch of which was down, but finally wandered into the galley, where a yellow-skinned cook received him with much Oriental profanity. The cook, however, assisted him in relieving his anguished stomach, in the midst of which operation a rough voice broke in upon them.

"Damn my eyes, if it aint Parson! Hey, Parson! You git below with the change o' watch, or I'll be up to drag ye down! Give him some chow, John, so's he can hold up his end with the black gang."

Venable recognized the man Stormalong, and with a weak effort he inquired about Garrity.

"Garrity?" rejoined the other jeeringly. "He's five hundred mile back in Frisco—where you'll wish you was if you don't buck up an' git to work!"

With this, Stormalong vanished. Venable was too weak and sick to give further heed to anything. How he had come aboard this ship, he neither knew nor cared. He begged the cook for morphine or opium, but the yellow man only shrugged his shoulders.

An hour later, scarce able to crawl for the sickness that was on him, Venable emerged on deck, painfully dragging himself aft. To his amazement he found there was no storm; the steamer was chugging through bright sunlight and sparkling waters; her decks seemed white and deserted, and all around was a horizon of long, rolling billows. She was not a large ship by any means, and Venable halted at sight of the stenciled name on boats and preservers—*John Ferguson*.

Why, that was Garrity's ship, surely! Even in his racked condition, Venable remembered the name. And Garrity five hundred miles away, back in Frisco? How did it happen?

PUZZLING over this strange fact, Venable halted to stare around him. No one was in sight, and the ship seemed to be going her business of her own accord. Suddenly he was aware that a man had appeared and was approaching him—a rather small man, wearing a faded cap and faded blue clothes.

"What are you doing here?" said the stranger.

"Looking for the captain," answered Venable feverishly. "Tell me—"

"I'm the skipper. Oh, you're Parson, are you?" The other man gave him a keen, searching look. "Well, what d'you want?"

"I—I—for the love of heaven, give me some morphia!" begged Venable with piteous force. "I'm going to pieces—"

"Get below, you old fool," snapped the skipper, "and clear out of this part of the ship! You'll get all the stimulant you want in the boiler-room—"

"There's been a mistake!" broke in Venable. "I—I never meant to be aboard here."

"You, Stormalong!" The skipper lifted his voice to some one forward. "Get this bum for'ard where he belongs and keep him there! Tryin' to tell me he was shanghai'd, the dopy old fool! Clear him out, now."

Stormalong appeared, gathered up the protesting but helpless Venable, and dragged him below again in short order.

Thus ended the primary stage of Venable's sea-education. The secondary stage was one of horror, humiliation and utter torment. Every man aboard ship knew that he was a dope-victim; and every man knew that a dope-victim is the most degraded of men. Only Garrity knew that his friend was a victim of fate, and not of opium products.

To the mind of Venable, at least, the intolerable torture which he now faced consisted of two salient features: he was kept at work shoveling coal, and he could get neither drug nor liquor. For a while he was close to madness. Perhaps Shinski saved him from madness; perhaps it was the steel within himself that saved him. Some men can go through agonies of suffering and labor, and the more they endure, the more spring comes into the steel of their souls; others, made of iron instead of steel, go to pieces and must be slowly welded or not at all. In Venable's case it was steel, and it was proven.

Shinski was a man in his watch. When Venable crawled into his bunk the second night of his deprivation and torment, he was groaning bitterly, half raving. Shinski came to him, an odd little man, tenderly pitiful, speaking accented English, and like an angel of mercy gave Venable a tiny bit of white powder.

There was something to Shinski. Usually silent, once or twice his voice leaped out

across "glory-hole" discussions; then it became a flaming, vitriolic voice that burned and bit, the words terrific and pregnant. Twice he lectured the gentry of the watch on radical lines. Shinski was a Red, an anarchist. Too tender-hearted to kill a cockroach, Shinski believed in slaughtering the privileged classes, and had done his share of the slaughtering; it was muttered that he had been through the worst of the Russian shambles, a crimsoned figure. Glory-hole gossip made of him a Robespierre, and probably with truth. His presence here was wholly a mystery. He was no opium-victim; yet he had found the powder for Venable.

WHEN Venable went to work again, it was quite obvious that the drug was uplifting him, and about six bells he collapsed. He said nothing, and how the secret became known was untold; but something happened to Shinski. He was shifted to the other watch, so that Venable saw no more of him.

At the end of a week Venable was reacting very well. His brain was clearing out. Stormalong drove him mercilessly, yet not with the brutal fury applied to the other men, for Parson, as he was now known, gave himself to the work and did not slack. Finding that he was indeed at sea and bound for Asia, Venable accepted the situation and made the best of it. Patching together the shreds of his vague memories, he could connect Terence Garrity with his presence here in a very slight manner; besides, was not Garrity his friend? It was inexplicable. How he had come aboard the ship, he could not understand.

Meantime his body throve under punishment and hearty food. The gaunt frame hardened and became a powerful machine, with a vigor it had lacked for years past. Saved only by a narrow margin from mental collapse, Venable had no time for any thought or theorizing. He worked, ate, slept, in a monotonous sequence that filled all his day. His brain lay unused, fallow.

Of this, a fortnight in all. It was not much, as time goes, certainly not enough to pull Eric Venable out of all temptation and make of him a new man; but it was sufficient to clean and renew him in mind and body. And when the time was past, came—Garrity.

It was noon. Stormalong ordered Venable on deck, without explanation, shortly

before watches changed. Out in the sunlight, awaiting him, Parson found the copper-thatched Garrity.

"It's me," Garrity grinned, hand outstretched. "Ye need not stare so! It's me."

"Why!" Venable took the proffered hand, whereat Garrity's starry blue eyes lighted up. "They told me that you were back in—"

"I know all about it," intervened the other bluntly. "Listen, now! 'Twas me had ye brought aboard, Parson—had ye shanghai'd, no less, and it was for your own good. Ye'll not love me for it, but that's the truth: I could not bear to leave ye, goin' the way you was back there! I know that ye do not want a boost up, but none the less I gave it. Now, if ye hate me for it, I can't help it none."

Venable said nothing; he could find no words. A furious, gusty anger leaped up within him as he comprehended. He stood impassive, towering over the engineer, staring down into those stark blue eyes that glimmered from the brick-red face with its broken nose.

Gradually there smote into his brain some realization of the simple, lucid honesty that lay in Garrity's eyes. A week previously, he might have sprung upon the other in furiously insane passion; now he merely stood and realized the truth. Accustomed to weighing men and their motives, accustomed to viewing the spiritual side of things as the average man sees the practical, he comprehended the real affection for him that was in this man's heart. And suddenly—just as ship's bell was striking—his gaunt lined features broke into a smile.

"Eight bells!" he said. "Run along, Garrity—we'll have a chat to-night, eh? Confound you, you rascal! I believe I'm glad you brought me along with you!"

GARRITY hastened below, overjoyed. For a space Venable stood at the rail, gazing with wide eyes at the blue sky and the blue-gray whorls of water; in that moment it seemed to him that after all, God lived—that in the far, clean depths of sky and sea were typified the vast omniscience of the Creator, governing all things! The brief moment swiftly passed. Venable turned away, his lips set in renewed lines of bitterness. He could see no light ahead, no future, nothing! This was the mental result of the drug, of course.

So vanished the second phase of his seafaring; and now began the third phase. It was one of introspection, of self-battles. The old craving was terrible in its power; he felt all helpless, hopeless, careless of what happened.

He saw much of Garrity now, and was strengthened by the doglike affection of this man who had plucked him from the gutter. He was shamed at thought of what his life in that interlude had been. The sun and the salt air, the hard work, began to tell. Old forgotten oaths came to his lips. He doffed the sanctified mantle that had held him apart from worldly things these many years, being now a new man in a new environment. He could not crowd out of his soul the fact that he had once been called to be a priest of God; but it lay far in the background, not molesting him overmuch.

One night there was pandemonium below—a fight, a wild riot. Venable was caught in it, and he found himself fighting as in the old north-woods days of his youth. Some one laid him out, finally, all but splitting his skull with a firebar; and it was good for him—it helped greatly. It went to make up the combination of little things that were needed. Garrity looked on from afar and said nothing, but his eyes were happy as he observed the change in his friend.

The truth about Venable was that he had both won and lost from that voyage to Tientsin. He won much of himself back again; a share of his dead youth was resurrected and returned to him. He lost much of his unworldly, theological attitude, and gained in practical ways. To illustrate: the night they entered the river and were dodging up toward the Tientsin wharf, Venable had an argument with a Greek stoker; the Greek drew a knife, worn in defiance of American shipping law, and Venable half killed him with three blows. You may draw a large inference from this happening.

So, then, they tied up at the Tientsin wharf. The work was finished. All hands were paid off, and separated presumably for ever. Venable and Terence Garrity walked ashore and to the fate destined them.

IT was late afternoon, and both men had money. Garrity caught a jinrikisha and directed their course to a decent place that he knew, in the French Settlement just across Bristow Road. On their way they

passed through Victoria Road and the British Settlement; Venable was astonished at the beauty of the city, at its ultracivilization. Because he had come to China, he had expected pigtailed and pagodas on every hand.

"Don't ye believe it!" said Garrity sagely. "The world's the world, Parson, and ye can't get away from it nohow—except only at sea, and there's more damned rules an' conventions there than ashore. Ye can't get away from the world, for a fact!"

Two hours later, having bathed and dined, they sat together in their room. Garrity broached what was uppermost in his mind—their immediate future.

"I'm urg'in' nothin' on ye, Parson. Say what's in your brain; that's all; say what ye want to do, where ye want to go—up, down or roundabout—and I'm with ye while I'm wanted! You're your own boss now, me lad. If ye want to go to hell again, we'll go together!"

VENABLE laughed. He was amused by the situation and by the man Garrity. The steel in him was cropping out now.

"I've been a tremendous fool," he said shortly.

"Ye have. And will ye now be a fool again?"

Venable shook his head, a curious steadiness in his deep-set eyes. "I think not."

"Praise be!" exclaimed Garrity. "What will ye do, now? Go back to preachin', maybe?"

"No." Venable stroked his gray hair. "I'm an old man, Garrity, older than my years! This trip has shown me things; this trip across the Pacific has brought back to me things I've lost since boyhood. I don't know just what I'll do, but for the present—"

He paused. Then, suddenly, he smiled. "Terence Garrity, six months ago I stood high in the world; out of all my friends and brethren, not one but gave me up as a hopeless degenerate. A man who picked me up on the street, at my lowest point, is my best friend on this earth—and as long as he'll have me, I'll stick with him and bid the world go hang!"

"Oh!" cried Garrity, shoving forth his fist delightedly. "God love ye, Parson—shake! I was afraid ye'd be done with me. And to-morry we'll look up a job, eh?"

Venable nodded.

CHAPTER IV

HOW BORIS DREW CHIPS

HAD anyone followed Mr. Shinski as he left the wharf and scene of his travail behind, early that evening, it would have been observed that for a stoker on a tramp steamer he acted in a very inconsistent fashion!

He went, first, to a Chinese hotel for officials and gentry in the French Settlement. Thence, an hour later, emerged a new Shinski, immaculate in whites, a suitcase in his hand. He took a cab to the Imperial Hotel, in the same quarter of the city, where he registered for a ten-dollar room. He inquired for mail, and a letter was given him.

Upon reading the letter, Shinski used the telephone briefly, then sank into a chair in the lobby, accompanied by a fifty-cent cigar. It might have been noted that he chose a chair in a corner, away from other loungers.

Before the cigar was half smoked, a woman entered the lobby, Shinski rose to meet her, hand outstretched. Color suffused his pale features; his eyes burned luridly on hers.

"My dear Marie!" he murmured, speaking now in Russian.

"You are wonderful, Serge—as always!" Her voice held admiration, but nothing deeper. "You have actually managed it! We had given you up!"

He drew up a chair for her, laughing. His manner was excited, eager with suppressed exhilaration; the whole man seemed to be highly tensed, vibrating.

"Many people would be glad to leave America, but they cannot," he answered, settling down in his own chair again. "I wanted to come here—and I am here. But in the name of the devil, how I have worked to get here! Well! Tell me quickly about everything! You have been successful?"

"Partly."

Marie seemed to enjoy his impatience, as she drew off her gloves. She was a handsome woman, a magnificently handsome woman; her face was not in the least aristocratic, being rather coarse, but it was suffused with a dynamic force of character, a driving vitality. One would have put her age at thirty, her experience and ability at fifty. Yet there was nothing hard or harsh in her features. A mass of bronze hair lowered above her brow; her

voice was rich and deep, an instrument entirely responsive to her wishes.

Her gloves removed, she turned a ring upon her left hand so that the bezel came outward. A gasp broke from Shinski. He leaned forward, stared at the glittering yellow diamond in its antique setting, then lifted his eyes to the poised gaze of the woman.

"The Shirvan diamond—then you have succeeded! But you must not display that in this place."

MARIE nodded as she again turned the bezel of the ring inward—not, perhaps, without reluctance, since this was one of the historic jewels of the world, and a wonderful stone.

"We have succeeded very largely. Two of us alone failed; Arnheim was caught in Vladivostok and killed. Abe Gerin was recognized in Omsk—and is still there."

"How did you manage it?" exclaimed Shinski, his eyes devouring her. "Getting the jewels through, I mean!"

"Largely by wit, my dear friend. The six of us separated in Moscow, after dividing the jewels, and came separately. Gerin, being Trotzky's secretary, secured correct papers for us all. I kept the largest stones myself, so that the others had no temptation to abscond; the big money would come when we pooled again and sold the stuff. I now have the entire lot in my possession and keeping—Arnheim and Gerin had small lots, so that we lost little.

"We are now living separately, the others in the Japanese quarter, I in the British. Even here there is a violent feeling against anything that savors of Bolshevism, and the others are afraid to take chances. You and I had best arrange everything, for we are safe enough."

"Exactly." Shinski nodded energetically. "I now have my first papers as an American. Well! This is better than I had hoped for! You had my cable about the Ivanoff woman? The devil himself must have helped her! Getting money out of American millionaires is hard; I know, because I tried. Yet she must have succeeded, because she—"

Marie's eyes dwelt upon him in a pitying comprehension.

"Don't you realize the truth, my dear Serge?" she said quietly. "Such men demand proofs. You had none; you are a Russian, of peasant stock, and they were afraid of you. The Ivanoff, on the con-

trary, shows in her very person the caste to which she was born. She doubtless had letters from the Metropolitan of Moscow and others; American and allied diplomats would know her and vouch for her; the Russian aristocrats now in America would be wholly behind her endeavors. Naturally, she would succeed!"

Shinski's eyes were red. "Class!" his voice bit out. "Again the aristocrat—"

"Be quiet!" Marie's hand touched his arm, silenced him, quelled him, this little man with the fiery eyes and soul. "All that is done with, my friend. Before you left Russia, we agreed that the proletariat cause had cut its own throat; it is but a question of time, and for that reason we have turned individualist. Now that we have gotten out with our loot, it ill becomes us to use the old language on which we have turned our backs."

Shinski shrugged his shoulders. "None the less, it is true! We are traitors to our ideals, but—"

"No but's!" she intervened crisply. "As for me, I want no more revolution. I have worked twenty years in its cause, and I have seen it succeed, only to fail in a spasm of blood and ruin. I am sick of it! We shall reach Mexico and be rich—that is enough for me. In course of time we shall get into the United States; you and I can do so at any time, being citizens. You have not discovered what the Ivanoff woman is planning?"

SHINSKI gave her a caustic glance. "Since you have abandoned the cause, Marie, why not call her the Princess Irene?"

"Very well!" Marie laughed softly, gayly, and patted Shinski's arm. One gathered that she regarded him rather in the light of an animal tamed and subservient to her will, that intimacy with him had bred in her something akin to good-natured contempt. Certainly there was no fear in her wide eyes.

"She has some mad scheme." Shinski spoke in a voice softened, mollified. "I don't know it, but I gathered that it dealt with religion. She's that type of fool."

Marie nodded. "I can tell you all about it," she said calmly. "She has been raising American money for two objects: first, to rescue the Romanoff women, and second, to rescue many of the ancient relics of the Russian church."

"Oh!" said Shinski, a sudden light in

his eyes. "Then she has gone back into Russia! We shall send word of that—"

"Not at all! She has sent a good deal of money back, and expects the Romanoff women to be brought out by others working inside the country. A large trunk filled with relics has already been sent to her. That was where we overlooked something, my friend! We took the jewels and reliquaries, and threw aside the relics. Well, those relics are worth something! And this woman has them, together with many jewels that we were unable to obtain—some of the finest, in fact! She is now waiting for the Romanoff women—or at least, for the czar's daughters. And they will not come."

"Why not?" demanded Shinski.

"Because I sent warning."

"You are consistent, you!" Shinski's eyes were beginning to blaze again. "You talk about turning your back on everything—"

"Because I hate that woman!" cried Marie in a sudden gust of passion. "It was her dead husband who sent me to Siberia years ago, a girl! She stands for everything I have fought against, for everything I have suffered! If I had her here now, I would kill her!"

Shinski drew back from her, alarmed. "But her husband died before the war; she too has suffered—"

MARIE'S mood changed abruptly. With a gesture she dismissed the matter.

"She has chartered a ship and has kept it waiting for the Romanoffs."

"Where? At Valdivostok?"

"No. Here—down the river at the Taku anchorage."

"Ah! Then she herself—"

"Is here in town, at the Astor House."

Shinski drew a long breath. For a moment he sat looking straight out before him, at nothing. His eyes were narrowed, filled with calculation, lurid with a cunning fury of thought. At last he spoke, his voice soft and low.

"How many are with her?"

"One—an old fool of a family servant." Marie was watching him curiously. "Why? What is stirring in that clever head of yours?"

Shinski gave her a grin. He set his cigar-stub between his teeth, leaned forward and fastened his eyes upon hers.

"Listen, Marie! Because you and I are Americans, you think it easy to get away from here, to reach Mexico and America?

But I tell you it is not easy! The three with you are—"

"David Pinsky, Levi Deardorf, and the boy, young Marks."

He nodded swiftly. "New York East Siders—fools who burst over to Russia and threw away their American citizens' papers! Now, let me tell you, America is in fear of letting in the radicals! They don't want us. South America also. Our one sure haven is Mexico, and there I have made all arrangements. But first we must get there; it will be hard, hard!"

"But why? There are ships—"

"And there are spies, of all countries; also there are customs officials! We cannot travel on any public carrying steamer, unless we go separately and by stealth. This we cannot do, with three accompanying us—"

"If you mean," she broke in coldly, "to desert Pinsky, Deardorf and Marks here, and to run away with the loot, I say no!"

"Nonsense! I meant nothing of the sort!" cried Shinski with an impatient gesture, although disappointment lurked in his eyes. "I mean that to reach Mexico, we must go via other countries, which is hardly possible; or else we must charter a ship—or obtain a ship—of our own. Ships are not easily chartered. The cost is terrific."

"Well?" She regarded him steadily. "You propose—"

"The simplest thing imaginable. Tell me about this ship of the Ivanoff—her name, size and so forth."

"She is called the *Kum Chao*, is Chinese-owned, and is a small steamer of two thousand tons—a coaster, I think, and an old ship. But surely you could not get—"

"It is simple, my dear!" Shinski looked cheerful. "There are difficulties, of course. The chief one is getting away without trouble; to effect that, we must manage the Ivanoff woman, let her smooth away every rocky spot, work hard for us! We must have a go-between, some one she will trust—one of the old aristocrats who will sell his soul for our money! The woman must be made to realize that the Romanoffs are beyond rescue, but that others need her help. She will thus get the millionaires some value for their money."

SHE watched him intently, trying to pierce the veil of his crafty thought.

"Even if we succeeded, Serge, we could not make her think we are aristocrats."

"Tut, tut! Am I a fool? She will not see us. Where is the man or woman to help us?"

"Ah!" The quick word broke from her. "Boris Kryalpin is at Port Arthur—I heard that he was playing the French tourist! You remember Boris? In the old diplomatic service, a noble; he was disgraced by Grand Duke Michael early in the war for selling information to the Germans, and the Czarina barely managed to save his life! He was organizing the German prisoners in Siberia when the Czechoslovaks cut him off from home, and he fled. He dares not go to any Allied country, and he is unable to get back into Russia now."

"The very man for us, and a most accomplished liar!" exclaimed Shinski. "You must see him at once; leave to-night or in the morning, by the first ship! Before he sees the Ivanoff, I shall have her informed about the failure of her hopes; thus, she will jump at the chance that Boris will offer her—"

"Not so fast! How shall I handle Boris? What story shall I tell him?"

"Can you trust him with that Shirvan diamond?"

"If he is closely enough watched."

Shinski grinned, and drew his chair closer. He was aflame now, aflame with creation and construction—his brain, developed along one particular line, was working like clockwork as he mapped out his scheme.

It was a good scheme, an excellent scheme in its own way. There was no mercy in it, and its merciless quality was odd to be engendered in a man who loved animals and all living things as did Shinski. But his brain was warped. To him, aristocrats were as lice. To him, the struggle of classes was the great and only thing in the world, responsible for all history and underlying all mundane events; everything that happened to him or to anyone else was viewed by Shinski through class-struggle glasses. He was perfectly sincere, and believed absolutely in this philosophy of his.

"You are sure Boris has no present connection with Moscow?" asked Shinski suddenly.

"I am sure of nothing; but I know of none," answered Marie. "He has little money, I hear, and while he might be very glad to reach Moscow, he is at present cut off from everyone back there. He can

turn to nobody, and will welcome our offer as a godsend."

"Good! Then squander promises on him, but no more cash than you must. Get him here at the earliest possible moment, and cable me when you leave Port Arthur. I shall be busy."

"By the way, arrange to look for Abe Gerin," said Marie, at a stab of memory. "I sent money to insure his escape from Omsk, and if he gets out at all, he is due here shortly."

"Then it must be very shortly," Shinski snarled. "I have no time to waste! If he comes—"

"Then he is entitled to his share of the proceeds, whether he has lost his share of the loot or not."

Shinski met the steady gaze of Marie, and nodded—as though he could not help himself.

CHAPTER V

ERIC VENABLE, SECOND OFFICER

GARRITY the magnificent lost no time in setting out to find a job. He did not want a job for himself; he had just finished one bit of work, and had not the slightest ambition to sign on for another voyage anywhere until his money was gone. Being the man he was, however, he considered it best for all hands that he and Venable get a job right away, lest Venable's determination weaken.

Cocaine and morphia are to be had at any street-corner or crossroads in China, as Garrity knew. He knew that the Japanese bought a large share of the Indian opium crop each year, shipped it to their Formosa factories and made it into active drug products. He knew that they poured it wholesale into China by mail, having the Chinese postal system under their thumb; and he knew that Venable was in the way of temptation so long as they remained ashore. Hence, for Venable's sake, he made the heroic resolve to get back to sea at once.

However, he found that engineers—especially engineers who had a name for liquor—would have trouble in landing the proper berths, and Garrity had no notion of signing aboard any native craft. Besides, he wanted something good for Venable, and it was most indisputable that nobody would hire Venable if they saw him first.

It was a stiff problem, but like all such, there proved to be a solution. Garrity remembered the tramp steamer rocking out in the Taku anchorage, and in the course of gossip along the wharves, he found that she was something of a mystery ship. No one knew much about her, but she was supposed to be awaiting a crew, for some obscure reason, and was under a Russian charter.

All this looked promising to Garrity, and he went forthwith to see the owners—a reputable Chinese firm with an agency on Victoria Road. As it happened, Mrs. Ivanoff had requested the agency to keep an eye open for a crew, which she might want in a hurry. They gave Garrity her name, and Garrity betook himself to the Astor House.

He was admitted to the apartment of Mrs. Ivanoff by a bearded old man whom she later addressed as Paul, and who bore a grand manner. In five minutes Mrs. Ivanoff herself appeared, and Garrity stood aghast at sight of her. He remembered her instantly; he could not forget that rather wonderful face with its slight reddish mar on one cheek. To his untold amazement he recognized her as the woman whom he had observed in San Francisco, the woman who had recognized Venable!

SHE did not remember him, obviously, and he controlled himself in a moment. Doubtless, she had never even remarked him on the earlier occasion; she had then been all eyes for Venable. He mustered up courage and broached what was on his mind.

It was plain to him that the lady herself was in much agitation over something. In fact, she was extremely disturbed mentally, but in the end she was conquered by the twinkling eyes of Garrity, who presently had her undivided attention.

"I've a pal to land a berth for alongside me," he continued earnestly. "In fact, it's both of us or none, beggin' your pardon! A gentleman entirely he is, and him havin' a bad run o' luck and all, I'm wantin' to help him a bit. If ye could hand him somethin' fair and decent, now—"

Mrs. Ivanoff smiled. "Perhaps I can make use of him, Mr. Garrity; and if your papers are in order, I shall be very glad to make use of you. Also I shall need other engineers and a mate. I have secured a captain and first officer—"

"Oh!" exclaimed Garrity with a relieved

air. "I did not know ye wanted any officers, ma'am. This friend o' mine, now, has a second officer's license in steam, and barrin' a bit o' bad luck he's had, is a good man for the place. We'd like to be together, and I thought that he might get anythin' at all for this voyage; but if it's a second officer ye lack, say the word!"

Mrs. Ivanoff rose. "Just at present, Mr. Garrity, I scarcely know what I shall want. I have had some very bad news to-day which may change all my plans. If you will leave your address with me, I can notify you should anything turn up in the near future. Of course, I would wish to interview your friend before engaging him; but I am really very uncertain about everything to-day."

"Yes'm, women is that way, I hear." Garrity laughed so engagingly that Mrs. Ivanoff smiled in response. "It's mighty good of ye, ma'am, to bear us in mind, and proud we'll be to sign on with ye if the luck turns that way. If I might write down me address, now—"

Garrity went home again, rather disconsolate on the whole, and wondering whether it would be to Venable's advantage to be drawn into contact with this woman who so evidently knew him. This caused Garrity no little perplexity. However, he resolved to waste no time worrying, but to see what happened; he had no great anticipation that Mrs. Ivanoff would ever put to sea in the *Kum Chao*, for from her words he gathered that she was in trouble and very indefinite as to her plans.

His inspiration to paint Venable as a second officer had good grounds. He knew where he could pick up a second officer's papers,—illegally,—and he took for granted that when Mrs. Ivanoff discovered the imposition she would shield Venable. Was she not a friend of the man's? Obviously! Let him once land Venable in the mate's berth, therefore, and things would somehow take care of themselves.

So Garrity took himself back to the boarding-house, said nothing to Venable, and tried to pick up other berths—without success. He got into touch with Storm-along, who was likewise out of work, and tipped him off regarding the *Kum Chao*. Stormalong declared profanely that Mrs. Ivanoff's ship did not look good to him, but he would wait and see. So Garrity opened his illegal negotiations regarding the second officer's ticket for Venable, and rested on his oars.

LATE in the following afternoon, without the knowledge of Garrity but destined to exert a direct influence upon Garrity's future, a gentleman named Boris Kryalpin arrived in the city via boat from Port Arthur. There also arrived, by rail and very furtively, a broken-bodied little man who walked with the aid of a crutch, a Russian refugee who spoke American and Yiddish, by the name of Abe Gerin. A most insignificant man, this Abe Gerin, who had deserted the sinking ship with the other rats, yet far above Shinski in mental caliber and moral fiber. He was a poet, and in his hurt body abode no petty meanness or trickery; something of the old Jewish greatness was in him. For the sake of an ideal, Abe Gerin had gone to Russia. His ideal was now destroyed, but he, alone from the entire group headed by Marie, had worked and fled without selfish aims. With his arrival in Tientsin, Shinski and the others were completely dwarfed. Marie alone could understand his unselfishness, and the clear devotion that was aflame within him.

Abe Gerin vanished from sight almost as soon as he reached the city, but Boris Kryalpin, in the guise of a Frenchman of means, went directly to the Astor House and sent a hastily scribbled note to Mrs. Ivanoff.

Ten minutes later Boris was gracefully bowing over that lady's hand. He was a charmingly graceful man, was Boris—white teeth glinting under a smooth mustache, a swarthy face, a feline litheness in every movement, and the heart of a devil masquerading under the guise of a nobleman.

At the present moment Boris was the secret but accredited agent of Lenine, Trotzky & Co., a fact which would have given Mr. Shinski considerable alarm had he known it. Serge Shinski and his friends, Abe Gerin and Marie excepted, were mere rats who might prove deadly at a pinch; but Boris Kryalpin was a tiger, a man of infinite resource and craft, of no scruples or principles, and of a diabolic bravery.

Coming upon the errand of double treachery that had fetched him hither, Boris had to be coolly brave to look into the sea-gray eyes of the Princess Irene without faltering. But he did it.

"You do not remember me, Your Highness," he said smoothly, "but I had the honor of being presented to you at an imperial reception four years ago."

"Your face is not unfamiliar," said Mrs. Ivanoff, her eyes searching him. "May I ask how you were informed of my presence here?"

"Through seeing you in Vladivostok recently. I was unable to approach you at the time, but followed you here. For six months, Your Highness, I have been located in this vicinity—upon much the same business as your own, I imagine. Of course, I know little of your business, but one is permitted to draw inferences, eh? And I had certain dear friends under the old régime."

HE named a group of half a dozen nobles of the old empire. All were prominent names, names intimately known to the Princess Irene; the fate of all was now cloaked by the red shadow that gloomed above unhappy Russia.

"It has been my privilege," he continued easily, "to assist this little group of friends in reaching a place of safety, and in caring for certain valuables, public and private, which they had rescued from the wreck. I have brought one of these to prove my story to you, should you need proof."

He opened his hand, displaying there a blazing yellow diamond set in an antique ring. At sight of it Mrs. Ivanoff changed color.

"The Shirvan diamond—one of the historic jewels of a historic family!" pursued Boris. He paused an instant; then, as Mrs. Ivanoff remained silent, he continued his speech.

"These friends are now over the Mongolian border and within Chinese territory—are, indeed, close to Peking. They are safe, Your Highness. As you can understand, they are destitute; the money with which I worked is exhausted. To sell their jewels I am neither able nor willing. They are mine only in trust, and I have a conscience in such matters.

"I learned that you had chartered a ship; so I came to you in the confidence that you would extend us help in reaching America. They might be dependent upon the charity of the Allies, yes! They know you better than I, of course; yet I cannot doubt that you will help, if you can. They would not hesitate to appeal to you, I believe, and so in their name I have come to ask your aid."

He waited, proudly erect, confident, frank.

PRINCESS IRENE saw no reason to distrust this man. She had learned the disastrous news that her efforts to save the Romanoff family were futile, that her intrigues had been discovered and her friends in Russia scattered. She had contrived to smuggle out a quantity of the most holy relics of old Russia, but to sail back to the United States empty-handed save for these relics would scarce justify her labors and expenditures—in her own eyes.

Now, as though providentially, she beheld the chance to give harborage to a lesser group of the persecuted ones. They were not the Romanoffs, true; no less were they stricken humanity in distress, gentlewomen and princes hounded like beasts, tortured and driven into an exile that was as heaven after the hell that Russia now was.

Mrs. Ivanoff, that strong-souled woman who had been a princess, did not hesitate. She must give up a portion of her great plan; yet she could rescue these few and take them in comfort to America. Of the man before her she scarcely thought at all. Her brain was busy with the little band of refugees trailing a weary way across outer China, toward her. In other days they had been her dear friends. Boris had chosen his names very carefully.

"When will they arrive?" she demanded.

"That depends largely upon you," answered Boris. "They should reach Peking to-morrow. If you refuse them the aid of your ship, and secret passage to America, they will remain in Peking for the present."

"Secret passage?" she repeated, frowning.

"Necessarily." He made a graceful, assured gesture. "There are many others yet in Russia. I am working to bring them out, as well as these. Let it become known to the Bolshevik agents and spies that this party has reached safety, and escape will be tenfold harder for the others; every avenue will be watched.

"But, assured of your help, I go to-night to Peking, to meet the party. To-morrow night I return with them, still disguised, and will place them straight aboard your ship. You will be at sea by dawn, and until they reach America the secret will be kept. By that time, I have great hopes that a second party will be over the Mongolian frontier."

"That will be a swift arrival in Peking," she said slowly.

"I have made many arrangements, Your Highness. Do you think I have wasted my time?"

There was no doubt that the countenance of Boris expressed vigor, energy, sheer ability. No one ever denied him these qualities. At present he was in perfect control of himself; his face and manner formed an instrument entirely responsive to his brain. And his brain was clever—in fact, it was far more clever than either Shinski or the woman Marie could dream!

MRS. IVANOFF could not know that this man who stood before her in the guise of one who was exerting every self-sacrifice in order to save others, had in reality betrayed his country to the Huns, had betrayed his own caste to the Reds, and had betrayed his soul to the devil. She could not know that he was now playing a keen game, single-handed, with the intent to betray everyone and everything around him.

"Are you certain of your plan?" she asked presently. "If I arrange to sail to-morrow night, it will cause me intolerable trouble and work. Unless you are very sure of your arrangements, I do not wish to attempt so early a departure."

Boris bowed, with just the proper hint of deference and gallantry.

"Your Highness, I pledge you my word that if you can be ready to sail to-morrow night, I shall put the party aboard your ship at midnight."

"Very well." She rose, smiling a trifle sadly, and extended her hand. "It is agreed, then! I shall be ready to sail."

With a burst of assumed joy, Boris fell to one knee and bent his lips to her hand, but at this she drew back.

"The old days are dead, my friend; the old rank is dead!" she said protestingly. "We who have survived the whirlwind are brothers and sisters in misfortune, no more. And the Princess Irene is dead, like the rest. I am Madame Ivanoff, whose family passed even before the great disaster, and whose life holds only the hope of doing a little good before the inevitable end comes to her as to all others. You are doing a noble work, and I respect you for it; good-by, and may God send you your deserts! Until you return—*au revoir*."

Boris looked for a moment into her eyes, and turned a little pale.

When he had gone, Mrs. Ivanoff wrote a brief note and gave the envelope to the

old servant Paul, who had attended her out of Russia and had served in her house all his life.

"Paul, we shall leave here to-morrow night, taking with us some of our friends who are on their way to safety. Take this note to Mr. Garrity, at the address inscribed. Make sure that he gets it—give it into his own hand and wait for an answer. I must see the port officials at once, and the captain whom I have engaged."

CHAPTER VI

LI JOHN, MENTOR

TERENCE GARRITY was fortunately sober when Paul reached him with the note from Mrs. Ivanoff. He was sober of necessity, because if he drank, Venable might be tempted; in sublime ignorance that Venable's iron will was now above temptation, he was conducting himself in the narrow path of caution for the sake of his friend. It was heroic, as anyone who knew Garrity would admit.

Having read the brief note, Garrity looked up at Paul.

"So we're sailin' to-morry night! And she wants me aboard with the second officer, and is dependin' on me to be raisin' the rest o' the crew! What's happened, me lad?"

"*Je ne comprends pas l'anglais,*" said old Paul through his white beard.

"The devil!" Garrity turned to Venable, who was watching with an amused smile. "Did ye catch the dago stuff, Parson?"

Venable collected his long-dissipated French and gazed at the old servitor.

"You are French, old one? And your mistress also?"

"*Pas de tout, monsieur,*" answered Paul. "We are of Russia."

Venable, who knew nothing about the *Kum Chao* except the very little that Garrity had vouchsafed him, translated his friend's statement that they would be aboard at eight bells to-morrow afternoon. To this Paul bowed and departed.

"Who's the 'old gentleman?" inquired Venable.

"Answers the door for the lady who owns the ship," said Garrity, and reached for his cap. "Come along, now! She wrote that she was weighing anchor after midnight to-morry night, and wanted me to supply what crew and officers she lacked. We'll need a full engine-room

force, and you'll be second mate of the hooker, Parson."

"Second mate? Why, man, you're mad! I am not—"

"Hush, now!" pleaded Garrity. "Can ye not run a bit bluff? If I get a fine quartermaster to stand at the wheel and tell ye what to do, and me down below at the engines, what more can ye ask? Never mind botherin' me, now; do what I tell ye and trust to Garrity! Praise be, we'll be goin' to sea in a private yacht to-morry night, for the craft has naught but ballast in her, as I know well! Come with me, now, and we'll snatch a bite o' supper on our way. Stormalong we need, and need bad, him bein' a friend; for I misdoubt that this is no pleasure voyage we're goin'."

"Wont there be trouble when the captain finds I'm an impostor?" demanded Venable, laughing despite himself at Garrity's whimsical tone.

"There will," said Garrity, "if he's any sort o' skipper, but chances are, he aint. There's too big a demand for skippers these days, d'ye mind, to let good men be rustin' out their souls in Asian ports—and that's the truth! She's got skipper an' mate, says she; most like, she got 'em both together, same as us. Mark me, Parson! We'll find them two birds of a feather—either marked by drink or somethin' else, maybe with suspended licenses. Ye can't tell! There's queerer things in these parts than makin' a second mate out o' you overnight."

BY this time the garrulous one was at the door, and Venable at his side, committed.

Nor did Eric Venable care a bit what chanced. The reckless mood of Garrity infected him to some extent, and upon him was his lost youth; he was in truth a gray-headed man with the heart of a lad in him again. That was because he loved Garrity, perhaps.

The red-headed engineer, who knew the city well, had a fairly good idea of where to seek Stormalong. After a hasty meal at a restaurant they caught a yellow-board tram and were transported into the Japanese quarter. Here Garrity began to make the rounds of certain tea-houses conducted in the ancient and unmoral style of old Nippon—a style calculated to draw wandering sailormen even as a magnet.

They had tried two of these places with-

out success, and were crossing the Katabuki-gai in quest of a third, when in the light of a street-lamp they beheld a curious scene. They turned the corner of a side street, and came plump upon a gang of Japanese urchins who were clustered about a small man. The latter had his back against a wall, held a broken crutch in his hand, and was answering the jeers of the street-gang with a flood of English and Yiddish curses.

"That's their way," said Garrity sagely, starting for the boys. "Let 'em get a white man in a corner, and—"

Under his vitriolic tongue the gang scattered quickly. Venable went to the little man standing against the wall, supporting himself. He was astonished to find the man's features inordinately beautiful, chiseled in contours as perfect as those of a Greek statue.

"You're not hurt?" he demanded.

"I'm hurt, and badly hurt," said the other, smiling suddenly at him. "But not by these little gangsters. I broke my crutch, and I can't walk without it."

"Take my arm," said Venable, suiting action to word. The little man leaned upon him, betraying that his left leg was twisted and much out of shape, as though splints and wrappings lay underneath the coarse trousers. "Aren't you an American?"

At the question, he felt the hand upon his arm give a quiver.

"I used to be," said the other, his voice low and unhappy. "Now I am only—a Jew."

"Give us your other arm, matey," broke in Garrity. "Where bound?"

"To the Kosai-kwan, an inn just across the Asahi-gai."

"Right-o!" said Garrity. "We're bound for that same ourselves, so we'll be proud to have your company, me friend! It's a pity about that leg, or we'd have ye off to sea with us to-morrow night, an' good-by to Asia!"

"So you're going to sea to-morrow night!" said the rescued one. Venable was struck by the refinement of his voice.

"Aye, with an old hull-deck tramp layin' downstream—the *Kum hao*," rattled Garrity. Once more Venable felt the hand quiver on his arm. He became curious as to this little man with the handsome face, this little man who called himself a Jew. "I'm pickin' up a crew this minute, though I guess we'll have to use Chinks and be satisfied."

"That is odd," said the other, smiling. "I expect to sail on that boat myself—but not as a member of the crew. I tell you this because we shall meet again, but I wish you to say nothing about it. You are good men, and you shall not be sorry for this action."

GARRITY was amazed, but Venable looked down at the face of beauty, and spoke.

"I do not know who you are, my friend," he said deeply, "but you look strangely like the pictures I have seen in magazines of a New York writer—a poet named Gerin. I have read much of his writings, and like them."

"I am Gerin," said the other, his voice stifled. "Listen! I have been in Russia, and I have seen hell there. It was torture that hurt my body—my soul has been hurt far worse! If you breathe my name once, it will ruin me; I am trusting you. This is my only hope of getting home to America again. My soul is very sick—"

"You have been foolish," said Venable simply, guessing something of the man's story. "You are a radical; I have read your writings and know. Like all the rest, you busy yourself with introspection until you are blinded to outside values. Forget all that, man! Wake up to the world around you! Who cares about your soul in the world? Get away from your individualism; make yourself part of the world again! That's rough advice, but it's true."

They had reached the entrance to the tea-house or inn, and here Gerin halted. The talk was over Garrity's head.

"Send me out two of the boys, if you will," said Gerin. "Thank you, friends; I shall see you again, and I am glad of the meeting. There is a breath of life in you both—good men! Send me out two of the boys."

They left him there, and went in together. When Garrity had dispatched two of the servants to aid Gerin, he turned to Venable.

"Divil take me if I understand all this, Parson! Is the man mad?"

"A little, perhaps," answered Venable with his slow smile. "But no more so than most of us. Do you know, Garrity, I believe there is something queer about this ship of yours, and her business at sea?"

"You're damn' right!" assented Garrity fervently; then his mad cheerful gen-

ius came into the ascendant, and he laughed gayly. "Come along!" He grabbed Venable's arm and thrust that gentleman before him. "I hear Stormalong deliverin' a song inside—on with the game, and devil take the hindmost! But no drinks, mind that! Not one."

THEY found the burly Stormalong, together with divers other gentry of the engineering profession, hard at work decreasing the visible supply of rice-wine. Unblushingly, Terence Garrity introduced his companion as "Second Officer Venable," and when both men declined to drink, the roar of protest drowned Stormalong's belated amazement at the title. A moment later Garrity was whispering in the ear of his confrère, who finally nodded sagely.

"I'll sign on," he rumbled with a grin at Venable. "I'll sign, chief! About the quartermasters, now, I don't know. Better ask these here lads for directions! My Lord, but this is sure goin' to be one wild v'yage or I miss my guess! And in ballast, too! Have a drink, Parson!"

Venable declined sturdily, while Garrity consulted the others present regarding quartermasters of discretion. He met with success, being promised two Chinese brethren who could be relied upon for anything from barratry to murder—a recommendation which sounded alarming to Venable, but which satisfied the engineer thoroughly. This settled, they bade the company farewell, and departed.

"The hooker not bein' under American registry, we'll use Chinks for the crew," chattered Garrity as they headed homeward. "They're cheap, and good, besides bein' here in plenty. Let 'em wait till to-morry."

"When am I to take up my new duties?" demanded Venable.

"When there's nothin' else for ye to do, Parson! We'll go aboard to-morry afternoon, and if the owner's there, all well an' good. We have money, and can take care of advances to the Chink quartermasters; to-morry will be our busy day, what with outfittin' you, and the like."

THE following morning Venable obtained his sea-chest, outfit, and certificate as a second mate in steam—the latter a bare-faced forgery but so well done that, as Garrity said, he could get by with it once, if he never tried it a second time.

The quartermasters also showed up as

promised. They were named Li John and Li Ho—brothers, big, brawny north-country men of cheerful intelligence and great efficiency. Li John, who spoke fair English, was attached to Venable with full explanations. Garrity made advances to both men, and they promised to be on hand at three-thirty to go aboard.

"I've discovered," said Garrity at lunch, "that it's as I thought; the skipper an' mate are two birds who still have their tickets by good luck, but nothin' more. Cap'n Hewson and Mr. Jason they are, able to run a bluff and get past with our owner, but well seasoned with suspicion an' general dislike. 'Twas them that ran the *John Rierson* onto one o' the Saddle Islands and burned her, them claiming she was afire first; never proved, but looked bad. And more'n one other trick like that, too, so that them two birds play in luck when they draw a white owner. It's a lively v'yage we'll be havin', and no mistake!"

At four that afternoon the hired launch that had brought them down the river set them all aboard the *Kum Chao*—Garrity, Venable, Stormalong and the two quartermasters. The steamer was a venerable little tramp, but the crew which Garrity had previously sent aboard was hard at work putting her in first-chop condition, so far as cleanliness was concerned. There was a fore-castle forward, and a glory-hole aft; the white men of the crew—all of them officers—would occupy the quarters amidship, beneath the bridge.

Mrs. Ivanoff greeted them as they came over the rail. She was busy with *comprador* and supercargo, getting stores aboard; and with scarcely a glance at anyone save Garrity, she sent them to the cabin to await her coming.

Venable lagged after the others. When he joined them in the main cabin, he was frowning in perplexity; and Garrity watched him with uneasy eyes.

"That woman's the owner?" he said. "I've seen her somewhere before—can't remember where. A most striking face, full of personality and character!"

"Oh, she's a good sort," said Garrity hastily, "and knows what she wants, too! None of your backing and filling kind. Wonder where that lousy skipper and mate are?"

"Seen 'em uptown," put in Stormalong, his voice husky with liquor. "Same place I was."

"Then we go to sea to-night with all hands aft drunk, and the Lord have mercy on us!" was Garrity's only comment. "Parson, you and I are sober; it's us will take this hooker to sea; so mind what Li John there tells you! And you, John, you mind that wheel like a sharp un!"

"My savvy plenty," said Li John, grinning. "My watchum second mate plenty."

Venable laughed. At this moment Mrs. Ivanoff entered the cabin, and they rose.

IF Mrs. Ivanoff had not seen Venable before, she saw him now; she saw him and stood transfixed before him, staring in blank astonishment.

Still Venable could not place her, for a long moment. Now, as upon a previous occasion, the strong character in her face conquered and overpowered him; it held the strength of sorrow and a firm resiliency, while across the left cheek ran a slight red weal, a thin mar. In her eyes, however, dwelt the marvelous soul of the woman herself. Looking in those eyes Venable found himself remembering their fine, level poise. They were sea-gray eyes like his own, deep and steady like his own. Their probing gaze brought remembrance to him with a shock. This was the woman who had called upon him—the day before he had left home.

"You are—Doctor Venable!" she breathed.

"No, ma'am," struck in Garrity hastily. "Second Officer Venable."

"Be silent!" She threw the words at him without removing her gaze from Venable. The two words struck Garrity like a whiplash, stung him into obedience.

"I remember you now, madam." Venable was suddenly pale. "And I remember my discourtesy. I regret it extremely—for, thank God, I am not now the man I was then! If I had known that you were—"

"Never mind all that," she said quietly, her eyes still searching his face. "Yes, I can see that you are different. Surely you are not the second mate of whom Mr. Garrity spoke?"

A tide of color suffused Venable's face. He could not lie to this woman—to those eyes.

"Yes," he said. "I am the man, but—"

"Leave it to me, ma'am," spoke up Garrity suddenly, stepping forward. "You've got a skipper and first officer that are drunk this blessed minute—and you can't get no

others. If Parson don't handle your ship better than them, I'll take the blame! Here's his ticket, ma'am—and it's better than theirs any day."

She glanced at the certificate which he extended, then fastened her eyes upon his.

"You are a good friend to have, I think," she said, so significantly that Garrity flushed to his hair-roots. "I shall leave this matter to you, as you suggest. Now—"

Stormalong and the two quartermasters were introduced, and Mrs. Ivanoff found them good. Ten minutes later the papers had been signed, and Venable was standing in the cabin where his box had been deposited, staring around. He felt bewildered, like a man in a dream. He was actually second officer of the *Kum Chao*, and how it had all happened he was not in the least certain!

He went out on deck and took charge of the ship, Li John at his elbow and Garrity hovering close about.

CHAPTER VII

THE KUM CHAO PUTS TO SEA

THAT night Venable got his first inkling of the status of those aboard the *Kum Chao*. And it was an inkling with dynamite attached.

When darkness fell, the ship was in trim for her voyage. Mrs. Ivanoff might have made money by carrying a cargo, but she had no time to make money. Long previously, she had had a small dining-saloon and passenger staterooms installed abaft the bridge-house; after dinner she retired to her own stateroom in this pseudo-imperial suite, ordering that she be called half an hour before midnight.

Garrity, satisfied as to the engine-room and anticipating a hard trick ahead, also sought his bunk; Venable was in charge of the ship, with a half-sobered Stormalong for company. He appealed to the latter to give him some idea of the apparatus on the bridge-deck, and Stormalong was in the proper mood to be surly.

"No use tellin' you anything, Parson," he growled. "What I was comin' to, shipping aboard this hooker, I don't know! A woman for an owner, and a parson for—oh, hell!"

Something in the man's tone stirred Venable.

"My friend," he said calmly, "that is the wrong way to begin. I need at least an appearance of respect from you if I am to have it from anyone else." And he indicated Li John and Li Ho, who were examining the binnacle and steering-gear with professional interest, and putting the flag-locker in shape.

"Fine chance, you have!" sneered Stormalong. "An old man like you what never put foot aboard ship before, to lord it over decent sailormen—"

Venable took him by the collar with one hand, lifted him off his feet, and kicked him toward the port ladder. The amazed engineer, too astonished to resist, gripped the rails and tumbled to the deck without pronounced disaster.

"Stay down there until you can speak decently—or come on up if you want more," said Venable. But Stormalong merely voiced an oath and disappeared in the darkness, to figure out what had happened to him.

It was after eleven when the two chief officers of the steamer came aboard. They came by launch, and were carried up the ladder. For them to come aboard in any other manner was entirely out of the question, since they were drunk and snoring. Venable viewed them with unassumed disgust. Mr. Jason was a thin, baldheaded person of uncertain age, with unlovely features; Captain Hewson was fat and flabby, gingery as to hair and whiskers, and apoplectic.

"What'll I do with this fine pair?" he asked Stormalong, who had appeared out of nowhere to view proceedings.

"Any second officer what valued his ticket," returned Stormalong without mention of the late unpleasantness, "would send 'em to bed with a bottle in each bunk and a jug o' cold water to wake up on. But if it was me—"

"Ah!" said Venable with understanding. "I certainly do not value my certificate! You, Li John! Take everything from the pockets of these gentlemen and give it to me; then order your men to draw up buckets of water and give these two men a good bath. They need it. Then take them to their cabins and lock them in."

"Good Lord!" gasped Stormalong. "Lookee, Parson; it'll raise hell with authority aboard to do that."

"Nonsense!" broke in Venable, taking the revolvers and valuables handed him by Li John. "If I'm going to run this ship,

I'll run it; and I'll not have these two men parading their bestial conduct before the crew. Douse 'em good, boys, and lock 'em up."

SO it was done according to order, and Venable entered the fact in the rough log which he had started on Garrity's advice. He had scarcely finished the entry when Li John brought word that the captain wished to see him at once. Venable sought the skipper's cabin, to meet a half sobered and wholly enraged captain mousing oaths.

"That's enough from you, Mr. Hewson," he broke in quietly. "Another word and you'll be put off this ship—and you'll stay off. Another word, mind! You turn in and go to sleep, and you'll be in something of a decent condition to take charge of this ship to-morrow morning. I'm the second officer, and I'm in charge. Another word, and off you go!"

Mr. Hewson bethought him of his soft job, and stood in staring silence. He had expected to deal with a woman, not with this lantern-jawed man who looked able to break him in two hands—and was! Venable shut the door, locked it and returned to the bridge.

That the ship was peculiar, he knew. He could figure out no relationship between Mrs. Ivanoff and the poet, Abe Gerin; the old servant Paul was aboard, although generally invisible. The ship carried no cargo, but her cabin stores were of the best. No money was being spared on her. She was a mystery.

Shortly before twelve Mrs. Ivanoff appeared on the bridge.

"The captain has come?" she inquired.

"He came with Mr. Jason—drunk," said Venable. "I had them doused with water and locked in their cabins. Once we are at sea, they may be in condition to take charge."

He heard her soft laugh, like a low 'cello note.

"I hope our passengers will be aboard soon," she said without comment. "They are Russians, Mr. Venable—princes and nobles of old Russia. By the way, you might find this of some interest."

She handed him a typewritten sheet, and left the bridge. Venable found the writing to be an exegesis of her work in America, giving the purpose of the funds which she had raised there. He read, and reread. When he remembered how Mrs. Ivanoff

had called upon him, and what had passed at their first meeting, he flushed again and called himself a fool.

He understood now. This ship was to take to the land of freedom a party of folk who had lost rank and name and wealth in Russia; also, probably stored aboard, must be the relics and sacred things of which the paper spoke. What about the poet Gerin? Well, no matter; a strange man, that!

VENABLE laid the paper aside, wondering at the chance which had thus brought him again into touch with Mrs. Ivanoff. Seldom had he met a woman whose personality so thrilled him, so vibrated him, as did hers. As he thought thus, a low hail from the lookout apprised him that a boat with the passengers was coming alongside; he could hear the chugging of her engine, blending with the striking of eight bells, midnight, from the bells of other ships up and down the river. As he left the bridge, Venable met Garrity.

"Watches all arranged, sir," said the engineer cheerily. "I'll be down below, this watch."

"Good," assented Venable, and passed on to the head of the ladder.

There he found Mrs. Ivanoff, with a group of the crew; Stormalong stood to one side, watching. The launch was just coming to the ladder, below. As the two men at the landing made fast their boat-hooks, a single figure passed them and came to the deck hastily. Venable noted the lithe agility of the man.

"Your Highness?"

"I am here, Boris Kryalpin," said Mrs. Ivanoff, her voice calmly poised despite the excitement that must have been tearing at her soul. "All are safe?"

"All, madame," answered Boris. "But I must see you alone for a moment before they come aboard. I have an important letter for your eyes alone, and also there is a man with the party whom I do not know; the others are afraid he is a spy."

"Come to my stateroom," broke in Mrs. Ivanoff. "Paul! A light."

Few lights were showing about the ship, for Mrs. Ivanoff was desirous of attracting no more attention than need be, to her departure. Boris Kryalpin followed her aft, and was lost in the darkness. Below, the launch rocked at the landing.

"Any baggage to come up?" demanded Venable of those below.

"I have two trunks," floated back the voice of a woman. "And there are some suitcases."

"Send them up." Venable ordered some of the yellow men down, but Li John intervened and took charge of slings already rigged. The two trunks were landed safely on deck, and the men brought up the suitcases.

Still there was no sign of Mrs. Ivanoff returning, and those in the launch had made no move to come aboard. Venable was just beginning to become uneasy, when the erect figure of Boris Kryalpin made its appearance.

"You are the captain?" he said to Venable.

"I am in command—the captain is asleep."

"Oh! Madame Ivanoff has received news of a disturbing nature. She orders you to put to sea at once. Our friends are to be assigned to their cabins."

"She is not going to see them?" asked Venable in some astonishment.

Boris shrugged his shoulders. "Evidently not, until morning. I do not inquire too closely into her actions, my friend, and I would advise you not to. If you do not object, I shall come to the bridge a little later and get acquainted."

"By all means," murmured Venable.

BORIS leaned over and spoke in Russian to those below; they came up the ladder quickly, as though they had been awaiting his instructions. Venable saw that there was but one woman; all seemed well wrapped against the cold of the evening. Besides Boris and the woman, there were four men in the party. One of them, Venable recognized as the poet Gerin.

The yellow steward took charge of the passengers at once. Ordering the ladder hoisted in, Venable took his way to the bridge, with Li John beside him. Another helmsman followed.

Getting a steamer under way, even a small and venerable tramp, is a matter of order and ceremony and formality. Venable was ignorant of these things, but fortunately Li Ho and Stormalong were on hand to assist. As Li John issued the necessary orders, Venable repeated them in a voice that carried through the ship; the bellow of Stormalong and the shrill tones of Li Ho sounded as echoes.

Under the instructions of his yellow mentor, Venable went to the engine-room

bell, heard the cheery voice of Garrity in the tube—and the *Kum Chao* was heading out between the flat, marshy river-banks toward the gulf of Pechili and the open sea. Stormalong and Li Ho departed to their bunks. Venable stood in the wheel-house behind the two yellow men, and watched the gulf open out ahead in the starlight; he realized with a sense of fright that upon him hung the lives of all aboard, the life of the ship herself!

Then Boris Kryalpin appeared and introduced himself.

For a little he stood beside Venable, chatting lightly, yet making it very clear that he was in command of the party of refugees.

"I've been below," he said at length. "It seems that our captain and first mate are rather careless characters. I'm glad that a man of your personality is now in charge. Do you expect to have any trouble with them in the morning?"

"No," said Venable grimly, "I don't. By the way, may I ask how it happens that a man such as Gerin, the poet, was included in your party? I'm interested in him."

Boris stood motionless for a moment, as though startled.

"There are some things," he answered slowly, "which will perhaps appear strange to you. I would suggest that after breakfast in the morning, before you return on duty, you come to Madame Ivanoff's cabin; we must arrive at a mutual understanding, all of us. We shall have an informal meeting there."

"Very well," assented Venable.

Boris presently took his departure, humming a gay air under his breath. The steamer headed out into the wide gulf, churning steadily along at her best ten-knot gait, and her second officer kept very careful jottings of the changes of course as she made for the straits. Li John was frank to say that when the skipper took charge, an expert knowledge of navigation was going to be much needed unless the ship were to pile up either on the Port Arthur headland or the Miao-tao Islands.

SIX bells had just passed when a yellow man, the junior steward, came stumbling up the ladder, chattering as he came. Li John at once abandoned the wheel to his colleague, and turned to Venable.

"Him say one piece dead man stop along deck below. Huh? You my look-see."

"Dead man!" repeated Venable. "You—"

"Look-see," snapped the quartermaster, starting for the ladder.

Venable followed. Under one of the boats in the waist, huddled in among the shadows, they found the body of old Paul, the servitor of Mrs. Ivanoff. The body was cold, and had obviously been dead for some time. Li John straightened up and pointed.

"Him stabbed in back, all-samee pig, huh? You savvy who catchum knife?"

Venable shook his head, shocked by the thing, staring blankly at the dead servant. He realized that he himself was helpless to act; there was nothing to tell of the assassin, or of the cause. Bidding Li John have the body cared for, he went to the engine-room and found Garrity, relating what had happened and asking advice.

"Whew!" whistled the red-headed one. "Didn't I say there'd be the divil and all to pay this voyage? Tell ye what, Parson—leave this up to the skipper, see? He'll come on watch 'fore long, him and the first; jot it down in your rough log and leave him to straighten things out—him and Mrs. Ivanoff betwixt 'em. And don't say a blessed word about bein' off the bridge, neither! You duck this thing, and let Cap'n Hewson handle it."

It was good advice, and Venable followed it.

At four bells he sent Li John to unlock the doors of the captain and mate. They reached the bridge and said no word. Venable indicated the course, handed them his rough log, and received a nod in reply. Two officers were evidently still shaky as to his attitude, and he was content to leave matters so.

Upon reaching his own cabin, Venable found that the revolvers he had taken from Hewson and Jason were missing. So was the automatic which Garrity had bought for him in Tientsin.

CHAPTER VIII

MASKS OFF

VENABLE was wakened next morning, after a troubled sleep, by Garrity—who had also been summoned to the meeting in Mrs. Ivanoff's cabin. Both men were in some perplexity over the cause of the summons.

"Any developments about Paul?" in-

quired Venable as they breakfasted in the mess cabin.

"Divil a one—the skipper seems to have ignored it," said Garrity, wrinkling up his nose. "The body was sewed up an' hove overboard. Parson, you look out for squalls! I dunno what's up, but there's queer doin's aboard here, I'm thinkin'. And hang close to that gun I got ye."

"It's gone," said Venable. "So are the two I took from the captain and mate."

Garrity whistled, then was silent a moment.

"Damn' queer!" he said. "It wasn't the their doin's; the chink steward, most like. But lay low and say nothin'. I have two gats stowed away safe, if we got to use 'em; chances are, however, that there's more to all this than we know. And remember, if that skipper gets his claws onto the fact that you aint no mate, he'll trim ye right! He's got sea law, mind. The old lady herself can't save ye. I don't like how things is turnin' out, and that's a fact, Parson! Remember, now, keep a still tongue and let me do the talkin'."

Venable promised.

They started toward Mrs. Ivanoff's quarters, but halted immediately in sheer astonishment. Approaching them was a man whose attire was strange, but whose face and figure were most unmistakable—those of the quondam stoker Shinski! He greeted them with a grin.

"Good morning, gents! I see dat you know me, huh?"

"Blast my eyes!" ejaculated Garrity. "If it aint Shinski! And look at the fancy clo'es on him!"

"Shinski, yes," said the other, and gestured over his shoulder. "Come along—I was on de way to get you. We're havin' de meetin' in de main parlor."

"What the devil are you doing aboard here?" demanded Venable.

Shinski's face changed. "I'm a passenger, Parson—and a gentleman, by de Lord! You remember dat!"

GARRITY sputtered in wrath, but at that instant appeared Abe Gerin, swinging along on his repaired crutch.

"Morning, good friends!" he cried out cheerfully. "I see you don't know Serge Shinski in his real self! Come, come, let's have no harsh faces, Mr. Garrity—you gentlemen are going to learn some astonishing things in a few moments; so save breath."

Shinski turned upon him. "Where is Marie gone?"

The very beautiful face of Gerin set toward him like a mask, in which only the dark eyes lived and flamed.

"Marie?" he countered. "She is not to be present at the meeting. She is too filled with anger and old resentment to be impartial."

Shinski threw up his arms. "Impartial!" he screamed. "Who in hell—"

"Shut up!" snapped Gerin. "None of your ranting now, Serge; I'm running this affair, and I mean to run it! You fool, do you want to quarrel with me now? With Boris Kryalpin aboard? Probably you don't know that he's an agent of Lenine at this minute—ah, that got to your thick head, eh? Well, if you want to match yourself against *him*, go ahead! But if you want me to handle him, you toe the line and say mighty little!"

Shinski, indeed, had changed countenance at mention of Boris and Lenine. He swallowed hard, but made no further comment. Abe Gerin motioned the stupefied Venable and Garrity to accompany him, and turned toward the newly installed saloon cabin. That cabin, intended to give comfort to the Romanoffs, now harbored the choicest collection of ignoble souls that had ever come out of Russia.

"Divil take it!" muttered Garrity. "What are these lads talkin' about? Is it a madhouse we're in, then?"

"Curb your tongue, old man," said Venable, frowning anxiously.

Abe Gerin paused at the saloon door, waited until Shinski had entered, then stopped Garrity and Venable.

"I must warn you," he said in a low voice, "to restrain yourselves and say as little as possible. After this meeting, when you are on the bridge, Mr. Venable, I wish to see you alone. Until then, I beg of you, have patience. Enter!"

They obeyed him, wondering.

VENABLE saw Mrs. Ivanoff first of all, and at sight of her stricken face he felt a distinct shock. She looked ten years older; her face was set in stern, proud lines, and her sea-gray eyes were blazing like stars. Venable sensed a distinctly hostile atmosphere in the air.

Introductions followed. Boris Kryalpin was here, and upon every face except his was written determination, hatred or sullen suspicion. Pinsky and Deardorf were

bearded, furtive men of middle age, their eyes snaky, their dirty fingers perpetually curling at their beards. Marks was a boy under twenty, with degenerate features, a limp cigarette hanging dead in the corner of his mouth, eyes lowering at everyone, and thickly crimson lips like a scarlet smear across the white of his face. Shinski was a notch above these, but imbued with their same low cunning and treachery.

When all save Boris Kryalpin were seated, the door was closed. Venable, having had a glimpse into things, marveled that Abe Gerin should make himself very inconspicuous in one corner, leaving the floor to Boris.

"We are assembled upon an errand of mutual explanation," said Kryalpin, gracefully twirling his mustache, and dividing his attention between Venable, Mrs. Ivanoff and Gerin. "I regret, dear Madame Ivanoff, that I was forced to mislead you as to the character of your passengers. You may best judge of our character by the fact that, when I locked you in your cabin last night, we were forced to overcome the objections of that old fool who served you. He was buried this morning, I think."

Boris paused, to let this statement sink in. Mrs. Ivanoff flinched perceptibly.

"Murderers and traitors!" she said, her voice low. "I know your characters—and too late, I know you, Boris Kryalpin! God will bring a vengeance upon you for this work. That is my last word to you."

Shinski laughed, as did his companions. "God?" he said gutturally, and sneered. "We tried out God in Russia, huh? And where was he? Bah! You aristocrats—"

"Enough," said Abe Gerin from his corner, and Shinski subsided.

"I am sorry that Marie is suffering from *mal de mer* and could not be present," pursued Boris, speaking to Mrs. Ivanoff. "She has endured much from you and yours, that woman. She would be glad to see your death. But, my dear madame, you have served us well, and we do not expect to reward you so poorly."

He turned now to Venable and Garrity.

"You are friends of comrade Abe Gerin, yonder, so you have been called in here that you might come to a proper understanding of things. In order that you make no regrettable errors, I would say that I have already interviewed Captain Hewson and his mate, and have reached a satisfactory basis of action with them."

AT his statement, Venable saw Shinski dart a swift look at Abe Gerin, but the latter made no sign.

"Huh!" blurted out Garrity. "Bought 'em, ye have! They'd sell out to any devil that was loose from hell, them two birds would!"

Boris regarded him with narrowed eyes.

"I would advise you," he said gently, "to moderate your language and views. You really are not needed aboard this ship, Mr. Garrity, because Comrade Marks is an excellent machinist, and your friend called Stormalong has already agreed to obey Captain Hewson's orders—which are my orders. So be careful."

Once more Shinski looked at Abe Gerin, alarm in his eyes. But Garrity, gulping down an oath, made no response. Venable said nothing at all.

Boris Kryalpin turned again to Mrs. Ivanoff, smiling thinly.

"Madame, I must inform you that we are not going to the United States. We all intend to go there eventually, but for the present there are slight objections to that course, and so we are going to Mexico instead. Comrade Shinski, I understand, has already made full arrangements for our reception there."

Mrs. Ivanoff kept her eyes on his, keeping silence, but her eyes seemed to disturb the charming equanimity of Boris, who became less diplomatic and more direct in his next words.

"We have brought many beautiful jewels out of Russia—witness the Shirvan diamond, which is now, with the others, in the keeping of Marie," he said, not without a sigh. "You also have had some luck, madame, obtaining many relics whose value we overlooked, and no doubt a goodly share of glittering stones also. We know that they are aboard here, and of course could obtain them very speedily by making a search of the ship. However, we are delicate in such things, madame, and much prefer to arrive at a proper understanding with you."

A touch of cold cruelty lighted up his face.

"You will do two things, madame," he pursued. "You will keep to your cabin, except at certain hours of the day when you may take exercise on deck; and you will at once deliver to us all valuables now in your possession. On these conditions, we will guarantee that your life will be safe."

"And if I refuse," said Mrs. Ivanoff with contempt, "you will murder me?"

Boris smiled. "No, my former princess," he answered. "But in that case, I think you will wish that we *had* murdered you!"

Garrity came to his feet, his hoarse voice breaking in upon the scene.

"Whatever you do, Par—Mr. Venable goes with me," he said, tense with repression. "I stick with you. If ye'll excuse me, ladies an' gents, I'll be off out o' this. Mr. Venable can be makin' any bargain he likes for me."

GARRITY left the cabin, the bang of the door drowning the violent oaths that burst from him after he departed. Young Marks, who had been eying Garrity without love, had ventured a growling protest, but Abe Gerin stilled him immediately.

"I will answer for Mr. Garrity," said Venable, his voice deeply poised. He was rather amazed at his own calmness, for he realized that he stood in actual danger, and that only careful stepping would save him from very disagreeable experiences. The fate of Paul was yet fresh before his mind.

Boris eyed him curiously, appraisingly, then nodded.

"Very well. And you, madame?"

"I wish to know," said Mrs. Ivanoff steadily, "just what disposition you intend to make of me and of this ship. I realize that I am helpless against you, but—"

"Have no fear, madame!" And Boris laughed smoothly. "Captain Hewson has undertaken to make certain changes in the ship en route to avoid recognition of her while at sea; and she will never reach land at all. You understand, even in Mexican ports one must proceed with great caution. Your ship will presumably have foundered shortly after leaving China.

"As for yourself, madame, you will remain with us until we have landed in Mexico, when you will be set at liberty. That is all. Will you now give us the valuables, or shall we have to seek them?"

Mrs. Ivanoff made a gesture of dismissal. "You shall have them," she said, as she came to her feet. "If you fine gentry are now finished with me, I shall go to my own cabin."

"Certainly, madame." Boris bowed and opened the door for her. "We shall come presently for the—ah—valuables! They are to remain in the custody of Marie—whom you have not encountered. I believe

that she is very anxious to meet Your Highness."

Mrs. Ivanoff passed him without heeding his half-mocking, half-sneering words. But as she went, Venable saw that the red mark upon her cheek was standing out like fire, and her eyes met his for a moment. In her eyes of sea-gray he read a startling and thrilling message. It was as though she had called to him; her eyes seemed to smite into his brain with their clear, penetrating sweetness; yet there was a vibrant energy in them also—and above all, a personal appeal, a call, a wordless touching of soul. That one look left Eric Venable shaken and alarmed.

Boris turned now to Venable.

"I would suggest," he said, "that you and Mr. Garrity obey the orders of Captain Hewson and make no protest. Do you think the advice good?"

Venable rose, shook himself, and a smile stole across his gaunt, sun-browned features.

"I think the advice is good," he said, forcing a whimsical lightness into his manner. "As I understand it, the ship remains under the command of her officers; we have merely changed owners."

"Exactly," assented Boris. "As for compensation—"

The voice of Abe Gerin spoke up from the corner.

"I will myself arrange that with Mr. Venable," he said. "We had best discuss it among ourselves first. With your permission, Mr. Venable, I shall come to the bridge shortly."

Venable nodded assent, and turned to the door.

Once outside, he came to a halt at the rail, drawing the salt air into his lungs with great gulps. He felt in need of the clean sunlight and sea, of the clear heavens; he felt as though he had been smirched to the soul in that cabin, as though he had come into contact with vile and unclean things.

Yet very little time had passed. As he stood there, he heard eight bells sounding from forward. Mechanically he turned to take up his duty on the bridge. When he reached it, Mr. Jason gave him a rather sickly grin and indicated the course.

"We're all in the know, I guess," said the mate, "and no hard feelin's, eh! All right. And if the skipper blusters, don't you pay no heed. That's just his way. No hard feelin's!"

Venable merely nodded, for he could not

trust himself to speak. He realized now why Garrity had left that cabin.

CHAPTER IX

WHEELS WITHIN WHEELS

IT was an hour later that Abe Gerin climbed to the bridge, with much difficulty. He stood puffing for a moment, then jerked his head toward Li John, who was alone at the wheel.

"Shall we go outside?"

"No need," answered Venable, understanding. "He's one of the quartermasters, and is perfectly safe. He will obey me in everything."

Gerin looked at him, and suddenly smiled.

"You're a strange man! What makes other men follow you?"

"Do they? I suppose, then, it's because I'm used to leading them. But what drew you into such company as you're in, Gerin?"

"Fate." The poet shrugged his shoulders and sat down on the bunk, producing a cigarette. "See here! You're a man of education, it seems; and you're certainly a man of action. Also you're a man to trust—and you have read some of my verses."

"And understood them," added Venable with a dry smile.

"Sure. Well, all of that's largely the reason why I'm here talking to you; also, the fact that Mr. Garrity, who seems a decent sort, and others aboard here appear to follow your guidance. Then, you're the second mate of this ship—which means a good deal."

Venable said nothing. He saw that Abe Gerin was being somewhat deluded by surface appearances—the story of what he had done to the skipper and mate seemed to have spread. However, he was very hazy as to Gerin's position, and so he merely grunted an assent.

"I wish," said Gerin, puffing at his cigarette and gazing at the horizon, "to explain the situation aboard here as I view it. It has a dozen different viewpoints, but I am interested only in my own—and I hope to interest you in it."

"Well said," replied Venable, and hesitated. Then impulsively: "But you'll have a hard job interesting me in any murderous proposition such as that devil Kryalpin—"

"Forget it!" Gerin turned to face him. In the strangely beautiful features, the features which were abnormally beautiful, there blazed anger and determination.

"Here's the lay of things! Kryalpin has bribed Captain Hewson and the first mate to throw in with him, absolutely. Marie—the woman whom you've not met—is the most wonderful woman I ever knew; she and I will hang together, for she's the only one of this crowd who is ruled by principle. There you have two groups of us. The third, headed by Serge Shinski, takes in the other three men. Those three groups, composing all of us, are in reality bitterly antagonistic."

"You forget Mrs. Ivanoff," said Venable, his voice harsh.

"I don't. I'm coming to that later. Now, you know well that the old stories of treasure-trove are changed in meaning to-day; gold is hard to take into any country on earth, unless its origin is clear. Also it's bulky. So! We brought out of Russia, all of us, a very large treasure, consisting of the finest gems and jewels we could lay our hands on; many of them are historic stones; all of them are very valuable. However, they take up small space, and are easily gotten into such a country as Mexico. That treasure is now in the keeping of Marie, whom all of us know to be absolutely trustworthy."

"And Mrs. Ivanoff's relics?" put in Venable again. Again Gerin waved down the query.

"I'll come to all that later; let me finish expounding things first! Kryalpin is at this moment an official of the Lenine government—he thinks none of us knows it. He is planning to get hold of that treasure and ditch the rest of us.

"Shinski and his friends have the same object in mind. I am a cripple for the present, and easily dealt with, while Marie would be shot by them without hesitation. That covers two of the groups. As for Marie, she wants her share of the treasure, but would not cheat the others. As for me, I don't care a tinker's dam about the treasure, except for Marie's sake; I intend to get the whole thing for her."

"I think you're a liar there," said Venable calmly.

GERIN turned and looked at him steadily. The eyes of the two men clinched.

"Let me tell you something, Venable; I got a few thousand dollars out of Rus-

sia—oh, I'm not painting myself any better than the others! It's safe in New York. More than that, I don't want. But I've known Marie for ten years, and I've loved her for ten years. She wont marry me, doesn't love me; but she's slaved like a dog for this damned revolution, and now she's seen that it's like an apple that looks good outside, but is rotten under the skin. She's out of it, disillusioned, helpless, facing the world squarely. And I'm here to help her. That's all, my friend."

In the man's eyes Venable read a deep sincerity; despite himself he was impelled to belief. The old Venable would have apologized—but the new Venable merely shrugged his shoulders, a sardonic set to his lips.

"Very well," he responded without emotion. "We will take your integrity for granted until it is disproved by the facts. I have no particular interest in you or any of your friends, after that interview with Kryalpin this morning."

"Oh, but you will have!" And Abe Gerin laughed confidently. "You see, Captain Hewson is very bitter because of your treatment of him last night, and Boris knows that you are a man to be reckoned with. Therefore you will be the first to die."

"How do you know this?" demanded Venable, looking at him.

Gerin shrugged. "Know? My dear fellow, we are not in the world of legal evidence and facts that must be unquestioned. We are moving in a little world of our own—a world of shadows. I have always respected Walt Whitman for rescuing that fine word *eidolons* from obscurity; well, we are moving in a dream-world, if you like!

"A ship of shadows!" he continued musingly. "There's poetry in the title, my friend; there's hard, sober fact in it also. Everyone aboard this ship, with the exception of yourself—and I'm not so sure about you—is merely a shadow, an image of some former entity. Even Hewson, rascal that he is, must be far gone before he would run counter to all the severe law of the sea and adopt the mad course with this ship that he has planned. All of us are alike in this—men and women without name or place, shadows fighting around the solid substance of wealth, contriving to get away with that wealth and to regain our former positions. None of us are cowards, Venable, and a person who is not a coward

is always fighting, upward—either for an ideal or for self. We have lost our ideals, we Reds, and so we are in the fight selfishly.

"And remember this, Venable—whoever strikes first and hardest in this fight will win. The first blow will count for a great deal. We can't wait to go on facts; we must go on intuition, and if we make a mistake, let the other fellow suffer! That's the fighting law. I mean to come out of this mess with my life, and I mean Marie to come out of it with the loot; that's my position."

"And you mean that I shall ally myself with you." Venable produced his pipe, filled it, and shook his head when he had lighted it. "I don't care for allies, Gerin, and I don't care to mix in such a fight for my own sake—"

"Not so fast!" cut in Gerin calmly. "I understand that when you came aboard here, it turned out that you and Mrs. Ivanoff had known each other—or knew each other."

"How did you hear this?" demanded Venable.

"The steward; he was in Shinski's pay, although he's now in that of Boris, I think. So, you may do for the sake of Mrs. Ivanoff what you would not do for your own! No one but I has the brains to suspect that you might help Mrs. Ivanoff—a strong point! They all think she is entirely isolated, now that Paul is dead. They know that if she had a single friend aboard, she would be capable of anything. That is why she is kept guarded; they fear her! And she is a woman to be feared, I can tell you!"

VENABLE frowned. "You propose—"

"I propose that you and all who stick with you shall join me. I propose that both of us join Mrs. Ivanoff, on the basis of restoring the ship and relics to her if she will take care of getting us home safe. And by 'home,' I mean America. I am ashamed of having left America! Until I get there again I am a Jew; once there I am—"

"Oh!" exclaimed Venable, astonished despite his growing knowledge of the man. "You mean to turn traitor and join Mrs. Ivanoff! What guarantee have we that you would not in turn betray us?"

Gerin made an impatient gesture. "We put ourselves in your hands. Can't you see I'm giving you the straight of it? If

we win, Marie and I will be in your power. I know that you and Mrs. Ivanoff can be trusted; you two have the instinct of honor and the tradition of conscience deep-grounded in you—making a bargain, you would keep it, you two!”

“Thanks,” said Venable dryly. “Where does Marie stand in this? Is she a party to your proposals?”

“No. She doesn’t realize the situation yet—nor does anyone else. Good Lord, man! Can’t you see that I’m *ahead* of the others? Can’t you see that I’m striking first? That devil Boris is not to be caught napping every day, I tell you!”

“Who is to do your striking?” asked Venable. “If you think I’m going to murder people, or that Mrs. Ivanoff is either, you’re far wrong!”

“You’ll not refuse to fight if you’re attacked?” snapped the other.

“Of course not. But I have scruples about deliberately going in for sudden death!”

“I haven’t.” Gerin produced a fresh cigarette, lighted it, and scrutinized the long horizon for a moment as he puffed. Then he turned.

“Venable, I’ll handle the offensive. All I ask of you is to fight when attacked; or if you prefer, to obey the orders of Mrs. Ivanoff and to protect her and the ship! You’ll have to fight quick enough, if you want to live—I’ll guarantee as much! There’s the proposition in a nutshell, the basis of our agreement. What do you say?”

Venable sucked moodily at his pipe. What scheme was in the mind of Gerin, how the crippled poet meant to open the fight and get in the first blow, he neither knew nor cared. But he was fairly certain that the situation aboard here was exactly as Gerin had described it.

Since that conference in the cabin, since getting an insight into the manner of passengers this ship carried, Venable had been mentally staggered, not knowing which way to turn or what to do. Gerin, with his talk of shadows, had visualized the situation very accurately. Venable thought grimly that he was a shadow himself, as much as anyone!

That matter of treasure had provided a solid basis for murder and sudden death, although Venable refused to entertain such a suggestion very seriously. He was not close enough to it to realize its possibilities; it eluded his mental grasp. Thus

thinking, he rose and went to the engine-room tube; Garrity answered him.

“Terence?” he said. “You remember Abe Gerin? He’s coming down to see you. Listen to what he says, and think it over. When we’re off duty, give me your opinion. That’s all.”

He turned to Gerin. His beetling, iron-cast features were set in lines of severity; sun-bronzed, he looked younger than when he had left his old home and parish and life all behind him. His graying hair was now close-cut, and from his rugged face looked out his gray eyes, steady with purpose and gravity.

“You go down to the engine-room and tell Garrity all you’ve told me,” he said simply. “Then see Mrs. Ivanoff and arrange for me to see her. If she and Garrity agree to your proposals, you can count me in.”

Gerin’s face wrinkled up; the abnormally beautiful features clouded into anxious lines.

“Man, that may mean the death of us all!” he countered slowly. “For you to see her at once is impossible—the others must never dream that you and she have anything in common! You cannot see her until I can arrange it—and it will take time and caution, just now when time means everything to us!”

“Very well,” answered Venable coldly. “You have my reply; take it or leave it.”

With a savage curse Gerin rose and took up his crutch.

“All right—you win! But I hope that your cursed delay doesn’t get all our throats cut!”

HE departed without further words. After he had gone, Venable suddenly came to the realization that Abe Gerin had not tried to bribe him. The thought gave him pause, gave him a new and steadier reliance upon this queer poet-man. He began to believe that Gerin was playing a straight game. Venable was slow to come to any such decision, but once arrived at it, he was wont to accept it without reserve.

The one thing that never occurred to him was that his position as second officer of the *Kum Chao*, with all that it implied, could have any direct bearing upon Gerin’s scheme of action. Yet upon this fact hung the fate of the *Kum Chao* and all aboard her.

Shortly before noon Venable saw the skipper for the first time. Captain Hew-

son came to the bridge, bearing his instruments, greeted Venable with frigid politeness, and after inspecting the compass and chart, made no comment. Venable, for his part, was glad to keep silence. He saw that the florid chops of the skipper were bristling with repressed rage, and he gave the other no opening.

"You need not bother to get out your instruments—if you have any," volunteered the skipper as noon neared. "Mr. Jason and I will handle the navigation of this craft."

"Very good, sir," said Venable with an assumed humility that brought the purple into Captain Hewson's face.

Venable wondered if this pousy, apoplectic, whisky-logged man could really be then scheming his murder, as Gerin had intimated. When the mate appeared, he wondered if this scrawny, bald vulture could be all evil smiles on the surface, and bold murder in his heart. Hard to think such things true! Perhaps, after all, Gerin had exaggerated. At any rate, Mrs. Ivanoff would know the truth. Venable did not understand the supreme confidence which he felt in that woman with the poised eyes; he did not understand why Gerin's mention of her had swung him around to the poet's viewpoint.

He messed with Garrity, but had no chance for a word alone, as the entire passenger-list also messed with the officers. Marie alone was not at the table, and Venable wondered what manner of woman she might be. She had been practically invisible when she came aboard.

THE meal over, Venable went direct to his own cabin. Here, inside of five minutes, Terence Garrity joined him, blue eyes twinkling shrewdly, tangled red mop of hair flying wild.

"Divil take it, it's a wild mob we're travelin' with!" exclaimed the engineer when the door was shut.

"Gerin talked with you?" asked Venable.

"He did that."

"What did you think of his yarn?"

Garrity pushed stubby fingers through his hair.

"To be honest with ye, Parson, I thought both this way an' that way about him. None the less, it struck me that the bird was playin' on the level with the both of us. His tale was one o' them things that it's hard to believe, but if ye don't believe it, ye'll be out o' luck."

Venable nodded. "I agree with you. What's your verdict, then?"

"Faith, that's up to you! I'd say, off-hand, that if Mrs. Ivanoff wants to throw in with Gerin, well an' good; if not, the same. In other words, I'm for the lady!"

"Whatever she says, goes with us," stated Venable. "That suits me, Garrity. We'll leave the decision up to her and take her orders. Gerin is to arrange for me to see her soon."

"It'll have to be soon, I'm thinkin'," said Garrity. "That divil Boris Kryalpin was down messin' around me this mornin', and hard work I had to keep me two hands off'm him, the dirty scut! But Gerin chased him away, praise be. Well, bein's everything is settled, I'm off to pass the time o' day with the lady standin' guard at Mrs. Ivanoff's door. A glimpse of her I had, and I'll stake me oath that she's no hard-spoken female."

"Oh!" exclaimed Venable. "That must be the woman Marie—the one Gerin spoke of."

"More'n like," assented the engineer, at the door.

Venable, his pipe alight, presently went out to the deck. He passed aft, not wishing to seek Mr. Jason's company on the bridge, and came within sight of Mrs. Ivanoff's cabin. There he was brought to an abrupt halt.

Twenty feet distant stood Garrity; and the man looked like one thunderstruck—mouth agape, position awkwardly fixed, face deathly white. Against the cabin door stood the woman Marie, staring at him. One hand was raised, as though in protest against his coming closer, and stupefaction sat in her eyes.

Venable, pausing, wondered at the wordless scene there before him. He was a little surprised by the aspect of Marie—a firm character sat in her face, and goodness. He had thought to find some wild termagant, some man-woman bred of the revolution. Then he reflected that Abe Gerin was not a shallow man, and would love deeply; besides, this woman Marie seemed to have served ideals all her life, and now that her ideals had been destroyed, she was not a participant in the wild, selfish scramble which had engulfed the others.

He saw Garrity say something in a low voice, and Marie shake her head. Then she answered, and the wind brought the words to Venable, carried her rich, womanly voice to his ears:

"Not now—not now! Later, perhaps. I—I cannot understand it—please leave me!"

Garrity turned, like a man suddenly stricken, and groped his way across the deck to where the tall, gaunt figure of Venable loomed. He looked up at his friend, his blue eyes stark and wide; then he brushed a hand across his brow.

"Divil take it!" he ejaculated, gripping the rail, amazement filling his voice.

"What's the matter, man?" queried Venable, alarmed at his aspect.

Garrity blinked at him against the sun.

"D'ye mind, Parson, me tellin' ye about the girl I married an' never saw afterward—"

"Yes."

"Well, that's her."

Garrity jerked his head toward the figure of Marie, who stood watching them.

All this was not done in an hour. By the time the painters got to work changing the white-and-red hull into black-and-gray, another day had passed. In that length of time Venable had made some discoveries.

The steward was in the pay of Boris. This was elucidated by Li John, whose brother Li Ho also asserted that old Paul had been murdered by Boris and Shinski together, and that the latter had wept bitter tears over the job. Further, the demeanor of the skipper and mate became so affable that Venable began to be seriously alarmed.

No opportunity had yet come to speak with Mrs. Ivanoff, apparently, and Abe Gerin was wearing a worried expression. On the third evening, however, when the painting of the hull was nearly completed, Gerin came to the bridge and told Venable that Mrs. Ivanoff would see him when he came off watch.

"I'll be on guard at her door," went on the poet with an ironic smile. "You'd better show up there about nine o'clock—two bells, isn't it?—and slip in quietly. But leave the door ajar, because I want to hear what goes on. I've seen her, and she appears amiable; yet the woman is terrible of soul. She is capable of anything!"

"Very well," assented Venable. "The skipper appears amiable, too, and I don't like it. By the way, he's changed our course altogether; we're heading due south into the Eastern Sea, instead of east past Japan on a course for Honolulu. Look at the chart yourself."

Gerin nodded carelessly. "Of course; he wants to get off the steamer-lanes until the work on the ship is done; then he'll draw a line direct for Mexico. If he runs across any other ship, we sha'n't be recognized. Well, we'd better arrange matters to-night, and I'll attend to Mr. Hewson without delay. So long!"

VENABLE did not understand the poet's unconcern over their course. He himself studied the pricked chart with a frown, for the *Kum Chao* seemed to be heading for Polynesia. To his landsman's eye, with no thought of currents or leeway or drift, it seemed an absurdly easy thing to lay a course to any given point on that chart and follow it. But the ocean was very big, and Venable did not like the thought of heading aimlessly into the vastness of it as the skipper seemed to be doing. Also, the chart seemed thick with

CHAPTER X

GERIN STRIKES

THAT afternoon Captain Hewson—or rather Mr. Jason, who was the mouthpiece and active partner of the beefy skipper—fell to work upon the unhappy *Kum Chao*. There was much breaking out of paint; of which useful commodity, by some mystery which Boris Kryalpin or the skipper himself might have explained, there was a large supply aboard.

When Jason yielded the bridge to Venable, the skipper showed up and pushed the work savagely, revealing himself as a bullying bucko of the old type. The cargo-booms and derricks were stripped away and thrown into the hold; false rail and bulwarks were constructed that turned the craft from a well-deck tramp into one of the awning-deck species; a second funnel of wood, tin and canvas was stayed securely into position, and then, as a deft touch upon which the skipper prided himself hugely, was fed with smoke by a cunning pipe-line from the real funnel.

By means of much carpentry and spoiled canvas the entire shape of the superstructure amidships was altered, after which the painting was begun—every sign of the old *Kum Chao* being obliterated, and in her stead appearing the *Porte Cochère* of Marseilles. Mr. Hewson chose this name, as he explained to Venable, because he had once found it in a book and liked the tony sound of it.

reefs and islands, most of which, to Venable's great surprise, were assigned to Japan.

His surprise heightened as he looked farther. He had heard vaguely that Japan had taken all the German islands north of the equator; like most other people, he had paid little heed to it. But now he saw the large-scale chart outspread before him, and it seemed as though the *Kum Chao* were entering into a veritable Japanese world. From the Bonins down to the farthest Caroline, and away eastward through the Marshalls, stretched the great scimitar-sweep of Japan—the hilt at Asia, the point within fifteen hundred miles of Hawaii!

"Most astonishing!" murmured Venable, staring at the vast expanse of Micronesia which had passed from European hands to Asian. "An imaginative person would deduce a yellow peril from this chart, eh? And all closed to outside capital or enterprise, no doubt. Well, well, no matter! There comes Kryalpin, confound him!"

He nodded to Boris, who came to the bridge as he often did, and glanced at their course. Venable could pretend no liking for the man or his smooth courtesy, but Boris could be a charming individual at times, and seemed to exert this side of himself toward Venable. The latter liked it ill.

"Have you seen the Captain?" asked Boris casually. "No one seems to know where he is, and he's not in his cabin."

"No, he's not been here," answered Venable. "Last I saw of him, he was looking up some gold leaf for the new name on the stern. He's probably below in the store-room."

Kryalpin nodded and tendered Venable a cigarette, which the latter refused.

"You use a pipe, eh? By the way, I am very glad that you have decided to stick with us and obey orders. I'm afraid we're going to have trouble with one or two of our friends; young Marks has taken a dislike to your friend Garrity, and Pinsky is advising that you be put out of the way. I thought I'd warn you. Those fellows are not to be trusted."

"Thank you," returned Venable, frowning a little. "Still, I fancy you've exaggerated; we've not mixed with any of your crowd, and they'd have no reason—"

"My dear fellow," exclaimed Boris familiarly, "when an ill-gotten fortune is at stake, there is only one reason at bottom of everything; the fewer to divide the loot,

the better! I have warned you; so look to it!"

WITH this admonition, Boris turned and left the bridge, Venable frowning after him in indecision and perplexity. What to make of this warning, he knew not; he decided to ask Garrity about it that night.

So, when he turned over the bridge and ship to Jason at eight that evening, Venable went direct to Garrity's cabin. Darkness had fallen, earlier than usual; for the afternoon sky had been overcast, and the ship was rolling and lifting through heavy seas that boomed and battered upon her port counter.

As Eric Venable threw open the door of the tiny stateroom, a lurch of the deck sent him sidelong against the door-sash; at the same instant something crashed into the wood beside him. Instinctively he grappled with a dark figure that had uprisen in front of him. A stunning blow broke the skin of his forehead. Venable clutched at the slungshot.

For the first time in years, passionate anger mastered him completely. The grunted oaths of his opponent told him this was not Garrity, but some one who had sought to murder Garrity by stealth and treachery. The blow, the touch of the coward's weapon, maddened Venable. He threw out all his strength in a blind fierceness, a fury of surging muscles.

What happened next he could not tell. He was threshing about the stateroom with another man; that was all. Presently he found an electric torch flashing upon him, and knew that he was standing, trembling, with Garrity's hand on him and Garrity's voice in his ear.

"For the love o' heaven, Parson!" cried the engineer excitedly. "Will ye not be content with killin' the lad—"

"Killing!" echoed Venable. "He was waiting in here—"

"There's a hell of a mess up for'ard," thrust in Garrity. "Jason is—"

A dark shape appeared, crutch stamping to the roll of the ship, and Abe Gerin burst upon them in a blaze of energy. Garrity had extinguished the light.

"Venable—ah, I thought you'd be here! Get to the bridge—hurry! They've found that the Captain has disappeared, and the mate—"

"Quick!" snapped Garrity with a shove that sent Venable staggering away.

"For'ard with ye, Parson! And take this along."

Venable felt an automatic pushed into his coat pocket as he left.

Dazed, bewildered by what had taken place, he stumbled through the blackness, conscious of an uproar around him. At the bridge ladder he collided with Boris Kryalpin.

"Ah, Venable!" The voice of Boris was now steely, vibrant, and it lifted in a shout to the bridge above. "Here he is, Jason! Up with you, Venable—take charge of the ship! Captain Hewson has vanished."

Venable did not stop to consider that Boris seemed actually in charge of the ship; he hastily gained the bridge, where Mr. Jason was dancing about and yelling frantic orders. He seized on Venable and gave him a push toward the wheel-house.

"Take charge!" he foamed. "Course is so'theast a quarter south—and git up a storm-apron—blowin' hell's bells 'fore morning. I'll be back soon."

He disappeared, with Boris, leaving Venable in charge of the ship.

ON the deck below was pandemonium, blackness, spindrift. The ship was bucking into a head-wind that pounded her with seas and kept her forward deck sluiced down continually, while Li Ho and another man at the wheel were kept at work to hold her steady.

From the confusion Venable gathered that search was being made for the missing Hewson. What had happened, he did not exactly know; things had broken too suddenly. But now, as though by some magic, his bewildered brain cleared. His hesitation was gone. He realized that he stood face to face with a dozen perils, and the knowledge steadied him, snapped his brain into cool precision.

Presently Li John made his appearance, and with much relief Venable ordered him to rig a storm-apron: The quartermaster summoned men from below. With them came Garrity, a cheerful whistle upon his lips.

"Praise be!" exclaimed the engineer. "It's all ravin' maniacs they are, down there! D'ye mind, Venable, that whiskered chap Pinsky? He was in your cabin, waitin' for ye—same as the boy Marks in mine. They've missed Marks already."

"Missed him!" Venable stared. "You mean—they'll find him—"

"Not much!" And Garrity chuckled.

"Lord, what a grip ye have, Parson! We put him over the rail, Gerin and I."

"What happened to Captain Hewson?" demanded Venable.

"Divil a bit does anyone know, or care, either—unless it's Boris Kryalpin. Him an' that bird Jason are fair wild! I see Mrs. Ivanoff out on deck, paradin' around; she said for you to see her after the confusion quieted down a bit. They've been watching her pretty close, but Gerin had charge of her to-night, and I s'pose he let her drift around."

"So Pinsky was waiting for me, eh?" said Venable slowly. "Garrity, I believe Kryalpin put them up to that murder-plot! Then he warned us. He didn't care who got killed, so long as some one caught it. I believe Abe Gerin told the exact truth! Everybody aboard this ship is out to murder everybody else!"

"Pretty close to the mark, Parson," assented Garrity. "Boris tried to buy up Stormalong, who was wise enough to say yes. I told him about things, and he says to tell you that he'll throw in with us any old time."

"All right." Venable nodded. "Here's some one now. Looks like Jason."

The mate appeared, carrying a lantern and a strong whisky-breath. He squinted at the course, and nodded.

"Cap'n's gone!" he said lugubriously. "Poor ol' Hewson's gone! Him an' me has sailed together these seven year, too. And he owed me thirty dollars Mex! Aint it hell?"

"What d'ye mean?" snapped Garrity. "He's not dead?"

"He's gone; that's all," responded the mate in half-maudlin accents. "That's what comes o' having a woman owner aboard! Mr. Hewson aint aboard this hooker no more. That kid Marks, he's gone too. I told the skipper to watch out for that crowd; so did Kryalpin. They've done him in, that's what. It comes of them saints' bones that's aboard."

Venable turned from the man.

"Take over the bridge," he said curtly. "I'm going to turn in."

"Aw right," assented Jason, rubbing his hand over his bald, wet skull. "Aw right. It comes of them saints' bones and a woman owner aboard! That's what it does—"

Venable and Garrity left him mouthing words. The man was palpably knocked off his feet; he had had some affection for

the beefy skipper, after all, perhaps. And he had drunk deep while below.

"You run along and see the missus," said Garrity. "I'll take a look-see for any more mousetraps in our cabins, and you can report afterward on what she says."

"We're safe enough now," asserted Venable confidently. "Boris laid the trap for us, but the disappearance of Hewson has staggered him. He'll go slow for the present and work in with Jason; he won't want more of the ship's officers to turn up missing, for he figures on working the ship to the Mexican coast. So long!"

Venable swung away aft, toward the specially installed cabin of Mrs. Ivanoff, abaft the bridge-house. But Garrity paused by the ladder to gaze after him, and grinned as he gazed.

"Divil and all, if he aint comin' out like a new man!" said the engineer reflectively. "That tone of him, now—and my Lord, what he done to Marks! Killed him with the two bare hands, praise be! Divil a cheep out of him about it, neither—he might be a bloody pirate for all a man knows, killin' of 'em before breakfast. Hurray, says I!"

VENABLE passed on to Mrs. Ivanoff's cabin, and came upon Abe Gerin.

"In with you!" Gerin jerked his head toward the door. "She expects you."

Venable opened the door and stepped into the cabin. He disregarded Gerin's prior instructions and closed the door behind him.

If he had anticipated a fateful interview, he was quite correct; but there was nothing prolonged or dramatic about it. Mrs. Ivanoff held out her hand, and smiled.

"I am glad to see you at last, Doctor Venable."

"Please, not that!" Venable protested quietly. "The past is dead, madam."

"Very well." Her sea-gray eyes searched him curiously, strangely. "You've changed—and I'm glad! Gerin has made his position clear to you?"

"Gerin—and others. The Captain disappeared to-night. And Marks—"

"I know." Her eyes shone out suddenly at him. "Gerin told me. Ah, that was wonderful! But you must not stay—it is dangerous. You are ready to act?"

"At your command, madam," said Venable, standing very straight before her.

"To think what a man of iron you are now, and what you were when I first saw

you!" she said softly; then she shrugged her shoulders. "Very well. I have assented to Gerin's proposals. I have no commands, except that to-morrow you must be ready to act. Things will happen."

"What?"

"I can't say. You and Garrity must watch. And I wish you'd take this and put it in some place of safety—stow it away in one of the lifeboats, where no one would look."

She held out to him a parcel wrapped in burlap and tied with twine.

"Don't let Gerin see it—put it under your coat," she pursued calmly. "It contains some private effects, and our cabins are liable to search at any moment. Thank you. Pass the word to those whom you can trust about to-morrow; early in the morning, I think, there will be trouble."

Venable frowned at her, perplexed.

"But what makes you think—"

"Oh, I have been busy to-night!" She laughed out at him, an eager, thrilling laugh that went into his blood like wine. "They were right to be afraid of me, those gutter-rats! But you shall see to-morrow."

Venable bowed and left her.

Outside, Gerin looked up at him with a twisted smile. "Ah! We work together, eh? Good. That is a woman in there! A wonder!"

"She says there'll be trouble to-morrow," said Venable. "What does she mean?"

"Lord knows!" The poet shrugged. "But we got in the first blow, eh? Nobody knows how Hewson disappeared—and nobody saw. I was careful about that! The old fool was slung under the stern, lettering—"

Venable's face hardened into steel. "You—murdered him?"

"No," said Gerin, "I didn't. I simply knocked him off the sling and let the water do the rest. And by to-morrow night you'll be in charge of this ship."

Venable started to speak, then halted. He could not trust himself to explain to this assassin.

CHAPTER XI

THE STORM BREAKS

BEFORE he went off watch at four in the morning, Venable passed the word to Garrity and Stormalong, also to the two Chinese quartermasters—

the word that trouble was on the way, and that they must stand by to obey his orders when the time came. Certain of the crew whom Li John and Li Ho could trust were to be told also. Others, however, a number of the stokers and the two stewards, were known to have been won over by Hewson and Boris Kryalpin. How far they would follow Boris was questionable.

The parcel wrapped in burlap Venable had placed under the tarpaulin of the after starboard boat, lacing up the covering again.

Venable slept untroubled, waking in time for breakfast when the bell was rung at seven-twenty, after shipboard custom. He messed with Garrity.

"If trouble is brewin'," said the latter, "'tis a bad mornin' for the same! I seen that chap Deardoff down the passage, and green he was; I'll be seasick me own self if this holds!"

There was no storm, but the *Kum Chao* was wallowing and bucking into a stiff wind and bad sea. On his way to the bridge, Venable saw that her foredeck was being continually swept by the seas, and she was laboring hard. Jason, looking very haggard and unkempt, hailed the relief with joy.

"I'm keepin' her off two points," he said, "to hit the seas easier. She's goin' to drop her screw yet, the old tinpot! Hear the blade race when she lifts up her hind end? Wish ye luck with her! You'll have to shoot the sun this noon; now that skipper's gone, you an' me got to hang together."

Venable found himself alone, except for the two men at the wheel, with vast relief. He did not like Jason or trust him, and he found himself on a tension this morning, waiting for Mrs. Ivanoff's prediction to be fulfilled. But nothing happened. Garrity informed him by tube that all was quiet below.

Shortly before four bells, or ten o'clock, Venable looked down at what had been the well-deck, and saw Shinski and Boris walking there and talking. As he gazed idly upon them, he saw the woman Marie appear.

Instantly Venable knew from the repressed excitement of her face, her manner, that something had happened. He turned and spoke through the open window to Li John, at the wheel behind him.

"Send another man up here to mind the

wheel. Summon your brother, the second engineer, and the others. The time is at hand."

"Aye, aye, sah," responded the British-trained Li John. "Number one piecee bobbery come quick, huh?"

VENABLE gave his attention to the three below him. Marie had halted the two men, and now the uplift of the wind carried her words clearly to the bridge.

"It's gone!" Her voice was tensely shrill. "It's gone, I say!"

"What's gone?" demanded Shinski, who was livid with seasickness.

"Everything!" Marie's voice rose in hot anger. "Some one has been in my room,—it was in my trunk,—and it's been stolen! The jewels—"

The two men broke into oaths of amazement. Then, his eyes blazing, Boris Kryalpin whirled on Shinski, and his hand went to his coat.

"You, you rat!" snarled his voice. "You've—"

Shinski swerved away with a bleat of fright; but Kryalpin's pocket vomited a splash of smoke, and a revolver cracked. Shinski flung up his arms and pitched down the deck as the ship rolled.

Marie had whipped out an automatic as Boris turned to her—but from some point aft, outside the range of vision of the paralyzed Venable, came another shot, thin against the wind. Boris dropped his weapon, put one hand to his head and fell.

Another shot, a third, cracked. Marie threw up her automatic and answered it, shooting aft; then she leaped aside and was gone. Below him, Venable saw Shinski's body rolling in the scuppers, while Boris Kryalpin was half kneeling amid a rush of green water and holding to the rail-chains.

Venable turned to the helmsman. "Steady as she is!" he ordered, his voice quiet. Then he took out his automatic and went to the ladder, descending.

He wondered why nothing more had happened—why Garrity and the others had not appeared. But it had all chanced in the fraction of a minute, that scene of murder. When Venable came to the deck, he saw Li John just at the hood of the fore-castle hatch, leaning over and calling to his mates below.

Venable faced aft, along the port rail. He had no intention of going below to the

cabins, for with murder afoot that narrow passage would be a shambles. Everybody seemed to be shooting at everything in sight. Hell had broken loose with a vengeance!

So some one had stolen the jewels, eh? Marie had been foolish to come and blurt it out, thought Venable; that had precipitated the fracas. Each man thought the other man had been guilty—but who really had taken the stuff? Boris, beyond a doubt. He was head and shoulders above the rest of them in brains. And he had been swift enough to shoot down Shinski!

And now Venable heard another weapon's report, and the bullet screamed in the wind overhead.

Out ahead of him popped, grotesquely and terribly, the figure of Abe Gerin—crutch gone, reeling brokenly across the passage and back again. Behind Gerin came a second figure, that of the bearded Deardorf, revolver in hand, aiming at the staggering Gerin.

"Down with that gun!" roared out Venable.

Deardorf saw him, hesitated, then rapped out an oath and lifted his weapon. Venable threw out his automatic and pulled the trigger. He aimed blindly, ignorantly. He was astonished to see Deardorf flung back against the rail as though by some invisible hand, drop his gun, and clap his hand to his left shoulder.

"Marie!" gasped out Gerin, half lying on the deck. "They—caught her—"

He pointed aft, and with a lurch of the ship rolled against the rail. Then, unexpectedly, a rush of feet sounded behind Venable, who turned to see Garrity and Stormalong, followed by half a dozen yellow men, streaming toward him. He passed Gerin and went on to the after-deck.

MARIE was there, struggling in the firm grip of Jason, while Pinsky was searching her. Garrity flung himself forward, a cry of fury bursting from him; Venable found himself thrown against Jason, and swung his fist against the mate. He was answered by a smash that lifted him against the rail, and then clinched.

But for the wound which had stretched him half senseless on the fore-deck, Kryalpin would have won the ship in that moment. The stewards had gathered other yellow men of his party, and Jason was bel-

lowing to them to come on—but they held back, irresolute. Then Li John and his brother turned to face the danger, Stormalong leaped at the threatening party, and they turned tail and vanished with howls of fright.

Small wonder, indeed! Venable had come to his full height, holding over his head the screaming figure of Jason, whose bald head was crimsoned; bending himself, he flung the hapless mate along the deck, sent him slithering and sliding over the white planks, to bring up with a crash against a section of the flimsy false superstructure. Mr. Jason lay there silent and unmoving.

"Garrity!" Venable's voice bit into the wind. "Go for'ard and seize Kryalpin—also Shinski, if he's alive! Stormalong, grab that fellow Deardorf, and bring Abe Gerin here. What's become of Pinsky?"

He stared about the deck, passing over the frightened, wondering gaze of Marie, who had shrunk against the rail. Pinsky had vanished.

Then Venable had his answer. His gaze caught a black thing in the ship's wake—a head and arm that rose out of the water, made itself seen and was gone. Li John touched his arm, grinning.

"Misteh Gallity knockum off!"

Venable shrugged his shoulders, after another look at the tossing waters which showed no further trace of the Bolshevik.

"Shinski's dead!" came Garrity's voice, who appeared, leading two of his men, their hands busy with Boris Kryalpin. "This bird has a scratch across the skull, but he'll be up to more divilment when he comes around, I'm thinking."

Stormalong showed up in charge of Deardorf, and Abe Gerin was helped to the scene. He looked at Venable with a grim smile.

"Just in time, Venable! Thanks. My ankle's been twisted up pretty badly, I guess. All the fish in the net? Where's Jason?"

THE mate was disinterred from his canvas shroud, and found to be senseless but not particularly damaged. Marie was helping to support Gerin, whose face was blazing with an indomitable energy that mastered his pain.

"Now!" he cried out at Venable. "Finish it, man—finish it! Put them in a boat and be rid of the lot—"

"In this sea!" Venable shook his head.

"I'm no murderer, Gerin. If it were calm water—"

Garrity pushed forward, laughing.

"Nonsense, Parson!" he roared. "It's a grand idea, that! And in this bit sea they'll come to no harm, more's the pity! Jason's a seaman. He'll have a sail up and be scudding before the wind in no time."

"It'll not do it," answered Venable. "It would be sheer murder. Take care of the hurt men and make them all prisoners; I'll ask Mrs. Ivanoff what to do with 'em. Madam, are you injured?"

This to Marie, who dumbly shook her head. She was upholding Gerin; yet her eyes were fastened upon Garrity in fascination.

Venable turned his back upon all of them and passed to the saloon-deck ladder. His scuffle with Jason had opened the cut upon his forehead given him by Marks, and he wiped the trickle of blood away, absently, careless that it left a broad smear of red.

His refusal to dispose of the prisoners as Gerin had suggested was wholly from utilitarian reasons, for he had no particular pity on any of them. Jason was needed, and very much needed, as being the only navigator aboard—the only man able to extricate the ship from her present wanderings, and to take her safely to Honolulu or San Francisco. She was now rolling down toward Micronesia, and Venable thought of that much-spotted chart with a positive shiver.

When he reached Mrs. Ivanoff's door, he knocked. She herself opened it to him, and beyond a slight widening of the eyes at his appearance, betrayed no astonishment.

"The ship is at your disposal, madam," said Venable laconically.

"Ah!" she exclaimed. "I suspected as much, from the sounds, and was just coming up. You have not been shot, I hope—"

"No, no," said Venable. "Merely a blow. It is most astonishing that none of us have been hurt; Gerin's leg was injured a trifle, I think. Shinski is dead. In fact, Dear-dorf, Mr. Jason and Boris Kryalpin are all more or less hurt, and prisoners. David Pinsky went overboard. It seems that Gerin murdered Captain Hewson yesterday."

MRS. IVANOFF nodded. She appeared to be quite composed, as though she had seen so many perils that her present situation was entirely without power to

excite her. She indicated a samovar bubbling in a rack in one corner of the cabin.

"There is no hurry, Mr. Venable," she said, "and—you know I am a Russian; let us have a cup of tea before we go on deck; I'm sure you look as though you needed it! And I want to know exactly how things stand before I take charge."

Venable smiled. "You appear quite unconcerned before the most amazing changes of fortune!" he said. "I must congratulate you on your poise."

"It is not poise," she broke in. "It is because I have seen the great agony of Russia, and after that, all little things pall upon one. But come! Tell me what started affairs up above?"

She was busy with the samovar and tiny cups taken from a rack built in the corner.

Venable described to her how the battle had started. "And so far as I know," he concluded, "the missing loot which began the affair has not yet been located. Whoever took it certainly precipitated events."

"I took it," she said, a slow laugh breaking in her motherly features. "I took it with precisely that intention!"

"Great Jehu!" murmured Venable, astounded.

In her eyes he saw a gayety, a sheer impulse to high spirits, that was new; there was a flame in her manner, a vibrant buoyancy of soul, an upburst of energy. For the first time he realized the strength of this woman, the abounding vigor beneath her placid surface.

And then, suddenly, she was turned half away from him in pretended business about the samovar; and he saw the rush of tears upon her cheeks. It was a moment before she was able to speak.

"I am a woman—I was not meant for such work," she said, between low sobs. "I knew what would happen—I had to fight; but the killing of men—"

Venable towered above her, and placed his arm about her shoulders as he turned her face toward him. In his eyes was tenderness, and a great understanding; sympathy had melted the iron contours of his rugged features, until one saw that here was a man who had suffered greatly but well, and would be loved for his deep strength of endurance.

"Be patient, dear woman! I know how you feel. Like you, these many years I have been in the world but not of it—liv-

ing my own little life in my own environment, out of contact with primitive things and emotions, coursing in a narrow path and unable to see beyond it; like you, I have been in touch only with the gentler side of life, dreaming of God and sufficient unto myself alone—thanking Heaven that I was not as other men were! And now it's all changed."

His deep voice filled the room with a thrum of music, and the woman gazed into his working features with eyes widened by this sudden baring of his inner self.

"Now I've been among men, I've plumbed the depths—I've become primitive again," he went on. "And I've come to know more of God and man! It's a fight, this world, a great fight. Uprightness is strength, and it must prove itself pitilessly. If we have a cause, we must fight for it—look at that pitiful man Abe Gerin! His whole fight here is for the woman Marie who loves him not, and he gives himself because he loves her—"

"I am very silly," said Mrs. Ivanoff, breaking in upon his disjointed words, and striking the tears from her cheeks. "I thought no one could understand."

SHE turned again to the samovar, and began to draw tea into the tiny cups. When she extended one of them to him, she was smiling again; between them had arisen a wordless warmth, a contact of the spirit, a comprehension. It was with a start of recollection that Venable came back to mundane things.

"We must go on deck—I had forgotten—"

"Oh!" The exclamation broke from Mrs. Ivanoff. "I too—"

Together they sought the deck, and the noonday sun burst upon them. The ship was rolling on her course, lifting to the long seas, smashing into the foaming rollers that swept her bows. Venable turned to the after-deck.

They came plump upon Abe Gerin, supported by Marie and Stormalong. The poet's injured leg had been dressed, but fever sat in his flushed face.

"Gone!" he cried out at sight of them. "We cannot find the stuff; it's gone."

Mrs. Ivanoff smiled. "I know," she said quietly. "I took it last night; you shall have the jewels again, my friends—and I must thank you for the success of our partnership. My dear Marie, I understand that in times past you have suffered be-

cause of those around me. Will you forgive the fault of those who are gone? Will you let the dead bury their dead?"

The outburst of passionate emotion that filled the face of Marie was quenched by the softness of the sea-gray eyes that compelled hers. Her lips quivered; and abruptly she caught the outstretched hand of Mrs. Ivanoff. Tears smothered the words in her throat.

"Where's Garrity?" demanded Venable of the two men.

Abe Gerin poised himself upon Stormalong's arm.

"Down lookin' to his engines," growled the second engineer, an anxious frown upon his burly face as he watched Venable. "Say! I was lookin' for you. This guy—"

"The prisoners?" exclaimed Venable.

"Gone!" cried out Gerin, flinging up his free arm and shaking his fist at the horizon. "Gone—by my orders! Undo it if you can!"

A gasp broke from Venable. "Murdered? If you've dared—"

"No," broke in Stormalong. "He had 'em put in a boat—give 'em water an' grub and charts. Jason was fit to take charge o' things. They'll be all right."

Venable lifted his gaze to the empty horizon, and slowly conquered the anger that had gripped upon him. When he looked again at Abe Gerin, his eyes were cold and emotionless.

"So you did this, you fool!" he said biting. "After I had refused to allow it! And who's to take charge of this ship?"

"You," retorted the flushed poet. "You're the second officer, aren't you?"

"Oh, hell!" broke from Stormalong in sudden and dismayed comprehension.

Venable looked at them, then sought the startled gaze of Mrs. Ivanoff. Each of them, save Gerin, understood the situation perfectly, and was wordless before it.

"Put Gerin to bed," said Venable, and turned. "And Stormalong! Send Garrity up to the bridge, will you?"

CHAPTER XII

THE YELLOW SCHOONER

GARRITY looked sheepish when he came to the bridge. He had been excited, carried away by the fight and the rush of events; also he had talked more than a little with that wife of his,

Marie. When Boris Kryalpin and the others had been put into a boat and sent adrift, Garrity had been aflame with reckless enthusiasm, thinking naught of disobeying Venable. But now he had cooled down appreciably, and he began to understand that by parting with Jason, the *Kum Chao* had been turned into a blinded, brute thing.

"We shouldn't ha' done it," he said, miserable before Venable's lack of reproach. "I'm sorry, Parson—but I didn't think. Say! Turn about, now, and be headin' back! We could pick up them birds."

Venable shook his head and pointed to the chart.

"We know exactly where we are, Garrity; Jason has kept everything shipshape, and we've been moving at a steady speed. As it is now, we can at least try to make some port where we can pick up a navigator. If we began to quarter the ocean, we would very likely fail to pick up the boat, and then we'd be miles off our course and helpless."

Garrity nodded. He was nothing of a seaman himself—little more of one than was Venable, in fact—else he would have realized the sheer folly of not trying to pick up the boat. To him, as to Venable, the horizon looked terribly wide, and the compass was confusing.

"Then go ahead, and the saints be kind to us!" he said at length. "Where'll we head for now?"

They went to the chart-table. Their last noted position was 132 E. by 29 N., and since the previous day they had held almost a straight course.

"Thank the Lord!" said Garrity fervently. "We've been hittin' nine and a half steady; you can work out where we are, easy enough, makin' allowance for the sea we been buckin'. Take the log now—it's one of them patent things—and average her up with this mornin's reading. What's that you're pointin' at?"

Venable's finger had passed down the outflung string of the Ladrões, to come to rest at their southernmost tip.

"Guam!" he answered. "United States soil, Garrity—and all the help we want!"

"Ah! That's better," said Garrity briskly. "And not so far neither—a matter o' three hundred miles."

"Six hundred," corrected Venable. "It's a mere dot in the ocean."

"Go to it!" retorted the engineer. "Go

ahead, man—ye're bound to be hittin' something from the looks o' that chart! If not Guam, then ye can get directions. Divil and all, I could sail a ship meself with charts like them, and islands all around to ask your way from! We'll do fine, Parson; so go ahead and don't be botherin' Mrs. Ivanoff about it."

VENABLE shrugged his shoulders.

"Very well. But when you go down, see if anyone on board knows anything about navigation. It would help a lot."

"I've already asked, with no luck," and Garrity grinned. "It's in your hands, me lad, and more power to ye! By the way, have ye observed Marie at all?"

"Your wife?"

"Well, the one I married—yes. It's a wonderful woman she is, Parson; upon me word, 'twould amaze ye to talk with her a bit! And do ye know, she's done with all that socialist stuff—poor girl, she's had a hell of a time with them Bullsheviks and all! They all come to it, Parson—that is, if they got any real gumption, like she's got. They all quit it and come back to earth."

Venable regarded him, smiling queerly.

"So!" he said. Under his look, reading the thought in his eyes, Garrity flushed bright red. "So! It would be a strange thing, now—wouldn't it?—if you two were—"

"Aw, hell!" uttered Garrity. "You 'tend to them charts, Parson! So long."

The engineer fled hastily. Still smiling, Venable turned to his work, and fell sober. The immensity of sea and sky, the utter futility of all his knowledge, the appalling density of the coral reefs dotted on the chart, brought him to a grave doubt of himself and his task. He was afraid.

"Li John!" At his word, the Quartermaster turned to him. "Pick out the best men from each watch for the lookouts, and warn them to sing out at the first sign of reefs or islands. You will take charge of the ship when I'm off watch, and call me when you sight anything. You understand?"

"My savvy plenty fine, sah," answered the yellow man.

Venable went out on the bridge. As he stood there, gazing ahead, he saw Mrs. Ivanoff and Marie walk out on the fore-deck, talking together. Mrs. Ivanoff looked up at him and beckoned. Venable descended the ladder and joined them. He

was more than glad to see that between them lay friendliness; both women were smiling as he came up.

"We were just speaking of you," said Mrs. Ivanoff brightly. "I was telling Marie about the package wrapped in bur-lap that I gave you."

"Oh!" Venable's brows lifted. He was slightly perplexed. "Yes, of course. You want it back again?"

"If you please," answered Mrs. Ivanoff, and laughed. "You see, all Marie's jewels were in that package."

Venable whistled in astonishment. Before his amazement both women smiled again.

"So that was it!" he ejaculated. "And you handed it over to me as though it were some paltry—"

Mrs. Ivanoff touched his arm. In her sea-gray eyes lay a swift appeal.

"It was no lack of trust, Mr. Venable. I was the only one who knew what was in that package, and I preferred to keep the secret to myself until the time came. Now the time has come, and I want to return what does not belong to me."

"I see," Venable nodded, and turned.

He halted, staring blankly along the starboard rail. His jaw fell.

"What's the matter?" demanded Marie quickly.

"The matter? That boat—the after boat is gone!"

MRS. IVANOFF frowned suddenly. "The boat? Yes. That was the one they sent away the prisoners in."

Venable made a tragic gesture—a motion of helplessness, of futility. He turned to them a face furrowed deeply.

"I opened up the cover of that boat," he said, "and put the package under one of the thwarts, then laced it up again. And Gerin gave them that boat—"

Understanding broke upon them. Marie's eyes flamed; her cheeks went white as she gazed at him. Then, under his grave gaze, the anger died from her face and left it miserable. Despair thickened her voice when she broke the silence.

"No use—no use! It seems that—that fate—that everything is in vain."

She turned her back to them, choking; but Mrs. Ivanoff put an arm about her shoulders, and caressed the masses of bronze hair.

"My dear! I am so sorry; I am sorry, for your sake! It was my fault entirely!"

"No!" Marie straightened and whirled, facing her. "Don't say that; you are a noble woman, and I'm a—a poor miserable girl who has failed in everything—even in theft! It was not your fault at all. Oh, can't you see that I'm not grieving for the loss!"

They stood silent before her, wondering. Perhaps Mrs. Ivanoff, who understood everything, comprehended what was passing in her heart; but Venable was astonished.

"I'm glad it's gone!" cried out Marie passionately. "There was blood on each one of those stones; I had dreamed of their staining my soul—oh, I can't tell you all of it! But now it's gone, and I'm glad. It was like a bloody nemesis out of the old life, hanging over me always; could I have enjoyed that money, that blood-money, those thirty pieces of silver? No, I'm done with it all now—all the old life is behind me and done with! I've thrown away the best of my youth and have bartered my soul for a bubble that is broken."

Tears suffused her eyes. Mrs. Ivanoff threw Venable a look, a swiftly commanding look that tacitly bade him begone; and he obeyed it. As he stumbled back up to the bridge, the two women disappeared toward the after-deck.

"Regeneration there," thought Venable, marveling at it all. "Strange how it's working out with her! Poor girl, she's been one of the sincere ones, but now she's badly shattered and in need of aid. And the aid comes to her from Mrs. Ivanoff—the type of aristocrat she had hated and plotted to overthrow! Very queer—mysterious, rather. Yes, mysterious! God's still at work in the world."

THE thought of the treasure, as such, did not move him in the least, had no appeal for him. He cared nothing about its disposition, except as it affected the others around him; and yet the guiding chance of this whole affair was very curious. Kryalpin, defeated and kicked adrift on the seas, had none the less won the great stake! Gerin, coolly murdering men in order to give Marie possession of the treasure, had deliberately but ignorantly turned over that treasure with his hatred; in venting his fear and vengeance upon Boris and the others, he had made them rich men—had let them depart with the jewels!

"It will go hard with Gerin when he learns the truth," thought Venable, quite without pity. He could not forget how

Captain Hewson had been murdered; poet-wise, Gerin had pictured the scene for him in a dozen words that lingered in his memory.

Later, when he stood in Gerin's cabin and told the poet of the happenings, Gerin said nothing at all. He turned his beautiful face to the wall, and was silent.

It appeared that Mrs. Ivanoff had handed over to the ex-Bolsheviks her own trunk containing relics and jewels, as stipulated at their first meeting, the morning after leaving Taku. The jewels had been given to Marie for safe-keeping, while the relics had been left undisturbed. Marie had kept these stones separate from the others, so that they had not been in the burlap package. She had now returned them with the relics to Mrs. Ivanoff.

IN the wheel-house, upon the following morning, Venable bent over figures and charts, hard at work. After hours of absorbed calculation, after much fruitless poring over Knight and Bowditch and other books found in the skipper's cabin, he reached the odd but unassailable conclusion that the *Kum Chao* was at that precise moment smack in the center of Dolares Island, a speck of land midway between the Riukiu and Bonin groups. As he leaned back and considered this queer situation, there came a hail from the bows, repeated by Li John.

"Land ho, cap'n! Him catchum land! Two points to po't!"

Flurried, Venable rang for half speed, then summoned Garrity up above for a consultation. On the rim of the wine-dark sea ahead, slightly to port, was a low-hung bluish break, a dot of land.

Garrity arrived on the run, and listened to Venable's exposition, rubbing his broken nose the while. At length he broke into a grin, his star-blue eyes twinkling.

"Faith, Parson, ye've accomplished a miracle, no less! How ye did it is past me, but it's done."

"What do you mean?"

"Yonder is Dolares Island; that's all!" Garrity pointed to the chart. "Your figures were right enough at a guess. Now lay your course sou'-sou'east by three-quarters east, and ye'll fetch Guam—bar-rin' accidents. More power to ye!"

VENABLE gave the course to the quartermaster; while he was doing so, Mrs. Ivanoff arrived. Garrity departed to his

own place, while Venable pointed out their position to Mrs. Ivanoff. In reply to her questions he explained the odd relationship between Garrity and Marie, and detailed his own friendship with the engineer. Nor did he spare himself in the telling, but filled out the portrait of himself with strong, harsh strokes.

"We're not unlike," she answered softly, the rich timbre of her voice thrilling and vibrating within him. "We've each suffered; and now we're traveling the same path toward the better things. I've doubted much—"

"By to-morrow night," Venable said, smiling, "we'll be through our worries, I trust."

He pointed out their course to Guam. Dolares Island was already on the star-board horizon and dropping behind. But as he put down the chart, Li John turned to him from the wheel and jerked one hand aft and to port.

"Catchum ship, Cap'n!"

"A ship!"

Venable took the binoculars from the rack and stepped outside, Mrs. Ivanoff at his elbow. To the northwest was a dot against the horizon. Venable focused the glasses on her, and made out a ship crawling down the sea-rim after them.

"A small craft of some kind!" He handed the glasses to Mrs. Ivanoff.

"But faster than we, for she seems to be catching up with us," was her comment. "Hm! She's heading as though to speak us, too."

"Good!" exclaimed Venable. "We'll be able to verify our position from her and obtain the proper course to Guam. I think we'd better come down to half speed and let her catch us up if she wants to."

MR. IVANOFF returned the glasses, frowning a little.

"I—I'm silly," she said hesitantly, "but I'm afraid of everything, Mr. Venable. After what has happened since leaving Tientsin, I can't help feeling as though—"

"More trouble were coming?" Venable laughed. "Nonsense! We're all right, I assure you; still, if you prefer, I'll not slow down. By the way, how is Gerin?"

"I looked in on him just before coming up here," she replied, her eyes on the crawling dot. "He seemed quite himself. Mr. Stormalong was fixing his crutch so he could use it again. Did you notice his face?"

"Yes. It's very remarkable." Venable took out his pipe and filled it. "The man himself is a strange mixture of good and bad; his devotion to Marie is a beautiful thing, while his actions are the exact contrary. Altogether complex! The man is a shadow like the rest of us, eh? Too much imagination for his own good."

"He did much evil in Russia," she said, her voice low and repressed. "And some good, also. Such a man can never find happiness; he cannot find his place in the world. I wonder what his conception of heaven can be?"

"What is yours?" asked Venable unexpectedly.

"Mine?" She hesitated, searching him with her eyes. "Ah—that is hard to say! One's point of view changes at times. . . . Well, *au revoir!*"

He wondered what she had meant by those words, but could arrive at no answer. He was filled with a great reverence for her, an unmixed admiration. Something deeper was in this feeling, too—something he could not express or visualize. It was as though she had brought something into his empty life, filling the vacant spaces. Her eyes seemed always to be calling him, speaking to him of inward things. Such a woman, he pondered, would be an inspiration to the world, an inspiration to any man.

His thoughts ended there, for the dot on the sea-rim was coming closer now, and he could make out signals flying from her gaff. She was a schooner, but obviously under motor power, for she had no canvas spread.

Venable sought among the skipper's books and papers for some explanation of the signals, and presently found a copy of the International code. After much study of the schooner's signals, entirely strange to his eye, he made them out to indicate that she wanted to speak.

"Oh! You want to speak us, do you?" muttered Venable. He had previously summoned Terence Garrity to the tube, and repeated the signal. "Shall we stop or not?"

"If she's faster than we are, let her run up!" returned Garrity with an oath.

So Venable paid no heed to the signal. As he examined the schooner through his glass, he made out that a group of men was busied about a large tarpaulin on her fore-deck. When the tarpaulin was removed, a glittering object, to Venable's

gaze quite unfamiliar, was laid bare. The men working on the schooner's deck seemed to be brown or yellow.

Suddenly an exclamation burst from Venable, staring amazedly through the glasses. From the after companion of the schooner a group of men had come up on her deck, one of them a Japanese, the other three white. And the white men were Mr. Jason, Boris Kryalpin and the wounded Deardorf!

Barely had Venable recognized them when the gun on the fore-deck of the schooner sent a white burst of smoke. Before the shot sounded, there was a terrific explosion somewhere in the bowels of the *Kum Chao*. Her engines stopped.

CHAPTER XIII

THE TIGER WINS

THE *Kum Chao* wallowed in the trough of the seas, helpless, while down upon her bore the Japanese schooner. Aboard the latter a boat was being made ready for lowering; from her size, Venable was certain it was the same boat in which Boris and his friends had been sent adrift, the boat which had given them the treasure!

What were they now after, then? The remainder of the treasure, of course—the jewels and relics gained by Mrs. Ivanoff. They had been picked up by this schooner, and had no doubt bribed or lied her commander into pursuing the *Kum Chao*.

"Ho!" cried Garrity, panting as he leaped beside Venable. "Ho! The schooner ye were tellin' me of, eh? Let's have a look. Stormalong is keepin' the others down. We'll want a cool head and no talkin' here, I'm thinkin'—"

He seized the glass from Venable's hand and looked. Then he swore.

"Boris it is!" A sudden coolness came over him as he squinted. "The devils would not be satisfied with what they had, but wanted the rest! And the murderin' Jap, yonder—when he found that the old ship was by way of bein' an outlaw—"

"Man, he fired slap into us!" exclaimed Venable, finding his voice for the first time. "He fired into us without warnin'!"

"Don't I know it?" said Garrity grimly. "The engines smashed and some o' the Chinks kilt entirely! And a hole in her starboard bow where the shell burst."

He laid down the glasses and looked at Venable; the rage had seeped out of him, and he was coldly self-possessed.

"We are up against it, me lad," he said, his voice quiet. "Ye realize what they mean?"

Venable made a gesture of puzzled incomprehension. He could understand nothing of it.

"No, I don't. That's not a warship, of course; yet—"

"Oh, the Jap ships can go armed in these waters if they want. Listen, now! Boris has told 'em the story, or some kind of story; they're out now to get what's left of the loot, and to keep us from tellin' any tales. And we're helpless against 'em!"

Venable's face hardened. "You don't mean—they would murder us?"

"Just that." Garrity was quite pale now. "To save his own neck, Boris must shut our mouths, d'ye see? And the Jap realized quick enough that he could be sinkin' this ship with impunity; because why, if she shows up in any port like she is now, there'll be a big inquiry with courts and what not. But if she doesn't show up, she's gone with all hands—and Mr. Jason's neck is saved likewise!"

"But they'd not murder everyone aboard here—"

"Oh, ye think so!" Garrity's voice held supreme scorn. "Wi' thousands and thousands o' dollars at stake? Ho!"

"What can we do, then?"

"Nothin'—nothin' at all, divil take it! The Japs will want to loot this ship, too. Fine pickin's for the likes of them, it is. Pirates, they are—and I'd prob'ly be the same in their boots!" he added morosely, staring at the other ship.

TO Venable it seemed very unreal and impossible, here under the blazing sunlight that flooded all things with afternoon radiance. The sea was still heavy, so heavy that the two ships would doubtless be unable to come alongside; the water heaved in great masses of flinty blue-gray, reaching up to the horizon-rim like a vast bowl of tumbling billows, amid which the crippled *Kum Chao* rolled, a wounded leviathan. Toward her crept the schooner, menacingly silent.

Venable was vaguely conscious that from below came the sounds of tumult—the Chinese crew was excited, shouting shrilly, but dominated by the bellow of Stormalong at the foot of the ladder.

"Mebbeso you fight?" suggested Li John, fingering the knife at his belt. "My thinkum China boys velly glad catchee number one fight, sah!"

The other helmsman nodded quick assent. But Venable shook his head, and with a gesture dismissed them both. Now that he was forced to admit the incredible truth, he saw the sheer futility of resistance; such a course would be madness. The schooner had crippled the *Kum Chao* with a single shot. She could sink her as easily, if she so wished.

The two yellow men departed, looking rather disappointed. Mrs. Ivanoff made her appearance, her gray eyes blazing furiously. It was clear that those below fully appreciated the situation; she asked no questions, but turned to Garrity, her voice calm.

"Marie is asking for you. She is frightened."

Garrity bobbed his red head and departed, wordless. Venable gave Mrs. Ivanoff a curious glance.

"Frightened, you say? I did not think it possible—that type of woman."

"Things have happened to her lately," responded Mrs. Ivanoff. Her cool gray eyes, despite the anger storming in their depths, gave him an odd sense of peace and tranquillity; he felt better poised, more sure of himself, to know that she was beside him.

"She has undergone a revolution within herself, I think," continued Mrs. Ivanoff. "At any rate, she is much changed. And a woman has limits, you know; all of us have! We can endure just so much; then a seeming trifle will work a great change, somehow. I do not understand it myself."

She looked at the schooner, and altered the subject abruptly.

"Well! I see Boris is back again. He will be merciless this time; he has us helpless. He came back for the remainder of the jewels, of course—and to make sure that we should not escape to tell tales. That one shot made his intentions very clear."

"We can do nothing," said Venable.

"Exactly, at present. You have a revolver? Good. One never knows what the end will be, of course."

"Gad, but you take it coolly!"

She looked at him, laughter dimpling in her face.

"Why not? Do you think I am beaten? Not until the end!"

"What can you do, then?"

She shrugged her shoulders. At this moment the engine-room tube whistled. Venable went to it, and heard the voice of Stormalong.

"All quiet below, sir. Three Chinks killed down here; engines temporarily crippled and a hole in her starboard bow. She's making water. Shall I order the hand pumps rigged?"

"If you please," said Venable calmly.

HE rejoined Mrs. Ivanoff outside. The schooner was now close aboard and was losing way. The boat was overside, and men were in her; Deardorf and Mr. Jason were in the stern. At the schooner's rail stood Boris Kryalpin, a neat bandage about his head giving him an air of rakish deviltry which quite suited him. He was just lifting a speaking trumpet.

"Hello, Mr. Venable! Good afternoon, madam," his voice carried mockingly to them. "We are coming aboard. Lower your ladder. If you attempt any resistance you will be sunk."

Venable made a gesture of assent. Boris, followed by the Japanese skipper and mate, descended into the waiting boat.

"We might as well go down," said Venable. "Perhaps they will not bother you and Marie."

"Bother!" repeated Mrs. Ivanoff, a wondering scorn in her tone. "Don't you realize that they are devils and not men? Come."

At the rail, where Li John had lowered the ladder, they gathered and watched the boat come creeping over the great swells—watched her, that is, when they could see her, for the *Kum Chao* rolled deep and wide, and only when the boat pointed over a crest and slid down toward them could they glimpse her. Each crest brought her nearer, closer.

The crew kept themselves elsewhere, no doubt in utter fright. Beside Mrs. Ivanoff stood Marie, with Garrity behind her; if she had been frightened, no fear sat now in her handsome face, and the wind blew tendrils of her bronze hair about her eyes unheeded. Abe Gerin stood and watched, saying nothing. His too-beautiful face was drawn into thin lines, perhaps from pain of his hurt leg; or perhaps because he knew well what mercy he would get from Boris Kryalpin and the wounded Deardorf. Once and again his eyes turned to Marie, and then they softened wondrously—al-

though Marie was looking at the oncoming boat and not at him. Stormalong was at work below, while the two quartermasters either were aiding him or were hidden with the other yellow men.

As the crawling boat came close, Venable could see those aboard her plainly. Mr. Jason looked venomous, like some beaten-off vulture returning to its prey. Deardorf, bearded and stiff with his wound, was dirty and evil-eyed as ever. Boris Kryalpin was laughing at some jest with the Japanese captain, and he was very debonaire and cheerful. The two yellow men who commanded the schooner were not prepossessing in looks; both were small, crafty-eyed, viperish fellows, and from the looks of their men Venable expected no good. Of these were six, at the boat's oars. As many more were loafing at the fore-rail of the schooner.

The boat rounded in under the ladder at last, out of sight of those above. The oars were run in; two men with boathooks took hold and fended; and the boarders came up the ladder. Four of the yellow seamen followed, the others remaining to hold off the boat from smashing against the ship's side.

FIRST over the rail was Boris Kryalpin, with a smile and a mocking bow; but behind the smile his mouth and eyes were cruel. The others followed him.

"Greetings, ladies and gentlemen!" he exclaimed. "You did us a better turn than you knew, when you sent us adrift into the arms of our friends! Allow me to introduce Captain Moto."

The yellow skipper took off his cap and ducked his head, grinning wolfishly. Venable observed that Mr. Jason was watching Marie with some intentness, his scrawny features alight as though transfused by inward fires. No weapons were in sight, but coat pockets bulged very suggestively.

"Are you never satisfied?" responded Mrs. Ivanoff; whereat Boris looked slightly puzzled. "Could you not be content to leave us in peace?"

"Ah, no, gracious lady!" Kryalpin laughed gayly. "The seven devils having been driven forth, we have gathered seven other devils worse than ourselves—and have returned. My dear Marie, may I ask you to produce the glittering baubles which you so kindly rescued from the wreck of Russia for our benefit?"

Abe Gerin, who was watching the enemy with a close scrutiny, suddenly started and would have spoken; but Marie forestalled him.

"Liar and hypocrite!" flashed Marie, a fury of passion stirring in her rich voice, as she thought that she pierced Kryalpin's craft. "I suppose you have not told your friends that the stuff is already in your possession, eh? Trying to cheat them as you cheated us!"

Surprise crossed the swarthily handsome features of Boris, to be followed by swift and cold anger.

"Come!" he snapped. "No evasions, my girl, or I'll use the whip! You know well—"

"Evasions!" she repeated shrilly. "When you had the stuff in the boat all this while? Do you take us for fools, not to know that you had it?"

Misconceived although her position was, Marie almost succeeded in her attempt to sow dissension. Captain Moto regarded Boris with narrow-eyed suspicion; Jason and Deardorf turned upon him likewise. Boris himself was flatly at a loss to understand Marie's words.

Abe Gerin attempted to keep the situation under control. "Don't look so bewildered, Kryalpin," he jeered. "We know that you had the stuff in a burlap package—we discovered too late that you had taken it aboard the boat with you. So—"

With one accord the three castaways seemed to remember that burlap package. Deardorf was first at the rail, but with an oath Mr. Jason thrust him staggering away, and went down the ladder. Boris Kryalpin, leaning over, spoke softly.

"Bring it up, Mr. Jason—bring it up! Just as it is."

Mr. Jason obeyed.

SO, then, the burlap package had never been touched! Venable glanced at the others, and in their faces found his own discomfiture reflected.

"Divil take it!" muttered Garrity in glum wrath. "If they'd only found the stuff, we'd ha' been well rid of 'em after all, the dirty hounds! But now we're in for it."

Taking the burlap roll from Mr. Jason, Boris swiftly unwrapped it. He disclosed an inner wrapping of soft cloth, which when opened showed a mass of cotton studded with colored flames that glimmered and danced in the sunlight. A sharp

breath came from Mr. Jason at the sight—but Boris calmly rolled up the treasure again and handed it to Captain Moto.

"You will take charge of this? Good. Deardorf, kindly keep your eye on Captain Moto, lest he be tempted to return suddenly to his schooner. And now—"

Kryalpin turned to Mrs. Ivanoff, a genuine amusement struggling with the cold cruelty of his eyes.

"So you actually sent us adrift with the treasure! I congratulate you, Your Highness, upon your generosity; it is really quite unexampled! And now, to complete the tally, let your noble spirit prompt you to hand over what remains. I presume that you have recovered it from the keeping of Marie? Naturally. Your collection of relics will not be of much interest to us, I admit, but you have some very good stones in the lot."

At this point Captain Moto touched the arm of Boris and uttered a low word. Boris nodded in response, and the yellow skipper spoke rapidly to his mate. The latter and two of the men vanished into the boat alongside, and were presently seen rowing over toward the schooner again.

"I might say," explained Boris coldly, "that my good friend Captain Moto wishes to take away a few mementoes of this charming steamer, and is sending for a few more of his men in order to make the work move lively. If you do not object—"

"What is your intention with regard to us?" demanded Mrs. Ivanoff suddenly.

Boris regarded her with a slow smile. "Ah—yourself particularly, or everyone? That is hard to say, Your Highness; for I have no intentions whatever! When I have taken what I want, the rest of you may go." His insolent gaze swept from Venable to Garrity and Abe Gerin, then lighted on Marie. "As for you, Marie, I think that Mr. Jason will become answerable for your safety. You will have company, for Captain Moto may take Mrs. Ivanoff aboard in case I decide that she is a little too old for my taste—even though a princess."

HIS words bit. Before anyone could answer him, however, Boris turned.

"Come along, Mr. Jason; you and I will get Mrs. Ivanoff's valuables. Don't bother to accompany us, Your Highness! Captain Moto, kindly send your two men with

us, in case we decide to bring the whole trunk along; you may entertain the ladies while we are gone."

He swung away, followed by Jason. The two Japanese seamen moved after them, at a nod from their skipper. At the after-deck, Boris halted to fling a word over his shoulder.

"Disarm them, Captain! It may not be necessary, but we must take no chances."

Captain Moto smiled at the group facing him, while Deardorf drew a revolver.

"Please, your weapons!" said the yellow man, looking at Venable. The latter produced his automatic and threw it on the deck. Words were useless. Garrity followed suit.

"Please!" repeated the smiling skipper, looking at Abe Gerin. With a curse, the latter obeyed the behest.

Like Venable, the others were silent, repressing the surge of futile anger that was upon them all. The boat had reached the schooner now, and into her were dropping others of the yellow crew. The two ships had drawn closer together.

Deardorf and Captain Moto were alone with their captives, but the menace of that gun on the schooner's fore-deck was more potent than many guards. Following the sneering implication of Kryalpin's words, Mrs. Ivanoff and Marie had drawn together, and the arm of the older woman was about the shoulders of Marie as though in comforting protection.

The two yellow seamen again made their appearance, bearing between them Mrs. Ivanoff's trunk, containing the relics and jewels which she had smuggled out of Russia. Behind them followed Boris Kryalpin and Mr. Jason, the latter grinning broadly. And at this instant came a wild clattering from the bowels of the ship—a heaving, throbbing clangor that set the whole hull to vibrating and shuddering, and all but drowned from hearing a faintly heard bellow of delight in the hoarse tones of Stormalong. The *Kum Chao* stirred, and began to move slowly through the water.

CHAPTER XIV

MRS. IVANOFF COMMANDS

"**A**INT that Stormalong a divil, now!" cried Garrity, awed. "Smashed up, them engines were, but Stormalong's down there wi' the Chinks, and he's got 'em wheezing—"

Mrs. Ivanoff looked at him. Garrity met her eyes, and his own widened slightly, as though in those sea-gray orbs he read some covert message. He scratched his red head and then started off suddenly.

"I'll be havin' a look at them engines meself," he said, and no one stopped him. But Boris Kryalpin gazed after him with a thin smile.

Captain Moto sputtered a word, and Kryalpin turned.

"What difference does it make?" he said with a shrug, and jerked his hand toward the sea. "She's barely moving—barely got steerageway! Mr. Jason, you'd better close the hatch over the engine-room."

Jason nodded and took a step away. Abe Gerin flung out at Kryalpin, a passionate heartbreak in his eyes.

"You devil! You're shutting those men down there—"

Kryalpin reached out, unexpectedly, suddenly, with the swiftness of light. His hands clutched Gerin about the throat and lifted the lesser man. He shook Gerin bodily—and then the hand of Venable clamped down on his wrist.

"Stop that," said Venable. His grip twisted into the flesh of Boris, whose hands loosened and relaxed. Abe Gerin, his crutch fallen, reeled to the rail and leaned there, his fingers searching at his throat as he coughed.

The *Kum Chao* had slowly come about; she was heading into the seas now, heading toward the schooner and the men-filled boat that was pulling toward her. No one noticed this, however. Jason had disappeared in the direction of the hatchway.

Boris Kryalpin and Venable looked into each other's eyes. Venable was grim, silent, motionless; in his deeply lined face, in the beetling, haggard features, there was purpose indomitable. Yet his eyes were strangely serene and cool, deep-piercing—the eyes of one who has looked upon many things and learned much. Meeting those eyes, the bold impudence died out of the Russian's face. Boris seemed to shiver a little, as though he read a strange fate in those eyes.

Then, mastering himself, he stepped back and sneered at Venable.

"You wish to get shot, my friend? Have a care! Now, step up to the bridge; we wish to look over things there, with your presence. Come, Captain Moto! Ah, here's Mr. Jason returning—kindly assist Deardorf in taking care of these people,

Mr. Jason; better keep them up in the bows, until Captain Moto's men are all aboard. All ready, Mr. Venable."

MR. JASON passed them, returning; he was gazing at Marie, and in his steady regard was a hungry anticipation. But Mrs. Ivanoff looked at Venable, and he read a smile in her eyes; utterly at a loss to understand the meaning of her smile, unable to do more than obey, he turned to the bridge-ladder, with Moto and Boris Kryalpin following him.

As he mounted to the bridge, Venable saw Mrs. Ivanoff and Marie walking together into the bows; Abe Gerin dragged himself behind, with recovered crutch, while Mr. Jason and Deardorf slowly followed. The latter, bearded and dirty, was chuckling some evil jest to the mate.

Venable stepped to the bridge and paused before the wheelhouse, glancing inside. As he came, he thought he had seen a movement here, as of some person whisking away from sight; but the place was empty. A loop had been slipped over one of the wheel spokes, so that the *Kum Chao*, under bare steerageway, was still heading toward the schooner. The latter's boat, filled with little yellow men, was now close aboard.

The two ships were now much nearer to each other than at first, for the *Kum Chao* had not ceased her gradual progress toward the schooner. From down below, the reeling clangor of the racked engines filled the whole ship with strident groanings and clackings. She was reeling much less to the waves, and not without alarm did Venable's startled senses take in the fact that she seemed lower than usual in the water. So, then—she was slowly sinking! Perhaps Stormalong was trying to work the steam-pumps, he thought, although he could not hear them going.

Yet in this thought he was very wrong.

Wondering why Mrs. Ivanoff had smiled in her eyes when she looked at him, Venable gazed down at the foredeck in a moody silence. Boris and Captain Moto had gone into the wheelhouse. The boat from the schooner was almost under the steamer's ladder now; the schooner herself had lost nearly all way and was rolling idly up the seas and down again, as though waiting for the *Kum Chao* to crawl up beside her. A single man showed on her stern-deck, now toward the steamer. Obviously, every available man had been brought over to strip the prey.

Captain Moto came out beside Venable and shouted something in his own tongue. Venable looked down, at answering voices, and saw the two yellow seamen at the foot of the ladder. They exchanged a word with Captain Moto, and then began to ascend.

Only a few moments, an absurdly few moments, had passed since the engines had started and Garrity had gone below, to be shut down with Stormalong by Mr. Jason. Yet to Venable's mind had intervened long ages of agony. And now, watching the two seamen coming up the ladder, he suddenly heard the laugh of Mr. Jason from the fore-deck.

VENABLE turned to that scene in the bows. He saw Jason speaking to Marie, saw the mate leer at her and reach out for her, saw Mrs. Ivanoff quietly come between them. An oath burst from Jason as he thrust her to one side, then caught Marie's arm. And as he did this, Mrs. Ivanoff flashed out a small revolver and shot him through the body.

To Venable it seemed unreal, as though he were gazing at some stage rehearsal. Mr. Jason fell to the deck and rolled limply over. Deardorf, a wild and fearful cry breaking from him, threw up his automatic as if to shoot Mrs. Ivanoff—then Abe Gerin had clutched him about the shoulders, throwing him aside. Crippled poet and wounded Bolshevik, they twisted on the deck together.

Some instinctive warning, some half-caught panting of breath, caused Venable to turn around. He perceived Captain Moto coming at him from one side, Boris Kryalpin from the other—the yellow man empty-handed, the Russian with an automatic pistol. Even so, it came to Venable that Captain Moto was the more to be feared.

That instant was terrible and interminable. As it dragged its course, Venable realized that he had been fetched here to be murdered; he realized that all resistance was useless—that Mrs. Ivanoff had shot the mate to save Marie, yet it would be in vain. Even now, the schooner's boat was alongside and her men were coming up the deck!

With this, befell action and a blurring of all things except what happened here at his side.

Boris was throwing up his pistol at Venable, a thin smile on his lips, when a

silent figure came around the corner of the wheelhouse behind him—the quartermaster Li John, knife in hand! A warning cry from Captain Moto brought the Russian around in time to grapple with Li John.

Venable found the yellow skipper upon him, empty-handed but terrible. For, diving at Venable, Captain Moto drove his fingers into the white man's throat and all but paralyzed him with a cunning strangling of the muscles.

Venable staggered back, clutching at those yellow hands. He was a little dazed by the swiftness of things, a little confused by all of it, unable to comprehend the situation in a clear light. The appearance of Li John had been bewildering.

PAIN wakened Venable, however; pain roused him and stabbed his brain into action, and ceased the aimless, panicky fumbling of his hands. He threw out all his strength into those hands. Coolness came upon him, and a deadly wrath that had no mercy. So quickly had events chanced that the two yellow seamen were still upon the ladder, ascending to the bridge. When they came, death would come also.

Thus thinking, Venable seized Captain Moto and tried to pluck him away, as one tries to snatch away some loathsome reptile that has suddenly seized and twined in a venomous embrace. Twice he strove in vain, while the saffron claws sank into his throat and had him gasping; then he gathered himself and plucked again. At this plucking, Captain Moto screamed out suddenly; his hands tore loose under the sheer strength that wrenched at him; Venable lifted him and hurled him into the air, so that the scream trailed off into space—hurled him clear of the bridge and over-side, where he vanished.

Staggering from that mighty effort, and reacting to the pain that gripped his throat, Venable collapsed against the rail and clung there weakly. Down upon the fore-deck still stood the two women together, Mrs. Ivanoff gazing up, revolver in hand. Abe Gerin was still rolling with Deardorf; but now Deardorf's automatic cracked, with a queerly muffled report, then the two men lay quiet. As Venable still stared, he saw Deardorf raise himself to one elbow and lift his automatic toward Mrs. Ivanoff. Marie screamed, and Mrs. Ivanoff turned.

That was all Venable saw for the moment. One of the two approaching seamen had leaped to the aid of Boris Kryalpin, while the other fired point-blank at Venable; the bullet seared past his head, the explosion fanned him with a breath of fire. He flung himself sideways at the man, throwing up the weapon as he closed. The two, grappling, reeled into the wheelhouse, and the yellow seaman's head smashed through the weather light. There was a rush of blood as the slithered glass sliced face and throat, and the man relaxed limply. Venable was dimly aware that his own arms had been badly gashed, sending a drip of crimson from his fingertips.

He remembered the quartermaster, and dropped into the tangle of bodies—just in time, too, for Li John had been hit over the head and lay senseless. Venable stamped with his foot on the wrist of Boris, as an automatic jerked up at him; the weapon fell and exploded, the cruel bullet raking upward through the body of the second seaman. Disarmed, Boris Kryalpin rolled over and gained his feet, snarled frenzied curses, caught Venable about the waist, tried to break the latter through the bridge rail where the canvas storm-apron shut them off from the world.

THE two men hung there, striking madly. As they hung, Venable saw over the shoulder of Boris—caught a glimpse of the deck below.

The mate of the schooner, with his men, had gained the deck of the *Kum Chao*. Three of the yellow seamen had advanced forward, the others were out of sight. But those three on the fore-deck had turned, were facing aft; Venable saw their revolvers cracking and heard the shots. Something was happening down there—what? At whom were they firing?

A shrill screaming filled the air, a shrill, strident rush of voices. Into Venable's range of vision came half-naked yellow bodies; they were the Chinese of the crew, and the huge Stormalong was leading them, bellowing as he came. The three Japanese were engulfed, and knives streamed red down there. Farther, in the bows, stood Marie and Mrs. Ivanoff, the latter holding her smoking revolver; but Deardorf now lay with his arms flung out, dead.

Venable did not stop to wonder how Stormalong and Garrity had come from below—the Chinese had done that, of course. He had no chance to wonder about

anything, for Kryalpin was at his throat, and the Russian was a tiger unleashed. The two reeled away from the rail, Boris trying to catch Venable off balance and thrust him down the ladder, but Venable bore forward again, back-heeled his opponent, and the grappled men shot headfirst into the wheelhouse. Boris landed on top. They lay there almost motionless. Venable had been partially stunned by the fall, and was unable to prevent the Russian getting a grip on his throat. His own hands, reddened with hot blood, drew Boris down close to him yet could not quell the fierce grip that strangled the life in his heart.

Almost motionless they lay, but every muscle in both bodies was working and tensed. Face to face—above him, Venable saw the snarling, tigerish features of the Russian, alight with the exulting confidence of triumph.

From somewhere below them, somewhere deep in the bowels of the ship, came a quick roar, a muffled, vibrant explosion that shook the entire vessel, followed at once by a lurching stagger as the *Kum Chao* dipped her nose into the seas and came up heavily. A bulkhead had blown out. The shell, passing through the engine-room, had exploded forward, and she was well down by the head now. With each sea, her stern lifted and the propeller raced madly, sending shuddering vibrations through the ship.

Venable realized that the ship was going down, realized that there was a mad chaos of fighting on the main-deck, and the reddened darkness before his eyes cleared away. The iron band about his throat clamped the tighter. Fire was in his lungs. His hands loosened from about the Russian, and groped out blindly and desperately for a weapon.

HIS left hand clenched upon a slim, heavy object—the ebony chart-ruler with which he had been laying out the course that morning. To strike with this thing would be futile; but Venable did not attempt to strike. He brought it up behind the neck of Boris Kryalpin, and his right hand closed upon the other end. His two hands slid up the black stem of wood and closed there, touching the neck of Boris, pressing the brass edge of the ebony into the Russian's spine.

He felt the iron grasp dig deeper into his throat; the face of Boris came down closer to his own—their cheeks touched.

Venable pressed home his fearful weapon, drew down and back with all his strength, threw up his face convulsively and forced the head of Boris back.

Suddenly fear came into Kryalpin—fear of the thing at the back of his neck, bending his spine! He loosened his death-grip on the throat of Venable and tried to tear himself clear. He caught at the wheel and dragged himself up; but Venable came with him.

Then the Russian tried to reach his feet, and this effort cost him life. For, in the effort, he lost his footing, lost his leverage—and Venable bent his head backward upon his body. The ruler fell to the deck and clattered. Boris, his neck broken, fell over it.

THE *Kum Chao*, with Garrity handling the emergency wheel in the stern, crowded down upon the Japanese schooner. The clangor of the engines ceased, leaving a sudden deathly hush upon the ship; the water had reached the fires, and presently the boilers would go. But still the steamer forged slowly ahead, and came down upon the schooner like a fate-driven thing. The one man aboard the schooner was working at the gun forward—running from gun to helm, unable to turn the schooner so that the gun could bear upon the sinking steamer. But when the two ships came rail to rail, and the lowered bows of the *Kum Chao* ground into the quarter of the schooner and slowly crept forward along her rail, both ships staggering and crunching in the seas—then the one man on the schooner began to fire.

He was too late. Other men, other yellow men, yellower than he, were flooding upon him with knives.

CHAPTER XV

GARRITY ASKS A FAVOR

THE schooner was heading into the south, her decks bathed scarlet in the glow of sunset. Behind her, débris littered the heaving seas—débris of the old *Kum Chao*.

In the stern of the schooner, gazing back upon that scene of wreckage and desolation, stood Venable, much bandaged about the arms and throat. There under the water had vanished the passions of men, assailed by the clean sea; there had gone down Jason and Abe Gerin and the others,

good and bad intermingled. Venable breathed a prayer as he stood, his rugged face lined with sadness. That memory of Boris Kryalpin was to him like an evil dream. The prayer that he uttered was for himself.

A hand touched his arm, and he turned to meet the eyes of Mrs. Ivanoff.

Wordless, they stood—a mute communion that could find no paltry words wherein to express itself. Grave and starry-eyed, Mrs. Ivanoff lowered her gaze to Venable's bandaged arms, and a slow tide of color came into her face.

"I hope—your injuries are not paining you—" she hesitated, lifting her eyes again.

"I'd forgotten them." Venable smiled a little, and brought an answering hint of radiance to her features. "I did not dream, all the while, that you had any plan—that there was any salvation for us! It was so desperate, so hopeless—"

"That was why I had to do something," she said simply. "Stormalong thought the engines could be made to do a little work—and they paid no attention to Li John, up on the bridge, until we were heading for the schooner. Well, no matter, it is all done with."

GARRITY stood behind them, clearing his throat. They turned to meet his grin, and he ruffled up his red mop of hair in some confusion.

"Beg pardon," he said, "but I've a bit favor to ask of ye, Parson! Ye mind, now, that when we reach Guam or wherever we're goin', there's goin' to be hard words said and no end of investigatin' and all the likes o' that. Well, we'll come out clear enough—that is, all of us except maybe Marie."

"We'll take care of her," said Mrs. Ivanoff. But Garrity shook his head.

"If it's all the same to ye, ma'am, I'd rather be doin' that meself. I've had a talk with Marie, now, and—and—well, Parson, we thought that ye might stretch a point or two and sort o' make up for all the time we've spent, the two of us."

"What on earth are you driving at?" demanded Venable, astonished. But Mrs. Ivanoff caught his arm, laughter dimpling in her face.

"Don't you see? Don't be blind—I'll go and help Marie get ready!"

"Wait a minute!" cried Garrity hastily,

but she merely laughed at him and departed. The brick-red engineer turned to Venable with a gesture of helplessness.

"Aint that like a woman, now? I wasn't meanin' to be hasty in the matter, but she up an' flies off the handle."

"Look here!" exclaimed Venable. "What *do* you mean, old man? Not that you and Marie want to be—"

"Sure! Ye see, Parson, it was a consul married us before, and a long time ago; and now that you're here and with us, why, if we were married right when we hit Guam, then Marie bein' an American citizen that way—"

"Oh! Is that the only reason you have for marrying?" There was a twinkle in Venable's eye. "Merely for the sake of expediency?"

"No!" blurted Garrity, flushing anew. "For the sake o' bein' married! And listen to me now, Parson; there's another favor I want to be askin' of ye."

"Speak it out," said Venable, laughing.

"Well, when you and Mrs. Ivanoff make up your minds,—you know!—Marie and me want to be in on the— Wait till I get through, will ye now? It's like this: Marie has one o' them Roosian jools,—the Shrivan diamond, she calls it, or some such name,—and she wants to be rid of the whole thing, in a way. The other stuff went down with Captain Moto, ye mind.

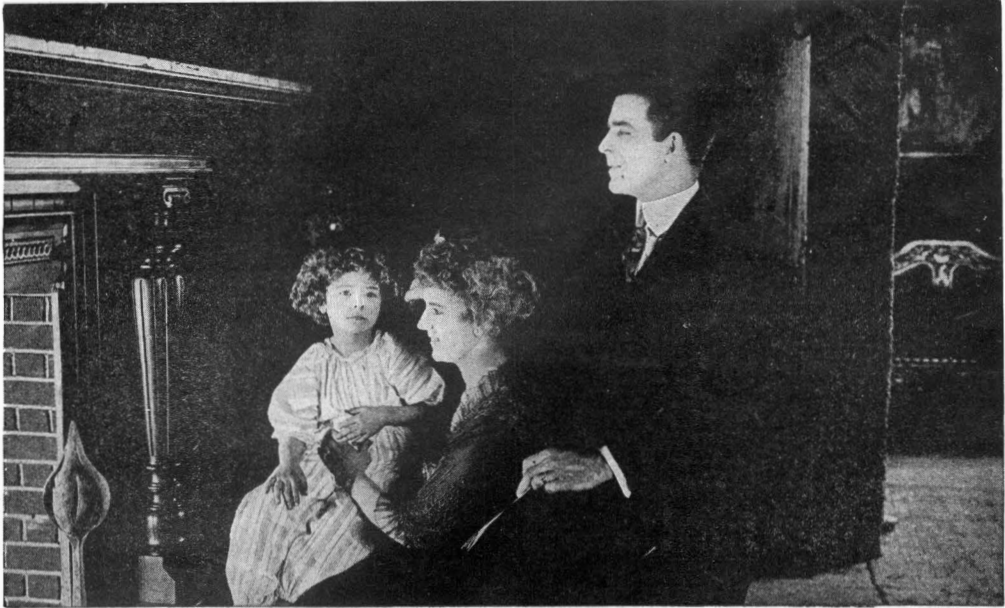
"Well, Marie says that she's wanting to give this here diamond ring to Mrs. Ivanoff to go in with what the lady's got in that trunk of hers up for'ard. So, nobody bein' blind to the lay o' the land, Parson, if you'll marry us here and now, then let us help you and Mrs. Ivanoff get spliced at Guam—"

"For heaven's sake, shut your mouth!" exclaimed Venable. "Mrs. Ivanoff is coming with Marie."

"Oh, that's all right," said Garrity, and winked. "D'ye mind, Marie is goin' to break some o' the news to Mrs. Ivanoff, to help ye out, as it were. Now don't be too sudden in the matter, Parson; but when ye do pop the question—"

Venable took a step forward, and Garrity, turning, fled hastily. He joined Marie, and they went forward together. But Venable, conscious only of the great impulse drumming in his brain, gazed across the deck at Mrs. Ivanoff.

She came to meet him, smiling.



“The proudest moment of our lives had come!”

“We sat before the fireplace, Mary and I, with Betty perched on the arm of the big chair. It was our first evening in our own home! There were two glistening tears in Mary’s eyes, yet a smile was on her lips. I knew what she was thinking.

“Five years before we had started bravely out together. The first month had taught us the old, old lesson that two cannot live as cheaply as one. I had left school in the grades to go to work and my all too thin pay envelope was a weekly reminder of my lack of training. In a year Betty came—three mouths to feed now. Meanwhile living costs were soaring. Only my salary and I were standing still.

“Then one night Mary came to me. ‘Jim,’ she said, ‘Why don’t you go to school again—right here at home? You can put in an hour or two after supper each night while I sew. Learn to do some one thing. You’ll make good—I know you will.’

“Well, we talked it over and that very night I wrote to Scranton. A few days later I had taken up a course in the work I was in. It was surprising how rapidly the mysteries of our business became clear to me—took on a new fascination. In a little while an opening came. I was ready for it and was promoted—with an increase. Then I was advanced again. There was money enough to even lay a little aside. So it went.

“And now the fondest dream of all has come true. We have a real home of our own with the little comforts and luxuries Mary had always longed for, a little place, as she says, that ‘Betty can be proud to grow up in.’

“I look back now in pity at those first blind stumbling years. Each evening after supper the doors of opportunity had swung wide and I had passed them by. How grateful I am that Mary helped me to see that night the golden hours that lay within.”

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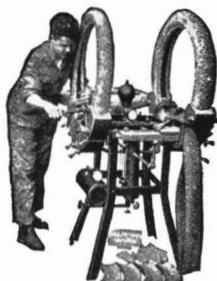
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FOR a long time the directors of our company had felt the handicap of limited capital. We had business in sight running into a million dollars a month. But we couldn't finance this volume of sales. We simply had to get big backing, and that was all there was to it.

Because of trade affiliations, one man—a great financier in New York—controlled the situation. Win him over and the rest was easy. But how to win him?—that was the question. No less than five men and two women—all people of influence and reputation—had tried. They were all repulsed—turned down cold and flat.

You know how a thing of this sort grows on you and how bitter utter defeat is. Well, we were talking it over at a board meeting when one of our directors announced that he knew of only one man who could possibly put through the deal—a man by the name of Preston.

So it was agreed that Preston was to be sounded out at luncheon the following day. He proved to be a fine type of American. At 34 years of age he had become president and majority stockholder of a thriving manufacturing business rated at three-quarters of a million dollars.

Preston was deeply interested, as anyone would be over the prospect of closing such a big deal. The director in question said casually, "Why don't you run down to New York and take a shot at it, Preston?" Preston looked out of the window for a moment, and then quietly answered, "You're on."

I went along with Preston simply as a matter of form to represent our interests. Aboard the 10:25 train out of Chicago we headed for the smoker and got to talking with the crowd there.

Then I noticed something. Preston had dominated them all. Everyone was eagerly hanging on his words, and looking at him with open admiration. No sooner would he stop talking than one of the men would start him up again. And as the men dropped off at stations along the way they gave Preston their cards, with pressing invitations to look them up. No doubt about it, Preston was THE man aboard that car.

The colored porter, too, came under his sway. For that night, when the berths were being made up, the porter came unasked to Preston, told him

that his berth was right over the car trucks, and insisted upon changing it to a more comfortable one.

And so it went all the way to New York. Everyone who met Preston took a great liking to him the instant he spoke. They seemed to be eager for his companionship—wanted to be with him every minute, openly admired him, and loaded him with favors.

Even the usual haughty room clerk at the hotel showed a great interest in Preston's welfare. He showered us with attention while a long line of people waited to register.

The next morning we called on the great financier—the man who was so bitterly against us and had flatly turned down seven of our shrewd influential representatives.

I waited in the reception room—nervous, restless, with pins and needles running up and down my spine. Surely Preston would meet the same humiliating fate?

But no! In less than an hour out they came, the financier patting Preston on the shoulder in a fatherly sort of way. And then I heard the surprising words, "Come to see me as often as you can, Mr. Preston, and remember that I'll back you to the limit!"

At the hotel that night sleep wouldn't come. I couldn't get the amazing Preston out of my thoughts. What an irresistible power over men's minds he had. Didn't even have to ask for what he wanted! People actually competed for his attention, anticipated his wishes and eagerly met them. What a man! What power! . . . Then the tremendous possibilities of it all—think what could be done with such power!

What was the secret? For secret there must be. So the first thing next morning I hurried to Preston's room, told him my thoughts, and asked him the secret of his power.

Preston laughed good-naturedly. "Nothing to it—I—well—that—is—," he stalled. "I don't like to talk about myself, but I've simply mastered the knack of talking convincingly, that's all."

"But how did you get the knack?" I persisted.

Preston smiled, and said, "Well, there's an organization in New York that tells you exactly how to do it. It's amazing! There's really nothing to study. It's mostly a knack which they tell you. You can learn this knack in a few hours. And in less than a week it will produce definite results in your daily work."

"Write to this organization—The Independent Corporation—and get their method. They send it on free trial. I'll wager that in a few weeks

from now you'll have a power over men which you never thought possible . . . but write and see for yourself." And that was all I could get out of the amazing Preston.

When I returned home I sent for the method Preston told me about. It opened my eyes and astounded me. Just how he had won over the financier was now as clear as day to me. I began to apply the method to my daily work, and soon I was able to wield the same remarkable power over men and women that Preston had. I don't like to talk about my personal achievements any more than Preston does, but I'll say this:

This knack of talking convincingly will do wonders for any man or woman. Most people are afraid to express their thoughts; they know the humiliation of talking to people and of being ignored with a casual nod or a "yes" or "no." But when you can talk convincingly, it's different. *When you talk, people listen and listen eagerly.* You can get people to do almost anything you want them to do. And the beauty of it all is that they think they are doing it of their own free will.

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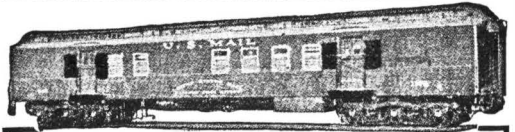
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The valuable new beauty book which Madame Clare is sending free to thousands of women is certainly a blessing to women. All our readers should write her at once and she will tell you absolutely free; about her various new beauty treatments and will show our readers:

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THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE THE GREAT SHOW WINDOW OF AMERICA

EVERY WOMAN CAN HAVE A WINNING PERSONALITY

Let Me Introduce Myself

DEAR READER: *I wish to tell you* how to have a charming, winning personality. Without *personality*, it is almost impossible to make desirable friends, or get on in business; and yes, often must a woman give up the man on whom her heart is set because she has not the power to attract or to hold him.

During my career here and abroad. I have met a great many people whom I have been able to study under circumstances which have brought out their weak or strong points, like a tiny spot on the lens of a moving picture machine will magnify into a very large blot on the screen.

Success of a Winsome Manner

I saw numerous failures that were so distressing that my thoughts could not help dwelling upon those shattered and vain conditions. I have seen women of education, culture and natural beauty actually fail where other women, minus such advantages, but possessing certain secrets of loveliness, a certain winsomeness, a certain knack of looking right and saying the right word, would get ahead delightfully. And often the winning women were in the thirties, forties, or even fifties. Yet they "appeared." They drew others to them by a subtle power which seemed to emanate from them.

French Feminine Charms

The French women among my friends seemed to me more generally endowed with this ability to fascinate, than did my friends among other nationalities.

"Were you born that way?" I would often ask some charming woman.

And she smilingly told me that "personality" as we know it here in America, is an art, that is studied and acquired by French women just as they would learn to cook, or to sing by cultivating the voice.

Every girl and woman possesses latent personality. This includes you, dear reader. There are numerous real secrets for developing your personality.

How Men's Affections Are Held

Lately the newspapers have been telling us that thousands and thousands of our fine young army men have taken French wives. It was no surprise to me, for I know how alluring are the French girls.

French Secrets of Fascination

My continued residence in France enabled me to observe the ways and



methods of the women closely. I studied and analyzed the secrets of their fascinating powers.

When I returned to the dear old U. S. A., I set myself at work putting together the facts, methods, secrets and formulae that I had learned while in France.

Of one thing I am absolutely convinced—every woman who wishes it may have a winning personality.

Overcoming Deterrent Timidity

I know I can take any girl of a timid or overmodest disposition, one who lacks self-confidence, or is too self-conscious for her own good, and show her how to become discreetly and charmingly daring, perfectly natural and comfortable in the presence of others.

Uncouth Boldness—or Tactful Audacity

If you are an assertive woman, the kind that suffers from too great forwardness, I can show you in a way that you will find delightful, how to be gentle and unassuming, to tear away the false fabric of your repelling and ungracious personality and replace it with another that wins and attracts.

I can take the frail girl or woman, the listless one who usually feels that the good things in life are not for her and show her how to become vigorous and strong, tingling with enthusiasm and good cheer and how to see the whole wide world full of splendid things just for her.

Become An Attractive Woman

I can take the girl or woman who is ignorant or careless of her appearance, or the girl who dresses unbecomingly and instill in her a sense of true importance of appearance in

personality; I can enlighten her in the ways of women of the world, in making the most of their apparel. All this without any extravagance; and I can show her how to acquire it with originality and taste.

For Married Women

There are some very important secrets which married French women know that enables them to hold the love, admiration and fidelity of their men. How the selfish spirit in a man is to be overcome so ingeniously that he does not know what you are accomplishing until some day he awakens to the fact that his character and his manner have undergone a delightful change—that he is not only making you happy, but he is finding far greater pleasure in life than when he was inconsiderate.

Acquire Your Life's Victory Now

What we call personality is made up of a number of little things. It is not something vague and indefinable. Personality, charm, good looks, winsomeness and success can be cultivated. If you know the secrets, if you learn the rules and put them into practice, you can be charming, you can have an appealing personality.

No Fad—the Success of Ages

I could go on to tell you more and more about this truly remarkable course, but the space here does not permit. However, I have put some important secrets for you into an inspiring little book called "How" that I want you to read. The Gentlewoman Institute will send it to you entirely free, postpaid, in a plain wrapper, just for the asking.

My advice to you is to send for the free book "HOW" if you want to gain the finest of friends and to possess happiness, with the contentment that will come to you as the result of a lovely and winning personality.



Juliette Fara

Every girl and woman possesses latent personality. This includes you, dear reader. There are numerous real secrets for developing your personality.

How Men's Affections Are Held

Lately the newspapers have been telling us that thousands and thousands of our fine young army men have taken French wives. It was no surprise to me, for I know how alluring are the French girls.

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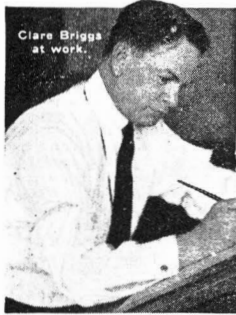
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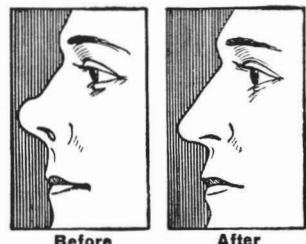
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That film is what discolors—not the teeth. It is the basis of tartar. It holds food substance which ferments and forms acid. It holds the acid in contact with the teeth to cause decay.

Millions of germs breed in it. They, with tartar, are the chief cause of pyorrhea—a common and serious trouble.

Now a Way to Combat It

These facts have been known for years, but dental science found no way to effectively combat film. Now that way is found. Able authorities have proved it by careful tests. Leading dentists all over America are urging its adoption. And millions of teeth are now cleaned daily as they never were before.

The method is embodied in a dentifrice called Pepsodent. And, to spread the facts, a 10-Day Tube is being sent to everyone who asks.

Based on Active Pepsin

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